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Call to Action and Rhizomatic Networked Perception in Cine-VR 3D

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Abstract

This article focuses on the embodied activity of perception and expression within 360° stereoscopic spherical film (3DSC), which, by being situated geographically in the centre of viewing experience, destroys any illusion of what the author of phenomenological spectatorship Vivian Sobchack calls a transcendent space: the black void as the distance between the screen plane in a movie theatre and the audience. Instead of being afforded a specific point of view, the VR viewer has specific mobile bodily engagements with subjects in film whose visible activity articulates a shifting field of vision, all in conflict with the community-mediated VR viewing platforms that, in turn, morph the current phenomenological cinematic experience into a rhizomatic networked spectatorship. Personal prototypes shot in 3DSC are used in support of the argument that the latter spectatorship form is both an alternative and optimal mode for film viewing in the new virtual space.

Keywords

focalization, 360° 3D, perception, virtual reality, Cine-VR

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Introduction

The role of a spectator in the construction of narratives shapes the core models of many film theorists, such as in David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and Edward Branigan's *Point of View in the Cinema* (1984), where the notion of a cinematic narrator is rejected as an 'anthropomorphic fiction' (Bordwell 1985:62; Gunning 1999:470, as cited in Faulkner, 2004:134). The former believes that narration is a dynamic process where the major reconstruction of stories is done by a viewer through various layers of visual and auditory information, where the viewer does not merely act as a passive object, "positioned" by what happens on the screen, but as an active participant – indeed, an agent – who virtually creates the film's narration" (Chatman, 1990:125-126), whereas Branigan argues that film camera is a linguistic construct, whose meaning depends on the shared communal interpretation by the wider audience (Quendler, 2012:202). In this respect, Cine-VR (Williams *et al.*, 2021), particularly shot stereoscopically (termed as 3DSC), affords its audience a much more decisive role in shaping the flow of narrative transmission in a manner not even imagined by Bordwell or Chatman at the time their theories on the cinematic narrator were published. Moreover, in the 3DSC format, the viewer not only narrates but does so by means of his or her active bodily engagements with the objects and characters, distributed in 3D space, and bracketed within the framework of phenomenological spectatorship.

Vivian Sobchack's (1992) existential phenomenology of the cinema and its residual spectatorship formula are rooted in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and pursue a different route than the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, the "founding father" of phenomenology (Stadler, 1994). While adhering to Husserl's central claim, made by Stein, Merleau-Ponty, and other phenomenologists, that the lived

body (Husserl's *Leib* or *Leibkörper*) is inseparably linked with all the organs of sensation, perception, and voluntary movement, through the intimate encounter with objects in space, "in terms of their disclosed profiles, their resistance, visible and tactile surface character" (Dahlstrom et al., 2015:58), her deviating contention is that film is a "pure" cinematic vision with its own existence, as a "viewing-view/viewed-view" bodily organ, locked in a somatic and dynamic relationship with the body of a spectator (Sobchack, 1992:133). Such a cinematic vision is never monocular but doubled, hermeneutically negotiable of *two viewing subjects* by means of the embodied and enworlded "address of the eye" that...expresses both the origin and destination of viewing as an existential and transcendent activity [across the dark space in a movie theatre], the transcendent space, that is, a space exceed-ing the individual body" (Sobchack, 1995:54). Yet, as authentic as the *transcendent* space might be in traditional film viewing, it is being destroyed by the new technological arm of virtual reality, where the viewer is no longer separated by the black void and becomes a part of the narrative fabric presented as well as the object of viewed-view. The question remains by what narrative dynamics and technical peculiarities he or she is the object of gaze and address.

My treatment of the audience's bodily engagements with the objects surrounding it in the 360° milieu stems from the fine-tuning of Sobchack's (1992) three metaphors – the *picture frame*, the *window*, and the *mirror* – which have been at the core of cinema: the frame and the window represent the opposing poles of classical film, while the third, the mirror, represents a synthetic conflation of one's perception and expression in contemporary film. I contend that only 360° stereoscopic spherical film offers its spectators a natural habitat for such a conflation, the parallel embodied activity of perception and expression, because of its use of the centrifugal anchoring, bodily situating of existence in relation

to the objects of the outside world.

By being situated geographically in the centre of viewing experience in virtual reality (VR), any illusion is destroyed in what Vivian Sobchack calls a *transcendent space*, the black void in the distance between the screen plane in a movie theatre and the audience. What she means by a purely phenomenological filmic experience is that, instead of a specific point of view, the viewer has specific mobile bodily engagements with subjects whose visible activity articulates a *shifting field of vision* from a world that always exceeds it (Sobchack, 1992:62), that is, the perspective driving the oscillating process becomes an accurate description of Cine-VR experience with its twist-and-turn agency as its primary *modus operandi*. Moreover, such a *bodily centring*, a *shifting field of vision*, and the *intimate cinematic experience*, which is in conflict with community-mediated VR viewing platforms, triangulates the perception of the current communal experience in what I claim to be a *rhizomatic networked spectatorship*, albeit other markers to define such a form of spectatorship exist. Whether the platform is labeled as *Storyplex* (Riggs, 2019), or the 'rhizomatic networked spectatorship' platform, as I have proposed, their ontology is essentially the same: they explore the best psychosomatic immersive states in public space, within the framework of a communal spectatorship based on the network models, as framed by the *Deleuzoguattarian rhizome*, and in conjunction with Vivian Sobchack's spectatorship mode.

Embodied Activity

In order to explore various immersive states, a process needs to be carried out spatially; it defines a relationship between a place and the body by underscoring the fact that a physical environment cannot exist without humans who experience it in their daily lives through "larger political and economic contexts within which

these individuals operate in any specific location” (Sen and Silverman, 2014:3). Thus, *embodiment* is a precursor to *embodied activity*. Embodiment is also a psychosomatic act. In other words, the kind of body we possess affects the kind of behaviours, experiences, and meanings we have (Overton *et al.*, 2008:1; MacLachlan, 2004:4): some studies have shown that individuals primed with holding a hot or cold drink prior to meeting another person would later see that person in light of having a warm or cold personality, respectively (Ahn, 2011:6). The mental disposition we have towards ourselves can also affect the scale of embodiment, sliding between “secure embodiment, defined by wholeness and a feeling that that self is ‘spatially co-extensive with the body’ [and disembodiment] in which the body is often conceptually separated from the self in an attempt at self-preservation”, such as in an internal torment (Ross, 2010:12).

In addition to possessing and acting through a physical manifestation in the world, embodiment, by its very nature, occurs in real time and real space (Dourish, 2004:100), which makes embodiment practically most effective only in the VR setting, and, more so, in 3DSC. Although traditional media such as television and film already extend the capacities of human sensory systems to some degree by means of shifting perspective and presenting fantastical characters in unnatural narratives, virtual environments keep coming up with unique agencies that take full advantage of the encounters with embodiment (Ahn, 2011:10), engaging “the body as kinaesthetic input via the specialized interface devices that... require bodily actions to be performed sensorially, kinaesthetically, proprioceptively – within a full 3D spatial, yet virtual construct” (Morie, 2014:126). In this regard, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, one of the most creative American artists, a scientist and educator in immersive technologies, is not the first who pointed to the surge of *embodied encounters* (Ahn, 2011:10) in *posthuman societies*. The most prophetic of them was actually Maurice Merleau-Ponty with

his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), who saw “one’s body [as] a ‘potentiality of movement,’...a ‘field of possibilities of interaction with the environment,’...[and] embodiment relations in which an artifact becomes part of the body schema by becoming a medium” through which *perceptual and motor skills* are expressed, namely, through telescopes, microscopes, hearing aids, stethoscopes, etc. (Brey, 2000:5).

Morie, however, takes a step further by delineating all the chief artifacts and affordances that make posthuman existence possible, according to which the embodiment is attained via virtual avatars (such as in video games): *the first-person avatar*, embodied with extended virtual prosthetics (generally arms); the *third-person/observed avatar*, where an avatar appears, at some distance, out in front of the player’s visual locus; and *no avatar*, which provides the first-person point of view as if seen through one’s own eyes “with the camera lenses situated at the approximate location of each eye [matching] the mental model we have of the self that inhabits the physical world” (Morie, 2014:131). The first-person, no-avatar angle is the default point of view, which Malcolm MacLachlan, a Professor of Global Health at Trinity College, and Raymond Gibbs Jr., a psychology professor at the University of California, believe an embodied person takes instead of the objectified third-person, because our experiences are channelled through the first-person perspective, at all times and regardless of what transpires in life (Taibbi, 2011:1): “Even if totally paralyzed, an individual has a first-person relation to his or her own body if the thought ‘I wonder if I’ll ever be able to move my legs again’ can be entertained” (Fludernik, 1994:285). This latter, no-avatar model, albeit in the first-person perspective, which Morie refers to as the self-representation of a user in immersive environments and the primary mode of embodied expressions in contemporary VR (Fludernik, 1994:285), is the most appropriate one for 3DSC, defined as a *deputy avatar*, for it matches Marco

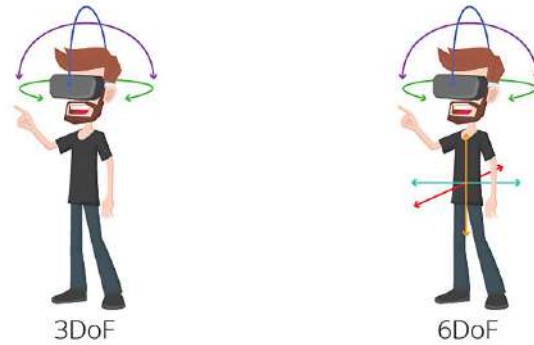


Figure 1. (Riga: Aigars Ceplitis, 2021)

Caracciolo's (2014) deputy focalization model, in which a viewer, an embodied self, fully present in the Cine-VR setting, has access to the fictional world without being a character in the story or having the ability to interact. In terms of its functions, such an avatar operates as a *Dualistic Body* or a so-called *Bifurcated Body*, since it, while being virtual, is still perceptually aware of being in the physical world (Fludernik, 1994:286-288).

Being perceptually aware of one's 'Bifurcated Body' in 3DSC is a cognitive act, where the *embodied activity* is framed as an active form embodiment and entails what Tan (2014:116) terms as an *emotional action readiness* in cinema. Because embodiment per se possesses a bona fide *phenomenal character* that transcends the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive properties beyond one's everyday consciousness of oneself as *embodied subject* situated and acting *in one's "surrounding world* insofar as 'I now here' see and act" (Dahlstrom *et al.*, 2015:30), at the root of such a consciousness are the emotions that prompt behavioural responses, thoughts, or attention. What distinguishes emotion from other states of mind is *readiness for action* (Tan, 2014:106). In cinema, we cannot act, particularly in 3DSC. But *even* if we cannot persuade the characters in a story to do what we want them to do, we can wish that they would virtually "amend" the situation;

so, they are *called* to act. A *Call to Action* (CtA) in Cine-VR is a default embodied activity, constrained by the inability (3-DoF) to move in X, Y, Z space (6-DoF) (Figure 1), and, thus, compensated with an eager desire to act upon and move with characters in the unfolding process of a narrative, or to put it differently, CtA fosters oscillation between "*I can* and *I cannot*, an oscillation that propels [the audience] outward into the movement [it observes] and backward into [its] own capacity/incapacity, [by] projecting [it] into a realm of movement possibility that frees...[the] body's limitations (its *I cannot*) by vicariously eclipsing [it]" (Tait, 2020:94).

The very attribute of '*I can* and *I cannot*' feeds the root of phenomenological states in 3DSC, the expression of CtA. The in-between immersion it fosters, neither entirely active nor passive, bears resemblance to live theatre, more so than to cinema, where the viewer *is* co-present with the actors and objects in 360° space, and where the position of the audience and the surrounding narrative is configured in multiple ways to evoke different experiences, using all possible technologies, up to light field and real-time volumetric film, in conjunction with 3DSC (Ko

et al., 2018, as cited in Pillai, 2019). In addition to a particular intermediate state, the limitation on movement sets parameters for the choice of perspective the audience can have in 360° narratives, where there is no such thing as ‘helpless distance’, the very peculiar stance shared by many computer-generated virtual reality professionals and gamers, who insist that the inability to move in x-y-z space or inability to haptically interact with a VR environment is non-immersive (Jahn, 2017:9). For one thing, such a stance is not supported by data from a number of neuroscientific studies that confirm that the neural activation paths in the hippocampus region, during whole-brain, high-resolution fMRI scans, are triggered by a mere planning of action or willingness to move or engage with a VR environment, irrespective of whether the environment is full VR or Cine-VR (Schmid, 2010:92; Schmid, 2010:93). Second, the viewer’s pivotal vortex in the 360° sphere already predisposes one to “embodied activity of perception and expression – making sense and signifying it – as modalities of a single experience” (Sobchack, 1992:62) by means of three metaphors – the *picture frame*, the *window*, and the *mirror* – that are at the core of cinema: the frame and the window represent the opposing poles of classical film, while the third, the mirror, “represents the synthetic conflation of perception and expression that characterizes most contemporary film theory” (Sobchack, 1992:15). Such a conflation, the “embodied activity of perception and expression”, uses “the *structures of direct experience* (the ‘centering’ and bodily situating of existence in relation to the world of objects and others)” as the foundation of its medium-specific cinematic language; the importance of the body here “as the agency and location of perception cannot be overemphasized [since] the body is the vehicle for perception and expression” (Dowbenko, 2003), contained in a default state of viewing views and being viewed, or to put it differently, *called to act* in the parameters of phenomenological spectatorship.

Phenomenological Spectatorship in 3DSC

Sobchack (1992) claims that cinema is not shaped by the viewer as much on his or her ideological grounds as on their embodied activities (Stadler, 1994:65). Because the film and a spectator produce the en-gagement of two “viewing views” and “viewed views” (the spectator’s and the film’s), this makes a film intelligible and gives the film experience its meaning as such (Stadler, 1994:65). In her response to Harald Stadler (1994), where she illustrates a phenomenology of embodied vision in a human subject, she refers to Richard Zaner’s description of four fundamental ways in which the human body perceptively engages us in the world. First, the perceptive body is the bearer of the orientational point with respect to which other objects are organized in the spatio-temporal surrounding; second, the perceptive body serves as an “organ of perception,” that is, as a single technology with several sensory fields; third, the perceptive body is an organ of perception that synthesizes the aforementioned sensory fields into an identifiable place; and, fourth, the perceptive body is that “which actualizes volition and signifies through gesture and language the intentionality of consciousness” (Sobchack, 1994, as cited in Stadler, 1994:66). Whether she prophetically envisions the audience trapped in a 360° stereoscopic sphere – this can be left to anyone’s imagination, but what is clear is that the four fundamental features Zaner talks about are all present in 3DSC, albeit it does not immediately follow that the four traits, by virtue of being present, make the spectatorship phenomenological. But Sobchack’s (1992) insistence on the ‘complete film experience’ – “an experience that irreducibly links human intentionality through mediation (of one’s own embodied activity and that of technological body (camera, projector))” (Stadler, 1994) – comes into collusion with Sobchack’s own concept of the “*transcendent space*, that is, a space exceeding the individual body and its unique situation yet

concretely inhabited and *intersubjective*” (Sobchack, 1992:25).

Crux of the Conflict

The crux of the discord is that in 2D flat mode, the film experience is incomplete in terms of its phenomenological attributes. The most obvious one is this very presence of the dark. The abyss one stares into, the act of viewing in the dark becomes an increasingly solitary and superficial experience, to the point of signalling the dissolution of the cinematic itself (Casetti, 2015:205). In this context, Sobchack’s (1992) modelled correlation, what she terms as the “engagement of two ‘viewing views’ and ‘viewed views’” (the spectator’s and the film’s), is rather theoretical, because the audience is bound by the film’s frame and window. The audience can surmise but cannot see what the camera sees. The two forms of embodiment, the spectator’s and the film’s, are loose and conditional. But if one eliminates the dark *transcendent* space, which locks the audience into being a passive observer endowed with the third-person perspective, and affords it a second-person narrative situation instead, via *shifting fields of vision* within the schemata of *rhizomatic spectatorship*, the phenomenological state that is triggered is the very embodied activity only 3DSC affords. To prove my point, let me decode *Public Enemies* (2009) and *Lady in the Lake* (1947), with the latter being a more extensive focus of Sobchack’s illustration “of visually perceiving and visibly expressing the world through vision” (Sobchack, 1994, as cited in Stadler, 1994:65).

In *Public Enemies*, directed by Michael Mann and released to a wider audience in 2009, the crux is the final Biograph Theater scene where Dillinger is watching *Manhattan Melodrama* (1934), while the FBI assassins are waiting outside. In anticipation of his doom, having lost his girlfriend and allies, Dillinger makes a decision not to drag on any longer; in that, he has Mann’s admiration and



Figure 2. Robert Montgomery, “Lady in the Lake” (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1947)

suppressed desire to emulate Dillinger’s “intense trajectory, this fascinating life filled with mystery”, where “we’re all doomed anyway” (Patterson, 2014:3). It is telling that the film was released amid the backdrop of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, which echoes the very causes and effects of the Great Depression and, thus, becomes a covert sociopolitical statement of Mann’s in the words and attitude of John Dillinger, who regards banks, corporations, the FBI, and the ruling political elite as no more than a “band of thugs and even murderers, presided over by a quasi-fascist” state (Laurier, 2009:2-3) and, therefore, as fair game. Art critic Joan Laurier (2009) goes even further, claiming the director was blunt in advancing Dillinger’s cause, as sociopathic as it may seem, as a national heroism of sorts, while linking the FBI’s head in the thirties, Hoover, with Donald Rumsfeld, who perfected the modern justice system into a travesty at times, when bankers “weren’t murderers or anything; they had merely stolen more money than most people can rationally conceive of...[and]...came to Washington, took an oath before Congress, and lied about it” (Taibbi, 2011:1). To argue that *Public Enemies*, as a filmic apparatus, guarantees the immediate kinship between a spectator (a male, at least) and the film is a stretch. When we talk about embodied activity in this film, its cinematic prowess depends on

the viewer's status in the "pecking order of the societal food chain", on *perceptual* spectatorship: someone who is well off might associate with or embody Johnny Depp's Dillinger less so than one living on the margins of society. Such instances where the embodiment of a spectator and that of a film apparatus (director, actor, ideological position, etc.) coexist and reinforce each other in a very convincing fashion are rare in 2D flat cinema; they are by no means certain, or even convincingly gaged.

Lady in the Lake, a 1947 murder mystery, directed by Robert Montgomery, who also plays the leading protagonist the film, is shot in the first-person perspective, a revolutionary cinematic technique at the time. With a few exceptions when Montgomery's character addresses the audience directly, the audience sees only what he does. According to a New York Times 1947 article, *this literary first-person-perspective-turned-into-movie style is a flop* [1], and it was hardly repeated in film production, at least not until the dawn of video game culture and VR. The first dilemma in Sobchack's analysis of *Lady in the Lake* is that the film is not really told in the first person, but rather in the second person, where the spectator is addressed as "you" in very general terms; after all, one is forced to be associated with Montgomery's character, who is the camera in this instance, and talked to directly (Figure 2). Second, Sobchack's model of cinema's *intelligibility* [2] does not apply; the addressee in a movie theatre separated by the 'transcendent' plane is not seen specifically enough to assure the interchange of two separate visions. But if the transcendent space is eliminated and *Lady in the Lake* was to be transplanted into stereoscopic Cine-VR, the dynamics of seeing and being seen would acquire a factual manifestation, and the two opposing visions would be in sync; in fact, second-person narration is the very engine that drives the embodied activity in 3DSC.

1
New York Times, 1947. *At the Capitol*. NYT Digital Archives.

2
"The result is that the cinema's vision cannot be seen visibly-materially-as human vision even though its essential structure

From Phenomenological to Rhizomatic Spectatorship

The curious case of *Lady in the Lake*, within the spectrum of narratological possibilities of 3DSC, suggests that the embodied activity is, first of all, driven by narrative situations where the audience is addressed as an active protagonist in the diegetic space. Second, I will add that this second-person frame necessitates the *shifting fields of vision* and *rhizomatic viewing platform* that cement Sobchack's (1992) claim to the engagement of two "viewing views" and "viewed views" in a more tactile and compelling manner.

In 2018, two published research papers clearly demonstrated that the second-person narrative situation is a *lingua franca* of 3DSC: *Virtual sidekick: Second-person POV in narrative VR* by Mads Larsen, at UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, and *The Second-Person Narration as a Natural Habitat of 360° Stereoscopic Spherical Cinema*, which I had authored for the 2018 SGEM Social Sciences and Arts Conference. The former argued that a disembodied third-person objective camera view is unlikely to satisfy the audience, whereas the second-person perspective, where the viewer is the protagonist's sidekick, affords the audience with an ever-greater agency to take independent actions for the plot (Larsen, 2018). In arguing his case, Mads Larsen, however, conflates the two perspectives, the second and the third, in that he leaves no space for a distinction between the general 'you' and the specific 'you', when the audience is addressed directly. I root my arguments in Monika Fludernik's (1994) interpretation of Mary Frances Hopkins' and Leon Perkins' *Second Person Point of View in Narrative* (1981), where she rather convincingly opts for subjunctive, hypothetical, and "counterfactual" narrative scenarios where the audience embodies plural forms of address, as this accommodates "a variety of 'you's' and a variety of 'I's,' and a combination of these [moving] along

and function (the intentional correlation of the visual and the visible that irreducibly links the seeing to the seen and implies a reciprocity between them) are enough like that of human vision to allow for the cinema's *intelligibility*" (Sobchack, 1994, as cited in Stadler, 1994:65).

and across another boundary line, that between the discourse and the story” (Fludernik, 1994:286-288). What was once a rather rare narrative device in *Peeping Tom* (1960) or *Dark Passage* (1947), albeit elegant and effective in their own way at the time, is now deployed with frequency; *Nowhere: A cinematic virtual reality experience* (2017), *Catatonic* (2016), and *First Impressions: a virtual experience of the first year of life* (2017) are just a few amidst the troves of VR titles where the protagonist, rather successfully, addresses the viewer directly.

The Second-Person Narration as a Natural Habitat of 360° Stereoscopic Spherical Cinema (2018) tracks the demarcation boundary between the discourse of virtual reality and the story, set against the backdrop of Gérard Genette’s and Seymour Chatman’s narrative theories as well as Marie-Laure Ryan’s concepts of immersion. With the support of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methodology, semi-structured interviews, and field experiments, where my own VR prototypes were used, I compared and contrasted the expected residual data to come up with a unique narrative framework, geared specifically for 3DSC, that measures the various levels of embodied activity, depending on the optical perspective used. Amongst the two seemingly similar but ontologically different second-person perspectives, which I term as *Reverse External Locus* (REL), an exclusively Cine-VR device that addresses the audience with a “general ‘you’”, and *Reverse Internal Locus* (RIL), which addresses the viewer with a “specific ‘you’”, where a narrator or a character, while having no access to the viewer’s thoughts, is fully aware of the audience being present in the 360° virtual space, the latter, RIL, is the most immersive of all (Ceplitis, 2018). The findings also show that the immersive properties of RIL, as a narrative technique, most effectively promote the breakdown of the barriers between the two intelligent bodies, if Sobchack’s (1994) terms are used, “the seeing” and the reciprocal “seen”, in a vision that belongs to the third, the

‘Bifurcated Body’.

It is important to note that, in the spirit of Sobchack’s articulation of “*a shifting field of vision* from a world that always exceeds it”, where there is no such abstraction as *point of view* but rather “a specific and mobile engagement of embodied and enworlded subjects/objects” (Sobchack, 1992:62), the ‘Bifurcated Body’ engages with an oscillating reprise. A case in point is the triptych of *Taxi Driver* (2019), *Departure* (2018), and *Ascenseur Pour L’échafaud 2017* (2017), a part of the prototype series I have completed in 3DSC to examine the various narratological canons in order to finalize the narrative taxonomy deployed for stereoscopic 360° spherical cinema.

The premise of *Taxi Driver* is simple enough: the audience is a customer who has just taken a cab. In the course of the ride, the audience is forced to hear a lengthy charade on the wisdoms of life, and from none other than the cab driver himself. As is often the case in Latvia, where inhabitants are used to waiting, and are forced to wait, the cab driver gets out at some point to do his own business. Obviously, as is customary in the Baltics, where no one knows who does what and why, another guy whose face the audience barely sees suddenly gets snuffed; all the while, the radio host in the background discusses the inflated salaries and bonuses the public radio administrative staff receives. Upon committing the murder, the cab driver simply returns and continues to lecture his customer (the audience) on how to proceed in life. The interaction is optically anchored in a specific focus on the audience as if the underlying motto was “listen to what I say, and not to what I do!”. The address is visually direct, leaving no doubt that the taxi driver *knows who* the viewer is and why she or he is *being taken for a ride* (Figure 3).

In a similar technique, *Departure* deploys a shifting perspective to address the neoliberal economic policies enacted in 2008 that are still taking



Figure 3. "Taxi Driver" (Riga: Aigars Ceplitis, 2019)



Figure 4. “*Departure*” (Riga: Aigars Ceplitis, 2018)

place and rapidly depopulating the already weak economic structures in Latvia. The whole film is shot through the perspective of a deputy focalizer, the presence of whom is only acknowledged in the shot when the family picks up its suitcases, to forebode the viewer to be the next departing candidate. The last shot accentuates the embodied activity of a spectator by means of an insect crawling onto the camera lens, into the very eyeball of the viewer (Figure 4).

Finally, *Ascenseur Pour L'échafaud 2017* echoes Louis Malle's 1958 original crime film about the murder of a wealthy arms dealer. However, the connection is loose, as its overall approach uses the lingua franca of Herluf Bidstrup's social satire, and, more appropriately, it is a dark noir spoof about the dire political corruption in Latvia.

The plot centres around a policeman who enters the second floor of a large business complex and hears a commotion; he proceeds to investigate the source of the sound. Then, a shot reveals a half-dead body being dragged through a hall. It is unclear whether the victim is male or female, but it is clear that the audience is led to believe that the events occur on the same floor. It is when the actual killing occurs, unseen by the audience, and the policeman is nowhere to be found; the panning of the view (if the audience chooses to shift the perspective) reveals the third floor, in fact, and, finally, the bloody torso dragged into the gallows. The choice of shifting fields of vision here is deliberate: in the 2014 parliamentary election, a leader of a major political party was elected through a backdoor channel. After she suffered a serious and embarrassing defeat in the polls, a fictitious narrative was concocted that allowed her to retain her seat. Furthermore, the continuation of her political career was assured with the appointment of ambassadorship upon completion of her final term in office in 2018, in spite of her overwhelming unpopularity. And, hence, this film is a reaction, a testament to the political hijacking.

Ascenseur Pour L'échafaud 2017 plays with perspective where the spectator, being a mere witness, a bystander to the crime, is an unwilling silent participant due to his or her inability to fully deploy the innate Call to Action (CtA) (Figure 5) with which some VR technologies, particularly those in video games, are naturally endowed: in this regard, a technological handicap of 3DSC becomes a serious narrative advantage.

The triptych, along with other VR prototypes, is splintered across multiple Cine-VR stations, in a rhizomatic pattern, that is, starting with one story, then, by "adding pieces on to it *ad infinitum*... 'greater than the sum of its parts' and 'a single cohesive story'...with the result ending in 'fragmentation – the story has been broken into pieces'" (Phillips, 2012:15) (Figure 6). The ambition is for the audience to fill in the gaps in this fragmentation by introducing potential extra details in a plot that is not based on itself, per se, but rather on "complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories" (Jenkins, 2007:2-3), through digital technologies, such as VR, that are more democratic and participatory (Harvey, 2015:201). Thus, not only the Bifurcated Body possesses the intelligence but the *rhizomatic spectatorship*, as the viewing format, displays it as well, by being "the ideal aesthetic form for an era of collective intelligence... within a networked society" (Jenkins, 2007:4).

Originally, the concept of *rhizome* was proposed in "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia" by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, which established rhizome as a *modus operandi* of "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system", a mass of roots that "has no beginning or end; ...always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (Deleuze, 1987) (Figure 7), in opposition to object-oriented, cause-and-effect, hierarchal movement. It was then morphed into 'vizome' by Ann Cudworth, a VR designer from the Mixed Reality Division at



Figure 5. “Ascenseur Pour L’échafaud 2017”
(Riga: Aigars Ceplītis, 2017)

in other words, it becomes a rhizomatic expression of virtual technology-mediated multiplicities that “present not a single linear narrative, but rather a progression of multiple spatial, temporal, and diegetic...plurality” (Lee, 2015:6) along a three-dimensional x, y, z spatial axis. Whether such a communal spectatorship form is anything but *Storyplex*, which Stephanie Riggs, a video game software developer and an expert on location-based immersive technologies, identifies in order to signify a “dynamic network that balances the traditions of storytelling, human psychology, and the affordances of computational systems to create an immersive narrative” (Riggs, 2019:139), or ‘vizome’ (Cudworth, 2016), or *rhizomatic networked spectatorship*, as the article proposes, its chief function stays the same: to move away from the *tell-narrative* towards the *experiential* narrative, through frames and squares, in opposition to purely spherical environments: “the *Square* approach tells a story within a boundary; the *Sphere* approach creates an experience within an environment” (Riggs, 2019:140).

Conclusion

This paper remodifies the three phenomenological metaphors – the *picture frame*, the *window*, and the *mirror* – that have been at the core of traditional cinema: the frame and the window represent the opposing poles of classical film, while the third, the mirror, represents a synthetic conflation of one’s perception and expression in contemporary film (Sobchack, 1992). The adjustment is necessary for understanding their role and function in the ever-evolving 360° 3D ecosphere, which offers us a natural habitat for such a conflation, the parallel embodied activity of perception and expression, because it uses “centring”, bodily situating of existence, in relation to the objects of the outside world.

It is Vivian Sobchack’s (1992) claim, rooted in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological

concept of embodiment, that makes a film intelligible and gives the film experience a meaning as such (Stadler, 1994:65) because film possesses its own being, in the sense that it behaves” (Sobchack, 1992:135), in that not only the spectator, but also the film is embodied (Stadler, 1994:65) through the engagement of two “viewing views” and “viewed views” (the spectator’s and the film’s). The phenomenological spectatorship model she offers is in juxtaposition with Judith Mayne’s (1993), which associates cinematic spectatorship with terms and phrases like “apparatus,” the “(male) gaze,” and “suture”. Of the three theoretical models of spectatorship Mayne expounds on – the *perceptual*, the *institutional* and the *historical* – the most important one is associated with the works of Michel Foucault: in this model, ideology is not imposed upon cinema, it is always implicated in it; that is, film is an institution which simultaneously acts upon the viewer and is shaped by the viewer (Mayne, 1993:25). The difference of Vivian Sobchack’s core departure point from that of Mayne lies in the former’s insistence that cinema is not shaped by the viewer as much on ideological grounds as through various embodied activities (Stadler, 1994). The problematic aspect of her model for such embodied activities in 3DSC, however, lies in her concept of *transcendent space*, the black void in the distance between the screen plane in a movie theatre and the audience, the purely phenomenological conduit where “all viewers [are] viewing, engaged as participants in dynamically and directionally reversible acts that reflexively and reflectively constitute the *perception of expression* and the *expression of perception*” (Williams, 1995:38). In demonstrating that her notion of the “engagement of two ‘viewing views’ and ‘viewed views’” (the spectator’s and the film’s) is rather theoretical and conceptual because the audience is bound by the film’s frame and window, I ascertain that the two forms of embodiment – the spectator’s and the film’s – are truly phenomenological only in stereoscopic spherical 360° space, and not in traditional cinema.

The proposition is supported by data from my own prototypes used in field experiments that measure various levels of embodied activity, depending on the optical and narrative perspective used, and distil three core prerequisites for embodied activity in 3DSC: the second-person narration, as a natural phenomenological habitat in Cine-VR; shifting fields of vision or oscillating perspective; and the rhizomatic spectatorship platform, providing the most optimal experiential narrative encounter.

To summarize, *the embodied activity* in 3DSC is an *expression of Call to Action*, by virtue of a dialectical nexus between the embodied spectator and the embodied film apparatus, both forming a third, the *Bifurcated Body*, with its own intelligence, vision, and expression of perception. The synthesis of the Bifurcated Body is never complete unless it functions in a narrative space in which cinematic prowess and effectiveness are dependent on the second-person *experiential* narrative configuration via *shifting fields of vision* under the public viewing scenario in what might be termed as *rhizomatic networked spectatorship*, where there is no macro or micro narrative structure, but rather principles of connection and heterogeneity with no beginning or end to a story – a story that can be started or entered at any point, in a dynamic network with desktop computers, head-mounted displays, and virtual social platforms interacting with others in multiple locations.

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