A Poetics of Time and Timing in the Moving Image

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Abstract

Time is an aesthetic feature of film and the moving image that we cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. Beyond music, it is difficult to imagine an artform that places more importance on time as an aesthetic feature, yet questions surrounding how time affects the emotions in film and other moving images such as television and video have largely been overlooked. Taking an analytic-cognitive approach, my original contribution to knowledge aims to fill this gap by uncovering the ways in which time and the temporal relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events (or what I will generalise as the 'audio-visual makeup' of film) affect our emotions during film engagement.

The general claim of this dissertation is that emotional engagement with a film is not solely the domain of sound and picture, but of time as well. Filmmakers can manipulate the temporal relations within and throughout the audio-visual makeup of a film through cinematic means involving the mise-en-scène, cinematography, and sound. Through a close analysis of examples from predominantly contemporary narrative film with some relevant references to television and video, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that time and the temporal relations within and throughout the audio-visual makeup of film influence emotional engagement with narrative films. By focusing mainly on three emotion-driven genres, including horror, suspense-thriller, and comedy, my analyses will seek to demonstrate that manipulating the temporal relations within and throughout the audio-visual makeup helps generate emotions.

Refining and expanding Susan Feagin's (1999) conceptualisation of *timing* in film, which she defines as the duration and durational relations between and among images, I develop a theory of *affective timing*, which aims to explore the ways in which cinematic timing affects viewers emotionally by generating or enhancing affects such as suspense,

surprise, and humour. This dissertation argues that just as it matters *what* happens on screen or in the soundtrack, so too it matters *when* something happens on screen. In my view, timing is affective when the duration and durational relations within and throughout the audio-visual makeup of a film help generate emotional responses in viewers, which makes affective timing *the art of when*. By adopting and adapting certain terms from the study of music such as pacing, beats, and rhythm, this dissertation also seeks to advance a productive lexicon for the further discussion of the relationship between the temporal nature of film and emotion or what I call *affective temporality*.

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Introduction

Time is a principal aspect of the audio-visual experience that we colloquially refer to as watching a movie, television show, or video.[1] It takes time to watch a movie and moreover, movies, or films, or moving images – whatever we choose to call them – are carefully divided into temporal fragments that, as I will argue, we perceive – and appreciate – in much the same way that we perceive and appreciate other phenomena inherent in cinematographic media such as images and sounds. We perceive phenomena such as images and sound with sensory organs of the body. Eyes let us see, ears let us hear, yet, unlike other aesthetic aspects of phenomena, we can't see or hear time; we can't touch, taste, or smell it, which perhaps explains why it and its effects have remained largely overlooked in the literature until now.

A cursory glance at human anatomy may not give us obvious clues as to where in the body time is perceived, yet, we all seem to know it's there. Neuroscience instructs us that time is processed in the brain and certain parts of the brain are dedicated to perceiving and processing time. According to neuroscientist and psychologist Dean Buonomano,

> Unlike vision or hearing, we do not have a sensory organ that detects time. Time is not a form of energy or a fundamental property of matter that can be detected via physical measurements. Yet, much in the same way that we consciously perceive the color of objects (the wavelengths of reflected electromagnetic radiation), we consciously perceive the passage of time. Our brain creates the feeling of the passage of time. (2017: 21).[2]

The perception of time in films is not entirely different from other sensory phenomena, but ultimately time perception relies on the brain rather than any other sensory organ. Although time is perceived in the brain and not by any other sensory organs, time seems to be perceptual and may therefore be exploited for affect.[3] As Murray Smith (1995) has pointed out, films are not merely aesthetic vehicles for perceptual and cognitive activities, they are, more specifically, vehicles that aim to engage the emotions. We can infer this very simply from the names of certain genres: comedies are intended to generate comic amusement;

horrors are intended to frighten and horrify; suspense-thrillers are intended to activate our sense of anticipation and hopefully thrill us.

In short, filmmakers make choices that shape the form and style to best serve their artistic, aesthetic, and emotional aims. Story and plot drive the narrative, while mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound generate a sense of style. If films manipulate the auditory and visual attributes for aesthetic and emotional purposes, then it stands to reason that they would manipulate aspects of the temporality as well. The present research is, therefore, concerned with understanding how manipulating temporal aspects of film helps generate and enhance emotion. It examines what Susan Feagin (1999) calls *timing* or the durations and durational relations between and among images (and I would add sounds, actions, and events) in film. This dissertation could, perhaps, be summed up as a general inquiry into how temporality affects the emotions, but my aims are more localised since I focus heavily on *cinematic timing*. My research uncovers the affective nature of temporality (what I will refer to as *affective temporality*) with a focus on timing (what I will refer to as *affective timing*). Affective timing refers to the ways in which the durations and durational relations between images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack generate or enhance emotional effects in the temporal art of film. The examples under analysis, which include both film, television, and video, illustrate the ways in which filmmakers exploit aspects of temporality in order to generate emotional responses in viewers. In order to accomplish this however it is first necessary to understand film as a temporal art.

When most people think of what traits film, television, and video share, they think of movement, which stands to reason since those mediums are composed of moving images. Movies, television shows, and online streaming videos are, no doubt, visual and often auditory, but they are also temporal and not just because they have a runtime (i.e. a set

duration of display measured in minutes and seconds); they are temporal in many respects. Of course, they take time to perceive, but, more often than not, they also represent time in terms of a story, which may last a few hours, a few days, a lifetime, or more. Additionally, moving images can realistically portray events as they happen in real-time. That is to say, films don't merely represent time, they consist of time, and accomplish what Gregory Currie calls a 'portrayal of time by means of time' (1995: 95–96).[4] Beyond representing a certain amount of time in terms of a story and portraying time by means of time, narrative films are often imbued with a perceptible system of pacing that makes the work seem fast or slow. They can make the viewer sit through an inordinately long wait at a doctor's office or they can zip through an entire day in the blink of an eye.

Until now, time as an aesthetic feature of film has yet to undergo a dedicated and thorough analysis using the analytic-cognitive methods first developed in works like David Bordwell's (1985) *Narration in the Fiction Film* and Noel Carroll's (1988) *Mystifying Movies*. Bordwell (1985) analysed the temporal structure of narrative films, the temporal order, duration, and frequency of plot events that determine the relations between scenes and the story as a whole. Bordwell gave us a macrolevel view of how the temporal structure of a film may be understood. The present research offers a microlevel view of how the temporal structures between and among images, sounds, actions, and events stand in relation to one another. Bordwell suggests, 'From a temporal perspective, the most important technique is editing' (1985: 94). Indeed, editing is a vital filmmaking tool for structuring story events that follow a particular plot. However, the present research does not privilege any one technique of filmmaking, rather it examines all techniques as they relate to one another on a moment-to-moment basis. Further, Bordwell's comprehensive analysis of temporal structures that make up a film narrative focuses on cognition and in particular comprehension but ventures to say little about emotion. My research aims to answer that call. By providing a microlevel

analysis of the moment-by-moment relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events, I provide not only a comprehensive account and a microlevel view of temporal structure, I examine the ways in which those features affect the emotions.

My research takes temporality to be an inherent, perceptual property of moving images and analyses the ways in which temporality affects the emotions. Specifically, the temporal properties that I focus on include timing, pacing, and rhythm. Timing, as I will come to define it, refers to the durations and durational relations between and among images and sounds at the microlevel, that is, on a moment-by-moment basis. When I examine timing in a film, I am focusing not on entire scenes and the durations and durational relations between scenes, but rather a few moments of time. Timing is a durational aspect of temporality because it relates to precisely *when* something happens not in what order or what frequency. Operating at a slightly larger scale, pacing as I will come to define it may be characterised by the pace, speed, or tempo of images, sounds, actions and events within a scene or scene fragment (i.e. a few moments within a scene), between scenes or sequences (i.e. a group of scenes), or the film as a whole. In general, pacing may be fast or slow and certain kinds of pacing are generally related to specific genres. For instance, action films tend to be fast-paced, while 'slow cinema' tends to be (as the name implies) slow-paced.[5] As it applies to a given scene or a sequence within a film, pacing refers to the temporal relations between groups of timed events (i.e. several 'timings'). So, when I discuss the pacing in a certain scene or sequence, I am also referring to the relationship between and among the timings that appear within that scene or sequence and how they relate to one another. Operating on a slightly larger scale still, rhythm as I will come to define it refers to the pattern of 'pacings' and 'timings' within a film. Rhythm encapsulates the relations between and among the 'pacings' and 'timings' within a film. In my view each of these temporal

properties serve to generate and enhance emotion within film and they also contribute to the emotional and artistic aims of the film's genre.

For instance, the fast-paced nature of the action-comedy *Crank* (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2006) gives it an overall sense of urgency that contributes and feeds into the genre expectations of the action film, while the sudden shifts from fast to slow pace generate an overall rhythm that helps develop the film's comedic attributes. Shifting unexpectedly from fast to slow pace within a scene represents a temporal incongruity and as we shall see in Part III, temporal incongruities under the right circumstances can generate comic amusement.

At the moment, very little dedicated research exists that explains how temporal properties of film such as timing, pacing, and rhythm serve the artistic and emotional aims of filmmakers. My examination of how timing, pacing, and rhythm generates and enhances emotions in cinematic works contributes to the ongoing research in the fields of film aesthetics, psychology of time, and emotion studies. Through what I call a 'microlevel' analysis of mostly contemporary films, I seek to establish a *poetics of time and timing in the moving image*, detailing the ways in which the temporal relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events generate and enhance emotions in the film viewing experience.

David Bordwell defines poetics as 'a systematic inquiry into the presuppositions of artistic traditions' and calls poetics of film 'a practice-based theory of art' (2008: 22). My project follows what Bordwell calls *analytical* poetics which studies 'particular devices across a range of works or in a single work' as well as *theoretical* poetics which 'lay[s] out the conditions for a genre or class of work' but where appropriate my project ventures into *historical* poetics which studies 'how artworks assume certain forms within a period or across a period' (2008: 12). An instance of what might be thought of as historical poetics is

showcased in Chapter Five, where I track the origins of the startle effect as it is used in cinema (following Robert Baird's 2000 study of the subject).

The area of film poetics tends to focus on visual or auditory features apparent within the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, or sound but what I'm concerned with here is time, specifically the temporal relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events. The employment of cinematic timing is not confined to any specific technique or film style. Any of the techniques mentioned can be used to time out the presentation of images, sounds, actions, or events. In other words, any cinematic technique can be timed to occur at a specific time. For clarity it might be worth mentioning that I am using 'time' here as a verb so by 'time out' or 'be timed', I just mean the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen or in the soundtrack as they appear in the linear arrangement in which we perceive them, assuming we are not suffering from a type of brain damage that would alter a normal experience of time (I'll return to time experience and perception in Chapter Two). In short, images, sounds, actions, and events are timed within the moment-by-moment unfolding presentation of a film. In my view filmmakers use timing in a purposeful way when they use it to generate and enhance emotional effects during the film viewing experience.

Time and timing are important for the appreciation of many aesthetic activities not just film. Music is an obvious example, but precise time is also a vital aspect of cooking and in particular baking. For instance, the baker must not only select the best ingredients and precisely measure out the correct amount of flour, baking powder, etc. she must also remember to take the cake out of the oven at just the right time. Removing it too early or too late could result in disaster. In my view time and timing are just as important in film.

To touch upon an idea that will be discussed in detail in Part II, narratively speaking, as a film starts to play, time is running out. That is to say, the viewer knows the film has a

finite runtime, usually somewhere between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes. During that time period, certain narrative questions or challenges are put forward that are meant to intrigue the viewer and generate feelings of anticipation and excitement. Noël Carroll argues that suspense is generated by what he calls 'macro-questions' pertaining to the film as a whole and 'micro-questions' pertaining to the relations between scenes or sequences. According to Carroll, macro-questions involve the organisation of 'the bulk of the significant action in the movie' while micro-questions 'connect two individual scenes or a limited series of scenes and sequences' (1996: 90). This characterises what Carroll calls 'erotetic narration' or the system of asking and answering questions throughout a film that drives the story to a satisfying conclusion.[6] By focusing on the moment-to-moment micro-questions within a scene or a scene fragment, I have developed a theory that explores the affective nature of time and timing. I will argue that timing is affective when it contributes to the emotional impact of a scene or scene fragment. Note that in relation to my own theories of affective temporality and timing, I use 'affective' in the sense that cognitivists and psychologists use it to mean something that is generally related to emotion.[7]

In short, my research offers a systematic analysis of the affective (i.e. emotion-generating or emotion-enhancing) nature of timing and other temporal attributes operating at the microlevel of narrative films. I employ analytic-cognitive models to the study how affective timing works in film. As I shall demonstrate, affective timing helps shape both the cinematic form and style of films. For filmmakers, timing is an artistic choice that involves every aspect of film style including mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. As I shall argue, it not only matters what cinematic techniques are employed but precisely when those cinematic techniques are employed. I therefore characterise cinematic timing as *the art of when*.

In the following section, I will summarise the overall structure of the thesis and outline the main arguments of each chapter.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into three parts, which relate to a specific topic relevant to my study of affective temporality and timing. **Part I: Film as a Temporal Art** explores the temporal nature of film, tracks how the question of cinematic time has been handled by other scholars, and refines the terms that will be employed throughout this dissertation. **Part II: The Temporality of Cinematic Suspense** provides what I call a *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film*. Part II focuses on how certain temporal structures elicit appropriate emotional responses in horror and suspense-thriller films such as fear, suspense, and the startle effect. **Part III: The Temporality of Cinematic Humour** examines the relationship between temporality and humour in contemporary comedies and provides what I call a *temporal account of humour in film*.

The examples under analysis are largely represented by feature-length films, but since the temporal and emotional phenomena at stake are not limited to this type of moving image, I have also included examples from contemporary television as well as online video. In particular, the final chapter in the thesis focuses largely on the video *Too Many Cooks* (Casper Kelly, 2014) which was initially aired as a late-night television special on Cartoon Network's adult-oriented, night time programming block Adult Swim before finding a permanent home on the video streaming website YouTube.

Chapter One, *Time and the Moving Image: A Review*, contains a broad overview of the literature surrounding cinematic temporality including narration and time and cinema as a temporal art. After an exploration of Currie's (1995) definition of film as temporal art, I focus on the writings of authors who in my view were largely operating the field of analytic

philosophy of art and poetics of film up to and including Bordwell (1985). Following this introduction into the field of poetics, which is relevant to methods that I will be undertaking in this dissertation, the chapter takes the opportunity to evaluate alternative approaches to the subject of cinematic temporality which could be very broadly generalised as Continental philosophy of film. I conclude with an elaboration on Susan Feagin's (1999) essay 'Time and Timing' which represents one of the few highly dedicated studies of cinematic timing operating in the analytic tradition. Her account serves as the foundation upon which I build a theory of affective timing in suspense-thriller, horror, and comedy films.

Chapter Two, *The Art of When*, outlines my approach to cinematic time and timing. In this chapter, I argue that cinema is 'the art of when' not because it has a temporal dimension, as most or all of artforms do. Rather, *cinema is the art of when because what makes it stand apart from other artforms in a phenomenological and an artistic sense is the importance it places on* when *things occur on screen*. I follow Smith's method of 'triangulating aesthetic experience,' by bringing together three areas of inquiry as they relate to time and the moving image: (1) phenomenological experience[8]; (2) psychology; and (3) (to the extent that it relates to film viewing) neuroscience. Hence, in this chapter, I introduce the relevant psychological and neuroscientific literature on the perception and cognition of time in an effort to establish the groundwork for which I make claims about the effects of perceiving temporality and temporal shifts in a cinematic work of art. I also reference long-established concepts from the study of another temporal artform, music, and apply them, where appropriate and with modifications, to the study of cinematic time and affective timing.

While each chapter in Part I works towards a theory of cinematic temporality as 'the art of when' and contributes to the framing of the moving image as a temporal art, Part II is all about putting into practice the theories constructed in Part I. The primary aim of Part II is to evaluate the ways in which our perception and cognition of time and timing affect our

emotions in suspenseful films. Chapter Three, *Cinematic Suspense as a Kind of Betting*, sets up what I call a *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film*, which relates to my overall thesis that the experience of time in film is aesthetic, affective, and a pleasure for its own sake. Chapter Three positions *aesthetic* or *cinematic suspense* as a kind of paradoxical experience that *we should not want to feel, but a feeling that we – strangely – seek out regardless* in the form of cinematic entertainment like suspense-thriller films. In contrast to the paradox of suspense (also sometimes referred to as the problem of anomalous suspense) theorised by Noël Carroll (1996; 2001) and Richard Gerrig (1996), I am interested in a different kind of paradox involving suspense. Anomalous suspense refers to the quirk of aesthetic suspense that involves repeat viewings. Theorists of anomalous suspense wonder why anyone would feel suspense if they already know the answer to a question or if they already know how a story will unfold. But the paradox that Chapter Three examines more closely resembles the paradox of horror explored by Carroll (1990). I hope to answer the question of why anyone would want to feel suspense in the context of a suspenseful film in the first place.

Chapter Four, *Ticking Time Bombs and Other Explosive Devices*, examines how suspense is generated in contemporary suspense-thrillers through the precise timing of certain events within the moving image and sound track. Films falling into the genre of suspense-thriller such as *No Country for Old Men* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2007) or *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007) not only use suspense as an affective feature; in doing so, they embody an essential feature of the genre as a whole. Even if one disagrees that there are any essential features of a genre, it would be difficult to imagine the same films without suspense (just as it would be difficult to image a contemporary action film without a fast pace). Even if it were somehow possible to 'edit out' the suspense from *No Country for Old Men* or *There Will Be Blood*, we would, nevertheless, be left with drastically different films

from the originals. Harkening back to the spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone, these updated, contemporary westerns rely so heavily on the generation of suspense, even the titles of the films hint at their affect.

In contrast to the previous chapter, Chapter Five, *Killing Time in Startle Cinema*, focuses entirely on an analysis of the contemporary paranormal horror film. Turning away from suspense in a strict sense, I examine the impact that suspense has on generating the cognitive-biological phenomenon known as the *startle effect*. Beginning with an exegesis on the current debates surrounding the cinematic startle including Baird's (2000) thorough study of over one hundred films. After a close analysis of what has come to be thought of as the first startle effect used in a feature-length film from the movie *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942), I turn my attention to examples from contemporary paranormal horror films including *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010), *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011), *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) and *Annabelle* (John R. Leonetti, 2014). Through careful analysis of these films, I aim to demonstrate how temporality and the experience of time as duration help to generate suspense and surprise in horror and suspense-thriller films. In addition, I take the opportunity to clarify a related term that has recently started to gain traction in academic literature: the *jump scare*, which I characterise as a type of cinematic startle effect most commonly employed in horror films.

Part II focuses on the temporal affects that help to generate fear and suspense. In keeping with my ultimate goal to contribute to emotion studies, **Part III: The Temporality of Cinematic Humour** examines how our perceptions of time and timing are exploited for comedic purposes in popular film and television. Additionally, throughout Part III, I cite examples of what I call *temporal humour*, which I defined as jokes that take time as their subject. In these examples time is not simply a component of what makes the gag funny, but

it is *a part of the content of the joke*. In other words, temporal humour describes jokes and gags *about time*.

According to the adage most often attributed to the entertainer Bob Hope, 'Timing is everything'. This seemingly innocuous phrase indicates the importance that comedians place on the rhythm of telling jokes and performing comedic set pieces. Indeed, timing is a crucial feature of most successful comedies. Chapter Six, *The Poetics of Comic Timing*, enters this discussion by formulating a poetics of comic timing. I begin my analysis with a discussion of the question of comic timing and situate my theoretical contributions alongside the existing literature in narratology, cognitive film theory, philosophical aesthetics, and humour theory. I take humour to be derived from violations of anticipated outcomes. Through microlevel analysis of extracts from *The Lego Movie* (Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, 2014) and *Hot Rod* (Akiva Schaffer, 2007), I furnish support for a version of the *incongruity theory of humour*, espoused by John Morreall (1983; 1987a; 1987b; 1998; 2009; 2016), Noël Carroll (1996; 2001; 2014), and others. My research demonstrates that *temporal incongruity* generates comic amusement in viewers and points to the ways in which cinematic humour is largely indebted to the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events.

In Chapter Seven, *Four Types of Comic Timing*, I continue my exploration of comic timing as temporal incongruity by delineating four temporal strategies of comic timing in contemporary comedy that involve duration, pace (i.e. tempo or speed), repetition, and absurd spatio-temporal relations. *Perceived durational incongruity* represents a violation of anticipated temporal duration and durational relationships between and within images, sounds, actions, and events. *Perceived tempo incongruity* represents a form of incongruous juxtaposition of two or more different and unanticipated tempos. *Repetition* represents a violation of anticipated frequency. *Spatio-temporal incongruity* represents a violation of the

anticipated spatio-temporal arrangement of images, sounds, actions, and events. While many of the examples might be considered slapstick comedy, which might be described as a kind of physical humour, my analysis also shows how timing functions in much the same way that is does in action-comedy genre as well as absurdist film and television. My research conducts a microlevel analysis of extracts from comedy films and television including *Hot Rod*, *Crank*, *Family Guy* (created by Seth MacFarlane, 1999–present), *Zombieland* (Ruben Fleischer, 2009), *Dude, Where's My Car?* (Danny Leiner, 2000), *Wet Hot American Summer* (David Wain, 2001) and its spin-off television series *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (created by Michael Showalter and David Wain, 2015). My research demonstrates that although timing is not the sole factor for determining the success of a work, it plays an important role in eliciting humour. Good (i.e. effective) timing can push a cinematic work into the realm of the comedic masterpiece, while poor (i.e. ineffective) timing can render a work inert despite all other formal or stylistic achievements.

Chapter Eight, Too Many Cooks *(2014): A Shaggy Dog Story*, examines the act of extending the length of a gag or on-screen joke to the point of absurdity and maybe even exhaustion. Often culminating in a non-sequitur or notable for its apparent lack of a punchline, these sorts of jokes are usually categorised as 'shaggy dog stories'. What philosopher Ted Cohen refers to as 'meta-jokes', shaggy dog stories take advantage of the listeners' foreknowledge about the conventional structure of jokes (1999: 9). They are therefore what Jerrold Levinson has called 'second-order' jokes (Levinson 2002: 381). Chapter Eight offers a close examination of what I consider to be an audio-visual shaggy dog story. *Too Many Cooks* (created, written, and directed by Casper Kelly, 2014) which first aired on Adult Swim, an American night-time television block located on Cartoon Network, consists of eleven minutes of introductory opening credits to a fictional 1980s/early 90s style American television sitcom in the vein of *Family Ties* (created by Gary David Goldberg,

1982–1989) and *Family Matters* (created by William Bickley and Michael Warren, 1989–1998). The merit of *Too Many Cooks* as a work of effective comedy has been contested, making it an interesting case study for my theories of temporal incongruity and temporal humour. Through framing the video as a shaggy dog story, my analysis helps describe why so many viewers found it enjoyable, while many critics dismissed it as a passing fad.

A Poetics of Time and Timing in the Moving Image is intended to contribute to the traditions of poetics, analytic-cognitive film theory, and studies of time and emotion. A thorough examination of the affective nature of time and timing helps paint a more complete picture for how perception, cognition, and emotion contribute to the film viewing experience. If my thesis could be boiled down to one central aim, it would be to illustrate the importance and power that time and timing have in an artform that has been traditionally characterised and defined by space and movement. Film is not just an artform of movement, images, and (typically) sounds; it is an art of time. At the most basic level, I hope to show how cinematic temporality affects the emotions in contemporary film, television, and video. In other words, when examining how films affect the emotions, it's time for time.

Part I

Film as a Temporal Art

What does it mean to say that film is a temporal art? What exactly is the temporal nature (i.e. the temporality) of film and how can we recognise it if we can't see, touch, taste, hear, or smell it? Generally speaking, the temporality of film refers to the fact that it exists in time. But so do all the other artforms from painting to poetry. Why should film merit special attention as a temporal art? Furthermore, if we can't perceive time using our bodily senses, how do we know that it even exists? And if it does it exist how is it that we have a sense of time? Answering the question about the existence of time goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I mention it here to show that the possible questions that one could ask about the temporal nature of film are vast and far-reaching. The central goal of thesis is to examine the ways in which *cinematic timing*, or the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack generate or enhance emotional effects. This kind of emotion-generating or emotion-enhancing timing is what I refer to as *affective timing*. The following two chapters investigate the claim that film is a temporal art and attempt to formulate a theory for how time – that is, the perception of time – generates or enhances emotional effects.

Chapter One

Cinematic Time and Timing

> What is the essence of the director's work? We could define it as sculpting in time. Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it – so the film-maker, from a 'lump of time' made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image.
>
> (Andrei Tarkovsky 1986: 63–64)

The present chapter functions as an entry into the relevant research on the subject of film as a temporal art. It further seeks to demonstrate that little research has been dedicated to the affective nature of time and timing in film. I intend to show that what research exists on the subjects of time and temporality in film tends to employ close film analyses in order to conceptualise *about* time – that is, about the philosophical nature of time as an abstract concept – but not on how perception of time in cinema might affect us emotionally. As stated in the introduction, this dissertation follows in the tradition of poetics, 'a systematic inquiry into the presuppositions of artistic traditions' (Bordwell 2008: 22). My central research question focuses on how time and timing are used for artistic and affective purposes and has little to say on the subject of time as a philosophical concept. Although there are many other methodological approaches that scholars have employed to examine the temporal nature of cinema, this chapter seeks to establish that an analytic-cognitive approach is the most appropriate methodology to examine the emotional effects of time and timing in cinema. As we shall see in the second section of this chapter, there have been very few dedicated film analyses that focus on the affective nature of time, especially with respect to my area of inquiry, *cinematic timing*, a subject which I will return to in the fourth and final section of this chapter where I engage with Susan Feagin's (1999) discussion of time and timing in film.

The first section of this chapter engages with the question of film as a temporal art. The second section of this chapter consists of an overview of the research on cinematic time as it relates to the tradition of the poetics of cinema, including the work of Alexander Sesonske (1973; 1974; 1980), Seymour Chatman (1978; 1980), Haig Khatchadourian (1978; 1980; 1987), Brian Henderson (1983), and David Bordwell (1985).[9] According to Bordwell, poetics is 'a practice-based theory of art' and 'a systematic inquiry into the presuppositions of artistic traditions' (2008: 22). Film analyses operating in the tradition of poetics tend to focus on how temporal relations between the story and plot give rise to different narrative structures. This type of inquiry characterises what I will refer to as 'macrolevel' analyses, which focus on 'big picture' questions having to do with the narration of whole scenes or whole films.

In contrast, I would characterise my level of inquiry as highly local and focused on the moment-by-moment relations between images, sounds, actions, and events. In terms of narration, my level of analysis focuses on what might be called 'small picture' questions having to do with the narrational inferences that we make on a moment-by-moment basis within a scene or scene fragment. My type of inquiry may be considered 'fine-grained', focusing on a 'microlevel' of analysis. In addition, I will focus on the affective qualities in a film (i.e. the qualities that help generate or enhance emotions) as well as (secondarily) the narrational qualities (i.e. qualities that help generate comprehension and inferences).[10] The central question of my dissertation as a whole is concerned with the affective nature of cinematic timing or the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on the screen and in the soundtrack. In other words, how does cinematic timing generate or enhance certain emotional responses in viewers?

Because my thesis concentrates on questions of the *affective nature of cinematic timing*, there is a risk that my terminology might be confused with various other film

scholarship traditions concerning the concept of 'affect'. Throughout this dissertation, when I employ the term 'affect' in relation to cinematic timing, I generally mean something akin to the sense in which psychologists and analytic-cognitivists use it, which has to do with emotion.[11] Cinematic timing is affective, in my view, when it generates or enhances emotional responses in viewers. This distinction between the different meanings of 'affect' will become important in the third section of this chapter where I engage with research projects that analyse films from differing methodological approaches that utilise a highly specific meaning to the term.

In my introduction, I have stated that while I find the diverse methods and terminology of the analytic-cognitive approach to be the most useful and productive for undertaking the kind of fine-grained microlevel analysis that understanding the nature of cinematic timing requires, it is certainly not the only approach available. In order to have a comprehensive account of my subject, it is important to survey the existing literature relevant to the nature of cinematic time and timing. Therefore, in the third section, I will evaluate six comprehensive treatments of the temporal nature of cinema including works by Gilles Deleuze (1986; 1989), Garrett Stewart (2007), Matilda Mroz (2012), Mary Ann Doane (2002), Helen Powell (2012), and Lee Carruthers (2016), which might be very broadly categorised as Continental approaches. Since the theoretical methodologies covered in the third section of this chapter are quite diverse, both from one another and in many cases from my own approach, I will endeavour to reveal points of contact with my own research project where appropriate, but ultimately my goal in section three is to demonstrate that my thesis question, which aims at understanding the ways in which time – or rather, our perception of time – affects our emotions during the film viewing experience, would be best suited to a piecemeal approach that draws on a fine-grained systematic analysis of the moving image combined with relevant scientific evidence from current psychology and neuroscience.

As we shall see in what follows, research into the ways in which the temporal properties of film help generate or enhance feelings or emotions is partial and incomplete. Moreover, Part I seeks to show how a dedicated and systematic analyses of one aspect of film's temporality – cinematic timing – is a worthwhile, but largely overlooked area of scholarly attention. In order to demonstrate this, it's vital to highlight the fact that film is a temporal art, but in what sense is film temporal? Gregory Currie calls film 'a strongly temporal art' because 'it cannot but represent time by means of time' (1995: 103). In the following section of this chapter I will explore what Currie means. This characterisation of film as a strongly temporal art will become important in the final section of this chapter where I unpack the notion of cinematic timing.

1.1 Temporality in Representational Art

Representational art may be thought of as a kind of art that represents phenomena in the world. Not all art is representational because not all art seeks to do this. Examples of representational artforms include portraiture and scenic painting, literature, stage plays, photography, and narrative film. Music could be considered a representational art to the extent that it can represent sounds to resemble other sounds. For instance, in the musical composition *Peter and the Wolf* by Sergei Prokofiev (1936) Peter is represented by string instruments (violin, viola, etc.) while the Wolf is represented by French horns. Although narrative film is considered representational, highly abstract and experimental films tend to be considered non-representational. As I will demonstrate, one of the things that films can represent in some sense better – more completely and in more dimensions – than any of the other representational arts is time.

Narrative films can represent the time of a story that takes place over several minutes or they can represent a story that takes place over a single day or evening. Examples of this

include *Dazed and Confused* (Richard Linklater, 1993) and *Before Sunrise* (Richard Linklater, 1995). A film can depict a story that takes place over several weeks like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001) or several years like *Blue Valentine* (Derek Cianfrance, 2010). They can take place over several hundred years like *Bicentennial Man* (Chris Columbus, 1999) or even several thousand years like *The Fountain* (Darren Aronofsky, 2006) and *Cloud Atlas* (Lana Wachowski, Tom Tykwer, and Lilly Wachowski, 2012). In addition, film narratives may contain two or more timelines within a single film. Examples of this include *The Princess Bride* (Rob Reiner, 1987) and *The Royal Tenenbaums* (Wes Anderson, 2001). Perhaps most infrequently, they can represent contingency by showing what would happen in multiple worlds or multiple timelines. Examples of this include *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1998), *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998), and *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (David Slade, 2018). This level of temporality seems obvious, but there are other levels at which film is temporal.

Gregory Currie identifies film as a temporal art and discusses the realistic depiction of time in film as one feature that makes it stand apart from other artforms.[12] Currie writes:

> Everything that happens happens in time, and everything is temporally related to everything else. It takes time to watch a film, but it also does to watch a play, read a novel, listen to a symphony and look at a painting. In this sense every art is a time art. But in some way, the cinema is very distinctively an art of time. (Currie 1995: 92)

Currie distinguishes between three types of temporality and assigns film the special status of a fourth connected temporality that only film has. The first kind is *temporality*$_w$ or the 'temporal properties of the work' (1995: 92). A work is temporal$_w$ if it involves 'change over time' intrinsically in a manner in which Currie calls 'unfolding'. Unfolding is characterised by 'the presence of temporal relations between constitutive elements of the work' (1995: 93). Currie notes that although we might observe a painting change over time by accumulating dust, that does not make it temporal$_w$. Only works that 'unfold' over time are temporal$_w$. He

notes that kinds of art that are temporal$_w$ either hold the property strongly or not at all. So film, music, and theatre are all strongly temporal$_w$, because all works of these kinds unfold over time, but painting, still photography, and literature are not temporal$_w$ at all because no works of these kinds unfold over time.[13] Note that temporality$_w$ has to do with the temporal properties of the work itself, and not the temporal properties of the thing it represents (which is a different kind of temporality according to Currie). For instance, it might take a reader about three hours to read J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* cover-to-cover and we would therefore say that the novel has a duration of about three hours for that reader. We might say, however, that this durational experience changes from reader to reader and is not dictated by the work itself. It might take me three hours to read, but for my brother only two. Film, on the other hand, typically has a consistent duration in the form of a runtime (sometimes referred to as running time). For example, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962) has a runtime of ninety minutes and that duration remains consistent with each viewing. Likewise a stage play might have a performance time of about two hours but because it is performed live, that time may vary according to changes in the actors' recitation speed, changes in the tempo of the live performance of the music, changes in stagecraft effects such as the transitioning from one scene to the next (i.e. the time it takes for stagehands to break down and re-build sets between scene transitions). Consequently, we might say a performance of the stage musical *James Joyce's The Dead* based on Joyce's short story) seemed 'rushed' upon one evening's viewing and 'relaxed' upon another. Upon either viewing, however, we probably still feel we have experienced the same work of art but that the durational experience is simply less consistent than that of a film's runtime. The film version of *The Dead* (John Huston, 1987), for example, has a runtime of eighty-three minutes and that durational experience remains the same each time the film is viewed. If we only view seventy minutes of that film, we would

not have watched the entire work. So, from Currie's definition of temporality$_w$, we can say that films have durations that are more precise than some other kinds of artworks.

The second kind is *temporality$_e$* or experiential temporality, which is defined as the 'temporal properties of the observer's experiences of the work' (1995: 92). Currie argues that temporality$_e$ adheres strongly in literature, music, and film but weakly in other mediums like painting and sculpture because we typically do not find our observations of paintings and sculptures temporally guided by the works themselves. For example, Vincent van Gogh's painting *Almond Blossom* (1890) contains no hint as to an order by which to direct one's attention, but Richard Serra's sculpture *Sight Point (for Leo Castelli)* (1972) invites us to first observe the work from the outside and then from the inside. By contrast, a film's narration directs the order or arrangement of observation; our attention is guided along a particular path from one scene to the next.

The third kind is *temporality$_r$* or the 'temporal properties of what the work represents' (Currie 1995: 92). According to Currie, just about all representational arts can be temporal$_r$ because they have – at least in principle – the capacity to represent time. Temporality$_r$ is the quality that allows narrative films to represent a story that takes place over days or weeks. For example, the film *Bicentennial Man* represents roughly two centuries as it follows the life of an android who is lucky enough to live that long. Similarly, the film *Russian Ark* (Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002) represents about three hundred years following the history of the Winter Palace in Saint Petersburg. Film, literature, and plays are strongly temporal$_r$, whereas painting and sculpture are weakly temporal$_r$. While some paintings might have the capacity to represent moments or fragments of time – like the portrayal of two figures glancing at one another from across a distance – they can be said to represent time in Currie's weak sense. Currie distinguishes a fourth kind of temporality that is reserved for film alone. This kind is labelled *temporality$_c$* or connected temporality. According to Currie temporality$_c$ is not

merely the sum of all three temporalities, which film can and does have. According to Currie, 'An art form has temporality$_c$ if temporal properties of elements of the representation serve to represent temporal properties of the things represented. Cinema is temporal$_c$. What is distinctively temporal about film is not its portrayal of time, but the manner of its portrayal: its portrayal of time by means of time' (1995: 96). To summarise, film is temporal$_c$ because it is intrinsically temporal (temporal$_w$), it represents time (temporal$_r$), and it does so through the temporal properties of the work (e.g. duration) serving as a guide (i.e. temporal$_e$) to working out the temporal properties of what is represented.

In this way, film can represent the passage of time as we think we experience time in real life. For example, the long take achieves temporality$_c$ because the natural passage of time within the narrative of the film is not disrupted by cinematic techniques such as slow or fast motion, jump cuts, or any other kind of editing. We might claim that within the long take, the scene passes naturally in accordance with how we assume real (or what will be denoted later as 'natural') time passes. This was a quality in film that André Bazin in particular praised. Now that we have an initial framework for the analysis of cinema as a temporal art, we can begin to explore the comprehensive treatments of the temporal nature of film.

1.2 Towards a Poetics of Time in Film

During the time period that film was evolving into the artform we know today, psychologist Hugo Münsterberg recognised the unique relationship that film has to time (1916: 66–74). In his treatise of the emerging artform of the 'photoplay' that we now know as film, Münsterberg recognised that unlike other artforms such as the stage play, film stories could transcend time and place through the cutting and joining together of different film strips. Emerging from this novelty of what we now call editing, Münsterberg notes, 'With the full freedom of our fancy, with the whole mobility of our association of ideas, pictures of the past

flit through the scenes of the present. Time is left behind. Man becomes boy; today is interwoven with the day before yesterday. The freedom of the mind has triumphed over the unalterable law of the outer world' (1916: 70–71).

If Münsterberg was concerned with what editing could do for the presentation of a visual story, André Bazin was concerned with film's ability to capture the duration of things. In his 1945 essay on the photographic image, Bazin claimed that due to their recorded nature, films have the ability to capture temporal duration. 'Now, for the first time,' he writes, 'the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were' (1967: 15).[14] In contrast to Münsterberg, for Bazin the time that cinema captures is objective. In fact, he calls cinema 'objectivity in time' (1967: 14).

Beginning in the 1970s, the notion that film in comparison to other artforms has a unique relationship with time carried over into the works of Sesonske (1973; 1974; 1980), Katchadourian (1978; 1980; 1987), and Chatman (1978; 1980) who addressed the ways in which screen time and screen space differed from time and space in other artforms such as plays, literature, and painting. For instance, Sesonske (1974) asserts that time is one of three primary formal categories of film, the other two being space and motion. Without a doubt these scholars, who were operating in what might be collectively referred to as narratology, viewed film as a temporal art. Gerald Mast, for example, calls film the 'truest time-art of all, since it most closely parallels the operation of time itself' (1977: 112). Overall, these debates surrounded questions about the medium of film. Since much of the scholarship was entrenched in the more dominant literary studies, they were also concerned with the so-called 'tense' of film – the idea that a film narrative starts off in the present tense and is then able to represent the past or future by means of leaping backward or forward into the narrative. Ultimately their work feeds into the paradigm that follows in the traditions of Russian

Formalism and Constructivism that Bordwell (1985) brings to the fore in his book *Narration in the Fiction Film*.

Russian Formalism is responsible for introducing the concepts *fabula* (usually translated as story) and *syuzhet* (usually translated as plot). In terms of a narrative film the fabula is continued by all the components of the story in chronological order, whereas syuzhet is constituted by the arrangement of events on the screen. Distinguishing between fabula and syuzhet can help us differentiate between the various kinds of temporal relations within narratives. In terms of narrative duration, Bordwell conceptualises three levels of film duration, which include *fabula duration*, *syuzhet duration*, and *screen duration*.[15] Fabula duration describes 'the time that the viewer assumes the story action to take' (1985: 80). For any given film, this could be a day, a year, or several lifetimes. Syuzhet duration 'consists of stretches of time which the film dramatizes' (1985: 80). Bordwell notes that although a film might have a fabula duration of ten years, the plot might only focus on a relevant few months out of the story as a whole.

Bordwell claims that 'fabula duration and syuzhet duration are not embodied in the film's stylistic system' in contrast to screen duration or 'projection time'. And because '[s]creen duration is [an] ingredient to the very medium of cinema, all film techniques – mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound – contribute to its creation' (1985: 81). Relating that to the film *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), which depicts just two hours in the life of Marshal Kane (Gary Cooper), Bordwell writes, 'the syuzhet duration may closely approximate screen time, but the entire fabula duration tends to outrun both' (1985: 81).[16]

It's important to note here that in his analysis of the temporal structure of a narrative, Bordwell's assertions are about film form, not about film style. Film form describes the film as a whole, while film style describes 'the pattern of technical choices that a filmmaker makes' (Bordwell and Thompson 2013: 111). The various technical choices that a filmmaker

makes include aspects with the mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. This will become an important distinction later on when I discuss Feagin's analysis of timing and sequencing in film in the final section of this chapter. In my view time is an aspect of both film form and style, but I am most interested in how it can be used creatively as an asset similar to the ways that filmmakers use other stylistic assets such as colour, lighting, or sound.

The practice of analysing the story and plot structure of narratives generally falls under the purview of the discipline of poetics. Although the practice of analysing the formal properties of narratives dates at least as far back as Aristotle's *Poetics*, Bordwell was among the first film scholars to employ the term 'poetics' to the practice of analysing the various conventions of form and style found in film narratives. Broadly speaking, however, his conceptualisations about narrative time largely emerged from Gérard Genette (1980) whose Structuralist work examines the 'tense' of narratives including *order* (i.e. the arrangement of narrative events within the plot), *frequency* (i.e. the amount of times a narrative event appears within the plot), and *duration* (i.e. roughly speaking, the length or amount of pages that a narrative event takes up), as well as the *voice* (i.e. the type of narrator or narration) and *mood* (i.e. the distance and perspective of a narrator or narrative). Because he is focused on written works of art such as the novel, Genette overlooks the subtle differences between how a novel conveys time and how a film conveys time. In his critical commentary on how Genette's work on tense, mood, and voice might translate if applied to film, film theorist Brian Henderson (1983) notes: 'Aside from a reference or two, Genette does not treat film, and his work cannot be directly applied to film. Each of his categories must be rethought on the ground of film analysis' (Henderson 1983: 4–5). Bordwell's chapter on narration and time answers this call.

Bordwell writes that '[i]n cinema many processes of narration depend upon the manipulation of time' (1985: 74). In my view Genette's three categories do not merely describe narrative tense (i.e. whether or not a scene is written in the present, past, or future tense), they help define cinematic temporality in general. That is, the categories of order, frequency, and duration go beyond the service of revealing the tense of a given scene or paragraph when applied to film. At the beginning of his chapter, Bordwell writes, 'The film absolutely controls the order, frequency, and duration of the presentation of events,' and, therefore, the viewer 'submits to a programmed temporal form' (1985: 74). In film, order is used to describe the arrangement of the depicted events along the plot line, while frequency describes the amount of times an event is depicted in the plot. Finally, duration is defined as the amount of time a depicted event endures on screen. Although there are subtle differences in how films convey order and frequency, it is generally similar to the way novels convey it: in novels, events are ordered from page to page and from chapter to chapter and may be either chronological or non-chronological. Examples of non-chronological plot structures include flashbacks and flashforwards in the narrative. Novels may dwell on a certain event again and again or use repetitive language to connote repetition. Typically, however, novels do not simply repeat whole paragraphs verbatim, just as films tend not to repeat footage frame by frame (although there are examples of this). However, both novels and films sometimes present different accounts of certain events so as to convey a general confusion about the truth of a fictionalised event, although this too tends to be rare. An obvious exception here is perhaps *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950).

Duration is a slightly trickier concept to line up between novels and film for the simple reason that films have a set duration (i.e. a runtime) and novels do not. On this point, in his evaluation of Genette's work in relation to film, Henderson notes:

> Films, of course, have fixed viewing times. One may compare a length of film, measured in minutes and seconds or in feet, to a portion of story, or vice

> versa, and one may assemble these findings in an exact table. One may examine the large narrative articulations of a whole film or the microrhythms of very short passages. Genette's account of duration does not enlarge these methodological options; he is dealing with a less exact case. But by making the question of duration newly interesting, he provides new motivation to make such analyses. (1983: 8)

Because he was dealing with written works of art, Genette describes a story's duration in terms of paragraphs and pages: certain events may be described in such detail that a fraction of a minute in the story takes up several pages, while the passage of several years may be encapsulated in a single sentence, but this information is really only noteworthy if we are able to compare it to the rest of the book. In other words, knowing that a given book devotes ten pages to describing a single day in the life of a character tells us very little about temporal relations unless we have something to compare it to. Likewise, knowing that a given film devotes ten minutes to depicting a single day in the life of a character tells us very little unless we could, say, compare that to another portion of the film or another film altogether. Hence, Henderson's claim that duration as a supposedly more precise metric in terms of film is dubious without understanding the relationship between different durations (whether they are measured in pages of a novel or in minutes of a film).

Through his detailed examination of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1992), Genette notes, according to Henderson, 'A durational evolution in the overall text: a gradual slowing of the narrative through longer and longer scenes and a corresponding increase in the number and length of ellipses between such scenes' (1983: 8). Genette labels such variations of speed as 'anisochronies' or effects of rhythm (Henderson 1983: 8). Although Currie (1995) has established that film and novels differ in a number of important ways, we can presume that the same can be said for film narratives: patterns of rhythm can be generated through variations in the length of durations of scenes.

In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss durational patterns in relation to Feagin (1999), who lays the groundwork for thinking about this sort of rhythm in film. For

now, it should be noted that Bordwell's conception of narration and time is not without its critics, which is what I will be concerned with in the next section along with an analysis on some alternative approaches to the subject of cinematic time that may be generalised as following in the tradition of Continental philosophy. I will attempt to highlight points of contact between their research and my own, but ultimately what my analysis in the following section is meant to illustrate is that a piecemeal approach that draws on a fine-grained systematic analysis of the moving image combined with relevant scientific evidence from studies of the mind (i.e. psychology and neuroscience) is the best approach for studying the ways in which time – or our perception of time more precisely – affects the emotions while engaging with film.

1.3 Alternative Approaches Considered

Since the appearance of Deleuze's two-volume work (1986; 1989), collectively referred to as the cinema books, the study of time in film has undergone something of a theoretical fragmentation. Rather than analyse the ways in which time functions as an aesthetic feature of film, many of the authors discussed in the present section utilise time to frame arguments about film culture and history, memory, identity, or reality. In my view, what these approaches all share is a general interest in time as a philosophical concept and a commitment to the idea that analysing the temporal nature of film will contribute to their individual philosophical programmes. They do not, however, demonstrate a clear interest in understanding how our perception of the passage of time within a film might affect the emotions.

For instance, in his conceptualisation of what he calls 'framed time' Stewart (2007), in contrast to the methods of narratologists like the ones discussed in the previous section, claims that his 'narratographic method is in fact more medium specific than traditional

narratologies, whose "ology" is by nature global, transtextual, intermedial, pansemiotic' (2007: 23).[17] Stewart's 'narratographic' method relates to the debates about film as a distinct artform (or 'medium' in Stewart's words) in contrast to other artforms such as literature. However, there are a number of problems with Stewart's approach. For starters, Stewart's (2007: 25) assertion that style is 'for Bordwell mostly a bonus, an add-on, an adjunct to structure' is unsubstantiated considering Stewart's discussion of Bordwell is confined to *Narration in the Fiction Film* in isolation to other works of Bordwell which substantively engage with film style.[18] In his evaluation of the forking path narrative, Bordwell writes that 'we shouldn't underestimate the extent to which stretching traditional narrative requires care … Artists are forever testing the limits of story comprehension but those very limits, and the conventions that accommodate them, remain essential to our dynamic experience of narrative' (2008: 187). Stewart's concept of 'framed time' derives from his examination of European and American films made after 1995, which he dubs 'postfilmic'.[19] According to Stewart, these films require his new method of 'narratography' for analysis because, '[i]ncreasingly, the temporal transit (mechanical) of the film image, frame by frame, gives way to its temporal transformation (electronic) within the frame' (2007: 2). In short, Stewart is concerned with film as a temporal art, but his work sidesteps the question of emotion in order to focus on film's medium specificity.

Moreover, to the extent that Stewart's method offers a productive way for understanding cinematic time, I am sceptical, since the films might have changed in the last twenty-odd years, but our minds with which we use to make sense of them have not. Echoing Stewart, Mroz (2012) challenges Bordwell on the grounds that

> Bordwell's analysis of time in cinema is limited to categorising strategies of temporal construction 'within' the film, distinguishing between fabula, syuzhet, and screen duration, and defining ellipses and compressions of time. In Bordwell's writing, each image seems to affix a meaning or cue to itself to be decoded in the moment of its appearing; the durational flow of the film thus appears to stutter. Cognitivist or formalist writings can categorise shots

> by their camera angles and framings, but give little sense of the movement between moments where film configures itself through a specific angle or as a particular frame. The durational process through a film, in this mode of analysis, becomes fragmented into well-defined moments of succession. [Therefore] it does not contribute enough to an understanding of the aesthetics, affect, concept and operation of duration. (2012: 24)[20]

Insofar as Bordwell's distinctions provide a useful framework for thinking about how narrative time is divided within a film and how those divisions have cognitive effects of the viewer, I am in agreement with Mroz. However, I would note that Bordwell's work does not merely analyse 'local' qualities such as individual shots, edits, or the narrative relations between them, but also the qualities that emerge from whole sequences and whole films. These are precisely the kinds of 'macrolevel' and 'big picture' issues that I discussed in the opening to this chapter.

Moreover, while I agree that Bordwell's distinctions are limited in the sense that they do not elaborate on the affective or emotional possibilities for this division of time in the cinema, I would not qualify this as a deficiency of Bordwell so much as a question that he was not willing or ready to answer before offering a comprehensive account of the cognitive effects of narration and time. Having done so, Bordwell's work paves the way for the present study, which seeks to examine the emotional impact of cinematic timing. Before moving on it's also worth considering that what Mroz means by 'affect' has a different meaning than that used by psychologists and cognitivists. As I mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the meaning of 'affect' used by psychologists and cognitivists is that which I shall use throughout this dissertation.

In psychology, affect is taken to be akin to emotion, but for Mroz, 'affect' refers to the philosophical concept first introduced by Baruch Spinoza and later concretised by Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994).[21] For Mroz, I take it that affect means what Felicity J. Colman defines as 'the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact' (2005: 11). According to Mroz, who interprets the notion through Deleuze and

Guattari's translator Brian Massumi, 'affect is intensity…that moves beyond [and disrupts] meaning. Affective sounds, moments, or images suspend linear temporality and do not necessarily fit into narrative progression' (2012: 5). Mroz's film analyses of *L'Avventura* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960), *Mirror* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975), and the *Dekalog* series (Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1989) reveal 'the ways in which affect is disengaged from the customary constraints of spatial coherence and temporal chronology' (2012: 6).[22]

For Mroz, the disjointed, temporally ambiguous transitional scenes in these films demonstrate how 'affect' in the sense that she is using it is not tied to what I'll call here 'run of the mill' time perception. We shall in Chapter Two, in the section where I discuss the psychological research on time perception, that affect in the sense that I use the term is tied to 'run of the mill' time perception. In fact, affect in my sense of the word, that is, in the cognitivist or psychologist's sense – which is roughly equated with emotion – has been shown to impact time perception. In contrast, Mroz claims that '[a]n affective moment is not, in theory at least, the same as an emotional one' since affect, apparently, cannot be fixed (2012: 33). Instead, Mroz claims that affect 'is an intensity that cannot necessarily be explained' (2012: 33). Ultimately, however, Mroz concedes that '[i]n the duration of the film, however, affect and emotion may not be so easily distinguished from each other…In the process of film viewing, affect and emotion may be intertwined' (2012: 33).

Mroz argues, 'Cinema can make us aware of rhythms of duration through images that are held for too long or not long enough…Unless we fast-forward through a film's duration, we must share with the film a certain section of time' (2012: 40). In Chapter Two, I will discuss film rhythm in relation to the qualities that film shares with another temporal art, namely music. Mroz indicates that the special relationship that film has with time can lead to differing aesthetic experiences, where some viewers might feel a given shot runs too long, while others feel it's just right. Her analysis of *L'Avventura*, which was initially booed at its

premiere before securing its position as 'a classic example of modern art cinema,' illustrates this:

> While the radical deployment of temporal rhythms and the film's ambiguities of meaning angered some of the Cannes audience, *L'Avventura* was immediately recognised as a masterpiece by the jury panel, which awarded it a Special Jury Prize for 'a new movie language and the beauty of its images'. (2012: 50)

Beyond the fact that audiences (and film festival judges) can have very different expectations and tastes, Mroz's example also supports two key claims that I make throughout Parts II and III of this dissertation: (1) audiences have durational expectations and (2) whether or not durational expectations are met can have affective (perhaps emotional) consequences.[23]

I mentioned earlier that Mroz's notions of temporality and affect stem from the work of Deleuze. Since his writing has proven so influential to works that engage with the temporal nature of film, it would be helpful to briefly unpack some of the pertinent concepts in Deleuze's cinema books such as 'durée' (usually translated as 'duration') if only to illustrate how these concepts ultimately fail to answer the research questions important in the present thesis. Broadly a work of philosophy, Deleuze's cinema books sought to define the ways in which cinema and various cinematic styles and techniques function, but they should also be understood in the context of his greater philosophical programme, which includes: *Difference and Repetition* (1994); *The Logic of Sense* (1990); *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) (both co-written with Félix Guattari); as well as his interpretations of Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant, Baruch Spinoza, and Michel Foucault, among others. Drawing on the semiotics of C.S. Peirce, the cinema books constitute a taxonomy of images and signs in the cinema, although Deleuze notes that he effectively changes the meaning of Peirce's term 'sign' in order to suit his philosophical programme.[24] In addition, Deleuze's concepts of 'durée' and 'image', derived from Bergson, undergo similar modifications. Bergson developed his notions of 'durée' and 'image' through

a metaphysics of time that carried on the spiritualist tradition in philosophy.[25] Deleuze positions films as temporal forms of art that help him better understand the nature of time. It should be noted that this is a very different theoretical aim than the one posed in the present thesis. While I aim to study how the perception of time and timing triggers emotional responses in viewers, Deleuze aims to say something about the nature of time itself.

According to D. N. Rodowick, for instance, 'Deleuze's philosophy is, in the deepest and most complex ways, a philosophy of time' (1997: xiii). Rodowick argues that 'the cinema books continue a deep and complex meditation on time that is one of Deleuze's central contributions to contemporary philosophy' (Rodowick 1997: x). For Deleuze, films like *Last Year at Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961) with their cloudy timelines and ambiguous shot-reverse-shots seem to embody the concept of the time-image. It is evident, therefore, that beyond formulating a metaphysics of time, Deleuze's cinema books are also concerned with providing a critical theory about the history and trends of cinema as well as offering some highly evaluative film criticism. Therefore, although Deleuze's cinema books might at heart be concerned with a philosophy of time, they remain an influential commentary on the history of cinema and its relationship with the consequences of modernity and an industrialised society. Comparably, Doane (2002) argues that contingency, formulated in her book as a kind of representable chance, operates like a form of resistance to the pressures of modern-day capitalism.

Doane's critical inquiry into the history of the rationalisation and industrialisation of time begins with the ubiquity of pocket watches in the 19th Century, and the synchronisation of clock time brought on by the national rail system in England in the 1880s, which culminates in the Taylorisation of the industrial workforce and the assembly line.[26] Doane writes:

> It is the argument of this book that the rationalization of time characterizing industrialization and the expansion of capitalism was accompanied by a

> structuring of contingency and temporality through emerging technologies of representation – a structuring that attempted to ensure their residence outside structure, to make tolerable an incessant rationalization. Such a strategy is not designed simply to deal with the leakage or by-products of rationalization; it is structurally necessary to the ideologies of capitalist modernization. (2002: 11)

According to Doane, 'The significance of the cinema…lies in its apparent capacity to perfectly represent the contingent, to provide the pure record of time'. (2002: 22). As evidence, she cites the hundreds of 'actuality' films made by the Lumières in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[27] Later in her book, she examines the history of cinema through the lens of semiotics, claiming that 'In its dominant historical development, [cinema] has become the narrativization of chance, the historicization of the present. A large part of its pleasure and fascination is no doubt due to the lure of contingency, the promise of its indexicality, and hence its access to the present' (2002: 107). This represents a sentiment shared by Laura Mulvey (2006), whose attention to time stems from her meditation on film's capacity to be paused, rewound, repeated, or run in fast or slow motion, which is a practice that, for her, generates a new aesthetic pleasure while also revealing what she calls 'cinema's stillness, a projected film's best-kept secret' (2006: 22).[28]

In fact, echoing Bazin (discussed in the previous section), film's capacity to record, represent, and reveal the possibilities of time and time on screen is for Deleuze, Doane, and Mulvey one of the things that makes film so enjoyable and compelling to watch. Admittedly, this level of reflection is largely absent from my dissertation as I am primarily interested in the ways in which cinematic timing affects viewers and not on the ways in which film records time or the philosophical implications that would lead to such a conjecture. In light of the psychological and neuroscientific evidence presented in Chapter Two, I am not prepared to make the assertion that time exists outside the brain or that if it does exist outside the brain, that it could be recorded on any medium including film. Rather, my interest on timing has to do with the fact that, whether or not it exists outside the brain, time most certainly is

constructed and we can therefore say that time exists (at the very least) inside the mind. I will return to this in the second section of Chapter Two.

Helen Powell's book on cinematic time proposes 'to explore the usefulness of cinema in understanding the concept of temporality, in relation to both the individual subject and the social milieu in which they are situated' (2012: 10). Powell's book has the distinction of being the only one under analysis here that considers digital media such as live video conferencing as it relates to challenging the definitions of film and the moving image (2012: 30). Powell's discussion of the real-time principle represents one of the few examinations of its kind in print.[29] Although Powell's book sheds light on an under-researched area of film style and technique, it does not necessarily construct a framework for understanding cinematic time. By contrast, Carruthers (2016) develops a comprehensive theory for what she calls *timeliness*, which refers to a temporal quality of film having to do with happening or occurring at the right time.

Carruthers explains that in colloquial terms, 'When we refer to something as 'timely,' we simply mean that it comes at a moment that is suitable, a timely action, for instance, is one that is appropriate or relevant for our present situation' (2016: 16). Carruthers's formulation of timeliness, however, is inflected by her understanding of Martin Heidegger's concept of *Zeitlichkeit*, which she explains is better translated as 'timeliness' rather than 'temporality' because 'it is less a static concept than it is an activity: it is Dasein's way of being temporal, as a dynamic structuring of past, present, and future' (2016: 16). Carruthers's explains:

> Timeliness, in this combined sense, emphasizes that time is actively mediated by films and viewers: on the one hand, there is the way that films continually occasion time by their unfolding temporal structures; on the other hand there is the way these details solicit our engagement, making their acceptance and assessment a meaningful feature of viewing activity. This dynamic framework encompasses our encounters with filmic ambiguity, as we read and respond to shifting temporal cues, and it retains the immersive appeal of cinematic time as we acknowledge our ongoing investment in it, as viewers. (2016: 16)

Her hermeneutical and film-phenomenological approach assumes the fact that 'films *know* about time, and can teach us something about it' (2016: 2). Carruthers's close analyses of both Hollywood and global art cinema show how her theory of timeliness covers a substantial amount of ground in the study of cinematic time. For instance, in her scrutiny of the film *The Limey* (Steven Soderbergh, 1999) she asserts that the film's 'initially confounding formal structure acts as a guide to its operations; by requiring us to make sense of a welter of rhymes and repetitions, the film actually teaches us how to be its viewer' (2016: 39–40). Tying this in with the Russian Formalist notion of defamiliarisation, Carruthers remarks, 'That these procedures frustrate our expectations of a legible temporal sequence is precisely their point: our awareness of time, and our confusion about it, are vital components of the film's formal objectives' (2012: 40–41). Her analysis of *The Limey* shows how a film's timeliness can 'put us in an excellent position to contemplate our own activity, as viewers' (2012: 56–57).

In the present dissertation, there are several points of contact with Carruthers's theory. For instance, in her discussion of Noël Carroll's solution to the paradox of suspense, she points out, to my mind, one of the more interesting features of the paradox: 'the way suspense exerts a temporal tension that is infinitely renewable' (2016: 32). She adds:

> Its pleasure is undiminished by the knowledge we have of a film because it draws on our imaginative engagement with it; as long as we remain receptive to the film's time structures, the sensation of suspense is rekindled across multiple viewings. Conversely, it follows that the surest way to mute suspense is to abridge the temporal structures that facilitate it: anyone who has attempted to select a 'representative' excerpt from a suspenseful film knows how much its tensions depend on the stretches of time that surround it. (2016: 32)

In Part II, I'll be returning to this in relation to the question of timing and suspense. However, while Carruthers sees this as an opportunity to explore film history, I see it as an opportunity to uncover the ways in which cinematic temporality affects viewers' experiences and appreciation of suspense films. This difference marks an important point at which our theoretical aims part ways. While Carruthers' notion of timeliness may be located in some of

the film examples provided herein, ultimately her methods and more importantly her goals are quite different from my own. Carruthers introduces timeliness as a way to reflect upon 'the ambiguities of time' and 'as an incentive to phenomenological description and hermeneutical inquiry' (2016: 139).

Judging by their corpuses, these authors seem to be most interested in by and large is how films creatively mix up the plot. This is particularly true for Stewart (2007), Mroz (2012), and Carruthers (2016). There are two issues here that distinguish my approach from the ones discussed in the previous two sections. The first one has to do with the scale at which these theorists are operating in terms of their overall and broad interest in the temporal nature of film. The second has to do with a difference in corpus and the theoretical implications that, in my view, such corpuses suggest.

First, in the second section of this chapter, I mentioned that this dissertation focuses on the temporal structures at a highly local level. My microlevel analysis positions time as an asset of film style, not of film form. In contrast to Bordwell's fabula, syzhet, and screen time, which describe the temporal structures that shape film form, I am primarily concerned with temporal structures as they relate within a scene or scene fragment. Moreover, my engagement with the theoretical treatments of cinematic temporality that take on what I have generalised at the Continental approach reveals that they have highly different research aims than my own. While one might begin to imagine the grand philosophical implications of a dissertation all about cinematic time, an investigation into the metaphysical nature of film in relation to time ventures well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Second, although the individual research projects discussed in this section offer proposals for understanding the nature of cinematic time that sometimes overlap with my own aims, broadly speaking their research projects are focused on evaluating the temporal qualities in what might be considered 'aesthetically significant' films in the sense that they

deviate from the modes of conventional storytelling practices. Surely there is a vast range of films that might not be considered 'aesthetically significant' in the sense that I have just suggested yet deserve consideration in that they are effective in generating the desired emotional effects for their viewers.[30] Simply put, I do not aim to develop a theory of cinematic timing for 'aesthetically significant' films, I want to develop a theory of cinematic timing for film in general. Furthermore, few of the authors in this section, including Deleuze and his exegetes, shed light on the question of how cinematic timing is affective in the psychological sense, which is what I am concerned with in this dissertation.

Because my thesis aims to examine the local emotional effects of time and timing. I am primarily concerned with suspense and comic timing, which I believe requires a piecemeal approach that utilises different methodologies including relevant psychological frameworks alongside a fine-grained microlevel analysis of film. Through this dissertation, my examples of films involve a close analysis of scenes or fragments of scenes, which is why I characterise it as operating at the microlevel. Analysing the temporal structures of whole feature-length films is beyond the scope of this dissertation, although this is something that I gesture towards in my analysis of the eleven-minute short *Too Many Cooks* (2014) in Chapter Eight. In the following section, I'll turn to the notion of timing in Feagin (1999), which is representative of the kind of conceptual model building and analytical rigor that exemplifies the methodological aims of this thesis.

1.4 Cinematic Timing and Emotion

An important advancement towards the examination of how time functions in narrative film is Feagin's 1999 essay 'Time and Timing' in which she analyses the cognitive and emotional effects of what she calls *timing* and *sequencing*. It's important to note that Feagin's level of analysis is directed at the moment-by-moment unfolding of action on the screen. Her research

question has to do with one of film style, not of film form. As I mentioned in the section above, Bordwell's analysis of narration time analyses the temporal structures that make up the relations between fabula time (i.e. story time), syuzhet time (i.e. plot time), and screen time (i.e. presentation time). But Feagin's analysis of timing and sequencing has to do with film style because she's interested in the relations between the temporal structures within scenes and scene fragments. Moreover, her analysis reveals how filmmakers can use time creatively; they can use time like an asset of film style to generate emotional effects. I'll give examples of this in due course, but now it's important to understand Feagin's notions of timing and sequencing.

According to Feagin, 'Sequencing is the order of the presentation of events of a narrative or story…Sequencing is a temporal feature of film because it is the order in which various aspects of a story are told, and hence revealed to the viewer in and through time…sequencing concerns what came before and what came after' (1999: 174). Sequencing is therefore related to what Bordwell calls syuzhet because it has to do with the arrangement of 'various aspects of story' but she means something more specific than that since her analysis is localised to sequencing within scenes and scene fragments, rather than the story as a whole. In contrast to the kind of ordering that Bordwell discusses in relation to the plot, Feagin's sequential ordering also has to do with the fragmentary moment-by-moment ordering of images within scenes, although she notes, 'A canonical ordering of the presentation of the frames of a film is essential to its identity as that film. The sequencing of images can therefore be exploited to influence a viewer's emotions or feeling responses to it' (1999: 168).

Sequencing, therefore, denotes not just the arrangement of scenes in the film's plot, but also the arrangement of images, sounds, actions, and events as they are revealed on screen or in the soundtrack within scenes. On the other hand, she writes:

> Timing has to do with length of time (duration) of an image and relationships between and among various lengths of time relevant images persist … timing concerns how long, how long before, and how long after, and how these interactions affect audience response … Timing presupposes sequencing, since the duration and durational relations of the presentation of actions and events are dependent on the images of a film appearing in a certain sequence. Sequencing does not, however, presuppose timing; rather is makes timing possible. (1999: 174).

Both sequencing and timing are temporal characteristics. Sequencing involves the temporal order of images, sounds, actions, and events in a scene or scene fragment; timing involves when those features appear and for how long they persist on screen or in the soundtrack. Feagin argues that 'certain temporal features of a film – the duration of and durational relationships between and among images in a film – can affect spectators' emotional or feeling responses to a film in ways that enrich their experiences of it' (1999: 168). She claims that timing can take two forms: (1) the duration of an image and (2) the durational relationships between and among images. Feagin defines the duration of an image as 'the length of time an image persists, which may affect a viewer's responses,' while the durational relationships between and among images include 'the relative duration of images earlier in the movie, the length of time elapsed between or among them, and length of time elapsed between them and the present image, which may itself have a significant duration' (1999: 169). Because her local (or what might be called a microlevel) analysis of narrative films supports my broader thesis that filmmakers manipulate the temporal features of film for emotional purposes, her essay provides the foundation onto which I will advance of theory of cinematic timing and emotion.

Hinting at the fact that she views time as a creative asset of film style (e.g. colour, lighting, sound) Feagin addresses the fact that not all films have good timing. In fact, they can have bad timing. In Feagin's view, 'A film may lack timing, so that it does not have the effectiveness it could have' (1999: 169). We may claim, therefore, that some films have effective (i.e. good) timing, while others have ineffective (i.e. bad) timing – good or bad with

respect to certain goals, that is. It's worth nothing that she uses the term 'timing' to refer to durational features of a film when they are relevant to these and other assessments of how successful, unsuccessful, subtle, or obvious a film is, which is different from the way that I generally use the word 'timing'. When I use 'timing' I specifically mean the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack. In my view all films have timing because all films consist of time. In my view timing in a film can be either good or bad (i.e. effective/does its job or ineffective/doesn't do its job) but it can't not exist. For instance, we might say a film has good lighting, but since film is also a medium constituted of light, we would not say of a film with bad lighting that it did not have lighting. In any case, what I hope to establish through this discussion is that in the hands of a clever filmmaker, timing becomes a creative asset that the filmmaker can draw upon for artistic and emotional purposes.

While timing is certainly not the only feature that a viewer will respond to in a film, Feagin asserts, 'In a large number of cases, one's appreciation of a film will be fuller and richer both theoretically (cognitively) and affectively when one responds to it in ways that are affected by the duration of and durational relationships among its images' (1999: 170). I should note here that Feagin, in her own words 'stretches' the term 'images' to include both a static image as well as a portion of film, which could theoretically include sounds, actions, and events within the frame of a film (1999: 168). In other words, by 'images' Feagin means the audio-visual makeup of a film. For example, we could discuss the 'image' of a character on screen in relation to other characters or objects on screen. For clarity, in addition to what she calls 'images' in film, I will continue to add sounds, actions, and events when I discuss timing throughout this dissertation.[31]

This is all well and good for timing, but a general criticism that one might have against a theory of timing is that it might be found to be subservient to other assets of film

style such as sound, colour, lighting, and editing. In other words, isn't timing just an aspect of the other more important facets of film style? In short, yes and no. It is true that timing is a factor that applies to any and all facets of film style because it involves *when* something appears and for how long, but the argument could be made in the other direction. Apart from light and the potentiality for movement, the final ingredient for film (at least in my view) is time, so time and timing could be said to be much more fundamental to moving images than most other assets of film style.[32]

I think Feagin would also not deny this assertion. She elaborates on two factors typically responsible for viewer responses in film: elicitors and conditioners. Elicitors are 'a part of a film experienced at a given point in time, or during a brief period of time we can call the "experiential present"' while conditioners are 'a psychological state or set of states of the perceiver' which include 'beliefs, ideas, abilities, capacities, past experiences, moods, attitudes, personality and character traits, and no doubt numerous other psychological states or conditions' (1999: 171–72). In Feagin's assessment, timing is neither an elicitor nor a conditioner, because timing is neither a part of the content of the film nor something that the viewer brings with her to the film. In fact, she writes:

> When timing is involved, one's responses cannot be explained merely by appealing to elicitors and nontemporal conditioners. Timing works because of what happens to the viewer (or what the viewer does) during the temporal interval. The length of that interval – the duration and durational relationships between and among images in the film – will be part of the explanation why one responds the way one does. (1999: 172)

In my chapters on comedy and comic timing, I will challenge the notion that timing is not something that viewers bring with them when watching a film. In particular, I think viewers have a good idea of how long certain kinds of scenes usually last and when those expectations are thwarted, this can result in humour. In any case, Feagin rightly notes that evaluating the cognitive and emotional effects of timing is difficult. For starters, it's not clear how one would separate the timing from the content of a film. She adds:

> This ontological peculiarity of timing, its dependence on temporal relationships, is one reason it is difficult to isolate the role it plays in generating responses. Furthermore, it is also difficult to determine whether the particular duration and durational relationships among parts of a film are effective or whether it is only content and sequencing among parts that produces one's cognitive and affective responses. The affective potential of timing may always be at least partly a function of the content that is timed the way it is. (1999: 172)

Summarising her position, Feagin argues, 'Timing is an important part of [a film's] power to affect viewers' feelings and emotions' (1999: 179). That is to say, timing can be used to evoke feelings of happiness, sadness, fear, or indifference. Timing can be used to create suspense or aid in the effect of visual or auditory humour. A close examination of some examples will help to elaborate.

Consider a scene from the film *Garden State* (Zach Braff, 2004) where the protagonist Andrew (Zach Braff) visits a new psychiatrist. The scene or temporal 'unit', using Feagin's term, begins with Andrew sitting in a psychiatrist's office waiting for the doctor to arrive. Andrew gazes at the numerous photographs, diplomas, and framed awards and this is represented with a POV shot (i.e. point-of-view shot) of the wall. Following Andrew's point of view, the camera slowly tilts upward revealing hundreds of frames on the wall, halting just before reaching the ceiling. After a brief pause – that is, a short duration where nothing happens and the camera stops moving – the camera jerks abruptly upward revealing one last framed diploma, which is hung on the ceiling (see Figure 1.1b).[33]





Figures 1.1a–1.1b. *Garden State* (2004). Initially, the framing of this shot slowly tilts up to reveal all the awards that cover the wall, but right near the end of the take, the tilt lurches upward in a faster motion than before.

I would suggest that the temporal order or, in Feagin's words, 'sequencing', of the two disparate lengths in camera movement (i.e. long then short), and the two disparate speeds in camera movement (i.e. slow then fast) as well as the perceived juxtaposition within both contribute to the humour of this scene. The diplomas are revealed by the movement of the camera; the camera slowly tilts up until it reaches the ceiling and pauses for a beat – just a moment of inaction – before the camera tilts up quickly, revealing one last diploma.

So, what is the framed diploma doing on the ceiling? If I were to advance an interpretation of this scene, the psychiatrist's choice to decorate his wall and ceiling in this way displays something of his personality; he is a cluttered man and perhaps a little vain. However, the humour relies not only on making this interpretation about the personality of the psychiatrist; it is my supposition that the humour also relies on incongruities between the speed of the camera movement and the amount of space covered in the tilt upward. The slow pan up the wall affords us time to take in all the diplomas, while the beat or pause – the moment of inaction – before the final quick tilt upward allows us another moment to contemplate the vanity and over-qualification of Andrew's psychiatrist. The quick tilt upward gives us just enough time to take in the strangely positioned frame on the ceiling. The contrast between the long and slow tilt upward, which reveals the myriad of diplomas and awards, and the short and quick tilt upward, which reveals the last diploma, amounts to a humorous incongruity incorporating both speed (i.e. the speed of the camera tilt upward: slow, then fast) and the value of the angle of the tilt (i.e. a tilt that traverses the large space of the wall, then a tilt that traverses only a fraction of the ceiling). This amounts to a visual gag, embellishing the ridiculous situation in which Andrew has been placed.

The success of the visual joke in *Garden State* relies on the timing of the reveal of the diploma (the duration of the pause of camera tilt motion just before the reveal), but it also relies on the ordering or sequencing of what was shown before the final framed diploma to

achieve its comedic effect. Seeing, for instance, the single framed diploma dangling from the ceiling before being exposed to the crammed mass of diplomas, awards, and photographs would presumably be less humorous or perhaps not humorous at all because it would lack the build-up, anticipation, and finally the surprise reveal. In other words, it would start with the punchline instead of the setup. Hence, the temporal sequencing of the scene in the psychiatrist's office guides the viewer along a path of discovery that leads to a punchline: the lone, ridiculously placed diploma.

Another example, which Feagin herself cites, consists of an iconic scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) in which Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) is chased by thugs through a Cairo bazaar when, through a crowd of bystanders, he runs into a man in black robes threatening him with a scimitar. Figures 1.2a–1.2f illustrate the shot by shot sequence of the ensuing battle. The sequence begins with Indiana in a medium long shot with the pedestrians scattering behind him (Figure 1.2a). The film cuts to a shot with Indiana in the foreground as the man with the scimitar is revealed (see Figure 1.2b). In this shot, we can also clearly see that Indiana is holding his signature melee weapon, the bullwhip. The film then cuts to a reverse long shot where the man in black robes, now in the foreground, displays his skilful swordsmanship, while Indiana wipes sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his shirt in the background (Figure 1.2d). The film cuts again this time to a medium shot of the man in black robes, allowing us to get a better sense of his physical prowess and expert swordsmanship (Figure 1.2c). The film cuts to a medium shot of Indiana, who gives a look of impatience and begins to pull out his gun (Figure 1.2e). In the final shot of this sequence, Indiana fires and turns away before the man in black ropes collapses fully to the ground (Figure 1.2f). The entire sequence lasts only fifteen seconds.[34]



Figures 1.2a–1.2f. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981). Indiana Jones defeats a swordsman with his gun.

What is important here is not necessarily the duration of each single shot, lasting between one and six seconds, but the relationship between the duration of time devoted to the swordsmanship of Indiana's foe and the duration of time devoted to Indiana's offensive move. Thus, what is typically at stake for matters of timing is not merely editing, but a whole host of stylistic and technical factors. The swordsman displays an impressive skill with his weapon and the viewer, perhaps employing narrative schemata relating to the epic battle scenes in westerns and samurai films that they have seen, forms the hypothesis that Indiana Jones's attack will be just as impressive and skilful as the swordsman's. Feagin writes:

> The duration of the image, that is, the length of time spent showing the dexterity of Jones's foe, may have cognitive and affective results. A reasonable cognitive effect would be the belief that an action-packed battle would be the anticipation, with some trepidation, of a contest that has the potential to involve a lot of blood [...] The relatively lengthy buildup contrasts with Jones's quick dispatch of his rival to humorous effect. (1999: 169)

In other words, the setup of this gag stems from our anticipation of events and the payoff results when our expectations are subverted for humorous effect. The time devoted to showing the swordsman in black robes might create the expectation that the ensuing fight will be long and hard fought or, at the very least, that we will see Indiana make an equally impressive display of melee weaponry skill using his bullwhip. Hence, our surprise when Indiana pulls out his revolver and shoots the swordsman from a distance. Moreover, the contrast between the longer length of screen-time devoted to the swordsman twirling his sword versus the shorter length of screen-time devoted to Indiana shooting his gun, illustrates the importance of Feagin's notion of timing, and specifically what I will call incongruous timing, which I will discuss at length in Chapters Six and Seven. That is, there is an incongruity between the lengthy display of the swordsman and the short and speedy display of Indiana's counter move. Additionally, this scene from *Raiders* functions to incite humour in much the same way as my example from *Garden State* but it does so not through a measured beat, a pause before the surprising reveal, but through a surprising interruption.[35]

Both of these scenes show that contrary to Feagin, timing is indeed something that viewers bring with them in viewing a film, in that they have expectations of how a scene plays out; effective timing in horror and comedy in some sense manipulates or thwarts these expectations, as the remainder of my thesis will illustrate.

Conclusion

In his book *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, echoing Bazin, writes of a 'new aesthetic principle' that was discovered at the moment of cinema's invention:

> For the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means *to take an impression of time*. And simultaneously the possibility of reproducing that time on screen as often as he wanted, to repeat it and go back to it. He acquired a matrix for *actual time*. Once seen and recorded, time

> could now be preserved in metal boxes over a long period (theoretically for ever). (1986: 62, emphasis in original)

As the title of his book is meant to suggest, Tarkovsky sees the act of filmmaking as similar to the act of sculpture. In sculpture, the artist shapes her work out of clay, while, in film, the filmmaker shapes her work out of time. In my view, an important aspect of this cinematic 'time-sculpting' involves the ways in which filmmakers manipulate the temporal structure of a film for emotional and affective purposes.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive overview and to engage with the relevant literature as it pertains to cinematic temporality as well as to set up a general theory of cinematic timing with examples. The first part of this chapter established cinema as a uniquely temporal art, which is an important framing if we are to fully understand and appreciate the temporal properties that affect emotion in film. Following Currie (1995), who introduced the concept of cinema's connected temporality, we can say that film portrays time by means of time because it, unlike other artforms, can record and capture time just as it unfolds in real life and display that time back to us using time and in the same amount of time. When film portrays time in this manner, it doesn't just represent time by means of time because film is constituted of the time which it represents.

The second part of this chapter was devoted to what is generally categorised as the analytic-cognitive and narratological approaches to narrative time. In terms of mapping out the ways in which narrative time works, significant credit is due to the Russian Formalists, who introduced the concepts fabula (i.e. story) and syuzhet (i.e. plot) in order to distinguish the temporal relations between the overall chronological story and the arrangement of events within the plot, as well as Genette's Structuralist approach that established three temporal dimensions of narration including order, frequency, and duration, which were adopted by Bordwell and applied to film. Bordwell distinguishes between three levels of narration time in a film including fabula duration, syuzhet duration, and screen duration.

In my view, Bordwell's analysis of temporal structure largely focuses on the macrolevel of story and plot structure of a narrative. Over the course of the following chapters, I hope to make it clear that filmmakers are just as careful about how they manipulate temporal structures on the moment-by-moment microlevel by providing a fine-grained analysis of scenes or scene fragments.

I introduced Feagin's notion of timing and used it to formulate a general theory of cinematic timing and the emotions. Ultimately, what I hope to have shown is that very few studies offer a systematic focus on the question of time and the emotions in film, which this dissertation proposes to do. By altering the durations and durational relationships between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack, filmmakers are able to use timing creatively. The following chapter builds off of this idea of timing and further develops the notion of *affective timing*, that is timing that generates or enhances emotions in film.

Chapter Two

The Art of When

> 'The scenario was idiotic, but, oh, what rhythm!' That's the ritual pronouncement of every lover of 'pure cinema' at the exit of whatever cinema is in vogue. Press our man on what he means by that, and he will move on synonyms – cadence, movement, etc. – or to technical terms – flash scenes, swish pans ... – and end up telling you it's inexplicable, that it requires a sense of cinema!
>
> Roger Leenhardt (1988: 200)

One of the main goals of Chapter One was to articulate that the film scholarship on time tends to ignore or overlook the question of whether or not the manipulation of temporal features of film can have an emotional effect on the viewer. In other words, they tend to overlook what I've called *affective temporality* or the temporal qualities of film that generate or enhance emotional effects. This chapter is therefore concerned with the nature of affective temporality in the moving image. Analysing the emotional impact of temporality in film will require both empirical and theoretical methodologies, drawing on both the 'piecemeal approach' espoused by Noël Carroll (1988; 1996) and the method of triangulation espoused by Murray Smith (2017), this chapter seeks to establish the groundwork onto which a theory of timing, pacing, rhythm, and emotion in film can be understood.

David Bordwell (1985) argues that while watching a film, we are constantly making and revising hypotheses about what will happen in the narrative. He writes:

> The temporal constraints of the viewing situation … point directly to the central importance of 'rhythm' in the cinema. Cognitive psychologists have suggested that the mind's induction operations can be limited by the speed at which the environment demands decisions … Rhythm in narrative cinema comes down to this: by forcing the spectator to make inferences at a certain *rate*, the narration governs *what* and *how* we infer. (1985: 76)

It's worth mentioning that although Bordwell is primarily concerned with matters of cognition, I think what he argues here could actually be taken a bit further to shed light on the

affective qualities of rhythm. When faced with problems, puzzles, or questions, we have good motivation to make inferences about the future, both the immediate and the distant future, but throughout I'll be focusing on the immediate future since that is what is currently in question. In other words, why do we take pleasure in filling in these gaps in knowledge and what has rhythm got to do with it? I will argue that we experience pleasure in making correct inferences about rhythm, what neuroscientists Ethan S. Bromberg-Martin and Okihide Hikosaka have referred to as a 'cognitive reward' (Bromberg-Martin and Hikosaka, 2009).

Briefly summarised, the cognitive reward refers to a rise in midbrain dopamine levels not only when receiving a reward but when seeking out information about the reward.[36] The mechanisms behind the cognitive reward are not yet fully understood, but Bromberg-Martin and Hikosaka's research suggests that that seeking out information (what they refer to as 'information-seeking') might feel just as rewarding as conventional reward systems (what they refer to as 'reward-seeking'). In short, Bromberg-Martin and Hikosaka's research suggests that it feels good to learn. In my view this could help explain why we seem to take so much pleasure in attentively following a story and why we seem to be cognitively and affectively motivated to continually make inferences on a moment-to-moment basis during the film viewing experience.

My overview in Chapter One also reveals a general lack of engagement with scientific research about the perception of time and a preference for neologistic terminology used to define and refine the phenomenon of cinematic time. In her editorial introduction for the special issue of the journal *Film Studies* entitled 'Film and Time', Sarah Cardwell writes of the impressive response to her call for papers and notes that 'Little use has been made of changing scientific perspectives on time, perhaps echoing the relative paucity of researchers who are genuinely committed to and knowledgeable about both science and the arts' (2006: v). Unfortunately, in the decade since Cardwell's writing, that seems to have continued to be

the case. As such, hundreds of psychological and neurophysiological studies on the perception of time remain untapped. One of the aims of this dissertation is to reveal the ways in which scientific study can inform film scholarship. In order to understand exactly how our perception of time in film can have an emotional impact, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the perception of time in general. Therefore, in this chapter I will attempt to engage with the relevant scientific research on the perception of time with special attention to time perception and the emotions. In addition, since time is such a tricky topic to discuss, it will also be vital to develop and refine a productive set of terms. Film is not the only temporal art, however, so rather than invent an entirely new set of theoretical terms in order to discuss the temporal nature of cinema, I will adopt and adapt some relatively familiar terms from the study of music (i.e. musicology and music theory) including *rhythm*, *tempo* (i.e. *pace* or speed), and *beats*. I should add that I will not be arguing that film is at its core a musical artform, but rather I seek to highlight the temporal qualities that both music and film share.[37]

Relating film rhythm to the art of music is nothing new. As early as the 1910s, filmmakers and critics attempted to characterise film rhythm as a kind of creative use of pacing (i.e. speed or tempo), although they argued that film rhythm was unique to cinema because it could only be achieved through techniques such as editing, close-ups, and the careful selection of the duration of images (Abel 1993: 204). Sergei Eisenstein was particularly fond of comparing music theory to the art of filmmaking since both, in his mind, should be analysed and theorised by practitioners.[38] According to Eisenstein, 'an understanding of the structural laws of the process and rhythm underlying the stabilization and development of both [music and film] provides the only firm foundation for establishing a unity between the two' (1943: 128–29). In relation to what he sometimes called a 'metric beat', Eisenstein asserted that '[t]hough unrecognized, [the beat] is nevertheless

indispensable for the "organization" of the sensual impression. Its clarity can bring into unison the "pulsing" of the film and the "pulsing" of the audience' (1949: 73). In the final section of this chapter, I will explore the notion of the cinematic beat.

In his 1936 essay 'Le rythme cinématographique'[39] filmmaker and critic Roger Leenhardt decried the use of 'vague impressionism or a secret terminology' to talk about cinematic style. Leenhardt advised against the musical metaphor: 'Let's begin then by forgetting the dangerous literary or musical echoes (visual melody, etc.) of this word, rhythm, and attempt to isolate the elementary phenomenon to which it refers' (1988: 200–01).[40] Whether or not Leenhardt is successful in creating a new language for discussing the rhythm of cinema is debatable, since he too falls into the same traps with which he finds fault. It would seem that to a certain extent the 'musical metaphor' seems unavoidable.

Lacking a coherent technical language for film rhythm, filmmakers, critics, and theorists have relied on an analogy to music in order to discuss, develop, and apply theories of rhythm to film. More recently, musicologist Danijela Kulezic-Wilson seeks to demonstrate that 'film's musical qualities are not only metaphorical' (2015: 3). Her book *The Musicality of Narrative Film* undertakes 'a thorough comparative analysis of the common denominators shared by these two arts – time, rhythm and movement – exploring both the depth and the limits of the film/music analogy' (2015: 3). In addition, film scholar Lea Jacobs (2015) employs musicological terminology to discuss film rhythm in her book *Film Rhythm After Sound: Technology, Music, and Performance*, although it is not clear that her aim is ultimately to generate a standard language with which to discuss the temporality of cinema. Pointing out the differences between music and film, Jacobs states that 'while duration in filmmaking is patterned, I do not think that one can sustain the clear distinctions between meter, rhythm, and tempo that obtain in music' (2015: 25). On this point I largely agree

which is why, as I shall later indicate, it is necessary to adopt and adapt certain useful terms for application to cinema.

While I sympathise with Leenhardt's committed stance to eschew 'vague impressionism' and 'secret terminology' to discuss film rhythm, in my view no new terminology has sufficiently replaced the 'musical metaphor'. As I attempted to illustrate in my overview of the alternative approaches to the subject of cinematic time in Chapter One, neologisms such as Deleuze's *time-image*, while they may be useful and productive for their own purposes, do not reveal anything about the emotional impact of cinematic temporality, which is the main aim of this dissertation. Following Kulezic-Wilson, rather than rejecting musical terminology and developing an entirely new set of terms to discuss cinematic rhythm and the timing of actions and events on-screen, this chapter seeks to adopt and adapt existing terms that will aid in the discussion of cinematic time, temporality, and rhythm, which, as I will argue, make cinematic timing the *art of when*.

2.1 A Naturalised Aesthetics of Affective Temporality

Murray Smith describes an academic rift identified by the philosopher C.P. Snow in the 1950s, which demonstrates a conflict between the two extant academic cultures, namely the humanities and the sciences (Smith 2017: 1–3). Snow suggests a kind of methodological intervention between the two cultures, formulated as a 'third culture' (Smith 2017: 2). Adopting this *third culture*, Smith devotes his book *Film, Art, and the Third Culture* to formulating and demonstrating a *naturalised aesthetics of film*, which he defines as an approach that 'integrates methods and knowledge drawn from across the humanities, the social and the natural sciences, and contrasts with work rooted in the world of the two cultures' (2017: 4). According to Smith, the naturalised aesthetics of film is:

> an approach that, while fully acknowledging the diversity of artistic forms and their cultural contexts, sees film art as a manifestation of a cluster of deeply

> entrenched, basic human capacities, and thus treats it as a phenomenon which is likely to be illuminated by various types of scientific as well as traditional humanistic research. (Smith 2017: 3)

Smith's approach may be compared to Arthur P. Shimamura and Stephen E. Palmer's goal of *aesthetic science*, which they claim involves 'promoting meaningful dialogues among people in various disciplines, including psychologists, philosophers, neuroscientists, art critics, historians, anthropologists, and artists themselves' (2012: viii). In the later part of this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which an approach that straddles the humanistic as well as scientific research traditions can inform my study of the perception of time and film, illuminating the question for researchers in several areas of study. Smith's approach is not without its criticisms, however. In fact, Smith recognises the risk that his approach may be mislabelled 'scientism' and, therefore, be misinterpreted as an attempt to 'scientise' the traditional scholarly methods of film studies. He writes:

> It is important to stress that the position I advocate is not one according to which the traditional methods and principles of the humanities – close critical analysis and evaluation, introspective reflection, qualitative research, conceptual analysis, historical narration – should be supplanted by a battery of scientific techniques, from statistical tables to brain scans, evolutionary trees, and genetic maps. The vision is rather one of an integrated research culture, in which the questions posed determine what methods are brought into play, without the traditional barriers between disciplines and the worlds of science, engineering, the arts, and the humanities intervening. (Smith 2017: 4)

As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, scientific studies on the perception of time certainly inform but they in no way replace the methods of close analyses and philosophical conceptualisation that help paint a fuller picture of how cinematic temporality affects the emotions.

A key factor in Smith's approach takes into account *aesthetic experience*. Of this conscious activity, Smith writes:

> to engage in an aesthetic activity – whether as a creator of art or as an appreciator of nature or art – is to engage in an activity which is consciously experienced, in an important sense; indeed, when such experiences go well, they are not merely *had*, but *savoured*. (2017: 57, emphasis in original)

What methods should we employ to best understand the conscious activity of aesthetic experience? Smith puts forward the method of 'triangulation,' a three-pronged approach first suggested by Owen Flanagan (1992) to explain the general problem of consciousness. Triangulation, according to Smith, involves taking account of evidence from three levels of analysis:

> the *phenomenological* level (what, if anything, it feels like when we undertake some mental act)
>
> the *psychological* level (what sorts of psychological capacities and functions our minds possess), and
>
> the *neurophysiological* level (what seems to be happening in the brain when we exercise these capacities or have these experiences). (2017: 60)

Triangulation involves 'locating or "fixing" the object in explanatory space by (to follow the metaphor) projecting lines from each body of evidence and following them to see where they intersect' (2017: 60). With regards to the present study involving how the perception of cinematic temporality affects the emotions, taking into account a systematic analysis of the phenomenological (i.e. experiential), psychological (i.e. mental), and neurophysiological (i.e. neural) levels of evidence would serve to more fully answer the questions at stake.

Regarding the phenomenological level of how cinematic temporality affect the emotions would involve asking questions about the phenomenological experience of time while watching a film (e.g. what does it feel like while watching a film with certain temporal features?), while the psychological level would involve asking questions about the psychological experience of watching a film (e.g. what psychological functions are at play that could explain our reactions to the film's temporal manipulations?). Finally, the neurophysiological level would involve asking questions about the activities in the brain and body that occur while watching a film (e.g. fMRI scanning, measuring heart rate, eye-tracking, etc.). In Chapter One I discussed several treatments that take into account the experience of time, but as I mentioned very few are interested in how temporal properties of

film affect the emotions. Moreover, despite the massive number of psychological and neurophysiological studies on time perception, those that focus on the temporal nature of watching a film are limited to a handful of studies.[41] In spite of this, there's still an awful lot that psychological and neurophysiological studies can tell us about the perception of time that will inform our view of the affective nature of time in the cinema.

2.2 The Psychology of Time Perception

For decades, scientists have grappled with the question of time perception, making strides in a number of multidisciplinary endeavours that have enjoyed a recent renaissance. The formation of the academic journal *Timing & Time Perception* in 2013 reflects this robust interest in time perception. Founding editors Warren H. Meck, Argiro Vatakis, and Hedderik van Rijn call their journal 'the forum for all psychophysical, neuroimaging, pharmacological, computational, and theoretical advances on the topic of timing and time perception in humans and nonhuman animals' and emphasise the journal's aims of a 'synergy of neuroscience and philosophy for understanding the concept of time, cognitive science and artificial intelligence ... as well as psychiatric, neurological, behavioural, cognitive, and computational sciences' (2013: 1). *Timing & Time Perception* follows in the footsteps of the work of John Gibbon and Lorraine Allan, whose 1984 special issue in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* served as inspiration for its title. Gibbon's (1977) proposition that our ability to accurately judge the passage of time points to *an internal clock* system – theorised as the scalar expectancy theory or SET – and Allan's (1979) work on the perception of time have proved to be highly influential theories, which in turn have instigated hundreds of studies into timing and time perception. In short, the internal clock system is a theoretical framework that posits that healthy humans have a more or less accurate way to keep and judge the duration of events. As our internal clock increases in speed, more temporal units (also known as 'pulses')

are accumulated and time is judged to be longer. Conversely, as our internal clock decreases fewer temporal units are accumulated and time is judged to be shorter. For nearly four decades, psychologists and neuroscientists have attempted to demonstrate or disprove the accuracy of Gibbon's internal clock system. More recently, neuroscientist David Eagleman and his colleagues have found reasons to challenge the internal clock model, claiming that 'instead of an accurate internal "clock", the brain simply has access to the approximate constant rate of its own information processing' (Eagleman et al 2005: 10369). In other words, we perceive and judge duration against our own temporal processing mechanisms. Eagleman's account gives our experience of time a more purely subjective character than the internal clock theory. On these grounds, time perception can be said to be subjective.

According to a study conducted by experimental psychologist Warren H. Meck (1996), there is considerable evidence to suggest that mind-altering drugs such as cocaine and marijuana affect the ability to tell the passage of time. Under constrained laboratory conditions, trained rats under the influence of cocaine judge time to move more quickly, while rats under the influence of marijuana judge time to move more slowly. In addition, environmental factors triggering stress may alter our time perception. For instance, when under stressful conditions, we might perceive time as moving more slowly than under normal circumstances. Survivors often recall time slowing down during traumatic events, presumably allowing them to act more quickly than they otherwise would under normal conditions. This phenomenon is referred to in the scientific literature as *duration dilation*. Conversely, when under relaxed or pleasant conditions, we might experience time as moving more quickly, giving credence to the expression, 'Time flies when you're having fun'.

Eagleman and his collaborators have shown that although we may experience time differently depending on environmental factors, that difference does not necessarily translate to other faculties such as visual perception and resolution (i.e. a component of visual acuity)

(Stetson, Fiesta, and Eagleman 2007). In one experiment, the researchers wanted to see whether or not our vision and mental faculties actually speed up during a frightening event. Participants were asked to try and read numbers on a specially designed watch that flashed at a rate that the human eye cannot see under normal circumstances while free-falling from a height of thirty-one metres. What they discovered was that although participants estimated their descent was longer than it actually was, suggesting that they did in fact experience duration dilation (i.e. the feeling that time is moving more slowly than it actually is), this did not translate into a higher speed of visual resolution. In other words, the participants could not read the numbers flashing on the watch because their visual processing was not altered. According to the researchers, 'subjective time is not a single entity that speeds or slows, but instead is composed of separable subcomponents' (2007: e1295). Thus 'time-slowing is a function of recollection, not perception: a richer encoding of memory may cause a salient event to appear, retrospectively, as though it lasted longer' (2007: e1295). So, when time appears to slow down during a frightening event, it is hypothesised that this is because we are suddenly made more aware of our surroundings and our brains react by encoding more information than under normal or relaxed circumstances. Researchers of time perception refer to this and related phenomena as the *time–emotion paradox*.

The Time–Emotion Paradox

In recent years, a great many psychological studies on how emotion effects time perception have been conducted. Experimental psychologists Sylvie Droit-Volet and Meck (2007) provide the basis for how emotions affect our judgment of the passage of time. The researchers conclude that 'the effect of emotions on timing and time perception reveals that our feeling for time is fundamentally inseparable from our subjective experience of the environment. Time can be distorted to appear shorter or longer than it really is' (2007: 512).

In their essay on what they call the *time–emotion paradox*, Droit-Volet and Sandrine Gil (2009) discuss our ability to estimate the passage of time, which they claim changes according to emotional states as well as other factors. They write:

> One of the greatest paradoxes in the field of time psychology is the time–emotion paradox. Over the last few decades, an increasing volume of data has been identified demonstrating the accuracy with which humans are able to estimate time. Confronted with this amazing ability, psychologists have supposed that humans, as other animals, possess a specific mechanism that allows them to measure time. (Droit-Volet and Sandrine 2009: 1943)

However, when we experience positive emotions time seems to fly, and when we experience negative emotions, time seems to drag. This gives rise to the time–emotion paradox, which Droit-Volet and Gil formulate as the question: 'why, given that we possess a sophisticated time measurement mechanism, are we so inaccurate in our temporal judgements when experiencing emotions?' (2009: 1943). According to Droit-Volet and Gil, time perception will be altered depending on emotional valence.

The term 'emotional valence' is generally used to describe the positive or negative charges of a given emotion or mood. Louis C. Charland (2005) distinguishes between two aspects of emotional valence: *emotion valence* and *affect valence* (2005: 236). Charland describes emotional valence as 'an intrinsic objective property of individual whole emotions' (2005: 236). In other words, the discrete emotion 'fear' is thought of as a negative emotion, while the discrete emotion 'joy' is thought of as a positive emotion. In contrast, affect valence describes 'valence held to be a property of individual affects' (2005: 236). That is, we would say that *feeling fear* is a negative affect, while *feeling joy* is a positive affect. One of the reasons that time perception is said to be subjective is because emotional valence colours our perception of duration. Droit-Volet and Gil (2009) point to the work of Antonio Damasio (1994), who asserts that in real-world situations, we tend to rely on our emotions in order to make decisions.

In potentially life-threatening situations, our emotions help us determine how to react. Does time really slow down during a fearful event? Eagleman et al's research seems to suggest it doesn't. Rather, this 'slowing-down effect' (if we could call it that) is due to the way in which our brains interpret the extra information collected during a fearful event. Eagleman's experiment has shown that during a fearful event our vision system doesn't actually speed up (i.e. we aren't able to see and process information at a faster than normal rate), but that doesn't mean that other physiological response systems aren't affected.

As these studies demonstrate, emotions which affect time perception may be generated by a number of factors. One study entitled 'Emotion and Time Perception: Effects of Film-Induced Mood' tested how the time perception of participants changed after watching three mood-inducing film clips (i.e. fear, sadness, and a neutral clip for control) (Droit-Volet, Fayolle, and Gil 2011). The researchers found that time perception was not altered after watching the control clip or the sadness-inducing clip. However, time perception did appear to change after participants watched the fear-inducing clip, giving further credence to the notion that films elicit emotional reactions that are similar to the emotional reactions that we have in the real world, outside the cinema.

Before moving on, it's important to note that what is at stake for most psychological and neurophysiological studies of time perception involves studying the phenomenological forces that may alter time perception in humans and other animals. In other words, most of the existing psychological and neurophysiological research around the topic of time perception is interested in finding out how our perception of time can be altered under different circumstances. These researchers are interested in the environmental as well as the psychological and physiological factors that alter the perception of time.

This is important because it shows a significant difference between the kinds of questions that psychologists and neuroscientists ask about the problem of time perception and

the one that I am focused on in this dissertation: the evidence surrounding the psychology of time shows how external and internal factors such as one's environment or one's emotional state of mind can alter one's time perception, making time seem as though it's running faster or slower than it would otherwise. However, what I'm interested in is not how emotional films alter one's time perception, like Droit-Volet, Fayolle, and Gil's (2011) study of film-induced moods, but rather, how the temporal nature of cinema generates an emotional impact on the viewer.

Currently, very little research exists that tackles the relationship between time and emotion in this causal direction. Minet de Wied's 1991 PhD dissertation, 'The Role of Time Structures in the Experience of Film Suspense and Duration: A study of the effects of anticipation time upon suspense and temporal variations on duration experience and suspense' represents a rare exception. De Wied (1991) synthesises a series of experiments on the effects of two editing techniques, namely *ellipses*, the obvious omission of fabula-time between two scenes, and *compression*, the subtle omission of fabula-time within scenes. According to de Wied, ellipsis and compression affected the 'tempo, temporal expectancies and duration experience' of viewers (as quoted from de Wied, Tan, and Frijda 1992: 332).

Collectively, de Wied and her colleagues' studies from the early to mid 90s focus specifically on film suspense and the temporal structures that serve to generate film suspense. In their paper 'Duration Experience Under Conditions of Suspense in Films', de Wied, Tan, and Frijda examine 'why film suspense seems to lengthen duration experience' (1992: 325). Their study 'explores whether the experience of duration under conditions of suspense in film results from the confirmation or violation of temporal expectancies concerning *when* in time the outcome event should occur' (1992: 326, emphasis in original). Their research confirms previous studies analysing the 'watched pot' phenomenon, which refers to the phenomenon of 'the lengthening of duration experience' or feeling like time is passing more slowly than it

actually is when one is watching or waiting attentively for something to happen (1992: 326–27).

In my view, a crucial discovery of de Wied and her colleagues' research is that viewers do indeed have an expectancy of a certain time duration in films – that is, they anticipate a given event will end at a specific point – and when that expected duration is violated, time feels longer than it would under normal conditions (i.e. when duration meets expectations). The importance of this vital piece of evidence will become clear in the following chapters, where I discuss the expectancy of a certain duration in suspense-generating films as well as in comedy films, but it is also relevant later in the present chapter, where I discuss film rhythm and pattern-making. First, however, it is important to note that the notion that film viewers do in fact, on occasion, expect certain events to end after a certain duration has encountered some scepticism.

In an endnote to his essay 'The Paradox of Suspense', Noël Carroll ponders over the question of whether or not time plays a factor in the generation of suspense. He compares cinematic suspense with that of literary suspense, writing:

> We experience suspense not only while watching films, but in reading literature. It seems to me that the experience of suspense, whether seen or read, is pretty much the same. However, it is virtually unfathomable to me how people could form expectations about on what page a scene should end. Indeed, on the basis of introspection, I find it difficult to observe such expectations in me. Consequently, if the analysis of suspense in literature and the visual arts should be roughly the same, and if it seems unlikely that readers predict what they take to be the appropriate length of the exposition of events in literature, then why should we suppose that a prediction of the length of the exposition of the event is an essential ingredient in film suspense? (Carroll 2001: 426)

While Carroll does not outright deny that time plays a role here, he seems to overlook a key difference between the two artforms: both literature and film share the narrative temporal conventions of order, frequency and, duration, but as noted by Gregory Currie (1995), which I discussed at the start of Chapter One, they represent time within a story in different ways.

Like music as opposed to literature, film is constituted of time; following Currie, it portrays time by means of time. That is, the passage of time in film, time is typically represented by time. Carroll tempers his view in the next line of his endnote. 'On the other hand,' he writes, 'if these sorts of worries can be allayed, perhaps I shall have to grant that time plays a more integral role in the generation of suspense than I have acknowledged heretofore' (2001: 426).

This dissertation aims to do just that, for as de Wied and her colleagues have shown, viewers of films come equipped (at least sometimes and in relation to certain types of situations or events) with an expectation of how long an event will last. That is, they anticipate that a given cinematic event will end approximately at a certain point in time. I suggest that if those expectations are violated, the viewer will have an emotional reaction appropriate to the given mood of the scene. Take for example a suspenseful scene from a paranormal horror where the protagonist is being haunted by a ghost. During a suspenseful scene a character is under the impression that the ghost is just around the corner. We anticipate that eventually the scene will conclude at some point. We watch intensely as the character slowly reaches the corner. We know that the scene will conclude, we just don't know how or when. Maybe there isn't a ghost just around the corner? Maybe there is? Regardless, the building of suspense depends upon the stretching out of duration before the ghost appears (or doesn't appear as the case may be). We see this stretching out of duration before the culmination of an event brought up to an intense level in the first two opening sequences of *There Will Be Blood*, which I examine more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

Brian Henderson makes a related point about duration in his essay 'Tense, Mood, and Voice in Film', where he notes, 'Duration in cinema is a very delicate matter, as anyone knows who has shown Straub [i.e. Straub–Huillet] or Michael Snow to an unreceptive audience. Even viewers sophisticated in other respects become angered if their sense of proper filmic duration is challenged' (Henderson 1983: 8).[42] While Henderson's assertion is

probably relatable to many a film studies lecturer, it is important to note that his observation pertains specifically to the overall duration of a film, typically referred to as a film's *runtime* or 'running time' and what might be thought of as a macrolevel of analysis (i.e. a level of analysis that takes into account the film as a whole). As I will argue in Chapter Eight, this is even the case in comedies such as the video *Too Many Cooks* (Casper Kelly, 2014), where the film goes on for much longer than the viewer expects (resulting in humour for some and annoyance for others). In Parts II and III, I will explore the notion that violations of duration expectancies generate an emotional response in viewers more fully. In those chapters, it will become more apparent just how temporal violations of this kind can serve to generate suspense, surprise, and humour on the microlevel (i.e. a level of analysis that takes into account fragments of a scene – a few seconds or less – in a film).

Mind Time, Real-Time, and Rope

In an issue of *Scientific American*, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio discusses his research on the perception of objective time. He calls this perception of objective time *mind time* and explains that this feature of the mind 'has to do with how we experience the passage of time and how we organise chronology' (2002: 68). By examining and comparing patients with different forms of brain damage, Damasio and his collaborators have uncovered where the brain stores certain kinds of temporal perception. All of the aforementioned areas of the brain involve memory and patients with certain kinds of brain damage experience varying types of memory loss and amnesia. Patients with damage to the basal forebrain have trouble remembering certain events and placing those events within the context of their own timelines. These patients would for instance remember getting married but not when or at what age. Patients with damage to the hippocampus exhibit anterograde amnesia, which means they have no trouble remembering events before the damage but fail to form new memories.[43] Patients with damage to the temporal lobe exhibit retrograde amnesia, which

means they cannot recall events from their pasts. Damasio's research explains how these different parts of the brain work together in a healthy brain to form new memories, store these memories, and recall them when necessary. His research demonstrates the integral link between our experience of time and its relation to memory.

Damasio further explains the minute delay between the time it takes for our organs to sense something, that is, the time it takes for our eyes to 'see' an image, and the time it takes to process that sensation into consciousness. Damasio explains why this minute delay goes unnoticed by a healthy brain. He writes, 'The brain can institute its own connections on the central processing of events such that, at the microtemporal level, it manages to 'antedate' some events so that delayed processes can appear less delayed and differently delayed processes can appear to have similar delays' (Damasio 2002: 73). He cites the work of neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet, whose 1970s experiments 'may explain why we maintain the deception of continuity of time and space when our eyes move from one target to another during a saccade. We notice neither the blur that attends the eye movement nor the time it takes to get the eyes from one place to the other' (Damasio 2002: 73).

Damasio uses his findings to evaluate how we perceive the condensed time in Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope*. Set in a single high-rise apartment in contemporary New York, *Rope* follows the antics of two young sociopaths, Brandon and Philip (John Dall and Farley Granger), who, in an attempt to prove themselves superior human beings, secretly kill their old schoolmate, David, in their New York apartment, store his body in a chest in the parlour, and then proceed to hold a dinner party, using the chest as a buffet table for the food. The dinner party guests, which include the victim's father, aunt, fiancé, best friend, and their school teacher, Rupert (James Stewart), spend the evening speculating on the whereabouts of David. Over the course of the evening, however, Rupert eyes the boys with growing

suspicion and his calculated sleuthing eventually leads him to discover the horror of the young men's deed.

Sometimes described as a 'gimmick,' *Rope* is comprised of ten long takes, many with hidden or 'masked' editing, each lasting between four minutes to just over ten minutes in length. It should be noted, however, that these breaks or edits in the film were not an intentional style by the director, but rather an artistic compromise attempting to mitigate the limits of the cinematic technology of the day. At the time of filming, film canisters could only hold about ten minutes of film, so Hitchcock and his team developed a style that would effectively mask some of the edits. To achieve the effect of masked editing, the camera moves around the scene in a long tracking shot and tracks close into a character or a piece of furniture in order to create a momentary darkness while the scene continues seamlessly, seemingly unedited, using a fresh reel of film.

In the 'making-of' documentary, *'Rope' Unleashed*, (Laurent Bouzereau, 2001), *Rope* screenwriter Arthur Laurents recounts that Hitchcock's interest in the story, which is based on a British play by Patrick Hamilton, lay in filming it 'as a play'. Unsatisfied with the outcome, Laurents complains about the editing, stating, 'When you watch the film, what bothers me is [Hitchcock] has to close in on someone's back, reload the camera, and then pull back again from the back. So, you see really what he's trying to hide'. Whether considered successful or not, Hitchcock's editing attempted to create the illusion of screen time unfolding without any breaks in the continuity of the story or the plot. However, only half of the film's edits are actually hidden in this manner. In *Rope*, there remains four standard continuity edited shots or unmasked shots, which were planned to coincide with the projectionist having to switch reels after twenty minutes, another limiting factor of the technology.

Thanks to these techniques *Rope* is, what I have called elsewhere, a 'real-time film'.[44] A real-time film attempts to make the *fabula time* (i.e. the time of the story in chronological order), the *syuzhet time* (i.e. the time of the arrangement of the plot), and the *screen time* (i.e. the time of the screened events) very similar or equal in length. According to his interview with Truffaut, Hitchcock states that the film's narrative supposedly starts at 7:30 PM and ends at 9:15 PM, totalling one hundred and five minutes in length, the film's actual runtime only lasts eighty-one minutes including titles. Hence, the film effectively speeds up fabula and syuzhet time and omits about twenty-five minutes of screen time. Bordwell (1985) notes that nearly all films compress some time with the use of conventional editing techniques. What is significant about *Rope*'s compression is the degree to which it does not rely on editing to achieve such compression. Because the conversation in dialogue remains continuous throughout the entire film, it is not clear where the film makes use of ellipses. Of course, *Rope* contains some editing (masked or not), but the film relies on more imaginative ways to achieve this level of compression. In Damasio's analysis, the effect is achieved by misrepresenting how long it actually takes people to complete certain actions, such as browsing the antique books or consuming food and drink, and by changing the hue of the skyline from dusk to dark at a faster pace than one would experience in reality.

Although Damasio's explanation for how twenty-five minutes are missing from the film seems spot on, he somewhat glosses over exactly why anyone would bother to do this in the first place. After all, a spectator would probably not leave the auditorium wondering what happened to the missing twenty-five minutes. We might then inquire: how significant a finding is it that *Rope*'s onscreen time compression deceives us into thinking more time has passed than we should? While Damasio's explanation explains how a representation of time can affect our subjective mind time, he does not consider the emotional effect of a real-time narrative.

In my view, the real-time effect of *Rope* combined with a limited setting confined to a few rooms of a New York high-rise apartment aids in building up the tension between the two killers and their old school teacher.[45] Without the aid of the real-time effect, the stakes would be much lower in the following sense: Brandon and Philip have decided to test fate and their own presumed genius by wagering that no one will discover their murder in the amount of time it takes to hold the dinner party. They don't plan to keep the body much longer than the dinner party. They are in effect (albeit unwittingly) testing how long it will take Rupert to figure out their deed. If Rupert were only able to join the party for ten minutes, he would not have enough time to grow suspicious. Likewise, if it took him longer to figure out the plot, the trunk containing David's body would have been moved and the boys would have probably gotten away with the murder.

In his interview, Laurents notes that because the audience expects a resolution where Brandon and Philip are found out, it's not a matter of *if* the body will be found but *when*. In my view, based on their experience as movie-goers, audiences have a good idea that feature-length films tend to run anywhere from ninety to one hundred and twenty minutes and they also have good cause to predict that the body will be found towards the end of the film (as opposed to the beginning or middle). Based on this knowledge through experience, the audience will anticipate that the body will be discovered very close to the end of the film. The problem is that they don't know exactly how long the film is – certainly not down to the milliseconds. In my view suspense is elicited from the tension between the knowledge of the outcome of an event (or at least, a high degree of confidence that a certain outcome will occur), and the lack of knowledge of precisely when the outcome will occur. The missing twenty-five minutes serves to speed up the pace of the evening, making it all the more difficult to correctly anticipate when the outcome will occur. So, being unable to correctly guess the exact moment that the body will be discovered both generates and sustains the

suspense throughout but especially towards the end of the film, when the solution seems so obvious to both the viewers and Rupert alike. We know how this ends, surely. We even witnessed David being killed and shoved into the trunk at the beginning of the film, but for some reason, we can't wait to see Rupert open it and confirm his suspicions.

2.3 Film Rhythm, Tempo, and Beats

In his essay on film rhythm, Leenhardt argues that cinema is a unique artform, which relies on its own creative spirit rather than the mere reproduction of reality. Using the experiments of Lev Kuleshov as his primary example, Leenhardt considers the Kuleshov effect as 'proof that the cinema does not depend on the reproduction of images already emotionally charged in reality, which would have little aesthetic interest, but on the sequential order of different elements selected from that reality, whose arranged proximity creates a new reality' (1988: 201). Thus, for Leenhardt, an important factor for arguing that film is an artform relies on the ordering of events on the screen. In other words, one thing that is important about cinema as an art form is that its images follow a distinct pattern (i.e. temporal order). However, Leenhardt's next statement further emphasises cinematic temporality in the form of duration. Leenhardt points out that the duration of an image in film is also a creative choice and, as such, conveys a specific and non-arbitrary meaning just like the careful arrangement of shots (i.e. the order). He writes:

> Actually, for [Kuleshov's] experiment to be complete, he would have had to control not only the sequential order of these elements, but also the length of time of their projection. For instance, the smile would have to be furtively brief to seem amused; the indifferent smile would have to last normally; the sad smile would have to be prolonged. Thus amended, [Kuleshov's] experiment represents an exemplary definition of rhythm: a certain arrangement of images (of 'shots'), each of which has a particular duration so that together they produce the desired impression with a maximum of effect. And if you pass from being a spectator to being a creator, from the screen to the editing table, you will find that a filmstrip is composed of a series of pieces spliced together in sequence, each of which has an exact length, which is suited to both its own expressiveness and its effect on the others [before and

> after]. There you see, in a precise sense, how there really is a cinematic metrics. (Leenhardt 1988: 201, emphasis in original)

Thus, for Leenhardt, what makes cinema cinematic is its creativity when it comes to not just the selection of the order or placement of juxtaposed images, but also the selection of the duration of those images. Although, as I established earlier in the chapter, Leenhardt was unsatisfied with the musical metaphor, he nevertheless slips into somewhat murky terminology that fails to meet his aims of clarifying a language for discussing film rhythm. His cumbersome formulation of 'cinematic metrics', which he presumably derives from Eisenstein (1949: 72–73) who first theorised about 'metric montage', is a case in point.[46]

I'll come back to this in the final section of this chapter. For now, it is worth noting that Leenhardt was, of course, writing during the time period (i.e. the mid-1930s) that Jacobs is analysing in her book on film rhythm after the advent of sound, so his comments on film rhythm, in my opinion, seem particularly poignant in light of the cinematic 'clunkiness' that sync-sound technology brought to the industry just a few years earlier.[47] Leenhardt's essay conveys something of the anxiety that filmmakers and cinephiles of the day might have felt in relation to its more glamorous past in the years before sync-sound was introduced.

Jacobs argues 'that narrative films can…be considered rhythmic insofar as filmmakers need to exercise control over the tempo with which narrative events unfold, and engage in the subtle process of timing shot lengths and the performances of the actors' (2015: 24). Jacobs's rich analysis of film rhythm sheds light on how the film industry dealt with the challenge that sync-sound imposed onto the artform and reveals the ways in which filmmakers in the mid-1930s controlled the rhythm and pacing for artistic purposes. Although she does not focus specifically on the generation of certain emotions, her analysis further supports my general thesis that time is an asset of film style (much like colour, lighting, sound, and so forth) that can be controlled by filmmakers for artistic purposes.

Cautioning against the application of the musical metaphor to discuss film rhythm, Jacobs claims that 'It is very difficult to separate the patterning of duration from the speed of execution' (2015: 25). By 'patterning of duration', I take it that Jacobs means the timing between and among shots, which has to do with editing, while 'speed of execution' seems to refer to the pace or tempo within the shot, which has to do with the mise-en-scène (presumably the speed at which actors deliver lines or move within the frame, the speed at which objects move with the frame) and cinematography (presumably the speed of the camera's motion). Since she is analysing films from a period in time that faced enormous challenges with respect to the technological equipment at hand, I think Jacobs has good cause to make that assessment. However, in my view, in order to get to the bottom of affective temporality in film and the ways in which temporality affects the emotions, I maintain that retaining some version of the musical metaphor is necessary. Thus, I have elected not just to adopt, but also to adapt certain relevant terms from the study of music.

Musicians and music theorists have a long tradition of exploring the temporal nature of music and have as a result cultivated a productive cache of terms that aid in the systematic analysis of the artform.

Part I is interested in drawing out the ways in which film may be viewed as a temporal art, however I don't mean to argue that film is – above all else – a temporal art. Surely, film is a synthetic medium that combines the art of photography, narrative, performance, pictures, audio-visual, and perhaps others in various ways and to various degrees.[48] Given that both music and film fall into the category of temporal art (Alperson 1980; Levinson and Alperson 1991; Currie 1995), it would seem to make sense to borrow some terminology from the former in order to discuss the latter, rather than generate entirely new and potentially inscrutable terms. For instance, as discussed in Chapter One, Deleuze's conceptualisation of the *time-image*, while productive for its own purposes, does little in the

way of developing a theory for the emotional impact of cinematic time, which is the primarily goal of this dissertation. As mentioned above, the concept of the time-image may illuminate certain aspects of temporality as an aesthetic quality of film, but for my purposes, it is too philosophically loaded for the kind of concrete analysis that I intend to focus on.[49]

I concluded Chapter One with a discussion of Susan Feagin's concept of timing in film, which refers to the duration and durational relationships between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on-screen and in the audio track. There, I attempted to develop a theory of affective temporality in film using timing as a basis for thinking about the ways in which images, sounds, actions, or events on-screen or in the audio track can affect the viewer emotionally. Throughout this dissertation, the notion of timing will be important as well as three basic musicological terms that will aid in my understanding of the temporal nature of film. These terms include *rhythm*, *tempo*, and *beats*. I should stress the point that while I find the use and adaptation of these musicological terms to be a productive way to understand and describe the nature of film as a temporal art, I do not intend to argue that film is inherently musical, although a given film could be, so the application remains a possibility for film, but not a necessary quality of it. Here, an obvious example would be the musical genre, but other kinds of films would also seem to qualify. For instance, *Baby Driver* (Edgar Wright, 2017) has been highly praised for its musical qualities.

Beyond the fact that one artform is strictly auditory, while the other is (audio-)visual, music and film use different effects, have different aims, and are typically appreciated in different ways. For example, while it might be perfectly acceptable and enjoyable to listen to the song 'Hooked on a Feeling' by Blue Swede while doing the spring cleaning, the same cannot be said for watching *Guardians of the Galaxy* (James Gunn, 2014) as surely the temptation to look at the screen would interfere with one's chores.[50] Moreover, since music and film are different artforms, it stands to reason that not all musical terms will be of use for

the study of cinematic temporality. Therefore, only terms which have an obvious crossover to film should be adopted and adapted. For this reason, I will ignore musical terms that do not bear relevance to film. For example, the term 'meter', referenced earlier by Leenhardt as 'cinematic metrics' is not relevant to my study since film's formal, narrative structures generally preclude it from generating a regularly reoccurring pattern, which is the defining feature of a metre in music.

Musicologists claim that music has a kind of structure that defines how it divides, manages, and plays with time. According to musicologist Justin London, 'rhythm is concerned with the description and understanding of [a musical work's] duration and durational patternings' (2001b: n.p.). London continues:

> These durations may be more or less regular, may or may not give rise to a sense of beat or tempo, and may be more or less continuous, but as all music involves duration(s), all music necessarily has some manner of rhythm. Claims that a particular piece or performance 'lacks rhythm' may be taken to mean that the piece or performance lacks rhythmic regularity and/or a coherent sense of motion. In a similar vein, we use the adjective 'rhythmic' as an aesthetic positive in describing a piece; it would be strange, for example, to say that a piece was bad because it was very rhythmic. (London 2001b: n.p.)

Let's compare this with film rhythm: First, both music and film are temporal in the sense that they have duration(s). If music's duration(s) give rise to its rhythm, I see no reason why the same cannot be said of film. Second, similar to music, a film may be said to 'lack rhythm' in the sense that it contains perceived aesthetic failures such as clunky editing, or too much repetition. Third, just as in music, it would seem strange to charge a film with 'too much rhythm', although perhaps such a complaint could exist if the rhythm of the film was seen to detract from more important qualities. For instance, we could imagine a film that sacrifices story for style: one that generates rhythm at the expense of something deemed more crucial such as character development. Such a film would probably fail at forging emotional engagement with viewers. The film *Baby Driver* once again comes to mind; one critic called it a 'a super cool and ultra groovy heist flick that uses music the way the rest of us use air'

(Bibbiani: n.p.).[51] On the other hand, one could criticise a film aesthetically for being too fast-paced, resulting in incomprehensibility, or too-slow, resulting in boredom, but this would be conflating rhythm with another term, namely, tempo, which I will discuss below. Usually, films that carry a discernible rhythm are lauded for their cohesiveness as was the case with *Baby Driver*, although the connection to temporality is often overlooked.

It's important to note that while both music and film can be said to have rhythm, in music, rhythm is generally thought of as a necessary component of the artform, whereas in film, we may think that rhythm is typically present, but not a necessary component of the artform. Moreover, music and film use rhythm in different ways. A musical work has a metre, sometimes referred to as a 'time signature', that is, a pattern of rhythm constituted by the organisation of single temporal units called *beats*, which I will explore in further detail in the paragraphs below (London 2001a: n.p.). Metre is an important aspect of music that allows listeners to dance to a song without ever having heard it before. Generally speaking, most musical works maintain a single metre throughout their duration, while it would be difficult to imagine this kind of strict patterning applied to film in anything other than a music video. That is to say, metre is quite natural in music, whereas in film, it is not, since the demands of a narrative often require a much more fluid and versatile set of individual rhythms that will change according to the mood or tone of a given scene.

As I will explore in Chapter Four, this is also one aspect of what makes suspense scenes so difficult to accurately predict: with the absence of an ever-present metre repeating throughout the duration of the work, the rhythm of a film has the opportunity to be ever-changing, dynamic, and ultimately difficult to predict, whereas the metre of a song is generally the same throughout, allowing listeners to keep pace with the music by bobbing their heads, tapping their feet, and even dancing in step to the music – even if they have never heard the song before as I mentioned in the paragraph above.

Another term that helps in understanding the temporal nature of film is *tempo* or *pace*. In musicology, tempo 'is generally used to mean the speed at which a performance proceeds' (Kernfeld 2003: n.p.). Thus, in the case of temporal arts such as music and film, in addition to pace, tempo is also synonymous with speed. Accordingly, the tempo of a piece can be either fast or slow. So, in a given film, the tempo or pace refers to the speed at which the images, sounds, actions, and events unfold on screen.

In musicology, the *beat* is generally defined as: 'The basic pulse underlying measured music and thus the unit by which musical time is reckoned' (Kernfeld 2003: n.p.). The tempo and overall rhythm of a temporal work like film or music are composed of beats. In music, 'the beat, though not always sounded, is always perceived as underpinning the temporal progress of the music, and it is only the presence of the beat that allows rhythm to be established' (Kernfeld 2003: n.p.). Because film is visual as well as audible, cinematic beats need not be confined to the audio track. In film, beats may be visualised in the image, sounded in the audio track, or both. Additionally, a beat need not be visualised or sounded at all and instead may be skipped over, prompting a pause for dramatic effect.[52] In the field of experimental music psychology, there appears to be growing evidence to suggest that, in music, listeners have an expectation of beats and that musical beats aid in visual processing (see Escoffier, Sheng, Schirmer 2010).[53]

The notion of beats has long been established in the field of screenplay composition. Screenwriters use beats in their writing to plan out the temporal unfolding of action on a page. Beats help screenwriters pace out the images, sounds, actions, and events on the page. It's important to note that for screenwriters, the beat isn't just a metaphor, it's a way to transcribe what will become – when it is filmed – the normal duration (i.e. screen time) within a scene. Story consultant Robert McKee describes a beat as 'the smallest element of structure' inside the scene (1997: 37). According to McKee, 'A BEAT is an exchange of

behavior in action/reaction. Beat by Beat these changing behaviors shape the turning of a scene' (1997: 37, capitalisation in original). Cinematic beats, therefore, constitute affective shifts from one moment to the next until the scene is completed. In addition, Hollywood script consultant Linda Seger draws the comparison between cinematic beats and music:

> For writers, a beat works in a script much as a beat works in a piece of music. In a song, single beats are grouped to make up a measure. By adding more beats (thus more measures) you can create a phrase, and eventually an entire melody. In the same way, single dramatic beats or moments, placed together, create a scene. And the beats in a scene, together, create the beats of an act, and the beats of an act, together, create an entire film. (Seger 2010: 31)

Cinematic beats help screenwriters maintain a level of tension and drama throughout a scene, which can be difficult since they must always keep in mind that they are writing a story that will ultimately become minutes on a screen, rather than pages in a book. Without these small changes in tension, the scene would play out flat and most likely be considered aesthetically flawed.[54] Throughout this dissertation, I will employ the term 'beat' to indicate a moment in time of inaction. The beat will be particularly useful in my discussion of comic timing in Part III.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced Smith's method of triangulation, which brings together three different disciplines including psychology, neurophysiology, and analysis based on experience, exemplifying the kind of piecemeal approach that I aim for in this dissertation. My approach brings together relevant scientific literature on time perception alongside a discussion of the musicality of film rhythm, tempo, and beats in order to supplement my conceptualisation of cinematic timing introduced in the previous chapter. Chapter Two, therefore, represents an illustration of some of the ways in which other disciplines such as psychology and neurophysiology as well as musicology can inform a discussion about cinematic temporality and the emotions. While much of the experimental research on time

perception is devoted to uncovering the various emotional or environmental factors that alter time perception, the research of de Wied and her colleagues indicates that viewers of suspense films anticipate durations, which in turn, they hypothesise, can lead to feelings of suspense. I attempted to establish that along with the timing of dramatic beats, affective temporality in film is generated through film rhythm and tempo (i.e. pace or speed). The following chapter puts these lessons into practice by analysing cinematic suspense as a kind of betting.

Part II

The Temporality of Cinematic Suspense

In the real world, we are at risk of feeling suspense any time we wait with anticipation for our name to be called at the doctor's office or stare intently at a traffic light to turn from red to green. What interests most theorists of suspense, however, is not the suspense of everyday experiences found in everyday places like doctor's offices and congested highways, but the suspense of contrived experiences found in places like the circus, the casino, or the cinema. These special cases of suspense, which characterise *aesthetic suspense*, differ from *everyday suspense* in that people often go out of their way to experience them. Unlike waiting for a traffic light to change from red to green, presuming most commuters would drive along perfectly happily if they met no delays in traffic, aesthetic suspense represents what may be thought of as a pleasurable emotion, one sought after while engaging in aesthetic activities such as watching films. Put another way, aesthetic suspense may be thought of as purposeful suspense; suspense that is enjoyable and an experience for its own sake. The previous two chapters outlined the general literature that informs the ideas throughout this dissertation and set up in broad strokes the kind of analysis that will be presented throughout the rest of this dissertation. The following three chapters set up my *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film*. Each of these chapters outlines a different question relating to the temporal nature of suspense and emotions relating to suspense such as fear, trepidation, dismay, and the startle.

Chapter Three

Cinematic Suspense as a Kind of Betting

> When we bet on a hypothesis, especially under the pressure of time, confirmation can carry an emotional kick; the organism enjoys creating unity.
>
> (David Bordwell 1985: 39)

In his book *Your Brain is a Time Machine: The Neuroscience and Physics of Time*, Dean Buonomano explains that hundreds of millions of years of evolution has led the brain to function as 'a prediction or anticipation machine' (2017: 20).[55] 'On a moment-by-moment basis,' he writes, 'your brain is automatically attempting to predict what is about to ____.' (2017: 20).[56] According to Buonomano, 'These short-term predictions, up to a few seconds into the future, are entirely automatic and unconscious' (2017: 20). It's important to note that Buonomano is speaking of the moment-to-moment cognitive process of prediction. This kind of short-term prediction helps us operate in the real world; it is constantly running unconsciously 'in the background' so to speak. If an orange rolls off my table, short-term predications enable me to predict exactly where it will be in space at the exact right time in order to catch it.

While most theories of aesthetic suspense focus on what I would call 'big-picture' or perhaps 'medium picture' questions that encompass much longer durations of time than what Buonomano is referencing, what I'm interested in accounting for in this chapter are the 'small picture' questions that come up moment-to-moment while watching a film. Most theoretical accounts of aesthetic suspense examine how suspense occurs over longer durations. These theories maintain that aesthetic suspense is at some level a conscious process. This chapter does not dispute the fact that aesthetic suspense can endure over longer periods than the kind of fragments that will be of interest in this chapter and it does not deny that on some level

suspense is a conscious process. In fact, I think my theory of aesthetic suspense fits into some of the earlier models, which I will discuss in section one of this chapter.

However, what I will argue in this chapter is that focusing on 'big / medium picture' questions are only part of the puzzle that is aesthetic suspense. In my view, a microlevel examination of the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events will shed light on a nagging question: *What feels so good about being held in a state of suspense?*

Film and other artforms exploit this evolutionary feature of the human brain. For instance, in delineating a Constructivist theory of aesthetic activity, David Bordwell asserts, 'The artwork is necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and fleshed out by the active participation of the perceiver' (1985: 32). Literary theorist Eric Rabkin equates narrative suspense with the driving force that triggers a reader to turn the page, arguing that the feeling of suspense occurs when we are so engrossed with the plot that we become 'conscious of the waiting' (1974: n.p.). Being conscious of the waiting, the viewer attempts to fill in the details for *what they think is most probable to occur*, but they also have in their mind an idea of what *they would like to occur*. That is, their sense of anticipation at narrative questions hinges on both predictions as well as hopes and desires.

In his interview with François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock calls suspense 'the most powerful means of holding the viewer's attention. It can be either the suspense of the situation or the suspense that makes the public ask itself, 'What will happen next?'' (Truffaut 1983: 72). Gordon Gow (1968) provides one of the first accounts of cinematic suspense, while Noël Carroll sets out a theory of *aesthetic suspense* (1996) and also grapples with the so-called *paradox of suspense*, sometimes referred to as the problem of *anomalous suspense* (2001). The edited collection *Suspense: conceptualizations, theoretical analyses, and empirical explorations* edited by Peter Vorderer, Hans Jürgen Wulff, and Mike Friedrichsen

takes a plurality of methodological approaches including those from psychology, film theory, and communication research, framing suspense as 'an activity of the audience (reader, onlooker, etc.) that is related to specific features and characteristics of the text (books, films, etc.)' (1996: viii).[57]

In particular, Ed Tan and Gijsbert Diteweg's (1996) psychological study of predictive inference and emotion in regard to suspense during the film viewing experience sheds light on the myriad of other emotional experiences that surround the experience of cinematic suspense such as curiosity, regret, *schadenfreude*, and surprise. Such accounts take for granted that suspense as an aesthetic experience is a sought-after one, despite the fact that 'real-life' suspense is usually an experience to be avoided. For the most part, these accounts seem to overlook a potentially paradoxical problem when encountering suspense in the film (or indeed any suspenseful aesthetic activity such as reading narrative literature): if suspense is characterised as a negative experience in our day-to-day lives, like the waiting involved for a test result from the doctor's office, why should it be a sought-after experience when it comes to the film or, indeed, other forms of entertainment such as gambling? Suspense, alongside tragedy and horror, appears to be another 'paradox of aversion'.[58] Do we really enjoy experiencing suspense or rather the aftermath of no longer waiting in anticipation, an experience that could only have come from the unfortunate waiting in the first place? In other words, do we really enjoy the occurrent pleasure-in-suspense or do we simply enjoy the relief from the suspense?

To address these questions, I will characterise cinematic suspense as a sought-after temporal experience obtained in suspense-thriller and horror films. My *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film* is predicated on the arousal one feels while trying to anticipate the outcome of a narrative event. I will attempt to understand whether or not cinematic suspense is a pleasurable experience in and of itself. Because general theories of suspense frame it as

either a quality of the work (i.e. a suspense-thriller novel or film) or the feeling we get from engaging with such work, it will be helpful to understand what I mean by aesthetic suspense.

3.1 Theories of Aesthetic Suspense

Because my research question focuses on the potentially pleasurable (i.e. sought-after) experience of suspense, I characterise cinematic suspense as a kind of aesthetic suspense. Most existing accounts of aesthetic suspense ground the affect in narration. For instance, Aristotle notes that narrative delay, that is, suspension of the completion of a narrative act, is key to maintaining the spectator's interest in a drama or story because if the solution were found too easily, the feeling of gratification at witnessing the hero overcome obstacles would be lost on the spectator. According to Aristotle, what makes a story interesting is watching the protagonist overcome hurdles along their path. In effect, these hurdles function as instruments of narrative suspense, delaying the action of the protagonist until they reach their ultimate destination at the end of the story.

Gordon Gow (1968) offers an early account of cinematic suspense. For Gow, cinematic suspense results in what he calls a 'heightening of life' (1968: 10). The author explains: 'Drawn there by the boredom of routine lives that are subjected to the pressures that nag at the nerves, [spectators] find release in the exaggeration, consolation in the fact that 'it's only a film', and at the same time, since the most extreme of films can be related to life, they recognise their own fears writ large and are partially purged' (1968: 10). Here, Gow ventures towards the hydraulic theory of catharsis offered by Aristotle and later Freud to explain why emotions from aesthetic activities such as the theatre can be pleasurable. In the hydraulic view, anticipation framed as anxiety takes on physical characteristics likened to steam in a pressurised container. Accordingly, anxiety gets 'pressurised' in the mind when we experience suspense-inducing events in film, much in the way that water boils into vapour

while inside a pressure-cooker. When the conclusion of the suspense event is experienced, the anxiety finds release and the spectator, according to this view, feels relief or a sense of catharsis.[59]

Gow notes that although many, perhaps most, suspense films of his day were derived from novels, cinema breathes new life into these stories by depicting suspense in 'another language' and because of this, he insists that spectators of suspense films feel the emotion 'more strongly'. Gow explains:

> For no matter how deep a spell the written word may cast, none but the recluse can surrender completely. Any number of things will intervene: conversation, telephone, food, and even work, will demand that the thread be snapped repeatedly … The stage comes nearest to cinema in holding attention, because the audience has foregathered with the communal disposition to watch and listen for a couple of hours, and will usually contrive to do so even when the atmosphere is less than ideal. (1968: 10-11)

I interpret Gow to mean that cinema forces spectators into experiencing the duration of a narrative with little interference from the world outside the auditorium. This claim seems reminiscent of Hitchcock's discussion of the 'flux of time' in narrative film in which he claims that films are more like short stories than novels because they are typically consumed in one sitting. Hitchcock explains:

> A film cannot be compared to a play or novel, it is closer to a short story, which, as a rule, sustains one idea that culminates when the action has reached the highest point of the dramatic curve. As you know, a short story is rarely put down in the middle, and in this sense it resembles a film. And it is because of this peculiarity that there must be a steady development of the plot and the creation of gripping situations which must be presented, above all, with visual skill. Now, this brings us to suspense, which is the most powerful means of holding the viewer's attention. (Truffaut 1983: 72)

Likewise, Gow explains that while both theatre and cinema both compel spectators to remain in their seats, cinema alone has the added advantage of hiding the identities of on-screen murderers through framing out identifying features. He continues, 'The cinema can show merely the killer's hands or feet, close to camera, and thereby impart the ultimate in tension

and mystery' (1968: 11). These devices, according to Gow, 'rely upon the ability of film to direct our attention and our powers of reasoning' (1968: 11).

In the preface to his book on literary suspense, Rabkin writes, 'When the bit of text is a bit of plot, and when we are conscious of the waiting, we call the force that draws us through a narrative suspense' (1974: n.p.). I would add that being 'conscious of the waiting' is a component of both aesthetic as well as every day suspense. In his glossary, Rabkin defines suspense as 'the general term for the engagement with structure' (1974: 186). While this definition may seem to conflate the idea of suspense with that of narrative, his general aim is to illustrate the importance that narrative suspense plays in storytelling. Implicit in Rabkin's theory is the promise (and expectation) of a given story to be complete or whole and to contain within it a (satisfying) ending. Whether or not a story contains a middle, it must, his theory implies, have a beginning and an end. Rabkin expands this assumption to language, insinuating that tense-based words in sentences generate suspense. 'When Slim turned sideways,' Rabkin quotes from a western novel of his youth, 'his shadow disappeared' (1974: 172). The opening clause of the complete sentence carries limited meaning but creates, according to Rabkin, anticipation (i.e. the feeling of wanting to know what happens when Slim turns sideways). We discover, hopefully with amusement, that the man in question really does live up to his moniker. Without the conclusion of the sentence, the clause remains incomplete and so, according to Rabkin, the use of the tense-based word 'when' serves to generate a feeling of suspense.[60]

In Chapter One, I discussed Gregory Currie's (1995) concept of *connected temporality* or *temporality*$_c$, which he claims represents a special kind of temporality that generally only films have – the ability to portrays time by means of time. Although literature is clearly capable of generating intense feelings of suspense, film as a temporal art in Currie's 'connected' sense evokes, I would argue, feelings of suspense in a way that is different from

literature. Because films can portray time by means of time when they connect the time in the story, the time in the plot, and the time on the screen. These components are what Bordwell (1985) calls *fabula time*, *syuzhet time*, and *screen time*. Scenes such as this can be said to lack temporal omission because they in effect omit no fabula time, syuzhet time, or screen time. A result of film's connected temporality, in my view, constitutes a connection or link between the spectator's experience of temporal duration and the narrative film's display of temporal duration because in real life, we likewise experience no temporal omissions. As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, contemporary horror films exploit this particular temporal feature of film during what Robert Baird (2000) calls a 'threat scene'. What this analysis reveals is that film's connected temporality affords film the ability to produce powerful suspenseful experiences.

Overall, Rabkin's explanation of suspense as he applies it to literature is perhaps too broad for the purposes of discussing cinematic suspense. Additionally, the fact that his theory of narrative suspense seems to ultimately be rooted in language is also problematic since film is not, I would maintain, a language.[61] Because it focuses on literature and not film, Rabkin's account fails to address the immediacy of cinematic suspense. However, I find Rabkin's concept of diachronicity productive and shall employ it in the following to narrative film sequences that the viewer understands as unfolding through their own experience of time.

Even if we grant that suspense is necessarily a temporal affect and thus diachronic, it must be separated from simple anticipation and expectation. Noël Carroll argues this point, noting that 'when it comes to narrative art, it is advisable to keep the concept of suspense more narrowly defined than that of mere anticipation' (1996: 94). Carroll devotes little discussion to standing theories of cinematic suspense, because, he laments, there are few. Gow (1968) represents one example, but according to Carroll, Gow fails to demonstrate a homogeneous connection in his corpus of films. Carroll further refutes Roland Barthes'

(1977) account of suspense, which he deems 'too abstract' by confusing the concept of suspense with that of structural tension and closure (Carroll 1996: 94). Finally, Carroll criticises the psychoanalytic approach of suspense advanced by Altan Löker (1976), who 'sees suspense as a heightened state of ambivalence in which the audience is confronted by a dramatic conflict, staged in the film, which energizes an intrapsychic conflict within each spectator' (Carroll 1996: 95). Carroll questions the grounds on which Löker calls this affect 'suspense' and not simply 'anxiety,' claiming:

> Why…should this intrapsychic anxiety be cashed in as 'suspense,' and why should it redirect its target (or object) from say, the ego to the plight of some character? Without making explicit the nature of the connection between intrapsychic anxiety and the ostensibly different emotion of suspense, Löker has left a logical lacuna in his reductivist theory that is serious enough to disqualify it as an explanation of suspense. That is, without saying why intrapsychic anxiety is phenomenologically and personally felt as suspense, Löker has explained nothing. (1996: 95)

Abstract and reductivist views aside, Carroll is left with a quandary: how should we define suspense as it is found in film? He begins by establishing a general theory of narrative cinematic comprehension:

> When following a narrative film…a spectator internalizes the whole structure of interests depicted in the drama, and this structure includes alternative outcomes to various lines of action which the spectator must keep track of in some sense before one alternative is actualized in order for the film to be received as intelligible. I postulate that the spectator does this by tacitly projecting the range of outcomes as subconscious expectations which we can represent as questions. (1996: 97)

Note in Carroll's initial explanation the spectator begins with the presumption that the story they are currently engaged with will contain an ending (i.e. an outcome to the narrative catalysts at the start of the story). In order to be satisfied, according to Carroll's theory, we require knowledge of that outcome. In other words, we want to know what happens next in the story and ultimately how it ends. It would seem then that Carroll's view complements Rabkin's broader notion of suspense within literature, that is, the desire to know what

happens next in a narrative or a single sentence, but Carroll wants to separate the concept of cinematic suspense from that of mere anticipation.

To do this, Carroll refines his view that suspense arises when we are confronted with suspense-generating questions (as evident in the quote above). Carroll's differentiation between mysteries and suspense-thrillers is useful here. He writes:

> in mysteries…we are characteristically uncertain about what has happened in the past, whereas with suspense fictions we are uncertain about what will happen…
>
> A mystery of the classical whodunit variety prompts us to ask a question about whose answer we are uncertain and about which we entertain as many possible answers as there are suspects. But suspense is different.
>
> With suspense, the question we are prompted to ask does not have an indefinite number of possible answers, but only two. Will the heroine be sawed in half or not? (2001: 257-258)

Likewise, Bordwell (1985) argues that while watching narrative films we are constantly making and revising hypotheses about what will happen next in the story. According to Bordwell's Constructivist account, this aspect of viewer activity is what drives the narrative forward and helps maintain our interest. Bordwell notes, however, that it does not explain emotional engagement with a film. Bordwell argues:

> To the extent that this theory showcases perception and cognition, it does not have much to say about affect…It should be evident that emotion is not at all alien to the process of filmic comprehension…When the narrative delays satisfying an expectation, the withholding of knowledge can arouse keener interest. When a hypothesis is disconfirmed, the setback can spur the viewer to new bursts of activity. The mixture of anticipation, fulfilment, and blocked or retarded or twisted consequences can exercise great emotional power. (1985: 39–40)

Indeed, this is precisely what Bordwell means when he writes of the 'emotional kick' captured in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. In the following section, I will refer to this sort of 'emotional kick' in terms of what psychologists have called 'cognitive reward'.[62] For now, I'll turn back to Carroll since Bordwell's discussion of hypotheses relates to his general theory of narration and not specifically to the generation of suspense.

According to Carroll, ‘Suspense, in film, is generated as a concomitant of a question that has been raised by earlier scenes and events’ and is ‘a state that accompanies such a scene up to the point when one of the competing, alternative outcomes is finalized’ (1996: 100). In a later reworking of his theory, Carroll states that ‘suspense is not a response to the outcome; it pertains to the moments leading up to the outcome, when the outcome is uncertain’ (2001: 257). Here, Carroll seems to suggest that suspense ends the moment that our uncertainty vanishes, replaced by certainty, but this view would seem to be contradicted by cases of anomalous suspense (i.e. cases where we are in ‘perfect knowledge’ of the answer to a question or the outcome of an event) discussed later in this chapter (see Gerrig 1996: 100). According to Carroll, ‘Once the outcome is finalized and we are apprised of it, the emotion of suspense gives way to other emotions’ (2001: 257).

Suspense-thriller and horror films are riddled with suspense-generating questions. The opening scenes from Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Jaws* (1974) serve as two prototypical examples. In the opening scene from *Raiders*, the narrative poses an obvious question: ‘Will Indiana Jones outrun the boulder?’ Likewise, in the opening scene from *Jaws*, we are encouraged to wonder: ‘Will Chrissie Watkins be eaten by the shark? Note that both questions involve a temporal aspect regarding the temporal status of the character’s actions. They could be rephrased: Will Indiana Jones outrun the boulder *in time* before it crushes him? and Will Chrissie Watkins return to the shore *in time* before the shark comes in for the kill? See Figures 3.1a–3.1b.




Figures 3.1a–3.1b *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Jaws* (1974). In the first frame, Indiana Jones tries to outrun a giant boulder, while in the second frame, Chrissie Watkins skinny dips, unaware that a man-eating shark looms nearby.

In my view, examining the temporal aspects of cinematic narratives is key to understanding how suspense works in horror and suspense-thriller films. Returning to examples of everyday suspense, Carroll argues:

> Suspense in life, as opposed to film, is not just anticipation, but anticipation where something desired is at stake – a job, admission to a school, securement of a loan, passing an exam, escaping a nasty situation. Moreover, whatever is at stake has some psychological urgency partly because the outcome is somehow uncertain. (1996: 101)

According to Carroll, therefore, the feeling of everyday suspense arises due to uncertainty about how an event will unfold in our daily lives. It comes first from a recognition of ignorance (i.e. realising we do not know the outcome of something) and second from a desire to shed our ignorance (i.e. a desire to know the outcome). Of course, it also comes from the fact that we *want* the job or admission to a school etc. but I highlight this point here because it ties in with a concept that I introduced in Chapter Two called the 'cognitive reward', which refers to a rise in midbrain dopamine levels not only when receiving a reward but when seeking out information about the reward.[63] Does the cognitive reward inform Bordwell's statement quoted at the top of this chapter? He writes, 'the organism *enjoys* creating unity' (1985: 39). If it does, perhaps that's because we experience tiny surge in brain chemicals. We'll have to wait for more of the science to come out on this issue to say for certain.

According to Carroll, everyday suspense is similar to the suspense we experience while watching a film. The difference is that in film, we expect there to be a limited number of possibilities, whereas in real life it's not always that simple. He explains:

> Turning from life to film, we can see that in the largest number of the relevant film cases, the elements of everyday suspense – desirability and uncertainty – are still in operation; however, in the largest number of film cases, the range of each of these central elements has been narrowed so that the subjects of film suspense are the morally right (as the pertinent subclass of desirability) and improbability (as the pertinent subclass of uncertainty). (1996: 101)

For Carroll, cinematic suspense is a more focussed version of everyday suspense where a limited number of optional outcomes are offered to the spectator. Carroll suggests, therefore, that in film, we do not form expectations on our own; instead they are suggested to us through the narration of the film in what Carroll in a later essay on narrative closure defines as erotetic narration (see Carroll 2007). According to Carroll, erotetic narratives 'come with the promise of outcomes to the courses of events that comprise them. Though the outcomes are generally unpredictable, strictly speaking, nevertheless we expect to be able to say what happened next with respect to every significant line of action in such stories' (2007: 6-7).

In his initial theory of suspense, Carroll argues that the feeling of suspense derives from two factors: morality and probability. Carroll summarises his view that cinematic suspense 'is generated by combining elements of morality and probability in such a way that the questions that issue in the plot have logically opposed answers – and, furthermore, that opposition is also characterized by an opposition of morality and probability ratings' (1996: 101). From these assertions, Carroll derives a table of possible combinations of morality and probability ratings:

I. moral/likely outcome

II. evil/likely outcome

III. moral/unlikely outcome

IV. evil/unlikely outcome

According to Carroll, cinematic suspense only arises through situations II (evil/likely outcome) and III (moral/unlikely outcome). An example of the first suspense-generating situation (II) would include a cinematic situation where it looks likely that the hero will fall from a precipice. Take for example the scene from *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Peter Jackson, 2003) where Frodo Baggins (Elijah Wood) hangs from a precipice inside Mount Doom. The Ring of Power lies just out of his reach atop a roiling pool of lava, which Frodo will fall into if he fails to pull himself up. Frodo's friend, Samwise Gamgee (Sean Astin) calls out for Frodo to take his hand. See Figures 3.2a–3.2b.





Figures 3.2a–3.2b *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). Frodo hangs from a precipice inside Mount Doom.

We presumably do not want Frodo to fall into the lava, but it looks likely to happen and the suspense we feel, according to Carroll's view, is generated by not knowing the outcome in relation to this desire that Frodo be saved. This same example could also be characterised by the parameters of Carroll's second suspense-generating situation (III), where it looks unlikely that the hero will pull himself up from a precipice. Whichever way this scene is cast, the results are the same.

For Carroll, the feeling of suspense gives way to other emotions the moment the outcome is discovered. In formulating a theory of suspense, he does not appear to be concerned with what happens – emotionally speaking – after the outcome is known. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear to me how we can quantify the probability of certain

outcomes in these kinds of cinematic scenes. That is, *how* likely or unlikely is it that Frodo is going to fall? Does the degree of our feeling of suspense increase or decrease irrespective of the unlikeliness or likeliness of a given outcome? In addition, when watching *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time, those who have read the book would presumably know that Frodo does not die inside Mount Doom and in fact returns home a hero, so the fact that these viewers should feel suspense in light of perfect knowledge of the outcome remains a challenge for Carroll's view. Finally, even if we answer these questions, we still haven't explained why watching Frodo nearly fall to his death is an enjoyable and sought-after experience.

For the most part, both Bordwell and Carroll's analyses of suspense generally refers to the macrolevel 'big picture' questions about what will happen in the plot. I would argue that in order to more fully understand cinematic suspense and why it is an enjoyable and sought-after experience, we should also focus on the 'small picture' questions that occur on a moment-by-moment basis while we engage with a film. In the next section, I argue that we need to consider the emotions that come after the suspense-generating narrative events as well. Such an analysis might uncover a correlation between the likeliness or unlikeliness of a given outcome and the degree to which suspense is felt throughout the duration of a given scene on a moment-by-moment basis. Additionally, while I agree with Carroll that suspense-generating sequences are dependent on hypothetical predictions of outcomes, I think what the *Rings* example illustrates is that suspense does not strictly arise from moral considerations. That is to say, Frodo falling into the lava pit at the bottom of Mount Doom may be characterised as undesirable, but it is not exactly immoral.

3.2 The Paradox of Suspense

According to Carroll's table of possible combinations of morality and probability ratings, suspense is evoked either by instances where we are presented with a moral/unlikely outcome or an immoral/likely outcome. However, successful suspense-generating films (presumably) enjoy repeat viewings. For this reason, it is possible that the viewer knows the outcome of a narrative even before they have seen the film as might be the case with a cinematic adaptation like the example of *The Lord of the Rings* cited above. So, if the spectator already knows what is going to happen, theoretically, she should not feel suspense upon any subsequent viewing. Yet, spectators often do report feeling suspense at repeat viewings and this characterises what theorists have dubbed the paradox of suspense (Walton 1990; Yanal 1996; Carroll 2001; Smuts 2008; and Mag Uidhir 2011). Carroll (2001) outlines the paradox:

> we may begin with the assumption that, conceptually, suspense entails uncertainty. Uncertainty is a necessary condition for suspense. When uncertainty is removed from a situation, suspense evaporates…Moreover, if a situation lacks uncertainty altogether, no sense of suspense can intelligibly arise. It would be irrational for people to feel suspense in such contexts. And yet, apparently rational people are seized by suspense on re-encountering well-remembered films. (2001: 255)

To explain the phenomenon of what he calls anomalous suspense, psychologist Richard Gerrig and his team conducted experiments that tested readers' reactions to short stories where suspense-generating sentences were either added or excluded. The results indicate that in cases where subjects encounter suspense-generating sentences, doubt is sufficiently raised such that it takes subjects longer to answer true or false questions regarding the events of the story they have just read. Gerrig defines anomalous suspense as a 'type of suspense that survives in the face of perfect knowledge of the outcome' (1996: 100). He writes:

> To explain anomalous suspense, I have suggested that cognition is structured so that it incorporates an expectation of uniqueness (Gerrig, 1989b): Because life is made up of unique experiences—we undergo repeated types, but not repeated tokens—readers do not ordinarily have reason to search memory for literal repetitions of events. This principle is intended to capture the sense that individuals who experience anomalous suspense do not forcibly remove themselves from an unfolding narrative to determine whether they have prior knowledge of the outcome. An important implication of this principle, for

> current purposes, is that our cognitive architecture almost requires experiences of suspense. If our natural stance—as we are immersed in the ongoing stream of life—is always to act as if we cannot know what is going to happen next, we are likely to find our moment-by-moment existence routinely punctured by minor and major bouts of suspense. (Gerrig 1996: 102-103)

Applying this to the cinematic experience, we can understand how it is possible to experience suspense even upon repeat viewings and having perfect knowledge of the events that are about to unfold within the narrative because we are possessed by what Carroll (interpreting Gerrig) calls 'a uniqueness heuristic' (Carroll 2001: 269). According to Gerrig's view, we encounter all situations, even repeat viewings, with an (unconscious) expectation of uniqueness, thereby allowing us to experience suspense even while engaging in repeat activities such as watching the same film over and over again. What seems to bother Carroll about Gerrig's view is the assumption that, to him, this seems to indicate that we as spectators are not acting rationally when we engage with a film.

Carroll writes, 'Gerrig's approach still does render recidivists [repeat viewers] irrational, even if in the long run they are victims of a higher rationality (a.k.a. optimality). And this seems to me to be a problem' (2001: 269). He continues:

> Recidivist readers, listeners, and viewers of suspense fictions very frequently reencounter fictions with the express expectation of reexperiencing the thrill they experienced on earlier encounters. They remember the thrill, and they remember the story too. Gerrig seems to argue that their cognitive processing of the story the second or sixtieth time around is insulated from that knowledge. This seems to me to be highly unlikely. (2001: 269)

So, Carroll rejects the 'insulation' thesis he attributes to Gerrig, and disagrees that spectators are irrational in the manner which he interprets Gerrig to suggest. One issue with Carroll's critique of Gerrig is that, in the passage above, he seems unwilling to cast the repeat viewer's experience as suspense, instead labelling these experiences as 'thrills,' which is not, strictly speaking, the same feeling as what he has carefully cast as suspense, that is, the feeling leading up to and ending at knowledge of the outcome. Actually, 'thrill' would seem to imply a subsequent emotion felt after the suspense-generating question has been answered: we feel

suspense at watching Indiana Jones outrun the boulder and are thrilled by seeing him escape the temple in the nick of time. In a suspense-thriller, first we are made to feel suspense, then we are thrilled by the outcome. However, I take it that, in this case, Carroll is using thrill as a synonym for suspense. In any case, I wouldn't read that Gerrig is, in fact, arguing that spectators encountering a story for the umpteenth time are insulated from their knowledge. Rather, it seems to me that Gerrig is arguing that despite the fact that we have conscious knowledge of what happens in the story (i.e. we remember what happens while watching it during a repeat viewing), we cannot control the way that we feel around suspense-generating scenes because of the expectation of uniqueness that Gerrig's psychological studies have unearthed. In other words, Gerrig's account of our experience, and the 'cognitive architecture' underpinning it, is more complex than Carroll's view seems to allow.

Carroll rightly points out that repeat viewers remember what happens in the narrative and they remember how the narrative made them feel the first time they watched the film, but he does not want to argue that repeat viewers experience merely the memory of suspense upon repeat viewings; he wants to say that we do indeed feel suspense—and suspense of the same kind as the first viewing—during repeat viewings. I would argue that, in light of the psychological evidence on the accuracy of duration perception discussed in Chapter Two, humans are not very good at predicting exactly when something will happen down to the millisecond and so cannot accurately predict exactly *when* the outcome will happen. In other words, they might have perfect knowledge about what is going to happen, but they still have trouble predicting the exact moment when it happens. I shall demonstrate in greater detail in Chapter Five that 'recidivist' spectators, rational or not, cannot recall with any accuracy exactly when the suspense sequences ended, and thus cannot predict in repeat viewings when those sequences will end. That is, even if we have seen a film numerous times and know it well, we cannot precisely predict the exact moment in the film (in milliseconds) when the

suspense will conclude. The experience of timing in film, therefore, is in this sense new every time.

Carroll and Gerrig are not the only theorists who have grappled with the paradox of (anomalous) suspense. Murray Smith (2017) evaluates anomalous suspense with the methodology of triangulation, which I explored in Chapter Two. Smith argues, 'As in the case of anomalous suspense, the point of triangulating the phenomenological, the psychological, and the neural is to examine the extent to which a given hypothesis is or is not supported by a convergence of evidence across all three levels' (2017: 74). Smith defines the method of triangulation as a form of consilience in that 'it occurs across distinct types of evidence and levels of enquiry, rather than meshing together different bodies of evidence on a single level—as one might, say, in seeking to integrate neural accounts of the perceptual and emotion systems; or psychological theories of memory and imagination' (2017: 68).

Smith examines anomalous suspense using examples from the films *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) and *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006). In these films, the viewer presumably knows that the Titanic will sink and that the United Flight 93 will crash. Smith asks, 'If suspense is premised on ignorance of an outcome, how can suspense arise in contexts where we seem to know the outcome?' (2017: 69). But he also points out that 'Knowing that things will end happily does not simply erase or neutralize unhappy events as they happen' (2017: 70). Based on this observation, Smith suggests that an alternative explanation of anomalous suspense (feeling suspense where we know the outcome) is to recast the experience as 'appalled fascination or empathy' (2017: 70). He writes:

> In cases where we know that the outcome of a suspenseful narrative is bad, our emotional state has this character: grim fascination with the unfolding of a tragic, horrific, or otherwise undesirable sequence of events. And in cases where we know that a suspense narrative turns out well, perhaps the emotion we feel is a form of occurent, empathetic suffering with the central characters(s). (2017: 70)

By recasting the experience as either appalled fascination or empathy, Smith works around the problem of explaining why viewers feel suspense when they presumably know the outcome of a film. Smith claims that in these cases, viewers may not feel suspense at all, even though they may report their feelings as such since introspection of one's feelings after the fact is far from infallible. 'Suspense,' he reminds us, 'is not the only candidate on the table' (2017: 70).

In the case of *United 93*, spectators know that the plane will eventually go down but they probably do not know what happened on the plane on a minute-by-minute basis. They certainly do not know exactly when (or at what point in the film, that is) the plane will go down. While I am inclined to agree that what might instead be going on here is empathy rather than suspense, I question whether 'appalled fascination' could ever be entirely devoid of suspense since 'fascination' seems to imply that the spectator wants to find out what happens next and 'appalled' seems to imply that the spectator desires the opposite outcome (i.e. we do not want the plane to go down). As I shall show in the following section, suspense is contingent upon the anticipation of two factors: (1) finding out whether or not our hypotheses are correct and (2) finding out whether or not our desires are fulfilled. This model closely resembles Carroll's model of suspense based on probability and morality, but by focusing on the emotions subsequent to the feeling of suspense, and by replacing moral desirability with a broader notion of desirability, I will explore why and how suspense can be a pleasurable and sought-after experience in the first place.

Nearly all the accounts of the paradox of suspense frame the problem as a matter of certainty and uncertainty: why do we feel suspense when we are in perfect knowledge of the outcome of an event or the answer to a question? In the following section, however, I will focus on the second necessary condition for suspense: caring about the outcome. I will argue that there is pleasure in the waiting, in the delaying of the culmination of some series of

events. Generally speaking, this characterises what I call a *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film*, which relates to my overall thesis that the experience of time in film is an aesthetic one, an enjoyable one, or, more broadly, one that we find satisfaction in for its own sake.

3.3 A Temporal Account of Aesthetic Suspense in Film

As the title of this chapter suggests, my view relates the question of aesthetic suspense to the pleasure that one takes in gambling. For instance, when a gambler places a bet on black at a roulette table, she presumably wants the ball to land on black. For this kind of outside bet, the stakes are clear: if the ball lands on black, she wins double the amount she has bet, but if it lands on red, she loses the entire amount that she has bet. As the gambler watches the ball spin around the wheel, suspense builds and concludes only when either one of two outcomes is made apparent: either the ball lands on black and she wins or it lands on red and she loses.[64] The chances are roughly 50/50, which are not good odds if one has bet a lot of money. Presumably, however, chance betting is an enjoyable experience even, to some extent, if the gambler loses, but why? Why would anyone engage in this kind of chance activity?

Perhaps what makes the suspense of this gambling scenario pleasurable for our fictional gambler is the build-up of anticipation towards a desirable outcome? In the case where the ball lands on black and she wins, the gambler is probably going to experience happiness, the positively-valanced emotion *par excellence*. However, if the ball lands on red and the gambler loses, she is probably going to experience disappointment, which is generally classified as a negatively-valanced emotion. Therefore, I would argue that suspense in betting may be divided into at least two phases: the initial state where we may enjoy the

pleasure of making a bet or guess at the outcome; and the final state where we learn whether or not our bet or guess was correct.

The gambler's feeling of suspense while playing roulette is akin to cinematic suspense insofar as there is, in both gambling and watching a film, an agent (either a gambler or a spectator) anticipating possible outcomes: either desirable or undesirable. In gambling, however, our hypotheses and desires are conflated. If I bet on black at a roulette table, then it would not make sense to say that I thought it was going to land on red, but I bet on black anyway. If I really thought it was going to land on red, then I would have bet on red. Not so in film. Unlike gambling, in film hypotheses and desires may be in conflict. Before demonstrating this conflict, however, it remains to be seen whether or not waiting for a highly anticipated and desired outcome (i.e. suspense) may be thought of as pleasurable experience in its own right.

So, is pleasure simply derived from not knowing the outcome of an event? An example of such a phenomenon might include new parents who opt not to know the sex of their unborn baby in order to 'be surprised.' In this case, can suspense be pleasurable on its own even before discovering the outcome? Perhaps there is something to be said for the parents' desire to extend their uncertainty, and therefore suspense, for as long as possible? By choosing not to be told of the sex of their unborn child during a week-twenty ultrasound, the parents are effectively extending their experience of suspense. So, in this case, there appears to be pleasure in not knowing the outcome of the question of the baby's sex.

On the other hand, how, then, would we account for instances where parents opt not to know the sex of their unborn child because they want to 'be surprised,' but likewise claim that they will be equally happy with either a girl or boy? Would the state of being equally happy disqualify this example from being cached in as a state of suspense? Carroll reminds

us that in 'real-life' instances of suspense, we need to have some stake in the outcome. He writes:

> in 'real-life,' suspense only takes charge when we care about those future outcomes about which we are uncertain…Where we are impervious to outcomes, even though the relevant outcomes are uncertain, there is no suspense, because 'real-life' suspense requires a certain emotional involvement with the outcome, along with uncertainty about it. Interests, concerns, or at least preferences must come into play. (2001: 259)

So, how should we characterise the experience of suspense for parents who opt not to know the sex of their baby until its birth in order, as they claim, to 'be surprised' if the outcome does not matter to them? At first glance, this might appear to be a contradiction for if the parents truly do not care which sex their baby turns out to be, then why would they feel suspense at all before knowing the answer? In other words, for the parents who would be happy either way no matter what sex their baby turns out to be, but do (so they claim) feel suspense before the baby is born—so much so that they elect to extend their experience of suspense for as long as possible—*what exactly do these parents feel suspense about?* Carroll addresses the issue:

> Where care and uncertainty unite in a single situation, suspense is an appropriate or fitting emotional response…If I have no concern whatsoever for the outcome in question, a response in terms of suspense is unintelligible. Indeed, if I claim to be in a state of suspense about something about which I genuinely protest that I have not one jot of concern, then I sound as though I am contradicting myself; but if I believe that an outcome that I care about is uncertain, then suspense is in order. (2001: 264)

In my example of the fictional gambler, we can say that suspense arises from hoping for a desirable outcome (i.e. anticipation of a desirable outcome leads to the emotion of suspense), but in the case of the parents who feel suspense in keen anticipation of the sex of the unborn baby, the cause of the suspenseful feeling is unclear because, for them, either outcome (i.e. girl or boy) would be equally desirable, or so they claim. In answer to our example from above, we might say that the parents do, in fact, *care* about the outcome insofar as it is actually of huge consequence whether the child is male or female, but that the parents are not

necessarily *hoping* for one particular outcome or the other. What this example shows, therefore, is that suspense can arise where the outcomes are equally desirable. Indeed, there simply appears to be pleasure in the wait, that is, pleasure in waiting to find out the outcome, no matter what the outcome may be.

However, in most cases of suspense, it would seem strange to claim that the feeling of suspense can be generated when we have no particular preference for the outcome. If we return to our example from the roulette table, it seems difficult to imagine how a gambler would feel suspense if they bet on both black and red. If the ball lands on black, then the gambler would lose the same amount of money, having also bet on red, that she would have won. In other words, the gambler who bets on both black and red simultaneously breaks even and, presumably knowing their odds of breaking even are now about 95-97% (accounting for the one or two green zeros that appear on European and American-style roulette tables), would not be surprised by either outcome, black or red. If this example seems peculiar, it is meant to since in most situations where we are presented with a question that has two possible answers, we are not usually given the opportunity to choose both outcomes, but only one. I agree with Carroll's view (and in light of Bordwell's view of hypotheses in narration) that when we are presented with moment-by-moment suspense-generating questions such as 'What's behind the door?' or 'What made that sound?' we are apt to feel suspense. Yet, Carroll and Bordwell have surprisingly little to say about what comes after we know the outcome, that is, what feelings come after the feeling of suspense ends. By not focusing on this part of the puzzle, Bordwell's and Carroll's views cannot answer how it is that cinematic suspense (or indeed any feeling of aesthetic suspense) might be a sought-after and pleasurable experience. In short, Carroll's view explains why we should feel suspense, but not why we would ever want to feel suspense.

Effective suspenseful cinematic experiences such as watching suspense-thriller or horror films would then, like in my gambling example, seem to require that the spectator care about the outcome of the event. Outlier cases may arise, like the one described above where parents opt not to learn the sex of their unborn baby in order to extend their feeling of suspense despite the fact that they have no particular preference. This case of aesthetic suspense might be rare, but it indicates a problem for casting preference necessarily in terms of morality since the parents, while caring about the outcome, insist they have no particular preference for either a boy or a girl (and even if they did, I can't fathom why that preference should be cast as 'moral'). For Carroll, suspense is a consequence when the morally preferable option is in conflict with the probability of it happening. I think in most cases of cinematic suspense, its fairly easy to determine what the morally preferable outcome is, but I wonder if this would be better cast as the spectator's *desired outcome*, rather than in the terms of morality, since not all suspense generating outcomes boil down to either good or evil. Furthermore, while I agree with Carroll's notion that the spectator's judgement of the probability of the desired or undesired outcome influences the suspense that they feel, I think what's missing in his theory is a consideration of the general hypotheses that the spectator is constantly making while watching a film. In other words, the spectator has an idea in her head about what she wants to happen (i.e. a desired outcome), but she simultaneously has an idea about *what she thinks will happen* (i.e. a hypothesis). In the following paragraphs, I will distinguish my view from Carroll's. By switching focus to the temporal relations within and among the audio-visual makeup of a scene, I aim to give a temporal account for cinematic suspense.

It's worth reiterating here that in Carroll's view only narrative instances where probability and hopes/desires are in conflict generate suspense (instances demarcated in his II evil/likely and III moral/unlikely). But in my view, suspense can be generated in instances

where probability and hopes/desires are not in conflict (albeit to a different degree). To clarify, I'll return to *The Lord of the Rings* example. As I mentioned in my earlier analysis of this scene, when Frodo hangs off the precipice, it's not clear which category this should fall into: is it likely that he will fall? Or is it unlikely that he will pull himself up? Carroll would have it that we feel suspense because we don't know whether or not Frodo is going to fall and it looks like he might. I say that the spectator, due to their familiarity with genre conventions, does know that Frodo is going to pull himself up from the precipice and yet we feel suspense for some reason. I don't think anyone would deny that this scene does not generate suspense, otherwise, what's it doing there at the end of the film? It's a literal cliff hanger. My temporal account cinematic suspense as a kind of betting, therefore, allows for cases where the audience is able to accurately predict what happens, but nevertheless feel suspense.

The opening scenes of two Steven Spielberg films, including *Jaws* (1974) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), will serve as illustrations. I have chosen these examples not only because they were made by the same director, which gives my analysis some continuity, but also because the scenes in question occur at the very start of the films as well as the fact that both films mark the first instalments of what would become well-known franchises. Additionally, I chose these scenes since they are frequently referenced when discussing the generation of suspense. *Raiders* opens with a suspenseful scene that involves Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford) exhuming a temple deep in the jungles of Peru. After tripping one of the many booby-traps, Indiana finds himself having to escape the temple before a giant boulder crushes him. While watching Indiana escape the temple, our experience may be divided up into at least two states of mind: the state we are in while watching Indiana run (which I will label *anticipation*) and the state we are in while watching Indiana escape to safety (which I will label *relief*). Shortly, I will argue that there is a third state of mind that also colours our experience of such a suspense scene. This state of mind is dependent on finding out the truth

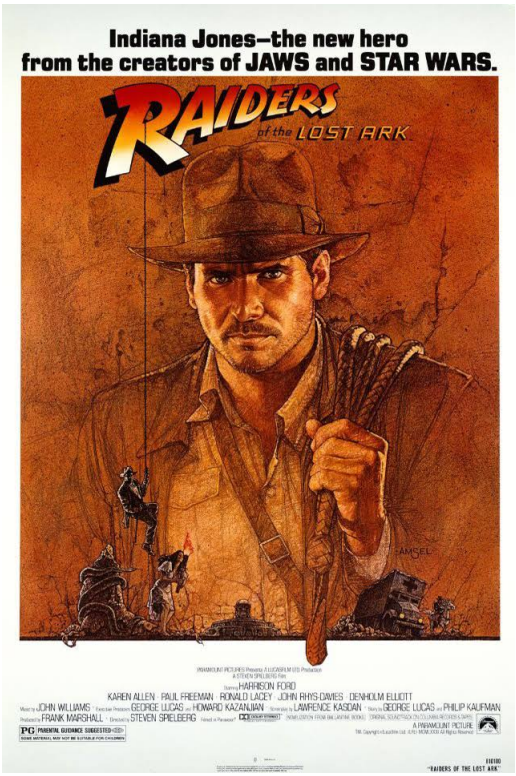
or falsity of the hypotheses that we make when we engage with narrative film (which I will label *satisfaction*). But, first, what about instances where the suspense event culminates in our fears being realised?

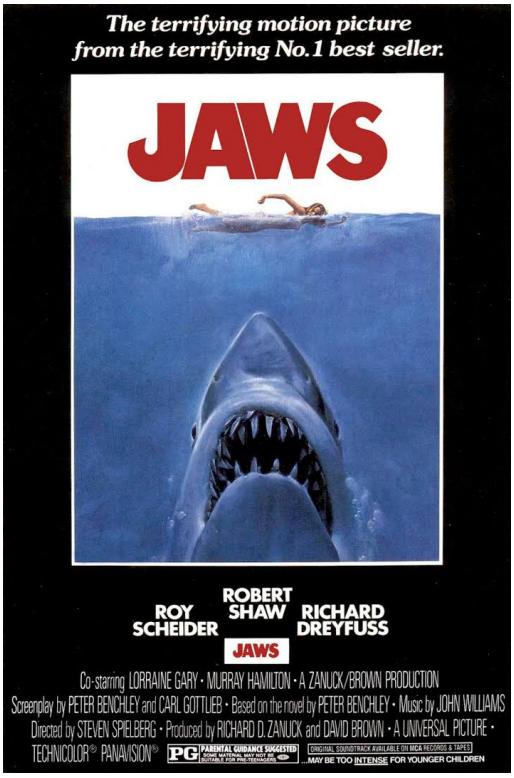
At the start of *Jaws*, teenager Chrissie Watkins (Susan Backlinie) leaves her beach party and goes skinny dipping off the coast of the resort island Amity, when she is attacked and eaten by a great white shark. In this scene, we experience the same initial state of mind (i.e. anticipation) but when the action concludes and we witness Chrissie being pulled under the water, we experience a state of mind different from the *Raiders* example (i.e. horror, which is typically characterised as a blend of fear and disgust and which I will generalise, here, as a type of intense dismay). In other words, upon seeing Chrissie being eaten by the shark we feel horrified, yet at seeing Indiana escape the boulder, we feel relieved. Thus, I characterise the two patterns of aesthetic suspense as *suspense–relief* and *suspense–dismay*. For brevity, I will generalise the relevant positively-valanced emotions (e.g. joy, amusement, awe, contentment, pride, admiration, inspiration, etc.) as 'relief' and the relevant negatively-valanced emotions (e.g. fear, dread, horror, pain, sorrow, frustration, disappointment, etc.) as 'dismay.'

In both examples cited above, our anticipation of what is going to happen in the narrative is guided by our desires and fears for the safety of the characters on screen. We desire Indiana and Chrissie to be safe, but we fear the worst. What this shows, of course, is that, as spectators, we care about the outcome. We have both a desired outcome as well as an educated guess at what will most likely occur (i.e. a hypothesis), which, as I mentioned earlier, might in fact conflict with our desires. At first glance, this might appear to be largely in line with Carroll's theory of suspense, however, my formulation of cinematic suspense as a kind of betting differs in that I take it to be the case that suspense can be felt whether or not the outcome seems probable and whether or not the outcome may be moral. In my view, the

suspense that is generated is a matter of degree, which may be felt strongly or weakly. In cases where probability and morality are in conflict, we feel suspense strongly but in cases where the probability and morality are not in conflict, we still feel suspense, but to a lesser degree. This type of suspense is generated through erotetic narration that is enhanced by the fact that we don't know – and cannot accurately predict – when something will occur. The following chapter develops this particular point of my temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film.

According to my view, we presumably do not want to see Indiana crushed by the boulder or Chrissie eaten by the shark, although this view might seem to conflict with some film criticism of the day.[65] I would argue that we most likely want the opposite to be true, that is, we want to see Indiana and Chrissie come through their ordeals safe and sound, but our guesses derive from what at the time seems most probable to happen. Hence, my view may be compared to Carroll's, but here I recast morality as desirable outcomes. My theory hinges on expectations that a spectator accrues before seeing a film often from trailers, posters, other promotional and marketing materials, as well as their experience with the conventions of a particular genre. Notably, both Indiana Jones and Chrissie Watkins were featured on the promotional posters of their respective films (see Figures 3.3a–3.3b).





Figures 3.3a–3.3b Posters for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Jaws* (1974).

First, let's consider *Raiders*. At the time of its release, audiences would have recognised Harrison Ford, whose most recent films included the first two of the enormously popular *Star Wars* films, as the protagonist, Indiana Jones. Additionally, Indiana has already been shown within the narrative to be crafty, physically fit, and agile, qualities illustrated through his (thus far) successful navigation of the heavily booby-trapped temple. It would, therefore, be safe to assume that Indiana will most likely come out of the temple alive. Hence, we form a hypothesis based on what we think is most likely to occur and so if Indiana escapes the temple, we would not be surprised. Of course, we are rooting for our hero to survive, but it's also a safe bet to assume that he will come out of this ordeal more or less unscathed. This example, therefore, falls under Carroll's first combination of morality and probability ratings: (I) moral/likely. In other words, it is, using Carroll's terminology, moral to root for Indiana's survival, but it is also, we can guess, likely that he will survive the situation. However, Carroll would have it that this type of combination (moral/likely) does

not generate suspense. While I do not contest that an instance such as this is not representative of the kind of blood-pumping, white-knuckle suspense that might appear later in the film, it is, I suggest, an instance of suspense, even if it may be considered somewhat light-hearted. If it isn't an instance of suspense, then we might wonder, what is the purpose of having Indiana outrun the boulder in the first place?

Now let's consider another example that, strictly following Carroll's morality and probability combinations, would probably fall under his (II) combination of evil/likely. Susan Backlinie was a relatively unknown actor at the time of the release of *Jaws* and remains so today. In contrast to *Raiders*, we would have no such expectation that Chrissie will come out of her ordeal alive because the actor is unknown, unestablished, and disposable on those grounds alone. Additionally, Chrissie Watkins is portrayed as young, hasty, and drunk and because of those qualities she is all the more vulnerable to the formidable shark we know lurks somewhere in the water. We would, therefore, be more likely to expect that Chrissie will probably get eaten by the shark, despite the fact that we may have no such desire to see her get eaten. In short, there is a difference between wanting and not wanting something to happen and thinking that it is likely or unlikely to happen. So far, this example straightforwardly follows Carroll's combination (II) evil/likely, but knowing this doesn't help explain why anyone would want to see Chrissie Watkins get eaten by the shark and it doesn't explain why anyone would enjoy the feeling of suspense prior to Chrissie's death. If we compare our hypothesis about the fate of Chrissie to the act of betting, then we might begin to understand why this is so because in betting, it feels good to win because we get a cognitive reward for choosing the right answer. As we watch Chrissie come dangerously close to getting eaten by the shark, we place our bets and in finding our hypothesis proven correct, we feel (even if only slightly) vindicated.

As we watch Chrissie swim, the looming soundtrack cues us into the point-of-view of the shark preparing to attack and we form a hypothesis that Chrissie is going to be attacked and killed. We see Chrissie react to a tug at her foot, followed by her screaming and being dragged across the surface of the water by the unseen shark. Our hypothesis turns out to be correct and I would argue there is a kind of pleasure that we feel at being proven correct (a cognitive reward). That is, having our expectations (however horrific) realised culminates in a sort of aesthetic pleasure that I would liken to a kind of betting, where we form hypotheses based on what is most likely to occur during suspense sequences and feel pleasure upon discovering that we have chosen the correct outcome. Hence, I see two processes going on that colour our emotional reactions to suspense sequences found in the establishing scenes of *Jaws* and *Raiders*: probability and desire.

First, there is the matter of our expectations (i.e. what we think is most likely going to happen) being met. Second, there is the matter of our fears or desires being realised; our fears represent what we do not want to happen, while our desires represent what we do want to happen. The latter has to do with our fears and desires, while the former has to do with our ability to form correct hypotheses based on all available information in the narrative. In Carroll's view, only II (moral/unlikely) and III (immoral/likely) instances generate suspense, while on my view, which considers the tension between desired and undesired outcomes versus the general hypotheses that spectators make, allows for suspense to be felt across all four combinations.

In the example from the opening scene of *Jaws*, we want Chrissie to be left alone by the shark, but we fear for her safety. Given that she is drunk and acting foolishly, the shark has yet to take a victim, and she is portrayed by an unknown actor, it is safe to assume that Chrissie is not going to make it out of this alive. On the other hand, in the opening scene from *Raiders*, we not only want Indiana to escape, we also think that it is likely that he will escape,

given that he has been portrayed as crafty, physically fit, and agile, and is portrayed by a well-known actor whom we already know is the protagonist-hero of the story.

In both examples, our hypotheses regarding the fates of each character are satisfied. What differentiates them, then, is whether our fears or desires were fulfilled. Thus, I characterise the experience of suspense in these scenes as a three-step emotional process that begins with a) the anticipation of the outcome (either desired or feared) in which a hypothesis is formed based on all available information, followed by b) the outcome in which the hypothesis is found to be either correct or incorrect, and culminating in c) a sense of either relief or dismay at the outcome. In the case of *Raiders*, both the hypothesis and desire are met and the experience can thus be characterised as *anticipation–satisfaction–relief*. However, in *Jaws*, only the hypothesis is met and can thus be characterised as *anticipation–satisfaction–dismay*.

So, informed guessing, even in cases which realise our fears, might in some ways be pleasurable at least on an epistemic level. For if the spectator correctly guesses that Chrissie will be eaten by the shark, then the suspense she initially felt does not go to waste. Getting an answer right, however gruesome, feels good because it amounts to cognitive reward. This cognitive reward has a biological explanation: as Buonomano reminded us in the opening paragraph, by anticipating what is coming, humans (and other animals) mentally prepare to react beneficially for their survival. Moreover, as film spectators we may congratulate ourselves at having correctly anticipated the outcome of the narrative. ‘I knew it!’ we think to ourselves, which implies the pleasure that we might feel at having correctly guessed the outcome.

Thus, I prefer to characterise suspense scenes in terms of hypotheses and desires rather than conform to Carroll’s morality/probability terminology. While watching a suspense-generating scene, our desires may either be fulfilled or unfulfilled. Likewise, our

hypotheses may either be proven correct or incorrect. In my temporal view of cinematic suspense, the suspense experience does not conclude when a single question or outcome finds resolution because, being temporal, the film keeps going and our emotions do not suddenly evaporate the moment we are confronted with new narrative information or new audio-visual content. They, as Carroll has argued, give way to other emotions.

One reason for this is that the answered question is all too often immediately or concurrently replaced by a new question that leads to the re-generation of suspense. The resulting combinations may be similar to Carroll's morality/probability matrix, but reframing expectations as hypotheses and moral desires for desires in general, I would argue, allows for a more complete view of the emotions we may feel during suspense-generating scenes. Suspense-generating scenes are often responsible for maintaining an ongoing mood of heightened emotion and heightened arousal in the viewer. At the moment when we realise all the other possible outcomes are no longer possible, our heightened emotions and arousal dip into the realm of relief or dismay. To illustrate what I mean by 'dip,' consider the following visualisation technique in the diagram below, which illustrates the opening sequence in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, leading up to the boulder chase scene.

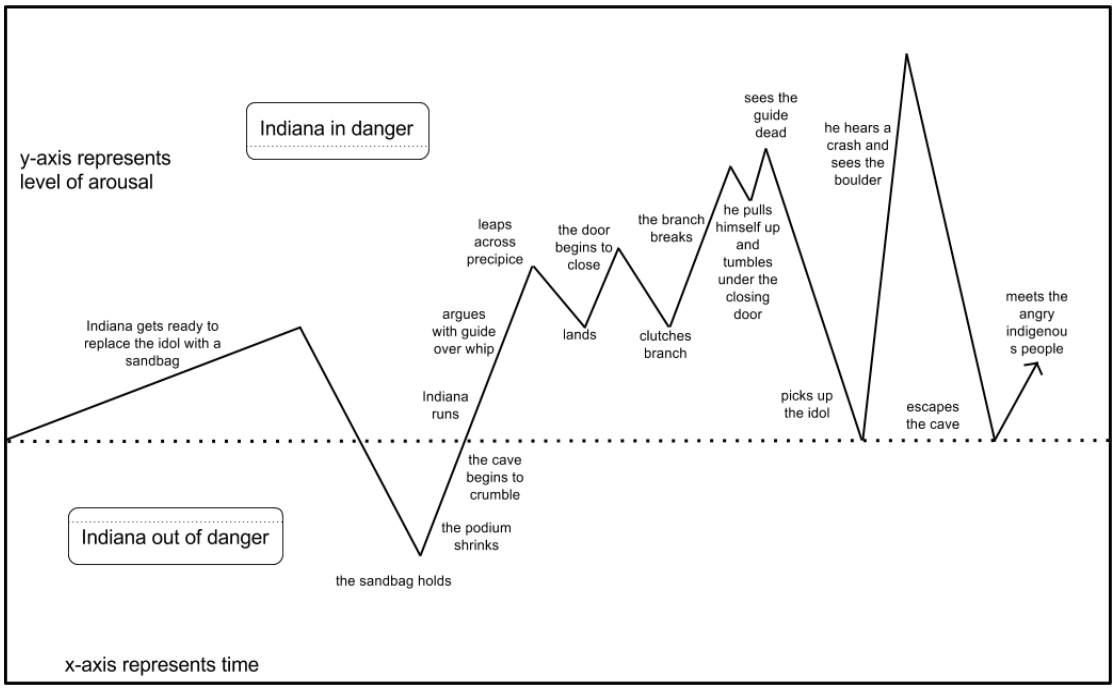


Figure 3.4 A visualisation of suspense unfolding over time from the opening scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

In Figure 3.4, I have constructed a diagram as a visualisation technique where the x-axis represents the narrative as it unfolds in time, while the y-axis represents the level of arousal that the scene evokes in viewers. The threshold above the dotted line indicates when the character is in peril, while the threshold below the dotted line indicates when the character is out of peril. The higher that the diagonal lines reach on the y-axis indicates a heightened arousal state in the viewer and coordinates with the peril of Indiana Jones, while the diagonal lines beneath the dotted line indicate a relaxed arousal state, when the protagonist is out of danger. Ascending diagonal lines and peaks in the diagram indicate when the character is in danger, while descending diagonal lines and valleys indicate when the character is out of danger.

At the beginning of the scene, Indiana has entered a cave with a guide, Satipo (Alfred Molina), who promises to lead him to a sacred idol, which sits atop an altar. Indiana suspects the altar is booby-trapped, so he carefully replaces the idol with a sandbag to thwart the trap.

In the diagram, I have represented this by the first diagonal line creeping steadily up towards a state of heightened arousal. At the first peak, Indiana successfully lays a sandbag onto the altar, swapping it with the idol. There is a moment—a dramatic beat—when the protagonist, the guide, and presumably the spectator all breathe a sigh of relief. This example provides evidence that the screenwriter's beat is not merely metaphorical, but a literal measure of time on the page as discussed in Chapter Two.

As the rest of the sequence plays out, Indiana faces new and more perilous challenges. First, the altar, which had been holding strong, begins to sink into the floor, indicating that something has gone wrong. Then, the walls begin to crumble and shortly Indiana finds himself trapped in the cave as it topples around him. He runs into action, dodging a fling of arrows, and reaches a precipice where Satipo has already used Indiana's whip to swing to safety. They argue for a moment and Satipo convinces him to give up the idol before he throws him the whip, but in his greed, Satipo abandons him. Indiana is forced to leap across the precipice. As he clings to the other side, the cave door begins to descend. He grabs a branch and there is a moment when he smiles in relief, but the branch breaks, forcing him to climb up on his own just in time to tumble underneath the closing cave door. As he inspects his surroundings there is a sharp crash and Indiana turns to face Satipo, who is now impaled by another booby-trap. Indiana then snatches up the idol and starts to make his way out of the cave when he hears another crash and realises that a giant boulder is coming right for him. Just after he outruns the boulder and exits the cave, Indiana finds himself surrounded by an indigenous tribe with bows and arrows trained on him.

As my visualisation technique within the diagram is meant to show, the anticipated peaks of high arousal states of suspense and subsequent states of relief felt by the viewer directly relate to the hurdles that the protagonist faces and overcomes. The following table illustrates the possible combinations of hypotheses (correct/incorrect) and desires

(fulfilled/unfulfilled). The third column in this table reveals the four types of suspense that result respectively from each combination.

	Hypothesis		Desired Outcome		Type of Suspense
(1)	correct hypothesis	+	desire fulfilled	=	anticipation–satisfaction–relief
(2)	correct hypothesis	+	desire unfulfilled	=	anticipation–satisfaction–dismay
(3)	incorrect hypothesis	+	desire fulfilled	=	anticipation–surprise–relief
(4)	incorrect hypothesis	+	desire unfulfilled	=	anticipation–surprise–dismay

Each combination of hypothesis and desire results in a unique type of suspense. All four suspense conditions begin with anticipation of the outcome of an event or the answer to a question and are differentiated by hypotheses, which are found to be either correct or incorrect, and desired outcomes, which go either fulfilled or unfulfilled. I use 'satisfaction' to describe the experience of finding out that our hypothesis is correct, while I use 'relief' and 'dismay' to characterise the experience of finding our desires either fulfilled or unfulfilled. The scenes from *Raiders* and *Jaws* fall into the first and second categories respectively. In the *Raiders* example, we wanted Indiana to outrun the boulder and we correctly anticipated that he would, in fact, do so. Hence, we feel relief that Indiana was not harmed, but also satisfaction that we were correct in our initial hypothesis. In the *Jaws* example, we feel horrified that Chrissie gets eaten by the shark, but, like the *Raiders* example, vindicated by our correct hypothesis because we pretty much saw that one coming.

Instances where our hypothesis turns out to be incorrect may be characterised as surprise because we were not expecting the outcome. In the following two chapters, I consider the final two suspense conditions *anticipation–surprise–relief* and *anticipation–*

surprise–dismay. These two suspense conditions are particularly relevant in my exploration of the jump scare discussed at length in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

In the real world, encountering everyday suspense can be disappointing or unpleasant, but, as I have argued, in film, aesthetic suspense is a sought-after experience that we actually seem to enjoy. The chapter introduced the first component to my *temporal account of aesthetic suspense in film*. It introduced the basic concept of aesthetic suspense, which I have defined as a sought-after experience that we seem to enjoy for the sake of it. Cinematic suspense, therefore, encapsulates the enjoyable experience of suspense found in suspense-generating films such as suspense-thrillers and horror films.

While there still seems to be debate over how to characterise the paradox of suspense—the suspense of repeat viewings, sometimes known as anomalous suspense, suspense felt in perfect knowledge of the outcome—I have advanced a view of suspense that reframes the question in terms of pleasure (i.e. the paradoxical pleasure felt from a cinematic experience that in the real world often leads to disappointment or displeasure, and is not typically savoured for its own sake). I recast cinematic suspense in terms of hypotheses and desired outcomes. Upon encountering a suspense-generating question, we form a hypothesis, which is either proven correct or incorrect. Likewise, we form a desired outcome in our mind, which is either fulfilled or unfulfilled. Thus, cinematic suspense may be likened to a kind of betting where we make a prediction about what will occur (based on its likelihood, taking all factors into consideration) while simultaneously hoping that it either does or does not occur (based on our desires). One limit of the analogy would include the fact that in the case of gambling at the roulette table, or, indeed, a coin toss, the only human agent whose fate is at stake is the gambler, while in appreciating film narratives the action is constituted largely by

human agents, ones with which we have, presumably, engaged with emotionally. Still, insofar as betting on an unknown outcome is a pleasurable and sought-after experience, I think the analogy is illuminating since the experience of betting is also a temporal experience. In both cases, my analysis sought to demonstrate that it is not simply the pleasure of finding out whether or not one's answer was correct, but that there appears to be some pleasure in the moments leading up to the discovery of the outcome. In other words, as far as aesthetic suspense goes, there appears to be pleasure in the waiting.

I have argued that cinematic suspense manifests in four ways, two of which I closely analysed using the opening scenes from the films *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Jaws*. The first two types of cinematic suspense result in the suspense conditions: (1) anticipation–satisfaction–relief; and (2) anticipation–satisfaction–dismay. In the case of anticipation–satisfaction–relief, the spectator's hypothesis is proven to be correct, leading to a sense of satisfaction, and the spectator's desire is fulfilled, culminating in a sense of relief. In the case of anticipation–satisfaction–dismay, the spectator's hypothesis is also proven to be correct, but her desire goes unfulfilled, culminating in a sense of dismay. In the following chapter, I will focus on the remaining two types of suspense including (3) anticipation–surprise–relief and (4) anticipation–surprise–dismay. In both of these cases, suspense-generating scenes begin with anticipation and both lead to a feeling of surprise at hypothesising incorrectly, however, they each culminate in either a feeling of relief or dismay. I shall focus on the remaining two suspense conditions in the following two chapters of Part II.

Chapter Four

Ticking Time Bombs and Other Explosive Devices

It may be uncontroversial to assert that successful horror and suspense-thriller films such as *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) and *Jaws* (Stephen Spielberg, 1974) are well-timed, but what exactly does it mean for a horror or suspense-thriller film to *be* well-timed? For starters, what exactly is *it* in the film that is well-timed? Moreover, if some horror or suspense-thrillers can be said to have 'good timing', what does it mean for a film to have 'bad timing'? As discussed in Chapter One, Susan Feagin (1999) defines *timing* by the duration and durational relationships between and among images. Cinematic timing refers to the ways in which images, sounds, actions, and events unfold in a moment-by-moment basis within a given cinematic scene. The present chapter is concerned with the function of what I will call *suspense timing*, that is, timing that serves to generate suspense in horror and suspense-thriller films through the employment of an unpredictable time limit that I will formulate as *narrative time pressure*.[66] I use narrative time pressure to refer to an aspect of cinematic suspense that relates to film as a temporal art in Gregory Currie's (1995) 'connected' sense (also discussed in Chapter One). Following Currie, we may say that film has a special relationship with time because unlike other representational arts such as literature, film has the ability to portray time by means of time and in doing so, on occasion, connects our experience of the unfolding of time with that of the characters on screen. In my view, it doesn't just matter *what* happens on screen in relation to our anticipations of expected and desired outcomes, which I brought to light in the previous chapter; it also is of critical importance *when* something happens on screen. This chapter, therefore, explores suspense timing in contemporary films including *No Country for Old Men* (Ethan Coen and Joel Coen,

2007), *There Will Be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007), and *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008).

In the previous chapter, I explored the question of cinematic suspense, which is, I argued, a form of aesthetic suspense that I take to be a pleasurable and sought-after experience. In an attempt to refine the existing theories of suspense, most notably those of Noël Carroll (1996; 2001) and Richard Gerrig (1989a; 1989b; 1993; 1996), I compared the experience of cinematic suspense with the act of betting on a 50/50 game of chance, which I also take to be a pleasurable and sought-after suspense-triggering activity. My analysis attempted to illustrate that the waiting time leading up to the discovery of an outcome can be pleasurable in and of itself and that sometimes it is possible to generate suspense in cases where we have no preference for a particular outcome, such as cases of parents opting not to learn the sex of their unborn baby in order to prolong their experience of suspense and 'be surprised' by the sex of their baby at birth. The theory of cinematic suspense that I develop in Chapter Three hinges on the relation between our anticipation of a desired outcome (i.e. what we want to happen) and an expected outcome (i.e. what we expect to happen; a hypothesis).

According to David Bordwell (1985), we are constantly forming hypotheses throughout our engagement with a film. That is, the viewer forms an educated guess – a hypothesis – about what she thinks will happen in a given scene. Bordwell's analysis of story and plot structure explains how we comprehend narratives and it helps in understanding how we might feel suspense in a general sense, prodding us to ask 'big picture' questions on the macrolevel about the film narrative as a whole, but it does not entirely explain how suspense is generated and maintained on a moment-by-moment basis within a given scene, that is, on a microlevel of analysis. In Carroll's (1996; 2001) view, cinematic suspense is generated when the narrative presents the viewer with one of two possible outcomes, and the viewer fears that

either evil will prevail or, at the very least, that good will not prevail, and so Carroll bases his theory of suspense on a matrix of the relations between morality and probability.

Carroll's view does not account for the suspense generated in instances where the viewer accurately predicts a moral outcome because for him, only instances where the morality and probability are in conflict can generate suspense. By reframing the question of suspense around spectators' anticipated desires and hypotheses, my view of cinematic suspense goes beyond spectators forming a hypothesis about what they think will happen. According to my view, spectators also form ideas about what they would like to happen. Thus, in my view, cinematic suspense is generated both through hypothesising a given outcome, while also formulating a preferred outcome in one's mind. My analyses in Chapter Three sought to show that when these two notions are in conflict, they emotionally 'colour' the suspense felt in a different way than when they are in harmony. By framing cinematic suspense as a type of betting, Chapter Three intended to shed light on why aesthetic suspense appears to be a pleasurable, sought-after experience.

The present chapter, however, refocuses my discussion on the temporal structures of cinematic suspense having to do with *affective timing* (i.e. timing that helps to generate emotional responses), which I first sketched out in the Introduction. In my view, in suspenseful scenes, audio-visual components are timed in such a way so as to generate suspense, which is what I call *suspense timing.* In order to understand the temporal structures at play in effective (i.e. good or well-timed) suspense timing, it will be necessary to closely examine the moment-by-moment unfolding of actions and events within a scene. Moving beyond the analysis of plot structure and the arrangement of scenes within a film that Bordwell (1985) conducts, suspense timing describes the specific temporal structures inherent in suspense scenes on a microlevel, moment-by-moment basis. Moreover, it will also be useful to explore the ways in which our hypotheses and our desires interact in relation to

narrative time pressure in horror and suspense-thriller films. In my view, narrative time pressure, or simply time pressure as I will refer to it from here, helps to generate suspense in each of the four types of suspense conditions established in Chapter Three.

The distinction between each type of suspense condition discussed in Chapter Three was meant to encapsulate the array of emotional experiences that we feel while engaging with suspense-generating scenes in horror and suspense-thriller films: (1) anticipation–satisfaction–relief; (2) anticipation–satisfaction–dismay; (3) anticipation–surprise–relief; and (4) anticipation–surprise–dismay. This array of emotions involves the anticipation of two possible outcomes. First, it involves the anticipation of what we expect to happen (i.e. what we think is likely to occur). Second, it involves the anticipation of what we want to happen, which is based on our fears and desires. When we learn the outcome, we feel either relief or dismay at learning the results (i.e. either our fears or desires were realised) as well as either satisfaction or surprise at learning the results (i.e. our expectations were either correct or incorrect). I explained this phenomenon in terms of the evolutionary-psychological concept of the cognitive reward, where humans feel pleasure (i.e. positively valanced emotions) at correctly anticipating outcomes, which presumably aids in survival. In engaging with the temporal art of film, however, we are not just charged with anticipating what will happen, but precisely when it will happen.

As I mentioned in Chapter Two, the trouble with humans is that at the microtemporal level of milliseconds, we are not very good at accurately predicting exactly when events will occur even if we know exactly what will happen and have a *rough* idea of when something will happen. In short, films are not as predictable as music because they do not adhere to rhythm in precisely the same way. As discussed in Chapter Two, although films have some musical qualities such as rhythm (i.e. the duration and durational patternings within a temporal work of art such as a song or a film), tempo (i.e. pace or speed), and beats (i.e. the

temporal units that comprise rhythm and tempo), films, barring music videos, generally do not have a metre or time signature (i.e. a pattern of rhythm constituted by the organisation of beats that typically runs throughout the duration of a musical work). Since metre is something that makes a musical work predictable, it stands to reason that listeners can tap their feet to a song that they have never heard before after only listening to it for a few seconds, whereas in film, it's not only difficult to predict what events will occur during a first viewing, I would argue that it is typically impossible to predict precisely when an event will occur in films. This will become evident in my analysis of scenes from the three films in question, including *No Country for Old Men*, *There Will Be Blood*, and *Let the Right One In*, each of which I argue illustrate how suspense timing functions to throw the viewer off the scent so to speak, generate surprise, and ultimately provide her with relief or dismay. Moreover, as my analysis will show, effective suspense timing gives us just enough time to form hypotheses and prod us by evoking our fears and desires, but it doesn't give us enough time to allow our feelings of anticipation to dissipate.

4.1 Suspense Timing and Time Pressure in Horror and Suspense-Thriller Films

Gordon Gow asserts that 'suspense is timed, by camera movement and by cutting, to increase steadily, engaging our concern' (1968: 16–17). According to this view, during a suspenseful scene, the rate at which certain cinematic techniques occur on screen increases: the rate of camera movement speeds up, the editing pace quickens, and additionally, the volume of the sound might increase. So, we can say with some certainty that what is well-timed in such films includes the order, frequency, and duration of certain cinematic techniques including camera movement, aspects within the mise-en-scène, sound, and editing.[67] Unfortunately, Gow does not explain exactly *how* timing impacts our awareness of what is going on in the narrative or how timing affects our emotions. This timing, being precisely what I aim to

illustrate in the following paragraphs, represents, as I will argue, an important, yet little understood factor in understanding aesthetic suspense in film. It is my argument that what is crucial to evoke emotional reactions during horror and suspense-thriller films is not simply what appears on screen, but precisely *when* these things appear on screen.

As noted in the previous chapter, Gerrig (1989a; 1989b; 1993; 1996) argues that anomalous suspense can occur when we engage with familiar narratives because of an aspect of our cognitive architecture that evolved to deal with the 'brute fact of nonrepetition' that we generally experience on a moment-by-moment basis (See Gerrig 1993: 170–71). According to Gerrig, in order to deal with the 'brute fact of nonrepetition', we encounter all events with what he calls an *expectation of uniqueness*, which serves to generate feelings of suspense. In his essay 'The Paradox of Suspense', Carroll (2001)[68] offers a potential counterexample to Gerrig: the gameshow *Concentration* in which contestants are tasked with remembering where the pairs of names of prizes are hidden behind a display of tiles. When the contestant succeeds in matching the tiles, a certain part of the puzzle – a rebus (i.e. a pictorial brainteaser that represents words through a combination of drawings and individual letters) – underneath the tile display is revealed. With each correct matching, the contestant gets a chance to solve the rebus within a time limit that lasts just a few seconds. Carroll hypothesises that if this game were simplified in such a way that 'there are so few squares that it is very easy to hold all the matching pairs and the image fragments and the saying that solves the rebus in mind after the game is over' then the game would quickly become boring if run through several times over. In Carroll's view, what suspenseful films have that a game of *Concentration* lacks are engrossing cinematic scenes that contain '[c]ertain sorts of events – including chases, escapes, and rescues, among others – [which] are staples of popular fiction just because they so naturally accommodate suspense, possessing, by definition,

logically exclusive, uncertain outcomes that can be so readily invested with moral significance' (2001: 264).

Gerrig's response to Carroll is noteworthy for my purposes because of his appeal to the perception of time and time pressure, arguing:

> We must explain why, for example, the introduction of a ticking bomb could keep even *Concentration* viewers on the edges of their seats. We must then explain why some, but not all, narrative structures engage readers [or presumably spectators] in a way that gives rise to anomalous suspense. Will that ticking bomb create a situation sufficiently engrossing to allow repeat viewings? (1996: 104)

It's important to note that for Gerrig, the concept of a *ticking clock* in *Concentration* is metaphorical since gameshows are (at least to some extent) not fictions (at least not in the way that narrative films are). Rather gameshows fall into the category of reality television since we generally take the contestants to be represented by real members of the general public and not actors. However, that is not to say that gameshows and other non-narrative temporal aesthetic activities cannot generate suspense in strikingly similar ways to narrative films as my chapter on cinematic suspense as a kind of betting argued. By calling it a ticking clock, Gerrig is presumably pointing out the use of the clock to delimit the amount of time a contestant has to solve the rebus after making a matched pair. In *Concentration*, the lives of the contestants are (thankfully) not at stake, but the count down on the clock nevertheless adds a crucial sense of urgency to the game. As viewers of the gameshow, we are not so much worried about what the puzzle is (for perhaps we have solved it already), but whether or not the contestant will solve it *in time* (i.e. before the buzzer goes off). I would therefore claim that the suspense generated in either a single run through of the game or a repeated viewing would culminate in some amount of suspense simply because the viewers cannot accurately predict when the buzzer will go off. In other words, both the contestant and the viewer at home are too busy thinking about answering the question rather than counting down the clock. The clock serves to increase time pressure because we know it's counting

down, but our attention can't focus too much on the clock or we wouldn't able to think of the answer to the question. The tension between paying attention to the clock and trying to answer the question generates dissonance and tension. Hence, time pressure.

Moreover, the knowledge that the buzzer will go off any second adds a component of time pressure to the situation. The time pressure of the situation increases the stress levels of both the contestant and the viewer at home because they not only have to answer the question, they have to answer the question before the time runs out. Gerrig's notion of the ticking clock creating a situation that is sufficiently engrossing so as to allow repeat viewings is, for the most part at least, plausible. Now let's think about how this experience might play out in a narrative film. In his analysis, Carroll points to a more literal use of the time bomb in narrative film, noting that

> suspense scenes often feature such recurring devices as time bombs. In my view, bombs attached to fizzling fuses or ticking timepieces work so well in generating suspense because, as each moment passes, time is running out on the good, and therefore evil is becoming ever more likely, even as the prospects for righteousness become more and more improbable. (2001: 264)

Carroll's assertion points out an interesting way in which time can be used to increase the suspense and raise the stakes in films. But while suspense scenes quite often feature narrative devices that push the characters forward and raise the stakes of the film, I would add that this kind of 'time pressure' can be added without the conventional aid of ticking time bombs and other kinds of ticking clocks, which I will address in the following sections of this chapter.

Contemplative Suspense: A Note About the Case Studies

Many horror and suspense-thriller films tend to be thought of as 'plot-driven' as opposed to 'character-driven' meaning the plot is more effective at driving the story than the development of the character(s).[69] However, in the films under analysis here, that doesn't exactly appear to be the case as all three of these case studies are what I would call 'contemplative' or 'slow-moving' films. For example, at first, it's difficult to see what makes

Let the Right One In a horror film until about ten minutes into the runtime when Eli's guardian Håkan (Per Ragnar) strings up his first victim in the woods. Both *There Will Be Blood* and *Let the Right One In* have been lauded for their intriguing portraits of multidimensional characters and while we never really get to know the characters of *No Country for Old Men* beyond their primal motivations for hunt and survival, the myriad of articles and reviews that discuss the enigmatic hitman Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem), as well as the striking amount of awards and nominations that Bardem's performance merited, suggest there is much more going on in the film than a simple cat and mouse plot.[70] Another factor that these films share is an apparent lack of a reliance on dialogue, especially dialogue in exposition. Rather than characters explaining themselves to one another on screen, each film relies on audio-visual attributes, including picture, sound effects, and music to convey the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations. This is evidenced by the numerous scenes of characters pictured sitting or travelling in silence in all three films (see Figures 4.1a–4.1c; 4.2a–4.2d; and 4.3a–4.3c).



Figures 4.1a–4.1c Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) watches and waits before approaching an injured man in *No Country for Old Men* (2007).



Figures 4.2a–4.2d Daniel Plainview adopts H.W. in *There Will Be Blood* (2007).



Figures 4.3a–4.3c Oskar stares out the window and notices a new girl moving into his building in *Let the Right One In* (2008).

When plot does come to the fore in these films we watch in anticipation of what will happen next, focusing our attention on the moment-by-moment unfolding of details. The fact that these films have linear plot structures make them an interesting as case studies in my view. Although, this indicates another difference in the way that I am approaching time when compared to Carruthers (2016), Stewart (2007), and Mroz (2012) discussed in Chapter One. The fact that these films lack flashbacks or other devices that disrupt the linear plotline would perhaps make them unimpressive objects for analysis of time for certain authors. Bordwell

(1985) notes that non-linear plot structures, that is, plot structures that do not follow a chronological path, through their implementation of flashbacks and flashforwards, generate suspense because they create questions in the mind of the viewer that she feels compelled to answer by generating hypotheses about what will happen and/or what has happened. A prototypical example of this for Bordwell is *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), which begins with the events at the very end of the protagonist's life – the 'rosebud' scene – where Kane as an old man infamously utters his last words. This puzzling last word of a seemingly unknowable man sparks the quest for the rest of the film, which is ultimately an investigation of the man himself, his character, and the events that led him to become the enigmatic figure that we saw in the very first scene. This investigation is tied to a number of empirical questions: *Why were those Kane's last words? What significance do they have for this enigmatic media tycoon?* And some, perhaps, more philosophical questions: *Does the sum of our experiences amount to the character we become? Can we ever really know a person?* Tackling the second set of questions involves a good deal of engagement with the story of the film, but this kind of engagement is not what I would generally point to as a factor that ultimately leads to a feeling of suspense. The first set of questions, however, are empirical in the sense that a thorough and systematic investigation of the facts can lead to reasonably satisfying answers. For instance, 'rosebud', of course, is the name of Kane's childhood sled that presumably gave him so much joy before he was taken away to be educated, indoctrinated, and ultimately corrupted by the world of adults. We can then infer that the sled becomes representative of Kane's childhood, a time of innocence for which Kane is apparently feeling nostalgic.

In my view, neither *There Will Be Blood* nor *Let the Right One In* have clear 'big picture' goals or outcomes that the viewer can get much pleasure from anticipating. In other words, in *There Will Be Blood*, what's the ultimate outcome that we might be expecting?

These stories could have ended in a myriad of different ways. Therefore, in these films, suspense is generated on a moment-by-moment basis. 'Big picture' questions such as *Will Llewelyn Moss survive Anton Chigurh and get away with the cash?* or *Will Eli turn Oskar into a vampire?* are very much understated. In some cases, uncertainty is so abundant that the viewer simply isn't presented with enough information to form such cogent macrolevel questions in her mind. In the remaining sections, I will explore some examples of the two types of suspense conditions that result in surprise–relief and surprise–dismay.

4.2 Surprise and Relief in *No Country for Old Men*

In Chapter Three, I introduced and gave examples of the first two suspense conditions, (1) *anticipation–satisfaction–relief* and (2) *anticipation–satisfaction–dismay*, which describe instances where our hypothesis of the outcome is found to be correct. In other words, we made a guess about what we thought was going to happen and even if the outcome may be unpleasant, we feel – to some extent – satisfied in our good judgement. For example, while we presumably take no pleasure in watching Chrissie Watkins get eaten by the shark at the beginning of *Jaws*, we nevertheless feel vindicated for accurately predicting the outcome. In Chapter Three, I also argued that in these cases we will feel either relief or dismay at discovering whether or not our desired outcomes have been met. For example, we are relieved to discover that Indiana Jones succeeds in outrunning the giant boulder that threatens to crush him inside the temple at the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1983), yet upon finding out that Chrissie does in fact meet her end in *Jaws* we experience dismay. In the present section, I will explore the second two suspense conditions, which include (3) anticipation–surprise–relief and (4) anticipation–surprise–dismay.

As explained in the previous chapter, 'relief' is meant to encompass positively valanced emotions (e.g. joy, amusement, awe, contentment, pride, admiration, inspiration,

and so forth), while ‘dismay’ is meant to encompass the relevant negatively valanced emotions (e.g. fear, dread, horror, pain, sorrow, frustration, disappointment, and so forth). These suspense conditions differ from the first two because our hypotheses are found to be incorrect. In other words, when confronted with a particular suspense-generating scene, we form a hypothesis that turns out to be incorrect. This feeling culminates in an emotional reaction that I’ve labelled ‘surprise’ since we have been unable to correctly anticipate the outcome. In cases where we do not correctly anticipate the outcome, resulting in surprise, there is still the chance that we might yet ‘get our wish’ so to speak and, as my analysis will show, these types of cases result in relief. An extreme example of this in horror and suspense-thrillers is represented by what might be formulated as a *false alarm* in which a feeling of suspense is evoked through the generation of the anticipation of expected and desired outcomes, but ultimately no harm comes to the character. A common trope of the false alarm in horror and suspense-thriller films is the use of cats or other animals that function as narrative decoys that trick the viewer into assuming there is a threat nearby. A more detailed discussion of false alarms appears in the following section as well as in Chapter Five, where I discuss *jump scares* (i.e. in common parlance, the description of a cinematic device that makes us ‘jump’ – either metaphorically or literally – out of our seats). As my analysis will reveal, false alarms tend to incite the startle response, which is detailed in the following chapter.

It is important to consider, however, that not all instances where anticipation–surprise–relief are in order elicit a ‘jump’ in this manner. A prototypical example of the anticipation–surprise–relief structure may be seen in *No Country for Old Men*, where the assailant Anton Chigurh stops at a rural gas station. His interaction with the gas station attendant evokes what I have formulated as anticipation–surprise–relief.[71]


IMPERIAL

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Figures 4.4a–4.4m *No Country for Old Men* (2007). The hitman Anton Chigurh has an altercation with a shopkeeper.

In this scene, which is about twenty minutes into the film, hired hitman Anton Chigurh stops for gas and a packet of peanuts along a dusty country road. At this point in the film, we know very little about him, except for the fact that he was hired to find a briefcase belonging to his employer containing two million dollars in cash and that he will kill innocent bystanders to meet that goal. As mentioned in the previous section, Chigurh represents an inscrutable figure in the film, since his true motivations (if he has any) seem hidden. Chigurh's particular brand of menace seems to come down to the fact that he kills without passion.

Throughout the film, there is the suggestion that Chigurh kills on the whim of a coin toss and as the scene which I am about to analyse plays out, that certainly appears to be the threat. However, I would point out that up till this point in the narrative, Chigurh is bent on finding the briefcase – as he is throughout the entire film. Yes, he could kill someone on the whim of a coin toss (or just because he feels like it), but not if that would get in the way of finding the briefcase. He won't kill someone just because he feels like it if, for instance, he might get caught and detained. This is shown in a previous scene when Chigurh speaks to an unhelpful secretary and it looks like Chigurh wants to kill her. Ultimately, he leaves her office when he hears someone coming because presumably, he did not want to get caught. So, I would maintain that Chigurh is a merciless killer, but he's not unmotivated. Every move he makes is entirely calculated and deliberate and at this point in the film, whether or not he kills someone or spares them seems to be entirely dependent upon furthering his goal of finding the briefcase.

At the beginning of the scene, Chigurh approaches the counter somewhat dismissively. He is looking down, nibbling on a packet of peanuts that he has yet to pay for and asks the shopkeeper to include his gas in the total. As the shopkeeper calculates the fee, he absentmindedly asks about the weather in Dallas, having noticed the license plates on Chigurh's car. Representing one of the few times in the film where Chigurh displays any semblance of emotion, this question seems to annoy him, and the dynamic of the scene shifts suddenly from an ordinary exchange to something altogether more threatening. Chigurh proceeds to grill the shopkeeper about the details of his life: what time the store closes, what time the man goes to bed, how he came to be a shopkeeper at this particular gas station. At first, perhaps due to the man's ignorance and passive nature he doesn't immediately comprehend that Chigurh's questions are actually subtle threats against the man's life and it's only in the final minute of the scene where Chigurh forces the man to call a coin toss that we get any notion from his facial expression that he understands just how high the stakes are in his exchange with Chigurh. What should have been an unremarkable in-and-out procedure turns out to last over five minutes.

Over the course of this exchange, the film cuts back and forth between close-ups of each man. As Figures 4.4a–4.4m illustrate, the framing of the shopkeeper's shifts from medium shots, to closeups, to long shots, while Chirgurh's framing is generally stable throughout. For the sake of economy, note that figures 4.4a–4.4m above do not represent an exhaustive account of every shot and edit, but I have displayed them here in chronological order with the shopkeeper on the left side and Chigurh on the right side so as to make framing comparisons more evident. Subtle tracking shots capture the exchange and the camera appears to move in closer to each character as the intensity of the scene increases. After Chigurh summarises the shopkeeper's meagre existence as 'marrying into' his current business, the film cuts to a closeup of Chigurh discarding his crumpled peanut packet on the

counter. The film lingers on the packet for a second, allowing us to examine the curious way in which the plastic unfolds itself before cutting back to the shopkeeper who seems to be staring at the packet dejectedly. This shot represents what I have discussed in Chapter Two as a *beat* in the practice of screenwriting, that is, a moment of inaction that gives a scene a particular pace (i.e. speed; tempo) and rhythm (i.e. an individual temporal patterning). Here, the beat functions to allow time for what Chigurh said about the man's life to 'sink in' as it were. It's a beat that takes its time, allowing both the mood and the topic of the conversation to switch gears. This beat, or several beats we might count as the moment of silence seems to stretch, underlines the slow tempo of the scene.

After we see the shopkeeper's dejected expression, the film cuts back to Chigurh, who asks, 'What's the most you ever lost in a coin toss?' He then proceeds to force the resistant shopkeeper to call a coin that he has just flipped. I should note here that throughout most of the scene, the soundtrack features only diegetic noises of distant cars and birds, but when Chigurh initiates the coin toss challenge, the soundtrack introduces a subtle non-diegetic reverberation that almost sounds like the steady hum of an electrical appliance. This droning sound helps to intensify the suspense in this scene because as we wait, we become conscious of its presence. We wait and as Eric Rabkin (1974)[72] has pointed out, we become conscious of our waiting, but the sound goes right on humming. *When will that sound end? What will happen when it does?* Since the audience knows that Chigurh is a ruthless killer, they are no doubt anticipating that if the man guesses wrong, then Chigurh will kill him, but they also have no reason to trust that Chigurh won't kill him anyway. So, the audience fears for the man's safety absolutely, presumably wanting him to make it out of this altercation alive. Based on what we have seen so far, we have good reason to believe that the man could very well die at the hands of Chigurh and we are pleasantly surprised to discover that Chigurh relents when he sees the head of the quarter. We feel surprised but also relieved that the man

is not going to meet his end for being vaguely friendly to a stranger. Hence, the suspense condition following the emotional trajectory of anticipation–surprise–relief can lead to a powerful emotional experience.

The above example might be seen as somewhat understated since the assumption that the shopkeeper's life is in danger is largely dependent on how moved we are by the scene and the assumptions that we make about Chigurh (e.g. the degree to which we view him as a heartless killer). One of the things that I find so compelling about this case study as an example of the suspense condition involving anticipation–surprise–relief is the fact that it relies so heavily on dialogue and yet Chigurh never outright threatens the man with violence. Everything he does and says might be interpreted as a threat and the audience surely interprets it that way, but because the shopkeeper has no idea what Chigurh has done and what he is capable of doing the threat remains – to a large extent – hidden, that is, relegated to the domain of implication rather than explication.

Robert Baird's (2000) formulation of the 'threat scene' is relevant here. In the following chapter, I discuss the 'threat scene' in detail as it relates to the startle effect. For now, it is relevant to know that, following Baird, a threat scene is one in which there exists an implied threat off screen such that the audience fears for the safety of the character on screen. In relation to the example above, one could argue that the scene follows Baird's concept and yet the man delivering the threat is clearly visible the entire time. What's not visible, however, are the thoughts of violence that we allow ourselves to entertain while listening to his loaded words. The threat implied is still technically off screen in the sense that it is not literally depicted, so what the *No Country for Old Men* example brings to light is that this pattern can operate even in dialogue. In the following sections, I will examine instances that evoke anticipation–surprise–relief at a much more discernible (and visual) level. The first instance I will discuss involves a build-up of suspense, followed by a shocking surprise.

4.3 It's Just a Cat

Film critic Roger Ebert identifies the *false alarm* as 'a basic device in all horror movies of the Mad Slasher sub-genre. Whenever there is a scare, and the scare turns out to amount to nothing, the movie takes a beat and then hits with the real scare' (Ebert 1988: n.p.). Just as in the example from above, horror and suspense-thrillers use beats to pace out the action, giving us time enough to comprehend what's going on, but also time enough to really recognise, perhaps even relish, our experience of fear, anxiety, and suspense within a given scene. Through editing, framing, lighting and other cinematic means, films suggest to us that a threat lies just beyond a door or in a shadow, inciting the necessary assumptions that lead us to experience anticipation of both expected and desired outcomes. But what about instances where a film deliberately leads us astray? As the name implies, suspense-thriller films want to generate suspense, but they also want to thrill us. As my analysis shows, this can be accomplished in a variety of ways, but it raises the question: why do films deliberately fool us into thinking that a monster, villain, or some other threat is just around the corner, when in fact, it's a cat (or some other non-threatening distraction)? To sustain and intensify suspense, as is relevant to the central aims of this dissertation: how does the timing (i.e. the duration and durational relationship between and among images, sounds, actions, and events) of these scenes help to evoke suspense?

As mentioned earlier, my formulation of 'relief' is meant to encompass positively valanced emotions such as joy and pleasure, but it can also be used to describe feelings of humour. In his review of *Halloween II*, Ebert describes the false alarm as a 'standard horror formula' (1981: n.p). According to Ebert, the formula goes something like this: 'Cause a false alarm, get a laugh, and then spring violence on the audience' (1981: n.p). Noteworthy here is Ebert's insistence that the false alarm should (at least fairly consistently) culminate in laughter. Ebert's formulation brings to mind what is sometimes referred to as the 'hydraulic

theory' of catharsis – also known as the 'release theory' – first developed by Aristotle and refined by Freud, which I touched upon in the first section of Chapter Three. In this theory, emotion is metaphorically represented as water vapor in a pressurised container. When the emotion reaches a certain breaking point, it gets released resulting in various emotional reactions. Chapter Six also discusses the hydraulic view but as a theory for humour.[73] In any case, Ebert's observation that false alarms often result in laughter is pertinent since it acknowledges the fact that even in horror films, spectators can experience a range of emotions, not just the obvious negatively-valanced emotions such as disgust and fear, and they can experience them in quick succession.

Carroll has acknowledged the relationship between humour and horror as well, writing that 'the boundary line between horror and incongruity humour is drawn in terms of fear' (2001: 253).[74] Perhaps the most common trope of the false alarm in horror films is what's sometimes jokingly referred to as a 'cat scare', where suspense is sufficiently conjured through the anticipation of expected and desired outcomes, but it turns out that what we thought was a threat is actually just a cat lurking around a corner. The trope has been so overused that it's been parodied several times, perhaps most notably in the film *Scary Movie* (Keenen Ivory Wayans, 2000) and more recently in the television series *Community* (created by Dan Harmon, 2009–2015).[75] Fans have even created 'supercuts' (i.e. short videos that track a particular quality or trope in film, television, and other media) in an attempt to catalogue and show every cinematic and televisual instance of a cat jumping out and scaring someone.[76] In short, what the 'cat scare' and instances like it illustrate is that this particular suspense pattern generates not just anticipation, and not just relief, but a third wave of emotion that occurs when the character is ultimately attacked by a genuine threat. In other words, we are surprised, then relieved, only to be surprised again, having been caught even more off guard than before.

4.4 Surprise and Dismay in *There Will Be Blood*

In anticipation–surprise–dismay suspense condition cases when we incorrectly guess the outcome and that outcome is undesirable, we feel surprise along with dismay. In the following example, I will examine a scene from *There Will Be Blood* in which Daniel Plainview and his colleagues, having recently struck oil, experience their first set back when the large metal bit used for drilling falls into the pit. My analysis will show that suspense of this kind is generated through the sudden disruption. I aim to show how suspense scenes often give rise to other emotions such as surprise. In my view, while we are busy eyeing and evaluating all the various the dangers that the men face, we are completely caught off guard when a wooden beam falls off of the oil rig and hits Plainview's partner in the head, killing him. The scene is ripe with suspense thanks to the dangerous imagery and the eerie and penetrating soundtrack. In contrast to the suspense sequence from *No Country for Old Men* analysed above, the scene in *There Will Be Blood* contains no dialogue.

At the start of the film, we learn that Plainview is a gritty, hard-working, and wholly ambitious man. Over a non-diegetic soundtrack of what might be described as a relentless and noisy barrage of stringed instruments, Plainview nearly dies mining for silver and has to crawl back through the hills alone with a broken leg. The stringed instruments along with the stunning imagery of Plainview's pain and suffering in the first five minutes of the film serve to establish the tone of *There Will Be Blood* as one of brooding anxiety and imminent doom, which carries over into the subsequent scene thanks to the continuity of the soundtrack. The scene in question begins around seven minutes into the film. A title graphic appears telling us the year is 1902. Plainview and his colleagues work tirelessly digging out an oil well. One of the men, H. B. Ailman (Barry Del Sherman), who is evidently Plainview's business partner, appears to be taking care of an infant. As the two men slowly wind up the heavy drill bit, Ailman loses his grip on the rope, causing it to get lodged in the mud at the bottom of the pit.

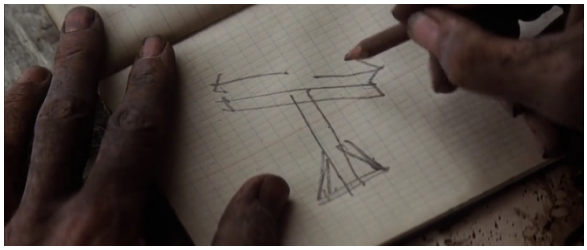
The man goes down to retrieve the bit, but it's stuck. He twists and yanks at the bit, seemingly to no avail, but finally, he manages to dislodge it. As it's raised out of the pit, the men, including Plainview can see that the bit is slick with crude revealing that they have indeed struck oil. In cue with the rising pitch of the non-diegetic music, over in the nearby encampment, the baby starts to wail, a sound which in many ways resembles an ambulance alarm. The film cuts to the two men working together at the bottom of the pit sending the crude up in buckets. The work is depicted as arduous and dangerous as Plainview nearly passes out from the fumes. Suddenly, a piece of Plainview's oil rig contraption snaps off and a wooden beam strikes the head of his partner. The film cuts to a closeup of Plainview, covered in blood and crude oil. The reverse shot reveals he's been left with Ailman's orphaned son, H.W (Harrison Taylor) (see Figures 4.4a–4.4t). I would argue that the sudden breakage of the oil rig in relation to the surrounding imagery indicates an *affective* use of timing because despite the fact that we are expecting something to happen, the breakage still manages to catch us off guard. It represents an example of the startle effect, discussed at length in the next chapter. The sudden breakage in this scene is timed in such a way as to affect our emotions, that is, it is designed to scare us.
























Figures 4.4a–4.4t About seven minutes into *There Will Be Blood* (2007), Daniel Plainview and his crew strike oil but the rig comes apart, causing an accident that kills Plainview's business partner, H. B. Ailman. Plainview is left with Ailman's orphaned son, H.W.

What my analysis of this sequence is meant to reveal is that despite the fact that we are anticipating that something bad will happen, our fears are not focused on a single 'evil' outcome, as in the case of the classic suspense scenarios that Carroll takes as typical. In this case, we suspect something will happen, but we have no idea what or when. Any one of the dangerous features of the scene could play a part in hurting one of the characters. There is particular attention paid to the ropes and the heavy drill bit. One might find oneself focusing on the worker in the background, who conspicuously smokes cigarettes throughout the sequence, an act that modern day viewers might perceive as a very bad idea around the highly flammable substances such as crude oil. In addition, the baby's presence adds an extra sense of vulnerability to the sequence, although the infant comes to no physical harm. What ends up causing harm in this sequence is the oil rig itself, a fact that would be difficult to predict given all the other options made available to us for hypotheses.

Another reason I find this example pertinent is the way in which it illustrates the temporal nature of cinematic suspense. The fact that it is able to rivet the spectator to the screen for such a long time (the sequence goes on for more than seven minutes) without the

aid of dialogue reveals film's special relationship with time that Currie (1995) explores and that I expounded upon in Chapter One. By portraying time by means of time, we are riveted to the action on a moment-by-moment basis. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine how this particular kind of suspenseful experience would be generated through any other artform. Throughout this sequence, we get the feeling that something very bad is going to happen to one or more of these men and although it is important that we don't know what – as I just pointed out, the film keeps us guessing – this sequence makes it absolutely impossible to predict *when* something bad will happen. The rising and falling of the music adds to the stress and anxiety of the situation and the fact that the men seem to be able to communicate with glances and nods leaves us further out of the loop as to what is really going on within the scene. By the time the oil rig breaks, we might have even given up on expecting something to happen if not for the relentless music pushing the narrative forward, an effect that arises from its rhythm and tempo. In short, it's a sequence that's difficult to predict and, as a result, it's rife with diffuse suspense that ultimately leads to a shock, followed by dismay at witnessing the death of what might have been Plainview's only friend and business partner.

4.5 Affective Rhythm of Long Tracking Shots in *Let the Right One In*

The two examples above demonstrate the generation of suspense with the aid of cinematic techniques that include crosscutting, shot-reverse-shot, and montage. They illustrate the ways in which editing can be used to not only guide the viewer's attention to the story, but also illustrate how the timing of each shot (or what each shot reveals more importantly) can be used to generate suspense. That is not to say that suspense timing can only be generated through the use of editing as this final section will demonstrate.

In the following paragraphs, I will examine two instances of the long tracking shot. The tracking shot involves a camera either on a dolly or handheld, allowing the camera to

follow the action of the story. Tracking shots are common in films but tend to be recorded and cut in such a way as to fold into the general flow and style of the film. The camera movement may be either fast or slow, jerky or smooth. In addition, tracking shots may be cut short or be kept quite long. *Let the Right One In* includes numerous slow-moving and smooth tracking shots, which conform to the film's overall sombre tone and minimalistic, almost bleak, style. Whereas most of the shot lengths in the film tend to run under ten seconds, the ones under consideration in this section are longer (over thirty seconds). While these tracking shots should be viewed in the context of the film as a whole as well as the series of edits that surround these tracking shots, I will be analysing them on their own in order to establish the notion that suspense can be generated through cinematic means beyond editing.

The first tracking shot under consideration is nearly one minute long and takes place near the conclusion of the film when Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) prepares himself for an evening swimming lesson (see Figures 4.5a–4.5g). The boys who have been tormenting Oskar throughout the film have other plans, however, and one of them, Martin (Mikael Erhardsson) lurks in a nearby aisle, functioning as the lookout for his fellow bullies. The shot opens on Oskar standing in the locker room alone, tying his shoelaces on the bench. After a beat, the coach (Cavetano Ruiz) steps into frame from the left, stares at the boy for another beat and then says hello. Oskar returns the man's greeting and just as Oskar finishes tying his shoe, the coach notices a discarded shampoo bottle on the ground and steps over to pick it up. Oskar walks closer into the foreground and just as he rounds the corner, he hears a boy say hello to him. Oskar stops and looks and after a beat says hello, but the boy remains off screen, his identity concealed. There's another beat of inaction, which eventually gets disrupted when the coach corrals Oskar out of the locker room and out of frame. The shot continues to linger for a moment but then the boy who said hello to Oskar, now revealed as Andreas (Johan Sömnes), one of the boys who has been bullying Oskar, steps into frame and watches Oskar

and the coach exit the locker room. After another beat of inaction, a squeaky door opens visible from the mirror in the middle of the frame, drawing Andreas's attention. Overall the movement of the tracking shot is slow and smooth. Likewise, the movements of the characters are rather slow and deliberate. When the door pictured in the mirror opens at the conclusion of the tracking shot, it is, I would argue, somewhat jarring since it contrasts significantly with the pacing of the rest of the movements up until now; it's faster in comparison to what the spectator has been subjected to over the previous few seconds. The noisiness of the creaky door opening likewise serves to disrupt the quiet, understated movements of the camera and characters on screen. Furthermore, since it is paced out with beats of action and inaction, this tracking shot generates a particular rhythm that – along with the contextual information given beforehand – evokes a sense of impending danger that might be fast approaching.











Figures 4.5a–4.5f *Let the Right One In* (2008). In a long tracking shot that lasts approximately one minute, Oskar gets dressed for his swimming lesson in the school locker room.

The next tracking shot that I will consider runs for just over forty-five seconds and takes place shortly after the one described above and depicts the bullies entering the pool and confronting Oskar (see Figures 4.6a–4.6g). As the tracking shot begins, our attention is focused on the Andreas, who is being used to distract Oskar while the swim coach disappears to deal with the dumpster fire outside. It should be noted that the pacing of this scene is somewhat faster than the one described above and this acceleration of the pace at the climax of the film, has the effect of increasing the tension between the characters. As the camera swings around Andreas's shoulder, the ringleader, Jimmy (Rasmus Luthander) along with two other boys, Conny (Patrik Rydmark) and Martin (Mikael Erhardsson), enter the pool hall from the door in the background. As Jimmy moves from the background of the frame to the foreground, he orders all the other children out of the hall and eventually winds up right in front of the camera, allowing a close-up view of the switchblade that he pulls from his pocket. After unsheathing the blade, Jimmy takes off his jacket and the camera swings back around letting us catch a glimpse of the two younger boys in the frame, who exchange a

worried glance with one another. The tracking shot cuts right after Jimmy crouches down to the pool where Oskar cowers in the water.



Figures 4.6a–4.6g *Let the Right One In* (2008). Tracking shot of the bullies entering the pool hall. The ringleader orders all the other children to leave, takes out his switchblade knife, then takes off his jacket, and crouches before a timid Oskar, who cowers in the pool below.

Just as in the first tracking shot, this shot generates a particular rhythm that aids in the generation of tension for the viewer. The order and duration of each action from the doors bursting open, to Jimmy's fragmented dialogue (e.g. 'Get out!', 'Out!', 'Do you know who I am?'), to the shoving of the boy in swim trunks, to the glance that Martin and Conny share, to

the snap of the switchblade seem to have a purpose and carry both emotional and narrational weight. That is to say, each action that the camera focuses on reveals something important about how the characters feel or what they are about to do. In addition, in contrast to the previous tracking shot that I analysed above, this one relies more heavily on beats of action rather than a mixture of action and in action. In short, the camera, as well as Jimmy, who is the central figure of this tracking shot, practically never stop moving in the scene. Moreover, the order and duration of these actions along with their respective changes in speed (fast to slow, etc.) generates a rhythm that seems to contrast with the rhythm of the song playing on the radio beside the pool ('Flash in the Night' by Secret Service). At the very least, it could be said that the beats of the action simply don't match up with the song exactly, producing what might be construed as a feeling of being 'off kilter' that further enhances the mood of tension and anxiety evoked by the imagery (e.g. the switchblade; Oskar looking vulnerable in the pool) and the context of the narrative as a whole (i.e. knowing that these bullies are there to hurt Oskar). Overall, the timing of the beats of action function to increase the pace of the scene especially in relation to the previous long tracking shot discussed above. Ultimately, the suspense that is generated by each shot taken individually, so the extended long take is part of what creates the suspense in this scene. In addition, the suspense emerges from the cumulative impact of the two shots. In addition to an increased pace, which serves to add tension to the scene, the rhythm that is generated through the beats of movement and action, being somewhat out of step with the music coming from the radio, helps underscores the general sense of unease in the scene. These two long tracking shots in *Let the Right One In* illustrate not only that affective rhythm can be generated through means other than editing, but that the timing of beats of action and inaction, movement and stillness, sound and silence, and a whole host of other audio-visual components that make up a film, can work together to generate an affective, that is, suspenseful rhythm.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I took the opportunity to expound upon the second two suspense conditions (3) and (4) that were introduced in Chapter Three. These distinctions are important because cinematic suspense is not a monolithic emotion that encompasses whole films or even whole scenes. Rather, it is a vital part of the emotional landscape within a given scene that will have numerous emotional twists and turns. Cinematic suspense describes the feeling of anticipation that arises from making a hypothesis and acknowledging a desirable outcome. Through analyses of scenes such as this, I attempted to show how the timing of the different components within a scene or sequence is crucial to generating our experience of suspense because the sounds and images develop our sense – our anticipation – that something bad is going to happen. We aren't entirely sure what's going to happen, and we absolutely cannot predict precisely when it will happen. The suspense scenes analysed in this chapter illustrate that Gerrig and Carroll's ticking time bombs can come in many forms. For instance, in the scene from *There Will Be Blood* analysed in the section above, the fallen drill bit and the various other potential dangers function as figurative time bombs since we are sure that one of them will cause a mishap at the oil rig; but we don't know which one, and we can't predict when the mishap will occur.

This chapter further develops my argument that films generate suspense through an exploitation of temporality in Currie's 'connected' sense. Since film has the unique ability to portray time by means of time, we remain riveted to the screen in a way that no other artform seems to be capable of replicating. This development will be relevant in the following chapter, where I analyse another temporal phenomenon unique to film. Finally, in this chapter I have argued that affective (suspenseful) rhythm can be generated by means other than editing, via the analysis of two tracking shots from *Let the Right One In*.

Collectively, analyses have illustrated that narrative time pressure – most recognised as the ticking clock device (either literal or metaphorical in the story) – constitutes affective timing. Furthermore, I have illustrated how timing, which is generated by a pattern of beats, can be joined together to form a specific rhythm. In other words, when we know (or expect) that something bad is going to happen in the narrative, and we become aware of the waiting, which was discussed in Chapter Three, we experience aesthetic suspense and that suspense of impending danger leads to feelings of anxiety, fear, perhaps even dread. If we are proven wrong, we might find ourselves pleasantly surprised as the example from *No Country for Old Men* was meant to illustrate. As a whole, the films that I analysed in this chapter may be thought of as slow-moving and contemplative. They might be characterised as 'character-driven' as opposed to 'plot-driven', which, in my view, best describes most contemporary (and, in particular, serialised) films in the horror or suspense-thriller genres. The following chapter continues my discussion of the temporality of suspense, but I will focus on films that exhibit a slightly faster pace than the ones discussed in this chapter. These contemporary paranormal horror films follow an altogether difference pace and rhythm from films like *No Country for Old Men*, *There Will Be Blood*, and *Let the Right One In*. I will be focusing specifically on an effect that has received much criticism in recent years: the startle effect.

Chapter Five

Killing Time in Startle Cinema

> [I]f we are studying horror films, it strikes me as incontrovertible that filmmakers often play upon what psychologists call the 'startle response,' an innate human tendency to 'jump' at loud noises and to recoil at fast movements. This tendency is, as they say, impenetrable to belief; that is, our beliefs won't change the response. It is hardwired and involuntary.
>
> (Noël Carroll 1996: 50)

> Our mature emotional life has its roots in the 'primitive' emotional responses of infancy and shares its most characteristic features with them. And however cognitively sophisticated we become, our moral indignation, awe, and embarrassment crucially resemble the humble startle response.
>
> (Jenefer Robinson 1995: 74)

For some film scholars, the startle effect might be considered one of the lowest tricks of the trade,[77] unapologetically playing off our base instincts rather than appealing to the cultivated sense of existential dread found in recent cerebral horrors such as *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017) and *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008). Yet, even these films, touted for their psychologically sophisticated and socio-political overtones, exploit the startle effect. Recent paranormal horror such as *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007) and its sequels[78] are awash with the effect, exploiting startles so frequently that the spectator has an experience more akin to riding a rollercoaster than watching a film.[79] As such, these films, which for the duration of this chapter I refer to as *startle cinema*, tap into what might be considered base or primitive emotions such as alarm and panic.[80]

Despite its popular use in contemporary horror, the startle is not universally admired. Film critic Nigel Floyd has branded films that overuse the startle effect 'cattle prod cinema'. In a 2013 interview with fellow critic Mark Kermode, Floyd asserts that traditional horror films (which he enjoys) 'build up a sense of suspense' that is 'built into the narrative,'

leading to a sense of 'cumulative dread' found in films such as *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), *Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven, 1984), and the work of David Cronenberg.[81] Referencing mainly the films of James Wan, including both the *Insidious* series (2010; 2013; 2015) and *The Conjuring* series (2013; 2016), Floyd accuses 'cattle prod cinema' of relying solely on 'shock cuts',[82] sudden movements, and loud sound effects. By contrast, film scholar Robert Baird celebrates the startle effect in film, asserting that 'startles prove to us, in the very maw of virtual death, how very much alive we are' (2000: 22).[83]

The startle effect[84] represents a highly affective technique that can be used in creative ways in the cinema. In my view, the startle effect caters to the kinds of repeat viewing experiences that viewers practice today. In keeping with the central thesis of my dissertation, this chapter aims to explore how the cinematic startle effect and startle cinema function by exploiting the viewer's sense of the durations and durational relationships between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack, that is, the role that *affective timing* plays in generating the startle effect.

The startle functions so well in cinema precisely because of the temporal nature of film. Film critics and theorists have long celebrated inherently cinematic techniques: Eisenstein emphasised editing; Bazin emphasised the mechanical nature of capturing reality on film.[85] Yet Floyd's apparent distaste for startle effects in film would seem to indicate a shift away from this tradition. Instead, they characterise the startle as cheap and heavy-handed.

In what follows, I will characterise the startle effect as largely cinematic amongst other representational and visual arts. That is not to say that the startle effect is unique to cinema, however – as my analysis will show – the cinematic startle relies upon the precise timing of events, dialogue, editing, and other cinematic techniques that are out of reach for other artforms such as the stage play or the novel for reasons that I'll discuss later in this

chapter.[86] I will also characterise the startle effect as resilient, that is, it does not diminish upon repeat viewings. I will argue that this is because the startle effect is inherently temporal; it not only depends upon the spectator being unable to anticipate exactly what will occur, but more importantly when it will occur (and how the spectator fails every time to not 'be surprised' by the shock that triggers the startle effect). This relies on the assumption that, given the nature of genre expectations, while watching suspense scenes, the spectator anticipates that something will happen, but that she doesn't know exactly what or, more importantly in my view, *when*.

A brief note on my second claim: The startle effect is resilient in the sense that it works no matter how many times a viewer has viewed a particular scene. This claim is ripe for further experimental study and the claims made herein may be thought of as a theoretical prolegomenon for such an empirical endeavour. As I will explore later on, early psychological studies of the startle response illustrate this point, which could, in fact, explain the commercial appeal of contemporary horror films. In other words, no matter how many times a spectator views *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) or *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010) she cannot but jump when prodded.

While the startle effect can appear in any genre of film, in this chapter I'll be focusing on the effect as it is found in contemporary paranormal horror films. Focusing on horror films allows me to examine why so many spectators apparently enjoy the feeling of being startled, or at the very least we can say they enjoy startle cinema; thus, my analysis has implications for the ongoing debate in the paradox of horror.[87] In addition, focusing on horror allows me to make a general distinction between different kinds of cinematic startle effects including the jump scare. The cinematic jump scare has not received much attention in the academic literature as of yet, perhaps due to its more recent usage among movie viewers. In the third

section, I will provide some groundwork for how we might characterise a cinematic jump scare.

5.1 The Startle Response

The startle is an automatic, physical, and psychological response often associated with a feeling of shock or surprise and is displayed in humans and other animals when they are suddenly confronted by a potential threat. Some theorists have questioned whether or not the startle should be counted as an emotion proper. Jenefer Robinson (1995) and Jinhee Choi (2003) have convincingly argued that the startle should be considered an emotion proper and although it is not crucial to my claims here that the startle be considered an emotion, I am inclined to agree. I'll return to this in section two of this chapter.

In any case, it is a generally accepted view that the startle response is a biological adaptation that makes individuals better suited to survive predatory situations. Psychologists associate the startle with the fight-or-flight response in which an individual is confronted with a threatening situation such as a predator and has to decide quickly whether to fight to defend themselves or flee the danger.[88]

Silvan Tomkins was one of the first psychologists to suggest that the startle response functions to interrupt ongoing mental processes in order to alert an individual that something needs her attention.[89] Psychologist Carroll Izard further suggested that the startle response serves 'to help prepare the individual to deal effectively with the new or sudden event and with the consequences of this event' (Izard 1988: 281; see also Choi 2003: 155).

Tomkins characterises the startle as one of eight 'primary affects', each with their own distinct facial responses. These include: interest–excitement; enjoyment–joy, surprise–startle; distress–anguish; fear–terror; shame–humiliation; contempt–disgust; and anger–rage. According to Tomkins' research, the surprise–startle is identified in the human face by an

involuntary raising of the eyebrows and blinking of the eyes. It is also characterised by its relatively short duration:

> Just as a pistol shot is a stimulus that is very sudden in onset, very brief in duration, and equally sudden in decay, so its amplifying affective analog, *the startle response, mimics the pistol shot by being equally sudden in onset, brief in duration, and equally sudden in decay*. Affect thereby either makes good things better or bad things worse by conjointly simulating its activator in its profile of neural firing and by adding a special analogic quality that is intensely rewarding or punishing. (Tomkins 1995: 53, my emphasis)[90]

Tomkins's comparison between the startle and a pistol shot amounts to what we may call the temporal relation of 'suddenness'. I'll return to point in the paragraph below, but first to put suddenness into perspective, we might be startled by sudden movements, sounds, gusts of wind, etc.

As discussed in Chapter One, according to Gregory Currie (1995), films have a special kind of temporality that he calls *connected temporality*.[91] Films don't merely represent time, he argues, they are constituted of time. According to Currie, films can portray time by means of time and suddenness is a temporal relation between events.[92] Accordingly, films don't merely represent suddenness they can be constituted of suddenness. When the action stops within a film, the stoppage isn't merely suggested or represented. It is stopped. Likewise, when the action stops suddenly within a film, the suddenness isn't merely suggested or represented. It is sudden. For this reason, time has a much more immediate and visceral experience than in temporal arts such as novels, where prose-writers are typically confined to less immediate means of conveying suddenness.

According to Tomkins, affects are 'innately determined' or hard-wired into the biological system for some adaptive purpose. Affects are innately determined and distinguishable by their facial expressions but, according to Tomkins, may become blurred due to some overlapping characteristics. For instance, one affect may be confused with

another due to the fact that affects may be combined, occur simultaneously, or run in quick succession. Tomkins explains:

> an individual may be surprised and afraid at the same time, afraid and interested at the same time, surprised and interested at the same time, or in succession but also simultaneously (when, e.g., slight fear continues after interest has also been aroused). Or the affects of surprise, fear, and interest may appear in succession to the same object, but in such rapid succession that the three affects are perceived by the observer as an undifferentiated totality. (1995: 240)

So, we can assume that while watching a startle film, numerous affects might be at play within a given scene or sequence. But what exactly does the startle effect feel like and how does it get triggered by cinematic techniques? The startle response is displayed by humans with a quick, nervous movement of the face and/or body as an instinctive reaction to pain or alarm. The cinematic startle is typically associated with a collection of film techniques used to systematically trigger the startle response in viewers. It might even be accompanied by shrieks, gasps, or slightly jumping in one's seat.

In the parlance of movie fandom, techniques triggering this effect are more commonly referred to as 'jump scares', referring to the cinematic effect that causes one to jump out of their seat.[93] In other words, the startle effect used in film scares the spectator by triggering the same basic mechanisms crucial for survival. As I mentioned in the introduction, some theorists have conflated the term jump scare with the startle effect (Aldana Reyes 2016a; 2016b; Smith 2017). In a later section, I'll return to the notion of the jump scare in an attempt to distinguish it as a distinct variety of the startle effect.

As we've seen, Floyd refers to the startle effect as a 'cattle prod' because it unceremoniously jolts the viewer into feeling something whether they want to or not. The kinds of films that exploit the startle effect in order to generate horror represent what I call startle cinema. These are not films that include one or two really big 'jumps' such as *Cat People* (Jacques Tourneur, 1942), which I analyse in the following section, or *Psycho* (Alfred

Hitchcock, 1960), which according to Baird (2000) popularised the effect. Rather, I consider startle cinema to describe films that raise the bar with ten or more startles (with some contemporary examples reaching around thirty startles). Tomkins's discussion of 'increased density of affect' seems particularly relevant here:

> If the individual's own affect or experience of affect from others becomes overly intense, overly frequent, and excessive in duration, the total density of such affect will assume monopolistic proportions such that he will tend to be sensitive to this affect when it is present, but also to perceive it when it is not present, and thereby confuse the dominant affect with various other competitors. This principle is equally involved in expecting that others will manifest a particular affect, or that one will experience a particular affect to the exclusion of others or both. (Tomkins 1995: 241)

Tomkins's explanation seems like a good starting point for considering what occurs while watching contemporary startle films.

Startle cinema is popular and this we can gather from the sheer amount of film franchises and sequels that follow in this particular trend: *Paranormal Activity* (Oren Peli, 2007), *Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010), *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011), *Paranormal Activity 4* (Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost, 2012), *Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones* (Christopher B. Landon, 2014), *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension* (Gregory Plotkin, 2015), *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010), *Insidious: Chapter 2* (James Wan, 2013), *Insidious: Chapter 3* (Leigh Whannell, 2015), *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013), *The Conjuring 2* (James Wan, 2016), *Annabelle* (John R. Leonetti, 2014), *Annabelle: Creation* (David F. Sandberg, 2017), and *The Nun* (Corin Hardy, 2018). However, as I mentioned in my opening, not everyone loves these films. In fact, they are particularly disliked by certain horror film connoisseurs and film critics (including Kermode and Floyd). In the following section, I'll discuss two charges made against the startle and startle cinema.

5.2 Charges Against the Startle and Startle Cinema

Theorists might deem the startle effect and startle cinema unworthy of serious scholarly discussion for two reasons: (1) being an automatic response, the startle represents a base instinct, rather than a higher-order emotion such as dread or horror; and (2) the startle demonstrates a lack of craft because it is supposedly easy to produce.

The first reason for ignoring or giving short shrift to cinematic startles is that they seem to appeal to our animalistic or base instincts, especially with respect to its classification as an automatic response and something that we cannot by nature control. The charge that the startle is not even a proper emotion because it is automatic is thoroughly challenged by Robinson (1995), Baird (2000), and Choi (2003). Jinhee Choi (2003) frames the debate in terms of two opposing views on the matter of the startle being an emotion: what she calls cognitivist and noncognitivist. In the cognitivist view, startle is not characterised as an emotion because, according to cognitivists, 'every emotion is accompanied by propositional attitudes of a certain sort' (Choi 2003: 153). But according to Choi, the sheer fact of affective responses such as the startle conflict with this claim. She supports the noncognitivist view that startles do not require propositional attitudes in order to be triggered, citing two reasons: first, 'the cognitive approach neglects the role of the style of a work in evoking emotional responses in the viewer or the reader', and second, 'more importantly, there are cases where emotions elicited by fiction do not require any type of cognition strictly called' (Choi 2003: 149). To elaborate, Choi writes:

> I agree with the cognitivists that our grasp of the content of fiction heavily depends upon the cognitive activity of the appreciator. However, our appreciation of fiction is not only confined to the representational content of the work, but also connected to the way the story is presented. If the formal features or styles of a work are an integral part of the experience of film, it seems to be a brute fact that the formal features of a work affect us directly. It is because when it comes to the formal aspect of film, people are not aware of their function or meaning, unless he or she has special training of the sort filmmakers and film historians undertake. (2003: 150)

As my analysis of contemporary paranormal horror films will show, the formal features of the works in question affect us directly and I would argue that for fans this is part of their charm. That is because certain formal features of films require no higher-order cognitive processing such as imagination to be triggered. Loud sounds are directly perceived as loud sounds, not representations of loud sounds. Moreover, as I introduced in Chapter One and have maintained throughout this dissertation, films don't merely represent time, following Currie (1995), they can portray time by means of time. So, the time experienced on screen can be direct in the same way that sounds can be. In other words, certain scenes, especially the ones I will discuss in relation to the 'threat scene' in the following section, connect the time of the characters to the time of the viewer. Put another way, time unfolds for the viewer at the same rate that it is portrayed as unfolding on screen. So, it should be no surprise when automatic responses such as the startle are triggered. This idea is supported by Choi:

> Reflexive affective response does not require a sophisticated cognitive process preceded by a complex elaboration of stimuli; response occurs before the subject makes a judgment about the stimulus. The response is automatic, unlearned, and immediate. Human beings are hardwired to respond to certain types of stimuli, no matter whether they are real or imaginary. Among the perceptual stimuli of which effects are unconditioned for human beings (as well as some other animals), researchers include repugnant odors, startling sounds, and intense flashes of light. The gulf between reflexive affective response and cognition seems to point to noncognitivism. (Choi 2003: 153)

Now, although Floyd and Kermode admit that the startle effect is universal, extremely effective, and impossible to resist, they seem to resent sacrificing what they perceive as a kind of 'control' over when and how they become scared while watching horror films.[94] While the idea that an emotion is something that we should be able to control might seem ludicrous to some, the fact remains that the startle is an automatic response, although I cannot see why this should prevent us from analysing its effects as these effects are currently enormously popular in contemporary paranormal films.

The second charge goes something like this: the startle effect is triggered by techniques that are apparently easy to produce, demonstrating a lack of craft on the part of the filmmakers.[95] Floyd characterises it this way: 'The problem [Kermode and I] have with cattle prod cinema is that it is literally that: It's like someone came up behind you and went 'Boo!' and jabbed you with a cattle prod and you had no choice but to respond. They are not really doing any work' (2013: n.p.). Floyd's argument against films that relish in the startle goes something like this:

1. The cinematic techniques that trigger a startle are easy to produce;
2. Easy to produce cinematic techniques are creatively cheap;
3. Creatively cheap techniques are aesthetically unremarkable;
4. Therefore, cinematic techniques that trigger a startle are aesthetically unremarkable.

In order to accept this argument, we first have to accept another implied premise: that effects which are easy to produce are aesthetically unremarkable. This characterises what Berys Gaut (2010) argues is an appreciation for technically difficult practical effects in films. The more technically difficult the practical effect, the more we appreciate the results. On the other hand, if a cinematic technique was technically easy to produce then it supposedly follows that we appreciate it less. The only problem is that in startle cinema the startle effect affects us whether or not it was easy to produce.

I agree with Gaut's view that certain types of film appreciation may be characterised in this way, but there's no reason to think that this is the only way that viewers appreciate films. Simply put, I don't accept the implied premise of Floyd and Kermode's argument that only techniques that are difficult to produce are aesthetically remarkable. And even if they were, there is ample evidence in my analysis of contemporary paranormal horror films that cinematic startles are anything but easy to produce. In fact, as my analysis will show, they illustrate a depth and sophistication with respect to cinematic techniques such as camera movement, angles, framing, diegetic and non-diegetic music and sound, and of course timing.

Even Kermode admits that what he calls ‘cattle prod cinema’ exhibits a certain amount of artistry when he paradoxically praises James Wan’s techniques while simultaneously panning their effects, stating that Wan ‘uses the camera very cleverly to lull you into a false sense of security but then he does a shock cut, or he’ll use a very flashy edit or loud noise, and immediately you cannot but respond. And you kind of feel a bit used’ (see Kermode 2013: n.p.). Here, perhaps accidentally, Floyd admits something of the director’s craft: Wan’s rather adroit use of cinematography that ‘lull[s] you into a false sense of security’. Both Floyd and Kermode admit that this kind of effect has appeared in the very cycles of horror that they seem to enjoy the most, but what they seem to take issue with is the prominence of the effect as a primary means of cultivating fear in contemporary horror.

Kermode later questions whether or not contemporary horror film simply lacks the same calibre of technique as films such as *Friday the 13th* (Sean S. Cunningham, 1980). According to Kermode, ‘there were four or five big jumps in *Friday the 13th*. And yet I don’t remember them literally just being somebody shouting bang loudly’.[96] Kermode is correct; the cinematic techniques involved in triggering the startle effect in so-called ‘classic’ horror films like *Friday the 13th* and *Halloween* are well beyond ‘shouting bang loudly’, but as I will show later in this chapter, they are not all that different from how the techniques are produced in the very films he criticises. I shall demonstrate this with a close analysis of a selection of contemporary paranormal horror films that arguably employ new and innovative techniques while drawing on some old standard ones. A handful of horror films from the 1970s contain ten or more startles including *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) at ten startles, *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) at thirteen startles, *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) at eleven startles, and *Friday the 13th* at ten startles. Sam Raimi’s *The Evil Dead* (1981) seems to have triggered a new level of saturation at twenty-two startles. All this serves to

underscore the fact that heavy deployment of the cinematic startle is nothing new but has probably increased in popularity and saturation since the 1970s or early 80s.

According to Baird, *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) popularised the startle effect despite the fact that it contains only two startles. His analysis of over one hundred American horror and suspense-thriller films that span seven decades indicates that usage of the startle effect is on the rise (2000: 13). For example, he notes that the original 1942 film *Cat People* directed by Jacques Tourneur, which contains what is thought to be the very first cinematic startle, contains two startles, while the 1982 remake directed by Paul Schrader includes eight in what Baird calls 'a typical example of the hypersensationalization of the post-Psycho horror/thriller film' (2000: 13). Some horror films continue to make little or no use of the startle effect such as the critically acclaimed *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (Ana Lily Amirpour, 2014), which contains no startles, and *Let the Right One In* (Tomas Alfredson, 2008) (discussed in Chapter Four), which contains only two. The apparent saturation of the startle effect in a certain subset of paranormal horrors that includes franchises such as *The Conjuring*, *Insidious*, and the *Paranormal Activity* series might indicate a subgenre or perhaps a cycle of horror cinema, i.e. startle cinema.

Floyd and Kermode's negative reactions to contemporary horror films are intriguing because in my view the startle effect is especially cinematic since it relies upon the precise timing of events, dialogue, editing, and other cinematic techniques. Throughout the history of film criticism, critics and theorists have long celebrated inherently cinematic techniques. As I briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Eisenstein emphasised the power of editing, promoting the results of intellectual montage, while Bazin emphasised the mechanical nature of capturing reality on film, which culminated in movements that aimed at showing the harsh realities of life such as Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave. In other words, critics and filmmakers have a history of finding what is unique about film and

exploiting it for artistic purposes, yet Floyd and Kermode's apparent distaste for startle effects in film would seem to indicate a shift away from this tradition. Furthermore, Floyd and Kermode's view fails to account for the commercial success of contemporary horror franchises such as *Paranormal Activity*, *The Conjuring*, and *Insidious*. Moreover, this view seems to ignore the common practice of watching one's favourite horror movie again and again for which the resilient startle effect seems most suited, an idea that I will explore at greater length later below. For this reason, I suggest that contemporary horror films are made with the expectation of being viewed numerous times and this fact has caused a shift in emphasis on what techniques to employ in new horror cinema.

Another aspect that I should also mention, which is tied to the repeated viewing experience, is a deeper and more appreciable understanding of the complex backstories of each horror series. Kermode rebukes this as 'a lot of incomprehensible backstory' but for fans of the contemporary paranormal series, sorting out the different avenues of cinematic lore is no doubt part of the pleasure. Contemporary horror films are, therefore, most likely not made with the hope of becoming serialised; they are made with the full intention of such. Following the tantalizing breadcrumbs of lore peppered throughout a series such as *The Conjuring* becomes an integral aspect of film engagement. Thus, world-building becomes just as important an aspect as anything else when conceiving new horror trilogies or spin-offs.

As a result of these criticisms, the cinematic startle has largely been ignored in the scholarly literature in terms of dedicated studies[97] and heavily criticised by contemporary horror critics such as Kermode and Floyd. To be sure, the cinematic startle is an enormously powerful effect and understanding how timing and film's relationship to time play a role in generating that effect during continuity-edited scenes is crucial to understanding these films' appeal.

5.3 Threat Scenes

Baird (2000) criticises contemporary film scholarship for systematically overlooking film startles since, according to him, they show how fictional stories trigger very real and visceral emotional and bodily responses in viewers. Baird writes:

> Many laymen and not a few philosophers and psychologists have been content to relegate startle to the category of dumb reflex, little more dynamic than a sneeze or a knee jerk. That film startles occur only during a particular scene type should alert us that something complicated and odd is occurring. Indeed, I believe film startles reveal the fundamental characteristics of cinema spectatorship, offering the most pointed opportunity for addressing and explaining the age-old paradox that fictions and representational spaces can stimulate intense emotional responses in spite of an awareness of fictionality. (2000: 13)

Baird's claim that 'film startles reveal the fundamental characteristics of cinema spectatorship' is precisely what I think is at stake for a contemporary ontology of film that recognises the important role that time and timing plays in relation to a spectator's emotional response to film. In my view, startles typically occur during continuity-edited scenes where the time experienced by the characters roughly lines up with the time experienced by spectators. This is representative of the special kind of temporality that Currie (1995) calls *connected temporality*, where there is a direct correspondence between time unfolding on-screen and time unfolding for the viewer. In Part I, I define strict continuity editing as the kind of editing in which the screen time roughly matches the time it would actually take for the action to unfold in the real world. In a startle scene, the spectator's experience of the unfolding of time typically matches beat for beat diegetic time, which I defined in Part I as time unfolding within the story world. So, what exactly does a cinematic startle scene look like?

As Baird notes, the first notable instance of the cinematic startle effect may be found in the supernatural thriller *Cat People* in which a bus unexpectedly hurdles into the frame. Producer Val Lewton would go on to generalise all cinematic startle techniques as 'busses'

(Baird 2000: 12–5; see also Joel E. Siegel 1973). According to Baird, startle effects occur only in a specific scene type, which he calls a 'threat scene'. He outlines three necessary components of the cinematic startle effect to occur within a threat scene:

> (1) a character presence, (2) an implied off screen threat, and (3) a disturbing intrusion into the character's immediate space. This is the essential formula (character, implied threat, intrusion) one finds repeated hundreds and thousands of times since Lewton's first bus effect. Lacking character, threat, or intrusion, the possibility of startle appears negligible. (2000: 15)

So, according to Baird, there is an implied off-screen threat to an on-screen character followed by a sudden intrusion into the character's immediate space. I believe Baird's 'essential formula' of a threat scene (character, implied, threat, intrusion) fits the description of what is commonly called a jump scare, which I will discuss in a later section. In his evaluation of Baird's claims, Murray Smith adds that threat scenes 'perform a balancing act between priming and misdirection: an unsettling, fearful mood is created, but within that broad affective context, our attention is taken away at the critical moment from the precise spatial location of the threat' (2017: 97).

Let's explore Baird's claim using the scene from *Cat People*, which has come to be thought of as the prototypical example. Set in New York, the film follows the unfortunate life and death of Irena (Simone Simon), a lonely dress designer from Serbia, whose romance and later marriage threatens to trigger an ability to transform into a big cat and kill anyone perceived as a threat to herself or her marriage. The 'bus' in question occurs when Alice (Jane Randolph), a co-worker and confidante of Irena's husband, walks home through Central Park at night. Irena follows Alice from a discrete distance (see Figures 5.1a–5.1c). The two sets of footsteps are distinguished by Alice's measured gate and Irena's louder, faster pace (Figures 5.1d–5.1e). After Alice passes by a streetlamp, the second set of footsteps disappear (Figure 5.1f). As this gradually dawns on Alice (Figure 5.1g), she turns around to see only the empty bridge (Figure 5.1h). In a medium close-up, we begin to hear a

cat-like growling sound that suddenly morphs into the alarming screech of a city bus (Figure 5.1i), which appears seemingly out of nowhere in a shock cut to a medium shot of Alice framed by the window on the door of the bus (Figure 5.j).










Figures 5.1a–5.1j *Cat People* (1942). (a) Long shot of Irena in pursuit framed by the bridge. (b) Cut to medium long shot of Alice walking down the sidewalk. (c) A moment later in the shot, Irena follows Alice. (d) Cut to medium shot depicting Alice's steady gate. (e) Cut to medium shot depicting Irena's faster clip. (f) When Alice leaves the frame, Irena's footsteps stop. (g) Cut to long shot. Alice seems to sense something behind her. (h) Cut to medium shot of Alice as she turns to look. (i) Match on action cut to a medium close-up of Alice staring off into the distance. (j) Shock cut to a bus with Alice framed in the window.

According to Baird, this scene generates the startle response because it includes the presence of at least one character (Alice), an implied off-screen threat (Alice pictured alone in Figures 5.1g–5.1i, accompanied by both the knowledge that Irena is jealous of Alice as well as the growl heard just before the bus pulls up), and an intrusion into the character's immediate space (the bus rushing onto the scene). Here, the film employs misdirection to achieve an effective startle response: we can assume that the spectator has focused her visual attention on spotting a panther, certainly not a city bus. Since predatory animals tend to sneak up on their prey, we anticipate that if Irena really can turn into a big cat, she will attack Alice from behind (i.e. in Figure 5.1g), from frame right, the opposite side from where Alice is looking.

As we will see in my analysis in the final section of this chapter, this same technique of misdirection occurs in a scene from *The Conjuring*.

In his analysis of the scene, Murray Smith notes 'the role and force of the deictic gaze, that is, our impulse to track the gaze of others' (2017: 97). The careful use of space within the frame leads us to anticipate that something is behind Alice because the frame dedicates more space to what is behind her than to what is in front of her. We anticipated that something was going to jump out and get Irena; we are startled by the sudden noise and movement when the bus appears; the realisation that it's only a bus is cause for surprise; and finally we are relieved to find that it was only a city bus and not a blood thirsty panther.

Off-screen space is particularly important to Baird's argument and we can assume that an implied off-screen threat would include a variety of entities such as monsters, killers, and ghosts framed just outside our view or concealed within the frame. Examples include the monster behind the door, under the bed, or concealed within a shadow or behind a curtain, as well as point-of-view (POV) shots from the monster's perspective such as those found in the beginning of *Halloween*, where the camera takes the POV of the killer Michael Meyers, and the beginning of *Jaws*, where the camera takes the POV of the shark. In these POV cases, though we see the character's field of vision, the monster itself remains off-screen. Baird's model is certainly compelling and would seem to account for the majority of startles triggered in contemporary horror, but not all startles in contemporary horror films are manufactured through a Baird-model threat scene.

For instance, the opening credit sequence of *Insidious* manages to evoke a potential threat scene through a winding long shot that reveals a young boy in bed, a hallway, and a pale-faced elderly woman wearing a diaphanous black veil, illuminated by a single candle's flame. Tense non-diegetic music consisting mostly of stringed instruments starts out quietly but gradually increases in volume as the frame moves down the hallway and closes in on the

pale-faced woman. The scene fades to black, allowing the music to linger just a moment longer than the image. Half a beat later, the title for the film suddenly appears on-screen in blood-red, gothic lettering accompanied by a high-volume, high-pitched reintroduction of the non-diegetic soundtrack reminiscent of the screeching of violins of *Psycho*. What causes the startle is not a threat to the young boy depicted earlier in the opening shot, but a perceived threat to us. The sounds of quiet and high-pitched screeching are not imagined; we perceive them directly. As there is no character on-screen at the time of the startle, we can assume that the startle is meant for the viewer alone. Momentarily, we perceive a threat, not a fake threat, but a real one. Automatically, we jump as we cannot but do when confronted with any perceived threat, even ones triggered for aesthetic purposes.

Beyond off-screen space, Baird outlines several other aspects which contribute to the effectiveness of startles including tone and pacing. Cinematic tone refers to the general mood evoked within a single scene. Of course, the tone may change one or more times within a single scene. For instance, a tone may start out neutral, sombre, humdrum, or dreary and may become silly, playful, frantic, joyful, sexual, threatening, violent, or suspenseful, and so on or any combination thereof. Baird defines threat scenes as those which start out with a threatening or neutral tone. According to Baird, pacing in a threat scene is described as

> the speed at which a threat scene develops, a factor contingent upon rates of staging, camera and figure movement, and editing. More complexly, pacing also consists of what we might label the viewer's perceptual comprehension rate, the maximum rate he or she may recognize objects, their locations, trajectories, and velocities within the imaginary film space. (2000: 16)

Just like tone, the pace of a scene may also change over time. The scene outlined above from *Cat People* for instance starts out with a slow pace, then gradually increases with the aid of the quickening rate of editing and the crosscutting between the pacing of each set of footsteps (i.e. Alice's slow pace, followed by Irena's fast pace, cut back to Alice's pace which begins to quicken), and then takes pause – slows down to a crawl – when Alice realises something is

wrong and stops to peer through the shadows. The ‘shock cut’ to the arrival of the bus that startles us may be described as fast, as would all such startle effects.

The scene outlined above illustrates Baird’s claims of tone and pacing. Since we see Irena stalking Alice from the very beginning of her journey through the park, we can say that the tone starts out suspenseful because we know something that the character does not and the tension gradually builds as Alice begins to become aware of someone following her. Using the scene from *Cat People* as a template, in the following section, I will define a general theory of what I call the suspense–startle pattern.

The Suspense–Startle Pattern

In a suspense–startle scene, the spectator anticipates a negative outcome, but they do not know exactly when the outcome will occur. The spectator makes predictions based on the content (i.e. what happens in the scene) but also the form. In other words, the spectator forms a hypothesis that the scene will end badly. The scene from *Cat People* includes what happens in the narrative: Alice keeps looking behind her, and every time she gets closer to discovering the truth, we get more anxious, anticipating a break in the tension, but each time Alice gives up and continues her journey, convincing herself there is nothing there, we retain some of the original tension because the threat has not yet receded entirely. We continue to anticipate the threat coming to a head. The key point here is that because the spectator expects that something bad will happen eventually, then the longer the scene gets drawn out while maintaining the promise of a threat, the more the tension builds. But the moment that the spectator loses interest (i.e. ceases to worry for the character) or stops believing that something bad will happen, the tension evaporates.

To be sure, the scene described above from *Cat People* carries with it all the quintessential build-up of suspense and anticipation discussed in the two previous chapters, but what makes it distinctive and the historical prototype of the suspense–startle pattern is

that it climaxes in a jump that presumably no spectator could anticipate since this seems to be the very first startle in cinematic history. Of course, upon its first screening, the scene produced an effective startle because no one could predict that the bus would screech into existence. Additionally, in the context of the story, the arrival of the bus was not foreshadowed as Alice had indicated in dialogue earlier that she intended to walk home. Furthermore, prior to its arrival, no signs of automobile traffic may be heard. As such, the bus seemingly materialises from nothing and nowhere, hence it startles the spectator, who was most likely anticipating a big cat about to leap from the shadows and pounce on Alice. What she gets instead is a loud bus and this triggers the startle effect.

So far, I have been unpacking exactly what goes on during a startle scene in what is perhaps the very first instance of the effect being used for cinematic purposes. It should come as no surprise that audiences in 1942 were shocked the first time they experienced this scene. Since *Cat People*, use of the startle in horror film has taken off with big-budget Hollywood films such as *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1974) (discussed in Chapter Three), culminating in the subgenre of startle cinema. The scene from Cat People could be thought of as a jump scare, which I argue is a distinct kind of startle effect used in a threat scene. Before I move into the final section where I analyse three examples of the startle effect, I will discuss a few aspects of the jump scare in order to help distinguish it from other uses of the startle effect.

Jump Scares

In the parlance of move fandom, the cinematic startle effect is commonly referred to as a *jump scare*, however, I think it would be useful to draw a distinction between the startle effect as it appears in a range of different kinds of films, and the jump scare, which in my view represents a kind of intensified cinematic startle effect, typically reserved for horror and suspense-thriller films.[98] Tone is of central importance to manufacturing a jump scare, since it becomes difficult to generate a sense of suspense, mystery, and danger when the tone of a

scene is jovial and non-threatening. That does not mean, however, that cinematic startles don't 'work' in comical scenes, they simply function differently and generate different emotional effects. Instead of fright, terror, or horror, they might trigger an entirely different emotion such as humour. In fact, startles can also lead to comic amusement and laughter, soon after the shock wears off. I consider an example of this in a scene from *Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, 1999) in Chapter Six, where I discuss the relationship between humour and horror.

How do we know if a cinematic startle will result in a scream or a laugh? By taking into account the tone cultivated before the startle, we can predict the resulting emotion ranging from fear to laughter. To be clear, I am not arguing that cinematic startles used for comedic purposes are not startling, I'm simply putting forward the notion that the startle does not necessarily lead to negatively valanced emotions such as fright, terror, or horror. In other words, all jump scares trigger the startle response and are therefore examples of the cinematic startle effect, but not all startle effects used in film are jump scares because they are not, simply put, scary.

Case in point: Murray Smith's analysis of the opening scene of *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008) in which Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) is caravanning across the Afghanistan plains accompanied by a handful of eager American soldiers (2017: 93). AC/DC's 'Back in Black' screeches from the Humvee's radio. One of the young soldiers asks to take a photo with Tony and as they pose for the shot, the leading Humvee explodes in the background indicating the caravan is being ambushed by insurgents. Smith notes 'the initially tentative, but increasingly relaxed and humorous, interaction between Stark and the soldiers' that was present before the explosion (2017: 93). So within just a few milliseconds, this non-threatening, even relaxed tone gets replaced by the unambiguous violent realities of the U.S. War in Afghanistan. Smith points out the incongruity of the situation:

> A micro-narrative is created around the taking of the photograph, which we expect to be completed. A complex but stable overall rhythm emerges from the blending of editing, figure movement, and the AC/DC song: the auditory dynamics of the scene are similarly stable…All of these factors set up the startle response cue. (2017: 93)

The scene is most certainly startling; it jolts us awake and forces us to re-focus our attention. It is also surprising in that most first-time viewers were probably not expecting the explosion to occur. I wouldn't say, however, that the scene cultivates a sense of fear prior to the explosion. In other words, the scene does not constitute a jump scare because it lacks any build-up of tension or sense of danger beforehand. Without cultivating a sufficiently eerie or frightening tone, the stakes are simply too low to amount to what is typically called a jump scare. As this is the very first scene in the film and a villain has yet to be introduced, there's simply no sense of the potential consequences of the explosion because the audience knows that it is highly unlikely that Tony will die. Hence, their fear for Tony's safety at this point is rather limited. I make a similar argument in Chapter Three regarding the opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981).

Here, the circumstances are somewhat different because there was no sense of anticipation or concern for Tony's safety leading up to the explosion. In other words, what's different about these two opening scenes is that *Raiders* is generating suspense, while *Iron Man* is not. If we phrase this in terms of what Carroll calls erotetic narration, the opening scene of *Raiders* is presenting us with questions that imply a limited number of possible answers, while the opening scene of *Iron Man* is not presenting us questions or if it is, we can at least argue that it's not implying a limited number of answers.

The explosion in *Iron Man* is startling, but it's not a jump scare because it doesn't cultivate a sense of suspense beforehand.[99] Again, tone and genre are an important factor in determining the ultimate emotional effects of the scene. As spectators of a superhero movie,

we aren't primed for reactions related to the horror genre and ultimately, I would argue, the explosion isn't that anxiety-inducing.

Smith recognises this as he remarks, 'the startle effect is not uniquely associated with the horror film or with other popular genres, even though it has certainly been exploited most frequently and routinely in these types of films' (2017: 95). Smith calls the startle effect 'an invariant feature of human physiology; what variation function we see arises from the contexts in which it is spontaneously triggered or exploited by design' (2017: 96–97). This might explain why the startle effect appears so frequently in the horror genre and why the horror genre seems to have developed an intense version of this effect known as the jump scare.

5.4 The Resiliency of the Cinematic Startle

I have, so far, presented the case that the cinematic startle is a temporal affect. Analyses of the recent popular paranormal horror series provide ample support for Baird's notion that the startle effect is alive and well in contemporary horror film and not coincidentally is the subject of Floyd and Kermode's vitriol toward this recent development of the horror genre. The startle may be elicited by several techniques including but not limited to diegetic sound effects and non-diegetic musical scoring, on-screen motion, camera movement, and editing. In the following, I will track the suspense–startle pattern in contemporary horror scenes, demonstrating how the suspense–startle pattern is especially cinematic because it blends cinematic techniques with cinema's connected temporality and timing, which makes it distinctive amongst the representational arts. My microlevel analysis of the unfolding of the scenes in question tracks the durations and durational relations between and among images.

The fact that the startle effect is an automatic and resilient response has been well-established by experimental psychology. My claim is that the startle as found in film, what I have thus far characterised as the cinematic startle, is also automatic and resilient in that no matter how many times a spectator views a threat scene, the effect is roughly the same. Spectators cannot control whether or not the scene catches them off guard simply by knowing what is going to happen next. Because of this, they will fail every time to predict exactly when the jump will occur and will thus continue to be startled as if they were seeing the stimuli for the first time. Beyond not being able to correctly predict the moment of when the startle will occur, they have no ability to control their reaction since, as psychologists like Tomkins have shown, the startle is an automatic reaction.

As we're seen in Chapter Two, one reason that we cannot predict the timing in this situation is that humans are simply bad at correctly recalling duration intervals down to the millisecond, a skill necessary for accurately predicting events that are so precisely timed in cinematic scenes and sequences. Hence, timing remains a crucial aspect of my theory. Another explanation could be Richard Gerrig's (1989a; 1989b; 1993; 1996; 1997) theory of *anomalous suspense*, in which he attempts to explain how by introducing uncertainty into a narrative, suspense can be generated even if the reader knows full well the outcome of the narrative:

> [O]ur cognitive processes incorporate an expectation that each life experience will be unique. In our lives, we encounter many repeated types of experiences, but the unidirectionality of time prohibits us from repeating tokens. Thus, when we are engaged in processing some life event, for example, a dinner at a restaurant, it is efficient to generate generic expectations based on repeated types but decidedly inefficient to search for a memory trace of exactly what will happen on that particular visit – such a trace can never exist in advance of the experience. But repeated stories violate this constraint. If an expectation of uniqueness is, in fact, incorporated in our cognitive processes, we would be ill-prepared to accommodate the violation: Anomalous suspense would arise because readers or listeners repeatedly immersed in the same episode would fail even to seek out appropriate information in long-term memory. (1989b: 245–46)

Gerrig's premise of the expectation of uniqueness as a basic feature of normal cognitive processes would explain not only why horror and suspense-thriller films are suspenseful upon repeat viewings, it would also explain why spectators startle even though they anticipate that the effect is coming. I posit that no matter how many times a spectator watches a startle film, she cannot but jump, if ever so slightly, since she cannot predict exactly when the jump will occur. She may know what's going to happen, she may even know approximately when it will happen, but since she cannot accurately predict when it will happen, she jumps every time. Although Gerrig's characterisation about anomalous suspense isn't about timing per se, what I'm suggesting about the prediction of timing is complemented by his formulation. It may be the case that there are two factors that are at work in the generation of 'anomalous startle'.

In my previous examples, I hinted at the notion of resiliency of the startle effect, but in the following, I will closely examine a final example from *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) in order to show how the startle effect remains resilient. This scene illustrates that there's no good way to predict when a certain sound, in this case the pounding of a door, will occur. What is key here is the timing of the sound editing, rather than the timing of the visual editing, although both need to be crafted with precision for maximum effectiveness.
The scene in question utilises the absence and sudden inundation of diegetic sound, specifically the pounding of a door. The scene also displays careful use of off-screen space and misdirection. Encouraging the spectator to stare intently at a certain space within the frame in anticipation of the appearance of danger leaves open the possibility for an attack from the side. I will be focusing on how sound is used to generate a jump.

Supposedly based on factual events, *The Conjuring* begins with a prologue set in 1968, which depicts two nurses, Debbie (Morganna Bridgers) and Camila (Amy Tipton), recounting their harrowing ordeal involving the haunting of an antique doll to real-life

'demonologists' Ed and Lorraine Warren.[100] According to Debbie and Camila, their antique doll (the same one described earlier in *Annabelle*) was found in different positions and places throughout their home, which led them to call upon a medium who informed them that the doll was inhabited by the ghost of a young girl called Annabelle Higgins. One night, after agreeing to let the ghost of Annabelle Higgins enter the doll, the nurses come home to find their living room over-turned; red crayon markings cover the walls and ceiling. Fed up and terrified, the nurses place the doll in an alleyway dumpster and later are awakened in the middle of the night by a loud pounding on the front door.

During the threat scene in question, Camila turns on the living room light, while Debbie, standing closer to the front door, turns on the entranceway light. Slowly, she opens the door (Figure 5.2a) and peers out into the hallway (Figure 5.2b), where she finds a note laying on the floor at her feet that reads 'Miss me?' (Figure 5.2c), the same message scribbled on their ceiling. The camera tilts down and back up, following her movement (Figures 5.2d–5.2f), leaving an inordinate amount of space on the right-hand side of the frame away from where Debbie directs her gaze, giving us the impression that she is about to be attacked at any moment from the right-hand side (Figure 5.2d). The film cuts back to a long shot of Debbie standing by the open door, looking back at Camila concerned (Figure 5.2e). For three silent seconds, they stare at one another when – all of a sudden – something pounds on another door in the entranceway nearer to where Camila is standing (Figures 5.2f). The film cuts back to Camila's reaction in a breaking of the 180-degree 'rule' adding visual incongruity that could be described as jarring (Figure 5.2g). This example illustrates the careful application of misdirection in the generation of suspense: while we were focused on Debbie at the front door, we failed to pay attention to Camila or the rather unremarkable second door from which the threat finally makes itself known. We expected the threat to

come from the hallway, frame-right and are surprised to find that the threat comes from inside the apartment, behind a door that until now, we were hardly encouraged to notice.



Figures 5.2a–5.2g *The Conjuring* (2013). (a) Debbie slowly opens the front door while Camila watches in the foreground. (b) Medium close-up of Debbie peering out into the hallway. (c) Tilt down to follow Debbie's hand pick up a note. (d) Tilt back up to Debbie as she peers down the hallway, leaving more space on the right of the frame than on the left. (e) Cut back to long shot of Debbie by the front door with Camila out of focus in the foreground. (f) Three seconds later a loud pounding on the door startles both women. (g) Medium shot of Camila staring at the door from where the sound is coming.

The scene utilises misdirection, off-screen space, a subtle breaking of the 180-degree 'rule,' camera focus and blur, and the careful timing of cues to elicit surprise. Of course, we were expecting something to jump out and scare us, but not knowing what, where, and most

importantly *when* fundamentally contributes to the elicitation of fear in this short sequence that lasts just over a minute. Even upon subsequent viewings and being in full knowledge of what is to come, we jump at the diegetic pounding of the door, primarily because of the imprecision of human recall and prediction. Recent psychology of time perception has found that we just aren't that good at estimating time duration in the milliseconds (Karmarkar and Buonomano 2007) and that while experiencing fear, our experience of time tends to speed up (Fayolle et al 2015), indicating that our perception is further distorted by our own cognitive–emotion system. Another example, this time from the first spin-off of *The Conjuring* series, further illustrates how timing generates affect in the suspense–startle pattern.

The *Annabelle* (2014). Set in 1967, a year before the nurses from *The Conjuring* acquire the eponymous doll, the film follows Mia Form (Annabelle Wallis), a housewife and amateur doll collector, and her husband John (Ward Horton), a doctor in residency, who live on a pleasant suburban street in Santa Monica, California and are expecting their first child. John gives Mia the large ceramic doll to Mia as a present, which she keeps in their nursery. The young couple carpools to church with their friendly neighbours, Sharon and Pete Higgins, who have an estranged daughter named Annabelle, who has run off with a group of ne'er-do-wells.

As the events of the Tate murders play out on the news, reminding us that in this day and age danger lurks around every corner and the good people of suburbia have to start locking their doors. One night the Higgins's daughter returns with her boyfriend and together they brutally attack and murder her parents. When John goes over to see if everything is alright, the murderers infiltrate the Forms' home and Annabelle's boyfriend stabs Mia in the belly before being gunned down by police officers. Annabelle Higgins slits her own throat while cradling the ceramic doll. Under strict bed rest, Mia recovers from the stabbing, but their house catches fire when the stove mysteriously turns on all by itself. Having collapsed

from smoke inhalation, Mia is rescued, but goes into labour and gets taken to hospital, where she gives birth to a healthy baby girl. Unwilling to return to the house where so many bad memories were made, Mia insists they throw out the ceramic doll and move into an apartment away from the suburbs. Inexplicably, the doll winds up in their new home. The rest of the film implies that the doll is possessed by an evil demon that formerly possessed the body of Annabelle Higgins and is now terrorising Mia in order to obtain the soul of her daughter.

Around the mid-point of the film, Mia listens to the song ‘Cherish’ by The Association on a record player while eating dinner alone; John appears to have been held up at the hospital. In defeat, Mia lifts the needle from the record player (Figure 5.3a) and returns to tidy up the kitchen represented in a static long shot of the apartment (Figure 5.3b). A few seconds later, the needle jumps backs onto the record and ‘Cherish’ continues to play (Figures 5.3c–5.3e). Perplexed, Mia leaves the kitchen to inspect the record player and the camera pans left to follow her movement, revealing more of the parlour, including the window where she notices a shadowy figure lurking behind the curtains (frame left of Figure 5.3f). After brief hesitation, Mia reaches for the curtains (Figure 5.3f) and a sudden wind blows the curtains into her face, causing her to scream (Figure 5.3g).










Figures 5.3a–5.3g *Annabelle* (2014). (a) Overhead close-up of Mia turning off the record player. (b) Long shot of apartment parlour, hallway, and dining room (right background). (c) This static long shot endures as Mia cleans up the dishes in the dining room (background right). (d) Static long shot continues as the record player turns on 'by itself'. (e) Long shot pans left following Mia as she traverses the parlour. A mysterious figure lurks behind the curtain (left). (f) Cut to medium shot of Mia slowly reaching for the curtains. (g) Suddenly, the curtains blow into Mia's face.

This scene exemplifies the cinematic nature of the startle effect through a combination of cinematic techniques such as the long take, camera movement, sound, editing, and precision timing. Of course, it also exemplifies Baird's threat scene, containing the key elements of character, threat, and intrusion. Mia is the character on-screen, the threat is represented by the context of the demon tracking her down inside the apartment, and the curtain blowing into Mia's face represents the intrusion. What is noteworthy about this scene is the way in which time unfolds within the diegesis.

Typically in film, actions take that much less time to accomplish for the sake of brevity and pacing. We saw this in my discussion of *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1948) in Chapter Two. Yet, this is not the case in the scene in *Annabelle*. The scene utilises strict continuity editing, cutting out no time from the plot. In this scene, therefore, story time, plot time, and screen time are all equal. In other words, Mia's time seems to be unfolding at the same rate as screen time. So, we experience time unfolding at the same rate as Mia. Although the scene uses editing, it uses it in a way that is highly comprehensive.

In short, the scene may be described as an instance of Currie's connected temporality where the film time and the spectator's time run at the same rate and may, therefore, be thought of as connected. I would posit then that this temporal attachment or connection that we have with Mia makes the effect all the more startling. In addition, the closeness that the camera affords the scene adds to the intensity of the startle effect. The curtains do not simply obscure Mia's sight, they obscure ours as well and while momentarily blinded, we panic, unable to see the real monster behind the curtain. The effect is startling to say the least.

A similar example may be found in *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011) when Lisa the babysitter (Johanna Braddy) gets blown in the face by the unseen paranormal entity just off-screen. Here the diegetic sound is so loud and alarming that even though the spectator's vision is not obscured, the effect remains just as startling. Much like the previous two *Paranormal Activity* films, non-diegetic music and sound effects are absent from *Paranormal Activity 3* and the story is told entirely through what appear to be home movies and makeshift security camera footage, giving it a feeling of authenticity inspired by the ersatz found-footage horror *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez, 1999). While the first two *Paranormal Activity* films are set in the present day and each follows one of two adult sisters, Katie (Katie Featherston) and Kristi (Sprague Grayden), both of whom seem to be plagued by an invisible and malevolent entity known as Toby, *Paranormal Activity 3* acts as a prequel, following the lives of the girls growing up in Santa Rosa, California in 1988. The footage is made by their step-father, Dennis (Chris Smith), a professional wedding videographer, who takes it upon himself to document the strange happenings inside their new family home. Just like with the previous films, *Paranormal Activity 3* contains a running timecode at the bottom right of the frame to enhance the feeling of authenticity.[101]

The scene in question begins at just past ten o'clock at night and contains very little dialogue. The family babysitter, Lisa, has successfully put the girls down for bed an hour earlier. The makeshift security cameras are all over the house and Lisa is aware that she is being filmed. In order to capture the entire living room and kitchen with one camera vantage point, Dennis has cleverly cannibalised an oscillating fan so that the camera moves right to left and back again automatically. This allows many scenes to unfold without the aid of editing. The following scene consists of two long takes, one captured by the downstairs oscillating camera and one captured by the stationary camera upstairs in the girls' bedroom. In the first long take, the oscillating fan serves to sometimes slowly, sometimes suddenly reveal and conceal the alarming antics of what could only be a paranormal entity stalking its prey. The overall sound of the shot consists of the evening hum of insects outside disrupted only by the occasional creaking of what could be footsteps.

After playing a trick, by hiding behind the camera in the kitchen and jumping out shouting 'Boo!', Lisa returns to her homework at the kitchen table, when she's pursued by what appears to be a small child underneath a white sheet pretending to be a ghost. The 'Boo!' certainly triggers the startle, but not to the extent that it does later when the tension is sufficiently raised. Lisa turns around, but the white sheet collapses. As the camera turns back towards the living room, Lisa begins to pick up the sheet and move into the adjacent room presumably to go check on the girls. The scene then cuts to the second camera position upstairs in the girls' bedroom, jumping about thirty seconds forward in time (indicated by the timecode at the bottom right of the frame). The camera set up in the girls' room is stationary. The only movement consists of the gently bubbling lighted aquarium in the centre background beside Kristi's bed and Lisa herself as she moves up the staircase and through the room (Figure 5.4a). Lisa tiptoes up the staircase leading to the girls' room (Figure 5.4b). After quickly checking on the girls, who appear to be sound asleep, Lisa turns her attention to

the corner left of the frame where the camera sits on its stationary tripod (Figure 5.4c). As she tentatively leans in, a sudden, loud noise consistent with an animal's growl along with a sudden gust of wind slaps her in the face (Figure 5.4d) and she leaps backwards, muffling a scream with her hands (Figure 5.4e). Terrified, Lisa backs away slowly (Figure 5.4f) but then quickly descends the stairs (Figure 5.4g). The scene cuts to the downstairs camera set up an hour later with Lisa impatiently waiting by the front door as Dennis and the girls' mother, Julie (Lauren Bittner), return home.















Figures 5.4a–5.4g *Paranormal Activity 3* (2011). Single take: (a) Lisa tiptoes upstairs to the girls' room. (b) She checks on the girls sleeping in their beds. (c) Lisa tentatively approaches the makeshift security camera in the corner of the room. (d) Something blows into her face, accompanied by a loud diegetic sound (like a growl). (e) She jumps back, muffling a scream with her hands. (f) Lisa slowly backs away and descends the staircase. (g) The scene/shot cuts after she disappears down the staircase.

It is simply not evident how the equivalent effect would be generated by a novel or a live stage performance. The cinematic style of found-footage horror films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and the first four *Paranormal Activity* films trigger intense startles because they so effortlessly portray real-time, through the use of long takes or realistic editing by the conceit of having multiple cameras running in unison. So, when a character anticipates a threatening figure will jump out to get them, that time and anticipation is matched beat for beat by the spectator. Given the expectations of the horror genre, we know to expect that something will jump out, but because we are biologically ill-suited to predict exactly when even if we've seen the film before, we jump every time.

In both the *Annabelle* case and the *Paranormal Activity 3* case, startle is triggered when a vulnerable woman gets blown in the face by an invisible force. In both cases the threat remains unseen, but not unheard. In the case from Annabelle, the use of a non-diegetic

score and sound effects combines with Mia's shrieks of fright. In contrast, the case from *Paranormal Activity 3* uses only diegetic sound to generate a very similar effect and the exact same affect (i.e. startle). What is consistent between the two scenes apart from the fact that they involve vulnerable young women charged with protecting children is the fact that very little movement appears on-screen. Despite the fact that the first shot from *Paranormal Activity 3* is composed of an oscillating pan, the stillness of the rest of the setting remains consistent with that of *Annabelle*. In other words, there is very little to attend to besides the women moving about on-screen. While watching these scenes, we are aware of the building tension that could only be broken when something happens to interrupt the flow of each woman's actions. Hence, the suspense–startle pattern is consistent with the theory of cinematic betting developed in Chapter Three.

A final film that illustrates that the startle effect is highly cinematic through the use of techniques including the precision timing of sounds and movements to which we attend is *Insidious* (James Wan, 2010), although this example includes much more movement overall and many more different components to attend to than the previous two examples. In other words, the following scene contains many more sounds and much more motion, both of which serve to distract and then re-focus our attention to the elements that will trigger the startle. *Insidious*, much like *Annabelle* and *Paranormal Activity 3*, follows the story of a young family. After moving into a new home, the Lamberts begin to experience strange occurrences including moving boxes vanishing and then turning up in the attic and books found on the floor after they had just been shelved. Tragedy strikes when their son Dalton (Ty Simpkins) slips into a coma after falling and bumping his head in the attic, confounding all doctors. While he receives at-home care, Dalton's mother Renai (Rose Byrne) begins to hear strange sounds and voices coming through their baby monitor, which culminates in a strange, angry male voice shouting, 'I want it!' causing the baby to scream and cry. Later that

night, as Renai explains the occurrence to her husband Josh (Patrick Wilson), they experience what appears to be a home invasion. In a scene that resembles the one described above from Annabelle, Renai and Josh are awakened by the noise of someone pounding on their front door. As Josh goes down to check, finding no one there, Renai goes into the nursery to check on the baby when she sees a face behind the chiffon curtain. At this moment, the film amplifies the musical score, underscoring Renai's apparent shock at having discovered the figure of a man with a white face standing over her baby's crib (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5 *Insidious* (2010). Loud non-diegetic musical accompaniment as Renai spots a man behind the curtain.

What is remarkable about this scene is that the demon depicted in the figure above stands motionless and does nothing to call our attention to his presence. Additionally, the moment his face appears on-screen is not the same moment as when the musical 'stinger' occurs. This musical gesture chimes a beat later, giving Renai and us time enough to comprehend his face before punctuating our recognition with this loud sound. Moreover, the only factor that seems to account for the timing of the musical accompaniment in this scene is the duration it takes for Renai (and us) to notice the demon standing behind the curtain. Whether we spot the demon before, during, or just after the moment the musical accompaniment chimes, we jump. Hence, the scene amounts to a sort of 'double whammy' where the non-diegetic musical score punctuates the visual representation of danger. In addition, what is noteworthy about

the startle effect triggered in this scene is that it would seem to conflict with Baird's definition of a threat scene because the face doesn't 'intrude' since it's there from the moment the shot begins. What's noteworthy about this example is that it takes us a moment (along with Renai) to notice it – then we jump. There's a very short beat after the scene cuts to this shot and only after that beat – after we've had time to scan the image for villains – does the sound cue happen.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the startle effect in contemporary paranormal horror films. Thanks to Baird's (2000) systematic analyses of over a hundred films, there is ample evidence that the startle effect has been increasing over the years. Despite the fact that the startle effect has been challenged as not qualifying as an emotion proper and the fact that the cinematic startle effect has been criticised by some film critics, the startle has become one of the most cinematic and effective techniques used to evoke fright, shock, terror, and horror in film today. I have examined a group of contemporary paranormal horrors that contain more than ten startle effects, as examples of the subgenre of startle cinema. I attempted to clarify new key terms for discussing the startle effect including the jump scare, a term which until recently has been used solely in fan literature.

Part III

The Temporality of Cinematic Humour

In Chapter One, I discussed how the existing film scholarship concerned with affect and emotion has to some extent ignored or overlooked the temporal relations within and throughout the audio-visual makeup of a film, while in Chapter Two, I argued that in order to fully understand emotions in film viewing, we must also analyse the temporal nature of film. I claim that it's not only important to examine *what* happens on screen or in the soundtrack but *when* something happens on screen or in the soundtrack. My analysis in Chapter Three was meant to show that aesthetic suspense, which I framed as purposeful suspense and an experience for its own sake, can generate a collection of emotions and affective experiences beyond mere anticipation. Chapter Four demonstrated that *affective timing*, which I have defined as the duration and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack on a moment-by-moment basis, and *narrative time pressure*, the narrative device of the ticking clock in contemplative suspense-thriller films function to generate suspense and other related emotions such as fear, worry, or anxiety, while Chapter Five demonstrated how affective timing functions in paranormal horror films by generating shock and fear via the startle effect. Generally speaking, emotions such as shock and fear are what psychologists characterise as negatively valanced emotions. My discussion of cinematic suspense as a kind of betting in Chapter Three hints at the fact that affective timing can generate positively valanced emotions because, as I argued, when we bet on an outcome and we are right (whether or not that outcome is what we wanted to happen from a moral standpoint), we experience an 'ah ha!' moment – what David Bordwell (1985: 39) refers to as an 'emotional kick' – which is generally referred to by psychologists as a *cognitive reward*. I have yet to discuss in any detail how affective timing can elicit

positively valanced emotions such as comic amusement. In Part III of this dissertation, I will focus on emotional responses related to comedy, in particular, comic amusement that arises from temporal relations between and throughout the audio-visual makeup of the film. I argue that affective timing complements the effectiveness of a joke. At the heart of my argument lies a general theory of humour known as the *theory of incongruity*. In short, Part III gives a *temporal account of humour*.

Chapter Six

The Poetics of Comic Timing

Data:	A guy walks into the doctor's office. The doctor tells him, 'You need an operation.' The guy says, 'I want a second opinion.' The doctor says, 'OK, you're ugly too.' Ba-doom boom ... Was I funny?
Guinan:	No ... Data, you spoiled the joke. Uh, it could have been your timing.
Data:	My timing is digital.
Guinan:	(laughs)
Data:	What?
Guinan:	That's funny.
Data:	Why?
Guinan:	It would take too long to explain.

(*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'The Outrageous Okona')[102]

Practitioners of comedy – the comic writers, actors, and comedians – take for granted the notion that timing is a vital component of humour, but the subject of the ways in which time and timing can enhance and enrich comedy in the moving image has yet to be explored in the literature. As discussed in Chapter Two, screenwriters employ beats to help them time out moments on a page. This aids in both the standardisation of the practice of screenwriting (where every page represents approximately one minute of screen time) allowing screenwriters to conform to industrial norms, but it also serves a creative function. The measuring of beats on a page allows screenwriters to time out the various components of the audio-visual makeup of a scene including the dialogue, sound effects, and other important actions that occur on a moment-by-moment basis within the narrative. Moreover, it allows practitioners to mark moments of silence or inaction. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the word 'beat' is often used in a screenplay to denote a pause in action or a poignant moment of silence. In the common parlance of joke-telling, it is often referred to as a 'pause for dramatic effect'. In this chapter, I will explore the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack that serve to elicit comic amusement. I maintain that comic timing is a form of temporal incongruity that elicits

comic amusement when certain conditions are met. In order to uncover these certain conditions, I will explore the incongruity theory of humour espoused by Noël Carroll (1996; 2001; 2005; 2009; 2010; 2014) and John Morreall (1983; 1987; 1998; 2009) among others. In my view, the incongruity theory of humour can account for the phenomenon of affective timing known as *comic timing*. As I shall demonstrate in the following section, there exists very little research on the topic of how timing effects or enhances jokes and visual gags in film and television. Susan Feagin's (1999) analysis of time and timing remains unique in this respect. This may seem strange since film, as I have shown in Chapter One, is a strongly temporal artform. The present chapter – as well as the following chapter, which expands the work here – aims at correcting that oversight.

6.1 Finding a Theory of Humour

The most widely accepted general theory of humour is currently the incongruity theory, although there are at least four other competing theories of humour, including the superiority theory, the release theory, the play theory, and the dispositional theory. Throughout this chapter and the ones that follow it, my analyses of affective temporality support the incongruity theory of humour for reasons that will become clear in the following section. Carroll supports the incongruity theory of humour because it provides 'a generally effective means for analysing comic structures that they encounter every day and which range from jokes to comic plots' (2014: 8). That is not to say that other competing theories do not have merit, but in my view, the incongruity theory of humour is appealing because it represents the best explanation for instances of the sort of humour found in the temporal artform of cinematic comedy as we shall see in my analysis of contemporary comedies. For the incongruity theorist, 'humour…is the response-dependent object of comic amusement', meaning when we encounter effective humour, it comically amuses us (2014: 50).[103] Put

another way, we will feel comic amusement (an emotion) when we respond to something humorous. That is not to say that a joke or gag cannot fail to elicit comic amusement; just like horror that fails to horrify, so too a joke – in the comedian's parlance – can 'fail to land'. I'll come back to this a little later in the chapter.

Additionally, the incongruity theory of humour relies upon perception. That is, in order for something to be found humorous, incongruity – within an image, a bit of dialogue, or over the course of a few sequential shots – must first be *perceived*. The incongruity theory is grounded in contemporary psychological work on human perception. In contrast, the release theory employs the conceptual metaphor of water boiling in a pressurised container to describe situations of tension and anxiety and is therefore sometimes referred to as 'the hydraulic theory of humour'. The release theory of humour states that when we laugh at a joke, pent up energy, namely anxiety, is discharged or released allowing for a feeling of levity.[104] Carroll traces the theory back to Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, both of whom wrote about laughter metaphorically as though it were a discharge of energy, but Carroll suggests that the release theory might have much earlier served as the theoretical basis for Aristotle's lost book on comedy. Carroll explains, 'Their theories assume that there is something to be released, something that is gathering and/or has been repressed, and that this is some quantity of energy. But there seem to be scant scientific grounds for such assumptions' (Carroll 2014: 38). There is still little evidence to support the notion that there is a physical substance – an unquantifiable energy – that gets released when the brain experiences *anything* up to and including humour. However, it is the case that our brain chemistry reflects changes in mental states. Endorphins are released when we engage in pleasurable activities such as eating chocolate or having sex and it is without question that comedy films and television shows have the capacity to put us in a good mood by simply watching them.[105]

Perhaps a useful takeaway from the release theory is its emphasis on narrative closure or what Carroll (2010) refers to as erotetic narration: the setup of a joke leads to a punch (or sometimes 'punchline' particularly in the context of verbal jokes) and humorous riddles demand to be solved.[106] Both require a certain amount of mental effort and it is in resolving the joke or riddle, according to release theorists, that we feel released from tension. Carroll explains:

> Jokes and riddles ideally inspire a desire for closure in listeners – a desire, for example, to hear the answer to the riddle or the punchline of the joke. When the answer or punchline arrives, that desire is satisfied, and such satisfaction contributes to the enjoyment that follows – enjoyment that is often marked by laughter. But there is no cause to speak of release here; talk of expectations or desires and their fulfilment suffices. (Carroll 2014: 39)[107]

It's also useful to note here that Carroll places jokes in the category of temporal humour because, he asserts, '[t]hey promise closure'. However, according to Carroll, 'not all humour is like this. Some humour involves no working-up of expectations. So even if we accepted the release theory as an account of the play of expectation in temporal forms of humour, such as jokes, it could not be extended to forms of humour that do not build up expectations over time' (2014: 40). Carroll offers the examples of the image of a ninety-eight-pound sumo wrestler or discovering a turkey in the washing machine, claiming that our expectations have nothing to do with the humour we might feel because 'we had no specific antecedent expectations collecting in our consciousness' (2014: 40).

I would add further to Carroll's criticism that the release theory fails to explain why we would find something funny upon a second encounter with it. Presumably, some people do watch their favourite comedies more than once and find the jokes and gags funny no matter how many times they have seen or heard the punchlines. It would, therefore, seem evident that repeat viewers laugh at their favourite comedies even though they know what's coming, which might bear an interesting relation to the paradoxical phenomenon discussed in Chapter Three, the paradox of suspense (i.e. anomalous suspense).[108] Moreover, the release

theory of humour broadly defined here explains little about why we might find the hurtful jokes of blondes and lawyers funny or why we laugh when a clown slips on a banana peel. Here, the superiority theory steps in to help us understand this seemingly cruel kind of humour.

According to Carroll, versions of the superiority theory date back to the theories of Plato and Aristotle. The superiority theory suggests that humour stems from some sort of 'malice or abuse towards people marked as deficient' (Carroll 2014: 8). This supposition is summarised in Thomas Hobbes's (1996) *Leviathan.* 'For Hobbes,' Carroll writes, 'the feeling humour stokes is that of the pleasure of finding oneself superior to others, along with contempt for them' (2014: 8). In other words, when we find something funny, we are laughing at those less fortunate than ourselves, thereby taking pleasure in our own superiority. Carroll gives the examples of insult jokes such as 'blonde jokes' or 'lawyer jokes'. Specimens of each include:

> Two blondes fell down a hole. One said, 'It's dark in here isn't it?' The other replied, 'I don't know; I can't see'.

And:

> Q: What do you call twenty-five attorneys buried up to their chins in cement?
>
> A: Not enough cement.

In both of these jokes, according to the superiority theory of humour, we laugh because we recognise stereotypes of groups meant to be reviled: in the first case, that all blondes are dim-witted and in the second case that all lawyers are crooked and deserving (hyperbolically, one would hope) of a slow and painful death. Carroll notes that while the superiority theory offers a compelling explanation of certain types of humour like insult comedy, it fails to explain many other forms of humour such as the self-deprecatory humour of Woody Allen or the amusement that a baby exhibits in playing peekaboo games. However, in the examples that I will explore later in this chapter, the superiority theory would fit certain jokes or gags from

the slapstick humour found herein. These include gags that feature characters severely hurting themselves by falling, crashing, or getting punched or hit by cars and baseball bats. However, as my analysis in the final two sections of this chapter will demonstrate, these cases of humour can also be accounted for by the incongruity theory of humour.

In contrast to the superiority theory of humour, the play theory of humour suggests that humanity's tendency to engage in play as a form of juvenile practice for the real world can explain humour. As we will see, play theory may help explain why some forms of comedy exist. Surely, the making and telling of jokes might impress upon those around us that we are intelligent and creative, but it doesn't explain the sorts of everyday humour one might encounter such as discovering an eggplant in the produce aisle in the shape in Richard Nixon's face (Morreall's example) or laughing at someone who has accidentally walked into a glass pane door.[109]

The play theory dates to Aristotle's instructions on how to have a well-balanced life, where play complements our daily activities along with work, intellectual pursuits, and rest. In addition, this theory also corroborates with Thomas Aquinas's recommendations in *Summa Theologica* (1981), for an 'active mental life'. Moreover, the play theory of humour presupposes that that humour and play are the same, which Carroll refutes by reminding us that games such as draughts (i.e. checkers) is a form of play, but it does not entail comic amusement, which, as I mentioned above, Carroll takes to be a necessary condition of humour as a response-dependent object. The play theory's main offence, according to Carroll, is that it unnecessarily equates humour with playful activities such as games (e.g. board games, video games, sports, and competition broadly speaking). In addition, Carroll asserts that play need not even be a necessary condition for eliciting comic amusement. Carroll argues that '[t]he problem here is our concept of play', citing satire as the most obvious counterexample. He continues:

> One temptation is to stipulate that play is disengaged from life – that it is not serious. But if that is what is meant by play then humour is not necessarily play, since a major form of humour is satire – both of society at large and of features of our conspecifics such as hypocrisy. Consequently, if play is defined as disengaged from life or as non-serious, humour does not fit squarely in the genus of play, since some (much) of humour, like satire, is engaged and serious.[110] (Carroll 2014: 43)

There are two final points that I would raise about the play theory and its relationship with the temporal nature of film. First, I would argue that certain forms of play do entail turn-taking. Second, I would argue that the play theory could help describe the emotional state of a person when they discover the solution to a logical puzzle that was meant to challenge them, not unlike the brief flux in one's emotional state after they have bet on the correct outcome of a suspenseful scene, as discussed at length in Chapter Three. However, it is likely that this emotional state, whatever it might be, is not what Carroll would characterise as comic amusement but rather a state of general amusement. In either case, Carroll makes no clear distinction between comic amusement and general amusement except to say that comic amusement involves the response-dependent object of humour, while general amusement does not. Later, I will describe an occurrence of this last point in an example from the television series *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp*. In this case, it is important that the spectator already be in a state of amusement to find the solution to a logical puzzle amusing. But first, I will examine one more theory of humour, known as the dispositional theory of humour, which states that a humorous disposition must first be achieved before we can be said to be in a state of comic amusement.

Jerrold Levinson is credited with the dispositional theory of humour, which ties humour inextricably to laughter. The dispositional theory is about what we call humour, that is, what under ideal conditions puts us in a disposition first to react pleasurably and subsequently in a position to laugh. Carroll explains:

> Something is humorous just in case it has the disposition to elicit, through the mere cognition of it, and not for ulterior reasons, a certain kind of pleasurable

> reaction in appropriate subjects (that is informationally, attitudinally, and emotionally prepared subjects), and where, furthermore, this pleasurable reaction (amusement, mirth) is identified by its own disposition to induce, at moderate or higher degrees, a further phenomenon, namely laughter. (Carroll 2014: 44)

I take Carroll's main argument against the dispositional theory to be the fact that Levinson links humour inseparably with laughter. To refute the dispositional theory, Carroll imagines a fictional species such as a society of injured humans or aliens that might enjoy incongruities, but might lack the physical capacity to laugh. In broad strokes, however, Levinson's dispositional theory might fit with some of the examples that I will detail later in this chapter. For instance, we might say that in order for someone to find a joke that relies on the physical injury of a character funny, we must first find ourselves in the disposition to do so, for if we are made to feel compassion for the injured character and are made to understand that their injuries are quite severe by way of the plot revealing their strained whimpers, we may not find their injury funny at all, but conversely tragic and upsetting.

I should add here that none of these theories shed light on why timing itself might aid in the production of humour. As such, a broader and more general theory of humour is required. In the following paragraphs, I will define and expand upon the incongruity theory of humour, espoused by Carroll, Morreall, and others, to explain the affects of comic timing.

Perceived Incongruity

The incongruity theory of humour states that comic amusement is achieved when we perceive something incongruous about the object or objects with which we are engaging. Carroll calls this phenomenon *perceived incongruity*. For example, comic duos such as Laurel and Hardy and Abbott and Costello present a perceived incongruity simply through their physical appearances, which are incongruous to one another. Oliver Hardy and Lou Costello are fat while their respective comical counterparts Stan Laurel and Bud Abbott are thin. Moreover, incongruity extends to the comedians' demeanours. In the comedy duo, Martin and Lewis,

Dean Martin plays the sophisticated and self-assured leading man to Jerry Lewis's dithering and dweebish buffoon. However, perceived incongruities need not be as coherent or precise as a comedy duo's body or personality types. It may, I will argue, be present in the duration and durational relationships discussed by Susan Feagin later in this chapter. Before expanding upon this, however, I will explore the incongruity theory as it contrasts to the previous theories discussed above.

Carroll writes, 'The leading idea of the Incongruity Theory is that comic amusement comes with the apprehension of incongruity' (2010: 400). Furthermore, according to Carroll:

> Comic amusement, on the Incongruity Theory, presupposes that the audience has access to all the congruities – concepts, rules, expectations, etc. – that the humour in question disturbs or violates, and perhaps part of the pleasure of humour involves exercising our abilities to access this background information, generally very rapidly. (2010: 400)

Thus, incongruities are formulated as violations in the expectations of what is to come. Additionally, Kevin W. Sweeney claims that repetition gags are not funny 'just because they are extended'.[111] He argues, 'If the repetition gags are funny, a critic might say, it is not because they are extended but because they present an event that encourages an initial expectation and then in the following events challenges that expectation'.[112]

Unlike other theories of humour such as release, play, or dispositional, the incongruity theory makes no assumptions about the state of mind we are in when we perceive an incongruity in order to find it funny. In addition, in contrast to the superiority theory, the incongruity theory does not assume or require an imbalance of power for us to experience humour. Where is the power imbalance, Carroll asks, of a baby laughing at a game of peekaboo? To further his point, Carroll gives the example of being in a rather nondescript mood when we discover we have just sprinkled sugar on our spaghetti instead of parmesan cheese. How would the superiority theory explain the state of amusement we find ourselves in when we laugh at ourselves? That is to ask, how can we feel superior to ourselves? The

message is that humour can strike anywhere and anytime, no matter the disposition of the person, who might laugh at themselves for taking in a mouthful of sugared spaghetti.

Carroll places three important caveats onto the theory of incongruity. The first caveat demands that in order for a perceived incongruity to elicit comic amusement, it must not be perceived as threatening or anxiety-inducing since if we are placed in a state of fear by the object meant to amuse us, we will fail to see what is funny about it. Although, in retrospect, a frightening incident that was horrifying at the time might be fodder for a funny story later on once we are away from the perceived danger. For instance, a driver might scream in terror during what appears to be a serious accident, but laugh in delight after they find themselves, their car, and/or the people around them unharmed. I would also point out that while this seems like evidence for the release theory, it is not necessary to couch such an incident of comic amusement in terms of the releasing of anxiety, but rather the realisation of a perceived incongruity. The laughter comes, perhaps, from the realisation that the driver herself is safe, unharmed, and this seems incongruous with what was anticipated given the seriousness of how the accident felt while it was happening.

A second important caveat Carroll places on the incongruity theory is that the perceived incongruity must not be annoying to the perceiver. While this may seem counter intuitive since many comedians rely on annoying voices or repetitive gags to get laughs such as the American comedians Gilbert Gottfried and Emo Philips, I would argue that instances such as these still count as humorous because the amused spectator's threshold for annoyance has not yet been breached. When it has been breached, the spectator would no longer find the joke amusing, but perhaps hackneyed, trite, or annoying. I will return to this caveat in my discussion in the next chapter about the video *Too Many Cooks* (2014).

In order to find something funny, the perceived incongruity must pass a third important caveat: the perceiver must not approach the incongruity in question with a sincere

problem-solving frame of mind. In other words, we will find a perceived incongruity humorous if it is not so cognitively demanding that we would not *get* the punchline. Take for example two individuals at a party, one of whom is wearing a novelty t-shirt that reads, 'FREE TIBET WITH PURCHASE OF ANOTHER TIBET OF EQUAL AND/OR GREATER VALUE', pictured below in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1 A novelty t-shirt featuring a pun that reads, 'FREE TIBET WITH PURCHASE OF ANOTHER TIBET OF EQUAL AND/OR GREATER VALUE'.

If the person then asks their friend wearing the shirt, 'What's ti-bet?' the joke has obviously lost its value due to educational deficiencies and/or a general lack of knowledge about global cultural issues. In other words, someone who has never heard of Tibet will fail to find the t-shirt humorous. On the other hand, if the person does not find the t-shirt funny because they believe it lacks cultural sensitivity, then the joke has broken the first important caveat that I have outlined above. One last note: if everyone at the party is wearing the same t-shirt, then the joke might break the second important caveat by being redundant and therefore annoying. However, in some of my examples outlined later in this chapter, redundancy as a form of repetition is employed, perhaps paradoxically, to elicit humour.

Carroll notes that the main drawback of the incongruity theory lies in the somewhat broad and nebulous definition of incongruity. Carroll explains philosopher Arthur

Schopenhauer's account of humour as essentially a category mistake, but, according to Carroll, 'The definition has appeared to be too narrow to accommodate everything we would count as humorous' (2014: 37). Incongruity has been defined as everything from 'conceptual and logical errors to inappropriate table manners' (2014: 37). Carroll explains, 'Such an imprecise notion of incongruity may not be exclusive enough, especially if it unqualifiedly countenances something as pervasive as the subversion of our global expectations as an incongruity' (2014: 37). Surely, in order for the incongruity theory to stand up to scrutiny, we need a narrower definition of what should count as incongruous. Finding such a narrow definition is beyond the purview of this thesis since I aim not to attack the incongruity theory at its weak points but to use it to explore and explain certain instances of comic timing that I have isolated in the examples to come. Perhaps, however, an account of temporal incongruity can serve to narrow the definition of incongruity if only in a small way.

To summarise, the incongruity theory of humour stands the best chance at delivering a satisfactory account of humour and comic amusement because it is the only theory presented here that stands up to rigorous testing via examples of humour, or more specifically as my examples will illustrate, comic timing. Carroll summarises a version of the incongruity theory:

> So, provisionally, let us say that creatures like us are in a state of comic amusement just in case (i) the object of one's mental state is a perceived incongruity which (ii) one regards as non-threatening or otherwise anxiety producing, and (iii) not annoying and (iv) towards which one does not enlist genuine problem-solving attitudes (v) but which gives to enjoyment of precisely the pertinent incongruity and (vi) to an experience of levity. And humour then is the response-dependent object of comic amusement, characterised thus. (2014: 49–50)

This last part is important because it reinforces the point that a joke will not elicit comic amusement, if no one finds it funny, but that does not remove its status as a joke. Moreover, an unsuccessful joke may be humorous to the joke-teller but not the joke-listener as

illustrated in the ‘image caption’ in Figure 6.2 more commonly known as a ‘dad-joke’, that is, a joke told by a well-meaning father to an unenthusiastic and/or resistant child.



Figure 6.2 A popular ‘image caption’ featuring a 'dad joke'.

This viral image caption parodies the television series *The Walking Dead* (created by Frank Darabont). In particular, it uses image captures from the episode ‘Killer Within,’ the fourth episode of season three, in which Rick (Andrew Lincoln) consoles his son Carl (Chandler Riggs), whose mother has just died in childbirth. Obviously, the mood of the original scene from which this was taken was quite different than the one conjured in the image caption. One might describe this ‘dad-joke’ as a *meta-joke* or a joke about jokes. The content of the joke involves a father, in this case played by Rick from *The Walking Dead*, telling his son, Carl, a rather innocuous pun about sushi and bees. Carl’s face as well as his interjection, ‘Stop it, Dad!’ reveal that he no longer finds his father’s humour funny, but Rick’s repetition

of the word ‘wasabi’ reveals that he disagrees. Of course, we as viewers on the outside of the joke might find the interplay between the son and father humorous if not also the internal joke within the image caption. Finally, it is important to note that even in image caption jokes like the one outlined above, timing, or in this case the order or sequence of words and images, is crucial to not only understanding the joke but ultimately finding it funny. Certainly, the repetition of the father’s words in the last frame of the image caption hit home the notion that while Rick may be cracking himself up, Carl is less than amused.

In Part I, I attempted to establish that durations of images, sounds, actions, and events are perceptible attributes within a film. That is to say, viewers can perceive and distinguish between two or more durations. Moreover, they can make a comparison between different durations and can thus perceive incongruity between two or more durations. In summary, spectators perceive roughly how long an action or event takes on screen and are then invited, via the narration, to compare (however unconsciously) that duration to that of another action or event. So that the duration of one action or event, when juxtaposed against that of another action or event, causes the spectator to perceive an incongruous duration between the two actions or events.

6.2 The Dramatic Pause

Sometimes referred to as the ‘pause for dramatic effect’ or the ‘pause for comedic effect’, the *dramatic pause*, as I will characterise it, refers to a beat of inaction and/or silence (i.e. a pause) inserted between the images, sounds, actions, or events on the screen or in the soundtrack between the setup of a joke or visual gag and the punch. Typically, the dramatic pause is inserted in between the setup and the punch of a joke or a visual gag, although that is not always the case as the following section demonstrates that sometimes humour can be generated through the absence of a dramatic pause. In this section, I will discuss scenes from

the computer-animated film *The Lego Movie* (Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, 2014) that include a dramatic pause sandwiched between moments of action. The dramatic pause represents a moment of inaction before a return to action and serves to prompt the coming punch of a joke or visual gag. *The Lego Movie* contains numerous instances reflecting a structure that includes a dramatic pause. Before I outline a few relevant examples, some context to the film would help situate these short moments of affective timing. Although this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the instances of the dramatic pause used for affect in *The Lego Movie*, it might be the case that the moments of affective comic timing are quite brief in terms of screen time – yet I would argue that they are still perceptible and therefore can be affective – and as a result the application of comic timing in the moving image can be very subtle. I will therefore examine an extensive sample of instances and it is recommended to view the extracts along with this analysis as well as the rest that follow throughout Part III.[113]

In this film, the protagonist Emmet (voiced by Chris Pratt), a construction worker from the town of Bricksberg, finds himself mistaken as a Master Builder, who is prophesied to discover a special construction block that will conquer the evil Lord Business (voiced by Will Farrell), who threatens to destroy the world. In the opening scene, a wizard and Master Builder known as Vitruvius (voiced by Morgan Freeman) battles Lord Business for control over the special block. As Vitruvius stands guard, Lord Business and his robotic henchman enter Vitruvius's hideout. The wizard challenges Lord Business by building Lego-block birds to attack his foe. Just after Vitruvius boasts, 'Your powers are no match for a Master Builder for I see everything!' Business hits him with an electrical current that dashes out the wizard's eyesight. As Lord Business gloats at his victory, Vitruvius's sightless eyes begin to glow and he recites a rhyming poem about a warrior carrying a special block that will save the realm. In relation to the short exchanges of dialogue between the two men so far, the story that

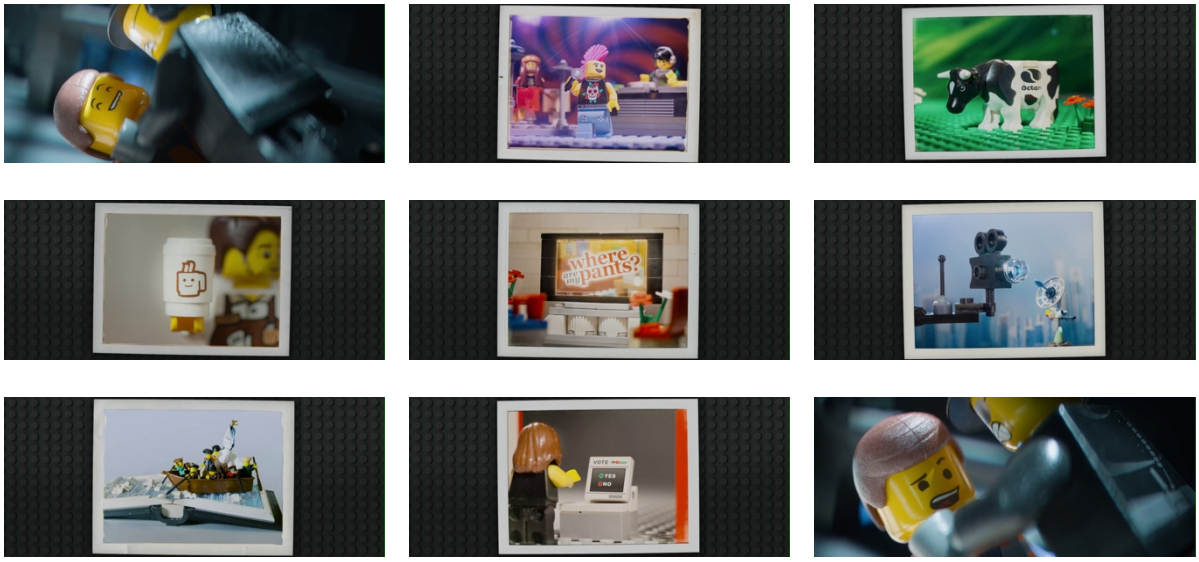
Vitruvius recites runs longer by comparison, which is in keeping with it being an important monologue ripe with exposition. After Vitruvius finishes his story, Lord Business congratulates Vitruvius on a story well-told, saying, 'That was a great and inspiring legend ... that you made up!'. Note here and throughout that I use ellipses (i.e. '…') to denote a pause in the dialogue. During this pause in dialogue, the film cuts from a closeup of Lord Business to a long shot of Vitruvius's hideout with both characters depicted in the frame. Then Lord Business unceremoniously kicks Vitruvius off the cliff (see Figures 6.3a–6.3d).



Figures 6.3a–6.3d *The Lego Movie* (2014). Right before Lord Business kicks Vitruvius off of the cliff, there is a brief *dramatic pause* in the sound and action (between 6.3c and 6.3d).

The scene above illustrates a dramatic pause between the sound and action of the scene. Another common way for the dramatic pause to be utilised for comedic effect is in dialogue, much like how a comedian might carefully space out their delivery to let the setup of their joke 'sink in' before revealing the punchline. In one such scene, Lord Business, whose public persona is 'President Business' (leader of the shady conglomerate Octan), has enlisted the help of one of his lead henchmen, Bad Cop (voiced by Liam Neeson). As Bad Cop interrogates Emmet, he unwittingly reveals President Business's plot to destroy the world, of which Emmet maintains he has no knowledge. In fact, Emmet rejects this idea out of hand

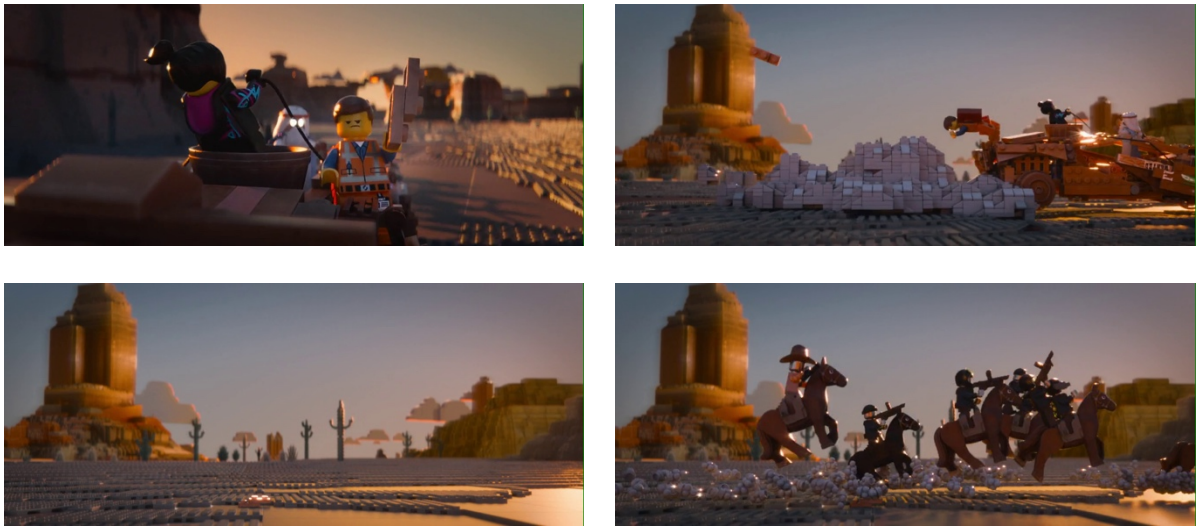
since he likes so many of the products that Octan produces. ‘President Business is going to destroy the world? But he’s such a good guy! And Octan, they make good stuff! Music, dairy products, coffee, television shows, surveillance systems, all history books, voting machines … wait a minute.’ See Figures 6.4a–6.4i. Notice we can also track the change in Emmet’s thinking by comparing the first and the last images. In the first image, Emmet’s facial expression looks happy, even content. By comparison, the last image in the series depicts something like scepticism.



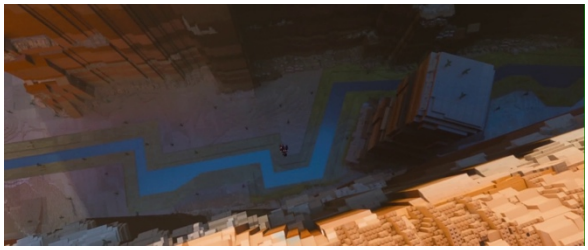
Figures 6.4a–6.4i *The Lego Movie* (2014). Emmet raddles off the Octan products that he likes in a long list before coming to the realisation that perhaps the Octan Corporation don't have his best interests at heart.

In a scene where Emmet, WyldStyle, and Vitruvius attempt to evade Business’s robotic henchman in The Old West, WyldStyle implores Emmet to build something that will save their lives. The trio is caught on a rickety, runaway carriage pulled by pigs with robotic henchmen gaining on them. In a panic or perhaps a moment of would-be clarity, Emmet puts two bricks together and throws them at the henchmen. The bricks appear to float in the air for a beat, and during this moment the exciting non-diegetic music momentarily pauses. But the bricks fall impotently to the ground with a quiet, plastic thud. The ineffectiveness of Emmet’s

attempt at saving his friends' lives is compounded by the dramatic pause followed by an unrewarding payoff that his invention delivered. Moreover, the fact that his idea has no effect on the ensuing gang of henchmen is punctuated by the moment of quiet when the bricks fly through the air (see Figures 6.5a–6.5c). Soon after, the henchmen miss a turn and accidentally ride off a cliff. This shot is punctuated once again by a moment of silence and inactivity before the henchmen hit the ground, which culminates in a giant explosion (see Figures 6.6a–6.6c).



Figures 6.5a–6.5d *The Lego Movie* (2014). At WyldStyle's insistence, Emmet builds something by connecting two small bricks together and throws it at the robot henchmen chasing them on horseback.


Figures 6.6a–6.6c *The Lego Movie* (2014). In 'The Wild West' Lego landscape, the robot henchmen on horseback accidently run off a cliff in pursuit of Emmet and the others. Right after they leap, the music dies down for a moment, allowing for a dramatic pause, which is shortly followed by a huge explosion when they hit the ground.

A very obvious instance of the dramatic pause between the setup and punch of a visual gag happens when Vitruvius takes his comrades through the fantasy-inspired land of 'Middle Zealand' to a secret door, which, we are told, is the entrance to a special hidden realm called Cloud Cuckoo Land. In a long shot, Vitruvius explains that in order to be let into this realm, all he has to do is give the 'secret knock'. In a long shot, he stands in front of the door and does nothing. After a long moment, allowing for the crew to stand in complete stillness for a beat, Vitruvius knocks one time on the door with his staff. Of course, given the intensity of the situation at this point in the story and the fact that the realm they are about to enter is special and hidden, we expect that the knock will involve some lengthy and complicated pattern, reflecting its importance. But the 'secret knock' turns out to be nothing of the sort. After a beat of silence and stillness, Vitruvius knocks once in a rather nonchalant and unceremonious gesture. The action itself is short and undramatic, revealing a distinct incongruity with what we had expected to happen (see Figures 6.7a–6.7b).




Figures 6.7a–6.7b *The Lego Movie* (2014). After a dramatic pause, Vitruvius knocks only once on the secret door that leads to the realm of Cloud Cuckcoo Land.

Several of these examples include more than one aspect of temporal humour in a given scene. Take for instance, the scene inside Cloud Cuckoo Land where Business's henchman have found the secret entrance and the city is under attack. Master Builders, including Shakespeare, Batman, Wonder Woman, Shaquille O'Neal, and many others, work together to defend the realm. When Cloud Cuckoo Land comes under attack by Lord Business's henchman, the Master Builders set to work building machines that will defend the city. Superman asks Shaq if he knows 'what time it is', to which Shaq proclaims, 'It's game time,' instigating the familiar 'pump-up' tune 'Get Ready for This' by 2 Unlimited, a song typically associated with American basketball half-time shows. Shaq and his team of Master Builders quickly construct a catapult. In time with the song, Shaq asks, 'Y'all ready for this?' and they hurtle a basketball at one of Lord Business's helicopters. Unfortunately, since Lord Business's machines have been reinforced with 'Kragle' (i.e. Krazy Glue), the basketball has no effect and simply bounces off of the side of the helicopter. What's interesting about this instance of the dramatic pause is its brevity. Unlike the instances that I will discuss in the next few paragraphs, this beat is so brief that it's *nearly* imperceptible. Being perceptible nevertheless it remains a highly subtle instance of the dramatic pause (see Figures 6.8a–6.8b).[114]



Figures 6.8a–6.8d *The Lego Movie* (2014). Shaq and his teammates build a catapult to the tune of 'Get Ready for This' by 2 Unlimited. When the catapult is ready and the basketball is ready to be launched, there is a short beat right before the launching of the catapult.

The final two examples of the dramatic pause that I will discuss include a death scene and a live-action scene, which are both located towards the final third of the film. A death scene might not be the most obvious place for a moment of comedy, but here might be where the art of comic timing can demonstrate its utility as a means to generate understated comedy. Vitruvius dies by decapitation, but – since these characters are made of plastic – his disembodied head survives just long enough to speak to Emmet one last time. Vitruvius asks Emmet to come close and then whispers something that sounds important: 'What I'm about to tell you will change the course of history'. After a brief beat, Vitruvius's eyes turn to 'Xs' as he gasps his last breath, dying before finishing his sentence. Of course, we anticipate that Vitruvius will finish his sentence by revealing something that will encourage and inspire Emmet to save his friends and all the realms. But this anticipation is thwarted by Vitruvius's untimely death.




Figures 6.9a–6.9b *The Lego Movie* (2014). Vitruvius tries to tell Emmet something important but dies before he has the chance. There is a dramatic pause right before he gasps and the lights in his eyes turns to 'Xs'.

One of the few live action scenes from *The Lego Movie* involves the father (Will Farrell) and his son Finn (Jadon Sand) after the two have made up. The father tells Finn, 'Now that I'm letting you come down here and play guess who else gets to come down here and play?' to which Finn asks innocently, 'Who?' 'Your sister,' the father replies. In sync with the cut from the medium shot to Finn, the cheerful non-diegetic music stops completely as Finn stares in silent disbelief for a beat, before punctuating the scene with the question, 'What?!' Finn's incredulity is compounded by that moment of inaction, that pause, where the realisation that he will have to share all these toys with his sister hits him like a ton of bricks (see Figures 6.10a–6.10b).

The scenes described in this section each include a build-up of anticipation, where we form an expectation that ultimately gets forestalled by what comes after it. The pause for comedic effect reflects the beat, or pause, before the realisation that our expectations were wrong. This pause serves to punctuate the twist conclusion to the cinematic phrase. In other words, according to my view, the humour of these scenes is enhanced by the dramatic pause, the duration and durational relationship of the beats of inaction before the punch.




Figures 6.10a–6.10-b *The Lego Movie* (2014). As Finn and his father play, Finn learns that he will have to share the Legos with his sister. The dramatic pause begins the moment the film cuts from the first to the second shot.

6.3 Comic Surprise

Matthew Bevis notes, 'Playing for laughs involves playing for and with time, and it nurtures a certain kind of rhythm' (2013: 49). He writes, 'Comedy has frequently been the art of springing surprises, but established routine is what makes surprise possible' (2013: 49). He points to an example for how this kind of rhythm and timing unfolds in music:

> The ending of Haydn's quartet (aptly named 'The Joke') has three general pauses to encourage a sense that the parallel phrases will continue, and also to accentuate a feeling of completion at the end of the fourth phrasing. This 'closure,' followed by the longest pause of all, implies that the piece is over only for the music to start up again with a repetition of the opening phrase, which itself then becomes the final cadence. (2013: 50)

In Part II, particularly in Chapters Four and Five, I explored the aesthetic experience of surprise as it relates to horror and suspense-thriller films. In horror film situations, often where there is the threat of unfortunate discovery or violence – a generic example might be a scene where the protagonist is slowly attempting to open a closet door to make sure there is no monster inside the closet – I posited that spectators felt fear in response to the surprise not because they were not expecting something to jump out of the closet, but because they had no idea exactly *when* the monster would jump out of the closet. In short, filmmakers have absolute control over *when* the monster jumps out of the closest. Presumably having seen a horror film before and therefore being somewhat familiar with the tropes and conventions of the horror genre, spectators know to expect something, but there's simply no way of

anticipating exactly how long it will take for the monster to appear on screen since it is at the discretion of filmmakers. In the real-world, too, surprise can often be an unpleasant experience in certain situations, particularly where the surprise puts the individual at a disadvantage. Getting ready to pay for your coffee at the till of a café only to find that you've forgotten your wallet can be a very unhappy, and perhaps even embarrassing, surprise. However, surprise can also be a pleasurable experience. For instance, one can be 'pleasantly surprised' at the discovery of unexpected money tucked away in a pocket.

A *comic interruption*, where the continuation of an action or event is disrupted by something else, is indeed an example of an abrupt surprise. Feagin's example from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* discussed in Chapter One would fit into this category since the spectator finds herself surprised when Indiana Jones pulls out a gun and shoots the assailant without first engaging him in a lengthy melee battle. The fight ends before it has a chance to begin and this might be cause for humour especially since the protagonist finds himself at an advantage, rather than a disadvantage, after the encounter. Both Indiana and the spectator are *pleasantly surprised* that he has escaped unharmed. In the following paragraphs, I will examine how this effect functions in the comedy film *Hot Rod* (Akiva Schaffer, 2007).

Produced by comedy trio The Lonely Island, known for the 'digital shorts' that appeared on the American sketch-comedy programme *Saturday Night Live* (created by Lorne Michaels), *Hot Rod* follows the story of a young man named Rod Kimble (Andy Samberg) who wants to become an accomplished stuntman in the vein of Evel Knievel and employs his showmanship and driving skills to put on a charity performance that will pay for his step-father's life-saving operation. The plot follows Rod's trials and errors as he practices for the climactic moped jump in the final act of the film. In the opening scene of the film, we meet Rod as he attempts to jump his moped over a mail truck. The sequence begins after the introduction of the Paramount logo overlaid with energetic rock'n'roll music with a cut from

black into a closeup of Rod buttoning his shirt, followed by a short montage comprised of closeups of other details such as the tying of his shoes and the application of a false moustache. The film cuts to an exterior long shot of a suburban neighbourhood where Rod sits atop his moped staring down the mail truck he intends to jump. He mentally prepares for this stunt by conjuring the 'soul of an eagle,' which appears as a cartoon graphic over his head and steadies himself before speeding down the suburban street. When he reaches the shabby plywood ramp, built by his friend Rico (Danny McBride), who observes from the sidewalk along with the rest of Rod's crew, including Dave (Bill Hader) and Rod's brother Kevin (Jorma Taccone), the ramp crumbles under the weight of the moped and Rod is flung over the mail truck only to smash into the ramp on the other side (see Figures 6.11a–6.11j).[115]





Figures 6.11a–6.11j *Hot Rod* (2007). Opening sequence featuring Rod getting dressed and prepared for a stunt. After checking with his pit crew, Rod conjures his hawk 'spirit animal', revs the engines of his moped, and starts driving, but the ramp breaks apart and his moped crashes into the side of the mail truck.

The sequence lasts less than one minute and thirty seconds but proportionally, most of this duration is devoted to the setup of this scene, that is, the preparation of the stunt in question. The stunt itself and Rod's subsequent agony lasts merely a fraction of that duration.

Another example of this occurs in a scene where Rod walks through the woods wearing homemade protective gear including pillows duct-taped to his chest and bubble wrap around his legs, when from seemingly out of nowhere, a truck, the front of which is also clad in similar homemade protection, slams into Rod, knocking him down (see next Figures 6.12a–6.12e).[116]





Figures 6.12a–6.12e *Hot Rod* (2007). During a training session, Rod stealthily moves through the woods only to run over by a minivan.

The final scene from *Hot Rod* that I will detail in conjunction with comic interruptions involves Rod as he bids a fond farewell to the young woman he likes, Denise (Isla Fisher), who Rod's been pining for since grade school.[117] Raising money for his stepfather's heart surgery hasn't been going so well, and Rod has decided to give up a career as a professional stuntman. After a long discussion about why Rod has made the decision, he says goodbye to Denise and starts to make his way across the street while pushing a grocery cart full of alcohol and is instantly run over by a truck. Rod's body is pummelled off screen, we hear a thud, and then Rod yelling with some effort, 'I'm all right!' and the scene concludes after a very short beat.

Each of the scenes from *Hot Rod* described above use a similar structure. They begin by building up expectations about what is going to happen in the scene and then quickly – and suddenly – are concluded when Rod hurts himself either by being hit by a van or slamming into something. There is one exception, which includes a scene where Rod is startled by his stepfather, which I discuss in the following section. I have included it here because it utilises the same temporal structure, a build-up followed by an abrupt ending with no pause for dramatic effect. One final note about these clips' similarities: they all end not

with a smash cut but a beat that is structured like the punch of a joke, a moment for the audience to catch their breath or continue to laugh at what has happened before continuing on to another scene or set piece. This beat, usually a moment for Rod to rally from his injury, serves to punctuate the scene for greater comedic effect.[118]

Is it Horror or Humour?

So far, I have discussed comic timing as an affective feature of comedy films that triggers and enhances comic amusement. The dramatic pause describes situations where the moment-to-moment unfolding takes a beat – a short pause – right before the moment of impact, so to speak, of the punch. The action-horror *Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, 1999) follows a crew of marine biologists, technicians, and corporate managers stuck in an isolated sea lab cut off from rescue during a storm.[119] Apart from battling the storm, which prevents the crew from safely departing the lab, they must also contend with so-called 'enhanced sharks' that break free from their cages and begin to attack crew members one by one. Around the midpoint of the film, tensions are, needless to say, running high. To quell an argument that threatens to unravel the safety of the remaining survivors, corporate executive Russell Franklin (Samuel L. Jackson) delivers an emotional speech on the deck of the wet lab. During this scene, the film cuts from Franklin to the resident shark wrangler Carter Blake (Thomas Jane) and back again, each time slowly moving in to reveal Blake's expression, which changes from defiance, to appreciation, and finally to determination. We would expect that a savvy viewer would know from watching action films that motivational speeches usually culminate with the speech-maker successfully rallying the listeners and inspiring collective action. Franklin's speech starts out the same way. He stops his crew members from fighting, an emotionally charged musical accompaniment in the soundtrack underscores his powerful words, and, as I just mentioned, a series of shot-reverse-shots that reveal the character's emotions shift from angry to inspired. Thanks to Franklin's speech, Blake and the crew will be ready to take

collective action against the sharks and save themselves, but just as Franklin begins to suggest a plan, a giant shark leaps out of the water and eats him. See Figures 6.13a–6.13j.



Figures 6.13a–6.13j *Deep Blue Sea* (1999). Russell Franklin gets attacked by a shark unexpectedly.

At first glance, the example from *Deep Blue Sea* might seem to conflict with Carroll's initial definition of comic amusement on the grounds that it seems to convey something threatening and anxiety-producing (i.e. a giant shark coming out of the water and eating a main

character). No doubt, the sudden death in the middle of a film of a prominent character played by a prominent actor of the day, comes as a shock. Indeed, the resulting emotional response from this surprise, we might assume, is one of fear. And yet, this may not be the only response as some viewers might in fact be moved, instead, to laughter.

Why might this scene evoke laughter instead of fear or horror? If a spectator engages with *Deep Blue Sea* in earnest, mentally framing the film as an action-horror, then they might indeed feel fear and horror during this gruesome turn of events. If, however, the spectator enters the experience with a sceptical mind and comes equipped with expectations of how these 'corny' motivational speeches tend to go, then the film can evoke laughter because it disrupts that spectator's expectations in a pleasant way. The shock is pleasant and enjoyable, rather than frightening because in the context of it being formulaic and a typical case in the horror-action genre, it does something unexpected.

This suggests that there may be at least two ways to enjoy *Deep Blue Sea* and consequently at least two kinds of viewers with two kinds of mind sets. One kind of viewer takes the film at face value. Framing the story and action in their minds as a serious struggle of man over nature, the first kind of viewer would feel surprise accompanied by fear and horror. For this viewer, the perceived incongruity happens in the context of *Deep Blue Sea* being a frightening action-horror film. Of course, this scene evokes the startle effect, discussed at great length in Chapter Five, whether we view this scene in an orthodox manner or not. The orthodox viewer 'jumps' at the effect and feels dismay at seeing Franklin get eaten; her expectations that Franklin would – at the very least – live to the end of his speech get thwarted when he's taken by the shark. A second kind of viewer, which may be characterised (for now) as an unorthodox viewer, is one who recognises the familiar structural patterns, tropes, and clichés of a traditional horror film and thereby frames *Deep Blue Sea* as a farce. The unorthodox viewer cannot stop herself from jumping – such is the

nature of the startle effect – and she would no doubt be surprised (at least upon a first viewing of the film) that Franklin dies this early in the film and in such a spectacularly unexpected way, but instead of horror and dismay, the unorthodox viewer's reaction is to laugh. What seems to cause the laugh, in my view, is the fact that the unorthodox viewer's expectations involving genre conventions are thwarted. The timing of the shark's arrival is so uncharacteristic for an action-horror and the resulting violence so gruesome and unexpected that for the unorthodox comic amusement becomes an appropriate response.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at sketching out a general theory for the incongruity theory of humour as it functions in comic timing. Certainly, the incongruity theory of humour has its competitors, as I meant to show in my brief outline in the first section of this chapter. Collectively, these competing theories may account for a wide range of cases of humour, but they fail to explain the mechanics of comic timing, which is an accepted practice in many forms of comedy including, but not limited to, movies. In my view, timing is responsible for enhancing and enriching the response-dependent object of humour, namely comic amusement, and I attempted to demonstrate how comic timing is generated from subtle temporal relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on the screen and in the soundtrack. In my view, when timing is perceived to be incongruent, then it elicits and enhances the humour already present in the content of the scene. The dramatic pause and comic surprise are just two ways that films can elicit and enhance comedy through affective timing. In the following chapter, I will outline four types of comic timing that play off of the dramatic pause and comic surprise.

Chapter Seven

Four Types of Comic Timing

Gary: Now, get this [bomb] out of head, Hue!
Hue: Oh, it was never going to explode, Gary. That's just my sense of humour.
Gary: You make one joke in five years and *that* is the one you tell?
Hue: Timing … is everything, Gary.

(*Final Space*, 'Chapter Two')[120]

In the previous chapter, I explored several existing accounts for humour and argued for a version of the incongruity theory of humour espoused by Noël Carroll (1996; 2001; 2005; 2009; 2010; 2014), John Morreall (1983; 1987; 1998; 2009), and others, which I claim makes the best explanation for the case that comic amusement is related to comic timing. The incongruity theory of humour hangs on empirical evidence that behind every instance of genuine comic amusement, a non-threatening, non-anxiety-inducing incongruity exists that thwarts the spectator's expectations, thereby causing her to experience comic amusement. One of the consequences of film being a temporal artform is that time and timing can be affective comedically. And indeed, according to my analysis, affective comic timing results from the duration and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events that are perceived as incongruous.

In the present chapter, I will continue my discussion of comic timing as it relates to the generation of comic amusement in film and television. I will isolate and discuss four categories of temporal humour including: (1) *perceived durational incongruity*; (2) *perceived tempo incongruity*; (3) *repetition*; and (4) *perceived incongruous spatial-temporal incongruity*. Although some of the cinematic and televisual examples under analysis cohabit more than one of these categories, I will attempt to handle each discrete category on its own and mark where overlaps occur.

7.1 Perceived Durational Incongruity

In this section, I will illustrate several examples of perceived durational incongruity, beginning with what I will call the *long setup–short punch* humour pattern. Jokes tend to follow a standard pattern commonly described as the *setup* and the *punch*. John Morreall frames what happens when someone experiences amusing incongruity in terms of a *cognitive shift*, or 'a rapid change in our perceptions or thoughts':

> In the jargon of stand-up comedy, a cognitive shift involves a setup and a punch. The setup is our background pattern of thoughts and attitudes. The punch is what causes our thoughts and attitudes to change quickly. In some humour, especially jokes, the first part of the stimulus establishes the background, and the second part serves as the punch. In other humour, our mental background is already in place before the stimulus, and the whole stimulus serves as the punch. (2009: 50)

Because the setup always comes before the punch, this pattern may be thought of as linear with a standard order and hence, temporal: first the setup, then the punch. So, in jokes, punches may not precede setups. Additionally, in typical jokes, there is a standard durational pattern that maps onto the setup–punch pattern, where the setup typically lasts longer than the punch. There are two key points that we should keep in mind here. Firstly, the purpose of most joke-telling is to catch the listener off guard, generate surprise, and thereby thwart the listener's expectations of what will happen next. Secondly, as it relates to the passage of time, in order to catch the listener off guard the setup will typically last longer than the punch. Why? Because as we've seen in the previous chapters, particularly in Part II, evoking emotion is achieved by building up suspense for as long as necessary before revealing the outcome to a question (whether it be narrative, suspenseful, or in this case, for the purposes of humour). The setup distracts the listener. The following diagram illustrates this temporal relationship visually, offering insight into proportionality of the setup–punch pattern (see Figure 7.1).

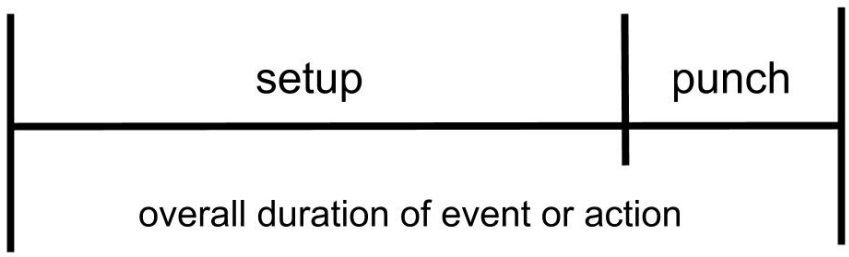


Figure 7.1 Diagram of typical setup–punch pattern illustrating the relationship between the long setup and the short punch.

For the purposes of simplification, I have positioned the setup as twice the length of the punch, but exact proportionalities may change from joke to joke. The main take-away here is that in a typical joke, the setup, however long, is perceptibly longer (i.e. there is more durational time devoted to its representation) than the punch. An example of this includes Susan Feagin's discussion of timing using a scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (discussed in Part I) where Indiana Jones kills a man wielding a scimitar with his gun instead of his signature bullwhip.[121] The sudden and surprisingly quick conclusion to the battle elicits comic amusement by way of a perceived temporal incongruity between the lengthy build up to the fight and the scene's anticlimactic ending. This is visualised in the following diagram, where the length of time devoted to the man in black deftly wielding his scimitar lasts for six seconds, while the length of time devoted to Indiana taking out and firing his gun lasts for only three seconds:

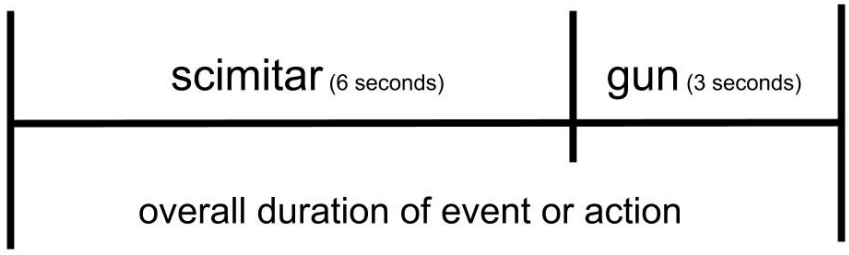


Figure 7.2 Diagram of standard setup–punch pattern in terms of duration as it applies to scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) where Indiana Jones has to fight a swordsman.

As I have argued throughout Parts I and II, duration and durational relationships between and among images, sounds, events, and actions are perceptible (as in we are capable of noticing the difference), that is, we perceive differences in the length of time devoted to one action versus another. Recall the scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* from Chapter One where Indiana Jones fires his gun instead of fighting the swordsman with his whip. The scene is not only incongruous in the content of the action, but in the durations of the events shown: one is long, while the other is short. That is, the incongruity in the difference between the duration of the first action (the man in black challenging Indiana to a duel) and the duration of the second action (Indiana firing his gun) aids in the effect of comic amusement.

Therefore, in certain cinematic sequences, duration and durational relationship between and among images – and I would add sounds, events, and actions – take centre stage to elicit emotion, namely comic amusement. But must comic timing always follow this pattern? What about instances where the punch seems to run longer than the setup?

Extended Duration

Extended duration represents a prolonged moment of action, where under normal circumstances we would assume a cut should exist. Humour elicited from extended duration happens when the spectator recognises their own knowledge of cinematic and televisual conventions. In this way, extended duration can be said to be a self-reflexive form of temporal humour sometimes referred to as 'meta-humour' or a joke about jokes. In the following paragraphs, I will examine additional examples where extended duration functions to elicit comic amusement: in the film *Hot Rod* (Akiva Schaffer, 2007), *Zombieland* (Ruben Fleischer, 2009) as well as scenes from the television series *Family Guy* (created by Seth MacFarlane and David Zuckerman, 1999–present).

Since television's time is typically highly organised to conform to the business of broadcast norms that include strict programming blocks and a set amount of commercial

breaks, I'll begin with a televisual example from the animated family sitcom comedy television series *Family Guy.* In the episode 'Wasted Talent', doltish husband and father Peter Griffin (voiced by Seth MacFarlane) wins a tour of the local brewery after he finds a golden scroll at the bottom of a bottle of a beer.[122] In a scene parodying *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (Mel Stuart, 1971), Peter runs home to tell his wife and kids the good news only to be halted prematurely when he suddenly trips over himself and hurts his knee. Peter grips his injured knee and seethes in pain on the pavement for about twenty-eight seconds of screen time and then cuts to black for about two-seconds before moving on to another scene. During the twenty-eight second period, there is no editing and the perspective of the picture, such as it is, remains still (see Figure 7.3a).

This sort of abnormally long duration to a somewhat mundane event is out of step with the fast-paced nature of what previously happened in the scene. As I mentioned, being a parody of a familiar film, we probably did not expect Peter, who had been barrelling down the pavement eager to announce the good news to his family, to suddenly stumble over himself. Moreover, we probably would not expect the shot of Peter seething in pain to last so long. According to the incongruity theory of humour, Peter's stumble is funny because it subverts our expectations that we have from our knowledge of *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, but that doesn't explain why Peter sits on the pavement and seethes in pain for twenty-eight seconds. The episode could have cut to the next scene after only a second or two, but it runs down the clock instead. So why didn't it cut sooner? It would seem evident that there must be some comedic value in the act of running down the clock in this manner. In my view, the lengthy screen time of the action contributes its own incongruity, one of perceptibly incongruous duration and durational relations between and among the actions of the event in question.




Figures 7.3a–7.3b *Family Guy*, 'Wasted Talent', (airdate 25 July 2000). On the pavement, Peter Griffin seethes in pain after falling and hurting his knee (7.3a). This occurs again at some point later in the episode when Peter is kicked in the shin by one of the Chumbawumba helpers. This kind of repetition in comedy marks a 'call back'.

Traditional stories of this ilk typically include short and snappy scenes that communicate just enough information to allow the viewer to follow the plot. This is compounded by the fact that American television sitcoms are squeezed into thirty-minute programming blocks that still need to leave time for five to seven minutes of commercials, so in the art of television-sitcom-making, every second *literally* counts. Devoting twenty-eight seconds to a character sitting on the pavement in agony should be considered a waste of precious screen time, especially since this fall has no apparent consequences later in the episode except to serve as something to 'call back' to when the gag gets repeated in the fourth act (see Figure 7.3b). In the parlance of comedy writing, a 'call back' is the technique of repeating an action or bit of dialogue that references a previous time in the narrative. Call backs are used for comedic purposes because they represent an incongruous use of repetition, which we'll see in the following section where I discuss repetitions in greater detail. The call back in *Family Guy* is incongruous because it does not conform to our expectations of a traditionally shot and edited animated (or live action) television series. In my view, extended duration is the primary driver of the humour of this portion of the scene.

According to my view, this extended duration of images, sounds, actions, and events generates comic amusement because it serves to subvert our expectations for how long something is supposed to take. When the action takes longer than we expected and the incongruity is perceived as non-threatening, then comic amusement is in order. In contrast to the short setup–long punch humour pattern, extended duration has a relatively short setup, that is, relative to the length of the punch. See Figure 7.4.

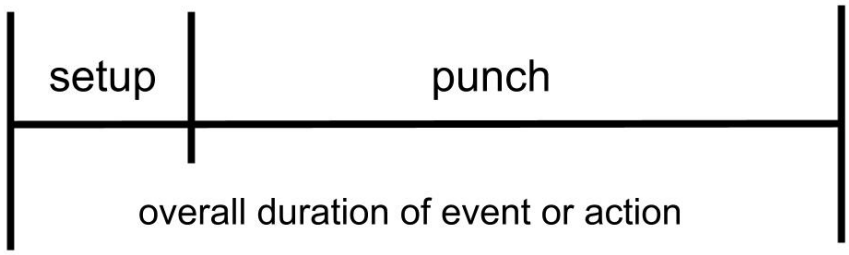


Figure 7.4 Diagram of the setup–punch timing pattern in cases of *extended duration* illustrating the relationship between the short setup and the long punch.

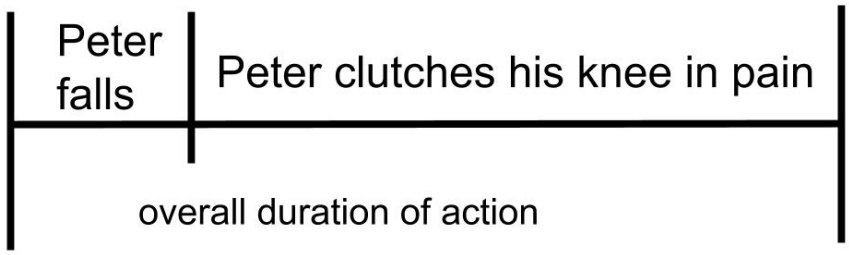


Figure 7.5 Diagram of the setup–punch timing pattern in the case of extended duration in *Family Guy* example. We expect the setup–punch timing pattern to look like it does in Figure 7.1 and when we realise that it doesn't, comic amusement is in order.

Another example of extended duration as a device for humour may be found in the film *Hot Rod*, where Rod, after an impressive display of gymnastics in the forest, stumbles and falls down a hill.[123] Just as before, the scene runs strangely long, depicting Rod falling from a height that would surely kill a lesser man. As Rod continues to tumble down what at first appears to be a hill, we begin to realise he's actually falling down the slope of mountain.

While this is happening, the viewer has time to reflect on the absurd situation of the protagonist and the strangely long amount of time that it is taking him to reach the bottom of the mountain. In short, this scene goes on and on and the extended duration of screen time, just as in the *Family Guy* case, becomes a source for humour in and of itself. Over the course of the forty-six seconds that Rod takes to reach the bottom, we begin to wonder a number of questions: *How much longer is he going to fall? When is this going to end?* And these kinds of questions, I would add, are temporal in nature because they have to do with the duration and the durational relations of the action in the scene. See Figures 7.6a–7.6u.





Figures 7.6a–7.6u *Hot Rod* (2007). Rod falls from what turns out to be a mountain. The total duration of his fall takes about forty-six seconds of screen time from the moment he slips to the moment he lands.

I would further argue that the scene may be thought of as self-reflexive because it affords the viewer the opportunity – and time – to dwell on the nature of slap-stick comedy more broadly as well as the temporal conventions of such scenes. Rod's fall looks excruciating, but since this is set in the world of slap-stick comedy, where characters typically seem to be made out of rubber, we don't really fear for his life, at least not at first. As Rod's falling continues, however, I believe some audience members would begin to question whether or not this kind of violent humour is actually funny. Perhaps it becomes gruesome for some?

The scenes from *Hot Rod* that I analysed in Chapter Six as examples of comic surprise demonstrated that typical instances of violent humour are delivered in short, sudden bursts that invariably involve Rod getting hit by a vehicle or slamming into a vehicle on his moped, but this scene differs from those previous scenes. To be sure, the mountain scene is surprising, but it's surprising in a different way from those previous examples because it keeps going and going until, perhaps, just like in the case of *Family Guy*, the joke is no longer funny. In any case, sheer extended duration such as this runs the risk of being boring and if our aim is to uncover the ways in which timing affects the emotions, it's important to understand why, which is a question that I consider at length in Chapter Eight in my discussion of the contested (and long) comedy video *Too Many Cooks* (2014).

The final example of extended duration as a form of self-reflexive comedy that I will consider is a scene from the film *Zombieland*.[124] In this action-horror-comedy, a young man who goes by the name of Columbus (Jesse Eisenberg) teams up with a powerful renegade called Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson) in order to survive a zombie apocalypse. The two unlikely partners agree to travel with a young woman called Wichita (Emma Stone) and her sister, Little Rock (Abigail Breslin), and together they make their way to Los Angeles, where they believe they will find a haven of survivors. No such haven is found, so the team decides to hunker down in a luxurious Hollywood mansion known to be the home of actor and comedian Bill Murray. Tallahassee and Wichita discover Bill Murray (himself) alive and healthy in his bed, but dressed in costume makeup in order to fool the zombies that might try to eat him. Bill Murray agrees to play a trick on Columbus and Little Rock as they sit in Murray's home theatre room watching a movie. He wanders in, making the ghoulish sounds of a zombie and surprises Columbus, who, ever vigilant, shoots Bill Murray in the stomach with his shot gun. As Bill Murray lays on the couch dying, the team huddle around him in sorrow. Bill Murray breathes his last breath, which continues for a few seconds. The expectation at this point in the scene is that Bill is passing away, but then he sucks in a little more air, and continues to exhale for a few more seconds before actually dying at which point Wichita snorts in laughter before apologising for her uncouth behaviour (see Figures 7.7a–7.7e). While unconventional in a traditional zombie film, the use of extended duration for humour is in keeping with the comedic nature of the rest of the film. Just as the previous examples have shown, I would argue that this is an example of the self-reflexive nature of extended duration, because even a character within the diegesis recognises the humour in the protracted death scene.



Figures 7.7a–7.7e *Zombieland* (2009). When Bill Murray dies, the exhalation of his 'final breath' lasts for nearly twenty seconds of screen time.

Returning to the question of some viewers failing to find the humour in scenes of extended duration, I would argue that in order to react with comic amusement, one must perceive the durational incongruity at play here in relation to their knowledge of the conventions of the artform. Of course, viewers who genuinely find no humour in scenes that utilise extended duration perceive the extension of time, what they don't seem to perceive is durational incongruity. What these cases show is that it's simply not enough to perceive extended duration of an action or event, one must also perceive the incongruity for being incongruous to the expected conventions of the artform in which they are operating, namely cinematic and televisual comedy. Therefore, in my view, in order to appreciate humour through extended duration of an action or event, one must come equipped with expectations about the lengths of certain actions or events. When those lengths of duration are subverted and made to run

longer than we expected, comic amusement is in order. However, for viewers that do not find scenes of extended duration amusing, then I would question whether or not they actually came equipped with these expectations of durational length in mind before encountering the scenes in question.

7.2 Perceived Tempo Incongruity

The second kind of comic timing is perceived tempo incongruity. As discussed in Chapter Two, tempo refers to the visual and auditory values of the pace or speed of a given shot or scene. In my view, two contrasting tempos juxtaposed within a given scene, results in perceived incongruity between the two tempos. When we call an action film 'fast-paced', we typically mean that the film imbues in us a sense of speediness in the way that characters move, the manner that dialogue is delivered, the style of editing, or the pacing of the sound effects or musical accompaniment. Carroll (1999: 425, n.17) claims that a fast tempo in a work of art is not enough to trigger emotion, so the resulting humour must derive from the juxtaposition of two tempos within a scene, which indicates that a temporal incongruity must first be perceived. Shaun May observes a kind of temporal incongruity in film that might be related to the incongruity of tempo that is the subject of this section (2016: 152–53). May asserts that there is a kind of temporal incongruity that occurs when there is perceived difference in the speed at which two characters move on screen. To illustrate this phenomenon, May cites a scene from an episode of the television series *Mr. Bean* (created by Rowan Atkinson and Richard Curtis, 1990–1995) entitled 'Mr. Bean in Room 426' where the title character finds himself trapped behind an elderly woman while trying to descend a staircase. May frames this kind of temporal incongruity as a 'trope' presumably because it occurs elsewhere in film and television comedy as a means to signal humour. While I believe this to be a case of temporal humour, May's emphasis differs slightly from the way I

understand tempo incongruity since for him, it stems mostly from our knowledge that Mr. Bean *wants* to move quickly. In the scene, he's generally not depicted as moving quickly and so the tempo incongruity is mostly inferred. However, in the moments during the scene where Mr. Bean rushes only to find himself stuck again and again behind elderly people on the stairs, represents the kind of tempo incongruity that is under examination in the following example from the action-comedy *Crank* (Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, 2006), in which perceived tempo juxtaposition places the viewer in a state of comic amusement because the placement of the second tempo is perceived as incongruous with what came before it. In my view, tempo juxtaposition is perceived when the paces of each of these components, when juxtaposed, appear to be incongruous with one another. Tempo juxtaposition can therefore be described in cinema as a moment or a few moments in a scene when the tempo shifts from fast to slow (or from slow to fast) where we did not expect such a reversal. This will become clear in a scene from *Crank* where the tempo of the scene shifts from fast to slow and back again during a cut to a brief shot of a slow-moving escalator.

Crank follows a retired hitman Chev Chelios (Jason Statham) who must find and kill the man who poisoned him with a synthetic drug that threatens to shut down his organs if he does not maintain a constant level of adrenaline. *Crank* is by all accounts a fast-paced film. Several scenes attest to this, including one instance of Chelios robbing a motorcycle cop of his bike while wearing a hospital dressing gown, and another instance where he hangs twenty thousand feet in the air from the door of a helicopter. In one notable scene, Chelios receives a cell phone call from his doctor (Dwight Yoakam) who explains how the synthetic drug works and that in order to survive, Chelios must keep up a constant level of adrenaline. As Chelios receives medical advice from his doctor, he begins to drive through a shopping mall with cops chasing him.[125] Shoppers scream and dash out of the way as the car comes barrelling down the footpath, knocking through merchandise and perfume counters. On the phone,

Chelios explains to his doctor that he is feeling well at the moment and the doctor concludes that this must be due to the fact that being chased by cops while driving through a shopping mall is a thrilling experience for Chelios; as long as he can maintain this level of adrenaline, he'll stay alive (see Figures 7.8a–7.8e).

The fast-paced nature of the scene is evident through both the speed of the car and the non-diegetic rock and roll music that accompanies it, which serves to illustrate Chelios's adrenaline-induced state of mind but inexplicably the scene cuts to what's ahead for Chelios: a slow-moving escalator (see Figure 7.8c). Compared to the fast-paced movement of the cars and the people dashing out of the way, the escalator at the other side of the mall seems to move at a snail's pace and the pedestrian shoppers within that shot seem entirely unaware that there is a car barrelling towards them. When the film cuts to the shot of the escalator, the non-diegetic rock and roll cuts out and we hear instead the diegetic murmur of customers and the lazy, hypnotic 'muzak' associated with elevators. When the film cuts back to a long shot of Chelios's car barrelling down the pedestrian pathway, both the fast-paced non-diegetic musical soundtrack and the fast-paced adrenaline-inducing mood returns. As the car approaches the escalator, Chelios swerves, flipping the car on its side with the driver still inside. Then, it cuts back to the car, which gets nestled inside the slow-moving escalator, switching the pace back to slow yet again (see Figure 7.8e).

As it relates to tempo incongruity, the main feature of interest in this scene, in my view, is the slow-moving escalator with its diegetic humdrum noises and boring elevator music. When contrasted with the shots of the speeding car, an incongruity emerges. The moment of temporal incongruity here is subtle, but affective since it contributes to the comedic tone of what is after all an action-*comedy* film (rather than purely action).



Figures 7.8a–7.8e *Crank* (2007). Chev Chelios drives through a shopping mall. Figures 7.8c and 7.8e show the slow-moving escalator. Throughout this sequence, non-diegetic fast-paced heavy metal music plays on the soundtrack, but when the film cuts to the escalator, the soundtrack switches to the diegetic noises of a shopping mall.

7.3 Repetition

Repetition may be described as any obvious reoccurrence of an image, sound, action, or event on screen or in the soundtrack that gets repeated throughout the course of a film or television episode. Repetition of an action or event is always temporal, but not all instances of repetition elicit comic amusement. In my view, in order to elicit comic amusement, the repetition must be perceived as incongruous. The fact that the action or event is happening again should be perceived as incredible, ridiculous, or inconceivable. In a paranormal horror film, such as we saw in Chapter Five, it's not inconceivable that a demon should jump out from more than one

closet. In a paranormal horror, the action is startling, but it's not inconceivable. That is to say, it's not incongruous with what we know about demons and their motivations for pursuing vulnerable humans. However, the repetition in a comedy film, particularly of the slapstick variety, must be perceived as incongruous as my examples from the film *Dude, Where's My Car?* and an episode from the television series *Wet Hot American Summer* will show.

The stoner comedy *Dude, Where's My Car* follows a day in the lives of best friends Jesse (Ashton Kutcher) and Chester (Seann William Scott) who wake up one day to find their car missing. In the scene under analysis, the first thing that the Jesse and Chester decide to do is to retrace their steps from the night before. Quickly, however, they tire of walking and attempt to hitch a ride from their neighbour, Mrs. Crappleman.[126] Mrs. Crappleman appears to be a sweet little old lady and the film illustrates this by cutting to a shot of her in the car smiling at Chester as he attempts to wave her down from the side of the street. Chester calls out her name and waves in a friendly manner, but Mrs. Crappleman barrels right through Chester, who glances off of the hood of her car, drops to the ground, and rolls back to the pavement where Jesse waits. After cursing the boys as 'useless stoners' Mrs. Crappleman drives off without stopping. A perplexed Jesse tries to make sense of what happened. 'She must not have recognised you,' he reasons. A moment later another car drives up the same way and Jesse recognises it as their other neighbours, the Binglemans. In the same manner as Chester, Jesse puts up his hand in friendly greeting and calls out to the Bingleman's, who, mirroring Mrs. Crappleman's actions, barrel right through him, causing him to glance off of their hood and drop to the ground. After Jesse rolls back to the pavement where Chester now waits, he suggests 'Maybe we should just walk.'



Figures 7.9a–7.9d Dude, Where's My Car? (2000). Chester (top two frames) and Jesse (bottom two frames) get run over by cars in exactly the same manner.

Of course, the humour from this scene stems in part from our disbelief that anyone could be as stupid and naïve as Jesse and Chester, but the fact that one would try the same exact action after watching his friend get hit by a car seems ridiculous. As I stated at the beginning of this section, all repetition of actions and events are temporal, but in order for repetition to elicit comic amusement, it must be perceived as non-threatening incongruity, however, the repetition of the action must also be perceived as ridiculous, absurd, or unlikely. It's inconceivable that Jesse should try waving down another one of their neighbours, having just witnessed his friend trying and failing at the same act, but he does, which is what makes the repetition here incongruous. In other words, according to my view, the humour of this scene stems from watching Jesse and Chester go through the same exact motions one after the other and suffer the same exact consequences.

In another scene from the same film, a male children's disability coach attempts to help a blind boy swing a baseball bat using a special tee-ball device that beeps to let the boy know where to swing. The coach encourages the boy to follow his ear and swing as hard as

he can at which point his beeper goes off. Following the wrong beeps, the boy takes a swing and lands a connection right on the coach's groin. A little while later in the film, the plot returns to the coach who is by now crawling towards his co-workers for help, clutching his groin. Just as he passes by a Slip 'N Slide, a child's foot makes another connection with the unfortunate man's groin and he blacks out from the pain (see Figures 7.10a–7.10b). As I mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, in the parlance of comedy writing, this device referred to as a 'call back' because the second or third instance is meant to call back to the first instance.



Figures 7.10a–7.10b. *Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000). An innocent bystander gets hit twice in the groin.

In my third and final example of repetition, I will examine the continuation of a scene from the television series *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp*. In an episode entitled 'Lunch' the counsellors Beth (Janeane Garofalo) and Greg (Jason Schwartzman) uncover a plot to dump toxic waste on the grounds of the camp.[127] After Beth and Greg descend a small hill, they crouch beside a pool of fluorescent green sludge. Greg sticks his finger into the pool and tastes it. 'Just as I suspected,' says Greg unaffected, 'toxic waste'. Upon learning this, Beth is appalled. Then Greg scoops up and ingests an even bigger mouthful of toxic waste. Proceeding with his analysis, Greg continues, 'And given the consistency of the sludge, I'd say it's been seeping into the water table for weeks.' Beth exclaims, 'Jesus!' At this point, Greg removes a spoon from his pocket, scoops up, and eats

another mouthful of toxic waste. He further explains that if left unchecked, the toxic waste threatens to destroy every living thing within a five-mile radius. Beth insists they get back to camp to warn the head counsellor and just as they are rushing to leave, Greg scoops up and eats a final spoonful of toxic waste. The humour, in my view, comes in part from the repetition of Greg consuming the toxic sludge over and over again. While it's evident that Greg's nonchalant performance is also crucial to the scene playing as comedy – he eats the toxic sludge as if it were custard – in my view, the repetition enhances the comedic tone because the act in itself may be disgusting, but the fact that he does it four times is not only disgusting, it's ludicrous (i.e. incongruous with what we know about the world). The viewer not only asks *Why would anyone willingly eat toxic sludge?* but *Why would anyone willingly eat toxic sludge so many times?*



Figures 7.11a–7.11f *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (airdate 31 July 2015). Greg tastes toxic waste four times.

7.4 Perceived Spatial-Temporal Incongruity

In traditional continuity-edited scenes, characters interact with each other and their surroundings as though time flows at a normal speed that more or less conforms to real world physics. If a character exits from screen right and the shot doesn't change, we don't expect them to suddenly reappear from screen left without good reason. Traditionally, filmmakers have respected screen space in this manner in to ensure maximum comprehensibility and to avoid confusing their audience. Sometimes, however, filmmakers might want to exploit the traditional methods of continuity shooting and editing for comedic purposes. In the following

paragraphs, I will illustrate perceived spatial-temporal incongruity with two examples from the *Wet Hot American Summer* film and television series.

In the scene described in the last example of the section above, camp counsellors Beth and Greg have stumbled upon a plot to dump toxic waste on the grounds of Camp Firewood. The section of this scene that is of interest to my analysis of spatial-temporal incongruity takes place a few seconds before Beth and Greg approach the green pool.[128] In the foreground of the shot, Beth and Greg crouch down quietly on the hill above so as not to be discovered. When the people in jumpsuits get in their truck and start to drive away, Beth and Greg quietly exit the shot off-screen left and almost immediately – not a second later and without a cut – appear at the site of the florescent green pool in the background (see 7.12a–7.12b).



Figures 7.12a–7.12b *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (airdate 31 July 2015). Beth and Greg descend the hill in a fraction of a second. The blue truck in the bottom part of the frame hasn't even pulled away yet.

Spatio-temporal compression is achieved here in one continuous shot without the use of editing. This special effect was most likely achieved with the help of extras dressed to look like Beth and Greg from a distance.

Another instance of this occurs in the film that preceded the series by fourteen years. In the film *Wet Hot American Summer*, the campers and camp counsellors of Camp Firewood are (this time) threatened by a piece of space debris that is headed straight for the camp.[129] Henry (David Hyde Pierce), a professor of physics at the local university, has agreed to help

out at the camp by giving science lessons to the ‘indoor’ kids at the camp. Camp Director Beth (Janeane Garofalo) has taken a liking to Henry and as they walk hand in hand, Beth muses about the future, ignorant of the fact that as they speak a giant piece of space debris is on its way to decimate Camp Firewood and all its inhabitants.

Henry tells Beth the future is the least of their worries but when Beth inquires to know more, Henry tells her that this is not the time nor the place to have that conversation. He requests that she meet him ‘in front of the picnic table in ten-seconds’, where he will ‘explain everything’. He leaves the shot by walking off-screen right, and Beth stands to look at the sky for a few seconds. After about ten seconds of one continuous shot of Beth – the same shot from which Henry departed moments ago – Beth walks over to the picnic table, which they had both just passed by only moments earlier. By now, Henry and his crew of ‘indoor’ campers are set up with science equipment on the picnic table. The kids are crowded around the table as if they had been there for hours and Henry stands beside the table ready to explain to Beth the problem about the falling space debris (see Figures 7.13a–7.13d). Without cutting, but with the help of a speedy production crew, the film achieves a bit of ‘movie magic’ and compresses the time that it would normally take for children to set up science equipment. In this case, the spatial-temporal compression is played for comedy and, just as in the example above, counts as a case of temporal incongruity.



Figures 7.13a–7.13d *Wet Hot American Summer* (2001). Henry and his 'indoor' kids set up their science equipment in a matter of seconds. The picnic table in the first frame is empty as Henry and Beth pass by it. But ten seconds later, the camera pans back and the children and equipment have all been assembled.

Conclusion

Although not meant to be exhaustive, this chapter attempted to flesh out some distinct types of temporal incongruity that serve to generate comic amusement in comedy films and television. Building off the theory of comic timing as a kind of affective temporality concerned with the generation of comic amusement, I discussed four types of comic timing, including perceived durational incongruity, perceived tempo incongruity, repetition, and perceived spatial-temporal incongruity. Each type of incongruity reveals a different possibility for the generation of comic amusement in film and television comedies. The fine-grained microlevel analysis of each example was meant to reveal the ways in which incongruous temporal relations within and among the images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack of a scene serve to enhance humour and sometimes generate it in their own right. The first sub-type of temporal incongruity that I discussed, which I referred to as extended duration, describes a comedic device that extends the punch of a joke over a long period. Given the fine-grained analysis that this chapter demanded, I had little to

remark about instances in film and television where extended duration goes beyond the extent of a whole scene. However, my analysis of those scenes taken from *Family Guy*, *Hot Rod*, and *Zombieland* suggests that not every audience member enjoys that particular brand of humour. In fact, some might find the humour obtuse and unamusing. The following chapter examines the case of the eleven-minute video *Too Many Cooks*, which could be said to take the principle of extended duration to a whole new extreme.

Chapter Eight

Too Many Cooks (2014): A Shaggy Dog Story

> A boy owned a dog that was uncommonly shaggy. Many people remarked on its considerable shagginess. When the boy learned that there are contests for shaggy dogs, he entered his dog, and the dog won first place for shagginess in local and regional competitions. The boy entered the dog in ever-larger contests, until finally he entered his dog in the world championship for shaggy dogs. When the judges had inspected all the competitor dogs, they remarked about the boy's dog, 'He's not so shaggy.'
>
> (Ted Cohen 1999: 7)[130]

At four o'clock in the morning on 28 October 2014, the American television programming block Adult Swim, located on Cartoon Network, broadcast a video entitled *Too Many Cooks*.[131] Featuring mainly live-action footage with some animation and digital effects, *Too Many Cooks* was produced in the Atlanta, Georgia-based studio Williams Street Productions to play during Adult Swim's 'infomercial' timeslot. This 'infomercial' timeslot is typically reserved for one-off (i.e. self-contained or non-serialised) short comedy programmes veering on the side of absurdity and farce. Created, written, and directed by Casper Kelly and filmed in a style reminiscent of 1980s and 90s American television situation comedies or 'sitcoms' such as *Family Ties* (1982–1989) and *Family Matters* (1989–1998), the eleven-minute running time of *Too Many Cooks* consists almost entirely of an introductory credit sequence for a fictional television show of the same name. Since its broadcast, *Too Many Cooks* has enjoyed a successful afterlife on the video streaming website YouTube.[132] Commonly described as a parody of the opening theme songs and credits of popular American sitcoms, *Too Many Cooks* (hereafter *Cooks*) became a viral sensation on the Internet, reaching over one million views within its first few hours on YouTube.

Dubbed by *Rolling Stone*'s David Fear as 'an instant cult classic', the video continues to garner viewership and has tallied over sixteen million views to date. A cursory search on

YouTube using relevant keyword search terms retrieves thousands of related videos including parodies, reaction videos, content analyses, interviews, and miscellaneous user-generated content. For example, on their respective YouTube channels, both CNN (Cable News Network) and PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) published video parodies. CNN's video about the 2016 United States presidential election featured an edited version of the *Cooks* theme song over video footage showcasing the myriad candidates who were expected to campaign (along with some obviously facetious candidates such as the Koch brothers and all nine Supreme Court Justices)[133] *PBS Idea Channel* published a video entitled, 'What Does *Too Many Cooks* Say About the Meaning of Life?' which makes an earnest attempt at finding meaning (or not as the case may be) in the absurd humour of the video through a comparative analysis of Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*.[134]

Yet, not all commentary praises the video. For instance, *The New Yorker*'s Ian Crouch comments that 'at just over ten minutes, [Adult Swim 'infomercials' like *Cooks*] try your patience, and they might not even be exactly funny at all' (2014: n.p.). Crouch refers to the video as a 'minor social miracle' because 'so many people have sat through the longest opening credits in the history of television, real or otherwise, a laugh turning to a fixed smile and then becoming a grimace', hinting at a concern that some viewers do not find *Cooks* funny, but rather, quite irritating (Crouch 2014: n.p.). Thus, for some viewers, the video's apparent affect might be more to annoy than to amuse. Perhaps the most common complaint about the video is the eleven-minute running time (i.e. the duration of the video in its entirety), which stands in stark contrast to the length of the running times of typical sitcom opening credit sequences, as we shall see in my analysis below. This may lead us to certain questions about the nature of *Cooks* and its arguably contentious popularity. For one thing, is it even funny? The fact that so many have complained about the popularity of the video on the grounds that it is not funny should give us pause to consider the ways in which *Cooks*

succeeds in evoking humour if at all. In other words, if it is found to be funny, what's funny about it?

The first two chapters of Part III sought to illustrate how timing can generate humour. Through an analysis of four types of comic timing, I demonstrated how temporality relates to the comedian's principles of setups and payoffs in cinematic and televisual comedies. Generally speaking, successful comedies are not known for their long-windedness or lengthy running times, but this doesn't appear to be the case for *Cooks*. Of course, while not all jokes need to appeal to every audience, what I find compelling about the *Cooks* debate is that according to its critics, the video fails at generating humour because it is simply too long, yet its proponents laud the video for exactly the same reason. Therefore, what makes *Cooks* hilarious for some is exactly what makes it an annoyance for others. The present chapter proposes to examine this seemingly paradoxical case of humour, which I take to be an audio-visual example of a type of joke known as the *shaggy dog story*.

The shaggy dog story refers to a lengthy story, told for the purposes of humour, that often neglects the inclusion of a discernible punchline. An example of such a story is recounted in the quotation above. While a handful of studies have attempted to categorise and index the shaggy dog story (see Partridge 1953; Brunvand 1963; Utley 1971–1973), the shaggy dog story has been relegated to a side note in more recent research (see Cohen 1999; Levinson 2002). As a result, there remains scant research focusing on this particular type of joke. Lexicographer Eric Partridge's 1953 book on the subject remains distinct in this regard and in the following section, I will expound upon his and others' analyses of the shaggy dog story.

After I explore the theoretical landscape of the shaggy dog story, I will offer a close examination of the various ways in which *Cooks* adheres to the principles of shaggy dog story, which I will argue is inherently an *affectively temporal* type of joke. That is to say, it is

a type of joke whose humour, at least in some ways, stems from its temporal nature, in this case, its long duration and use of repetition. In my view, *Cooks* represents a joke about temporal expectations, that is, the ways in which we expect time to be allocated to opening credit sequences of American sitcoms from a bygone era (more on that later).

8.1 The Shaggy Dog Story

According to Partridge, the shaggy dog story was invented – or perhaps 'acknowledged' is more appropriate – in the 1930s (presumably in the United States) and experienced a sharp rise in popularity in the 1940s at dinner parties, where witty socialites would impress their friends by sharing the 'latest "shaggy dog"' (Partridge 1953: 13). In his comparison between urban and rural jokes and joke-telling practices, folklorist and linguist Francis Lee Utley categorised the shaggy dog story as an urban joke that challenged the view that urban jokes always have a distinct punchline (1971–1973: 348–350). He notes, 'the point about the shaggy dog story is that it minimizes [the] final point, and presumably both the brevity and the punch-line therefore suffer' (1971–1973: 348).

Following Partridge, American folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand conducted a thorough examination of the of the shaggy dog story, categorising over two hundred types and subtypes of the genre. Commenting on Partridge's conclusions, Brunvand writes, 'The characters in ordinary shaggy dog stories do not respond to the fantastic things happening around them, but to the commonplace things going on simultaneously' (1963: 43). It's important to note that for Brunvand, the shaggy dog story always involves deception. He remarks, 'Every shaggy dog story is essentially a trick which is pulled on the listener after he has endured a drawn-out, ridiculous, seemingly pointless narrative' (1963: 43). Whereas Utley views the shaggy dog story more as 'a reversal of technique characteristic of art based

on an audience trained to the technique, and hence surprised by the reversal' (1971–1973: 349).

Utley's observation speaks to the notion of conventionalised artistic practices where certain artistic conventions come into play and dominate for whatever reason, causing the audience to react whenever the convention is challenged or broken. This in particular relates to my discussion in Chapter Seven of an episode of *Family Guy* (1999–present) entitled 'Wasted Talent', where Peter Griffin (voiced by Seth MacFarlane) hurts his knee and then sits in agony for an exceedingly long duration seething in pain. In the *Family Guy* example, as I explained, the convention of snappy editing or editing for brevity in a sitcom is challenged, causing the viewer to have an emotional reaction (i.e. laugh) based on the particular timing of the scene. The extract from 'Wasted Talent' has the characteristics of a shaggy dog story because, in my view, it is pointlessly long and drawn out, but more importantly its conclusion – and by extension precisely *when* it concludes, whether it be seven seconds, ten, or even more – is seemingly inconsequential; the point of the joke is that the action seems to be taking too long and to my mind it is not evident what an extra three or four seconds would add or take away from the joke. That is the say, the joke concerns the incongruous presentation of the shot duration compared with what we were expecting. Moreover, the scene ends with seemingly no point to it. The fact that Peter hurt his knee never comes up in the story again and so the incident remains utterly inconsequential to the rest of the narrative.

Having analysed hundreds of examples, Partridge concludes that apart from the fact that they involve a meandering story that seemingly lacks a punchline, the fundamental feature that most shaggy dog stories share is a deep understanding about the nature of its subject. In addition, according to Partridge, most shaggy dog stories are relatively clean

insofar as they typically lack references to lewd behaviour and coarse language.[135] In Partridge's assessment, the shaggy dog story is

> usually told in a leisurely manner…inconsequent and, in some instances, absurd. The final touch – a sudden and unexpected conclusion – contains a striking non sequitur that, in the purest form of the genre, is psychological, the merely logical non sequitur being rare. In addition to being either humorous or witty or, indeed, both, the 'shaggy dog' is, with very rare exceptions, notably clean. Moreover, it shows a warm appreciation and a deep understanding, not only of human nature but also of quadrupeds and of even humbler forms of life. It is, I think, this warm humanity which accounts for the popularity and the long life of this rather odd, yet unaffected and unpretentious form of literary art. (1953: 104)

In comparison to the absurd audio-visual artwork under examination here, this characterisation may – at first – seem a bit odd, but as my analysis in the final section of this chapter will reveal, this description fits fairly well with *Cooks*.

Ted Cohen views shaggy dog stories as inherently self-reflexive, defining them as 'stories that most conspicuously play upon joke-telling itself' (Cohen 1999: 7). Of the prototypical example cited above, Cohen compares the inherent self-reflexivity of the shaggy dog story to the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, commenting:

> If this is a joke, then it is a joke in the way in which certain works of Dada and Neo-Dada are art. They play upon a presumed background known to the audience, namely the background of normal joke-telling or art-exhibiting. Thus oriented, the audience approaches this item with expectations that are either simply disappointed or met in an utterly unexpected manner. Thus John Cage's 'Four minutes, 33 seconds' is given to an audience expecting to hear audible musical events, and the audience hears no traditional music. The story about the shaggy dog is given to people listening to the narrative and expecting it to culminate in a punch line of a certain kind. (Ted Cohen 1999: 7–8)

Therefore, the shaggy dog story plays upon genre conventions of how jokes are told. Cohen's comparison to John Cage's song '4 minutes, 33 seconds' in which the orchestra is instructed to sit in silence without touching their instruments is an apt example for the kind of self-reflexive, convention-breaking incongruity characteristic of the shaggy dog story. For one thing, Cage's song forces the audience to experience and become aware of duration in a way

that most songs do not. During this long stretch of time, the audience has time to reflect on the artform in a way that is generally not encouraged in most auditory or audio-visual artwork, furnishing us with further evidence of the insights that can be obtained by comparing the temporal qualities that both music and film share, discussed in Chapter Two. In addition, I can imagine that sitting through a live rendition of the song would bring on varied and mixed emotions in the audience ranging from amusement to anger and embarrassment, which are representative of the kinds of emotions that *Cooks* produces as well.

Just as the above example from *Family Guy* was meant to illustrate, the joke-teller assumes her audience is familiar with the conventional way a joke is told, which typically includes a setup, where some relevant information is given that causes the listener to generate expectations about how the joke will conclude, followed by a snappy punchline, where the listener's expectations are subverted. The shaggy dog story breaks normal joke-telling conventions by offering up irrelevant information about the circumstances surrounding the main points of the story, often following tangents, and culminates in a pointless, often absurd ending that might not even be considered a punchline. It's also a good deal longer than the conventional jokes that it mimics. In other words, it takes a lot of time to tell a shaggy dog story because one must embellish the attributes of the dog (or whatever subject stands in for the dog) in order to sufficiently build up the expectations of the listener, who will, it is assumed, only be disappointed upon hearing the conclusion that lacks a punchline.

Therefore, the shaggy dog story may be thought of as a 'meta-joke' or a 'joke about jokes' similar to the infamous joke that begins with 'Why did the chicken cross the road?' The setup of this particular joke plays on the genre conventions of the question-answer joke and subverts those expectations by offering an obvious, if not banal, answer in lieu of a snappy punchline. 'To get to the other side' is hardly surprising, but certainly may be thought

of as snappy since it doesn't take that long to say and is meant to be obvious to the listener. What the chicken-crossing joke and the shaggy dog story share is that they both *intend* to disappoint – and, perhaps paradoxically, amuse – their audience, which, in my view, seems to echo Crouch's suspicion cited above that *Cooks* 'might not even be exactly funny at all' (2014: n.p.).

Cohen emphasises the importance that appreciation plays when experiencing jokes (or indeed any artistic practice), asserting that it is possible to understand that something is supposed to be funny without actually finding it funny yourself. For Cohen, finding something genuinely funny is generally tied to laughter, so not laughing at a joke or having no humour-affirming physical response (such as cracking a smile) would be evidence that you did not find something funny.[136] Cohen argues that '[t]here is a difference between finding the funniness and sensing or feeling the funniness' (1997: 314). Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard (1997) would seem to agree. They write:

> One may understand a joke even if one is not amused by it; one may even think it is a good joke. But appreciating something, whether it is a joke, or a film, or a new socket wrench seems to require not merely understanding but involvement: using it, even imagining using it, in ways that enable one to experience, that is, appreciate, how good (or bad) it is. (Feagin and Maynard 1997: 7–8)

The fact that *Cooks* not only received praise, but also a good deal of criticism as well as analytical scrutiny in relation to its identity as a viral video reveals that different audiences were engaging with the video in very different ways, indicating that some viewers might have 'understood' why it was funny, but ultimately lacked the necessary background to appreciate it, presumably, as the filmmakers intended.

According to Cohen (1997; 1999), some jokes are conditional, meaning they either work (or don't work as the case may be) according to whether or not a set of conditions are met. Cohen argues that conditional jokes require 'a special background in the audience' (1997: 321). He continues that for conditional jokes, 'the requirement of a special

background is not stated explicitly. The audience discovers that and it also discovers that it can supply what's needed. It is further aware that not everyone can supply the background' (1997: 321). Yet based on what I would characterise as most of the attention directed at the video, it seems evident that *Cooks* 'went viral' as it were not simply because of its absurdity, but rather because many people find it genuinely funny.

In fact, as a video that was broadcast on Adult Swim, a programming block that specialises in cartoons for adults, the fact that *Cooks* intends to incite humour is undeniable, but whether it achieves this or not is, I would argue, a matter for the critic or the individual appreciating the work. Moreover, if it did not incite humour, then it would have been unlikely that the video would have reached over a million views in the first day of its publication to YouTube and subsequently garnered little media attention. That is not to say that all works must meet their intentions in order to garner popular attention. Notorious examples of low-budget films such as *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003) and *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (James Nguyen, 2010) represent paradigmatic cases of intense popularity due largely to a complete failure to meet their intentions. *The Room* was initially billed as a tragic love story, while *Birdemic* boasted spectacular special effects and thrilling action scenes. Neither films had, at the start, been intended as comedies and yet both have been hailed as unintentional comic masterpieces and cult classics subsequent to their releases. The celebration of these films – as comedies – did not occur upon their debut as it did for *Cooks*. Rather, the unintentional comic appeal of *The Room* and *Birdemic* was recognised later.

The humour that audiences derive from the class of films that *The Room* and *Birdemic* represent, which might be called 'unintentional comedies', was not originally intended by the authors during the filmmaking process, but instead *discovered* during the exhibition process, when audiences were found to laugh (rather than be thrilled, scared, or riveted) by the action on screen. So the class of 'unintentional comedies' such as *The Room* and *Birdemic* are

successful as comedies in part *because* they are unsuccessful as a 'tragic love story' and an action sci-fi film respectively. On the contrary, *Cooks* was intended to be absurd and humorous, and I maintain that its popularity is mostly due to the fact that it meets those intentions for a particular audience. Assuming that *Cooks* does in fact appeal as a humorous audio-visual artwork for a particular audience that comes to the work with the relevant background, we are left with the question: what's the relevant background? In other words, for those who find it humorous, *what's so funny about Cooks?*

8.2 A Parody of the American Television Opening Credit Sequence

In my view, an understanding of the genres, character types, and direct references to previous television shows plays a crucial role in appreciating the humour of *Cooks*. Each genre only appears for approximately one minute, so in that short amount of time, the viewer must have ascertained the type of genre it is before the video moves on to the next one and in many cases, *Cooks* achieves this within the first few seconds. As I will illustrate, the likeness to actual television shows is readily apparent to the viewer. In the following, I will examine four immediately recognisable tropes that *Cooks* shares with the American television sitcoms it parodies, including: the inclusion of a shot of the city skyline in which the show is set, the title font, the pose of each actor while their name is displayed in the lower-third portion of the frame, and the character of the soundtrack.

The opening credit sequence of *Cooks* starts out with an establishing shot of the cityscape that depicts the home of the television family. This type of musical introduction or opening credit sequence (also referred to as 'opening credits' or 'intro') was typical of American television of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, and characterises many hit television shows including family-oriented sitcoms such as *Full House* (created by Jeff Franklin, 1987–1995), *Family Matters* (created by William Bickley and Michael Warren, 1989–1998), and *Step by*

Step (created by William Bickley and Michael Warren, 1991–98). Like many television shows of that era, the opening shot in *Cooks* depicts a typical city skyline, which happens to be Atlanta, Georgia, the home of Williams Street Productions. The opening shot of *Cooks* closely resembles the opening shot from *Family Matters*, featuring the recognisable Chicago skyline (see Figures 8.1a–8.1b).

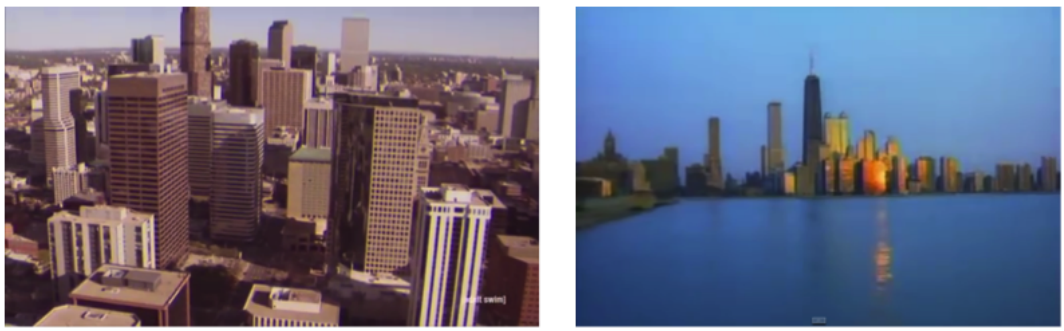
From the shot of the skyline, the video cuts to another establishing shot, this time featuring a typical suburban American home complete with sprinkler-soaked grass. The *Too Many Cooks* logo title appears overlaid in a blocky, yellow, embossed chyron (i.e. an electronic title caption) reminiscent of the television series *Family Matters*, *Full House*, and *Step by Step* (see Figures 8.2a–8.2d).

One-by-one, characters are introduced in the setting of the family home, while the actors' names appear in embossed, yellow chyrons on the lower-third portion of the frame. Each character in the family is depicted in a typical space within the Cook household: a home office, a child's bedroom, a kitchen, and so forth. With the introduction of each new cast member, the actor momentarily breaks character, turns towards the fourth wall and smiles as his or her name appears on screen, which most closely resembles the introduction to the television series *Family Matters* (see Figures 8.3a–8.3b).

In an interview, Casper Kelly admitted to watching between twenty and thirty television shows for inspiration. For Kelly, *Family Matters* represents a kind of 'average' of all television sitcoms from that era (Suzdaltsev 2014: n.p.). It seems fairly evident that the resemblance to the well-established family-oriented sitcom is clear. Additionally, the accompanying theme song also titled *Too Many Cooks* is reminiscent of similar television shows that feature songs with repetitive, upbeat, family-oriented lyrics, which often recite the title of the show in the chorus. The theme songs to *Full House*, *Family Matters*, and *Step by Step* were all written by Jesse Frederick and Bennett Salvay and they share several

characteristics such as a male dominated, somewhat raspy vocal track performed by Frederick. Composed by Shawn Coleman and Michael Kohler and performed by Coleman and Cheryl Rogers, the theme song ‘Too Many Cooks’ features a duet between a female and a male singer reciting the joys of familial domesticity. Coleman’s voice has a somewhat raspy timbre and is similar in pitch to Frederick’s voice in the actual television theme songs it emulates.

Overall, it seems likely that *Cooks* would be immediately recognisable to anyone familiar with American sitcoms from a certain period in time. In my view, the immediacy of recognition of the four aspects detailed above aids in the viewer’s appreciation of *Cooks* as a parody of television sitcoms from a bygone era. Hence, the speed at which the filmmakers are able to evoke such recognition in the viewer helps the viewer appreciate *Cooks*’s humour. To be sure, some of the humour from *Cooks* stems from the fact that it aptly parodies certain American sitcoms or other genres, but it is also situated in the place where the video diverges from them. The humour of *Cooks* is not merely parody because, in a new and novel way, it takes on the structure of what I will call a ‘cinematic shaggy dog story’ because it shares the characteristics apparent in the shaggy dog story outlined in the section above.



Figures 8.1a–8.1b. Right to left: a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the skyline of Atlanta, Georgia in *Too Many Cooks* (2014) and a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the skyline of Chicago in *Family Matters* (1989–1998). Both opening credit sequences opening up on their respective city skylines.



Figures 8.2a–8.2d. Clockwise starting at the top right: title cards of *Too Many Cooks* (2014); *Family Matters* (1989–1998); *Step by Step* (1991–1998); and *Full House* (1987–1995). Just like typical sitcoms of the 80s and 90s, *Cooks* opens on a suburban family setting. The font of *Cooks* seems to imitate the yellow font from shows like *Family Matters* and *Step by Step* and the hand-drawn scrawl style of the *Full House* font.



Figures 8.3a–8.3b. *Too Many Cooks* (2014) and *Family Matters* (1989–1998). Both shows begin by naming the starring actor who plays the quintessential 'TV dad'.

8.3 *Too Many Cooks* as a Cinematic Shaggy Dog Story

As a parody video, *Cooks* stretches the limit of anticipated running time duration and repetition of events, sequences, music, and other stylistic elements including mise-en-scène, editing, and cinematography. First resembling a family sitcom set in the home, the video changes settings several times over, tallying at least nine distinct television and film genres including: a family sitcom, an office sitcom, a police drama, a military themed cartoon, a

primetime soap opera in the vein of a teen 'slasher' film, a superhero television show, a crime drama, a science fiction show, and a medical drama.

In my view, *Cooks* shares the characteristics of a shaggy dog story in the following ways: (1) *Cooks* is longer than expected, i.e. the video's eleven-minute running time surpasses the average length of American sitcom introductory credit sequences by approximately five hundred percent; (2) *Cooks* is inconsequential and absurd, i.e. to search for meaning in its content or subtext would be a fruitless endeavour; (3) *Cooks* concludes with a sudden, unexpected ending that culminates in the 'TV dad' entering the front door of the family abode only to be cut off before he finishes his quintessential line, 'Hi, honey. I'm home'; (4) for the most part, *Cooks* may be thought of as 'clean' in that the limited nudity and violence are kept within acceptable American television-broadcast standards and may even be characterised as 'cartoonish' or 'non-provoking'; (5) although absurd, *Cooks* reveals a deep understanding of the nature of opening credit sequences, but more than that, it demonstrates a deep understanding of American television and American culture more broadly. In the next few paragraphs, I will outline the five characteristics that help frame *Cooks* as a shaggy dog story.

(1) An Extended Running Time

Traditionally, opening credit sequences or 'intros' of American sitcoms typically run between one and two minutes, so as to accommodate a roughly twenty-two to twenty-four-minute show with room for four to six minutes of commercials in a half-hour time-slot on broadcast television. Nearly all of *Cooks*' eleven-minute running time is dedicated to the opening credits, so it goes without saying that the intro to *Cooks* is perceived to be abnormally long. The characteristic of an abnormally long running time represents the first indication that *Cooks* works like a shaggy dog story because it runs the risk of being boring or monotonous. *Cooks* sidesteps the issue of monotony by including several false endings; just when the

spectator thinks the sequence has concluded, a new refrain is added. It also maintains attention by shifting from one genre to another, layering new cast members on top of those already introduced and seamlessly filing them into the, by now abundant, Cook family.

The musical introduction seems to wrap up for the first time around the one-minute mark when the 'TV dad' presses the automatic button on a camera (Figure 8.4a), hastily jumps into the picture with the rest of his family on the sofa, but fails to seat himself before the picture freezes mid-movement (Figure 8.4b). As if nodding to the fact that the family photo was flawed the first-time around, and in need of a re-take, the song picks up again after a beat and more characters are added to the cast's line up.

The repetitive lyrics of the theme song of *Cooks* complement the repetitive camera angles, camera movement, style of acting, and overall repetitive look and feel of the piece. As a parody of the sitcoms that came before it, it is itself a repetition, another rendition of a familiar story. Moreover, another element in the parody's success in generating humour lies in its breaking of the expectation that the song will end soon, an expectation deriving from the narrative schema associated with the length of television intros. Savvy viewers might, at this point, begin to think something's off.



Figures 8.4a–8.4b. *Too Many Cooks* (2014). The 'TV dad' tries to take a family photo by setting the camera with a short delay. Unfortunately, he's too late in seating himself. The figure on the right is representative of a freeze-frame in the video.

(2) Inconsequentiality and/or Absurdity

About one and a half minutes into *Cooks*, an anthropomorphic cat puppet called 'Smarf' is introduced, which is reminiscent of the television series *ALF* (created by Paul Fusco and Tom

Patchett, 1986–1990) (Figures 8.5a–8.5b) and the setting quickly transitions into what appears to be a cooking show where four cooks in chef's uniforms are introduced in shots which zoom from long to medium framings (Figures 8.6a–8.6d) before returning inexplicably back to the household setting.

The video then jumps from the household to an office setting, where more characters are introduced and layered on top of the rest of the cast. In a stunningly executed 360° rotating pan, the heretofore predominantly all-white family begins to share a meal, resembling the intro to *Roseanne* (created by Matt Williams, 1988–97) (see Figures 8.7a–8.7b). Midway through the seamless 'turn-table' shot, the race of the family changes from white to black before, inexplicably, introducing a shirtless fireman holding a plate of chicken nuggets, pointing towards the transition from family sitcom to police drama marked by a split screen (Figures 8.8a–8.8n), now following in the vein of *Hill Street Blues* (created by Steven Bochco and Michael Kozoll, 1981–1987) or *21 Jump Street* (created by Patrick Hasburgh and Stephen J. Cannell, 1987–1991).

At this juncture, the tone of the music becomes more aggressive in comparison to the jovial nature of the song thus far. During the police drama sequence, the video shifts from live action photography into an animated cartoon rendered in the likeness of *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero* (developed by Ron Friedman, 1985–1986) (see Figures 8.9a–8.9b). It makes the transition from live action photography to animation in a closeup of a pie sitting on a police officer's desk, which it credits as Lars Von Trier (Figures 8.10a–8.10b). The video continues to shift genres multiple times over, adding more and more people to its abundant cast. In total, the video lists sixty-six cast members some more than once. In the previous chapter, I discussed this kind of humour in terms of *perceived spatio-temporal incongruity*, which describes a kind of perceived incongruity related to characters appearing in places at times that under the normal constraints of physics would be impossible.





Figures 8.5a–8.5b (a) *Too Many Cooks* (2014); (b) *ALF* (1986–1990). The character Smarf in *Cooks* resembles the puppet in *Alf*.









Figures 8.6a–8.6d *Too Many Cooks* (2014). Four actual cooks presented in succession.





Figures 8.7a–8.7b (a) *Too Many Cooks* (2014); (b) *Roseanne* (1988–1997).



Figures 8.8a–8.8n *Too Many Cooks* (2014) imitates the 'turn-table' pan style of the photography in *Roseanne* (1988–1997). except in *Cooks*, new characters replace previous ones as the camera twists around and around the table. The sequence concludes in a split screen (l) and the genre transitions into a police drama (m–n).



Figures 8.9a–8.9b (a) Animation design in *Too Many Cooks* (2014) resembles that of (b) *G.I. Joe* (1985–1986).



Figures 8.10a–8.10b *Too Many Cooks* (2014). At the moment Lars Von Trier is credited as 'Pie', the video transitions from live action photography to animation resembling *G.I. Joe* (1985–1986).

(3) Sudden Conclusions or Non Sequiturs

As the *Cooks* intro rounds to a close, the 'show' opens amid what appears to be the entire sixty-six-member cast all crowded into the living room of the Cook household, the original TV dad enters through the front door, begins the familiar lines, 'Honey, I'm ho—' and is immediately cut off in freeze frame while a yellow chyron fades-in that reads, 'To be continued…'. The closing credit sequence, a scrolling list of the crew and sixty-six cast members, then scrolls past the screen at breakneck speed before concluding after eleven minutes and eleven seconds. *Cooks* is not *just* an opening title sequence, but an eleven-minute episode of an imaginary sitcom that includes a conventional sitcom opening gesture, an 'episode' such as it is, and closing credits. After ten minutes and fifty seconds, the opening credits finally end and the 'story' supposedly begins, but not before shutting down and moving on to the closing credits. Thus, comic amusement is derived in the incongruous proportionality of the presentation overall. A very long beginning, followed by a very short middle, and a somewhat short ending. Chapter Six explored the effects of the *comic interruption* in the film *Hot Rod* (Akiva Schaffer, 2007). In *Hot Rod*, the comic interruptions usually culminated in an act of violence involving Rod (Andy Samberg) being hit by a vehicle or crashing his moped. The comic interruption in *Cooks* works in a similar way, albeit under less violent circumstances. In *Cooks*, the comic interruption works by leading us to believe that the action of the father's speech will continue, when in fact it gets cut off.[137]

(4) Cleanliness (Relatively Speaking)

In the first part of this chapter, I briefly indicated that *Cooks* may be thought of as 'clean' based on the fact that it appeared on an American cable television network (albeit at four o'clock in the morning when presumably no children would see it). *Cooks* may be thought of as relatively clean for a number of other reasons as well. For starters, it gently pokes fun at the institution of marriage by the casual introduction of polyamorous couples, which is played for comedy rather than drama (Figure 8.11a). Furthermore, although *Cooks* contains some nudity, this is kept within broadcast regulatory norms. The two instances when nudity is portrayed, the woman covers her breasts with her arm (Figures 8.11b–8.11c). Finally, although *Cooks* contains some violent scenes, the horror imagery and gore are portrayed as inconsequential, unrealistic, and cartoony (Figures 8.11d8.11f) with the possible exception of the death scene of Smarf, who towards the end of the video is pictured dragging himself across the kitchen floor leaving behind a trail of blood towards what appears to be a red 'reset' button (Figure 8.11g). I would argue, however, that even this instance might bear comedic fruit. As William Paul (1994) has discussed in his discussion of the 'gross-out' comedy, even what disgusts us can bear comic fruit so to speak.



Figures 8.11a–8.11g *Too Many Cooks* (2014). The more risqué aspects are played for comedy.

(5) A Deep Understanding of the Nature of Its Subject

At various points, *Cooks* makes direct reference or plays homage to several recognisable television shows including the aforementioned *Rosanne* (Figures 8.7a–8.7b), *G.I. Joe*

(Figures 8.9a–8.9b), prime-time soap operas including *Dallas* (created by David Jacobs, 1978–1991) and *Dynasty* (created by Richard Shapiro and Esther Shapiro, 1981–1989), the theme song to *Law & Order* (created by Dick Wolf, 1990–2010), the transition music of *Seinfeld* (created by Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld, 1989–1998), and the infamous spin portrayed in *Wonder Woman* (developed by Douglas S. Cramer and Stanley Ralph Ross, 1975–1979) that allowed Diana Prince (Lynda Carter) to transform herself into the persona of Wonder Woman (see Figures 8.12a–8.12d). Although it is clearly poking fun of the medium, *Cooks* demonstrates a deep understanding and appreciation for its subject of parody. It demonstrates that it knows the subject of American sitcoms very well, in particular the opening credit sequences that became so characteristic of the era. Arguably, the opening credit sequence – at least this incarnation of it – is to a large extent an artefact of a bygone era when one could not simply 'mouse over' the screen to check the name of an actor in a specific scene, as current technology in certain streaming video websites such as Amazon Prime allow.

Additionally, it's worth mentioning again that the television shows that *Cooks* is parodying are from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. At the time of writing this chapter, *Wonder Woman* aired forty-four years ago, and *Family Matters* aired thirty years ago. In that pre-DVR (digital video recorder) era of American television, viewers could not simply 'fast-forward' through the intro, they actually had to endure them every week, which is perhaps the point – or at least one of the points – of *Cooks*' extended duration.








Figures 8.12a–8.12d *Too Many Cooks* (2014). Special effect of woman spinning around in a circle to change into her superhero costume. *Wonder Woman* (1975–1979). Special effect of Diana Prince (Lynda Carter) spinning to become Wonder Woman.

Conclusion

In my view, both the shaggy dog story and *Cooks* are ultimately joking about themselves. They are, in other words, self-reflexive. More than that, they are self-reflexive about their own temporal nature. Beyond subverting our expectations about the conventions of a joke, which the shaggy dog story does so well, or subverting our expectations about the length and character of the television intro, they subvert our expectations of timing (and by that I just mean, the durations and durational relations we expect them to have). Moreover, using time as a subject for comedy may be characterised as self-reflexive in the sense that an artwork draws attention to its own creation. In comedy, this would presumably be done for the purposes of humour. Hence, jokes or gags that refer to cinematic comedy as inherently temporal may be thought of as self-reflexive in nature. Carroll frames this level of self-reflexivity in comedy a 'meta-joke':

> Some jokes are called meta-jokes because they call attention to the conventions of joke-telling by deviating from them. The joke – Why did the chicken cross the road?/To get to the other side – is a meta-joke, because it violates while also revealing our conventional expectations about jokes, namely that they possess surprising and informative punchlines (Giora 1991). That chickens cross roads to get to the other side is hardly informative; being told that they do so is surprising only as the conclusion of a joke. Likewise, non sequiturs are incongruous, because they subvert our expectations that conversations and stories will be comprised of parts that are coherently linked. (2010: 400)[138]

What do we get by framing *Cooks* as a shaggy story? As noted in Chapter Five, narrative time pressure and the *ticking clock* device helps generate suspense, fear, and anxiety. Chapter Five elaborates on how suspense and related emotions such as fear and anxiety can be generated through *narrative time pressure* and the *ticking clock* device. In much the same way, the concept of time itself may be dramatized for comedic purposes. In his discussion of Jacques Tati's *Les vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, André Bazin writes, 'Never before has time been the raw material and almost the subject itself of a film to the extent that it is here' (2009: 41). As an artwork about time – moreover a comedic artwork about time – I share a similar sentiment for *Cooks*. In my view given the right cultural context, *Cooks* functions as both an amalgamation of what came before it and an extrapolation for what is to come.

A common occurrence of using time for comedic purposes includes the repetition of certain jokes or gags, referred to in the parlance of comedy writers as a 'call back', defined in Chapter Seven as a technique of repeating an action or bit of dialogue for comedic purposes. The call back works when it is perceived as incongruous with the current state of affairs within a scene.

I argued that *Cooks* represents a kind of televisual shaggy dog story that plays off of the fact that viewers expect the opening credit sequence of a sitcom to last only two or three minutes. Following Partridge (1953)'s examination of the type of joke as a dinner party phenomenon, I teased out five aspects that *Cooks* shares with the shaggy dog story: (1) an extended running time; (2) inconsequentiality and/or absurdity; (3) a sudden, unexpected conclusion or non-sequitur; (4) cleanliness (i.e. the joke is relatively family-friendly); and (5) a deep understanding of the nature of its subject. Although extremely repetitive, the various twists and turns in the genre that the video takes throughout its eleven-minute run-time serve to maintain interest, but ultimately *Too Many Cooks* is meant to try the audience's patience.

Its elongated running time is so unbelievable and ludicrous that just when the joke starts to get old, it refreshes itself, and starts the process all over again.

Conclusion

Part of the challenge when writing about time is knowing when to stop. As a subject for scholarly pursuit, it's massive. After writing an entire dissertation about it, I still feel as though I have only uncovered the tip of the iceberg so to speak. And that's just film time. There's still so much to consider when it comes to other moving image media; if we factored in video games and virtual reality, the prospects are endless.

As a rule, however, I tried to view the subject with a limited scope. More broadly, I wanted to know why there was a pause before the punchline of a joke. I wanted to know why we pay money to sit and wait for things to happen. A question that could be asked is *What kind of work is this?* And by that, I mean how should the present research be classified? Who's it meant for? There are a number of answers to those questions since my research could be slotted into the domains of cognitive film theory, analytic philosophy of film, and poetics of film. My work draws upon the scholarship of a wide-range of methodological approaches including cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, and analytic philosophy. It further engages with various subject-focused areas of study including genre studies, emotion studies, suspense studies, and humour studies. It adopts and adapts terminology from these disciplines too. I have identified a number of terms fit for use and fit for my purposes including affect (in the psychological sense, having to do with the emotions and the emotional response system), cognitive reward (in the neurophysiological sense, a rise in dopamine levels during knowledge-seeking), beats (in the music theorist's and screenwriter's sense, the most basic unit of time, a relational measurement by which to measure larger fragments of time), pace (in the music theorist's sense but also in a general usage, a rate of speed or tempo), and rhythm (in the music theory sense, a pattern of beats).

Using a piecemeal approach, I have tried to provide a thorough and systematic account of the ways in which time generates and enhances emotions in the film viewing experience. I attempted to give *temporal account of aesthetic suspense* and a *temporal account of humour*. I think I provided such an account for some of the ways in which time generates and enhances certain emotions. A singular contribution that my thesis makes to the wider film scholarship community and perhaps to the disciplines from which I borrow is the concept of affective timing. At its core, this thesis aimed to demonstrate the ways in which timing can be affective. That is, how timing can generate and enhance positively-valanced emotions like comic amusement (i.e. comic timing) and how it can generate and enhance negatively-valanced emotions like fear, trepidation, and dismay (i.e. suspense timing). To do this, I focused on what I considered to be the most obvious low-hanging fruit and by that, I mean the genres which seemed to be the most likely culprits for the exploitation of time as a stylistic asset in filmmaking: suspense-thriller, horror, and comedy. I chose these genres because I hadn't encountered a research project like mine before and I felt I needed to explain the basics to myself before venturing into unfamiliar territory.

Generally speaking, the corpus under examination could be very generally divided up into the genres most associated with generating negatively-valanced emotions (e.g. fear, trepidation, dismay) and positively-valanced emotions (e.g. joy, comic amusement). Aristotle's existent *Poetics*, which attempts to understand the effective devices of tragedy in drama and the epic poem, is only one half of his greater research programme that included a treatise on comedy, which is now lost. If we examine closely the current body of work produced by Noël Carroll and others following the tradition of analytic philosophy of art, we might observe a similar focal point. There's a reason why we keep coming back to the same division: Comedy and Tragedy are two sides of the same coin. We seek them out because

they engage our emotions and engaging our emotions is a pleasurable experience. An obvious question for research is then *Why?*

This thesis was meant to contribute to an answer to that question. I gave an account of the ways in which the temporal nature of film affects the emotions. Having the ability to affect the emotions, the temporal properties of film become an asset to filmmakers who seek to create effective – and affective – works of art. But there's still much to be discovered. For starters, I should mention that one of the originally planned chapters was removed from this project for logistical purposes. To give a very brief gloss, this chapter concerned the definition of film as a temporal artform. It discussed the ways in which the study of cinematic time contributed to the ongoing film-as-philosophy debate. I came down on the side that film could do philosophy, but only insofar that it could philosophise about itself.

In addition to more philosophical and argumentative questions, there are a fair amount of scientific and/or empirical questions that could be asked in light of the advancements made in the thesis. For instance, I briefly mentioned in Chapter Five that an empirical analysis could be undertaken with respect to the recent trends in startle cinema but the same could be said for suspense-thriller and horrors in general (e.g. does it really matter how long we have to wait for the monster to pop out of the closet? What if we altered the length of time by a few milliseconds?). A dedicated quantitative analysis using a large corpus might provide hard evidence for some of the conjectures I make as well. Likewise, empirical studies could be made of the chapters in Part III as well (e.g. do jokes really work better when they contain a certain length of dramatic beat? What happens if we alter that beat by a few miliseconds?).

In addition, my analysis of affective timing hints at the fact that films can not only have good timing (i.e. effective timing; timing that does its job) but also bad timing (i.e. ineffective timing; timing that fails). I think a fruitful discussion could be made from comparing films with bad timing, for instance *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (James Nguyen,

2010) and *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003) might make apt examples of timing that fails on both artistic and affective grounds. Another possible area for future research has to do with the relationship between horror timing and humour timing, which I only briefly discussed in relation to Samuel Jackson's iconic death scene in *Deep Blue Sea* (Renny Harlin, 1999) in Chapter Six. If there is more to be said on this topic, I suspect current psychological and neurophysiological research could provide answers. Silvan Tomkins, one of the first psychologists to seriously study affect, certainly seemed to think so.

Finally, I see how my research might feed into a larger programme about the cognition of time. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which our brains perceive time as we age. Currently, neurophysiological research suggests that as we age, our brains have a hard time keeping up with the daily quotidian. I wonder if that affects one's ability to enjoy television, which is most certainly a common pastime for aging adults. If one is suffering from hearing loss, they can turn on subtitles, but what if they also can't keep up with the pace of the images and dialogue written on the screen? Would slowing down the moving images help? I think it's possible that people suffering from hearing loss and cognitive decline might benefit from an appropriate implementation of audio-visual studies addressing their cognitive needs.

As this list demonstrates, investigating the temporal nature of the moving image can quickly lead into a variety of paths for those interested in the perception, cognition, and emotion generated through the temporal features of the artform. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the study of time and the moving image is not limited to any one approach, methodology, or paradigm, and that there exists a plethora of literature tackling these various questions.

It would have been impossible to satisfactorily address all of these questions in a single dissertation. Therefore, the central question of this thesis is reserved to a careful

examination of the ways in which perceptible moments in time in relation to other perceptible moments in time – which broadly encapsulates the concept of cinematic timing – affect the emotions. In other words, this dissertation analyses the affective properties of the temporal relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the soundtrack, what I call affective timing. I began this introduction with a complaint that when writing about this topic, it's difficult to know when to stop. Well, it's time.

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Filmography

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21 Jump Street. 1987–1991. Created by Patrick Hasburgh and Stephen J. Cannell. USA: LBS Communications and 20th Television. [TV series].

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Notes

Introduction

1. In the most general terms, the 'moving image' refers not just to film and cinema but to television and video as well. While I recognise that each of these terms has important differences, for the sake of brevity, throughout this dissertation, I will be generalising cinema, television, and video as 'film' or 'moving images' since when it comes to the study of time, they all share the same temporal attributes.

2. Additionally, in a review of the subject of time perception entitled 'Time perception mechanisms at central nervous system,' R. Fontes et al write, 'The perception of time is the sum of stimuli associated with cognitive processes and environmental changes. Thus, the perception of time requires a complex neural mechanism and may be changed by emotional state, level of attention, memory and diseases' (2016: 4).

3. Throughout, I will use 'affect' in the sense that psychologists and analytic-cognitivists use the term (i.e. akin to emotion) and not in the sense that individuals following the tradition of existential phenomenology or Deleuzian phenomenology use the term. This distinction will become important in Chapter One where I assess alternative approaches to the subject of cinematic temporality.

For an analytic-cognitivist usage, Carl Plantinga (2009) provides a helpful distinction between emotions and affects based on how they are cognitively processed. In Plantinga's 'moderate cognitive–perceptual' theory, affects describe the 'simple, automatic responses' such as the startle response (discussed at length in Chapter Five) while emotions require 'more complex construals' such as anger or jealousy (2009: 59). According to Plantinga, 'Emotions are states of minds that are intentional' (2009: 59). See also Plantinga (2013).

4. I'll return to Currie's (1995) conceptualisation of cinematic temporality in Chapter One.

5. For a thorough account of 'slow cinema' see Emre Çağlayan (2018).

6. See also Carroll (2007) on 'narrative closure'.

7. Additionally, because the dissertation is predominately concerned with the emotions and time, we run the risk of confusion: what might be considered 'effective timing' in film might also considered 'affective timing' since it succeeds in generating emotion. This is because one of the main goals of film is typically to generate or enhance certain emotional effects and if a film (or a cinematic device) succeeds in generating its targeted emotions, we call that film (or cinematic device) 'effective', meaning 'does the job it intended'. Of course, timing can be 'effective' in other ways. For example, timing that aids in the comprehension of some narrative plot point may be thought of as 'effective', but that does not necessarily have anything to do with the generation or enhancement of emotions. So, to make this distinction clear, I will use 'affective timing' as timing that succeeds in generating emotions,

hence ‘affective timing’ is also ‘effective timing’. In sum, since films tend to aim for the generation of emotions, all ‘affective timing’ may be thought of as ‘effective timing’, but not all ‘effective timing’ is ‘affective timing’.

8. Smith (2017) uses ‘phenomenology’ in the broad sense; he’s not specifically indicating the philosophical tradition.

Chapter One: Cinematic Time and Timing

9. Many of these authors grapple with the question of whether or not film can be said to have a ‘tense’ in the same way that language does (i.e. past, present, and future). Since my research is focused on the generation of emotion through cinematic timing, sketching out a view to the question of film tense falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I mention it here to demonstrate again that the questions about film’s temporality can be vast and far reaching. In any case, I wish to delimit my argument to the fact that film is a temporal art in order to make the case that a fine-grained analysis of the emotional effects of the durations and durational relations between and among images, sounds, actions, and events on screen and in the sound track is an important, valid, and under-research area of study, which is discussed later in Chapter One.

10. Bordwell (2008) refers to this method of analysis the ‘inferential model of narration’ (2008: 93).

11. It should be noted that the term ‘affect’ has been known to cause some confusion in film studies. For an overview on the distinction between the way that analytic-cognitivists use ‘affect’, in comparison to psychoanalysts, and existential phenomenologists (in the vein of Vivian Sobchack and Julian Hanich), see Jane Stadler’s entries on ‘Affect’ and ‘Emotion’ and David Sorfa’s entry on ‘Phenomenology and Film’ in Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (2015). Stadler and Sorfa’s helpful elucidations, however, do not mention the distinction between the way that Sobchack (1992; 2004; 2009) and Hanich (2010) use ‘affect’ and the way that Deleuze and Guattari use ‘affect’, which in my understanding is related but bears important differences. According to their translator Brian Massumi, Deleuze and Guattari’s usage of ‘affect’ derives directly from their interpretation of Baruch Spinoza. I will return to this in my engagement with Matilda Mroz’s (2012) examination of time, film, and affect. In order to be as clear as possible, throughout this dissertation I tend to refrain from referring to ‘affect’ as a noun, but I do refer to timing as being ‘affective’. For now, it is key to understand that when I employ the term ‘affective’, I am employing it the way that cognitive-analytic film scholars use the term. See for instance, Noël Carroll’s (1988) *Mystifying Movies* and *The Philosophy of Horror; or Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) and Murray Smith’s (1995) *Engaging Characters*. This usage of ‘affective’ refers to something that is generally used interchangeably with the word ‘emotional’ (e.g. when I say something is ‘affective’, I mean that it is emotion-generating or emotion-enhancing. That is, ‘affective timing’ is timing that generates or enhances emotions. We will encounter examples of this throughout the dissertation: in Chapters Three through Five ‘suspense timing’ is a category of cinematic timing that generates or enhances feelings of suspense and other emotions that coincide with the generation of suspense such as fear, trepidation, and dread, while in Chapters Six through Eight ‘comic timing’ is a category of cinematic timing that generates or enhances feelings related to humour such as comic amusement). Also see note 7.

12. Also see Jerrold Levinson and Philip Alperson's (1991) essay 'What Is a Temporal Art?' as well as Meir Sternberg's section 'Represented Time and Representational Time: The Quantitative Indicator' from his book *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (1978: 14–19).

13. However, literature recorded as audiobooks or radio plays, both of which do have a fixed duration, would be considered to be temporal$_w$.

14. In the quoted passage, Bazin beautifully captures the idea that to observe time really means to observe change and film as a recorder of that change captures a thing as it changes and holds it just so, seemingly forever.

15. It's important to note that at certain points in his analysis, Bordwell conflates 'duration' with 'time' and so to avoid confusion in the final section, I will use 'time' since I use duration to mean something more literal throughout the rest of this dissertation.

16 At this juncture, Bordwell switches to 'screen time', meaning 'screen duration'. See note 14.

17 At stake is Stewart's main claim that in the period after 1995, the film medium began to veer off into different directions by way of discovering different modes of storytelling and story structure. Stewart employs the notion of 'narratography' to clarify his particular method of film analysis: 'it is the writing *on* narrative's graphic effects, either lexical or filmic or now electronic, their category of study (rather than the writing in and by them of screen effects), that the term *narratography* is meant to help focus' (2007: 22, emphasis in original).

18. For Bordwell on style, see, for starters, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (co-authored with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson (1988), *On the History of Film Style* (1997), and *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006).

19. Stewart's selection of the time period does not appear to be based on the most obvious technological shift during the 1990s: editing. Walter Murch (2001) notes that the mid-90s marked the moment in cinematic history when the balance in Hollywood editing films practices tipped from analog to digital (via the Avid).

20. Anne Rutherford (2004) makes a similar charge, claiming, 'Bordwell marginalises this affective engagement with an image: effects not affects are his focus. It is only by detaching, in the analytical moment, the frame, the light, and the mobility of camera from their inscription across the bodies of the spectator, that these techniques can be seen as formalist devices, universalised across genres and cultures, working toward a universal goal of distanciation. To focus on these stylistic similarities is to miss their differences, for modernism is not just a set of techniques, but their deployment in a particular context toward particular ends' (2004: n.p.). Although, it seems to me that Rutherford's charge that Bordwell 'marginalises' affective engagement is somewhat overstated for reasons that I discuss in the following paragraph.

21 According to Felicity J. Colman:

> Affect is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the transitional product of an encounter, specific in its ethical and lived dimensions and yet it is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset, transformation, or ghost. In its largest sense, affect

> is part of the Deleuzian project of trying-to-understand, and comprehend, and express all of the incredible, wondrous, tragic, painful, and destructive configurations of things and bodies as temporally mediated, continuous events. Deleuze uses the term 'affection' to refer to the additive processes, forces, powers, and expressions of change – the mix of affects that produce a modification or transformation in the affected body. (2005: 11)

22. See also John Mullarkey (2009), where he discusses temporality and affect in relation to his reading of Bergson.

23. Additionally, the fact that audiences have durational expectations may help to explain cinematic affect in relation to the emotion of boredom, the importance of which will become clear in Chapter Eight, where I discuss the short video *Too Many Cooks* (2014) and its mixed reception.

24. In Deleuze's own words: 'We…take the term "sign" in a completely different way from Peirce: it is a particular image that refers to a type of image, whether from the point of view of its bipolar composition, or from the point of view of its genesis' (1989: 32).

25 . The spiritualist tradition in philosophy stands in direct conflict with materialist views, which hold that everything is made up of matter and there is no separation of mind from matter. In short, the spiritualist view holds that there exists an immaterial reality that cannot be perceived by the senses. The spiritualist view holds that the mind and memory are separate from the physical material of the brain. In his analysis, Bergson conceptualises the notion of durée and its relationship with constructing memory in order to support this idea:

> The memory of a given reading is a representation, and only a representation; it is embraced in an intuition of the mind which I may lengthen or shorten at will; I assign to it any duration I please; there is nothing to prevent my grasping the whole of it instantaneously, as in one picture [i.e. image]. On the contrary, the memory of the lesson I have learnt, even if I repeat this lesson only mentally, requires a definite time, the time necessary to develop one by one, were it only in imagination, all the articulatory movements that are necessary: it is no longer a representation, it is an action. (2004: 91)

It might also be relevant to know that at one point in his career, Bergson was locked in a debate with Albert Einstein regarding the nature of and the perception of time. Roughly, Bergson's argument was against Einstein's theory that combined space and time as one 'space-time'. For Bergson, conceptualising time as intrinsically linked to space falls short of explaining the phenomenological experience of durée, which for Bergson is the result of observing change over time. For a comprehensive exposition of this debate see Jimena Canales (2015). I mention it here because I think it's interesting how the differences in these two views (Bergson and Einstein) seem to have led to such strikingly different approaches to the study of temporality in the moving image. I would describe my approach to this question to lean heavily on the evidence of psychology of time, which views time as the result of the brain's attempt to make sense of the unfolding world around it. This will be of interest in Chapter Two. Also of interest here is Khatchadourian (1961) in which he refutes Bergson's conceptualisation of time and provides his own 'ordinary' view of time.

26. Frederick W. Taylor's 'scientific management' analysed the gestures of a worker in order to optimise performance and increase productivity (Doane 2002: 5). According to Doane, 'The overall impression is of a form of mechanization of the human body that would further support the alienation of the worker' (2002: 5).

27. Later, Doane cites Thomas Elsaesser, who notes, ‘Actualities obliged the film-maker to create even as he records an event, a specific sequential or spatial logic, which becomes in some sense the event’s (intensified) abstracted representation as opposed to reproducing its extensive duration’ (Doane 2002: 144; Elsaesser 1990: 17).

28. Reflecting upon my own process of microlevel of analysis employed throughout this dissertation, I would add an observation that repeat viewings certainly did affect my personal viewing experience with regards to the generation of suspense (relevant to Chapters Three and Four), but not so with regards to the startle effect (relevant to Chapter Five). I can report that no matter how many times I viewed the ‘startle scenes’ I was affected every time without fail, which supports the assertion of psychologists that the startle effect is tied to an automatic physiological response.

29. For a comprehensive survey of the real-time effect in narrative feature-length film, see my master’s thesis ‘Fiction in Real-Time: Aesthetics, Perception, and Cognition of Real-Time Narrative Cinema’, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2012.

30. Of course, ‘aesthetically significant’ could be taken to mean a lot of things. Here, I just mean to refer to the corpuses of the authors in section three by and large gesture towards ‘art cinema’ and/or films with unconventional temporal structures.

31. It should also be noted that Feagin’s use of the term ‘images’ bears relation no relation to Deleuze’s or Bergson’s use of the term.

32. Consider for instance Norman McLaren’s *Dots* (1940), which is composed of coloured splotches on screen in sync with sound effects.

33. View the extract from *Garden State*: https://youtu.be/eKV2Dys0nOA.

34. View the extract from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: https://youtu.be/4i39Tlb7yWY.

35. In Chapter Two, I will elaborate on what I mean by ‘beat’, but now it should be taken as a pause between the action. In this case, it specifically refers to the pause between the long and slow movement of the tilt upward and the short and fast movement upward that reveals the final diploma on the ceiling. Additionally, Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight discuss the comedic effect of interruptions in terms of what I call a ‘comic interruption’.

Chapter Two: The Art of When

36. Scientists Bromberg-Martin and Hikosaka are interested in the neuronal mechanisms of voluntary behaviour. Their 2009 study, which analysed the neuromodulatory systems (in this case midbrain dopamine levels) and the behavioural preferences of rhesus macaque monkeys, suggests there is what they have called a ‘cognitive reward’ when seeking out information.

> [W]e developed a simple decision task allowing rhesus macaque monkeys to choose whether to receive advance information about the size of an upcoming water reward. We found that monkeys expressed a strong behavioral preference, preferring information to its absence and preferring to receive the information as soon as possible. Furthermore, midbrain dopamine neurons which signaled the monkey’s expectation of water rewards also signaled the expectation of advance information, in a manner that was correlated with the animal’s preference. These results show that the

> dopaminergic reward system processes both primitive and cognitive rewards, and suggest that current theories of reward-seeking must be revised to include information-seeking. (2009: 120)

The notion of the cognitive reward will arise again in Chapter Three where I discuss it in relation to betting on the right outcome when faced with suspense-generating questions in films.

37. Furthermore, just because music came first historically, I see no reason to privilege music's claim to these terms. The concepts of rhythm and timing are just as relevant to dance and poetry as they are to music. However, music theory and musicology have already generated a robust lexicon for theorising about these concepts, so it makes sense to adopt and adapt rather than formulate (whole cloth so to speak) new terms.

38. Music theory is generally created by musicians, or at least it was at the time of Eisenstein's writing. This is a point that Bordwell makes in relation to the state of academic film theory (2008: 22).

39. Roger Leenhardt's essay appears in translation as 'Cinematic Rhythm' in Richard Abel (1993: 200–05).

40. In his book *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, Jean Mitry was also opposed to the employment of the 'musical metaphor' (Kulezic-Wilson 2015: 38; See also Mitry 1998: 104–50). In his section on cinematic rhythm, within his chapter 'Rhythm and Montage', Mitry cautions a direct comparison between film and music rhythm because unlike music, which generates emotion from the rhythm of sounds, the same, apparently, cannot be said of film editing since varying the shot lengths would have no particular emotional impact on the viewer (Kulezic-Wilson 2015: 38). Likewise, in his 1986 book *Sculpting in Time*, director Andrey Tarkovsky asserts that the mere assembly or order of shots in a film is not responsible for generating cinematic rhythm (1986: 117). Tarkovsky writes, 'The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them' (1986: 117; See also Kulezic-Wilson 2015: 44).

41. Chapter Five highlights a selection of psychological studies that analyses the time perception as a factor in the generation of suspense in film viewing (de Wied 1991; de Wied, Tan, and Frijda 1992; and de Wied and Zillmann 1996).

42. Henderson also notes a relevant anecdote from Frank Capra's autobiography where the director reports that after his film *Lost Horizon* (1937) received negative reviews from preview audiences for being too long at the beginning, Capra developed something of a mantra that advised one should 'burn the first two reels' of a film in order to get the story moving a lot faster. This anecdote reveals something of the importance that tempo and pacing have when trying to appease commercial audiences, but it also indicates something important about audience expectations regarding duration: if durational expectations are not met, then audiences might feel annoyed or cheated (Henderson 1983: 8–9).

43. This form of brain damage is depicted in the film *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2001).

44. For a detailed account of the 'real-time film', see my MA dissertation, 'Fiction in Real-Time: Aesthetics, Perception, and Cognition of Real-Time Narrative Cinema'

(University of Amsterdam, 2012). Enrico Terrone follows my account of the real-time film, nothing that 'when the pictorial series abides by the real-time principle, film experience emulates ordinary perception' (2017: 336).

45. The effects of confining the plot to a limited setting such as a single house or hotel room in real-time films is discussed in Schempp (2012: 69–86). Examples of real-time films with limited settings beyond *Rope* include *12 Angry Men* (Sidney Lumet, 1957), *Secret Honor* (Robert Altman, 1984), *Tape* (Richard Linklater, 2001), *Buried* (Rodrigo Cortés, 2010), and *Carnage* (Roman Polanski, 2011).

46. One of the five styles of montage developed by Eisenstein, metric montage, is constituted by a series of 'absolute lengths' of shots that according to Eisenstein had a systematic emotional effect on viewers when edited together in specific music-metric patterns such as three-quarter-time also known as 'waltz-time' (1949: 72–73).

47. Jacobs (2015) notes the technical difficulties related to recording sound on set during the transition from silent to sync-sound filmmaking practices. These difficulties included hiding the microphone, having the characters stand near or within earshot of the microphone that was hidden within a scene, and the fact that the camera had to be ensconced in a heavy container in order to dampen its mechanical noise, which limited the range of camera angles and motion significantly. See also Bordwell, Staiger, and Thomson (1988).

48. See Bordwell (2007). In his remarks about the different kinds of art that film might be, Bordwell neglects to mention film could be a temporal art, however, the sense in which it is a temporal art may be hinted at by it being what he labels 'audio-visual art'. According to Bordwell, Eisenstein 'was fascinated by the ways in which images and music worked together, creating an idea or feeling that couldn't be expressed by either one', which is relevant to my discussion about the properties that both music and film share (2007: n.p.).

49. Another attractive feature for adopting and adapting some terminology from musicology in order to discuss the temporal nature of film is that many of these terms have evolved from the practice of making music and not the theorising or critical engagement of it after the fact. In other words, practitioners (i.e. musicians) are responsible for generating some of the terminology of music theory, and, in my view, that adds an appealing level of practicality to their employment.

50. I do not, however, mean to imply that music is never listened to in a manner similar to sitting down and watching a film (i.e. devoting one's attention to the work rather than having it on in the background, so to speak).

51. See William Bibbiani's review '"Baby Driver", I Love Your Way,' *Mandatory*, 17 October 2017. https://www.mandatory.com/culture/1229007-sxsw-2017-review-baby-driver-love-way.

52. Here, one might speculate a connection to 'offbeat comedy,' where offbeat comedy describes a type of comedy that is unusual or atypical in some way, but this may also refer to the fact that many offbeat comedies, as the name implies, literally miss a beat in the course of a sight gag or humorous scene. I will return to this notion in Part III. For now, it is important to note that the cinematic beat is a well-established convention of screenplay composition, as I discuss in the main text below.

53. For instance, in their study, ‘Unattended musical beats enhance visual processing’ experimental psychologists Nicolas Escoffier, Darren Yeo Jian Sheng, and Annett Schirmer mention beats in relation to expectations: ‘One of the mechanisms by which music may synchronize human behaviour is described by ‘dynamic attending theory’ … This theory proposes that attention is not distributed evenly in time but varies periodically according to internal ‘dynamic oscillators’. These oscillators determine an individual’s attending rhythm and thus the rate at which the expectation for or processing of external events is at peak. Importantly, the harmonic structure and temporal course of external events may automatically entrain an individual’s attending rhythm by forcing internal oscillators to synchronize with the external events. According to DAT it is this entrainment that enables listeners to predict upcoming beats of a musical piece and to prepare motor acts that fall on salient events marking the underlying musical meter’ (Escoffier, Sheng, Schirmer 2010: 12)

53. I can see that this might have relevance for the more recent questions surrounding the artistic status of screenplays and the question of whether or not screenplays can be viewed as art or an artform in its own right. See Ted Nannicelli (2011; 2013; 2016).

Chapter Three: Cinematic Suspense as a Kind of Betting

55. See also Daniel Dennett’s *Consciousness Explained* (1991: 177) and Andy Clark’s (2013) ‘Whatever next? Predictive brains, situated agents, and the future of cognitive science’.

56. Buonomano adds that ‘Over hundreds of millions of years animals have engaged in a race to predict the future. Animals foresee the actions of prey, predators, and mates; they prepare for the future by catching food and building nests; and they anticipate dawn and dusk, spring and winter. The degree to which animals succeed in divining the future translates into the evolutionary currency of survival and reproduction’ (2017: 20).

57. Richard Gerrig has made a cognitive psychological account of what he calls ‘anomalous suspense’ or suspense in ‘perfect knowledge’ of the answer to a question or outcome of an event (1989b; 1993; 1996; 1997). Anomalous suspense is often referred to as the ‘paradox of suspense’ and accounts of this phenomenon are found in Kendall Walton (1990), Carroll (2001), Robert Yanal (1996), Aaron Smuts (2008), and Christy Mag Uidhir (2011). More recent examples of examinations of cinematic suspense may be found in the work of Maarten Coëgnarts and Miklós Kiss (2017), which takes a conceptual metaphor approach to slasher films, and Keith Bound’s PhD dissertation, ‘“Terror & Tension” psychophysiological suspense: defining a framework to measure cinematic suspense in 21st century horror films’ (2016).

58. The ‘paradox of aversion’ was conceptualised by Carolyn Korsmeyer in an attempt to unify and describe the various negative emotions that we paradoxically seem to enjoy in art. See Korsmeyer (2010) as well as Hans Maes’ (2017) interview with Korsmeyer.

59. Chapter Six discusses the hydraulic view as a theory of humour that is alternative to the incongruity theory of humour.

60. In relation to temporality, Rabkin notes, ‘since narratives are written in language, everything that takes place in a narrative takes place through time’ (1974: 73). He labels this aspect of narrative suspense diachronic narrative structure, which he defines as a ‘structure

which follows the order of perception of bits in time as one normally reads or listens' (1974: 184). Diachronicity, that is, the unfolding of a story event through the reader's experience of time, penetrates all levels of narration. Rabkin isolates four levels of narration, including style, theme, character, and plot, which 'all occur through time' (1974: 74).

61. While I don't have the space to enter the 'film as language' debate here, see for instance, Carroll (1996: 187-211) and Currie (1995: 113-37), where I believe it has been successfully argued that film does not follow the rules of a natural language.

62. What I also find particularly noteworthy about Bordwell's discussion of the 'emotional kick' is that in an attempt to briefly sketch a cursory postulation for how a Constructivist view could possibly account for emotion, which is, I believe, one of the few instances where he dedicates space to affect and the emotions in his book, he cites a book about music in the footnotes: Leonard B. Meyer's (1956) *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (see Bordwell 1985: 344). Understanding affect through the qualities that both music and film share would ultimately lead to an exploration of the temporal nature of both since film and music are both temporal arts, which I argued Part I. This supports a notion that emotion is *intrinsically* related to time, a question that unfortunately goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

63. See note 43.

64. To simplify things, in my roulette analogy, let's assume the chances of the ball landing on black are 50/50 just like in a coin toss. The green zeroes on a real roulette table mean that there are more than two outcomes with respect to colour: either the ball lands on red, black, or a zero (i.e. green).

65. In his 1976 *Jump Cut* article, 'The Jaws in the Mirror,' Dan Rubey argues that the introductory scene in *Jaws* gives the audience exactly what they want and want they want at least subconsciously, he argues, is to see Chrissie Watkins get eaten by the shark. Available online: https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC10-11folder/JawsRubey.html. Surely, a horror or suspense-thriller with no negative outcomes would most likely be considered aesthetically flawed as it generates neither horror nor suspense.

Chapter Four: Ticking Time Bombs and Other Explosive Devices

66. For a more comprehensive discussion of narrative time pressure as it relates to the ticking clock metaphor in real-time film, see Schempp (2012).

67. Gow (1968) adds that suspense may be found in genres outside the designated domain of horror and suspense-thrillers, noting that '[i]n comedy, emotional suspense is often mocked. Instinctive fears are exaggerated to the point where we laugh at them' (1968: 22). This would seem to support my later argument in Part III about how prolonged duration of characters in pain can serve comedic purposes. For instance, in the film *Hot Rod*, as we watch Rod fall seemingly endlessly down a hill that turns out to be a mountain, we are also waiting in suspense for the fall to conclude. Likewise, as we watch Peter Griffin in *Family Guy* clutch his knee in agony for an extremely long time, we are waiting in suspense for the scene to conclude or for something else to happen. In each of these cases the feeling of suspense drives the comedy and the suspense is created through prolonged duration of action or events and redundancy through 'enhanced' repetition.

68. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Carroll's essay 'The Paradox of Suspense' first appears alongside Gerrig's essay 'The Resiliency of Suspense' in the 1996 edited collection *Suspense: Conceptualizations, Theoretical Analyses, and Empirical Explorations*, which is what allows these two essays to be in dialogue with one another. I have cited Carroll's 2001 version of the essay from *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* since it is the most recent version.

69. 'Plot-driven' and 'character-driven' are terms commonly used by screenwriters to describe the narrative focus of a film. See Martha Alderson, writing for the Writers Store: https://www.writersstore.com/character-driven-or-action-driven.

70. For his supporting role in *No Country for Old Men*, Javier Bardem won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor, the BAFTA Award for Best Actor in a Supporting Role, the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actor – Motion Picture, and two Screen Actors Guild Awards including Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role and Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture just to name a few.

71. View the 'coin toss' scene from *No Country for Old Men*: https://youtu.be/yP3gkLlo0Pc.

72. See Chapter Three, where I introduce Rabkin's (1974) theory of narrative suspense.

73. This perhaps helps to highlight a significant drawback of the 'hydraulic theory' as a general theory of emotion, since it is apparently being used to explain why something is scary, why something is suspenseful, and why something is humorous all at once, making it difficult to see how the theory can be falsified. Karl Popper's famous quotation comes to mind: 'A theory that explains everything, explains nothing'.

74. Part III will explore the incongruity theory of humour in detail, but briefly, the theory functions as the most widely accepted view of humour to date. According to the incongruity theory, humour is derived from perceiving something to be incongruous. See also William Paul (1994).

75. *Community* season 2, episode 6 'Epidemiology' (originally aired 28 October 2010). View the scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxauTJpY-hg.

76. The YouTube channel Slacktory's 'Supercut: it's just a cat' is a good example of this trend: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp_8h-AbQ98.

Chapter Five: Killing Time in Startle Cinema

77. The technique is referred to as a 'trick' by several film theorists and critics including Pawel Wojtas (2015) and film critic Nigel Floyd in an interview with Mark Kermode (2013). Wojtas's essay on transgression and consumer culture provides a scathing assessment of the contemporary horror films that use this technique, asserting the startle offers little more than 'scopophiliac gratification endemic in postmodern visual culture' (2015: 33). Wojtas claims, '[T]he fixated gaze of the spectator both invites and precludes transgression. Such acts appear as transgressive, but since anticipated (aware of the tricks of the trade, the viewer is only left unmindful as to when exactly s/he would become prodded) the gesture annuls transgression the moment it ushers it in, hence burning its own boat' (2015: 34).

78. *Paranormal Activity 2* (Tod Williams, 2010); *Paranormal Activity 3* (Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman, 2011); *Paranormal Activity 4* (Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost, 2012); *Paranormal Activity: The Ghost Dimension* (Gregory Plotkin, 2015).

79. Both Robert Baird (2000) and Murray Smith (2017) have likened movies that utilise startles to rollercoaster rides.

80. Yet some scholars contest whether or not the startle should even count as an emotion. Both Jenefer Robinson (1995) and Jinhee Choi (2003) make convincing arguments that the startle should count as an emotion. Although my argument is not contingent upon whether or not the startle is considered an emotion proper, I am inclined to agree with their assertions. In the first section of this chapter, I illustrate this point in my discussion of psychologist Silvan Tomkins research on affect.

81. Mark Kermode (2013) interviews Nigel Floyd for his blog Kermode Uncut, 'Cattle Prod Cinema', http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/markkermode/entries/17c49d15-ab71-3db1-8a0b-17e814c6294a.

82. 'Shock cut' refers to a type of edit that generates a shock. While cuts are sometimes used to generate the startle effect in film, I would not characterise it as emblematic of the startle effect because not all startles in film involve editing as my analysis later in the chapter will illustrate. David Scott Diffrient (2004) calls the shock cut a 'technology of fear' and claims that an early instance of the technique was used in *Phantom of the Opera* when the phantom is first revealed without his mask in close-up. I would observe that this shock cut does not necessarily trigger the startle effect but rather a sense of surprise mixed with dread. Similar to the kind of negative criticism that the startle effect has received, Diffrient observes:

> Despite its centrality to the genre proper, the shock cut has attracted scant critical attention besides derision, irritation at best for what critics see as its obviousness, the sign of a filmmaker's inability to sustain suspense. Perhaps its very obviousness has rendered it invisible in the eyes of historians who are apt to toss it out like a baby with the bath water. Nevertheless, the shock cut facilitates our understanding of the horror genre in a way that few formal elements can'. (2004: 81)

83. Baird's assertion bears resemblance to Gordon Gow's remark that cinematic suspense amounts to a 'heightening of life' (1967: 12).

84. I use the term 'startle response' to indicate the autonomic, psychological, and physiological affect inherent in all humans, while the term 'startle effect' refers to a collection of techniques that are used to trigger that affect. Thus, the 'cinematic startle effect' refers to the collection of techniques used to trigger the startle response.

85. Chapter One touches upon Bazin's fascination with the mechanical nature of the photographic process of recording moving images and comes up again in relation to comic timing in Chapter Six. Chapter Two points to Eisenstein's theory of montage in relation to metrics, beats, and rhythm.

86. There are examples of startles being employed in music. For instance, the 'Ogives' by Erik Satie appears to contain a startling third bar where the pitch and volume rises dramatically and suddenly when compared with the previous two bars to the point that it

generates a startle in listeners. The phenomenon of the musical startle has been observed in laboratory settings. See, for example, Mathieu Roy et al. (2009).

87. See Noël Carroll (1990) *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*.

88. The fight-or-flight response was first discussed by psychologist Walter Bradford Cannon in the early 1900s (Encyclopædia Britannica online edition https://www.britannica.com/science/fight-or-flight-response); see also Harvard Health Publishing (2011), 'Understanding the Stress Response,' https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/understanding-the-stress-response.

89. Tomkin's essay where he discusses the startle response first appeared in 1981 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. The essay has been collected in Tomkins (1995) edited by Rachel Demos.

90. Tomkins's characterisation of the startle making 'good things better or bad things worse' complements my later claim that the startle may be used for humorous affects in comedy films, which I will demonstrate in Part III.

91. In Chapter One, I give a detailed account of Gregory Currie's (1995) three kinds of temporality in the arts: temporality of the work (temporalityw), temporality of the experience (temporalitye), temporality of the representation (temporalityr). Currie assigns film a special kind of temporality, which he calls connected temporality or temporalityc (1995: 92–103).

92. Currie argues that 'simultaneity is a relation between events' (1995: 95). It stands to reason that that 'suddenness' is also a temporal relation between events.

93. The site 'Where's the Jump?' boasts 'jump scare' statistics for over 450 films. https://wheresthejump.com/. Accessed 1 March 2018.

94. Additionally, the above quotation from Noël Carroll speaks to the universality and irresistibility of the startle effect and given that this excerpt from the edited collection *Post-Theory* dates to the mid-1990s, one can assert that he did not have Floyd and Kermode's contemporary 'cattle prod cinema' in mind, but rather the 1970s and 80s horror films that Floyd and Kermode celebrate.

95. This would complement Berys Gaut's (2010) theory of why people enjoy certain complex or difficult to achieve special effects (when they feel earned).

96. Though it's difficult to know for certain what exactly qualifies as a 'big scare' for Kermode, according to Where's the Jump, *Friday the 13th* has ten 'jumps'.

97. Jenefer Robinson (1995), Noël Carroll (1996), Robert Baird (2000), Jinhee Choi (2003), Julian Hanich (2010) are rare exceptions.

98. 'Jump scare' seems to be a rather new term in film analysis literature. Xavier Aldana Reyes (2016a; 2016b) and Murray Smith (2017) use it interchangeably with the term 'startle effect'. The term most likely comes from video gaming culture, where the effect is utilised as a means to catch the player off guard, frightening them enough to lose control of their controllers. Google Trends shows that the search term 'jump scare' gained significant popularity in April 2013 and had another surge in popular usage in January 2015, as illustrated by this graph, where the y-axis represents number of times searched and the x-axis

represents time in years 2004–2017:



Figure 5.6 Graph indicates a rise in popularity of search the term ‘jump scare’ between 2004–2017 (Google Trends).

99. In Chapters Six and Seven, I give an account of affective timing as it relates to the generation or enhancement of comic amusement; my discussion of comic interruptions is relevant here.

100. Ed and Lorraine Warren were a real-life ‘demonologist’ team that operated in the United States and the United Kingdom from the 1960s. As the surviving member of the team, Lorraine Warren has optioned the rights to their ‘case files’ which have served as inspiration for the shared-world of *The Conjuring* and *Annabelle* series. Both series boast that they are ‘Based on the true story,’ which is to say that there really was a pair of nurses who thought their doll was possessed by an evil spirit in 1968. The doll, which actually looks like a Raggedy Ann doll, is currently kept ‘locked up’ in a glass display in The Warren’s Occult Museum in Monroe, Connecticut. Ed and Lorraine Warren are perhaps best known for their involvement in the Amityville Horror case, a story to which Lorraine Warren never secured the rights apparently. A book and several films were made based on those events.

101. Although the *Paranormal Activity* films are photographed as if they were recorded from home movie systems and thus has a timecode running at the bottom of the screen, the films are still edited in a conventional manner. They are not what I have formulated elsewhere (Schempp 2012) as real-time films.

Chapter Six: The Poetics of Comic Timing

102. Quote from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (created by Gene Roddenberry, 1987–1994), season two, episode four, ‘The Outrageous Okona’, airdate 10 December 1988. View the extract: https://youtu.be/01_UKRLCvD4?t=217.

103. Humour theorists, by and large, tend to make a distinction between ‘comic amusement’ and the bodily response of laughter since laughter can be brought on by means other than as a response to finding something genuinely amusing.

104. In fact, the word ‘levity’ originates from the Latin levitas or ‘light’. OED Online (2017), https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/levity.

105. See Greg M. Smith’s (2003) ‘mood-cue approach’ in *Film Structure and the Emotion System* as well as Jeffrey Zacks’s (2015) *Flicker: Your Brain on Movies*.

106. I also discuss erotetic narration in Chapter Three in conjunction with betting the outcome of an event.

107. See also Carroll's (2001) chapter on jokes.

108. Unfortunately, engaging with this question goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I will discuss prospects for such an investigation in the conclusion.

109. See Morreall 2009: 29–30 for his brief discussion on eggplants.

110. It remains unclear what Carroll means when he claims that some or much of humour such as satire is serious. One wonders exactly what 'serious humour', even satire, might look like. Intuitively, the two concepts, 'serious' and 'humour', seem to me mutually exclusive. It would, however, appear that humour and play are not the same thing, although one (i.e. play), with an understanding of the dispositional theory to come, might set up a necessary attitude for the other (i.e. humour). For even in standard examples of satire, such as Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (2005), one must assume that Swift was not being serious when he suggests, in all seriousness that to keep from starving, families should eat their young. Moreover, stylistic forms of writing such as satire, even if it is written to seem serious, are not meant to be taken seriously. In other words, we are not meant to understand the message literally, but figuratively or more precisely as an example of irony and sarcasm.

111. See Kevin W. Sweeney (2013) 'Jacques Tati and Comedic Performance' in *A Companion to Film Comedy*.

112. Sweeney quotes Kant's explanation of laughter: 'an affect that arises if a tense expectation is transformed into nothing' (Kant 1987: 203).

113. View extracts from *The Lego Movie*: https://youtu.be/-Fsi07D7UWk (eight clips).

114. I should also add that this scene utilises a type of comic timing that I discuss at length in Chapter Seven, which I call tempo incongruity. What is noteworthy is how quickly the helicopters turn and train their weapons on the Master Builders right after the basketball makes contact. It represents an instance of tempo incongruity because the basketball is rather slow-moving by comparison to the fast-moving pivot of the helicopters. This change in pace from slow to fast is therefore perceived to be incongruous.

115. View the opening scene from *Hot Rod* (2007): https://youtu.be/7n2UhZvI1lY.

116. View extract from *Hot Rod* where Rod gets hit by a van in the forest: https://youtu.be/IpsV4Ws-IT0?t=29.

117. View extract from *Hot Rod* where Rod gets hit by a van on the street: https://youtu.be/IpsV4Ws-IT0?t=102.

118. There is more evidence than I have the space to consider in this dissertation. For further examples of comic surprise and comic interruption, view extracts from *The Lego Movie*: https://youtu.be/JUuCwdWKYxE (three clips) and *Hot Rod*: https://youtu.be/9EvtCIBP8y0 (five clips).

119. View extract from *Deep Blue Sea* (1999): https://youtu.be/J9CSf9qK0TU.

Chapter Seven: Four Types of Temporal Incongruity

120. *Final Space* (created by Olan Rogers and David Sacks, 2018–present), season one, episode two, 'Chapter Two', airdate 26 February 2018. For some context, *Final Space* is an

animated sci-fi-comedy television series distributed on Netflix. Gary (voiced by Olan Rogers) has been kept aboard a prisoner spaceship for five years. When he leaves the space ship to go rescue his friends, the ship's computer Hue (voiced by Tom Kenny) warns him that if he does not come back within a few hours, then a microscopic tracking device that has been implanted into his brain will detonate.

121. View extract from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981): https://youtu.be/4i39Tlb7yWY.

122. View extracts from *Family Guy*, (season two, episode twenty, 'Wasted Talent', airdate, 25 July 2000): https://youtu.be/DBeH41K92jQ (two clips).

123. View extracts from *Hot Rod* (2007): https://youtu.be/mW9UsTYH7OM (two clips).

124. View extract from *Zombieland* (2009): https://youtu.be/AyfmGC4Niag.

125. View 'shopping mall scene' from *Crank* (2006): https://youtu.be/_3w-mnbwwhs.

126. View extracts from *Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000): https://youtu.be/haUuceVlZzw (two clips).

127. View extract from *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (2015, season one, episode two, 'Lunch'): https://youtu.be/1KjQmNS8Anc.

128. View the extract from *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (2015, season one, episode two, 'Lunch'): https://youtu.be/BgYHINXum5A?t=55.

129. View extract from *Wet Hot American Summer* (2001) and *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp* (2015, season one, episode two, 'Lunch'): https://youtu.be/BgYHINXum5A (two clips).

Chapter Eight: *Too Many Cooks* (2014): A Shaggy Dog Story

130. This is not an original formulation by Cohen, but a paraphrasing of a prototypical type of joke known as the 'shaggy dog story'.

131. Since *Too Many Cooks* represents a somewhat non-standard audio-visual example in relation to the rest of the corpus discussed herein, it might be pertinent to provide some information about the context in which this was produced and consumed. Adult Swim inhabits the programming slots from 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM on the American cable television network Cartoon Network. Adult Swim is known for broadcasting both live action and animated television shows, some produced under the affiliated production company Williams Street Productions, which contain mature themes and adult-oriented humour. It is relevant to know that the type of programming featured on Adult Swim may be characterised as absurdist comedy with nostalgic or 'retro' themes. Both Cartoon Network and Adult Swim are owned by Turner Broadcasting System, a division of Time Warner, Inc., which holds the rights to the intellectual property of the now defunct American animation studio Hanna-Barbera, whose 1950s and 60s creations such as *Space Ghost* (1966–1968) and *Birdman and the Galaxy Trio* (1967–1969) were repurposed and retooled as parody cartoons: *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* (1994–2008) and *Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law* (2000–2007). To give a sense of the comedic and absurdist tone of the Adult Swim version of these shows: the superhero characters are recast, respectively, as a risible late-night television host and a

maladroit defense attorney. *Too Many Cooks*, as my analysis will show, shares a similar comedic and absurdist tone.

132. View *Too Many Cooks* (2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrGrOK8oZG8.

133. View the 2015 CNN parody video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6AlQiWatD4.

134. View the 2014 PBS Idea Channel video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_MOzbgUydg.

135. Although it's difficult to determine what that might mean in practice since it seems to me that opinions on what constitutes 'cleanliness' would vary from group to group and from time period to time period.

136. Carroll (2014) has refuted claims that ground humour in laughter and I am inclined to agree with his assessment, yet in principle I agree with Cohen that one can theoretically understand why something is funny without experiencing genuine amusement. However, like Carroll, I see no reason to ground that in the physiological response of laughter.

137. Comic interruptions are quite prevalent in slapstick comedy. See note 114.

138. Carroll references Rachel Giora's (1991) essay 'On Cognitive Aspects of the Joke'.