

Phenomenology and Stream of Consciousness: The French New Wave and Modern Films

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Abstract. Phenomenology is widely recognised as a philosophical framework that pertains to the comprehension of the universe and the investigation of epistemology, emphasising a shift towards seeing entities in their true form, while arguing that the outward manifestations are indicative of their intrinsic nature. The inclusion of consciousness in literary works deviates from conventional psychological portrayals due to the presence of the character's subconscious mind, which remains inaccessible to their awareness, alongside a representation of reality. Within the realm of film, the concept of stream of consciousness is translated into a visual representation, often referred to as a shot, which serves as a metaphorical depiction of the character's complete focus or absence thereof. This article posits that the topic of stream of consciousness remains prevalent in contemporary cinematic narratives by drawing a comparison between the French New Wave and current cinema.

Keywords: The French new wave; Phenomenology; Stream of Consciousness.

1. Introduction

Phenomenology is regarded as a philosophical approach to human understanding of the world and to the exploration of how one knows, which advocates a movement towards things as they are, asserting that appearances are essences. The outbreak of World War I at the beginning of the 19th century fostered a rethinking of pragmatic and rational thinking. The pioneer, Husserl, proposed the phenomenological reduction, i.e., the suspension of the theoretical or existential presuppositions that we are accustomed to use to regulate the phenomena of consciousness, so that they all become invalidated, in order to see the original phenomena in their own right [1, 2]. Man perceives more than reality exists, so essential intuition is given more possibilities and higher possibilities than reality in phenomenology. In order to be able to see the essence, the sense of life experience and experience has to be weakened as much as possible. Phenomenology is to a certain extent free from the bounds of reason, and attaches importance to subjective feelings, and builds up a space for thinking about the connection between philosophy and life without losing its rigour. In the development of phenomenology, it derives Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and existentialist phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and has a certain influence on analytic philosophy.

According to Husserl, the most fundamental unit of time is not the point but the halo, i.e., no matter how small the unit of time is, it must contain the retention or stagnation of the sound that has just passed in the sense of physical time, as well as the prehension or preoccupation with the sound that is to come [1, 3-5]. Husserl calls this halo of retention and preoccupation with the original impression the "halo of time". So consciousness is not static, but fluid like a stream of water. Husserl's theory, inspired by empiricism, suggests that there is a proto-consciousness in man that makes him feel every experience and act, and that the perception gained is influenced by experience. This suggests that what man sees has a processing process, for example, if man sees a table, he sees not only the side of the table shown before him, but a three-dimensional physical object, and can feel the edges that are obscured, because he lives in three-dimensional space. The temporal stream of proto-consciousness contains not only the past as described above, but also the future, e.g. when we recall the title of a book we know clearly that some of the names are similar but not, as if we were near the eddies of a pool of water, which exemplifies the intentionality of the stream of consciousness. Typical

consciousness can be defined as an individual-specific stream of experiences [2]. The fluidity of consciousness is typical of stream of consciousness theory.

It is undeniable that the concept of stream of consciousness originally came from psychology. In his book *Principles of Psychology* published in 1890, James defined the flow of consciousness as "the process by which certain information, emotions, and desires from the outside world or from the internal unconscious move in and out of consciousness in a continuous movement." The concept of consciousness is developed in phenomenology, where Scherer suggests that "the most fundamental experiences should be emotional, personal, and ethical experiences [6]. Phenomenology provides an ethical intuition and explicit investigation in which imaginative activity comes first and can construct the good and the good in ethical terms." In the second half of the 19th century, stream of consciousness as an artistic trend entered first literature and then film and television, and became part of the French New Wave movement roaring influence to this day. A dynamical systems and phenomenology-based approach demonstrates that human consciousness is associated with faster, more unpredictable and yet more constant consciousness. A dynamical systems and phenomenology-based approach demonstrates that human consciousness is associated with faster, more unpredictable yet more constant transitions in dynamical connectivity and reveals an increased repertoire of possible states [7].

Stream of consciousness to a certain extent reflects the psychological characteristics of human beings, character and emotional changes, and has a unique artistic beauty when used in films. The existentialist proposition that accompanies the stream of consciousness technique makes it worthwhile to analyze many details of the phenomenological view of stream of consciousness in film.

2. An Experimental Analysis of Memorable Stream of Consciousness: Time and Memory

The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques in film reflects the recognition of individual consciousness in film, the content of which is usually expressed through images and plot. The former stream of consciousness consists in transforming individual consciousness into visual, metaphorical images. The latter detaches the narrative structure from ordinary logic and rearranges it according to the psychology of the characters.

Memorable, from director Bruno Collet, was nominated for the 2020 Academy Award for Short Film Animation. It unfolds with an oil painter suffering from Alzheimer's disease and his confrontation with memory loss. The film consists of two perspectives, the wife's and the old man's, with the wife's perspective acting as a narrator. It is not a stream-of-consciousness film, but uses a lot of stream-of-consciousness techniques in the first perspective of the old man. It adopts the form of stop-motion animation, using clay to make the brushstrokes of oil paintings, constructing the visual world of an oil painter. Through stream of consciousness, the film illustrates the old man's psychology and pathology respectively, and its causal logic is abstracted, as he only knows the events but not the reasons why, and the audience is also substituting into the temporal and spatial chaos of the illness. The use of stream of consciousness in pathology and psychology will be analysed in detail below.

When the doctor asks the old man about his belongings at the table, he sees that the mobile phone and pepper on the table have turned into mixed pigments, yet retaining their original shapes, reflecting the old man's feelings of trying to remember but being unable to do so. These mixed pigments fly upwards in the form of beads, and the image changes to a top view with the table as the axis, the old man looks up helplessly at the rising beads of pigment, the beads of pigment are the result of the abstraction of a certain being in the old man's consciousness, and their changes also represent the changes in the old man's consciousness, showing the process of complete forgetting.

Significantly at this point the doctor at the table disappears in this image, alluding to the dislocation of time, and the light and people in the perspective occasionally move momentarily, showing the old man's mental time. Time perception can be defined as the conscious experience of time, as opposed to Building on Husserl's and others' phenomenological conception, three temporal aspects of

conscious experience can be perceived. Temporal aspects of conscious experience can be discerned, namely the tripartite structure concerning past, present, and future [4].

In the film, two parts, the present and the future, are presented more specifically, as general forgetfulness of the past or the interplay of past and present is typical of Alzheimer's disease. He stands in front of the window watching his wife chatting with the doctor, and reads the answer from her worried face. The camera pulls to a distant view, and the old man sees the peaceful place in his mind - the house and the trees planted in front and behind it, and their light and shadow change sharply into the night, with the shadows of the trees twisting and swaying, and the flow of starlight presenting a Van Gogh's star map. The peacefulness of the landscape changes into chaos and light, and the viewer is unable to know if night is really falling in the real world time of the film, as it seems to be non-existent, more like the old man's panic and fear of the future. As an oil painter, he seems to have become a psychotic Van Gogh in his later years. As he realises the reality of his illness that he has to accept, he is plunged into a torrent of consciousness like never before, paving the way for his next attempt at suicide and his fight against amnesia.

The old man thinks about death because he doesn't even know himself anymore and after an unsuccessful suicide the film enters a new phase where the old man starts exploring his own existence. His identity diminishes little by little as he loses his memory, he forgets that he is a father and he forgets his age. The loss of memory is close to the loss of experience, life is like a newborn pebble, naked and everything slips through it. In such primitive days the old man always sits on the sofa, and Bruno Collet arranges a special existence for him - a blank space indicating forgetfulness, a drawing board and a wife. Try to look at life from the existentialist's point of view, there is always a being that takes precedence over essence, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterwards will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Only afterwards will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be [8]. The epilogue allows the audience to unearth the meaning that the old man has given to his life and to peer into its past memories, and at the centre of his life is the desire to love - art and his wife. In the epilogue, the old man decides to paint the portrait of the woman he does not recognise in front of him (his wife); he does not recognise the brush anymore and paints with his fingers, which seems to be a loop of the present repeating the past. He invites his wife to dance, and as the crescendo of symphonic music builds, she is transformed into beads of paint and rises into the air (as mentioned in the text), and the old man eventually forgets everything.

The film ends on a rousing note, suggesting that this is not a sad story. The old man's psychological journey is one of escape - confrontation - instinct to love, and the same way as the story *The Old Man and the Sea* is the attitude towards suffering; they are both unyielding and loving in their lives, and the viewer can gain positive strength from it.

3. New Wave and Memorable Cinema Streams of Consciousness

The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques in cinema originated with the French New Wave movement, and continues to exist as a common cinematic technique in many films even after its disappearance [9].

The French New Wave movement was one of the three major aesthetic movements in cinema, referring to a wave of young, unknown film directors who competed to make their first films in the French cinema between 1958 and 1962 [10]. It was related to the reconstruction of French society after the Second World War, a time when young people scorned the old culture, when a new one was being created (rock and roll, new fashion, sexual liberation, tourist culture, football), and when there was a call for reform. Until then, French cinema had been closely linked to historical events, but the new wave movement rejected the link between cinema and politics, and young people expressed their desire to create something of their own [6].

Influenced by the philosophies of existentialism and Freudian psychology, New Wave cinema generally focused on the inner world, often associated with dreams, fantasies, memories, and a strong sense of the personal [6]. For example, Truffaut's rebellious boy Antoine in *The 400 Blows*, Chabrol's French middle-class family, Homer's typical Parisian intellectuals, Varda's female consciousness, Rivette's theatre career, Malraux's memories of the war [6]. Some of the characters were more marginalised than others. Some of these characters are more marginalised. In order to bring the audience into the heart of the characters and to interpret the story from the moral point of view of the characters, diary style, subliminal narration and dialogue are always used throughout, together with memories or fantasies from the characters' point of view, which has become the initial use of the stream of consciousness technique.

The French New Wave movement as a whole has a wide range of film genres. Typical stream-of-consciousness films include Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, Resnais' *Hiroshima My Love* and *Last Year at Marienbad*, and Fellini's *Eight and a Half*. Including the 21st century short film *Memorable* with stream-of-consciousness characteristics, their stream-of-consciousness use and expression are different, on the one hand, from personal characteristics and on the other hand, from the characteristics of the times, the differences and similarities are mainly reflected in the narrative and the picture, and this paper will be elaborated from these two aspects.

The use of stream-of-consciousness in film narrative is reflected in the fact that the narrative structure is detached from ordinary logic and rearranged according to the psychology of the characters [11]. For example, *Hiroshima My Love* is not recalled in sequence (nor flashbacks interpolated), but in accordance with the heroine's changing moods She jumps from one complete memory to another, touching on her most painful memory, the death of her lover, bit by bit. Because stream-of-consciousness films are concerned with the inner world of people, the process of extraction and reorganization inevitably touches on the handling of consciousness and reality. The difference in treatment creates the difference between stream of consciousness films.

In *Wild Strawberries*, the boundary between consciousness and reality is more obvious, probably because of the main character's calm and cold image, *Wild Strawberries* tells the story of an old doctor who foresees death and goes to Italy with his companions, he remembers his past on the way, realises his own coldness and feels pained and seeks for forgiveness in reality, and finally reconciles with himself. Reconciliation story. Bergman chooses to use the present tense scene as a framework, filling in dreams and memories (the conscious part), and letting the memories act as a point of conflict in the story, letting the dreams show the old doctor's responses and psychological changes, and the three elements of dreams and memories and reality alternate, like the repeated parts of a piece of music, reflecting the rhythm of the film. In contrast, Fellini overlaps reality and consciousness. *Eight and a Half* belongs to the director's autobiography, which expresses the director's feelings towards his works, which he anthropomorphises into women of various colours, expressing his attitude and doubts towards his creations through the dialogues. It is difficult for the audience to separate reality and consciousness, as both exist in the same scene [11]. The protagonist listens to the actor's complaints but in the next moment he sees his ideal lover gesturing to him, embodying the contradiction between reality and ideal. As mentioned earlier, *Memorable* has two perspectives, the old man's consciousness is chaotic, and reality and consciousness are entangled, so he will see notepads (representing passing memories) flying around in space. At this point jump cuts to the wife's (the Other's) perspective and sees a stony old man sitting quietly on the sofa, this scene acts as an explanation, like a lens with a filter (the old man's consciousness) but from time to time changes the filter leaving reality alone.

When inserting the conscious part, it is different from ordinary psychological depictions, because the consciousness has a subconscious that the character cannot notice, as well as a mapping of reality. In cinema, the stream of consciousness becomes a visual, metaphorical image (or shot) that shows the full extent of the character's attention or lack thereof.

4. Conclusion

The core of the French New Wave, as described by Bazin, has an air of existential humanism inside it. The cinematic medium was imbued with an existential humanist ethos that valued objectivity above all else. On other occasions, he and the auterists pushed for more "realistic," "democratic," or "undignified" camerawork. On other occasions, he and the auterists pushed for more "realistic," "democratic," or "undignified" camerawork. This was a perfect example of the camera-stylo doctrine, which gave the filmmaker unprecedented control over the camera via the use of techniques including long takes, sequence shots, and invisible editing. The most prominent feature of the stream of consciousness in new wave cinema was the use of camera language, for example, in *Wild Strawberries*, the old doctor sees in his dream two unriden horses dragging a coffin from far away to close to him. And approaching, until he is right next to him. This long shot makes the scene move like an eerie sketch, it doesn't omit time but makes everything more intriguing. Every transition of the camera in a stream-of-consciousness picture seems to have a deep meaning, sometimes it represents the psychology of the character, sometimes it represents time, and its transformations and shifts seem to imply the surge of the character's consciousness. Half a century later, colour cinema offers new creative possibilities: the old man in *Memorable* looks like Van Gogh's self-portrait, and as his illness worsens, his colours become more and more vibrant, reflecting the fact that amnesia has brought his life back to its essence, and that he has found the one thing he doesn't want to forget. The colours here do not represent joy or sadness, but rather a change in his unidentified consciousness. The flow and development of colours is used to represent the stream of consciousness expanding a new boundary with a more emotional and speechless character. The stream of consciousness images do not have a clear storyline but are dominated by feelings, seemingly granting the viewer the power of conscious dialogue.

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