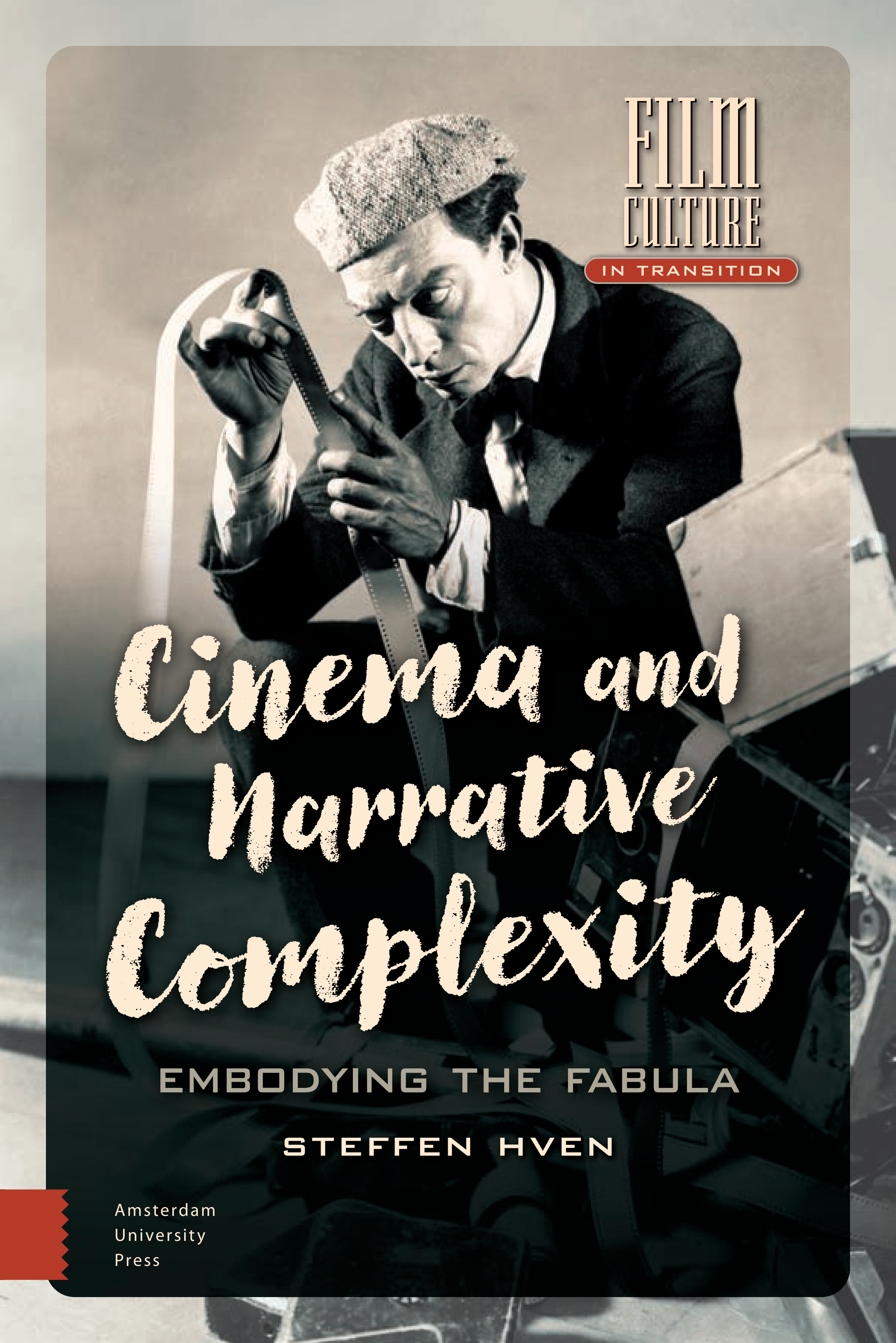

FILM CULTURE IN TRANSITION

Cinema and Narrative Complexity

EMBODYING THE FABULA

STEFFEN HVEN

Amsterdam
University
Press

Cinema and Narrative Complexity

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For Gefion

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I. Introduction

> No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert. What is a course of history, or philosophy, or poetry, no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen?[...] Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk on into futurity.
>
> – Thoreau 1995, 72

The brilliance of Christopher Nolan's MEMENTO (2000) lies in its complex narrative structure, which imposes a sensation of temporal disorientation upon its viewers that mirrors the anterograde amnesia suffered by its main character, Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce). Thereby the film allows the spectator to enact – rather than merely observe – the amnesia of what has become 'the archetypal example of the character who suffers from a loss of memory' (Elsaesser 2009, 28). Consequently, MEMENTO stands out as one of the most vivid representatives of a contemporary body of films that have challenged the long-dominant opposition between classical Hollywood storytelling and the tradition of (European) art cinema (cf. Kovács 2007, 33-48).[1] PULP FICTION (Tarantino 1994), LOLA RENNT ([Run Lola Run] Tykwer 1998), BEING JOHN MALKOVICH (Jonze 1999), FIGHT CLUB (Fincher 1999), AMORES PERROS ([Love's a Bitch] Iñárritu 2000), OLDBOY (Park 2003), 21 GRAMS (Iñárritu 2003), ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND (Gondry 2004), 2046 (Wong 2004), INCEPTION (Nolan 2010), SOURCE CODE (Jones 2011), and COHERENCE (Byrkit 2013) are but a few examples of the international surge within the landscape of moving images to develop increasingly demanding and challenging narratives.[2] These 'complex narratives' (Simons 2008) embrace non-linearity, time loops, and fragmented spatio-temporal realities (cf. Buckland 2009a, 6) to demonstrate a contemporary interest in personal identity, memory, history, trauma, embodied perception, and temporality (cf. Elsaesser & Hagener 2010, 149). Located somewhere in the encounter between film and spectator (cf. Deleuze 2005b; Engell 2005; Pisters 2012; Brown 2013), the complexity of these complex narratives turns out to be a complex phenomenon itself (cf. Simons 2008, 111).

Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, there are disputes on how to comprehend 'complex narratives', 'puzzle films' (Buckland 2009b), 'mind-game' movies (Elsaesser 2009), 'modular' narratives (Cameron 2008), 'forking-path' narratives (Bordwell 2002a), 'hybrid' films (Martin-Jones 2006), or 'neuro-images'

(Pisters 2012) film-historically. The most detailed definitions of what shall be referred to as the contemporary complex narrative are to be found in this body of research, yet no agreement exists as to whether the films in question constitute a break with, or should rather be perceived as an extension of, the boundaries of Hollywood's canonical storytelling format. The variety of answers to this question is demonstrated by the lack of both consensus in terminology and a clearly defined body of films.

Buckland's (2009a) term 'puzzle films' refers to 'a popular cycle of films from the 1990s that rejects classical storytelling techniques and replaces them with complex storytelling' (1; see also Buckland 2014). Following Elsaesser (2009), the 'mind-game films' cross 'the usual boundaries of mainstream Hollywood, independent, auteur film and international art cinema' (13) and comprise films in which games are being played with a character, as well as films which play with its audience (14). For Cameron (2008) it is central that 'modular' narratives offer 'a series of disarticulated narrative pieces, often arranged in radically achronological ways via flashforwards, overt repetition or a destabilization of the relationship between present and past' (1). Pisters (2012) argues that with the 'neuro-image we have quite literally moved into the characters' brain spaces. We no longer see through characters' eyes, as in the movement-image and the time-image; we are most often instead in their mental worlds' (14). Ultimately, Simons (2008) maintains that '[i]n spite of all this diversity and the different ways of approaching and assessing this body of films, most theorists would agree to subsume these films under the predicate "complex narratives"' (111). This book argues that inquiries into the nature of these films have been framed by overarching oppositions (e.g. classical versus modern(ist) cinema, linear versus non-linear temporality) that the films themselves have left behind (cf. Shaviro 2010, 2012).[3]

In her contribution to *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (Buckland 2014), Maria Poulaki (2014b) maintains that narratives, as well as the narrative mode of reasoning, prioritize wholes over the parts (36-37). Narrative events, she argues in reference to the narratologist Donald E. Polkinghorne (1988), make sense by forming a meaningful whole, where the events are perceived to cause each other. Meanwhile, the narrative is itself embedded with the expectation that it will eventually make sense according to a causal-linear schema. Given that such a schema defines how we think about narratives, scholars have tended to understand complex narration in terms of its deviation from causal linearity. As Poulaki (2014b) goes on to argue, this approach has lost its ability 'to provide further insight into the complex and non-linear structure of complex films, particularly at this point in time when the latter seem to have established a new paradigm of cinematic storytelling' (37).

When it comes to narrative complexity, Poulaki states: ‘It is no longer enough to show how complex films are not conventional narratives; the need for a positive definition and description of their processes has become apparent’ (37). According to her, the most valuable lesson of complexity is its insistence on ‘processes of resonance between individual components or units, and how the forms they create are never whole or complete, neither in the beginning nor at the end’ (48). Along similar lines, this book argues that in order to better comprehend contemporary complex cinema in its own terms, the formulation of a new mode of spectatorship that enhances cinematic perception by allowing spectators to ‘embody’ the narrative universe is required. In contrast to most prevalent studies, I argue that the complexity of contemporary cinema does not primarily rest in a complex, entangled, or complicated *syuzhet* or dramaturgy but owes to a ‘will to complexity’ – understood as an insistence on the mutual dependence of cinematic dimensions that have traditionally been kept apart.

From this perspective, contemporary cinema not only calls for a renewed appreciation of what shall be referred to as the ‘linear-non-linear’ dichotomy, but also forces us to rethink the interrelation of the cognitive, emotional, and affective circuits that constitute the cinematic experience. Therefore, parallel to studying a variety of modes in which cinema elicits spectators’ affective, emotional, or cognitive responses, I question favoured interpretative strategies with the aim of formulating an alternative approach designed to open up rather than closing down, ‘straightening out’, or ‘decomplexifying’ the narrative continuum.

In relation to this, the word ‘affect’ (*l’affect* or *affectus*) – as differentiated from cognitive states and describing the bodies’ capacity to move and be moved, to affect and be affected – becomes central. Within Deleuzian affect theory, as Shouse (2005) explains, emotions are object-oriented and social phenomena, whereas affect is prepersonal. Within cognitive theory, as Plantinga (2009a) explains, ‘emotions are intentional in the sense that they are directed toward some “object”’ (86), whereas affect is a broader category that comprises any ‘felt bodily state, including a wide range of phenomena, including emotions, moods, reflex actions, autonomic responses, mirror reflexes, desires, pleasures, etc.’ (87). In brief, whereas the Deleuzian framework tends to separate the ‘affective’ too abruptly from the cognitive and emotional sphere, the cognitive framework tends to reduce the affective to cognitive-emotional components.[4] As Seth Duncan and Lisa Feldman Barrett (2007) point out, since Plato and Aristotle, thoughts and emotions have been viewed as ontologically distinct, yet ‘[a]ny thought or action can be said to be more or less affectively infused, so that there is no ontological distinction between, say, affective and non-affective behaviours, or between "hot" and "cold" cognitions' (1202).

Perceived as indicative of a crisis in the spectator-film relation, the complex narrative does not merely demonstrate that the traditional suspension of disbelief or the classical spectator position as voyeur, witness, or observer is no longer deemed compelling or challenging enough (Elsaesser 2008, 16), it also demonstrates that our involvement and construction of a narrative is as affective as it is cognitive. In this fashion, contemporary complex cinema calls for a reconceptualization of the core analytical and narratological concept of the *fabula* and thus I propose an expanded notion of this term: embodied *fabula*. In order to develop this concept of embodied *fabula*, I will turn to embodied cognition, complexity theory, cognitive and affective neuroscience, and Deleuzian film-philosophy. While the contour of this concept, as it is formulated here, is based on an ongoing dialogue with complex narratives, the embodied *fabula* is not restricted to this particular kind of cinema. Instead, the embodied *fabula* is here envisioned as a 'processual' concept whose lines are dynamic and subject to change (cf. Mullarkey 2009, xiv-xvi).[5]

In this book, complex narratives are not distinguished by their intrinsic narrative complexity (cinema is by definition a complex phenomenon), but by virtue of their ability to induce a rethinking of elements that have commonly been thought of as separate in the tradition of classical science. In doing so, these films call for a film-philosophical excavation designed to render visible and to distinguish various modes of cinematic complexity – whether classical, modern(ist), or contemporary. In this context, cinema becomes philosophical insofar as the experience it gives rise to can be described as a form of philosophical thinking *in action* (Mulhall 2008, 4). However, my key concern is to argue that the kind of thinking involved in the cinematic experience is ill-conceived from the monolithic perspective of the analytically, cognitively, and temporally detached spectator, whose thinking consists in organizing the cinematic material into a unified, linear, and coherent story (e.g. Bordwell 1985a; Branigan 1992; Carroll 1996). Instead, it shall be argued that complex cinema facilitates a reconceptualization of the cinematic experience as embodied thinking *in action*, from which film-philosophical excavations can examine how the cinematic experience challenges the boundaries of our dominant conceptual frameworks and traditional patterns of thought.

From a narratological point of view, the use of the word 'complex' can be traced back to Aristotle's differentiations between 'simple' and 'complex' plots. For Aristotle, simple plots are mimetic because they arrange events into a single, continuous action with a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end. From such a perspective, complexity arises from an interweaving of two causal lines into a single, unified plot line.[6] Warren Buckland (2009a) has questioned the aptitude of this mode of comprehending cinematic complexity in relation to complex narratives. Against the cognitive-formalist film scholar David Bordwell (2006), Buckland (2009a) argues that the contemporary complex narrative 'is intricate in the sense that the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing; the events are not simply interwoven, but *entangled*' (3, emphasis in original).

For these reasons, complex narration cannot be reduced to the linear trajectory of classical cinema – something Buckland criticizes Bordwell for doing. However, Buckland commits to a widespread Bordwellian notion, when he argues that contemporary complex narration 'emphasizes the complex telling (plot, narration) of a simple or complex story (narrative)' (6). Thus, although Buckland is critical of Bordwell's cautious stance about the novelty of complex narratives (cf. Bordwell 2006), the overall approach of the anthology *Puzzle Films* is representative of much theoretical work on complex narration, since it reinvigorates Bordwell's (1985a) cognitive and analytical distinction between *syuzhet* and *fabula* (Buckland 2009a, 7).

In the following, I set out to challenge this popular analytical tool for examining cinematic complexity. While the distinction of the *fabula* (~ story) from the *syuzhet* (~ plot) can be extremely useful, its limitations once confronted with cinematic complexity shall be demonstrated throughout this book. I maintain that the major problem pertaining to this analytical distinction relates to its adherence to a series of classical scientific principles designed for the reduction of complexity. These principles – as traced out by Edgar Morin in his article 'Restricted Complexity, General Complexity' (2007) – are 1) the principle of universal determinism associated with Laplace; 2) the principle of reduction, which 'consists in knowing any composite from only the knowledge of its basic constituting elements'; and finally 3) the principle of disjunction, which 'consists in isolating and separating cognitive difficulties from one another' (5).[7] The cognitive and classical narratological presumption that complexity can be seen as an intrinsic value of the narrative itself can be traced back to these classical principles for the reduction of complexity. In order to counter this presumption, I aim to demonstrate that complex narratives first and foremost deserve the designation 'complex', because they make evident that '[c]omplexity is not only a feature of the systems we study, it is also a matter of the way in which we organize our thinking about those systems' (Tsoukas & Hatch 2001, 986; cf. Simons 2008, 116). That being said, it is important to stress that I am not arguing against reduction per se, since complexity and reduction are necessarily intertwined. I rather claim that the dominant and systematic mode of reducing complexity is no longer a viable approach, since it relies on a separation of those elements whose interrelation contemporary complex cinema sets out to (re-)explore.

Consequently, it can be argued that the term 'complex narratives' is problematic, because it falsely suggests that other types of cinema are *not* complex – in fact, it may even appear to imply a general prevalence of 'non-complex narratives' within cinema. It is possible to avoid this problem by taking the notion of complexity a step further than that usually found in the study of complex systems. This means understanding cinema from the perspective of what Morin (2007) has labelled 'generalized' rather than 'restricted' complexity. According to the latter, 'complexity is restricted to systems which can be considered complex because empirically they are presented in a multiplicity of interrelated processes, interdependent and retroactively associated' (10). Since this perspective never questions the epistemological nature of complexity it 'still remains within the epistemology of classical science' (10). Consequently, restricted complexity acknowledges the non-linear, relational nature of complex systems, but seeks to tame it in ways that reintroduce positivism and reductionism, whereby complexity is ultimately acknowledged only by means of 'decomplexification'.[8]

A move towards generalized complexity must thus involve an epistemological displacement encouraged by the invention of new conceptual frameworks that do not seek to redeem complexity into the classical scientific ideals of linearity, neutrality, objectivity, isolation, reduction, and disjunction. Yet, this should not encourage a simple reversal of the relation by means of an emphasis on those elements that have traditionally been excluded, such as non-linearity, complex temporal processes, incommensurable spaces, heterogeneity, and logic unruled by the principle of non-contradiction (cf. Rodowick 2001, 49). Ultimately, what is required instead are conceptual tools capable of embracing complexity, such as those which emerge from the *interrelation* of the elements that have been kept separated far too long (cf. Morin 2007).

In *Deleuze, Altered States and Film* (2007), Anna Powell contends that experimental cinema does not invite the 'problem solving' associated with cognitive-formalist approaches (cf. Bordwell 1985a, 2006; Branigan 1992; Carroll 1996; Thompson 1988). Instead, such films 'aim to derange the senses and the mind' (Powell 2007, 8). My goal is to make evident why such a conception misconstrues the cinematic experience as an option of either-or. In the 1980s, two very different approaches proposed alternatives to the psychoanalytical and semiotic studies that dominated film studies at that time. Despite being united in their dissatisfaction with the manner in which cinema had been used to confirm the theory applied, one could hardly imagine two more opposed conceptions of the cinematic experience than those proposed by cognitive film studies and Deleuzian film-philosophy. Since then the divide between them has been ever expanding and is today defining of film studies. At least until recently, when contemporary complex narratives have begun to encourage scholars to think beyond the linear-non-linear dichotomy underlying this divide (cf. Brown 2013; Engell 2005; Fahle 2005; Mullarkey 2009; Pisters 2012).

The 'linear' segment of cognitive film science includes scholars such as David Bordwell, Noël Carroll, Joseph Anderson, Murray Smith, Carl Plantinga, Greg M. Smith, Ed Tan, and Torben Grodal. In the introduction to the anthology *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (1996), Bordwell and Carroll explain that 'a cognitivist analysis or explanation seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency' (xvi). Bordwell's cognitive theory is particularly representative of the linear side of the dichotomy, since he maintains that the classical cinema has become the 'standard' film because its conventions of linear causality are 'cognitively optimal'.[9] The popularity of classical cinema thus lies in its natural correspondence with the systematic manner in which human beings make inferences, test hypotheses, and apply interpretative schemata in their everyday lives.

In his Henri Bergson-inspired film-philosophy, the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (2005a, 2005b) provides a framework that accentuates the linear-non-linear dichotomy since it proposes two overarching image regimes that roughly correspond to the opposition of classical and (European) art cinema: the 'movement-image' (and, more precisely, the 'action-image') and the 'time-image'.[10] In the first, the narrative universe is unified and its events are linked through 'rational' cuts and a style of montage that present time in an 'indirect' manner according to a logic that accommodates our everyday sensory-motor capacities. In the second image regime, time is freed from its sensory-motor linkages, while the cuts have become 'irrational', from which a 'direct' image of time appears. Unlike the more classical narratological, film-theoretical, and formalist concerns of cognitive film science, Deleuze's interest in cinema should be understood in relation to his philosophical undertakings, insofar as cinema grants philosophy a renewed mode of thinking about movement and time. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that Deleuzian film-philosophy and the more traditional film-theoretically founded cognitive formalism are interested in cinema for different reasons.

Perhaps exactly such lack of sensitivity towards their respective research interests has contributed to the tension between the ‘Continental’ film philosophers and the ‘Anglo-American analytical’ cognitive film science. This tension is detectable in Raymond Bellour’s (2010) telling dismissal of the cognitive stance:

> There is always the fear that the film and the spectator are all the more average, standardised, attuned to the dominant cinema, that one wants to address a supposed truth of the film and its spectator in a sort of monstrous, targeted freeze-frame. This is why, in their dogmatic application of knowledge of the cognitive sciences, most cognitive theoreticians of the cinema are, for example, inevitably attracted by Steven Spielberg’s films and Hollywood blockbusters. (92)

Despite the reservations between cognitivists and Deleuzian film philosophers, I argue that contemporary complex cinema can be perceived as an encouragement to reconnect the linear, cognitive, and analytical approaches of cognitive formalists with the affective, non-linear, and non-representational attitude that defines Deleuzian film-philosophy. However, this is not a straightforward task due to the discrepancies between the representationalist, realist, and classical scientific presumptions of (Bordwellian) cognitive film science and Deleuze’s anti-Cartesian, anti-representational film-philosophy. My thesis, however, is that the incongruities begin to vanish once the computational assumptions that guide the frameworks of most cognitive theories are replaced with those of embodied cognition. Not only have the computational assumptions started to reveal their philosophical or theoretical limitations (such as embodied cognition maintains), the rise of contemporary complex cinema has rendered visible how these restrict our comprehension of the cinematic experience, too.

Cognitive media scholars would immediately object and, rightly, argue that hardly anyone (if anyone at all) in their field has explicitly promoted a computational understanding of mind. When computationalism is debated, cognitive scholars point out that their field has ‘followed cognitive science’s gradual move from a focus on “cold” cognition (information-driven mental processes described in terms of inferential and computational models) to “hot cognition” (affect-driven mental processes)’ (Nannicelli & Taberham 2014, 5). Jovially referring to himself as a part-time cognitivist, Bordwell (2010) declares that ‘you don’t have to be a cognitivist 24/7’ (15).

Thus, we should not expect the computational assumptions of cognitive film theory to be explicitly stated. Instead, these assumptions, as I will demonstrate, are expressed in analytical devices and interpretative strategies that have their origin in, but are not restricted to, cognitive film theory.

Consequently, it is incisive to allow the films themselves to take an active part in the reconfiguration of our analytical devices and interpretative strategies. This inductive approach of allowing the films to shape our understanding of the cinematic experience guides all the examinations of individual films to be found in this book. In an extension of this, I aim to demonstrate that once we move beyond the linear-non-linear dichotomy and start to think of the cinematic experience in terms of the complex interplay between linear and non-linear elements, a field emerges from which complexity theory, cognitive film science, Deleuzian philosophy, and 'embodied cognition' can be combined in a joint effort to reconceptualize the cinematic experience as a genuinely cognitive-embodied experience. However, the danger involved in this is to reintroduce an inverse dualism that favours the body over the mind, or, as Brown (2013) asserts in relation to the pioneer embodied-phenomenological work of Sobchack, Marks, and Barker, the challenge of today is to 'synthesize with the haptic, or affective, elements of the cinematic experience the "higher" "brain" elements that in fact form a continuum with them' (141).

Therefore, to unite Bordwellian and Deleuzian ideas on the same conceptual plane, I draw upon the recent developments within the cognitive neurosciences, where certain scholars are coming up with an increasingly embodied understanding of cognition (cf. Varela, Thompson, & Rosch 1992; Clark 1998; Noë 2004; Wheeler 2005; Shapiro 2011). Given that these scholars understand mind, thinking, and cognition as genuinely embodied mental processes, this appears to be a particularly suited framework for comprehending the reconstitution of the viewer's affective, emotional, and cognitive bonds in the complex narrative. Ultimately, I argue that complex narratives question the classical narratological understanding of the *fabula* by 1) embracing a non-representational and non-computational mode of spectatorship 2) whose temporality may contain instances of, yet is not predisposed to, causal linearity.

The cinematic capacity to stimulate viewers in a direct, corporal-affective, and sensorial fashion has recently been the subject of growing attention (cf. Barker 2009; Marks 2000, 2002; Shaviro 1993; Sobchack 1992, 2004). Unfortunately, this body of work has been conducted in relative isolation from studies that examine the narrative powers of cinema (cf. Bordwell 1985, 2007; Branigan 1992; Smith 1995). Studies of the experiential and the narrative cinematic domains have thus up to now coexisted peacefully as two distinct cinematic dimensions best studied apart from each other. At the back cover of Vivian Sobchack's influential *Carnal Thoughts* (2004) the book's intention is declared to emphasize our corporal rather than our intellection stimulation with cinema. In *The Skin of Film* (2000), Laura Marks explains that 'haptic media encourage a relation to the screen itself before the point at which the viewer is pulled into the figures of the image and the exhortation of the narrative' (187-188). More recently, the concept of 'affect' has served a similar function as not only different in kind to cognitive responses but radically isolated from such processes insofar as affects are perceived as immediate and bodily autonomous responses to the images thus detached from their representational and narrative dimensions (cf. Clough & Halley 2007; Gregg & Seigworth 2010). A central argument made by this book, however, is that embodiment does not simply occur beneath or below cinematic narration; it actively demands a new interpretation of cinematic narration. No longer understood as a mental representation, the cinematic narrative must be perceived as an embodied activity that emerges out of the assemblage of spectator and film.

The growing popularity of embodiment has rendered evident the limitations of the *fabula* as a theoretical idealization that focuses exclusively on the cognitive aspects of narrative construction (cf. Bordwell 1990, 108). Yet, this key narratological concept remains to be revised according to the enactive, emotional, affective, and embodied understanding of cinematic spectatorship now prevalent (cf. Tikka 2008). Hence, I propose a conceptual differentiation between the 'analytical' and the 'embodied' *fabula*. The cognitive-formalist *fabula* thus pertains as the analytical *fabula* according to which our cinematic perception is structured towards the construction of a causal-linear story (cf. Bordwell 1985a). The embodied *fabula*, on the other hand, is designed to open up for an exploration of the narrative as our surrounding environment. Since the embodied *fabula* is a complex and recursive concept involving constant feedback loops, it is not diametrically opposed to the analytical *fabula*, which is rather to be understood as a prominent dimension of the embodied *fabula* – i.e. the analytical *fabula* is also an embodiment of the cinematic narration, but in a particular analytical manner.

In relation to contemporary cinema, the attention will be focused on four characteristics that in combination have facilitated the mode of comprehending cinematic complexity that I propose here. Contemporary complex cinema allows us to rethink and reconfigure 1) the linear-non-linear dichotomy of film studies that harks back to the opposition of classical cinema and the tradition of (European) art cinema. In moving beyond this divide, complex narratives 2) reveal a profound will to complexity, since they force us to think about the interrelation of what has traditionally been kept isolated, such as the linear and non-linear; the affective, emotional, and cognitive investment of the audiences; the contingent from the causally determined; the body from the mind; etc. It will be argued that contemporary complex cinema 3) reconfigures our mode of experiencing narration as the process of organizing events into a causal-linear order, i.e. according to the analytical *fabula*. More precisely, these films demonstrate 4) that linear cinematic perception (as cognitively structured around the construction of a causal-linear story) coexists with other modes of 'inhabiting' the narrative universe. It is in the context of capturing these dimensions of contemporary complex cinema that the differentiation between the analytical and the embodied *fabula* is suggested.[11]

I believe that the ability of contemporary complex narratives to 'enfold' or 'embed' us in their narrative universes has been a decisive factor for the formative role that recent film-philosophical projects trying to rethink the cinematic experience in the age of new media have granted this type of cinema (e.g. Pisters 2012; Shaviro 2010; Bianco 2004; Rodowick 2007; Brown 2013). Yet, throughout this book, I accentuate the importance of refining our conceptual frameworks through a constant dialogue with the challenges that arise from our encounters with *various* – i.e. not solely contemporary – complex forms of cinema. Rather than primarily asking what the films in question 'mean' or are 'about', I question the prevalent string of arguments that have traditionally been invoked to make sense of the moving images. In doing so, my focal points are the encouragements, obstacles, resistances, or ruptures that the films in question exhibit towards particular dominant modes of organizing and comprehending experience.

Consequently, the analytical material chosen for this study belongs to the sphere of well-known and much-debated examples. The advantages and disadvantages of this choice are obvious. The main disadvantage is, of course, that using established examples remains oblivious to new emerging trends and experimental approaches to filmmaking that indeed deserve more critical attention (I have chosen somewhat lesser known examples from acclaimed directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and Alain Resnais). Nevertheless, the selection of frequently studied examples has been a requirement for me to perform a series of meta-analytical readings of the films in question. Such readings help demonstrate how differences in theoretical and philosophical assumptions shape our actual analytical procedures.

The reader should be aware that the concept of the embodied *fabula* in its present form reflects the commitment of this book to known cinematic examples and the foregrounding of contemporary complex cinema. Nevertheless, I believe that the embodied *fabula* could prove useful for comprehending a variety of changes currently occurring within the field of cinema, which are not explicitly related to the complex narrative. The concept could, for instance, be utilized to understand the film-philosophical encounter facilitated by the experimental documentary film LEVIATHAN (Castaing-Taylor & Paravel 2012) or to conceptualize how 3D technology has been implemented in GRAVITY (Cuarón 2013) to allow for an entirely different embodied experience than traditional 2D cinema is capable of (I explore the idea of expanding the notion of the embodied *fabula* in relation to this cinematic 'will to immersion' in Chapter VIII). With such examples the notion of the embodied *fabula* could be expanded beyond the scope of the analytical material that I have selected. In this sense, each film-philosophical encounter bears the promise of uncovering dimensions of the embodied *fabula* that the encounters of this study have not brought to light. By the same token, I believe that it is possible to use this concept to comprehend aspects of the cinematic experience – the political, sociological, national, economic, technological, etc. – that have not been my focal points.[12]

That being said, I firmly believe that my examples demonstrate a simultaneously interesting and highly relevant contemporary embrace of cinematic complexity. In this context, the films' popularity has made it easier to study the recursive nature of complexity that emerges once the films and the prevalent conceptual tools, frameworks, and analytical assumptions of the analyst and/or the spectator are allowed to mutually reflect back on one another. In particular, the films I have chosen to study have been crucial to the development of the concept of the embodied *fabula* and to the ongoing reformulation of the cinematic experience that this concept entails. In this manner, I have endeavoured to retain the open nature of the films to allow them to inform us about the manner in which we participate in structuring experience according to our prevalent metaphors, conceptual tools, and along the lines of how we 'normally' structure perception – and thus to study cinema *between* the lines.

This has required a careful selection of films that enable the examination of different aspects of the conceptual tools and interpretative methods that concern us here. STAGE FRIGHT (Hitchcock 1950), which is examined in Chapter III, represents a classical instance of defamiliarization insofar as the film upsets the automatic expectations aroused in the audience by the formal device of the flashback. MEMENTO, the subject of Chapter VII, departs from a comparable defamiliarization in order to allow us to sense the habitual processes that usually operate unattended to structure our cinematic perception of the narrative in causal-linear terms. Yet, MEMENTO takes defamiliarization a step further to include the very foundation of what we traditionally think about as constituting the cinematic experience, i.e. it defamiliarizes the stable 'background' against which everything has traditionally been defamiliarized, thereby forcing us to reconceptualize the very notion of defamiliarization.

Similarly, 21 GRAMS and LOLA RENNT – both films are discussed in Chapter VI – enable their audiences to explore the virtual, non-linear dimensions (that, which could have, yet did not happen) of their narratives, but in entirely different manners. The non-linear and fragmented narrative structure of 21 GRAMS breaks down the smooth operation of spectators' affective, emotional, and cognitive circuits to establish instead a more direct empathetic bond between characters and spectators. LOLA RENNT, on the other hand, uses its multimodality and music-video aesthetics to make spectators bond with the narrative rhythm(s) of the film and the kinaesthetic of its main character. In HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR (Resnais 1959), which is discussed in Chapter IV, a comparable examination of cinema's virtual dimension can be detected. However, here this is achieved in a manner typical of modern(ist) cinema, which is to say that it involves a criticism of the linear organizational principles associated with classical storytelling.

The structure of this book – in which predominantly theoretical chapters (Chapter II and V) are followed by chapters devoted to closer examinations of films, their analytical treatments, and the development and application of the embodied *fabula* (Chapter III, IV, VI, and VII) – is different from the inductive and film-philosophical research process that lies behind it, where these closely intertwine. I have nonetheless chosen this structure to render it more visible how our philosophical presumptions influence our actual analytical procedures, even in cases where the analyst believes to have left these presumptions behind.

Consequently, this book is comprised of two parts. Chapters II, III, and IV form the first part of the book in which the linear-non-linear dichotomy is examined from several perspectives. This part establishes the theoretical foundations for the argument that the ongoing replacement of computational with more embodied approaches within the cognitive sciences may prove an important cornerstone for bridging cognitive and film-philosophical approaches to cinema (cf. Protevi 2010; Pisters 2012; Brown 2013; Chapter V). Thus, the main argument found here is that in disputing the computational and representational roots of cognitive film studies, it becomes possible to perceive cognitivism and film-philosophy as complementary, rather than opposing, positions. This would not only open cognitive studies up for the more non-linear and aesthetic dimensions of cinema, but equally encourage Deleuzian film-philosophy to connect with the more rigorous, analytical, and empirical – yet extremely innovative – research, which is currently being conducted within cognitive film science.

Hence, chapters V, VI, and VII form the second part of the book, which is dedicated to the exploration of various aspects of the embodied *fabula* in relation to contemporary complex cinema. In this part I draw upon embodied cognition, Deleuzian film-philosophy, and complexity theory to demonstrate that especially with regard to contemporary complex cinema the analytical *fabula* must be supplemented with a concept of the *fabula* that has been designed to capture the cinematic experience as embodied and complex. Therefore, I propose the embodied *fabula* as an operational tool that guides the viewers in their enactive and embodied engagement with the narrative universes they no longer primarily 'organize', 'linearize', or 'straighten out' but *explore*.

Chapter II argues that despite its constructivist nature, Bordwell's theory of narrative comprehension comes with the analytical presumption that the narrative – though being the mental construction of the spectator – can be analytically dissected as an intrinsic quality of the narrative itself. The problem with this reasoning is that it harbours a misunderstanding about the complexity of contemporary complex cinema. Following Morin (2007) 'any system, whatever it might be, is complex by its own nature' (10), and thus complex narratives cannot be said to differ from other cinematic regimes by virtue of their intrinsic complexity. From this perspective, the narratives in question deserve the adjective 'complex' only by virtue of inducing a transformation of our onto-epistemological conception of complexity – in particular by facilitating a highly sophisticated interplay of linear and non-linear cinematic elements. While all films from a generalized perspective are complex in their own right, not all films call attention to the immanent complexity of cinema.

In reference to Alfred Hitchcock's STAGE FRIGHT, Chapter III argues that while classical storytelling has often been associated with cinematic linearity, this linearity is as much a product of the linear interpretative methods that have been accepted as standards for dealing with classical cinema. It is examined how the dominance of goal-oriented characters, narrative resolutions, and linear spatio-temporal coherence has justified analytical methods that in their classical scientific cause-effect principles have produced an overtly linear understanding of classical cinema. It is especially examined how the cognitive-formalist conceptual framework perceives the linearity of the classical film to correspond to a 'natural' kind of filmmaking that can operate as a background to which all other regimes can be understood. It is argued that the cognitive concept of 'defamiliarization' actually performs a 'refamiliarization' of narrative transgressions. Ultimately, this chapter questions the restricted comprehension of the classical paradigm of both Bordwell and Deleuze, and argues that it stems from a lack of sensitivity for the inherent ambiguities that reside in the cause-effect dramaturgy of classical cinema.

Chapter IV examines HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR to carve out how the film formulates a cinematic logic that arises from the encounter between oppositions. As much as the Deleuzian concept of the time-image is capable of shedding light on this poetic film, so does HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR also facilitate an understanding of the conceptual powers and limitations of the time-image. It is argued that its main limitation rests upon the methodological choice of separating and contesting cinema's linear and non-linear dimensions. While it will be demonstrated that this resonates with the modern(ist) cinematic ideals, it is maintained that the opposition of movement-image and time-image is no longer capable of capturing the complex interplay between these dimensions in contemporary complex cinema. HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR becomes especially interesting because it expresses an at the time entirely new cinematic logic, which can be formulated with reference to Deleuze's concept of the encounter. This logic is opposed to the long-dominant linear manner of understanding narrative, history, memory, and time, whose desirability is repudiated at the end of HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR. It is in this context that the film can be taken as an acute expression of the modern(ist) paradox of 'representing the unrepresentable', which is still haunting Deleuzian film-philosophy.

Therefore, the basis for understanding the narrative experience as embodied and the development of the concept of the embodied *fabula* in Chapter V is not a mapping of cognitive-formalist and film-philosophical ideas on to each other. The aim is rather to reach a more comprehensive understanding of cinema, and thus not to remain 'true' to the theories, but to challenge and enrich their conceptual schemes. Patricia Pisters's (2012) work on the 'neuro-image' is crucial to this chapter, since she connects neuroscience to film-philosophy and modern screen culture. Equally important is John Protevi's (2010) argument that embodied cognition would benefit from adopting the Deleuzian tripartite ontological differentiation between the virtual, intensive, and actual. Protevi's text is visionary due to its insistence on viewing Deleuzian philosophy as working across – rather than playing a part in – the so-called 'Analytic-Continental' divide of philosophy. This is essential for my proposal of an alternative account of the *fabula* that is not based on the 'classical sandwich model of perception' (cf. Hurley 2002).

However, this primarily theoretical examination of the embodied *fabula* must be complemented with a study that takes into account the obstacles stemming from the complex narratives themselves. Chapter VI, therefore, scrutinizes a variety of applications of the classical distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. I demonstrate that the distinction carries a series of presumptions to which any uncritical use automatically commits. This is done in relation to two complex narratives: Tom Tykwer's 'forking-path' narrative LOLA RENNT (RUN LOLA RUN 1998) and Alejandro González Iñárritu's 'mosaic' narrative 21 GRAMS (2003). Ultimately, just as the scientific principles for the reduction of complexity have led to important and brilliant advancements up to a point, 'where the limits of intelligibility which they constituted became more important than their elucidations' (Morin 2007, 5), so the rise of complex narratives makes a similar statement about classical narratology possible. I argue that the problem is that narratologists have seen it as their task to explain away or straighten out narrative complexity. As an alternative to this, I draw upon the idea of embodying the *fabula* to enhance our understanding of the multimodal and complex cinematic experience that these films give rise to.

Finally, I examine Christopher Nolan's MEMENTO (2000) in Chapter VII and argue that the film has become a site for rethinking the complexity of the cinematic medium. In particular, this chapter is interested in exploring how the film facilitates a renewed conceptualization of two concepts: the *fabula* and defamiliarization. This requires a re-examination of the complex interplay between the film's linear and non-linear dimensions, which I maintain is constituted in a reconfiguration of the feedback loops of the cognitive, emotional, and affective registers. It is with reference to MEMENTO's narrative feedback loops that the logic of the embodied *fabula* finds its clearest cinematic expression.

On a final note, I am aware of the implications of referring to digital cinematic works as 'films'. However, following Brown (2013), I use the words 'film' and 'cinema' according to 'what they can do as opposed to in terms of what each word means' (11). Thus, it is the terms 'film' and 'cinema' that evolve to accommodate the products and the manner we use these, rather than the products outstripping the terms (13). Following a similar line of reasoning, my reflections about the cinematic experience depart from ideal viewing circumstances, although I acknowledge that films nowadays are often seen on multiple platforms – such as on a laptop or a smartphone – that may reduce their impact and ability to enfold or embed the spectator in their universes. Yet, I am interested in carving out the potential of the cinematic experience, and the fact that not all viewing circumstances are optimal for narrative immersion, does not cause this cinematic *potential* to disappear altogether (cf. Brown 2013, 9-12; see also Carroll 1996; Rodowick 2007). In answering the Bazinian question of 'what is cinema?', Dudley Andrew (2010) maintains that 'cinema, essentially nothing in itself, is all about adaptation, all about what it has been led to become and may, in the years to come, still become' (140-141; cf. Brown 2013, 12). This study explores how moving images are constantly expanding the *potential* of what the cinematic experience might become.