

Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen
Institut für Anglistik
Seminar: Critical Media Studies
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A Creative Film Project:

An Experiment on How to Convey Character Interiority

The creative film project, and thus the production of the short movie *Alienation*, was driven by the question if and how a film could convey a character's interiority. This curiosity was first initiated by my disagreement with an article we read in the seminar: Jason Mittell's article, in which he argued that movies would be inferior to written literature concerning the ability to depict a character's thoughts, emotions, and subjective perception of the world (2007: 159f.). In the further course of the seminar, my interest in this subject grew stronger due to Jan Alber's guest lecture on "Character Interiority in the Movies" (2 Dec., 2013). He countered Mittell's viewpoint and presented a list of filmic techniques used to convey the mental states of characters in the movies. His presentation was accompanied by movie scenes to demonstrate that movies have indeed other means as written narratives but are not less capable to represent character interiority.

Alber's detailed illustrations of filmic techniques formed the basis of my creative film project: he illustrated the importance of bodily positions and facial expressions of actors in order to show the character's inner state of mind. In my movie *Alienation* I play the main character, which is also the character whose subjective perception is supposed to be represented in the film. The main character is anxious, unsettled, and turned into herself with her troubles, which is reflected, for example, in her fixed gaze when she feels disconnected from the world, or her nervous eye movements when she is overwhelmed by social interactions. Furthermore, enacted mindscreens visualize what the main character dreams, remembers or feels, for instance, when she is sitting in the pub, a close up of her face dissolves into a scene at a fair and back again. These cuts suggest that she feels like having a merry-go-round in her head, seemingly mixed with the imagination of being

at a fair, and actual memories of once having been at one. In addition, throughout the whole movie, sound effects exemplify how the character feels and perceives the world: voice overlays depict how overwhelming social interactions are for the main character, and a more and more distant seeming sound conveys her detachment from the physical and social world around her. A specifically chosen soundtrack underlines and further creates the mood of the movie. Moreover, the distorted visual perception of the character defines the illustration of the movie's world: suddenly a hand, a glass, or a mouth is getting unrealistically bigger due to the character's unsettled state of mind. Thus, how the movie's world is portrayed is characterized by the subjective perception of the main character.

How the storyline of *Alienation* is structured, however, is inspired by the television series *Lost*, which we discussed in the seminar and in which flashbacks are regularly embedded in a primary storyline to provide interesting and unexpected insights into the different character's lives. The movie *Alienation* starts with a woman running, randomly stopping, and pulling a found plastic bag over her head. The viewer doesn't know why she is doing this. Then a close up on her face dissolves into a dreamlike flashback, which explains to the viewer why the woman was running and placing that plastic bag over her head. After this revealing flashback, the viewer returns to the initial situation.

Sarah Häcker

Works Cited

- Alber, Jan. "Character Interiority in the Movies." Phil I, A3, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Gießen. 2 Dec. 2013. Lecture.
- Lost* (2004-2010). Creator Damon Lindelhof, J. J. Abrams and Bryan Burk. ABC Studios, Bad Robot Productions and Grass Skirt Productions. DVD.
- Mittell, Jason (2007). "Film and Television Narrative." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 156-171. Print.

You may watch the short movie at <https://vimeo.com/102848923>.