Apollo, Dionysus, Dialectical Reason and Critical Cinema

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Summary

The contemporary era is dominated by an Apollonian visual language, i.e. the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and this study concerns the role that critical cinema, as Dionysian subverter, plays under such conditions.

I argue that critical cinema should not be viewed as something completely ‘new’ but rather as a new, or at least the latest, manifestation of an older subversive ‘Dionysian’ voice that has made its presence felt since the dawn of the hegemony of an Apollonian disposition in Homeric epic. (I maintain that the history of western culture can be understood in terms of the persistent tension between Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions, and I use the distinction Derrida makes in *Différance*, between restricted and general economies, to distinguish between them, respectively.)

I begin by considering the Dionysian echoes within Homer’s *Iliad* and then consider the way in which they became a ‘roar’ in the tragedies of Aeschylus. After Aeschylus a predominantly Apollonian voice asserted itself once again (to various degrees) through the work of Sophocles and Euripides. This was in keeping with the trend towards a more (Apollonian) restricted economy that is reflected in the writings of Homer’s literary successors, and which reached a crucial stage in Plato’s valorisation of ‘dialectics’, or what I term ‘dialecticism’, which saw the birth of ‘dialectical language’. Through Plato dialecticism, or dialectical language, became instantiated as the ‘language’ of western philosophy and this predisposed western culture to develop along predominantly Apollonian lines. This continued from Plato, through the Middle Ages, until in the 17th century this Apollonian trend became manifest in the concept of the stable, integral, autonomous and self-transparent Cartesian *ego*, which is inextricably linked to dialectical language that promises certainty of ‘truth’ and maintains the possibility of representing the world in its entirety (as a system). In the contemporary ‘age of a world picture’, the hegemonic (Apollonian) visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media propagates and perpetuates the belief in the possibility of representing the world in its entirety *through the image*, and insofar as it caters to audiences’ needs for stability and certainty (of ‘truth’) through providing such ‘complete’ representations, shapes their subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian *ego*.

According to Baudrillard, in contemporary society and culture the hyperreal realm of visual language has become far more significant for individuals than their immediate, empirical experiences, and that, as a result, they are far less predisposed to discussion and reflection and far more prone to passive ‘watching’. Also, Adorno maintains that it is impossible to have a form of critical cinema because of the way in which features inherent to cinema predispose it towards being an ideological apparatus. However, if both Baudrillard and Adorno are correct then the future appears increasingly bleak as it involves nothing other than the continuation and propagation of the hegemony of the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, with no possibility for critical resistance.

I argue instead that critical cinema *is* possible because the move towards a more restricted economy, motivated by an Apollonian disposition, did not develop from Homer to the contemporary era without meeting Dionysian resistance. I trace the presence of a subversive Dionysian voice through Homer’s *Iliad*, through Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, and through Plato’s *Dialogues*, where it echoes in the sentiments of some of Plato’s interlocutors, such as Callicles. In addition, I maintain that a ‘Dionysian’ voice resonates through both Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s respective criticisms of ‘dialectical language’ and the ‘validity’ of the Cartesian *ego*. I argue that critical cinema, particularly Aronofsky’s *postmodern* critical cinema, parallels their similar epistemological and ontological perspectives in the way in which it engages with the (Apollonian) visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and thereby, potentially, facilitates a more porous and protean subjectivity.

**Key Words**

Dionysus, Apollo, general and restricted economies, tragedy, dialectics, critical cinema, hyperreality
Introduction

While the history of western culture can be understood in terms of the persistent tension between Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions, it is the Apollonian disposition that has become increasingly dominant, forcing the Dionysian into the role of subverter. In what follows, I shall argue that, by and large, cinema mirrors and perpetuates this trend in western culture. Where mainstream cinema orientates itself around an Apollonian visual language, critical cinema (for the existence of which I shall argue) plays the role of subverter. The significance of cinema should not be underestimated as, from its humble beginnings at the turn of the 19th century to the contemporary post-modern hegemony of the mass-media, cinema has played an increasingly important role in the construction of subjectivity. Adorno delivers a scathing criticism of film when he maintains that among its functions, film provides models for collective behaviour…[and s]uch collectivity…inheres in its innermost elements…the film presents…mimetic impulses which, prior to all content and meaning, incite viewers and listeners to fall into step as if in a parade (Adorno 1981/1982:203).

Such criticism is entirely applicable to mainstream cinema because it constructs an ‘ideological’ subject. In other words, the norms and mores perpetuated and propagated by both the form and content of mainstream cinema create rigid, inflexible and uncritical subjects who think and act in the same way. Through this process an ‘in’ (conventional) group and an ‘out’ (dissenting) group are constructed and, when the ‘out’ group becomes regarded as irrevocably ‘other’, the situation lends itself readily to power struggles. However, Adorno’s criticism does not take cognisance of the degree to which a critical cinema is also possible, one which engages with the dominant Apollonian structures of mainstream film language, and thereby subverts the hegemony of certain conceptual structures and the corresponding creation of uncritical, unreflective subjects. Olivier questions Adorno’s position. He doubts that Adorno’s “modernist elitism, with its contempt for a superficial mass culture, brings us closer to an effective manner of dealing with that culture” (Olivier1996:51). The main problem, in his view, is that Adorno’s dismissive attitude towards film in general does not allow him to offer adequate

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1 In the ancient Greek polis, Apollo was the god of symmetry and order “elevated and purified [to the level of the divine, he was also the god of]…light and form” (Burkert 1985:143-149). In the relatively stable and integral images of the increasingly proportional sculpted statues of young men, or kouroi, is found the aspiration to realize these ideals in matter.
2 Dionysus is the god of chaos that subverts restraint and order. “Mania, the Greek word, denotes frenzy… Everyone who surrenders to this god must risk abandoning his everyday [integrated] identity and becoming mad…[nevertheless, according to Nietzsche.] the Apollonian and Dionysian…belong together as a polarity” (Burkert 1985:162).
3 When I refer to dialectical language or visual language as ‘language’, I mean that they are language in the very general sense of being logos, or, in semiotic terms, systems of signification (meaning).
4 When I use the terms ‘content’ I mean the conceptual underpinnings of a text.
means for dealing with the reality of the media’s power to construct subjectivity. Instead, Adorno’s assessment is one-sided in that he ignores the 

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between critical cinema and mainstream cinema.

I agree with Adorno that mainstream cinema exercises a powerful influence in the construction of subjectivity, and I argue that it informs subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian ego. Postmodernity is the epoch of the superficial mediated image, and these mediated representations perpetuate and propagate the illusion of the ‘image of well-being’, inspire the pursuit of similar illusions through reification (i.e. the process where the human subject identifies with the object, in this case the ‘consumed’ image) and, as such, are tantamount to Apollonian naïve art. Similarly, I agree with Adorno that the Apollonian images/representations of mainstream cinema and contemporary mass-media act as an opiate that lulls to sleep the critical faculties of an audience.

However, my position is also markedly different from that of Adorno’s insofar as I consider the ‘Dionysian’ voice of critical cinema to be of fundamental importance in engaging with this popularised Apollonian visual language, in that it offers the possibility of the construction of a different, more reflective subjectivity.

I argue that contemporary critical cinema (i.e. Darren Aronofsky’s films) offers a critique of the Apollonian hegemonic structures, found in its visual language, in a way that approximates a Nietzschean or Heideggerian critique of the Apollonian dominance in western philosophy. As such, critical cinema, far from being something trivial, is crucial in the contemporary era insofar as it facilitates critical empowerment. The value of the creation of critically-empowered subjects lies in the resistance such subjects offer to ideological hegemony, in that, what may be termed their appraisal of language as the ‘infinite play of metaphor’, subverts the possibility of such domination. Ideology results from language forgetting its own metaphoricity, while critical cinema, along with the critical perspectives of Nietzsche and Heidegger (among others), remembers that metaphoricity, and in doing so creates critical subjects possessed of a ‘will to poetry’,

5 That is, mainstream cinema and the mass media propagate the illusion of the ‘integrity’ and ‘stability’ of the (privileged) subject, and separate it from the world that is ‘served up’ to it as a visual ‘object’. This will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four.

6 “[I]n the naïve artist and the naïve work of art…Apollo appears to us again…he shows us with sublime gestures how the whole world of torment is necessary in order to force the individual to produce the redeeming vision and then to sit in calm contemplation of it as his small boat is tossed by the surrounding sea” (Nietzsche 2000:31). Redemption through beauty holds at bay the horror of existence. However, in excess, it acts as an opiate and disallows any resolute critical perspective, demanding instead ‘belief’ and the corresponding violent privileging of certain terms of binary opposites over others. As Nietzsche states, “If you desire peace of soul and happiness, then believe; if you would be a disciple of truth, then inquire” (Gane 1998:177). Where critical cinema inquires, the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema only pursues a redeeming vision, and is therefore the contemporary counterpart to Homer’s excessively Apollonian naïve art.

7 Because critical cinema operates at an Apollonian level, ‘Dionysian’ should not be understood here in terms of the Dionysian festival involving dithyrambic music, as valorised by Nietzsche, but rather in terms of that which subverts the integrity of the ‘Apollonian’ structures of mainstream cinema by revealing the ‘abyss of possibility’ upon which they rest.

8 Ideology is an immense subject and a thorough discussion of it is beyond the limited scope of this dissertation. When I refer to it I mean it in the broad sense in which John Thompson uses it when he states that ideology is “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson 1990:7). In Chapter Three and Four I will refer to the way in which mainstream cinema supports the ‘ideologies’ of capitalism, patriarchy and Christianity.
whose ‘poetic’ voice offers resistance to the language of Apollonian hegemony in mainstream cinema and contemporary mass media.

However, before continuing I must qualify the sense in which I use the terms Dionysian and Apollonian. Derrida articulates two different kinds of economy, namely a ‘restricted’ and a ‘general’ economy. These are characterised by a predominantly Apollonian or Dionysian disposition, respectively. In his essay *Différance*, Derrida articulates “the ‘restricted economy’ [as] that [which] takes no part in expenditure without reserve...[and] a general economy [as] that [which] takes into account the nonreserve, that keeps in reserve the nonreserve” (Derrida 1982:19). Within a restricted economy one will only engage in a calculated expenditure, or an expenditure of only that which is calculated to be expendable. This expenditure never undermines the underlying integrity and stability of that which expends insofar as whatever is invested/spent must offer an appropriate return, i.e. “investment for return” is the stable and integral point around which the restricted economy orientates itself. The maintenance of the cycle of investment, return and reinvestment is the *raison d’être* of that economy (an example of this might be the Roman principle of *quid pro quo*). This contrasts with a general economy that, in the absence of such an underlying, integral point around which it might orientate itself, expends not only the expendable but also that which is necessary for the survival and maintenance of that which expends, i.e. an expenditure that involves the ‘madness’ of a giving without reserve (as in the Buddhist precept that all giving should be accompanied by the reflection, “There is no gift, no giver and none that receive”). A restricted economy would manifest itself in calculated charity (e.g. a welfare system in order to keep crime at bay) while a general economy would become manifest in the madness of infinite generosity, to the point of giving up life itself (e.g. in the *Jatakas* or myths of the Buddha’s previous incarnations, one finds the myth involving an incarnation of the Buddha who offered himself up as food for a starving tiger out of the sheer, blind ‘madness’ of compassion).

Different conceptions of the self are constituted by and reciprocally constitute the respective economies. The more restricted economy of a predominantly Apollonian disposition manifests itself in a sense of self experienced as possessing increasing degrees of integrity and stability. The actions, intentions and sense of value of such an Apollonian self, constituted by a culture in which the more restricted economy is predominant, perpetuate and propagate this more restricted economy. This

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9 “Jatakas [are] ‘birth stories’ [that] detail the previous lives of the Buddha and of his followers and foes. They show how the acts of previous lives influence the circumstances of the present life according to the law of karma” (Fischer-Schreiber 1991:103).

10 Because an entirely restricted economy would be tantamount to complete stasis and death, just as an entirely general economy would be equivalent to complete dispersion and non-existence, an economy can only ever be *more* restricted and *less* general, or *more* general and *less* restricted. As such, in what follows, I will refer to the economies as either a ‘more restricted economy’ or a ‘more general economy’.
contrasts with the more general economy of a predominantly Dionysian disposition, which becomes manifests in a sense of self possessed of far less integrity or stability. I will illustrate the degree to which western culture can be understood in terms of the tension between these two economies and the correspondingly different senses of the self created by the predominance of each economy.

At the level of critical cinema, a Dionysian disposition is found in the postmodern films of director Darren Aronofsky who, through utilizing many of Eisenstein’s techniques, produces films that reveal the ‘innermost elements’ of mainstream cinema to be fragile Apollonian illusions, held in place by arbitrary privileging. Unlike Adorno, who simply dismisses mainstream cinema, Aronofsky’s films engage with mainstream cinema and, potentially, critically-empower audiences as reflective subjects whose voices can offer resistance to the hegemonic Apollonian visual language of contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema.

As mentioned, western culture can be understood in terms of the persistent tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Cinema, together with related media such as television, video and DVD, represents the most pervasive contemporary manifestation of western culture and hence must also be understood in terms of this tension, in that while mainstream cinema and the mass-media construct rigid, inflexible subjects, critical cinema endeavours to construct a more flexible, ‘poetic’ and open subjectivity.

Nietzsche’s metaphor of Dionysian and Apollonian impulses offers an illuminating way in which to consider this tension, and it is helpful to examine the ‘origins’ of the deities who came to represent the opposing poles of this tension, namely Dionysus and Apollo, since through such an investigation the nature of their respective impulses is revealed.

In the first chapter I consider the backdrop of the abyss represented by the Gorgo, and contrast it with the metaphors of Apollo and Dionysus. I then proceed with a discussion of the origins of the myth and figure of Dionysus, the relationship between this deity and a sense of immortality bound up with a perpetual cycle of dissolution and reconstitution, and the degree to which this idea is dependent upon the absence of alphabet writing. Following this, I consider the figure of Apollo (and the figures of the other Olympian deities) as an Homeric invention, along with the relationship between their state of stable immortality or being and the advent of the Greek alphabet. This is a precursor to examining the degree to which the Apollonian disposition rose to dominance in Homer’s writings, forcing the voice of Dionysus into the role of subverter after its erstwhile predominance and ubiquity. After I’ve dealt with the traces of the Dionysian voice that echo throughout Homer’s Iliad, despite the rise of the

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11 Boardman maintains that between “750-700 [the] Greek alphabet [was] created on Phoenician models and rapidly diffused throughout the Greek world”. Notably, during the same period (750-700 BCE) Homer and Hesiod were active as poets (Boardman 1986:411-412).
Apollonian principle to hegemony, I will consider the manner in which the Dionysian voice made its subversive presence felt in Attic tragedy. I will make the distinction between the proto-drama and later dramatic representation of Attic tragedy and discuss the way in which music facilitated a bridging of the Apollonian ‘gap’ caused by the form of the Homeric epic. In terms of content, I will analyse the intricacies of Aeschylus’ tragedy *Prometheus Bound* to illustrate exactly how a Dionysian voice made itself heard within the confines of the Apollonian framework of dramatic tragedy.

I begin Chapter Two by delving into the more shadowy and obscure realm of pre-Socratic literature and philosophy where I continue my investigation of the rise to dominance of the Apollonian disposition. After this, I consider the origins and trajectory of the most crucial development that facilitated the hegemony of the Apollonian disposition throughout western culture, namely the development and instantiation of what I call ‘dialecticism’ as the ‘language’ of western philosophy. The dominance of the Apollonian impetus was translated into philosophy via dialecticism and remained virtually unchallenged until Nietzsche’s subversion of Apollonian hegemony through his attack on Socratism and its heirs (a critique continued by Heidegger’s reawakening of more equitable relations between Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions in, among other things, his theory of the ‘Fourfold’). While Nietzsche’s use of the term *dialectical*, by virtue of association, instantly gives rise to thoughts of Hegel, it does not refer exclusively to the Hegelian dialectic because it was not Hegel but rather Socrates and Plato who, as exponents of a language more optimistic and dialectical than the language of Homer and the Tragedians, began a new tradition which steadily forced “ancient tragedy…off the rails” (Nietzsche 2000:92). This brief investigation of the genesis of dialecticism, specifically its metamorphosis through the thinking of Socrates, Plato and Hegel, is intended to help illustrate, in terms of the philosophically familiar, the presence of an impetus towards a more restricted economy that has persisted throughout western culture and philosophy for the past two millennia.

Following this, the impetus that became manifest in Plato’s dialecticism will be contrasted with the linguistic alternative that lingered and orientated itself around a more Dionysian perspective, in response to the Dionysian echoes that remain within Homeric epic (despite the hegemony of Homer’s Apollonian conceptual architecture). This linguistic alternative is found in the *Gorgias*, in Callicles’ ethical standpoint, which contrasts markedly with the ethical perspectives of Plato’s protagonist, both

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12 The exact date of the Dionysian proto-drama is a matter of speculation, but it is generally accepted that it would have occurred prior to the advent of Homeric epic. The dramatic representations of Attic tragedy, in turn, succeeded Homeric epic. However, while the dramatic representations were Apollonian in terms of their form, their content (or at least the implications of their metaphor) harked back to and attempted to rediscover the experience of the proto-drama. Dithyrambic music had formed an integral part of the proto-drama and it was, similarly, an important part of the dramatic representations of tragedy which sought, through the music, to bridge the gap of Apollonian epic and rediscover the experience of the proto-drama that had been forgotten through the dominance of epic.

13 I also engage with Heidegger’s very specific reading of the history of philosophy that does not do give due credit to Kant for his contribution towards the subversion of the Apollonian impetus.
of which are underpinned by diametrically-opposed epistemological perspectives and ontological ideas or experiences of the self.

Again, the reason for this line of investigation relates to my endeavour to illustrate the degree to which western culture can be understood in terms of the tension between restricted and general economies, an endeavour that, in turn, is a necessary precursor to an examination, in Chapters Three and Four, of mainstream film language and critical cinema as manifestations of that tension.

Chapter Two is followed by an Intermezzo in which I consider Heidegger’s analysis of dialectical language in his essay *The Age of the World Picture*. The point of Heidegger’s analysis is to make conspicuous again what may be termed a ‘Dionysian’ alternative to the hegemony of (Apollonian) dialectical language. This alternative, according to Heidegger, existed in pre-Socratic Greece and was characterized by the absence of any concept of the world as a system, along with a correspondingly more open and porous sense of self (as opposed to the [modern] ‘subject’). In contrast to this, the epistemological perspective of dialectical language, that maintains the possibility of representing the world in its entirety, results in the ontological validation of the Cartesian ego,\(^\text{14}\) whose integrity and stability, in turn, is relative to the degree to which it can represents the world (linguistically) as a system. In contrast to this dialectical ‘will to represent’, I discuss, briefly, Heidegger’s privileging of poetic language over the ‘certainty’ of dialectical language. I do so in the interests of making conspicuous the dynamic of the ‘standing reserve’, the desire for metaphysical certainty and *ressentiment* that underpin dialectical language. This is done to place dialectical language, as analysed by Heidegger in *The Age of the World Picture*, within the context of the move towards an increasingly restricted economy from Homer to modernity, as discussed in Chapters One and Two.

I conclude the Intermezzo with a brief overview of the parallels that exist between the subversive Dionysian voice of the proto-drama, that can still be heard in the later dramatic representations of Attic tragedy, and the voice of Dionysus that echoes through the writings of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Although both Nietzsche and Heidegger valorise (tragedy and) poetry for the ‘Dionysian’ possibilities contained therein, their valorisation occurs, ironically, at an Apollonian level (of reflection), while it seeks to destabilize ‘rigid’ Apollonian conceptual structures. By way of example, I consider Heidegger’s discussion, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes, because here Heidegger, at an implicit level (and in an Apollonian fashion), offers an alternative ‘mythology’ that subverts the hegemony of (Apollonian) dialectical language.

\(^{14}\) In the Intermezzo I discuss how this concept was inherited, indirectly, from Plato’s ‘just soul’. I maintain that the Cartesian ego *might be* considered a simplified and unified version of Plato’s ‘just soul’ that is no longer underpinned by any tension.
Critical cinema operates in a similar way, that is, at an Apollonian level while it seeks to subvert the Apollonian ‘structures’ of the visual ‘language’ (or system of signification) of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and my discussion of Heidegger’s treatment of Van Gogh’s painting is done with a view to comparing Aronofsky’s film language, at the end of Chapter Three and in Chapter Four, to the philosophical critique of western culture and philosophy offered by Nietzsche and Heidegger.

However, because the same ontological and epistemological perspectives at work in dialectical language operate within the visual language of contemporary mainstream cinema and the mass media, the above discussion also functions as a precursor to the drawing of parallels between dialectical language and visual language, in Chapter Three. I use Heidegger’s analysis as a privileged tool because it enables me to bring my discussion of the Apollonian and Dionysian tension in western culture to bear on cinema, and thus the Intermezzo forms a bridge between the philosophical and literary texts examined in Chapter One and Two, and the visual language that will be investigated in Chapter Three (and Four).

In order to place the content of Chapter Three in context, I begin by glancing retrospectively over the terrain already covered in Chapter One, Chapter Two and the Intermezzo, after which I explore the numerous parallels that exist between dialectical language and the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema. I follow this exposition with a consideration of Baudrillard’s account of the hegemony, in the contemporary era, of visual language, along with a consideration of Adorno’s (and Dana Polan’s) perspectives regarding the (im-)possibility of critical cinema. If Baudrillard and Adorno are right, then the contemporary era is a time of intolerable pessimism as, if visual language is hegemonic and constitutive of a significant part of social space, and if there is no room within visual language for critical cinema, then there no longer exists any possibility of significant critical resistance to the hegemonic axiology of the status quo. However, I contest the validity of this bleak scenario and maintain, instead, that critical cinema is possible.

With a view to supporting this statement, I proceed by identifying the constitutive features of visual language, beginning with an investigation of the film language of D.W. Griffith, who is arguably the ‘father’ of visual language. Griffith’s fiction was heavily influenced by the narrative style of Charles Dickens, which, in turn, resulted in the Apollonian logos, inherited by Dickens as part of his literary Homeric legacy (via Plato, and in the modern era, Descartes), being communicated into

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15 I associate Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture with the contemporary hegemony of visual language (that is almost literally an ‘age of the world picture’) because of the epistemological and ontological similarities between dialectical language and visual language, and not because of mere word association.
Griffith’s film ‘language’.

Griffith’s film language informed and continues to underpin the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema, and there exists an axiological continuity from Dickens’ texts, through Griffith’s films to contemporary mainstream cinema. To illustrate this axiological continuity, I compare the similar features of Griffith’s *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) to James Cameron’s *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991). Following this, as further evidence of this continuity, I consider the relationship between naïve Homeric art, the narrative technique of cross-cutting, and the phenomenon of Apollonian resolution in Howard Hawks’ *The Big Sleep* (1946) and David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (2000).

In contrast to this visual language of mainstream cinema and its implicit support of the axiology of the status quo, I then consider Eisenstein’s critical cinema that both translated and amended Dickens’ use of literary montage into cinematic montage, and mirrored elements of Griffith’s use of montage. Eisenstein, through creating a tension between narrative structure and visual content, successfully parodied and subverted the bourgeois axiology of the status quo, covertly reinforced through Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction.

Furthermore, through an array of other alienating techniques such as the absence of any central hero in his narratives, the use of Brechtian ‘distancing’ techniques, montage of rhythm and captions that involve an intellectual play on words, along with the representation of footage in reverse, Eisenstein created a critical space within visual language that demanded reflective engagement on the part of the audience.

However, the presence of the Marxist meta-narrative in Eisenstein’s films prevented them from attaining the critical edge of Nietzsche’s or Heidegger’s perspective. I conclude Chapter Three with a reflection on the limitations of Eisenstein’s critical cinema, along with a brief consideration of the ways in which Aronofsky, in postmodernity, has been able to overcome these restrictions and approximate the philosophical positions of both Nietzsche and Heidegger in his films.

In Chapter Four I focus on Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* (2001) and *Pi* (1998), and in my discussion of *Requiem for a Dream* I consider the parallels and differences between Eisenstein’s and Aronofsky’s respective subversions of the narrative structure of montage of tempo, as it is found in

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16 As discussed earlier (Cf. note 6), Homeric naïve art was an ‘opiate’, orientated around an excessively Apollonian disposition, which kept at bay the horror of existence. In the *Republic*, Plato, through a similar privileging of (Apollonian) reason, which kept at bay the ambiguity of mythology, arrives at an isomorphism between the just soul and the just community. Dickens’ 19th century literature reflects an analogous isomorphic and co-constitutive relationship between the Cartesian ego of the reader/viewer (Cf. note 14) and its social matrix. This isomorphism, as a result of Dickens’ influence on Griffith, became translated into Griffith’s film ‘language’ which, in turn, came to underpin the visual language of contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema. For a detailed discussion of this see – Chapter Three, The ‘age of the world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media: 4. The possibility of critical cinema, i. The influence of Dickens’ fiction on the film language of D.W. Griffith.

17 In much the same way, Brecht subverted bourgeois axiology by parodying the structures of traditional bourgeois theatre in his plays. The ‘bourgeoisie’ were originally the free members/residents of European towns during the period of the Middle Ages. Later, specifically during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, they became synonymous with the middle class.
mainstream cinema. In addition to this, I also focus on the way in which Aronofsky, in the process of constituting his parody of montage of tempo, highlights certain psychoanalytic themes in relation to the characters within the film, primarily because of the way in which this thematization also subverts mainstream film narratives and ‘aesthetics’. After this I proceed by considering Aronofsky’s use of the above-mentioned techniques discussed in relation to Eisenstein’s critical cinema, namely, the absence of any central hero in his narratives, the use of Brechtian ‘distancing’ techniques, montage of rhythm and captions that involve an intellectual play on words, along with the representation of footage in reverse, to further subvert the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media.

In contrast to *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), *Pi* (1998) is a neo *noir*, that is, it consciously reflects elements of *film noir*. I begin by discussing the genre of *film noir* and its critical components before embarking on a consideration of the critical value of neo *noir*. I argue that the critical components of *noir*, be it *film noir* or neo *noir*, lend themselves to the Dionysian impulse insofar as the implications of their content or visual metaphors destabilize and subvert the socio-economic structures of capitalism, the belief in the autonomy of the Cartesian ego, and the view of the world (and *Being*) as something stable and ‘representable’, all of which are valorised (implicitly or explicitly) by mainstream cinema.  

However, admittedly, not all neo *noirs* lend themselves to Dionysus with equal abandon, and there are many ‘failed’ *noirs* in which, despite many of the trappings (i.e. themes) of a *noir* film, the Apollonian impulse, involving an amiable resolution at the end of the narrative, is covertly reasserted. After discussing examples of such neo *noirs* I launch into an analysis of *Pi* (1998) as a neo *noir* that, in contrast to these, ‘succeeds’ in its subversion of the Apollonian visual language of mainstream cinema, and I pay special attention to the social critique, thematization of psychosexual dynamics in relation to the characters, and reflections of German expressionism contained within Aronofsky’s film text.

Where in relation to *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), I discuss the critical ‘techniques’ employed by Aronofsky that subvert the narrative structures of mainstream cinema, in relation to *Pi* (1998) I consider the way in which a Dionysian voice echoes through the text at the level of content, theme and visual metaphor. However this is not to say that either structure or content occur in isolation. Rather, it is because of the difficulty involved in separating them, that I use different films to focus on one or the other. Ultimately, what I attempt to show is that Aronofsky’s critical cinema, through its subversion of the narrative structures and themes of mainstream cinema, takes the viewer/audience to the ‘edge’ of the visual language of the mass media and opens them up to the ‘abyss’ of possibility that haunts those structures and themes. In the ‘absence’ or ‘forgetting’ of this abyss, visual language shapes audiences’

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18 Through such valorisation the visual language of mainstream cinema informs the subjectivity of the viewer along the lines of the Cartesian ego (Cf. note 5), a process which is subverted by critical cinema.
subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian ego. However, this process is subverted by Aronofsky’s ‘un-forgetting’ of this abyss that, potentially, contributes to the construction of a more open and porous subjectivity that might be said to parallel the subjectivity valorised by both Nietzsche and Heidegger.
1. Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy

1. Introduction

In the birth myth of Dionysus the deity undergoes a process of ‘constitution’, involving his exit from the womb of Semele, followed by a moment of dissolution when he is obliged to continue his period of gestation in the thigh of Zeus. This, in turn, is followed by a moment of reconstitution when Zeus ‘gives birth’ to Dionysus. The idea of reconstitution or resurrection was significant in the myth and ritual attached to the worship of Dionysus, but it did not involve the idea of the resurrection of an individual, personality or soul, but rather the acknowledgement and embrace of a primordial, impersonal, perpetual and irrepressible life force. The worship of Dionysus was therefore underpinned by a protean and porous sense of self subject to perpetual dissolution and reconstitution.19 This Dionysian sense of self was very different to the later Apollonian stable, integral20 (sense of) self, possessed of an immortally enduring soul. This latter Apollonian sense of self is hinted at in Homer,21 echoes with increasing volume through the pre-Socratic writers from Tyrtaeus onwards, and is finally loudly asserted by Plato (specifically in the Gorgias). In this chapter I will begin by considering what the figures of Dionysus and Apollo represent, and the nature of their similar relationship to the abyss of the Gorgo. This will reveal the ‘paradigm’ of the Dionysian as something fundamentally different to the Apollonian pursuit of the stability and integrity of the image.22 Proceeding along this trajectory I intend to demonstrate how the voice of Dionysus, once ubiquitous and dominant, was reduced to the role of subverter, after the usurpation of its dominant position by a more Apollonian disposition. I will also consider the degree to which this was the result of, or at least appears to be related to, the introduction of alphabet literacy. After this I will look at the instances and manner in which the Dionysian voice, subsequent to the Apollonian hegemony, made its subversive presence felt. Finally, I will consider Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound where there occurs a dialogue between the more restricted economy of Apollo and the more general economy of Dionysus,23 rather than any silencing of one by the other. The goal of this chapter is linked to the goal of the second chapter, namely a demonstration of how western civilization can be understood in terms of the tension between the more

19 “Everyone who surrenders to [Dionysus] must risk abandoning his everyday identity and becoming mad; [something seen as] both divine and wholesome” (Burkert 1985:162).
20 I use the term ‘integral self’ to denote the belief in a self that possesses an enduring point of stability, be it reason, complete self-transparency, total autonomy, or the religious concept of an immortal soul.
21 Later, I will attempt to show how the birth of the idea of stable immortality, as found in Homer’s Iliad, was a result of the Greeks’ acquaintance with alphabet literacy. See – Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 6. Stable Olympian immortality and Homer’s creation of written epic.
22 Cf. note 1.
23 As I shall show, Dionysus is not complete excess or flux but rather involves both apparently stable appearances and their dissolution.
restricted economy of an Apollonian disposition and the more general economy of the voice of Dionysus.

2. The Gorgo, Dionysus and Apollo

The relationship between the Gorgo and that which is represented by Dionysus and Apollo, respectively, is highly revealing with regard to the constitution of the Dionysian and Apollonian impulses. Gorgo, like Dionysus, represents an alterity…[that] wrenches humans away from their lives and themselves…with Gorgo, to cast them down into the confusion and horror of chaos…with Dionysus…to raise them up high, in a fusion with the divine and the beatitude of a golden age refound 24 (Vernant 1991:112).

However, where the worship of Dionysus was attached to festivals, Gorgo “is pure fright – Terror – as a dimension of the supernatural…not secondary, nor…motivated…[but] primary” (Vernant 1991:117). In Book 11 of the Iliad there is a description of Agamemnon’s shield on which is emblazoned “the Gorgon’s grim mask – the burning eyes, the stark, transfixing horror – and round her…the shapes of Rout and Fear” (Homer 1990:297). Rout and Fear are, in a sense, ‘daimons’ of the Gorgo who possessed troops on the field of battle and caused them, for no explicable reason, to lose all heart and morale, and to flee before the enemy. There is no festival of Gorgo or the Gorgon, rather “the Gorgons [remain those] on whom no human may look without immediately perishing, [they] are brostostugeis, horror for mortals” (Vernant 1991:123). The Gorgo is the un-representable (although, admittedly, it is alluded to in images such as those which adorned Agamemnon’s shield), unimaginable, inconceivable horror of a complete, terminal general economy that amounts to death and dispersion.

In the myth involving Perseus and the Gorgon, Perseus’ enemies are turned into statues of stone when they look into the face of the decapitated Gorgon, which Perseus holds out in front of him. 25 However, these mythical stone statues represent an economy of excess where the earth reclaims the living and where there is an eternal loss of life, represented by the stone. They would no doubt

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24 Here Vernant, like Nietzsche, inverts the usual hierarchical structure which sees the ‘rational’ development of culture as a sign of progress, and instead valorizes the more primitive circumstances (that existed before the normative dictates of advanced culture) as a golden age that is momentarily refound in the Dionysian celebration.

25 After cutting off the head of the Gorgon and rescuing Andromeda, Perseus and Andromeda’s wedding was interrupted by “Agenor…at the head of an armed party…Perseus…was forced to snatch the Gorgon’s head and turn…two hundred of them to stone…[Later] Perseus…found that Danaë and Dictys, threatened by the violence of Polydectes, had taken refuge in a temple.[Perseus]…went straight to the palace where Polydectes was banqueting…announced that he had brought the promised love gift…displayed the Gorgon’s head and turned them all to stone” (Graves1955:70-71).
have contained horrified expressions and contorted limbs, and hence should not be confused with the Apollonian artistic endeavour to attain integrity, stability and perfection of form which reaches its epitome in the sculpted stone *kouros*.²⁶ Although Burkert disputes the claim that “all archaic *kouros* statues represent Apollo…[he agrees that] the sculpted ideal of the treasured *akme* of physical development may stand for Apollo above all other gods” (Burkert 1985:143).

However if the Gorgo, in complete contrast to such Apollonian order and perfection, is the complete abyss of pure terror, then there appears to be only a very fine line between it and the terrifying abyss of Dionysian possession. This fine line is constituted by an act of volition that involves an element of *mediation*. Through *willingly* engaging in the Dionysian celebration (of the *proto*-drama) one might become submerged or immersed, at the height of ecstasy, in the ‘abyss’ of a general economy, due to the absence of the Apollonian illusion of individuation. However, one would never be lost eternally within that abyss as, later, after the experience of Dionysian possession, an Apollonian impulse would facilitate the reconstitution of the individual’s sense of self. (The close proximity of *this* form of Apollonian impulse to the ‘abyss’ precluded it from attaining any exclusive or privileged status while, in contrast to this, the form of Apollonian impulse at work in Homeric epic, having forgotten the ‘abyss’, attained a hitherto unseen degree of exclusivity).

The Dionysian festival acted as a form of mediation and what was mitigated was the intolerable horror of the Gorgo, i.e. the eternal loss of life. This mediation involved a celebration which *embraced* both order and chaos, both life and death. In other words, the festival and associated rituals did not attempt a denial of the chaos and the absurdity of the greatest of all ironies²⁷, nor was there any attempt to enshroud the ‘intolerable’ in Apollonian illusions that would make it more palatable. Rather, the *process* of the Dionysian festival mirrored the *process* of the human condition as it was, in turn, mirrored in the *process* of the passing of the seasons and time. It acknowledged the inevitability of a coming darkness that would swallow up life, and embraced it as much as the infinite possibilities of regeneration and rebirth inherent in the “unbridled craving for existence and joy in existence; [involving] the struggle, the agony…of countless forms of existence which crowed and push their way into life, of the overwhelming fertility of the world-will” (Nietzsche 2000:91). It is upon this abyss of impersonal craving for life that all Apollonian constructions, such as Homer’s immortal Olympian pantheon, were predicated, insofar as the Olympian deities constituted naïve art or that art which drew away from the horrors of the abyss and, instead, endeavoured to create ‘serene’ contemplation of the world through art that promised an impossible stability. In the Dionysian festival,

²⁶ Cf. note 1.
²⁷ Ernest Becker speaks of it as “the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression – and with all this yet to die” (quoted in Shlain 1999:28).
the result of close proximity to the abyss was the revelation that all such constructions were merely beautiful, fragile illusions, an insight and perspective integral to the Dionysian experience.\textsuperscript{28}

Through Dionysus the worshipper was allowed to enter into a proximity with the abyss of the Gorgo without falling prey to total dissolution within that abyss. To use a Nietzschean turn of phrase, the Dionysian festival effectively facilitated a ‘dancing upon the edge of the abyss’, where intoxication brought about the dissolution of the self without death, while the subsequent sobriety facilitated the reconstitution of the self in a celebration of life and joy. This process or sequence was mirrored as much in the later Homeric ‘revision’ of the myth of Dionysus’ birth as by the earliest use of seasonal change as a metaphor for the process of human life, which inspired the creation of the metaphor of Dionysus (and similar deities) to begin with.

3. Dionysus

Traditionally, Dionysus is considered to be a Thraco-Phrygian deity, introduced into Greece from either Thrace or (perhaps from both Thrace and) Phrygia, and often blended with native gods of similar character, for example, Iacchus at Eleusis. According to the Homeric version of the ‘birth myth’ of Dionysus

[Dionysus] was born at Thebes and was the son of Zeus and Semele…whose name is simply the Phrygian for “earth”…Zeus took him [the infant Dionysus] up, enclosed him within his own thigh until he came to maturity, and then brought him to the light, so that he was twice born (Harrison 1903:397-398).

Post-Homeric Greek scholars initially believed that Dionysus arrived as an immortal amongst the Olympian pantheon relatively late, being the son of Zeus and Semele. However, this was an error as it was “Homer and Hesiod [who] created for the Greeks a genealogy of the gods, gave the gods their epithets, distributed their honours…and stamped them with their form” (Burkert 1985:123). Homer’s treatment of Dionysus involved a ‘relatively recent’ appropriation of a much older myth and a re-articulation of its ancient and perennial deity within the context of the new Olympian pantheon. Burkert confirms this hypothesis regarding the greater antiquity of Dionysus over the Olympian

\textsuperscript{28} Again, this is not to say that Dionysus was synonymous with the Gorgo but rather that the Dionysian experience involved a proximity to the ‘abyss’ of the Gorgo that afforded an insight into the illusory nature of Apollonian art. This does not negate Nietzsche’s insight, though, that the Apollonian moment was indispensable for the emergence of ancient Greek culture, as it was precisely the Apollonian principle that enabled them to ‘draw a veil’ over the abyss of disintegration.
Immortals when he asserts that, as a result of recent discoveries, “Dionysus is attested on Linear B tablets from Pylos, perhaps even in connection with wine; and [at] the sanctuary at Ayia Irini on Keos...there is...evidence of [Dionysiac] cultic continuity from the fifteenth century to Greek times” (Burkert 1985:162). Thus, in contrast to earlier opinion based exclusively on Homer’s account of the Immortals’ genealogy, Dionysus is, in all probability, one of the oldest of all the deities. This stands to reason in that Dionysus is yet another metaphor in a long line of metaphors that articulate seasonal change and seasonal observations, such as the coming to fruition of the grape or the advent of the harvest, which are the most important of observations that underpin the shift from a hunter-gatherer existence to an agrarian culture.

Nevertheless, despite the Homeric appropriation of Dionysus, the new articulation of the deity carried with it the trace of the associations attached to the earlier deity or deities as metaphors imbricated with agrarian activity and seasonal change. This is evident in Homer’s description of Dionysus’ birth as a process of alternate moments of light and darkness, representing the successive cycle of the seasons. Also, echoes of the Dionysian ritual can be heard in the worship of Iacchus (Iakchos). In the Dionysian procession the maenads fended off the satyrs with the help of their thyrsos wands, while in the procession of Iacchus bundles of branches called bakchoi were swung to the rhythm of the incantation of the name of Iacchus, in a manner reminiscent of the worship of Dionysus. For these and other reasons, many believed “Iakchos...[to be] an epithet of Dionysus” (Burkert 1985:287). Iacchus’ status was that of a daimon of Demeter, who in turn was “the fertile mother goddess...the...earth which produce[d] crops and fruit every year” (Corsar 1977:11). The worship of Iacchus was thus tied to the land and harvest just as much as the worship of Demeter, and it was for this reason that, as mentioned above by Harrison, the figure of Dionysus was blended so easily with that of Iacchus. Furthermore, if Dionysus is distanced from the myths surrounding wine making specifically, a move which facilitates a view of him from a more general perspective, then “[a]ccording to tradition, Dionysus [is simply the deity who] died each winter and was reborn in the spring” (Bram 1983:222). Once these general agrarian connotations of seasonal observation become a central consideration, they facilitate an even easier explanation of why the figure of Dionysus merged so easily with other deities who were connected with agriculture.

29 In the seventh of the Homeric hymns, the hymn for Dionysus, Homer gives an account of the ritual myth involving Dionysus, a ship and Tyrrhenian pirates where, upon the arrival of Dionysus on shore, “les autres, en le voyant, sautèrent tous ensemble hors du navire, dans la mer divine, et y devinrent des dauphins” (Homer 1959:175). This translates as, ‘the others, on seeing him, jumped all together out of the ship, into the divine sea, and became dolphins’. On the 6th century cup (550-530 BCE) of Exekias in Munich “The tondo has Dionysus lying on his ship surrounded by dolphins”(http://ww.officenet.co.jp/~voji/vase/h_ab2_e.html). Yet it is unlikely that this myth is a Homeric poetic invention like the Olympian pantheon because “[a]mong the votive offerings [found at the shrine dating from] the fifteenth century, particular attention is attracted by a bronze ship...and a terracotta dolphin” (Burkert 1985:412).
4. Immortality as constitution and reconstitution

However, Dionysus should not merely be considered as a deity who represented seasonal change, but rather as a deity in whom the perennial implications of the passing of the seasons for humanity are inscribed. Where spring has always been a metaphor for fertility and rebirth, for youth and life, autumn has denoted old age, and winter, death. Although the Dionysian festival was held in spring, it could never exclude the winter, since it was only by virtue of winter and death that the contrast with spring and rebirth was possible, and by implication, that the Dionysian festival was possible. As just mentioned, this contrast between spring/daylight and winter/darkness is mirrored in the Homeric re-articulation of the ‘earlier’ myth of Dionysus which tells of him enduring the darkness of Semele’s womb before the flash of light of Zeus’ thunderbolt, followed by the darkness again within Zeus’ thigh before the light of his second birth. Again, later, in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, this perpetual cycle of time, mirrored in the movement of the sun, is reflected in the metaphors of the riddle of the Sphinx, solved by Oedipus. “[T]he…Sphinx…propounded the riddle: ‘What goes on four legs and two legs and three legs, and when it has most legs is at its weakest?’ Oedipus’…answer [was]: ‘Man, who crawls as a baby, walks erect in the noon of life, and needs a stick in old age’” (Ferguson 1972:182). The mention of adulthood as the noon of life implies that the morning of life is childhood, the evening of life, old age, and the night representative of death. Thus in Sophocles’ tragedy, performed at the Dionysian festival, the time frame of the seasons of the year that originally gave birth to the idea of the deity ‘Dionysus’ (and that are alluded to in the Homeric re-articulation of the myth) has simply been compacted around the diurnal progress of the sun. The progress of the sun is now seen as a metaphor for the birth, duration and passing of human life, with the choice of the sun and daylight as symbol implying the *resolute acknowledgement* of the imminence of night.

When these metaphors of the alternation of light and darkness are considered alongside the seasonal frequency of the Dionysian festival, the degree to which Dionysus is associated with life, death and resurrection becomes apparent. However, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, this resurrection does not involve the re-surfacing of any integral, enduring Apollonian Platonic-Christian soul but rather the irrepressible rebirth and blossoming forth of life as “the eternally creative mother, eternally compelling people to exist, eternally finding satisfaction in this changing world of phenomena” (Nietzsche 2000:90).

“In the middle of the fifth century…Dionysus…[came to be] portrayed as youthful and usually naked…enveloped more than before in…a truly erotic atmosphere…[.now w]ine and sex go together” (Burkert 1985:167). Again, these celebrations involved the dissolution of the sense of self, a
dissolution which remembered the general economy of death momentarily through intoxication before sobriety reconstituted the sense of self, or which dissolved and reconstituted the self around the experience of la petite mort of orgasm, where such dissolution and reconstitution were entirely consonant with the above-mentioned metaphors involving the cycle of light and darkness. The festival was predicated as much upon a porous sense of the self that could be dissolved through possession by Dionysus and reconstituted through the departure of the deity (a process which mirrored the imminent possibility of an individual’s dissolution through death), as it was underpinned by the inevitability of the coming winter’s usurpation of the fruits of the spring. The worship of Dionysus, like that of Iacchus, is thus tied to the land and the effects that the passing of the seasons have on the land. These effects, in turn, were seen to mirror the human condition and, as such, a Dionysian celebration involved an embrace of both life and death, an embrace of both the Apollonian mental constructs or phantasms of identity and individuation and their inevitable dissolution through the excess of the general economy of the abyss of chaos, or death.

This acknowledgement of the flux and perpetual motion of life could not have facilitated the birth and development of a concept of stable, eternally-enduring immortality. This is partly due to the time period of Dionysian worship which stretches back to the 15th century B.C.E. The dawning of Greek alphabet literacy only begins around the middle of the 8th century B.C.E., and this fact leaves Dionysian worship subject to at least seven centuries of purely oral tradition. An oral tradition is far more fragile than a written tradition in that all poetry only exists in the actual, momentary verbal articulation of the idea or verse. Similarly, through the death or failing memory of a poet, an oral tradition is far more prone to be forgotten and lost than a written tradition. Thus, in the centuries preceding the birth of the Greek alphabet, poetry lacked the illusion of stability facilitated by the introduction of the written word, and it is difficult to imagine how the content of poetry during these epochs could escape being influenced by the fragile ‘form’ or medium of poetry, i.e. a purely oral tradition.

Thus, in the absence of the illusion of stability afforded by an alphabet, the immortality of a deity might still be understood, but the nature of that immortality was fundamentally different to the immortality of the Olympian deities found in Homer’s epics, and echoed instead the fragility and instability of the medium of an oral tradition. Pre-Olympian immortality involved an infinitely repeated ‘Dionysian’ process or cycle that mirrored the succession of the seasons or the motion of the sun, a process that echoes through the metaphors of the myths of Dionysus, including the late Homeric revision of the Dionysian birth myth in which Dionysus was inscribed amongst the Olympian pantheon. Pre-Olympian immortality can be articulated as an immortality of becoming, rather than the being-laden immortality of the Olympian deities. The contrast between these two forms of immortality
can be seen clearly if the differences between the process of immortality, that manifests itself in the figure of Dionysus, and the stable immortality of the figure of Apollo, are considered.

5. Apollo

The diffusion of the Apollo cult is...complete at the time when our written sources begin, about 700...[and i]n the epics, Apollo is one of the most important gods. [Yet, i]n spite of this, the impression remains that Apollo is not only a youthful god, but also a young god for the Greeks. [Notably t]here is no clear evidence for him in Linear B (Burkert 1985:144).

The idea of Apollo as the “god of the sun and prophecy” (Corsar 1977:10) contrasts markedly with the associations usually attached to Dionysus. For instance, where the sun denotes clarity and insight, Dionysian possession involves a cloudy experience of intoxication and loss of control during which the golden age of a more primitive epoch is rediscovered. Also, where in the festival and metaphor of the Dionysian myth it is the seasonal movement of the sun that is emphasized, the association between Apollo and the sun carries with it an emphasis on the power and stability of knowledge afforded by the sun.30 Later this became manifest in Socratism that, according to Nietzsche, sought to ‘correct existence’ and place it on a sound and sure footing by “set[ting] out to destroy art and...to dissolve myth” (Megill 1985:56) with all their ambiguity and instability. (This will be discussed further in the following chapter.)

Furthermore, where a Dionysian perspective is predicated upon an acceptance of the inevitability of the passing of life and death as the ultimate truth, Apollonian prophecy has as its point of departure a more integral sense of self that desires to know more than this simple truth and, through such knowledge, seeks power that attempts to overcome the limitations, in however illusory a fashion, of a ‘pessimistic’ Dionysian perspective. This is hinted at in the myth where the young “Apollo sought out Pan, and, having coaxed him to reveal the art of prophecy, seized the Delphic Oracle” (Graves 1955:29). The manner in which the oracle mediated between Apollo and the devotee who posed questions involved traces of the Dionysian phenomenon of possession, but now “in th[e] ritual the prophetess...[who] delivered Apollo’s message [did so]while in or immediately upon release from a

30 That is, the clarity of insight afforded by the (Apollonian) light of reason resulted in the dissolution of ‘poetic’ ambiguity and the establishment of (supposedly) solid, stable conceptual foundations. This is reflected in Plato’s allegory of the cave, in Book VII of the Republic, where the sun (as a metaphor for reason) possesses as much stability and consistency as the darkness and shadows of the cave (its binary opposite).
state of ecstasy, [where this] condition [was] devoid of violence and hysteria and resembled a…mediumistic or visionary trance” (Guthrie 1950:109).

This moderation and move towards ever greater stability is similarly echoed in the sayings engraved, in the sixth century, on the temple at Delphi. Two of the more famous are ‘medan agan, nothing in excess, and gnothi sauton, know yourself…[which does not imply a personal, existential or psychological pursuit, but rather:] know that you are not a god” (Burkert 1985:148). The imperative to avoid excess is tantamount to an imperative to avoid Dionysian ‘intoxication’, while the imperative to know and appreciate one’s status as a mortal is not only a warning against hubris, but can also be interpreted as an imperative to avoid Dionysian possession where the devotee became the deity, albeit momentarily.

Although Burkert maintains that gnothi sauton did not involve any existential reflection, it is hard to imagine how a combination of reflections on these imperatives would not lead to the dawning of an existential perspective. Charging the individual with the responsibility to avoid excess implies that he/she possesses sufficient autonomy to practice the necessary restraint. This autonomy appears lacking in the Homeric epics, written some two centuries earlier, where the prevalence of daemonic possession would have subverted the possibility of such autonomy. Thus such an imperative indicates a rapidly changing sense of the self that is moving ever closer towards an individualized, existential perspective. Consonant with this is the imperative concerning the necessity of realizing that one is not a god, which facilitates further subordination, isolation and alienation of the individual, all of which push the sense of self in the direction of an ever more stable, integral, existential perspective.

In these Apollonian imperatives there is a move away from the porous, Dionysian experience of the self towards a more stable, impermeable and individualized sense of the self, where this new integral self stands before or against the god and the world, instead of merging with them as before.

6. Stable Olympian immortality and Homer’s creation of written epic

The dawn of this change, from a more porous sense of the self towards a sense of the self as something more stable and impermeable, became manifest within the art/poetry of Homeric epic.

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31 The mortal who hears this command and believes in its validity is subordinated by it insofar as such an imperative creates a clear distinction between the mortal and the deity, and obliges the mortal to adopt a position of humility. Any blurring of this distinction is tantamount to hubris and would incur divine punishment. This situation differs markedly from the Dionysian experience in which the individual becomes the deity through possession.

32 The influence of the Apollonian impulse echoes through to the Enlightenment where it is crucial in the development of rigid notions of a subject-object dualism.
The lyric poet...is a composer first and foremost and, as such, a Dionysiac artist who surrenders his egoistic subjectivity to identify himself with the true metaphysical reality and reflect it in music. He now comes under Apolline influence and is therefore able to symbolize the music, in turn, in the form of specific ideas and language...Epic poetry, like sculpture, is an Apolline art, and all such art involves a quite different creative process (Silk 1981:67).

It was precisely the rise to dominance of this other creative process, orientated around the more restricted economy of a predominantly Apollonian disposition, that forced the voice of Dionysus, that creative process which never lost sight of the abyss that haunts all Apollonian constructions, into the role of subverter. To illustrate the difference between a Dionysian and Apollonian creative process it is useful to reflect on the elements that constitute the Apollonian disposition in Homeric epic and the relationship between epic and dramatic tragedy.

There is a large dispute concerning the time period reflected in the epics and the authorship of the Iliad and Odyssey. In the interests of linking the epics to the dawn of alphabet writing, cognisance must be taken of some of the existing hypotheses. Andrew Lang maintains that “the Homeric Epics, as wholes...present a perfectly harmonious picture of the entire life and civilization of one single age...not a mosaic of the work of several changeful centuries” (Lang 1906:1). Lang goes on to justify this statement in terms of the ‘fact’ that iron is only mentioned in relation to implements and not weapons, “[O]nly in two cases does Homer describe any weapon as of iron...[namely a] knife...[B]ut no knife is ever used as a weapon of war...[Also, only] one arrow-head, used by Pandarus...[and] one mace, borne...by Areithöus [are mentioned]” (Lang 1906:179). Bronze was the metal used to construct all other arms and in “the Iliad we hear of swords breaking at the hilt in dealing a stroke at shield or helmet, a thing most incident to bronze swords, especially of the early type” (Lang 1906:189). Contrary to Lang, Bernard Knox maintains that the Homeric epics were constituted by an amalgamation of an array of tales concerning events from a variety of different time periods, and he cites as evidence for his hypothesis the same problem of metals, but this time with regard to their changing degree of value that implies that incidents within the epics may have been distanced from each other by centuries.

All through the poems...the weapons and arms of the heroes are bronze; this was the Bronze Age. Iron is mentioned but as a precious metal...in Book 23 a piece of iron is offered by Achilles as a prize...Yet in the fourth book the Trojan archer Pandarus has an iron arrowhead, mentioned quite casually as if that were normal (Knox 1990:13).
I find the middle path between these two radically different perspectives far more reasonable and support the view presented by Thomas Allen. His account takes cognisance of the impact of writing on poetry and facilitates an explanation of the above-mentioned discrepancies. Allen maintains that

the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* arose from the selection by a great poet of these two episodes from a mass of chronicle and their treatment on a grand scale...The *Iliad*...is an episode...of no great importance...Homer has given it enormous amplitude, swollen it to 15,963 lines, and as a result thrown the rest of the war into the shade” (Allen 1924:177-179).

Allen goes on to mention the criticism Homer received from his close literary successors for his choices and decisions in the construction of the *Iliad*. Yet the reason for Homer’s complex and weighty creative direction is presented in Milman Parry’s account where he maintains that

Homer belonged to an oral tradition and composed his poetry...by traditional means. [However, h]e did not construct his verses like a fully literate poet, but used the new technique of alphabetic writing for the development of traditional, unlettered poetry into the extended form and complex texture of an Iliad [My Italics](Kirk 1976:129).

At the level of form, the complexity and amplitude of the *Iliad* owe everything to the introduction of the Greek alphabet, while at the level of content, what is represented are events from far distant epochs or eras. However, having said that, it is important to note, in the interests of establishing a link between the dawn of alphabet literacy and the end of the ‘mythical’ period, that the Homeric epics, as a cultural repository, deal with a privileged epoch that surrounds the period of the Trojan war. This period remains separated from and uncontaminated by any later political and/or martial upheavals, in other words, after the end of the Trojan war the epics did not extend themselves further to cover progressively less historically distant events until they arrive at the contemporary world of the singer who recited the poem. Griffin states that

The mythical period [was the time of]...the Theban and Trojan wars; the rest of the past, however vivid or striking in memory, was felt to be different, and inappropriate for serious poetic treatment. Hence no tragedies about Pisistratus or Periander (Griffin 1980:81).

Griffin maintains that the mythical period was considered a special time and elaborates on the special features of the men and women of the time, but refrains from making any suggestions as to why it was considered different or special, except for a cursory deference to the authority of Herodotus for the delineation of these periods. However, a critical appraisal of the sharp distinction between the
older ‘mythical period’ and the later period of non-mythical history suggests some manner of epistemic shift which created an unbreachable chasm between the two time periods or epochs.

If the dates of the figures mentioned above by Griffin are considered, then a pattern begins to emerge. From “625-585 Periander [was] tyrant of Corinth…[while the f]irst tyranny of Pisistratus at Athens [was from] 560-556” (Boardman 1986:413-414). This places both Periander and Pisistratus well within the period dominated by alphabet literacy which began with the development of the Greek alphabet around 750 BCE, so that both political figures are distanced from the ‘mythical period’ by approximately five centuries. At the other end of the scale

1184 [was considered the traditional date for the destruction of Troy worked out by later Greek writers…][while the end of the ‘mythical period’ is from] 1100-1000…and involved the [i]nvasion of the Dorian Greeks into mainland Greece ([an event treated] in myth [as] ‘the return of the sons of Heracles’) (Boardman 1986:410-411).

Myres asserts that “although the Phoenicians were in no sense a literary people…inscriptions [have been] found at Gebal, now Jebeil, [dating from the] 10th century” (Myres 1899: 764). Thus the 10th century was not only the end time of the ‘mythical period’ treated in epic and tragedy, but also the time of the earliest remaining record of a Phoenician inscription. A possible counter argument that the Phoenician development of alphabet literacy, in and around the time of the 10th century, would not have had an effect on the dominant linguistic disposition of the Greeks (i.e. that of an exclusively verbal language) is severely problematized when it is remembered that the period from “1000 – 750 [was the] Age of Phoenician prosperity and expansion overseas” (Boardman 1986:411). That the Phoenicians possessed an alphabet from at least the 10th century onwards, and that this age of contact between the Phoenicians and other peoples, including the Greeks, coincided with the end of the ‘mythical period’, suggest that the exposure of an exclusively verbal Greek culture to a culture that contained alphabet literacy marked the beginnings of an epistemic shift which precluded the representation of any events or individuals, after the commencement of this period of contact, in a ‘mythical light’. This epistemic shift manifested itself in the distinction, in Homeric epic, between the older ‘mythical period’ and more recent periods, which were considered unworthy of mythical/epic representation.

As mentioned earlier, in terms of form, the complexity and vast amplitude of the *Iliad* were made possible largely by the introduction of the Greek alphabet. However, the alphabet itself was not simply an innocuous tool, but contained within it very definite Apollonian connotations of stability
and immortality that communicated themselves into the content of epic. The written canonization of epic involved an element of stability absent from any previous purely oral tradition, and this stability contributed to the move away from a more Dionysian epistemological perspective.

In terms of aesthetic representation, epic involved the calm and benign gaze of the spectator upon a world objectified and re-presented through art, a world which had attained the illusion of stability due to the advent of writing. The advent of writing saw the concretisation of a hitherto exclusively verbal language, and this concretisation detached language from a speaker and made it possible for meaning to exist in stasis, for an indefinite period, and independent of any vocal articulation. This, in turn, facilitated the birth of very Apollonian concepts of abstract eternity and stable immortality or being, which differed fundamentally from the infinitely perpetuated cycle or process of immortality associated with Dionysus and a Dionysian perspective, underpinned since the 15th century B.C.E. by a fragile and purely oral tradition. These new Apollonian concepts of a stable immortality, facilitated by the written word, coupled with the subordination of art to the level of an ‘object’ that was presented before the increasingly integral self of the spectator, involved a serene, detached, aesthetic stance, very different to the violent possession of the spectator during the Dionysian festival, which subverted the integrity of the self and precluded the possibility of any detached spectatorship.

7. A subversive Dionysian voice beneath an Apollonian hegemony

It seems highly unlikely that initial acquaintance with alphabet literacy would have resulted in an immediate insight into the ‘possibility’ of such ideas of stable immortality. Rather, such ideas are

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33 The account given by Derrida of ‘writing’ imputes to it more instability, in a certain sense, than to (logocentric, phonocentric) speech. However, I am not talking about writing in Derrida’s metaphorical sense. Rather, I am using writing as something that imparts a sense of stability on the basis of which more ephemeral acts of cognition occur.

34 As mentioned earlier, Burkert maintains that cultic activity surrounding the figure of Dionysus predated the worship of the Olympian deities and the advent of the Greek alphabet. While the Olympian deities mentioned in epic are considered to be a later invention of the poets from Homer onwards, evidence of the worship of Dionysus stretches back to at least the 15th century (Cf. note 29).

35 Support for this is found in Derrida’s argument against Husserl, in Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction, where Derrida maintains that writing lends a certain sense of permanence to the (philosophical) tradition. Derrida states that, “The possibility of writing will assure the absolute traditionalization of the object, its absolute ideal Objectivity…Writing, as the place of absolutely permanent ideal objectivities and therefore of absolute Objectivity, certainly constitutes such a transcendental field…writing is the highest possibility of all ‘constitution’, a fact against which the transcendental depth of ideal Objectivity’s historicity is measured” (Derrida 1978:87-89).

36 In the Intermezzo I consider the relationship between tragedy and Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s respective ontological perspectives. Although Heidegger also speaks of being it must be remembered that he understands it as a process, that is, as antithetical to the idea of being as something abstract, eternal and stable.
first implied through the very nature of writing and only gradually communicated or translated into concepts articulated within that written language.

The epistemic shift from a purely oral tradition to a written tradition did not take place instantaneously, or within the work of any one individual, but was rather the result of exposure, from the 10th century B.C.E. onwards, of the Greek oral tradition to the Phoenician written tradition. It is arguable that this exposure resulted in correspondingly gradual changes in the conceptual architecture of the Greeks, made possible through the concept of a written language, which was arrived at in relation to the Phoenician alphabet (to which the Greeks were exposed). The Greeks, because of exposure to (Phoenician) alphabet writing, became increasingly predisposed to the more restricted economy of an Apollonian conceptual framework prior to any development, by the Greeks, of their own alphabet. This process continued over a period of more than two centuries until it reached its akme in the creation of the Greek alphabet on the Phoenician model, an alphabet utilized by Homer in the creation of the epics.

Possible evidence for this lengthy process and gradual influence is found in the content of Homer’s Iliad, where Homer makes use of ideas of stable immortality. These ideas are already well-developed in, for example, the form and details of the immortal Olympian pantheon, as well as in the immortal glory desired by the heroes in the Iliad. Furthermore, Homer’s use of these well-developed ideas of stable immortality is consistent throughout the epics and, it is probably the case that, as such, it denotes a long ‘acquaintance’ of the Greek language with (Phoenician) alphabet literacy that would have facilitated the development of such concepts. That is, if Homer’s writings are dated around the same time period as the dawn of the Greek alphabet, then there would not have been enough time for the Greek alphabet to influence or promote concepts of ‘stable immortality’ within the Greek language to the degree to which they are used by Homer. The fact that such ideas are already well-developed in Homer’s epic, and the fact that Homer uses them with faultless consistency, implies, if my hypothesis concerning alphabet literacy is tenable, that the Greeks’ lengthy acquaintance with the Phoenician alphabet was responsible for the birth of such conceptual architecture in their language, and that such conceptual frameworks were already inscribed into the Greek language well before the advent of the Greek alphabet. That these epics were then appropriated as a cultural repository was a move which unwittingly resulted in the entrenchment and orientation of all subsequent art around a more Apollonian disposition.
i. Divine intervention

However, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the Dionysian voice was not silenced by the increasing hegemony of the Apollonian disposition, but rather made its subversive presence felt as echoes and irruptions within epic. Despite the different aesthetic at work in epic, involving the ‘detached’ appreciation of art by a spectator who increasingly possessed an integral sense of self, there remained, in the content of the material represented in epic, an echo of a Dionysian ‘music in dialogue’ with the world instead of the more static monologue of the Apollonian image. In the *Iliad*, there occur a great many instances of supernatural intervention or divine possession. For example, a wounded Glauceus prayed for assistance and “Apollo heard his prayer…stopped the pains at once, staunched the dark blood…and filled his heart with courage…. [while] Zeus began with Hector…and made the man a coward [so that] Hector…shouted out fresh orders [for a retreat]” (Homer 1990:430-435). In both of these cases, divine intervention involves a degree of possession. In the case of Glauceus, Apollo fills his heart with courage, while in the case of Hector, Zeus undermines his abilities through making him a coward. This idea of possession is an echo of the most important aspect of the Dionysian celebration/festival.

However, it must be remembered that Dionysus, prior to his installation by Homer within the Olympian pantheon, did not enjoy stable immortality. Rather, the passing of day and night, and the following of winter after spring reflected the perpetual cycle of life and death that was Dionysus. As mentioned earlier, this death and rebirth of the deity was something imbricated not only with agriculture, but also something predicated upon an exclusively verbal language that, in its fragility and transience, mirrored the constitution and dissolution of the deity Dionysus. Thus possession of the worshippers at the point of ecstasy involved possession by a deity who, like the mortals he possessed, was subject to death. Here the dissolution of the worshipper’s identity by the deity is a mirror of his/her coming death. I would suggest that it is only with the dawn of the alphabet that abstract concepts of stable immortality not subject to Dionysian-like perpetual cycles of death and rebirth, became possible, and with them immortal deities of being such as Zeus and Apollo, who now possess mortals. However, because they (i.e. the Olympian deities) possess stable immortality, they silence the earlier voices which embraced the perpetual cycle of life, death and anonymous rebirth.

However, in the epics Homer is representing events that took place during the ‘mythical period’ sometime prior to the 10th century (and thereby prior to the abstract conceptual ‘effects’ that resulted from Greek exposure to the Phoenician alphabet from the 10th century onwards). It is

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Cf. notes 1 & 3, keeping in mind that ‘monologue’ is an instantiation of language in the broad sense indicated there.
therefore questionable that the figures represented in epic (insofar as they correspond to historical individuals) would have had a concept of stable immortality in the Homeric sense of the term. They might well have understood an immortality in terms of an infinitely repeated process or cycle of death and rebirth, but they would (probably) not have been capable of comprehending the stasis implied by the Olympians’ immortality.\(^{38}\) Similarly, they would not have been able to comprehend possession of their protean selves by an ‘Apollonian’ figure (such as Apollo or Zeus) but only by a figure who, like them, partook of both life and death. Thus, while the daemonic possession and divine intervention of the Olympian deities in the Homeric epics mirror the possession of the worshipper found in the Dionysian festival, it is necessary to recognize that Homer imported ‘new’ immortal deities of being that, in rising to dominance, subverted the important aspect of the earlier Dionysian deities, namely their immortality of becoming. It is ironic that the Olympian gods act as pillars of being and function as the mediate-reflective grid through which epic attains its status as something stable and enduring, something to be ‘reflected upon’ rather than experienced in the sense of Dionysian possession, while the events re-presented through Homer’s Apollonian re-articulation of them in epic, were probably far more akin to the experience of such possession.

**ii. Homer’s exclusion of Dionysus, Demeter, Hades and Persephone from epic**

Bespaloff remarks that “Apollo the Preserver…nearer to men than to the Immortals, and yet more godlike than these turbulent gods, is really Homer’s teacher” (Bespaloff 1947:75). Homer’s privileging of the Apollonian over the Dionysian is further evident in that

[i]n Homer, Dionysus is never mentioned…nor does he appear in Olympus; Hesiod is the first who calls wine the gift of Dionysus. On the other hand, he is spoken of in the Iliad as “raging”, an epithet that indicates that the orgiastic character of his worship was already recognized (Farnell 1910:397).

The form of Homer’s naïve art of epic is influenced,\(^{39}\) predominantly, by an Apollonian disposition and, as such, it is not surprising that the Dionysian disposition appears as the non-privileged binary opposite in terms of the content of the text, even though the actions of the Homeric heroes, when they are under the influence of violent frenzies, bear overwhelming similarities to the phenomenon of Dionysian ‘raging’. Rutherford confirms that

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\(^{38}\) I am aware that Derrida, along with all the structuralists and poststructuralist, maintain that both speech and writing display a signifier/signified (concept) structure, and that, as a result, the concept of a ‘stable immortality’ is possible in the absence of writing. However, in terms of my hypothesis, I maintain that alphabet literacy both encourages and reinforces such a concept.

\(^{39}\) Cf. note 6.
the *Iliad* is extremely selective in its presentation of the divine. The focus is mainly on a few major divinities (Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Athena, Aphrodite, Poseidon…Hephaestus, Hermes, Iris, and others)…There are passing references to Demeter, Dionysus, Hades, Persephone, the Erinyes, and other powers, but these do not play speaking roles. The exclusion of Demeter and Dionysus has sometimes been explained on the grounds that they are less aristocratic, more popular gods…benefactors of all mankind (Rutherford 1996:46-47).

What Rutherford doesn’t consider is that the exclusion of the above-mentioned deities is the result of the degree to which they, and the myths attached to their respective figures, are imbricated with passing or dissolution into chaos before reconstitution, a sequence of events which mirrors the seasonal changes around which the myth of Dionysus (and Demeter, for that matter) was orientated. In other words, Homer excludes them because of the contrast between the dialogue of dissolution and reconstitution which they represent, and the monologue of the immortal stasis of the Apollonian impetus which underpins his epic.

The exclusion of the Erinyes relates to their antiquity, attested to by Dodds when he maintains that the “Erinys…go back to what is perhaps the oldest known form of Hellenic speech, the Arcado-Cypriot dialect” (Dodds 1983:8). This would put them well before the 10th century B.C.E. and thus well before any possible stabilizing influence that resulted from the Greeks’ acquaintance with the Phoenician alphabet. As mentioned previously, the figure of Gorgo or the Gorgon, synonymous with the Erinyes, represented the complete chaos of a general economy. The Erinyes are often associated with retribution and one can understand this retribution in terms of being visited by the chaos or madness that proceeds from the breaking of societal taboos.

In Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* the Erinyes pursue Orestes for his blood guilt, and in the temple of Apollo Orestes calls them both “Furies…and Gorgons” (Aeschylus 1975:231-233) and gives the following description of them: “[B]lack they are, and so repulsive. Their heavy, rasping breathing makes me cringe. And their eyes ooze a discharge, sickening, and what they wear – to flaunt that at the gods, the idols, sacrilege!” (Aeschylus 1975:233). The last mention of sacrilege is significant in that it suggests that the very guise and presence of the Erinyes in the temple of Apollo, as goddesses or rasping voices of chaos from an earlier era, is sacrilegious. For the same reasons it would have been ‘sacilegious’, in a sense, if Demeter or Dionysus had assumed speaking roles in the *Iliad* because their voices, with echoes of constitution and reconstitution, would similarly have subverted the Apollonian integrity and sense of stability created through Homer’s privileging of the immortal Olympian pantheon.
In contrast to this, Homer’s exclusion of Hades and Persephone seems unwarranted because neither of them falls readily into Rutherford’s above-mentioned category of popular deities who were benefactors of humankind. Similarly, Rutherford’s description of Dionysus and Demeter as popular deities who contrasted with the immortal aristocratic Olympian deities also falls short of providing a good reason for Homer’s exclusion of Hades, since Hades was the immortal king of the underworld. However, if Persephone’s status as the daughter of Demeter is remembered, along with Persephone’s relationship to Hades, then a possible reason for their combined exclusion begins to emerge. It was Hades who is said to have kidnapped Persephone and claimed the right to her company for five months of every year because of her consumption, during her time in Tartarus, of the food of the dead (namely five pomegranate seeds). “For the remaining seven months she was allowed to return to her mother [Demeter, goddess of the earth and crops, and it] …was only during these seven months that Demeter lifted her curse and allowed anything to grow on the earth” (Corsar 1977:20). Thus, had either Hades or Persephone spoken in the Iliad, the effect would have been the same as if Homer had given voice to Dionysus or Demeter, that is, it would have harked back to and thereby provided the subversive voices of the process of perpetual and cyclical change, voices of the immortality of becoming related to seasonal and agrarian observations, an opportunity to undermine the Apollonian illusion of stability created through the predominance of the Olympian immortals in epic.

iii. Dionysian echoes and incongruities in the sentiments of the heroes

In the prayers of supplication detailed in the Iliad there is another tension that results from the incongruity between the Apollonian sentiments expressed by the characters in Homer’s representation of the period, and what, in all probability, it would have been conceivable for people who existed during that period, in the absence of an alphabet or written language, to express. That is, their prayers of supplication call on Apollo to reconstitute that which has been dissolved or torn apart. For example, when the wounded Glaucus prays for assistance, “Apollo heard his prayer…stopped the pains at once, staunched the dark blood…and filled his heart with courage” (Homer 1990:430-435). Similarly, when Chryses prayed to Apollo to send a plague on the Greeks for refusing to return his daughter despite his offers of ransom, “[h]is prayer went up and Phoebus Apollo heard him…the god quaked with rage…and the corpse-fires burned on…no end in sight” (Homer 1990:79). Tsagarakis maintains that “Glaucus’ prayer, like that of Chryses…brings out the fundamental point that the worshipper can hope for the god’s support…[if the] man…[keeps] his patron’s altar burning” (Tsagarakis 1977:40-41). This means-end rationality may have formed the bedrock of religious practice as represented in the Iliad, but what is interesting is not the economy of exchange at work in such proceedings, but rather the
restricted economy of Apollo present in the supplication itself. In both cases, as mentioned above, Apollo is called upon to reconstitute that which has been dissolved or torn apart. In the case of Glaucus it is the body that must be reconstituted after being shattered by a wound, while in the case of Chryses, it is the family unit that needs to be made whole again after it has been rent asunder by Agamemnon’s theft of Chryseis (Chryses’ daughter). However, the Trojan war occurred sometime around the 12th or 13th century B.C.E. and therefore prior to the conception of the Olympian deities. Thus it is questionable whether the characters, subsequently represented by Homer in the Iliad, would have ever uttered these prayers or, more importantly, conceived of deities who would have answered them in the fashion described in the Iliad. It is more probable that such characters would have possessed a Dionysian-like perspective involving a dialogue with the world instead of any Apollonian perspective involving deities who stood against the world and remedied the random effects of chance in life.

Possible evidence for this prevalence of a more Dionysian perspective is found in the Dionysian subtext that echoes, throughout the epics, in the sentiments of the heroic warriors who lived life through a whole-hearted ‘consumption’ (i.e. destruction) of others and an embrace of the inevitable consequences of such violence. In Book 12 of the Iliad, Sarpedon admonishes Hippolochus’ son Glaucus saying:

Ah my friend, if you and I could escape this fray and live forever, never a trace of age, immortal, I would never fight on the front lines again…But now, as it is, the fates of death await us…and not a man alive can flee or escape them – so we go for attack! Give our enemy glory or win it for ourselves (Homer 1990:335-336).

Sarpedon does not assert that victory will bring immortality, but rather maintains the impossibility of anyone attaining immortality, which in turn acts as the motivation to aspire to glory through being remembered in poetry. However, there is an immense difference between being remembered, in Dionysian fashion, within the local poetic songs of an exclusively verbal language and culture, and being immortalized through entering the canonized annals of written epic. This is especially significant when it is considered that the written Homeric texts acted as a cultural repository for a people who were rapidly developing a sense of community that soon breached the isolated pockets of influence of the “class, kin, and oikos…[that] defined [Homeric] man’s life, materially and psychologically” (Finley 1954:79). This socio-political impetus manifested later, during the Archaic period, in the city-state or polis, an institution unimaginable for a Homeric heroic warrior who was tied into primarily familial networks of power structures.
Thus, not only was the scope of the oral poetry, in which the heroes of the Trojan war hoped to be remembered, far more local in character than that of Homeric epic, but it was also something far more fragile than the written word. The purely verbal poetry of an exclusively oral tradition was a very ‘Dionysian’ poetry in that it was subject to flux, change, accident and forgetting. It was a poetry which only existed in the immediate and actual singing of the warriors’ praises and was, as such, very much a poetry of becoming rather than a poetry possessed of the being-laden connotations of Homer’s written epic. Not only do Sarpedon’s words to Glaucus mirror this fragility of life, along with an acceptance of death as part of the human condition, but they also contain the trace or echo of a Dionysian perspective involving the dissolution and reconstitution of the self. For the heroes of the Trojan war, subsequently represented by Homer in epic, the consolidation of the self through glory might be realized through strife, but an integral part of the economy of Homeric martial action also involved the dissolution of the self through the victory of one’s opponents, a victory which resulted in one’s own death. This ‘beautiful death’ then facilitated the hero’s passage into the realm of oral poetry where he was remembered and thereby, in effect, re-constituted as a self. This dissolution and reconstitution of the self through an interminably unstable and extremely fragile spoken poetry has very definite Dionysian undertones.

iv. Dionysian echoes in the sentiments of the Olympian deities

Furthermore, it is not only in the sentiments of the warriors that this echo of a more Dionysian perspective is found, but also in the sentiments of the Olympian deities. “Zeus is well aware that the gods can die, and he bows before the great blind divinity who governs mortals and immortals alike” (Bespaloff 1947:77). “The gods, including even Zeus, must yield to the impersonal force of fate: thus Sarpedon must die, and Zeus himself weeps tears of blood for his son” (Rutherford 1996:49). Fate is bound up with the Erinys and the “complex moira-Erinys-ate had deep roots [that, as mentioned above]…go back to what is perhaps the oldest known form of Hellenic speech, the Arcado-Cypriot dialect” (Dodds 1983:8). The inclusion of these echoes of older beliefs in the Iliad indicates that Homer felt the weight of this ‘fate’ as something primordial that could not be usurped, either by his new Olympian immortals or by his heroes, as is evident when Achilles’ horse attempts to tell Achilles of his impending doom. As this information might jeopardise the fulfilment of fate, “[t]he Furies struck him [the Roan Beauty] dumb” (Homer 1990:502) before he could reveal all to Achilles, because “it is not ‘according to moira’ for horses to talk” (Dodds 1983:7).

However, despite these echoes of a Dionysian perspective to which all the above-mentioned subversive voices owed their genesis, epic only allowed the reader, or those for whom the epic was
performed, an opportunity to *reflect* at a distance on the Dionysian dispositions and perspectives mirrored in the text, which amounted to an opportunity to consider such dispositions and perspectives only through the mediation of the Apollonian form of epic. This mediation prevented the audience from ever approximating the ‘actual experience’ of Dionysian *possession*, Dionysian ‘raging’ or even a more Dionysian perspective. A significant contributor to this Apollonian dominance involved the music of epic. Although music is usually associated with a more Dionysian perspective, epic, when performed, was accompanied by the gentle, structured music of the lyre and not the violent sounds of the dithyrambic music of the Dionysian festival, a factor which contributed to the Apollonian nature of epic rather than detracted from it. Nevertheless, as discussed above, there exists a tension between the Dionysian tone underlying epic and the serene, reflective form of epic with its weighty content dominated by Apollonian metaphors. This tension is created because the *acts*, dispositions, perspectives and desires of the Homeric warriors and deities contain the trace and echo of a more Dionysian perspective that harks back to the proto-drama and breathes ominously beneath the thin Apollonian veneer of Homeric epic.

v. The *proto-drama* and *dramatic tragedy*

To understand better what Dionysian possession entailed, and how the subversive Dionysian voice manifested in the dramatic representations of Attic tragedy (after it had echoed throughout epic), it is necessary to take the investigation further back in time, not only to the period before the first dramatic representation of Attic tragedy at the Dionysian festival in 532 B.C.E, but also to the period before the composition of the Homeric epics around 750 B.C.E. This is done in order to make a clear distinction between the dramatic representations of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (i.e. Attic tragedy) and the proto-drama.

In Attic tragedy, Nietzsche argues, the chorus is of greater importance than the dramatic events portrayed on the stage in that, without the chorus, those dramatic events lose their meaning. This is because originally, in the proto-drama, there were no dramatic personae and no ‘stage-play’ but rather “everything [was] only a great sublime chorus of dancing and singing satyrs or of people who let themselves be represented by these satyrs.” (Nietzsche 2000:48) In the satyr, the Greeks saw

Nature before knowledge had set to work on it, before the bolts of culture had been broken open…[they] saw…the archetype of man, the expression of his highest and strongest impulses…the satyr chorus – is a copy of a more truthful, more real, more complete image of existence than the man of culture who commonly considers himself the sole reality (Nietzsche 2000:47).
In the proto-drama it was the visualisation of the deity Dionysus and the corresponding ‘transformation’ of the worshippers that originally constituted the tragedy. In the later dramatic tragedy the personifications of the deity Dionysus, in the form of the various dramatic personae, underwent stages of dissolution and reconstitution because the point of departure of such tragedy, in keeping with the Dionysian myth and ‘tradition’, involved an embrace of the infinite repetition of dissolution and reconstitution of the self, mirrored in the perpetual cyclical succession of spring by winter and day by night. In the earlier proto-drama the tragic experience was not one that involved the cool contemplation of art from the perspective of a relatively integral self-as-spectator, as was the case with the aesthetic contemplation of Homeric epic poetry, but was rather a dynamic experience of violent possession involving a dissolution of any sense of ‘self’ amongst the ‘worshippers’ for the duration of the orgiastic ritual, followed by a re-constitution of their sense of ‘self’ after the festivities.

8. The importance of music in the Dionysian festival

The experience of this process was continued in the later dramatic representations through the presence and impact of music, which was an integral part of the celebration because of its potential to intoxicate. Music induced a forgetting of the ‘self-of-culture’ and of normative social restrictions and engendered, instead, amongst the audience, an embrace of ‘infinite’, instinctual, and ‘primal’ possibilities through the presence and voice of the chorus. Schopenhauer gives a reason for this effect when he writes of music, in The World as Will and Representation, that

[m]usic is as direct an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself, nay, even as the Ideas, whose multiplied manifestation constitutes the world of individual things. Music is thus by no means like the other arts, the copy of the Ideas, but the copy of the will itself, whose objectivity the Ideas are. This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself (Schopenhauer 1964:333).

40 I argue that the term ‘visualization’ here is not used in the sense of an imagined solid entity, but rather in the sense in which it plays a role in Tibetan Vajrayāna practice, where a bodhisattva (a being of infinite compassion), when visualized, is not felt to be solid but rather to have the consistency of a rainbow. Similarly, the practitioner imagines him/herself to be of a similar consistency, which facilitates a merging with the bodhisattva. However, because of their similar porous consistency, such a merging is less a dissolution of one into the other, and more a dissolution of the error involved in thinking of oneself as separate from the bodhisattva. The epistemological and ontological perspective that underpins this practice is one which views all objects, all bodies, all sounds and all thoughts to be non-solid or non-integral and in a perpetual state of flux. There are distinct and interesting parallels between this induced experience and the experience of the Dionysian festival, and one has reason to believe that, within the context of the proto-drama too, ‘visualization’ did not involve any idea of solidity.

41 The application of the notions of despair and sadness to the later Greek dramatic tragedy involves an anachronism on our part. That we experience it as sorrowful is a good indication of how different our conception of the self is from that of Aeschylus and his audience, for whom the dissolution and reconstitution of the dramatic personae (in themselves symbolic of the porous sense of self) were an integral part of the play and, what’s more, a source of joy.
Music invades the hearer/listener because, as an unmediated copy of the will, there is no conceptual distance between the hearer/listener and it, with its primary effects being felt in terms of time and tonality while, at a secondary level, its effects involve the creation of a realm of ‘conceptual spatiality’. In terms of time, music, as a manifestation of noumena (as Schopenhauer would have it), intoxicates the hearer/listener because it is unlike (supposedly) static, ‘stable’ phenomena that a (predominantly Apollonian) self believes it can grasp conceptually. Instead, it is entirely fluid and fleeting, with the sound that reaches the ear a split second after the vibration re-presenting the Schopenhauerian will to the hearer/listener irresistibly, as a re-presentation that can only take place at the subliminal level of imminent perception. The primary lack of any conceptual distance between the hearer/listener and music results, at a secondary level, in involuntary changes in mood, attitude and emotion in response to alterations in tonality.

This response orientates itself around abstract mental diagrams and associations which involve the creation of a realm of conceptual ‘spatiality’, hence the terms ‘high’ and ‘low’ notes, a spatiality engendered by the immediate perception of music and accessible only through the presence (or imagined presence) of such sound. Both the primary and secondary effects become imbricated in the phenomenon of dance where the will, re-presented to the hearer/listener so irresistibly through music, appropriates more than just a realm of conceptual ‘space’ in consciousness, and instead appropriates the whole of consciousness and the body, impelling consciousness to act out the tempo in ‘objectively present’ space through the body. This occasion inadvertently blurs any fallacious distinction between the \textit{res cogitans} and \textit{res extensa}, and can manifest in anything from a Dionysiac-dithyrambic inspired orgy to the seemingly-innocuous foot-tapping at one’s desk in time to an irresistible beat.

This power of music to possess the individual is reciprocally supported by a latent and dormant Dionysian potential, which relishes such possession and finds in it an echo and trace of an experience which ‘pre-dates’ the restricted and normative economy of the more stable Apollonian sense of self. It is the possibility of the dissolution of this stable sense of self, as defined in terms of the \textit{theoretical man},\footnote{"[T]he serenity of…\textit{theoretical man}…shows the…characteristic signs…[of] the un-Dionysian spirit – it combats Dionysian wisdom and art, it seeks to dissolve myth, it replaces metaphysical consolation with a worldly consonance…it believes that the world is to be corrected through knowledge, that life can be guided by science…it…cast[s] a spell on the individual, confining him to a very narrow enchanted circle of soluble tasks" (Nietzsche 2000:96).} which constitutes the basis of tragedy in that this Apollonian sense of self, through actively and violently ‘forgetting’ or suppressing its Dionysian potential, laid the groundwork for its own dissolution in the presence of music and visualisations that ‘remembered’ such potential. Thus,
we must reject A.W. Schlegel’s interpretation of the chorus as the ‘ideal spectator’, there being originally no spectacle for it to be spectator of. We should also reject [Hegel’s] idea that it represents the populace as against the aristocratic heroes of the drama proper: in origin and essence, tragedy is purely metaphysical and not socio-political (Silk 1981:68-69).

Silk’s use of the word ‘metaphysical’ must be qualified here in terms of the experience of the non-stable ebb and flow of forces that underpin existence, a metaphysical process experienced through the proto-drama and later intuited through the implications of the representations of dramatic Attic tragedy. He does not use the term in the sense of any purely intellectual, metaphysical speculation regarding the existence of a stable Grund or hypokeimenon, nor in any sense of a detached intellectual, metaphysical consideration of the primacy of Heraclitean ‘perpetual flux’. This distinction between, on the one hand, primarily intellectual metaphysical speculation and, on the other, tragedy, becomes increasingly blatant when the above mentioned effects of music on tragedy are considered. The application of the idea of a distanced and detached spectator to the proto-drama is anachronistic, as it presupposes a much more concrete sense of an integral, reflective and contemplative self, something which only gained in momentum from Homer to Plato. Similarly, the application of the idea of such a spectator to dramatic tragedy is incongruous, given the Dionysian potential ‘remembered’ through the implications of the drama, which sought to undermine any such stable and integral sense of the self.

9. The relationship between dramatic tragedy and Homeric epic

The idea of the dissolution and reconstitution of the self, discussed earlier in relation to Sarpedon’s and Glaucus’ conversation on glory before they entered into the battle, was fundamental to both the proto-drama of tragedy and its later dramatic representation. The sentiments of the warriors contained a similar perspective to that found in both forms of tragedy, namely an embrace of the possibility of a protean self, and this underlying perspective engaged in a ‘subversion’ of the integrity of any Apollonian sense of an integral self. Dithyrambic music in the proto-drama had ‘possessed’ the listener and worked against the possibility of any benign, detached, ‘objective’ contemplation of art. However, the music and experience of the proto-drama had also facilitated a close proximity to the abyss of the ‘general economy’ of complete chaos, a proximity which had revealed the fundamental horror and suffering of existence. In contrast to the proto-drama, epic poetry constituted what Nietzsche termed “naïve art…a secondary phenomenon…like dreams…[whose] psychological…[function is the creation of a] visionary illusion…needed to redeem the horror and suffering of

43 That is, Silk is using the term in the same sense as Nietzsche uses it in The Birth of Tragedy.
existence” (Silk 1981:66). In the later *dramatic* representation of tragedy, the music of the chorus and the implications of the drama involved a breaching of the ‘barrier of reflection’ of Homeric *epic*, which had allowed epic to function as an opiate through promising stability, and threw the audience squarely back into the realm of the unstable consolidation and dissolution of the self. It thus gave voice to the age-old dispersion and reconstitution of the self, inherited from the *proto*-drama, which had remained as a subtext, echo and shadow within the speeches and actions (of the heroes, gods and goddesses) represented by Homer in the Apollonian dominated epic. Thus, accordingly, tragedy should “not…be thought of as a mere ‘imitation of nature’. [Rather, w]ith its creation and destruction of individuals, it [should be seen as that which] offers us a presentiment of the primordial unity that lies behind the world of phenomena” (Silk 1981:85).

In the content of the myths chosen by Aeschylus as the material for his dramatic representations, and in the content of the dramatic representations themselves, the dominant theme is this consolidation and dissolution of the ‘self’. With regard to the *Oresteia*, specifically the *Agamemnon*, Robert Fagles gives the following account of the myth concerning the house of Atreus.

The house of Atreus is the embodiment of savagery. No other Greek family can rival it for accumulated atrocities. The founder of the line was Tantalus of Lydia…He offended the gods by feasting them on his son’s flesh, and they condemned him to starve in Hades…[b]ut they restored his victim, Pelops…Later [Pelops]… went to western Greece, where he won the hand of Hippodameia by a ruse which killed her father…Pelops [then]had two sons, Atreus and Thyestes. When Thyestes seduced his brother’s wife…Atreus banished him and then, luring him back for a reconciliation, feasted him on his children’s flesh. Horrified, Thyestes cursed Atreus and his descendants and fled into exile…accompanied by his one remaining son, Aegisthus [who would later conspire with Clytemnestra against Agamemnon]. Atreus had two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus who…married…Clytemnestra and Helen…At the outset of the expedition [against Troy in an effort to return Helen to Menelaus]…Agamemnon had to sacrifice his and Clytemnestra’s daughter Iphigenia…The *Agamemnon* describes how Clytemnestra kills her husband for the death of their daughter and the insult of Cassandra [his new mistress from Troy] (Fagles 1975:14-15).

Tantalus attempted to resist the loss of his power, through its ‘Oedipal’ usurpation by Pelops, by ‘dissolving’ Pelops through a feast. However, the reconstitution of Pelops sees Tantalus disempowered and left forever wanting in Hades, while Pelops goes on to usurp the power of Hippodameia’s father. What is reflected here is the idea of the superior strength of those who undergo dissolution and reconstitution, a strength greater than those who are simply possessed of a rigid, stable, integral ‘self’. (That this is not something explicitly articulated relates to the Dionysian experience as a power *felt*, a Dionysian truth that remained wholly Dionysian, outside of any appropriation through Apollonian language.) Similarly, the children sacrificed and thereby dissolved through Atreus’
barbaric act of feeding Thyestes his own children, are re-constituted in memory, in a fashion akin to that of the heroic warrior (subsequently represented) in epic poetry, and thereby provide the impetus not only for the curse of the house of Atreus, but for Aegisthus’ vengeance on Agamemnon through his liaison with Agamemnon’s wife, Clytemnestra. Again, it is the re-constituted ‘self’ of Iphigenia, in the memory of Clytemnestra, which motivates the latter to take revenge on Agamemnon. The death of Agamemnon, in turn, constitutes the ‘dissolution’ of his ‘self’ which is re-constituted through the monument of his grave, a monument to which his daughter and son pay homage in the _Libation Bearers_, and which thereby reconstitutes the self of Agamemnon as far more powerful than Clytemnestra, and sees her overcome by Orestes in memory of his father. Yet as soon as her ‘self’ is dissolved through the matricide, her reconstitution through Orestes’ memory of her, and through his corresponding sense of guilt, sees her become more powerful than Orestes himself, whose identity is bound up with a self that has yet to be dissolved and re-constituted. _The Libation Bearers_ ends with Orestes being forced to flee before his guilt which manifests itself as the “Women…like Gorgons, shrouded in black, their heads wreathed…[in] swarming serpents” (Aeschylus 1975:225), while in the _Eumenides_ Apollo sends Orestes to the “citadel of Pallas [Athena or Athens, where he promises that]…with judges of your case…with words – we will devise the master-stroke that sets you free from torment” (Aeschylus 1975:234). This ‘masterstroke’ is nothing other than the figurative dissolution of Orestes’ self and its reconstitution that lend Orestes the required strength and make it possible for him to negate the power of the re-constituted self of the “Ghost of Clytemnestra [which] appears at the Navelstone, hovering over the furies as they sleep” (Aeschylus 1975:235). This dissolution and reconstitution of Orestes takes the form of the ‘court dispute’ where the claims of Apollo, those of the Furies, and the judgement of the “finest men of Athens…ten citizens…[Athena had] chosen to be judges” (Aeschylus 1975:253-255), figuratively rip asunder the body of Orestes in an effort to settle a dispute between old and new forms of justice, and between the horrendous chaotic abyss of the Furies and the word of Apollo. At last, Athena “[r]aising her arm, her hand clenched as if holding a ballot-stone” (Aeschylus 1975:264) casts her vote for Orestes and thereby, on the brink of his total dissolution, saves him and re-constitutes him as a “man…cleared of the charge of blood” (Aeschylus 1975:265).

In reading the arguments of Apollo and the Furies it is possible to see their dispute as orientated around their respective private agendas and mutual antagonism, for which Orestes merely serves as a pawn and the ‘object’ of a feast of conflicting discourse that sees him hang in the balance between total annihilation and re-constitution. While these ideas of dissolution and reconstitution ‘remember’ the proto-drama, their ‘status’, as a subversive Dionysian voice, implies the presence of an Apollonian ‘hegemony’. This hegemony was the result of a transition from a more ‘Dionysian’ phase
of culture to a more ‘Apollonian’ phase, and constituted the preparation for, what I propose to call, ‘dialectical language’, which will be discussed in the following chapter. However, in the following section I will consider the ways in which the subversive Dionysian voice operated within the ‘Apollonian’ confines of Aeschylus’ tragedy, Prometheus Bound.

10. Prometheus

The importance of the dissolution and reconstitution of the self is seen nowhere more clearly than in the figure of Prometheus in Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound where we see man himself, risen to Titanic stature, creating civilization by his own efforts…The control of fire is the mark of the civilization man aspires to, but constitutes a kind of sacrilege, a ‘robbery of divine nature’ that must be paid for with immense suffering (Silk 1981:72).

However, it is important to exercise caution when considering the nature of Prometheus’ gift of fire. Prometheus’ gift to humankind involves more than some mark of civilization, and rather carries with it connotations of profound self-knowledge, where the idea of self-knowledge corresponds to the image of a glowing torch that illuminates the darkened world of blind psychical striving towards some illusory point of integrity and stability. The self-knowledge of Prometheus differs from the type of knowledge valorised and pursued by Enlightenment thinkers, which was a knowledge predicated on the idea of a stable, rigid Apollonian-Cartesian subject, endowed with reason. Instead, it approximates the Lacanian ‘self’-knowledge regarding the impossibility of ever being ‘whole’ again. The gift of knowledge that Prometheus bequeaths to humankind is the Dionysian truth of the unavoidable and perpetual cycle of dissolution and reconstitution of the self, and hence it involves not only the symbolic significance of fire, but also (perhaps more importantly here) the idea of the perpetual cycle of dissolution and re-constitution as constitutive of the human condition, a process of perpetual becoming that manifests itself in the punishment Prometheus receives at the hands of Zeus.

44 Where Aeschylus’ tragedy subverts ideas of Apollonian being, that is, ideas of being as something stable and eternal, critical cinema subverts the Apollonian ‘structures’ of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and reveals the ‘abyss of possibility’ upon which they rest. In Chapter Two, and in the Intermezzo, I will consider the parallels between the subversive ‘Dionysian’ voices present in Aeschylus’ tragedy and those that resound in the writings of Nietzsche and Heidegger, while in Chapters Three and Four I will discuss how critical cinema engages with, and subverts, the ‘Apollonian’ visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media.

45 “Lacan says that we are never going to get a stable image. We try to interpret our relation to others but there is always the possibility of misinterpretation. There is always a gap, a misrecognition” (Sarup 1988:15). In maintaining this, Lacan echoes the sentiments expressed by Aristophanes in Plato’s Symposium. Aristophanes says that, “Each of us when separated, [by Zeus, from our other half,] having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of a man, and he is always looking for his other half” (Plato 1952: 158). In Chapter Four I will discuss Aronofsky’s (critical) film Requiem for a Dream (2001) where this same theme occurs in relation to the ‘image’ infatuation of contemporary culture. (Also, I will discuss the Apollonian-Cartesian subject in the beginning of the Intermezzo.)
When Ocean offers to “go plead with him [Zeus], and strain all powers I have, to loose thee from this chain” (Aeschylus 1952:36), Prometheus tells him to “be content” (Aeschylus 1952:36) and not to interfere. Again, later, he charges Ocean not to intercede on his behalf saying that such attempts are “[v]ain kindliness, and waste of foolish breath…Beware! My love may earn for thee another’s hate” (Aeschylus 1952:38-39). At first glance it appears that Prometheus is possessed of saintly magnanimity and benevolence, more concerned for Ocean’s well-being than his own torturous suffering. However, his release from his torments would constitute a negation and dissolution of his ‘gift’ to humankind as, through the trials and tortures exercised upon his person, through the enactment of the threats promised by Hermes, Prometheus becomes the ‘truth’ given to humankind. As the manifestation of the perpetual cycle of dissolution and re-constitution he is the fire of self-knowledge, the source of Dionysian wisdom, the metaphysical truth of the non-stable, porous, fluid nature of the ‘self’ and ‘reality’.

When Io asks about Prometheus’ predictions concerning the usurpation of Zeus’ power in her question, “The wife he weds shall hurl him from his throne?” (Aeschylus 1952:56), Prometheus responds by saying, “Her first-born greater than his sire shall be” (Aeschylus 1952:56). This is not mere wishful thinking but the end result of a series of events carefully orchestrated by Prometheus. When Io asks if anyone “can turn from Zeus that destiny?” (Aeschylus 1952:57), Prometheus answers, “I can; but only when these bonds are loose” (Aeschylus 1952:57). Again, this is less a case of Prometheus holding back information as a bargaining chip in order to save himself later, and more a case of him holding back information in order to orchestrate events in a way that will bring about the downfall of the privileged stability of being, as manifest in the figures of Zeus and the Immortals. Prometheus’ refusal to give Zeus the required information invokes Zeus’ anger and results in the following threats being delivered by Hermes:

Hearken now, if yield thou wilt not, what a storm, what wave threefold of unescaped ravin shall be rolled upon thee. First, this gulf of jagged rock the Sire shall rend in twain with thunder-shock and fire of lightning. Deep shalt thou be thrown below the earth, gripped by an arm of stone; till, when an age-long space of years is past, back to the light above though rise at last, and then – God help thee – the Sire’s winged hound, the blood-red eagle ravening, wound by wound, shall tear thy giant corpse, and shred by shred, day after day, unbIDDEN, to be fed he comes, and heavy-pinioned shall depart blood-gorged from thy gnawed and blackened heart. Nor ever respite from these agonies shall come (Aeschylus 1952:69-70).

However, in punishing Prometheus through the above-mentioned penalties, i.e. through having him torn to pieces and then reconstituted eternally, Zeus ‘creates’ and perpetuates the Dionysian ‘truth’ of dissolution and reconstitution, a ‘truth’ which undermines the Apollonian stable being bound
up with himself (Zeus) and the other Immortals. Insofar as Zeus could be said to be wedded to Wrath in his torture of Prometheus, the child of such a union could be said to be Dionysian truth that manifested itself in the figure of the eternally tortured Prometheus, a truth which Zeus inadvertently sires and perpetuates, to the detriment of himself and the other Immortals, and thereby inadvertently fulfils the prophecy of Prometheus, namely that “[t]he wife he weds shall hurl him from his throne…[h]er first-born greater than his sire shall be” (Aeschylus 1952:56). Prometheus answer to Io’s question, “And none can turn from Zeus that destiny?” (Aeschylus 1952:57) now makes perfect sense. Prometheus states, “I can, but only when these bonds are loose” (Aeschylus 1952:57). Quite literally, if Zeus releases Prometheus and fails to proceed with his plans to torture him eternally, the Dionysian ‘truth’ will not be made manifest, will not be perpetuated and, as such, will not undermine the stable Apollonian being of the Immortals (as found in Homeric epic). Prometheus can save himself (and the stable being of Zeus) by telling Zeus of the paradoxical and detrimental results of his eternal torture at the hands of Zeus.

Yet he refrains from doing so because his gift to humankind is fire, where fire is not only self-knowledge, that individual and fragile light source which contrasts with the omnipotent and Apollonian sun, but also becoming which contrasts with Apollonian being. Thus, although he, quite ‘literally’, can save Zeus from his destiny, he doesn’t because of his joint love of humankind and of becoming-in-man/woman.

11. Conclusion

Earlier in this chapter I discussed the Dionysian-Apollonian tensions that inhabited Homer’s Iliad, and I suggested that the Apollonian influence of alphabet literacy was, to a certain degree, responsible for the Apollonian form (and content) of the Iliad that attempted to silence any ‘recollection’ of the Dionysian experience of the proto-drama. Although there occurs an oblique ‘remembering’ of this experience through the implications of Aeschylus’ tragedy, as discussed in the previous section, Nietzsche maintains that the subsequent tragedians (i.e. Sophocles and Euripides), under an increasingly Apollonian influence, went to great lengths to, again, silence any recollection of the Dionysian ‘abyss’ in favour of reason and clarity.

According to Nietzsche there is an “un-Dionysian and anti-mythical spirit in operation…[in the] development of the representation of character and of psychological refinement in tragedy from

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46 That is, the Dionysian-Apollonian tension is at work within Aeschylus’ texts where the Dionysian voice (in the figure of Prometheus) acts as subverter to the Apollonian hegemony of the immortal Olympians, symbolized by Zeus.
Sophocles on” (Nietzsche 2000:94-95) that led to the death of tragedy. Nietzsche argues that this ‘death’ finally resulted from the work of Euripides because of the way in which he brought critical thinking onto the stage and sought to dissolve the ‘enigmatic depth’ that lurked beneath the characters, symbols and narratives of Aeschylus’ tragedies. “It was…the incommensurable that Euripides sought to eliminate from his own dramatic productions, for it sinned against Socratic reasonableness…[Euripides had, instead, an] un-Dionysian penchant for clarity in art” (Megill 1985:55).

Nietzsche maintains that a healthy culture needs a constant ‘dialogue’ or tension between the voices of Apollo and Dionysus. However, an Apollonian hegemony, involving the ‘monologue’ of Apollo, cultivates a “conscious, theoretical mind…that works in concepts [and]…cultivates a distance from its immediate perceptions and instincts” (Megill 1985:55).

In this chapter I have considered the rise to dominance of the Apollonian disposition and the way in which it manifested itself in Homer’s epic poetry (and the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides), along with the way in which Aeschylus, through his tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, offered temporary resistance to Apollonian hegemony. In the following chapter I will continue along similar lines of investigation by considering the way in which this Apollonian trend became manifest in the sentiments and axiological perspectives of the pre-Socratic writers from Homer to Plato, and the way in which it eventually culminated in, what I call, Plato’s ‘dialecticism’ and his idea of the ‘just soul’.

The ‘subversive’ (Dionysian) potential of Aeschylus’ tragedy, discussed in the previous section, relates to Chapter Two where, after discussing the pre-Socratic writers and the ‘birth’ of Plato’s ‘dialectical language’, I will consider the way in which, following Nietzsche closely, one can subvert Plato’s dialecticism by following up on the arguments of some of his interlocutors from the *Dialogues*, which are underpinned by similar axiological, epistemological and ontological perspectives to those found in Aeschylus’ tragedy.

This, in turn, relates to the *Intermezzo*, which follows Chapter Two, because there I discuss the way in which Heidegger subverts the hegemony of ‘dialectical language’ (which is related to Plato’s ‘dialecticism’) by offering an alternative mythology in the form of the ‘Fourfold’, which has links with tragedy via Nietzsche. That is, there exist parallels between Nietzsche’s valorisation of Aeschylus’ tragedies and Heidegger’s description, in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, of Van Gogh’s painting of pair of peasant shoes, in relation to which he characterises a peasant woman as a ‘tragic’ figure.

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47 ‘Clarity’ here is bound up with the idea of Apollo as the ‘light of reason’.
48 Megill is here referring to Euripides’ adoption of Socratic ‘reasonableness’.
Although both Nietzsche and Heidegger valorise a more ‘Dionysian’ voice, they both do so in an Apollonian manner, that is, in terms of poetry and philosophy, in the interests of subverting the dominant Apollonian impetus of western culture that privileges dialectical language. This is the same way in which the ‘Dionysian’ voice of critical cinema operates, insofar as it reveals, at an Apollonian level of reflection, the ‘abyss of possibility’ that lurks beneath the Apollonian narrative structures of the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and in Chapters Three and Four I will focus on this.
2. Dialectical Ressentiment

1. Introduction

Where Nietzsche states that “ancient tragedy was forced off the rails by the dialectical drive to knowledge and scientific optimism” (Nietzsche 2000:92), he means that the dialogue between Apollo and Dionysus embodied in tragedy was gradually silenced by the dominance of the Apollonian voice. In Chapter One I discussed the nature of the tension/dialogue between Apollo and Dionysus in Homeric epic (i.e. the *Iliad*) and dramatic Attic tragedy (i.e. Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and *Prometheus Bound*), and illustrated how, in both instances, the Dionysian voice made its subversive presence felt. However, the success of the Dionysian voice in increasing from a distant echo in epic to a roar in Aeschylus’ tragedies, was not mirrored in other literary forms. I will not revisit tragedy in this chapter, but will rather consider the work of a host of other writers, from Homer to Plato, whose texts reveal a progression of thought that does not run contrary to the Apollonian impetus found in Homer’s epics. Although these literary successors of Homer engage ‘critically’ with Homeric *arête*, their thought both perpetuates and propagates an increasingly restricted conceptual economy that moves steadily towards the Platonic dialectic and the idea of the integral, just soul. In this chapter I will focus on their work and the manner in which the Apollonian voice is epitomized by Plato’s dialectical method.

Traced to its origins in Plato’s *Dialogues*, what Nietzsche calls ‘the dialectical drive to knowledge’ amounts to the process of posing contentious issues in the newly forged dialectical language of philosophy/reason, which came to dominate the western philosophical tradition. This involved dividing arguments into viewpoints that faced one another as dialectical opposites (as embodying mutually contradictory truth values) and therefore necessitated an either/or choice between them. Having set up the agenda of philosophical thinking in terms of this privileged

49 I am using the term ‘ressentiment’ in the sense in which Deleuze uses it when he states that forces that are not active, are the reactive forces of *ressentiment* (resistance to the erosion of all through time). “[A]ctive forces are the superior, dominant and strongest forces…[b]ut inferior forces can *prevail* without ceasing to be inferior in quantity and reactive in quality…[As Nietzsche states in *The Will to Power*] “The strong always have to be defended against the weak””[My Italics](Deleuze 1983:58). Just such reactive forces prevailed with the triumph of what Nietzsche refers to as ‘Socratism’, or the birth of the dialectical tradition.

50 Even within the genre of tragedy, the ‘roar’ of Dionysus in Aeschylus’ tragedies was progressively silenced, first by Sophocles and then by Euripides. Nietzsche maintained that the chorus was of crucial importance to the *spirit* of tragedy and that it served as the link between dramatic tragedy and the *proto*-drama. Nietzsche contrasts this *tragic spirit* with the dialectical impetus that begins to gain ground from Sophocles onwards when he states that “Socrates, the dialectical hero in the Platonic drama, reminds us of the related nature of the Euripidean hero, who must defend his actions by argument and counter-argument and in the process…forfeit…our tragic compassion…Th[e] displacement of the chorus, which Sophocles…recommended…[was] the first step towards the *annihilation* of the chorus, whose phases follow one another with frightening rapidity in Euripides…and the New Comedy” (Nietzsche 2000:78-79).
oppositional/dialectical framework, Plato then used it to again privilege certain choices, namely those favouring clarity, order, certainty, hierarchy, etc.\textsuperscript{51} In what follows I shall give a brief outline of this move towards a more restricted economy from the advent of the Greek alphabet, through Homer and Plato, to its ‘culmination’ in Hegel.

I shall also focus on the way in which, following Nietzsche closely, one may subvert dialectical language, in order to challenge Plato’s arbitrary privileging of certain ideas. I shall endeavour to achieve this by following up on the arguments of some of Plato’s antagonists that were silenced by rhetorical techniques on the part of Plato rather than through any conclusive demonstration of their lack of soundness. In so doing, I will show how Plato gave crucial impetus to what became an increasingly restricted economy that dominated the subsequent philosophical tradition, formed as a result of western culture’s inheritance of the Platonic voice. However, as Plato too was an inheritor of an earlier impetus towards a more restricted economy, it is essential for a more encompassing understanding of the western tradition to look at some of the earlier literary manifestations of the move towards a more restricted economy that influenced him, i.e. Homer’s literary successors.

\textbf{2. Literary manifestations of a move towards an increasingly restricted economy}

In the Archaic Period there is the rise of the polis and a move towards, and greater valorisation of, social unity. At a military level the phalanx\textsuperscript{52} infantry formation replaced the heroic noblemen’s private duelling and thus Homeric \textit{arête} had to be re-defined in order to provide inspiration and a model for the troops. In the writings of Tyrtaeus,\textsuperscript{53} specifically in fragment 10, Tyrtaeus begins with the bleak doctrine that it is a fine thing for a ‘good man’ to fall and die in the front line, fighting for his [city. He says that,] “To abandon one’s city and rich fields for the life of a beggar is the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{51} An excellent example of this process is found in the \textit{Apology} where, although it is an early \textit{Dialogue}, Socrates forces Meletus to answer questions in terms of strict either/or possibilities. Socrates asks, “Which is better, to live among bad citizens, or among good ones? Answer, friend…Do not the good do their neighbours good, and the bad do them evil?…And is there any one who would rather be injured than benefited by those who live with him? Answer…the law requires you to answer….And when you accuse me of corrupting…the youth, do you allege that I corrupt them intentionally or unintentionally?” (Plato 1952:204). The dialectical process is such that the logical conclusions that Socrates draws from this form of questioning seem to be inevitable.
\item \textsuperscript{52} The phalanx was the “tactical formation developed by the Ancient Greeks…[it involved] an unbroken linear array of heavily armed infantry standing shoulder to shoulder in files that were normally 8 men deep but sometimes deeper…[T]he use of the phalanx spread throughout Hellas in the 7th century B.C. The Greek hoplite who manned the phalanx was equipped…[with] an 8-ft. pike for thrusting and a 2-ft. double-edged sword” (Lloyd 1908:416). This formation made the lone Homeric nobleman an anachronism on the battlefield and instead necessitated greater social cohesion in order to achieve victory. This, in turn, resulted in a change in notions of \textit{arête} during the Archaic period.
\item \textsuperscript{53} “On his origin and person most diverse beliefs were current: among others it was alleged that he was an Athenian. Apparently it could not be admitted that the Spartans had produced a poet. But in his songs he presents himself as a Spartan citizen. He wrote probably towards the end of the seventh century when the Spartans were for the second time engaged in a difficult war with…the Messenians” (Fränkel 1975:153).
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There is a great difference between what Tyrtaeus is calling for and the demands of Homeric arête, in that the Homeric hero’s primary concern was his own glory in combat, a glory that would see him elevated into the poetic annals of his community and thereby ‘immortalised’. In Tyrtaeus’ writings military arête has become imbricated with social duty, loyalty to the city and fidelity to its population. Similarly, in the work of Callinus⁵⁴ there exists the imperative that

Each man as he dies [should] make one final javelin-cast. For it is honourable and glorious for a man to fight against the enemy for his land and children and wedded wife...the warrior, if anything happens to him, is mourned by great and small...the whole people feels grief when a brave man dies [My Italics](Easterling 1985:88).⁵⁵

No longer is it required of the warrior to be ‘outstanding’ in the sense of the Homeric nobleman. Rather, it is now sufficient for him to stand shoulder to shoulder with others from his ‘land’ in the phalanx, remaining firm in the face of the enemy, for which he will be honoured by the ‘whole people’ of his city. Visible here are the social and material conditions that go hand in hand with the birth of the conceptual architecture that will facilitate the subsequent development of the idea of a ‘universal’. However, a condition of the possibility of thinking in terms of ‘universals’ is the experience of a relatively integrated sense of self; that is, a self not exclusively tied to and dependent upon the local language and customs of a particular community organised around a family unit (as in the Homeric era), whose relative independence from a specific community therefore allows for a sense of obligation that is understood as universally applicable.

Homeric individuals could never experience the concept of a universal, since their unstable, porous identities were entirely imbricated with the local languages of their own communities, which were, moreover, languages not yet concretised through writing. However, the period between the Homeric era and the “Orientalizing period” (Boardman 1986:413) during which Tyrtaeus and Callinus were active as poets, witnesses the advent of alphabet literacy.⁵⁶ The dawn of the alphabet carried with it the idea of words as capable of existing independently of a speaker, words to which a reader lent

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⁵⁴ “Greek elegiac poet, active in Ephesus about the middle of the 7th century B.C., appears to have written narrative poems [concerned with] the period of the Trojan War...[and] with the dangers threatening Ephesus from some unspecified enemy. The longest is an appeal to the young men to cast off their cowardly sloth and prepare to fight, and if necessary die, for the country” [My Italics] (Edmonds 1931:618) This marks his writings as a translation of Homeric arête into a form that suited the new move towards greater social cohesion which saw the rise of the city-state or polis.

⁵⁵ It is important to note Callinus’ reference to the much ‘larger’ units or concepts of a ‘land’ (or country) and a ‘people’, as opposed to the more local communities and family networks that constituted the world of Homeric man.

⁵⁶ During the Age of Euboean Expansion (825-730 BCE) the “Greek alphabet [was] created on Phoenician models and rapidly diffused in varying forms throughout the Greek world” (Boardman 1986:411).
his/her voice in the act of reading. As part of my focus concerns the different experiences of the self in relation to a growing linguistic impetus towards a more restricted economy, it is important to note the points mentioned by Godzich when considering the impact writing probably had on the experience of the self.

Godzich points out that the early human relationship to literature, the very act of reading, was fundamentally different to that experienced by contemporary readers, i.e. there was an emphasis on the internal power of the word itself.

To begin with, all reading was done aloud…our reader does not repeat words [usually found on funeral monuments, as words] said by someone [else]…but [rather] lends his voice…to these inscribed words. He lets his voice be occupied, appropriated, not by the words of another, but by words that were already there…the intrusion experienced by the reader precipitates a sudden awareness of the self as this self is in fact invaded [by the words]. It is not irrelevant to recall that some very early Greek inscriptions equate the process of reading with anal penetration. The sense of self is constituted at this moment (Godzich 1992:131-132).

Alphabet literacy promoted the development of the idea of a self that exists, in a sense, ‘outside’ of language, since it allows for the constitution of the self at the point of ‘invasion’. Further, this constituted ‘self’ is experienced as separate from ‘others’, which gives birth to the idea of obligation to others in terms of universal principles. The individual’s sense of obligation as a universalist concept begins with a sense of allegiance to the abstract concept of the polis. Homer individuals lacked this sense of self because they did not exist within a linguistic practice characterised by alphabet literacy, and hence their sense of self, tied up with the spoken word of their immediate community, had about it the same porosity, flexibility and fragility of that exclusively verbal language.

In the written fragments of the 7th century poet Archilochus, there occurs a criticism of the aristocratic, Homeric ideal of arête, specifically in fragment 5, where he states, “[M]y shield…I left by

57 The distinction must be made here between a universal principle in the modernist sense, for example Kant’s Categorical Imperative that runs, “Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it be a universal law” (O’neill 1993:177), and the local network of familial obligations consisting “of three distinct but overlapping groups, class, kin, and oikos…[which] defined [Homeric] man’s life, materially and psychologically…A large measure of informality, of fluidity and flexibility, marked all the political institutions of the [Homeric]age. There were lines of responsibility and power…but they were often crossed” (Finley 1954:79-84). The Archaic Greeks’ experience of obligation to others was probably something between these two extremes.

58 The sense of community of the polis was not dependent upon the familial networks of power that prevailed during the Homeric era. “[T]he polis, the city-state, [was] an institution of which any precise definition obscures the variety in size or shape or social and political organization…The physical base was almost essential, but even more so was the sense of community” (Boardman 1986:13).

59 “Archilochus…is the first Greek writer to take his material almost entirely from…his own experience and emotions, rather than from the stock of tradition…[H]epresents himself as a man of few illusions, a rebel against the values and assumptions of the aristocratic society in which he found himself” (Easterling 1985:76).
a thorn bush...But I saved myself. Why should I mind about that shield? Let it go: I'll get another just as good” (Easterling 1985:78).

This is in flagrant violation of the code of honour that scorned the cowardly who threw away their shields and fled battle, yet here and in other fragments that deal with martial subjects, the sentiments express a far more ‘reasonable’ outlook, instead of being dominated by harsh Homeric demands for valour. It is tempting to see in Archilochus’ writing the ‘liberation’ of the voice of a ‘reasonable’ person after centuries of Homeric jingoistic ‘ethical’ shackles, but to think this way would be anachronistic, since that would presuppose the existence of a stable, reflective self prior to the advent of alphabet literacy. Rather, in Archilochus’ writings, there occurs the ‘discovery’ of such a separate, reflective, reasonable self. A self that can conceive of a duty to an abstract concept, such as one’s ‘city’ or ‘land’, must necessarily also be able to approximate an existential perspective with regard to that which is obligated, i.e. an existential perspective with regard to the self that, to a degree, is not that dissimilar to the modern conception of the self. Thus, Archilochus’ criticism involves a withdrawing from the valuation of public opinion and a rejection of the need for the recognition of others, as was the case during the Homeric era, in order to facilitate the ‘existence’ of the self.

In the writings of Pindar one finds strong aristocratic overtones that contrast with the above-mentioned ‘individualistic’ sentiments of Archilochus. Yet, in another sense, Pindar departs just as much as Archilochus from Homeric arête. “Pindar’s last dated epinician was written in 446 for a boy from Aegina who had won the prize for wrestling at the Pythian games...[, and it] was to men and boys of this Dorian island that Pindar...dedicated many of his finest poems and deepest reflections” (Fränkel 1975:497). In these reflections there occurs a great valorisation of the beautiful, athletic body and athletic prowess. Homeric arête had also valorized the beautiful muscular body, but it had simultaneously regarded it as a means-to-an-end, namely an end which involved vanquishing one’s opponent in mortal combat. In contrast to this there occur, in Pindar, the beginnings of the idea of the beautiful body as an end-in-itself. Thus, in a sense, there are certain parallels between Pindar’s writing and that of Archilochus in that both involve a flight away from the excessive violence of Homeric arête. This involved not only the violence of military combat, which was an integral part of Homeric arête, but also the ‘violence’ associated with the absence of stability that facilitated a more porous sense of self (within the realm of a purely spoken language). This lack of stability, while consonant with a porous sense of self, was perceived as intimidating from the vantage point of both Archilochus

60 Although, this is not to say that the Archaic Greeks experienced themselves as Cartesian subjects. The modern conception of the self, that is, the Cartesian ego, will be discussed in the Intermezzo.
61 “[T]he archaic age of Greek literature found its ultimate crown of poetry in the choral odes of Pindar; and in their thought and expression the archaic ideal was expressed in impeccable purity” (Fränkel 1975:426).
62 In other words, the sense of self that prevailed during the era subsequently represented in Homeric epic.
and Pindar, whose dispositions were orientated around an increasingly stable sense of self. In their writing is found a further manifestation of the ‘concretising’ of the sense of self that is reflected in literature from Tyrtaeus to Plato.

Archilochus’ and Pindar’s flight away from the violence of the Homeric era could be seen as a move away from the unstable and fragile existence of the self in terms of the more general economy of a purely oral tradition which, from the perspective of their newly acquired stabilizing sense of self, was probably perceived as intimidating. This flight was towards the more restricted economy of a more stable sense of self, and it was precisely this impetus which can be seen to continue through the pursuit of ‘justice’ by Solon “the Lawgiver” (Easterling 1985:106) of the 6th century, whose reforms anticipate the idea of the people of the polis as ends-in-themselves. Through Xenophanes’ valorisation of “wisdom, sophia” (Adkins 1960:74) as a favoured arête, which he privileged against the unquestioning acceptance of anthropomorphic mythology, there echoes a similar gravitation towards the ‘essential’ individual outside of mythology. A “contemporary of Pythagoras and only a decade younger…[Xenophanes] deride[d] him [Pythagoras] on account of his doctrine of transmigration [of souls]” (Zeller 1969:31), maintaining instead a belief in a de-anthropomorphized monotheism or pantheism.

Zeller highlights the important influence this ‘de-mythologizing’ tendency in Xenophanes’ thought had on Plato. He states that

Platonic ethics like the Socratic is based absolutely on the autonomy of reason and is thus far completely independent of religion, that is at least of the religion which was current at that time. It actually corrects religion after the fashion of Xenophanes and Heraclitus by purging the ideas of the gods of their impure anthropopathic elements (Zeller 1969:139).

This ‘essentialising’ tendency finally reaches critical proportions in Plato’s privileging of the ‘certainty’ of dialectical language/knowledge in the middle to late Dialogues, a certainty that was perceived as appealing only because of a rapidly stabilizing sense of self. A good example of this is found in the Phaedrus where, in discussing the myth in which Boreas is said to have carried off Orithyia, Socrates states,

63 “In 594 or 593 Solon was elected sole archon with extraordinary powers to reform the Athenian state…[and] left no stone unturned in his desire to find a more equitable society” (Evans 1992:30-33). Evans goes on to elaborate on the numerous laws and measures devised by Solon, which included the abolition of debt slavery and the institution of a new class structure based on wealth. In his reforms we see the entrenchment of the idea of the individual of the polis as a significant, integral, political subject.

64 “Greek Religious thinker and poet…probably born about 570 B.C…[He] assert[ed] the claims of wisdom against the prevalent athleticism…[and] attack[ed]…the acceptance of Homeric mythology…[H]is attitude to nature was one of empiricism” (Freeman 1948:836) and in it we can see the beginnings of a move towards a rigid subject-object duality.
I might have a rational explanation that Orithyia was playing with Pharmacia, when a northern gust carried her over the neighbouring rocks; and this being the manner of her death, she was said to have been carried away by Boreas...[C]rude [mythical/poetic] philosophy...take[s] up a great deal of time. Now I have no leisure for such enquiries...I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says (Plato 1952:116).

Later Socrates (as Plato’s protagonist) describes rhetoric as the “universal art of enchanting the mind by arguments” (Plato 1952:131), and contrasts it with the “[far] nobler...[and] serious pursuit of the dialectician who...by the help of science sows and plants...words [in the soul of a congenial listener that make] the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness” (Plato 1952:139-140). A good example of the dialectical process of categorisation or conceptual compartmentalisation occurs at the end of the *Philebus*.65

There is an important link between the ‘new’ Platonic idea of a more stable self and dialectical language. The aim of dialectical language is to arrive at certain, unequivocal knowledge, which is non-mythical and non-rhetorical. Yet the stabilizing of the flux of myth, rhetoric and poetry is only demanded and necessitated by a self that experiences itself as increasingly stable, the experience of which leads to the appraisal of the flux of myth, rhetoric and poetry as intolerable, as an excess that, because it is not contained, intimidates the new-found integrity of the increasingly stable self. This is what occurs in Platonism (i.e. the reception of Plato), namely that a more restricted economy of the self gradually replaces the more general economy of the Homeric ‘lack-of-self’.66

However, Plato cannot receive all the dubious credit for this epistemic shift, as his work merely represents a point at which a variety of writings in which this transformation is anticipated, are gathered into sharp focus.

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65 In the *Philebus* Socrates counters Philebus’ assertion that pleasure is the greatest good, maintaining instead wisdom and those things akin to it to be the greater good. Socrates wins the argument and asserts that “the first of possessions [involve] measure...the mean...the suitable, and the like...In the second class...the symmetrical...beautiful...perfect or sufficient...in the third class mind and wisdom...in the fourth class...sciences...arts and true opinions...[in] the fifth class the pure pleasures of the soul...[etc.]” (Plato 1952:638). It is noteworthy that the ‘truth’ and ‘validity’ of each category and division are attained through ‘dialecticism’.

66 Plato still retains echoes of this, even as late as in the *Symposium* where, especially in Socrates’ contribution to the discussion, he describes love (on the part of the self, by implication) as involving ‘lack’. This is consonant with the tension ‘within’ the soul found in the *Phaedrus* where Plato states, “Of the nature of the soul...let me speak briefly, and in a figure. And let the figure be composite – a pair of winged horses and a charioteer” (Plato 1952:124). The important point is that, for Plato, because of the ‘unruliness of the steeds’, there exists a ‘tension’ within the soul. In the *Intermezzo* I will consider how this impetus towards a more restricted economy continued to develop until it extinguished this tension and culminated in the idea, in the 17th century, of the Cartesian subject or ego.
3. Nietzsche’s controversial reading of Socrates and Hegel

At the outset, some difficulties require attention. The first difficulty concerns Nietzsche’s standpoint on Socratism. Because my point of departure involves both a Nietzschean perspective and its amendment, I should point out immediately that Nietzsche does not make what has now become a common distinction between the ‘Socratic’ dialectic of Plato’s early Dialogues and the ‘Platonic’ dialectic of the middle to late Dialogues, but rather sees the dialectical tradition of western philosophy as beginning with Socrates. This, despite the fact that the only (significant) access to Socrates is via Plato. However, it is important to note that, given certain structural differences between the early Dialogues and the later ones, a distinction between Socratic and Platonic conceptions of the dialectic is readily conceivable. Hence I differ with Nietzsche on this point.

The Socratic dialectic takes as its maxim the impossibility of getting away from the search for knowledge and self-knowledge, and Socrates’ interminable question regarding the degree to which his interlocutors actually understood the subject of their conversations with him “marks a return to Heraclitus’ kind of concern: scientific and sociological enquiries are rejected until we have the self-knowledge to understand the proper use to make of the results” (Boardman 1986:231). The Platonic dialectic, however, specifically in the middle to late Dialogues, becomes very different to this open-ended perpetual questioning.

Usually grouped as ‘middle’ dialogues are Gorgias, Meno, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic, Phaedrus, Cratylus...Timaeus... with the dialogues usually grouped as ‘late’: Theaetetus, Parmenides, Sophist, Statesman, Philebus [and] Laws...the middle and late dialogues are radically different from the early ones. They are much longer, mostly undramatic...and above all...didactic. The stylistic changes reflect a shift away from the personal urgency of Socratic enquiry: from the middle dialogues on, we are in no doubt that Plato does have views of his own which the figure of Socrates serves merely to present (Boardman 1986:232-233).

In the middle to late Dialogues, the discussions between Plato’s protagonist (often, but not always Socrates) and the various sophists and artists, involves far less ‘back-pedalling’ on the part of Plato’s protagonist than before, and even less negation of the protagonists’ ‘original’ position, argument or idea. Rather, the protagonist paints his opponents into a corner, intellectually speaking, frustrating them until they are left with no option other than to acquiesce to his position and either

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67 Early in The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche asserts that tragedy was killed by “the Socratism of morality, the dialectic, the modesty and serenity of the theoretical man...might this very Socratism itself not be a sign of decline, of exhaustion, of ailing health...?” (Nietzsche 2000:4). Earlier in this chapter I touched on this theme of Socrates and Plato being inheritors and exponents of a literary tradition that had been moving towards its culmination in ‘Socratism’ since the dawn of the Archaic Period.

68 That is, there are structural differences between the early and middle/late Dialogues.
openly or by default acknowledge the superiority of his argument or idea. A good example of this is found in the *Phaedrus* where Socrates’ criticism of Lysias’ speech (*inter-alia* for its lack of structure) is put to an acquiescent Phaedrus in an almost entirely didactic mode. Socrates censures Lysias for his lack of dialectical clarity and skill saying “the clearness, and roundness, and finish, and tournure of the language…I was doubting whether this could have been defended by Lysias himself” (Plato 1952:118). There is no sense of any reciprocal ‘give and take’ between Socrates and Phaedrus as Plato’s protagonist is, from the outset, convinced of the superior value of *order* that is a manifestation of the dialecticians’ insight into true knowledge, and he is concerned merely to impart an understanding of this to Phaedrus.

Towards the end of the *Phaedrus* Socrates states that “Oratory is the art of enchanting the soul…But nobler far is the serious pursuit of the dialectician” (Plato 1952:137-139). It is evident from this that there was no modification of partial views in favour of a reconciliation in a higher synthesis because it was precisely this position that served as Plato’s protagonist’s point of departure in his initial criticism of Lysias’ speech. In other words, this was less a dialectical exchange in the Socratic sense and more a didactic exercise. 69 Given the change undergone by the dialectic from a Socratic to a Platonic conception, I maintain that it is a safer option to see only the dialectic of the middle to late Platonic *Dialogues* as forming the foundation upon which the western philosophical tradition, up to and including Hegel, is built. 70

The second difficulty concerns Nietzsche’s contention that Hegel’s dialectic represents the culmination of the Platonic tradition.

The notion of dialectic Hegel took…from the Greek philosophers…it mean[t], originally, “discussion”…[where i]n a discussion between two people who are both seeking the truth of the topic…[e]ach party…may gradually come to understand the other’s position, and ultimately both of them may come to agree to reject their own partial views and to accept a new broader view which does justice to the substance of what each of them had begun by maintaining; the original opposition has been reconciled in a higher synthesis (Johnston 1929:382).

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69 This privileging of the dialectic is a constant theme in the middle to late *Dialogues*. Desmond Lee reminds us that “in the *Ion, Symposium and Phaedrus*…Plato speaks of artistic and other creation as something that cannot be reduced to rule; it is a form of madness…that…cannot be simply subjected to sober social purposes; [this]…very power of the arts makes them dangerous” (Lee 1955:39). Again, in the *Republic* Book X, Plato maintains that “the tragedians and other writers of the kind...definitely harm the minds of their audiences, unless they’re inoculated against them by knowing their real nature…Homer [might well be the] master and guide of all the great tragic poets. But one must not respect an individual more than the truth” (Plato 1955:422). Earlier, in Book VIII of the *Republic*, Plato indicated the importance of dialectics in approaching the truth when he states that, “Dialectic…is the only procedure which proceeds by the destruction of assumptions to the very first principle, so as to give itself a firm base. When the eye of the mind gets…bogged down in a morass of ignorance, dialectic gently pulls it out” (Plato 1955:344).

70 This is *not* to say that ‘dialectics’ and the western philosophical tradition end with Hegel, but rather that the dialectic attains its acme of significance in Hegel’s philosophy.
The above quote suggests that Hegel resurrected certain aspects of the Socratic dialectic, namely the mutual, reciprocal rejection, on the part of both parties, of their initial views in favour of a new, broader, more insightful view that arises through engaging in dialectics and the quest for self-knowledge. However, there are significant differences. In the Preface to The Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel maintains that self-knowledge does not pertain to an individual’s introspective awareness of his/her own place in the world as it does with Socrates, but rather to the collective Self-knowledge implied in practical knowledge (knowledge gained through practice or action) of the spirit or ethos of a particular community, and ultimately practical knowledge of the spirit of the whole world, of which humanity as a whole is the medium. Secondly, Hegel maintains that the movement of Spirit “is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning, and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual” (Hegel 1977:10). This teleological circularity, with its implied belief in the possibility of a final resolution of knowledge or attainment of a plateau of absolute knowledge, echoes a Platonic far more than a Socratic dialectic. Kelly Oliver affirms Nietzsche’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy as the culmination of the Platonic tradition when she states that

In [the] Phenomenology of Spirit, the highest level of consciousness is reached when we can describe our experience – when we mean what we say and say what we mean - when there is no gap between language and our experience…[when r]eality is what is rational, and what is rational can be articulated (Oliver 1997:xii).

One can find plenty of textual justification for her assertion in Hegel’s work. In the Phenomenology of Spirit, for example, Hegel maintains that,

The way to Science is itself already Science, and hence, in virtue of its content, is the Science of the experience of consciousness. The experience of itself which consciousness goes through can, in accordance with its Notion, comprehend nothing less than the entire system of consciousness, or the entire realm of the truth of Spirit…consciousness will arrive at a point at which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of ‘other’…And finally, when consciousness itself grasps this its own essence, it will signify the nature of absolute knowledge itself (Hegel 1977:56).

Furthermore, in the Science of Logic Hegel criticises Kant for leaving Reason in an unhappy state of being bound by its very principle to seek the impossible, i.e. the noumenon or Thing-in-itself. Hegel articulates his contrary position as follows:
[O]ne can only read with surprise the perpetual remark that we do not know the Thing-in-itself. On the contrary there is nothing we can know so easily...The things of which we have direct consciousness are mere phenomena, not for us only, but in their own nature...their existence [is] founded not in themselves but in the universal divine Idea (Hegel 1931:93-94).

This universal divine Idea manifests in the initial, self-conscious articulation, by an individual, of the word ‘I’ to designate him/herself as separate from other individuals and objects. Yet the initial apparent distinction between subject and object dissolves

as experience becomes experience of value, ethical, aesthetic, religious and philosophical...[and] the identity which underlies the distinction becomes apparent to the subject, and he progressively recognises his object as...his other self...‘With self-consciousness,’ says Hegel, ‘we enter the native land of truth (Mure 1965:7).

Refusing in this way to acknowledge the irreducibility of Reason’s tragic position (which would force him to give up on his primary criticism of Kant), Hegel is obliged to find some means to overcome the intolerable limitations imposed on Reason by Kant. He claims this laurel for the dialectic, through which, he argues, one may reach a final synthesis of one and all. Again, Mure confirms Nietzsche’s view when he states that

In Hegel’s system Objective Spirit closes in World History, the thesis and antithesis of Absolute Spirit are respectively Art and Revealed Religion, and the synthesis of Absolute Spirit, Philosophy, begins to unfold itself as Logic...asking us to believe that the phases of his own dialectic are final...his system for all the vastness of its reach begins to excite in us an acute feeling of claustrophobia (Mure 1950:338-344).

Mure’s criticism is predicated upon the idea that Hegel believed in a final resolution of knowledge, an idea which echoes through Nietzsche’s texts. I believe that the above evidence justifies me sufficiently in accepting Nietzsche’s perspective on Hegel’s philosophy as the culmination of the Platonic tradition, insofar as Hegel’s philosophy of Spirit includes the optimistic idea of a final and invariable resolution of knowledge, the attainment of a plateau of knowledge which will facilitate complete self-transparency, thereby forever dissolving the haunting presence of the Dionysian abyss (or the Kantian noumena or later Freudian unconscious).

However, I am well aware that in deferring to the authority of Nietzsche in this matter I risk running into dispute with contemporary authorities who point to the discrepancies between Hegel’s overt claims and the actual working out of the dialectic. Mure himself points to these discrepancies in
his criticism of Hegel. Schmidt, on the other hand, in The Ubiquity of the Finite, offers a complex reading of Hegel’s dialectic that emphasises its restlessness in a way that places it in sympathy with Derrida’s work. He asserts that

Being is dialectical…it is a complex and conflict that is originary and circular…The war of Spirit with itself cannot cease, even in the stage of its own reconciliation. The homecoming of Spirit is not its abolition but rather the moment in which the full potential of Spirit as dialectical is unrestrained (Schmidt 1988:120-121).

While such a perspective offers an interesting challenge to the thought of any final attainment of a plateau of knowledge, any final resolution with regard to knowledge, it is really beyond the scope of this study to follow it up. Instead, given the weight of the arguments mentioned above, on this very contentious issue, and because a choice must be made, I shall here concede to Nietzsche’s authority.

4. The impact of different ideas of the self on ethical standpoints

The motivation for Nietzsche’s challenge of the dialectical tradition is to be found in the beginning of The Birth of Tragedy, where he ties the origin or genesis of this dialectical tradition, which he maintains stretched from Socrates to Hegel, to a decline, a sense of “exhaustion, of ailing health” (Nietzsche 2000:4). These intimations of weakness contrast with his own imperative of amor fati - an imperative to embrace one’s fate resolutely, regardless of the way in which that fate is tied up with dissolution through time. Nietzsche considered this ‘resolute’ disposition as having been the prevalent and dominant disposition before the beginnings of the dialectical tradition, but one which was gradually usurped by the ‘powerful’ weakness of dialecticism that promised certainty of knowledge and thereby acted as an illusory bastion against erosion through time. In The Birth of Tragedy Nietzsche asserts that the tradition involving the dominance of dialectical language began with Socrates, and was largely the result of a blindness to Socrates’ rhetorical techniques that created the erroneous belief in the possibility of arriving at certain knowledge, while it simultaneously curtailed the avenues of thought opened-up by Socrates’ antagonists in the Dialogues. As a

71 Mure goes on to say that “Following Hegel closely, we have witnessed the failure of dialectic as a flawless system. We have seen that it can give us no final truth in any of the traditional branches of philosophy” (Mure 1950:344). This sentiment, regarding the manner in which Hegel’s dialectic flounders on the duality of human experience, is echoed again in Mure’s later work Retreat from Truth where he states, “[M]y vision of human experience is far too limited and broken to let me suppose that I could present it as any such regularly ordered march of self-development” (Mure 1958:207).
consequence of this blindness an increasing level of credence was granted to the ideas expounded by Plato’s protagonist (often but not always Socrates), and there was a corresponding increase in prejudice against any ideas that did not fall in with the impetus towards certain and stable knowledge that, by and large, underpinned Plato’s thought.

Instead of perpetuating this prejudice, Nietzsche, in effect, re-adopts the stance and develops the nuances of Callicles’ argument from the *Gorgias*. Like Callicles, Nietzsche valorizes strength and power, echoing Callicles’ argument that “the superior should take the property of the inferior…the better should rule the worse, [and]the noble have more than the mean[etc.]” (Plato 1952:274). In the *Gorgias*, Polus, and later Callicles, become involved in an ethical argument with Socrates concerning whether or not it is better to suffer injustice or to perform injustice. In contrast to Polus, who argues that it is better to perform than to suffer injustice, Socrates argues that “I should not like either, but if I must choose between them, I would rather suffer than do” (Plato 1952:263). While the force of Socrates’ ethical argument seems to speak for itself (especially to contemporary ears), it can be challenged by showing that Plato’s and Callicles’ respective ethical positions derive from very different epistemologies, which are fundamentally linked to very different ideas of the self, the former being entirely consonant with Plato’s drive towards certainty while the latter remains in conflict with the impulse towards closure.\(^{72}\) However, that Callicles’ perspective was considered *significant* enough to feature as a position against which Plato argued (through the character of his protagonist), indicates that despite the move towards a more restricted economy which manifested in literature from Homer to Plato (the development of which I traced earlier), there existed a significant linguistic alternative to this progression that lingered and orientated itself around a more general or more ‘Dionysian’ perspective.\(^{73}\) However, Plato established a prejudice against this alternative; an arbitrary prejudice (as motivated by his privileging of ‘reason’), which is clearly exhibited in the *Gorgias*.

Earlier in the *Gorgias*, Socrates maintained that the just man was happy while the unjust man was not, and Polus countered with the argument that the unjust man might well be happy if he avoided punishment or retribution.\(^{74}\) Socrates then went on to ‘prove’ to Polus that justice is not something flexible or rhetorically amendable, but rather something more fixed, a position which sought to subvert the quasi-morality of the political rhetoricians, which rested on unstable public sentiment (nomos), in

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\(^{72}\) The notion of the self presupposed by Callicles corresponds to a post-modern conception of the self, informed by post-structuralism, which has regained currency today after having been silenced by Plato and the inheritors of the Platonic tradition.

\(^{73}\) ‘Dionysian’ must here be qualified not in terms of the proto-drama but in terms of the Dionysian echoes of the proto-drama that vibrate through Homeric epic. This linguistic alternative, contemporaneous with Plato, could be seen as either a product of the Dionysian resistance that resounded through dramatic tragedy, or as an earlier ally that contributed to the manifestation of Dionysian resistance (to Apollonian hegemony) in the tragedies of Aeschylus.

\(^{74}\) Socrates sums up Polus’ position as follows, “If the unjust be not punished, then, according to you, [Polus,] he will be happy” (Plato 1952:265).
deference to an idea of justice based on order as its transcendental condition (physis). Callicles rightly counters this idea by describing it as a re-articulation of “popular and vulgar notions of right, which are not natural[physis], but only conventional[nomos]” (Plato 1952:271). For Callicles, the idea that ‘might is right’ is natural while the ‘dictates of reason’ are a matter of mere convention. For Socrates, Plato’s protagonist, the ‘dictates of reason’ are natural while the idea of ‘might as right’ is a matter of mere convention. Socrates thus uses the same argument against the sophists as they use against him, except that in his articulation of the argument the meaning of the terms has become diametrically opposed to the meaning attached to the terms by the sophists. This situation is finally resolved only by the ‘rational’ choice between dialectical opposites that are presented (by Socrates) in such a way that only one of the two options ever appears as acceptable. However, although Socrates, by virtue of this process, wins the argument, the implied imperative/obligation to choose between the options (i.e. the rigid either/or structure of the entire argument) remains glaringly unacceptable to both Callicles and any contemporary poststructuralist. Callicles’ argument, on the other hand, follows along the lines of Antiphon’s distinction between nomos and physis. Antiphon maintains that, “A man would…make use of justice in a manner most advantageous to himself if he were to treat the nomoi as important when witnesses are present, but the edicts of physis as important when he is alone” (Adkins 1970:113). The edicts of physis are those that Callicles represents as the natural demands of more base animal instincts that require satisfaction, as Freud confirms in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), despite humanity’s varying degrees of civilization. However, the satisfaction of these needs requires navigation around the nomoi or the societal norms that make social co-habitation, with all its mutual benefits, possible. In other words, these needs will often be mediated or translated by social developments. There is no ‘either/or’ logic in Antiphon’s argument but rather an appreciation of the value of approaching social co-habitation from a position that respects societal norms and the more counter-societal imperatives of what Freud termed the Id. In other words, Callicles and Antiphon should not be viewed as anti-social undesirables, merely awaiting an opportunity to transgress whatever is laid down by the nomos of the city in the interest of indulging their secret desires and predilections. Rather, in the Gorgias, Callicles’ position is a manifestation of an experience of the self far more in keeping with the Homeric ‘absence’ of any integrated sense of self, reminiscent of the

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75 In Book IV of the Republic Plato defines the four qualities that the State will possess as “wisdom, courage, [self-] discipline and justice” [My Italics](Plato 1955:197). It is through dialectical endeavour that the ‘knowledge’ of the indisputable pre-eminence of these four virtues is uncovered.

76 Antiphon was a contemporary of Thrasymachus; “both [are] difficult to date but [were] active in the late fifth century” (Boardman 1986:230). “Antiphon…the sophist wished to appeal from artificial law to elemental nature” (Fränkel 1975:77).

77 Also, it is no surprise that Callicles ‘loses’ his argument against Plato, because the argument in its very form is dialectical (in the Platonic sense of the word), whereas Callicles represents an epistemological and ethical perspective that can only survive and ‘be’ insofar as it does not convert to the rigidity of dialecticism.
proto-drama, than with the Platonic idea of an essential soul, characterised by justice and immortality.\(^7^8\)

Homerian man, as represented in Homeric epic, is lacking in any integral sense of self, yet the very Apollonian nature of epic is the precursor to the development of such a restricted economy. Although this process towards an integral sense of self is begun in epic, it is far from complete and, as discussed in Chapter One,\(^7^9\) and earlier in this Chapter,\(^8^0\) there are also echoes of the proto-drama that prevail throughout Homeric epic. Their presence within epic did not pass unnoticed by generational subsequent to Homer, and instead facilitated a parallel predisposition towards a linguistic alternative that orientated itself around a more ‘Dionysian’ perspective. This linguistic alternative not only remembered the ‘Dionysian’ echoes within epic but gave voice to them in Aeschylus’ tragedies. As such, there were two possible paths along which language could have proceeded. One involved the continual remembering of the Dionysian voice despite the advent of the Greek alphabet, and could conceivably have precluded the development of any integral sense of self, while the other involved the continuation and propagation of the Apollonian disposition inherent to epic, to the detriment of the voice of Dionysus and the porous sense of self. Although both paths were taken initially, as is evident from Callicles’ perspective, the second path prevailed. Vernant confirms the link between literature/language and the sense of self when he states that

> There is a structural relation between the ancient personality - exteriorized, grafted onto public opinion - and epic poetry, that functions as paideia in its glorification of exemplary heroes and their will to live on in ‘imperishable glory.’ The modern personality - an interiorised ego, unique, apart - has the same structural relation with its ‘purely’ literary genres, like the novel, the autobiography, or the private diary, which preserves the hope of living on as a special immortal spirit (Vernant 1991:58).

Plato’s ‘just soul’ bears more of a resemblance to the latter, whereas Callicles is speaking more from the perspective of the former.\(^8^1\)

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\(^7^8\) In the era subsequently represented by Homer in epic poetry, there was no integral sense of self, and although the characters in Homer’s representation exhibit a ‘similar’ lack of any integral sense of self, the Apollonian form (and content) of the Iliad were a manifestation of a move towards an increasingly restricted (conceptual) economy that propagated an increasingly integral sense of self. In the texts of the pre-Socratic writers, discussed earlier, it is possible to see this move gaining momentum until it became manifest in Plato’s ‘just soul’. However, for Plato, the ‘soul’ was not one but composite, possible evidence for which is found in the Phaedrus where Plato uses the figure of a charioteer and two winged horses to represent the tensions within the soul (Cf. note 66).

\(^7^9\) See - Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 7. A subversive Dionysian voice beneath an Apollonian hegemony.

\(^8^0\) Cf. note 73.

\(^8^1\) However, this is not to say that Plato’s ‘just soul’ is identical to the modern personality (Cf. note 66).
5. Echoes of the proto-drama in Homeric *arête*\(^82\)

In the absence of such an integrated sense of self, Callicles’ (and Antiphon’s) position is bound up with a morality that echoes the ‘shame’ culture of the Homeric era, a culture in which all lived only through mutual recognition. Such a ‘shame’ culture demanded public honour in life and the need for a beautiful death, with moral blame only being imputed in the case of observable social transgression. A ‘shame’ culture therefore precludes the experience of private guilt and remorse if a social transgression is not observed by others. An elaboration on the nature of Homeric *arête* will illustrate this point.\(^83\) Homer’s *Iliad* opens with the lines, “Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus’ son Achilles…*[b]egin, Muse, when the two first broke and clashed, Agamemnon lord of men and brilliant Achilles” (Homer 1990:77).

Here Homer refers to the power struggle between Agamemnon and Achilles, due to the incompatibility between their respective forms of *arête*. Agamemnon’s *arête* is that of the king or ruler, and is based more on wealth and the ‘power of rule’ than on individual valour (i.e. he brought the greatest number of troops to the walls of Ilium).\(^84\) Forced to return Chryses’ daughter to end the plague sent by Apollo, Agamemnon finds himself without a prize. This being an unacceptable position for such a significant figure, he consequently claims Achilles’ prize, namely the girl Briseis. Achilles is the epitome of the epic warrior. His *arête* is based on valour and martial skill, and is thus far more fragile than the *arête* of Agamemnon. He cannot allow his honour to be insulted in this manner as the slightest slur on his name might preclude him from gaining immortality through epic poetry. Essentially, the argument between Achilles and Agamemnon “highlights the tension between ordinary honour, the societal approval necessary for self-definition, and the much greater demands of heroic honour” (Vernant 1991:55). Despite the differences in *arête*, however, in both cases the ‘self’ is defined by the appraisal of others. In other words, it is defined externally in terms of concrete manifestations of power, such as wealth, possessions or acts.

\(^{82}\) Although I have discussed ‘divine intervention’ in the Homeric epics in Chapter One, I include this section in Chapter Two to facilitate an easy comparison between Callicles’ and Plato’s respective senses of the self.

\(^{83}\) Arête is a conception of virtue or excellence. “[T]hings as well as people can be described as possessing *arête*… and more importantly, the list of the aretai (plural) of a human being may include qualities which are not ‘virtues’ at all – that is, not moral qualities” (Rowe 1993:123). This is especially evident in the Homeric epics where martial victory is often equated with *arête*.

\(^{84}\) “Agamemnon…is several times called ‘most kingly’ of the heroes at Troy…His position…was not personally earned but was the consequence of his superior position in power, as the leader who could bring the largest contingent, one hundred ships. His status gave him command…[and] also prevented the aggrieved Achilles from expressing defiance other than in the passive form of a mighty sulk” (Finley 1954:76).
The clash between Agamemnon and Achilles results in Achilles withdrawing from the fighting, returning only after the death of Patroclus and after Agamemnon’s apology. What is of interest for present concerns is the manner in which Agamemnon apologises. He states “I am not to blame! Zeus and Fate and Fury stalking through the night…drove that savage madness in my heart…when I seized Achilles’ prize” (Homer 1990:491). At a glance the modern reader might, from his/her contemporary moral/ethical perspective (a perspective indirectly inherited from Platonism), consider this a feeble excuse, an unwillingness on Agamemnon’s part to accept responsibility for his actions. However, Achilles agrees with the idea that supernatural intervention lies behind Agamemnon’s actions. He states “Father Zeus…blinding frenzies you deal out to men…[I]f not, I swear, Atrides could never have…wrenched the girl away against my will” (Homer 1990:497). Some may argue that this is merely a polite public speech in which Achilles does not wish to shame Agamemnon further by blaming him. However, there is reason enough to dispute this and suggest that Agamemnon and Achilles view this matter in the same way. As Dodds points out: “[A]lready in Book 1, when Achilles is explaining the situation to Thetis, he speaks of Agamemnon’s behaviour as his *ate* [i.e. experience of divine temptation or infatuation], and in Book 9 he exclaims, ‘…Zeus the counsellor took away his understanding’” (Dodds 1983:3). Nor is this an isolated incident, as many other characters in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are similarly subject to different forms of divine intervention which cause them to commit various mistakes or act in socially unacceptable ways. Such divine intervention, however, simultaneously dissolves the possibility of moral slur.

The above indicates the echo of the proto-drama in the Homeric era, namely the lack of a unified concept of a ‘soul’ or ‘self’. Not only were individuals defined externally in terms of the appraisal of others in relation to their activities, but they were also in the “habit of…‘objectifying emotional drives’, treating them as not-self…open[ing] the door wide to the religious idea of psychic intervention” (Dodds 1983:15-16). As such, Homeric individuals could not and did not experience themselves as isolated, autonomous, impermeable selves in the modern or Enlightenment sense of the word, but rather as something far more protean, porous and connected with the world (in so far as the

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85 Admittedly, for Plato, morality is primarily a cognitive issue, whereas for modernity, morality is a rule or a duty.
86 In the *Iliad*, Book VI, “Zeus, stole Glaucus’ wits away. He traded his gold armour for bronze with Diomedes, the worth of a hundred oxen just for nine” (Homer 1990:203). In Book XVII Automedon tries to double as both charioteer and spearman, “pursuing mobs of men…he could not kill the ones he rushed in force…at last…Alcimedon…shouted out, ‘Automedon! What god has put such a tactic in your head?’” (Homer 1990:457). As Dodds maintains, “These two cases clearly have no connection with any deeper divine purpose; nor can there be any question of retaining the hearers’ sympathy, since *no moral slur is involved*” [My Italics](Dodds 1983:4). Yet, through daemonic possession, Glaucus’ and Automedon’s ‘foolish’ errors of judgement are mitigated.
87 The modern sense of the self will be discussed in the *Intermezzo* in relation to the Cartesian *ego* and dialectical language.
gods manifested in the world, e.g. Apollo as the sun god, Artemis as the goddess of the moon, etc.).

Although the ‘religion’ involving the Olympian deities was something that emerged a significant time after the period subsequently represented in epic, its architecture and ritual carried the trace of this sense of openness and connectedness. “During the sacred work of sacrifice at the altar the temple is at the back of the participants; they look towards the east and pray to the sky…the pious man stands…beneath the eyes of the deity…it is not the inner space of the temple which draws him in, …[away] from the world” (Burkert 1985:92). This contrasts sharply with the bowed heads of penitent, faithful Christians, enclosed within the great walls and ceilings of a Gothic cathedral. There is a strong relationship between these different approaches to religious practice and their accompanying ideas of the ‘self’. The Christian self, again, much indebted to Plato’s ‘just soul’, is entirely responsible for his/her ‘wrong thoughts’ or intentions. Here personalized guilt and self-admonition for ‘evil’ sentiments results from the supposed autonomy (that is, freedom of the will) of the self. In contrast to this, there existed a certain ‘freedom of thought’ during the Homeric era, since there was nothing that necessitated a constant monitoring of one’s mental contents, no moral indictment of certain thoughts and hence, no sense of guilt or self-recrimination. Remorse existed only in so far as it related to an undesirable concrete manifestation or act that was either immediately visible to, or remembered by, others.

Given this background it is no wonder then that Callicles’ ethical perspective in the Gorgias, insofar as it draws on, reflects and echoes the experience of a ‘porous’ or more protean sense of self (as found in the Homeric epics), clashes with Plato’s ethical perspective which, in contrast, draws on the idea of a more integrated, or at least potentially harmonious, moral soul that has significantly

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88 In the Iliad, there is a marked absence of the ‘older’ deities of becoming in favour of the new Olympian deities of being (See - Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 7. A subversive Dionysian voice beneath an Apollonian hegemony, ii, Homer’s exclusion of Dionysus, Demeter, Hades and Persephone from epic). The new Olympian deities were Apollonian re-articulations of older, ‘more’ Dionysian deities (See - Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 3. Dionysus), but the older, underlying Dionysian sense of a porous self communicated itself into the later Olympian religious worship (as a subversive voice), in spite of the Apollonian conceptual architecture involving the Olympian deities of being.

89 “To decode a medieval church we have to understand it…[as related to] such divinely inspired structures as Noah’s arc, Moses’ tabernacle…and perhaps…the temple Solomon built in Jerusalem…[it is] a sheltered place, whose walls promise security and peace, a refuge from the insecurity reigning outside…a bastion against the forces of darkness…against the devil’s hordes…whose darkness daily conquers light” (Harries 1997:105-106).

90 “By connoting secondary meanings, a building will inevitably also communicate an ideological perspective, a way of standing in the world, a specific ethos” (Harries 1997:92).

91 For example, in the 16th century, Saint Ignatius of Loyola advised Stefano Casanova in a letter that “[W]hen the reason of enlightenment by God becomes aware of a movement of sensuality…you repress it through the fear and love of God…even though some weakness should ensue or some bodily ill, since sin should not be committed for this or any other reason” (http://www.georgetown.edu/centers/woodstock/ignatius/letter50.htm). A ‘contemporary’ Catholic website (as opposed to the ‘historical’ or ‘archival’ site quoted above), still maintains that such rigorous spiritual exercises are valid and that one must “conquer oneself and regulate one’s life without determining oneself through any tendency that is disordered…and by this means…save…[one’s] soul” (http://www.ecatholic2000.com/ignatius/spie5.html).

92 Cf. note 66.
different moral obligations. At a fundamental level, Callicles’ ethical perspective presupposes a different epistemological perspective to that presupposed by Plato’s ethical stance. The epistemology that underpins Callicles’ ethical position, couched in porous, poetic and mythical terms, does not seek (as Plato does via the dialectic) to stabilize or concretise the linguistic expression of insight or understanding. Rather, insight ‘dwells poetically’ in the fluidity and flexibility of emotive expression and metaphor. Such an epistemological leaning is consonant with a porous experience of the self, open to the intervention of divine forces and, moreover, supports a flexible idea of morality that accedes to the demands of an *arête* that takes its cue from (what Socrates, as Plato’s protagonist, considered to be) *nomos* rather than *physis*. This is the very morality of the sophists and rhetoricians against which Plato waged such a relentless campaign in favour of the idea of a more stable self, orientated around an immortal, just (i.e. harmonious) soul.

6. Conclusion

An entirely restricted economy would constitute complete stasis, and in Plato’s writing there only ever occurs a move *towards* a more restricted economy, a move that continues the linguistic impetus that traces its way through the various Greek poets’ works discussed earlier. It is important to note that this process of ‘sedimentation’ or ‘stabilization’ of the self is far from complete in Plato. Derrida points out that the *khôra* in the *Timaeus* destabilizes any doctrine of Platonic ‘facts’ or ‘forms’ as the ‘*khôra* may be taken as one of those ‘places’ in the history of philosophy where the *differance* by which all things are inhabited wears through, where the abyss in things opens up and we catch a glimpse of the groundlessness of our beliefs and practices” (Caputo 1997:98). The *khôra* is not the only place in the *Dialogues* where there occurs an element which destabilizes that artifice of ‘‘Platonism’…constructed by cutting and pasting, trimming Plato’s text neatly around the borders…creating the safe, sanitized, distilled ‘effect’ called Plato’s ‘philosophy’’” (Caputo 1997:82), yet Nietzsche doesn’t acknowledge the presence of the *khôra* or any other ‘problematic’ area in Plato’s texts. This is understandable insofar as Nietzsche’s attack was directed against the concretisation of concepts (that is, the way in which they attain the status of ‘facts’) and the process of ‘sedimentation’ in philosophy whereby the inescapable metaphoricity of language had been forgotten, a dialectical process which, although it *begins* in earnest with Plato, only reaches its ‘culmination’ in Hegel.

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93 In contrast to this position, in the *Apology* (although it is an early *Dialogue*), it is precisely Socrates’ complaint that the poets cannot explain and clarify their own work. Socrates states of the poets that they “say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them” (Plato 1952:202).
large part of Nietzsche’s attack was therefore directed against the ‘tradition’ of philosophy whose point of departure was ‘Platonism’ (the ‘reception’ of Plato’s work) rather than the actual texts of Plato, and against the impetus towards a more restricted economy which, although it manifested itself in Plato’s thought, continued unabated throughout the philosophical tradition until Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. As such, it would have been counterproductive for Nietzsche to emphasize the places in Plato’s text that did not correspond to the doctrine of Platonism, places where the dialectical impetus was not salient, since the degree to which this dialectical impetus had been adopted by the western tradition of philosophy overwhelmed, to the point of exclusion, the isolated instances of non-dialecticism in Plato’s text. As such, in post-modernity, with the benefit of, among others, Derrida’s insight, a Nietzschean position might be articulated as involving a criticism of *Platonism* rather than Plato’s texts, or as a criticism involving a direct attack on any uncritical inheritance of Platonism which, to a large extent, amounts to a criticism of any uncritical inheritance of, and granting of exclusive credence to, dialectical language.

In the beginning of this chapter I dealt with the rise to dominance of the Apollonian disposition that manifested itself in the impetus towards a more restricted economy in literature from Homer to Plato. After this I drew parallels between the dialecticism of the middle to late Platonic *Dialogues* and the Hegelian dialectic as an illustration of the degree to which western culture and thought have been influenced by the epistemological and linguistic impetus towards a more restricted economy. Finally, I concluded that the weight and power of this impetus and influence rest primarily on western culture’s uncritical inheritance of Platonism and dialectical thought/language. However, a mere critical engagement with western culture’s Platonic inheritance will not suffice to liberate western culture from the linguistic impetus towards a more restricted economy, unless it offers an alternative myth to the myth or promise of *stability* and *certainty* that underpins Platonism. Nietzsche not only criticized Socrates (or Platonism) but also offered an alternative myth in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, involving a joyful ‘will-to-mythologize’. Similarly, Heidegger not only questioned the validity of, and engaged critically with ‘dialectical language’ (and the encompassing mode of being of Enframing), but also offered an alternative mythology in the ‘Fourfold’ as I shall show in the following section (i.e. in the *Intermezzo*).

In the next chapter (after the *Intermezzo*), Chapter Three, I will discuss Eisenstein’s critical cinema, and in Chapter Four I will consider how Aronofsky, following Eisenstein, critically engages with the Apollonian ‘structures’ of the visual language of mainstream cinema. Aronofsky simultaneously, in a manner consonant with Nietzsche and Heidegger, offers an alternative

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94 For my purposes, following Nietzsche, I regard Hegel as the culmination of the ‘Platonic’ tradition. However, one could also, quite easily, consider Husserl or Sartre as occupying such a position.
(subversive) ‘mythology’ in the place of the myths inherent to those Apollonian ‘structures’, i.e. the myths of resolution, restoration of the status quo and/or reconstitution of order after chaos, and I will argue that this alternative ‘mythology’ facilitates the construction of a more porous and open subjectivity.
Intermezzo : Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture

1. Introduction

I use Heidegger’s analysis of, what I have described as, dialectical language in The Age of the World Picture as a privileged tool because it enables me to bring my discussion of the Apollonian and Dionysian tension in western culture to bear on cinema. This is not simply because the contemporary age, dominated by the hegemony of the visual language of the mass media, is also an ‘age of the world picture’. Rather, it is because the same ontological and epistemological perspectives at work in the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, operate in the dialectical language characteristic of the literary and philosophical texts discussed earlier. However, this Intermezzo is a precursor to the examination, in Chapter Three, of the distinct and interesting parallels that exist between the visual language of the mass-media and dialectical language. Thus while such parallels will be alluded to in the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the Intermezzo, this Intermezzo is primarily a discussion of Heidegger’s analysis of dialectical language in The Age of the World Picture, and a consideration of the alternatives that he offers to, what I call, such an Apollonian hegemony.

In The Age of the World Picture, Heidegger gives an in-depth analysis of the ontology and epistemology that underpin dialectical language. At an ontological level, Heidegger’s analysis uncovers the subject-object dualism, inherited from Descartes,\(^5\) that governs dialectical language,

\(^5\) In the previous two chapters I have discussed the Apollonian move towards a more restricted economy that occurred from Homer through to Plato, and the way in which it ‘culminated’ in, what I have referred to as, Plato’s dialectical language, with Plato’s idea of the ‘just soul’ a possible result of the move towards an increasingly integral sense of self that is reflected in the texts of the pre-Socratic writers as discussed in Chapter Two. However, while Plato’s ‘just soul’ is a far cry from the Cartesian ego, and while the Ancient Greeks did not have any idea of a separate subject in the modern sense, certain of Descartes’ sentiments seem to suggest that the Cartesian ego was the ‘culmination’ of this move towards an increasingly integral sense of self (that was paralleled by the development and growth of dialectical language). For example, Descartes’ statement that, “I am a being whose whole essence or nature is to think, and whose being requires no place and depends on no material thing” (quoted in Flew 1979:91), suggests that the intellectual and ontological distance between the self and the world, mentioned earlier in relation to Euripides (Cf. note 48), and reinforced by the spell of Socratism, reached its acme in the 17th century. This is accompanied by further ‘echoes’ of Plato’s dialecticism in Descartes’ Discourse on Method where he maintains that it is sufficient to follow four rules, “The first was never to accept anything as true that I did not know to be evidently so…The second, to divide each of the difficulties that I was examining into as many parts as might be possible and necessary in order best to solve it…The third, to conduct my thoughts in an orderly way…And the last…[to make sure]…I would have…omitted nothing…[If these steps are followed then] there can be nothing so distant that one does not reach it eventually, or so hidden that one cannot discover it” (Descartes 1988:41). This is, largely, reminiscent of Plato’s valorisation of dialecticism in the Republic Book VIII (Cf. note 69), and in the Philebus (Cf. note 65). Although Descartes was separated from Plato by nearly two millennia, the intervening centuries, specifically those of the Middle Ages, were dominated by Christianity that contained distinctive elements of Plato’s philosophy. “The doctrines of Mainstream Christianity…adopted the Philosophy of Plato (circa 400BC). His beliefs were the most popular in Greece and Rome when Christianity made its debut into those regions. Early Christianity battled the influence of Plato. But the adherents to Platonic philosophy came to dominate the Church from the 3rd century AD to the present” (http://members.tripod.com/~Christiantruth/). Descartes seems to confirm this when he, in the manner of the good citizen of Plato’s Republic, asserts that firstly, “[I shall] obey the laws and customs of my country, firmly preserving the religion into which God was good enough to have me instructed from childhood, and govern…myself in all matters
while at an epistemological level, Heidegger reveals the illusory nature of the (Apollonian) belief that through dialectical language one can represent the world in its entirety, and by implication, Being, as something stable. Ultimately, the point of his analysis is to make conspicuous again the ‘Dionysian’ alternative to this perspective that existed in pre-Socratic Greece, but which was suppressed by the dominant trend towards an increasingly restricted (Apollonian) economy in western culture. During this epoch, there was no ontological subject-object dualism in the Cartesian sense, while at an epistemological level there was no sense of stable knowledge. Rather, there existed an appreciation of the perpetual (inter)play of understanding as something underpinned by aletheia. Heidegger contrasts this human mode of being, involving the absence of any integrated world-view (or conception of the ‘world as a view’), with the Cartesian perspective and its pursuit of ‘certain’ knowledge, and maintains that each resulted in different senses of the self.

After tracing the roots of Cartesian epistemology to certain epistemic principles of Plato and Aristotle, he goes on to consider the degree to which the subject-object dualism of Descartes has had an impact on the predominant world view, in contemporary western culture, that is characterised by the belief in the possibility of conceptually and linguistically representing the world, in its entirety, as a system. Admittedly, Heidegger’s reading of the history of philosophy is very specific and often does not do justice to the philosophical endeavours of key figures (for example, Kant), and I engage, according to the most moderate opinions and those furthest from excess” (Descartes 1988:45). One might speculate that it is possible for Christianity to have been a repository for certain Platonic ideas that still made their presence felt in the 17th century through Descartes. Although I propose that this was the case, I also maintain that these ideas underwent certain changes along the lines of the Apollonian ‘momentum’ discussed in Chapters One and Two, that is, towards an increasingly restricted economy that eventually resulted in the concept of a ‘rigid’, self-transparent subject, greatly removed from Plato’s ‘ideally harmonious’ sense of self (articulated in the Gorgias as a ‘just soul’). This discussion is relevant to my argument insofar as it is necessary to see parallels between the dialectical language of Socratism, against which Nietzsche argued, and the dialectical language of modern metaphysics, of which Enframing as the essence of technology is the culmination, against which Heidegger argued (and which will be discussed later). This is because in the beginning of Chapter Three, I argue for the parallels between dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema, and maintain that critical cinema, insofar as it succeeds in subverting the visual language of mainstream cinema and mass media, constitutes a continuation of Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s critical stance regarding the illusory nature of dialectical language’s supposed integrity.

96 The Cartesian subject, according to Heidegger, is fundamentally new in that it makes the human being the epistemic and ontological ‘lawgiver’ of all that is, in contrast to the far less ‘assertive’ ‘self’ that prevailed during Ancient Greece and the Middle Ages, respectively (i.e. different senses of the self prevailed during each period - Cf. notes 134 &135).

97 This representation of the world ultimately gives rise to Enframing (Enframing developed out of modern science which, in turn, developed from modern metaphysics) “which sets upon man…[and] challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve” (Heidegger 1977:20). That is, Enframing is similar to the Apollonian impetus behind the attempts, as noted by Nietzsche, of logic “to comprehend the actual world by means of a schema of being, posited by ourselves; more correctly, to make it formulatable and calculable for us” (Megill 1985:59). Enframing (as an encompassing mode of being) manifests itself in the desire to order and impose conceptual structures on the world, and is motivated by the desire to lay to rest ambiguity and the ‘dark spaces’ of the unknown, and thereby affirm and lend credence and integrity to the Cartesian ego through affording it a sense of privilege and control. However in privileging the ego/subject it also negates the value of the earth in the co-constitution of the subject as a ‘Mortal’ (Cf. note 103), and instead designates it (i.e. the earth) as an expendable resources to be exploited (I will discuss the idea of the ‘standing reserve’ in greater detail later in this chapter).

98 This progression was discussed at length in Chapters One and Two.
briefly, with his contentious account of the development of philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, I maintain that Heidegger’s analysis in *The Age of the World Picture* can still be used as a privileged tool because it does reflect the nature of philosophical ideas at a popular level, which is also the level at which the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema operate.  

Thus, in relation to Heidegger’s text, I consider the way in which dialectical language supports the (popular) belief in the possibility of linguistically representing the world in its entirety.

I follow up on this discussion of Heidegger’s thesis by contrasting Heidegger’s privileging of the resurrection of poetic language (as found in *The Origin of the Work of Art*) with the privileging of ‘certainty’ in dialectical language. I do so in the interests of making conspicuous certain dynamics and nuances between the Cartesian *ego* and dialectical language, such as the ‘metaphysical’ disposition that pursues certainty of knowledge and the phenomenon of *ressentiment* (or the spirit of revenge against time).  

This is done with a view to placing dialectical language, as detailed by Heidegger in *The Age of the World Picture*, within the context of the move towards an increasingly restricted economy from Homer through Plato to modernity, as discussed in Chapter One, Chapter Two and the beginning of the *Intermezzo*.  

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Heidegger’s exegesis of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes where I argue that his poetry/prose bears certain resemblances to tragedy, as valorised by Nietzsche, and that it also, like such tragedy, subverts the ‘legitimacy’ of dialectical language, or at least contains within it the possibility of such subversion.

This is a forerunner to my discussion, in Chapter Three, of the parallels that exist between dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, after which I argue that critical cinema, in the way in which it subverts ‘standard’ visual language, mirrors Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s subversion of dialectical language. As such, this *Intermezzo* forms a bridge between the philosophical and literary texts examined in Chapter One and Two, and the visual language that will be investigated in Chapter Three (and Four).

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99 The way in which the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media shapes subjectivity along the same lines as dialectical language, namely in terms of the Cartesian ego, will be discussed in Chapter Three, along with a consideration of the parallels that exist between visual language and dialectical language.

100 The Apollonian impulse towards form and integrity is, according to Nietzsche, a manifestation of a *spirit of revenge against time* that seeks to resist the perpetual cycle of erosion and reconstitution. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche uses the metaphor of the tarantula to represent those possessed of the spirit of revenge…[In contrast to them, Zarathustra states] *that man may be freed from the bonds of revenge; that is the bridge to my highest hope and a rainbow after protracted storms* (Nietzsche 1961:123). Humanity, if freed from *ressentiment*, would accept and be open to their own dissolution and the eventual dissolution of all of their efforts by time, and would embrace the nature of all facts as fluid metaphor.

101 Cf. notes 95, 96, 97 & 98.

102 This subversion of the ‘legitimacy’ of (Apollonian) dialectical language takes place, ironically, at an (Apollonian) conceptual level through his poetry, and involves ‘wonder’, rather than the ‘immediate’ Dionysian level of dramatic tragedy, which involved music and experiences of terror and awe. It is important to note this because this (Apollonian) conceptual level is consonant with the iconic-linguistic level at which critical cinema operates in its subversion of the visual language of mainstream cinema and mass media.
2. Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture

Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture is predicated upon the idea of a fundamental epistemic shift between the modern age and that of pre-Socratic Greece. With regard to language, this epistemic difference manifests in the modern age’s belief in the ability of language to represent the world in its entirety as a system, and through such representation, to appropriate and ‘secure’ Being as a representation or picture. This contrasts with the non-existence of any such conceptual system or belief in the adequacy of representation in pre-Socratic Greece. The modern age’s re-membering, or piecing together of Being, in the form of entities (as if it were merely a puzzle to be solved), goes hand in hand with a ‘forgetting’ of the degree to which knowledge is restricted to that which is ‘unconcealed’, again, in contrast to the prevalence of an appreciation of aletheia in pre-Socratic Greece.

Heidegger states that the “world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture [or as a representable system]”[My italics](Heidegger 1977:129). He contrasts this view with the pre-Socratic Greek perspective that involved an apprehension of whatever was ‘unconcealed’ without any attempt to appropriate it as the sole reality. Rather, the prevalence of an appreciation of aletheia was accompanied by an awareness that that which was ‘unconcealed’ presupposed infinitely more that remained ‘concealed’, an understanding of which precluded the possibility of ever attaining any thorough, definitive knowledge of all that is. This limitation marked the pre-Socratic Greek psyche, and Heidegger states that

Through man’s being limited to that which, at any particular time, is unconcealed, there is given to him the measure that always confines a self to this or that. Man does not, from out of some detached I-ness, set forth the measure to which everything that is, in its Being, must accommodate itself. Man who possesses the Greeks’ fundamental relationship to that which is and to its unconcealment is metron (measure [Mass]) in that he accepts restriction…to the horizon of unconcealment that is limited after the manner of the I; and he consequently acknowledges the concealedness of what is (Heidegger 1977:146).

Heidegger reawakens (what he understands as) the pre-Socratic perspective that sees in a human the awesome, invisible and ‘unspoken’ perennial dialogue between the ‘Mortal’ and the other members of the ‘Fourfold’. In Building Dwelling Thinking he discusses the relationship between the members where to be “on the earth” already means [to be] ‘under the sky’. Both of these also mean ‘remaining before the divinities’ and include a ‘belonging to men’s being with one another’…When we say earth [or sky, or divinities, or mortals] we are already thinking of the other three along with it…Mortals dwell in that they save the earth…receive the sky…await the divinities…[and accept their] being [as] capable of death” (Heidegger 1971:149-151). The ‘Mortal’ is removed from the Cartesian subject in that it is perpetually co-constituted by the other members of the Fourfold and is hence not an isolated ego. Because of this it does not exploit the earth as an expendable natural resource, nor does it rebel against the infinity of the sky by retreating into the bastion of dialectical language with its attempts to represent and control the ‘abyss’. Rather, the mortal is open to the ‘benefaction’, and the lack thereof, of the nameless, absent deities because it does not possess what Nietzsche would term, ressentiment (Cf. note 100), and is instead open to the ‘process’ of its own being and inevitable dissolution, which it acknowledges and accepts.
This acceptance of the limitations and restrictions of knowledge not only precluded the pre-
Socratic Greeks from attaining any unified concept of the world as a ‘system’, but it also had an
impact on their sense of self, in that it facilitated the existence of a more porous, flexible and protean
sense of self, far more Dionysian than Apollonian.\textsuperscript{104} This contrasted with the later Cartesian
valorisation of the self as a self-transparent, ‘foundational’, thinking being, and of epistemic certainty
regarding the world by means of conceptual representation. For the pre-Socratic Greeks, by contrast

\[\text{[t]}\text{o be beheld by what is, to be included and maintained within its openness and in that way to be borne
along by it, to be driven about by its oppositions and marked by its discord – that is the essence of man in
the great age of the Greeks …Greek man \textit{is} the one who apprehends…that which is, and this is why in the
age of the Greeks the world cannot become a picture (Heidegger 1977: 131).}\]

\textbf{3. Origins of dialectical language and Heidegger’s reading of the history of philosophy}

Heidegger maintains that the attitude involving the fallacious belief in the inherent potential of
language to represent the world and \textit{Being} thoroughly is relatively new, but that it has its roots in the
way in which “the beingness of whatever is…[was]defined by Plato as \textit{eidos} [aspect, view]”
(Heidegger 1977:131) and by Aristotle as \textit{empeiria} or “the careful observing of things themselves”
(Heidegger 1977:122). Within this epistemological framework that Heidegger attributes to Plato and
Aristotle can be heard the latent murmurings of the subject-object dualism that would manifest later, in
the language of the 1\textsuperscript{7}th century, as the relationship between the Cartesian ego and the world.\textsuperscript{105}
Heidegger asserts that after this, “The whole of modern metaphysics taken together…maintains itself
within the interpretation of what it is to be and of truth that was prepared by Descartes” (Heidegger
1977:127). Similarly, in \textit{Being and Time}, Heidegger identifies the development of the idea of the
integral subject as being the result of myopic philosophical error and the lack of investigation into the
structure of \textit{being}. He states that “certain distinctive domains of being become visible in the course of…history and henceforth dominate the range of problems (Descartes’ \textit{ego cogito}, subject, the ‘I’,
reason, spirit, person), [and] the beings just cited remain unquestioned with respect to their being”
(Heidegger 1953:19). Admittedly, Heidegger, in maintaining the above, ignores and ‘forgets’ the
philosophical contributions of Kant (and Husserl) who moved away from the rigid Cartesian structure
of the \textit{ego} and may be shown to have engaged in a rigorous investigation of the structure of the subject
and of experience that went far beyond Descartes. Nevertheless, Heidegger is correct insofar as the

\textsuperscript{104} See - Chapter Two, Dialectical \textit{Ressentiment} : 3. The impact of different ideas of the self on ethical standpoints.

\textsuperscript{105} Cf. note 95.
modern natural sciences, social sciences and popular culture are predominantly orientated around the belief in the validity of the Cartesian ego as a rational, autonomous, completely self-transparent being. Such a popular conception of the self is predicated, in turn, upon the distinction between res cogitans and res extensa, which contains the designation of the world as a separate, independent and representable object eternally removed from an inviolable, integral subject.

It would not be untimely at this point to recall that this Intermezzo is designed to serve as a bridge between the discussions of the literary and philosophical texts in the previous two chapters and an analysis of the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema in Chapter Three. There exist numerous distinct parallels between the visual language of the mass media and dialectical language, as both are orientated around the above-mentioned Cartesian subjectivity, just as both seek to objectify, represent, and thereby create the ability to delimit and ‘control’ the world. However, the degree to which their respective epistemological and ontological presuppositions are similar will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

4. Constitutive elements of dialectical language and Heidegger’s proposed alternatives

In the essay Language, in Poetry, Language, Thought, Heidegger contrasts his position on language (a position similar to that which he considered to be prevalent during pre-Socratic Greece) with the perspective and general impetus at work during late modernity, involving an absence of an appreciation of the limits of language and knowledge that was part and parcel of the Cartesian inheritance mentioned above. He states that

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106 In light of quantum physics, Heidegger’s criticism of natural science must also be reconsidered and re-evaluated.

107 Understandably, the Christian ‘meta-narrative’, to use Lyotard’s turn of phrase (Cf. note 156), and Capitalism, are far more influential in informing a popular sense of the self than Kantian philosophy. However, they are also all orientated around and predicated upon the belief in the validity of the Cartesian ego or an integral sense of self, and inform the popular conception of the self accordingly.

108 Foucault lends support to this thesis in The Order of Things when he maintains that the epistemic shift of the 17th century was a product of a changing perspective ‘within’ language. This altered perspective manifested not only in philosophy (e.g. Descartes’ Meditations), but also in new approaches to, and the formation of, an array of different ‘sciences’ (such as economics, grammar, the natural sciences, etc.). In the early part of the text, Foucault contrasts these new perspectives with those of the Middle Ages in a manner that is reminiscent of the contrasts that Heidegger draws between the contemporary age and the age of the pre-Socratic Greeks. His endeavour can also be seen to echo Heidegger’s statement in The Age of the World Picture that, “In the Middle Ages a system is [also] impossible, for there a ranked order of correspondences is alone essential” (Heidegger 1977:141). However, Foucault differs from Heidegger in that he gives Kant due consideration and asserts that the event of Kant’s transcendental turn was “one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture…from which, even now, we have doubtless not entirely emerged” (Foucault 1970:220).

109 The idea of ‘Apollonian’ control is intricately connected with the ‘integrity’ of the Cartesian ego insofar as its integrity and stability are necessary to justify its ability to control and orchestrate its life or being. This belief distances it from a belief that it is co-constituted as a ‘Mortal’ in terms of the Fourfold, and therefore distances it from its potentiality for being (Cf. note 103).
We do not wish to assault language in order to force it into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand. We do not wish to reduce the nature of language to a concept, so that this concept may provide a generally useful view of language that will lay to rest all further notions about it… [Instead we would] constantly reflect on language… [that] Language itself is – language (Heidegger 1971:190).

Initially, in the above quote, in articulating his desired approach to language, Heidegger defines it negatively against the approach of the modern age and, in doing so, simultaneously points out key elements of the approach of this age. The verb ‘assault’ is not merely figurative language or metaphoric, but denotes the attitude of, and impetus inherent to, the dominant or prevailing linguistic system in which modern western culture is immersed. This violent impetus is underpinned by a desire to quieten, silence and then ‘lay to rest’ the disturbing abyss of possibility that is language, as an expression of, and in the interests of, lending stability and integrity to the ‘sovereign’ subject or Cartesian ego. The means to this particular anaesthetic end involve forcing language ‘into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand’, and an example might be what Heidegger regards as the reductive effect of ‘mathematically pre-determined’ scientific terminology that delimits options in contrast to the creation of poetry that embraces possibility and ambiguity. Through scientific terminology language is reduced to a ‘useful’ concept that, in turn, serves the interests of the ‘integral’ subject who wields it. ‘Useful’ here is also significant in that it denotes a designation, on the part of the prevailing linguistic system, of the infinite possibility of the abyss as useless, with the privileging of the useful over the useless implying a means-end economy underpinned by a rigid Cartesian subject-object dynamic, which ultimately prepares the way for something like the ‘standing reserve’. The habits of thought imbricated with this linguistic perspective not only result in the sedimentation of thinking around a rigid subject-object dualism, but also contribute greatly to the creation of the idea of the world (and humanity) as the ‘standing reserve’.

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110 As Derrida (and others) maintain, metaphor is never dead or innocuous.
111 Later in the above-quoted text, in relation to a letter written on the 10th of August 1784 from Hamann to Herder, Heidegger paraphrases Hamann’s concerns where he poses the question, “[I]s language itself the abyss?…The sentence ‘Language is language,’ leaves us to hover over an abyss as long as we endure what it says” (Heidegger 1971:191).
112 Cf. note 97.
113 I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Heidegger’s poetry/prose concerning Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes where I endeavour to show the way in which he, following tragedy, makes the subversion of dialectical language possible through the implications of his ‘verse’.
114 Perhaps parallels might be drawn between Dionysus as the ‘abyss’ of possibility contained within language and Apollo as the god of form, order and usefulness, as usefulness always presupposes a degree of control. Also, the arbitrary privileging of order and form by the age of ‘technoscience’, inspired by the essence of Enframing (Cf. note 97), echoes the Nietzschean identification of the rejection of the Dionysian in favour of the Apollonian by “theoretical man” (Nietzsche 2000:82). With regard to technoscience, Lyotard maintains that “knowledge will be produced in order to be sold…[and will] cease to be an end in itself…It is this condition that dismantles the association of scientific knowledge with Enlightenment narratives…Science blends with technology and becomes what Lyotard calls technoscience…[which is] based on performativity, as the corporation emerges as the locus of scientific research” (http://www.lclark.edu/~soan370/global/sciencesig.html).
It is important to consider, briefly, the nature of the ‘standing reserve’, because treating the world in this way is a habit of thought that is an integral part of the linguistic disposition (i.e. dialectical language) of the modern age against which Heidegger contrasts his own linguistic disposition in the above extract from *Language in Poetry, Language, Thought*. In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger explains the ‘standing reserve’ with an illustration involving the discovery of coal and ore in a field, after which the Earth...reveals itself as a coal mining district,[and] the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order...[now] appears differently...[Where] the work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field...[in coal-mining,] the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature...Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, [and] the earth to yield ore [etc.] (Heidegger 1977:14-15).

Through an appreciation of the ‘dialogue’ with the world through which the subject (as ‘Mortal’) is co-constituted, the subject (as ‘Mortal’) does not challenge the world but rather dwells within it and with it. In contrast to this, the ‘standing reserve’ is the ‘mode of revealing’ that negates the degree to which the subject is co-constituted by the world. Instead, when the habit of thinking in terms of the ‘standing reserve’ holds sway, this ‘dialogue’ and the possibility of the human subject’s ‘dwelling’ within the world, in terms of this co-constitutive dialogue, are forgotten, because the subject is considered as integral, isolated and distanced from an objectified world. The needs of the ‘integral’ subject now take precedence over the needs of the world, since the world is no longer considered necessary for the co-constitution of the subject. This position readily lends itself to a consideration of the world as expendable, a perspective which legitimates the ‘setting upon’ and exploitation of the world in the interests of catering to the needs and desires of an isolated subject. The ‘weight’ or momentum of the subject-object dualism within the modern age, prepares the way for the habit of thinking in terms of the ‘standing reserve’, and not only leads to the exploitation of the resources of nature as something expendable, but also privileges the subject to the extent that other subjects, and indeed humanity, can also fall with ease into the category of the ‘standing reserve’, under the rubric of “human resources” (Heidegger 1977:18).

Importantly, the privileging of the subject (Cartesian ego) not only manifests in the legitimation of the exploitation of the world (and humanity), but it also manifests in the negation of a subject’s limitations concerning knowledge and incapacity for complete control. This negation of

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115 Also, as will be discussed later, the visual language of contemporary mass media has distinct parallels to dialectical language and creates and perpetuates a view of the world (and humanity) as the ‘standing reserve’ just as much as dialectical language.

116 Cf. note 103.
limits to the capacity of representations to represent the world is necessary because an
acknowledgement of such limitations and lack of control would intimate the underlying lack of
integrity and ‘power’ of the subject. This, in turn, is the result of the concept of the subject being based
upon a belief in the validity of the integral Cartesian ego as a rational, autonomous and completely
self-transparent being. Essentially, in the modern age, language is forced ‘into the grip of ideas already
fixed beforehand’\(^{117}\) by the desire to represent the world as something that can be represented in its
entirety, because of the degree to which such representation implies Apollonian control.

5. Heidegger and tragedy

As discussed in Chapter One, Aeschylus’ dramatic tragedies temporarily subverted the
exclusively Apollonian impetus towards a more restricted economy (that later manifested in dialectical
language) by revealing, through the aid of dithyrambic music, and via the implications of the
metaphors of the tragedies, the illusory nature of all Apollonian forms. For Nietzsche, music (i.e.
dithyrambic music) played a crucial part in the subversion of the dominant voice of Apollonian being-
as-stability, which has subsequently prevailed as a feature of western culture as a result of its Platonic
inheritance. Against this “disaster slumbering in the womb of theoretical culture…”\(^{117}\) Nietzsche
maintained that we should imagine a future generation with…[a] fearless gaze, with…[a] heroic
predisposition towards the tremendous…[who will] turn their back on all the weakling doctrines of
optimism, in order to ‘live resolutely’” (Nietzsche 2000:98-99). That is, rather than succumbing to the
‘optimism’ of dialectical language, Nietzsche valorised a resolute stance that accepted the
impossibility of delimiting existence and faced the ‘abyss’ of possibility that was implied through
tragedy. Nietzsche also launched attacks on art forms dominated by Apollonian dispositions, and
contrasted Greek tragedy with decadent parallel art forms such as opera, which saw “the birth of the
theoretical man…[who, b]ecause he has no sense of the Dionysian depth of music…transforms the
enjoyment of music into the intelligible word-and-sound rhetoric of passions” (Nietzsche 2000:103).

However, although Nietzsche valorises the subversive Dionysian power of ‘music’, he does so
in the absence of any immediate experience of dithyrambic music, that is, ironically, at an Apollonian
level through the ‘poetry’ of his philosophy.\(^{118}\) Through this he arrives at a perspective of language
and meaning as robbed of enduring stability, emptied of any ‘objective factual’ content and hence
transformed into an interpretative pluralism. Nietzsche argued that “nothing exceeds the scope of

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\(^{117}\) Cf. note 97.

\(^{118}\) Philosophy is, after all, an Apollonian discipline that owes its genesis to a sense of ‘wonder’ rather than to ‘awe’ and ‘terror’.
interpretative activity…[, and] the ‘will to power’ is…[his] name for the activity of interpretation” (Schrift 1990:182-183). Freed from ideas of stable being and ‘factuality’, everything becomes a matter of perspective and, as such, subject to interpretation. Nietzsche’s valorisation of the voice of Dionysus in tragedy, over its absence in the dialectical language of Plato, is because of the way in which it facilitated a more open and porous sense of self, which contrasted with the later (Apollonian) Cartesian ego. However, again, it must be remembered that all of this occurs in Nietzsche’s texts, at a conceptual, philosophical and Apollonian level, even if the Dionysian is invoked and, by implication, re-activated by Nietzsche’s use and understanding of language.

Similarly, although Heidegger’s description in The Origin of the Work of Art, of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of peasant shoes, constitutes a valorisation of poetry and a ‘poetic existence’ that contrasts with the (Apollonian) impetus of dialectical language and Enframing, its form is inherently Apollonian.

The implications of Heidegger’s description of Van Gogh’s painting, along with the implications of the images that arise from it, contrast with an Apollonian-Cartesian epistemological and ontological perspective, and contain, instead, certain parallels to tragedy. Although the dramatic personae of tragedy have been reduced to the single, humble ‘Mortal’, who stands on the ‘Earth’ beneath the nameless ‘Divinities’ of the ‘Sky’, the ‘essence’ of tragedy still plays out in the scene. That is, between these members of the Fourfold, or at least what Heidegger refers to later, in Building, Dwelling Thinking, as the Fourfold, a ‘Dionysian’ voice resounds and carries with it the idea of Being as a process of constitution and dissolution. Heidegger states that

From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spreading and ever-uniform furrows of the field swept by a raw wind. On the leather lie the dampness and

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119 As discussed, the Cartesian ego’s (supposed) capacity for control and complete self-transparency can also be seen as the ‘end’ result of Plato’s dialectical language, and the culmination of an increasingly integral sense of self that developed from Homer onwards. This Apollonian impetus sought, via the exclusive privileging of reason, to exclude all ambiguity and uncertainty and to set knowledge on a sure footing (Cf. note 95). In doing so the ‘abyss’ that lurks beneath all Apollonian illusion is negated and ignored, and instead the self’s (and from the modern era or 17th century onwards, the subject’s) capacity for rational control and autonomy is valorised. This is continued through the ‘encompassing mode of being’ of Enframing, as discussed earlier (Cf. note 97), which becomes manifest in the desire to impose an interpretative grid upon the world and thereby to control it.

120 Heidegger may be criticised for his ‘overly romanticized’ ideas of peasantry, and if his prose paraded itself as a realistic representation of peasants then this criticism might be valid. However, as his prose simply uses the metaphor of the peasant in much the same way as dramatic Attic tragedy used the metaphors of the nobles, I feel that, perhaps, this criticism is not valid.

121 There are further similarities between Heidegger’s description and certain aspects/themes of the early proto-drama, the most notable of which is that, as mentioned earlier, in the proto-drama there were no dramatic personae and no ‘stage-play’ but rather “everything [was] only a great sublime chorus of dancing and singing satyrs or of people who let themselves be represented by these satyrs” (Nietzsche 2000: 48). The satyr is half-natural and half-conventional, and this is echoed, to a certain extent, in the co-constitution of the ‘Mortal’ by the other members of the Fourfold.
richness of the soil. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, the trembling before the impending childbed and shivering at the surrounding menace of death (Heidegger 1971:33-34).

According to Heidegger, all of the images in the above passage stare forth from the dark opening of the worn…shoes. This ‘dark opening’ is framed by the shoes, and the present-absence of the darkness-as-abyss “constitutes a breach in the context of references discovered in our circumspection” (Heidegger 1953:70). In other words, as we investigate the painting, the absence of any definite form or meaning in the darkness contrasts with the meaning and form of the shoes that frame the darkness. This contrast, and the fact that the images emerge from, or ‘stare forth’ from out of, the dark opening, reveals the Apollonian creative impulse as a knee-jerk reaction to the abyss of meaninglessness that flees from such meaninglessness by creating form. However, in doing so, it also implies that the nature of all created meaning is an Apollonian illusion. This might, possibly, be seen as mirroring the same tension at work in the creation of the Apollonian figures of dramatic Attic tragedy, whose integrity is, in turn, subverted by the implications of the drama.

Heidegger represents the peasant woman as a tragic figure, in her relationship, as a ‘Mortal’, to the ‘Earth’ of the ‘soil’ and ‘raw wind’, and to the ‘Divinities’ of the ‘evening [S]ky’. He situates her alone, in a seemingly infinite field, when her daily work is done and hence can no longer occupy her thoughts or serve to distract her from her contemplation of the anxiety of loneliness and death. As such, there is an absence of any friend or relative who might provide ‘inauthentic’ comfort, while the evening sky serves as a perennial reminder of the cycle of life and death. However, she is a tragic figure not because she inspires pathos, but in the sense in which she dwells within a context not

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122 That is, the images he describes in his exegesis of the painting that concern the peasant woman.
123 Unlike dialectical language, Heidegger’s metaphor does not seek to negate the existence of the abyss, or the unexplained, but rather acknowledges its perpetual presence and the role it plays in the creation of meaning. However, unlike the intuitive, “unconscious creativity of Aeschylean-Sophoclean tragedy” (Megill 1985:55), Heidegger’s description is ‘more reflective’, and thereby, ‘more’ Apollonian. Yet, while this might preclude his prose from inducing in the reader Dionysian awe and terror, it does not prevent it from engendering a sense of (philosophical) wonder in the reader (Cf. note 118) through the implications of its images.
124 Cf. note 103.
125 This is not to say that all company is ‘inauthentic’. In Being and Time Heidegger identifies the relationship of the “authentic alliance [that] first makes possible the proper kind of objectivity which frees the other for himself in his freedom” (Heidegger 1953:115). Although it is not within the scope of this section to give a detailed analysis of ‘authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’, it will suffice to say that authenticity involves, among other things, a resolute appreciation of the imminent ‘abyss’ of the possibility of one’s own ‘non-being’, or death. An ‘authentic alliance’ would be a friendship that encourages acceptance of this imminent possibility. That is the sense in which it is relative to the above discussion since this acknowledgement of ‘non-being’ is also found as the dark presence behind the metaphors, symbols and narratives of Aeschylus’ tragedies, the acceptance (and embrace) of which is valorised by Nietzsche as the tragic ‘spirit’.
126 Cf. note 41.
dominated by Apollonian impulses that would conceal her ‘thrownness’ from her.\textsuperscript{127} ‘Evidence’ for this is that the peasant woman’s acquaintance with toil, with the earth, with birth and with death is in the absence of any purely theoretical tendency to ‘frame’ and thereby ‘appropriate’ the world. Instead of isolating, separating, labelling and compartmentalizing all her experience in the interest of quelling anxiety by fabricating an Apollonian myth (however implicit or explicit) of control, Heidegger depicts her as simply ‘letting things be’. Fell maintains that

\begin{quote}
[T]he mortal ‘affair’ has always been an affair between man and gods…[and] Heidegger holds that the absence of the divinities is their ownmost way of being…Heidegger writes: ‘The god is unknown and is nevertheless the measure. Not only this but the god who remains unknown must, in showing himself as he who he is, appear precisely as the one who remains unknown’ (Fell 1979:239).
\end{quote}

For the peasant woman, the ‘ripening grain’ (as a cultivated crop) is ‘World’ that brings the gift of the ‘Earth’ into un-concealment, while it also necessitates the assumption of the presence, or in this case the absent-presence, of a giver, namely “the ‘divine’ or ‘divinities’” (Fell 1979:222). Through these absent ‘Divinities’, Heidegger posits the presence of a dark region that can never be conquered by (Apollonian) dialectical language, by science or even, ultimately, by modern technology. As such it is something that will always remain a dark region, not of ‘ignorance’ but of ‘un-knowing’, that perpetually inspires the ‘Mortal’ with awe and terror.\textsuperscript{128}

Apollonian subject-object dualism, through privileging the subject, paves the way for considering the earth as the standing reserve, as discussed earlier, or “primarily as tappable resources or raw materials…[over which] the light [of knowledge, progress, etc.] can be indefinitely extended…[and from the perspective of which all d]arkness is provisional, the yet-to-be illuminated” (Fell 1979:240). This contrasts with the relationship between the peasant woman as ‘Mortal’ and the ‘Divinities’, where she lives, perpetually, in the presence of this dark region, ever-near the nameless and faceless divinities, without ever trying to appropriate them through anthropomorphisms or to extinguish them through ‘dialectical language’.

For her, the absence of food in the ‘unexplained…fallow desolation of the wintry field’ is related to this dark region of ‘un-knowing’, before which she waits anxiously, without any means of

\textsuperscript{127} That is, she does not succumb to the ‘comfort’ of dialectical language which casts the illusion of control, understanding and ‘design’ over existence. “[T]hrownness is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over” (Heidegger 1953:127). In other words, she, at an existential level, accepts the way in which, as a result of birth, she is ‘thrown’ into a sublime existence that is not bound by (illusory) Apollonian conceptual structures. She might be said, by Heidegger, to be ‘authentic’ insofar as she accepts this condition.

\textsuperscript{128} While terror or awe are associated more with Dionysus, wonder is, perhaps, something more Apollonian (Cf. note 118). While the peasant woman might experience such awe and terror, ‘we’, as the reader, can only experience ‘wonder’ at the implications that her awe and terror hold for ‘us’, because of the way in which they are the result of the proximity of a dark space of ‘unknowing’ that involves the Divinities and which refuses to be colonized by (Apollonian) dialectical language.
appeal or recourse should benefaction cease. Similarly, the ‘uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread’ relates to the impossibility of knowing whether the benefaction of the nameless divinities will continue or whether it will indeed cease. Yet, instead of petitioning that ‘dark space’ (through prayer) in an effort to comfort herself, instead of going to great lengths to destroy that uncertainty with the technological developments of the ‘farming industry’, the peasant woman ‘resolutely’ waits.129 The ‘anxiety as to the certainty of bread’ might be paraphrased as ‘the anxiety as to the certainty of continued meaning’ while, similarly, the last part of the passage involving the ‘trembling before the impending childbirth and shivering at the surrounding menace of death’ continues this theme of waiting before the mystery of the dark space of the ‘unknowable’, in the absence of any ‘scientific’ framing of the event of birth which would dissolve its awe and terror.130 Fell points out the underlying link between Nietzsche and Heidegger when he states that

[t]his joyful affirmation of a finite fate that is also an anxious burden is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s amor fati…Heidegger does not describe freedom as a present power of autonomous or arbitrary choice. He understands it not as a state but verbally, as a “Being-free for.” This will have to mean: Being-free for…in the way in which one really already is. Being-free for…clearly refers to the future (Fell 1979: 62).

The peasant woman’s openness towards her inevitable dissolution through death, through the possibility of dissolution and death that are present from the very first moment of life on the childbed, and her openness to a life spent in the perpetual present-absence of an impossibly dark and unknowable region denotes, in effect, a tragic existence. Transformed is the stage and the dramatic personifications of Dionysus, along with the intoxicating dithyrambic music with its traces of the proto-dramatic ritual, yet in the ‘Mortal’, in this case the peasant woman, whose Being is a process constituted by a ‘silent’ dialogue with the ‘Divinities’, the ‘Earth’, and the ‘Sky’, tragedy still plays out. Although Heidegger introduces the reader to the scene at an Apollonian level, the implications of the peasant woman’s proximity to the ‘abyss’ of possibility, contained within the Fourfold, result in the opening up of a more porous sense of subjectivity that, ironically, subverts the integrity of the (Apollonian) Cartesian ego, along with the ‘legitimacy’ of dialectical language.

129 “[R]esoluteness does not detach…[the self] from its world, nor does it isolate it as free floating ego…it...is…nothing other than authentically being-in-the-world…Resoluteness brings the self right into its being together with things at hand, actually taking care of them, and pushes it toward concerned being-with with the others…Resoluteness means letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the they” (Heidegger 1953:274-275). In other words, the perspective attained through letting oneself be summoned out of the Apollonian conceptual architecture of dialectical language, involves facing the imminent possibility of one’s own non-being, before the ‘nameless divinities’, which according to Heidegger, allows one to be in the world. Thus, the peasant woman’s resolute ‘waiting’ should not be seen as resignation but rather as an ‘active’ part of her ‘being-in-the-world’.

130 Such scientific framing has become commonplace in the contemporary world, for example in the guise of ‘sonar scans’ of a foetus in a woman’s womb.
6. Conclusion

In Chapter One, I discussed the Apollonian move, from Homer onwards, towards an increasingly restricted economy, and the momentary subversion of this trajectory by Aeschylus’ tragedies, before Sophocles and Euripides, to various degrees, ushered in the death of tragedy through perpetuating and propagating the dominance of a more critical (Apollonian) disposition. Similarly, in Chapter Two, I continued to trace this trend towards a more restricted economy in the texts of the pre-Socratic writers until its culmination, in a manner of speaking, in Plato’s ‘dialecticism’, or what I refer to as, dialectical language. In the beginning of the Intermezzo I discussed how, from the 17th century onwards, dialectical language contributed to the constitution of subjectivity around the idea of the integral Cartesian ego. Nietzsche valorised Aeschylus’ tragedies not only because of the way in which they had ‘originally’ resisted the growing Apollonian hegemony (which later manifested itself in dialectical language), but also because of the way in which they had informed (and still contained the potential to inform) a more porous, open sense of self.

However, because of the Apollonian hegemony of the contemporary era it is impossible to return to the ‘innocence’ of the proto-drama with its awe and terror, and Nietzsche’s philosophical valorisation of tragedy and its dithyrambic music operates, ironically, within ‘Apollonian’ confines. Yet simultaneously it highlights the limitations of this (Apollonian) philosophical/conceptual paradigm and, by implication, presents a more porous form of subjectivity as an alternative to the Cartesian ego. Heidegger’s poetic description of Van Gogh’s painting of peasant shoes operates in the same way. That is, while as something linguistic (and conceptual) it is inherently Apollonian, the implications of the images sketched (verbally) open up the reader to both the ‘wonder’ of a perspective beyond the narrow confines of (Apollonian) dialectical language, and to a more open and porous subjectivity, i.e. one that does not stand against the world as a Cartesian ego, but is rather co-constituted by a ‘dialogue’ between the members of the Fourfold.

In the beginning of Chapter Three I will consider the numerous parallels between dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, and I will attempt to show that visual language shapes subjectivity along similar lines to dialectical language, namely, in terms of the Cartesian ego. Also, in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I will argue that critical

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131 This impetus did not end with Plato but has continued through to the contemporary era. However Plato, through his instantiation of ‘dialecticism’ as the language of philosophy, gave added momentum to this Apollonian trend.

132 In Chapter Four I will deal with the manner in which Aronofsky’s critical film language in Requiem for a Dream (2001) and Pi (1998) engages with, and subverts, the formal features of that which has become instantiated as the ‘Apollonian’
cinema, in its subversion of visual language, parallels Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s subversion of dialectical language, as discussed above. That is, while it engages at a critical (Apollonian) level with the narrow confines of (Apollonian) visual language it also, simultaneously, opens up the viewer to the ‘abyss’ of possibility that haunts the narrative structures of that language, and thereby (potentially) facilitates the construction of audiences’ subjectivity as something far more porous and fluid than the Cartesian ego.
3. The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media

1. Introduction

The move towards a more restricted economy in the visual language of contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema is not something new but rather a continuation of the manifestation of an increasingly Apollonian disposition in western culture, certain philosophical countertrends notwithstanding. Glancing retrospectively over the terrain already covered, one may recall that this move began with the advent of the Greek alphabet and continued through Homer and the pre-Socratic writers to the dialectical language of Plato. Plato’s dialecticism, inherited later by Hegel, still dominates the mainstream of western culture.

The protean sense of self, that existed prior to the birth of the alphabet, was underpinned by an exclusively oral language that made it difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of the world as a picture or system.133 This protean self was gradually superseded by an increasingly stable and integral sense of self, underpinned by written language.134 In the work of the writers from Homer to Plato (with the exception of Aeschylus and, to a certain degree, Sophocles) a definite move towards an increasingly restricted linguistic economy can be observed. This went hand in hand with an increasing concretisation of the sense of self that placed the self ‘outside’ of the language of the community, renounced any ‘dialogue’ with ancient deities (that is, renounced the possibility of daemonic possession, which presupposes a porous and flexible sense of self),135 and increasingly subjected the idea of the self to ‘universal’ concepts (for example, the concept of the polis).

133 See – Intermezzo, Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture: 2. Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture.
134 This protean self knew no personalized, internalised sense of guilt. Rather, in the Homeric era (i.e. the era subsequently represented in Homeric epic), to be was to be seen by others in the community, and to be appraised favourably by them in terms of Homeric arête. As the language of that community consisted only of the spoken word, the Homeric hero only ‘existed’ insofar as his presence was articulated in the language of his community, that is, insofar as he was remembered in the language of his community through an oral tradition of poetry. However, not everyone was granted such recognition, and in order to enter the annals of oral poetry one had to excel in terms of Homeric arête. All of this changed with the introduction of the alphabet, the development of which was paralleled by an increasing ‘integrity’ of the sense of self.133 Although demonic possession still ‘occurred’ much later during the Middle Ages, the difference was that, during this period, because of an even more integral sense of self, a person who succumbed to such possession was considered morally responsible for it. This responsibility was tied up with the idea of ‘sin’ against which the individual had to strive in order to save his/her immortal soul (Cf. note 91). This contrasts with the daemonic possession that ‘occurs’ in the Iliad because there it prevented moral slur from falling on the individual who temporarily succumbed to the influence of a deity. That is, because of the prevalence of a more porous sense of self, to acknowledge possession was also to acknowledge the loss of autonomy and, hence, responsibility (Cf. note 134 & See – Chapter Two, Dialectical Ressentiment: 5. Echoes of the protodrama in Homeric arête).
Recall, for example, that Homeric *arête*, as it pertained to martial valour, was challenged indirectly in the writings of Tyrtaeus and Callinus, where Homeric ‘glory’ and ‘honour’ were rearticulated to suit the new sense of community (orientated around the *polis*) that developed in the Archaic Period. Archilochus posed a more direct challenge to the Homeric ‘way of being’ and its legacy. His writings reflect the ‘discovery’ of the self as an entity independent of favourable public appraisal in terms of the rigid codes of Homeric *arête*, (even as re-articulated by Tyrtaeus and Callinus). Similarly, Pindar valorised the beautiful body as an end-in-itself in contrast to the Homeric idea of the body as a means to the end of martial victory. This concretisation of the sense of self, which accompanied (and reinforced) the move towards a more restricted economy, was continued not only by Solon but also by Xenophanes. Solon wrote of societal reforms that anticipated the idea that the people of the *polis* could be ends-in-themselves, while Xenophane’s attitude towards nature approximated empiricism and gravitated towards the ‘essential’ individual outside of mythology. This essentialising tendency finally reached critical mass in Plato’s concept of the ‘just soul’. This concept, which cast the illusion of integrity over the self, was imbricated with the desire for certainty of knowledge, which according to Plato (or, at least, according to a certain reductive ‘Platonism’), dialecticism could deliver. This ‘Platonism’, or ‘dialecticism’, which is carried through Hegel and his precursors to the modern age, saw a perpetuation and propagation of the illusory belief that epistemological certainty could be achieved via the ostensible power/capacity invested in dialectical thinking and language to represent the world in its entirety.
Nietzsche’s criticism of this dialectical language highlights an important additional constitutive feature of it, namely *ressentiment* or the spirit of revenge against time. According to Nietzsche, *ressentiment* underpins dialectical language insofar as this language is imbricated with an increasingly stable and integral sense of self, and only such an integral self can experience a sense of revenge against time and mortality, or against time’s steady erosion of its stability and integrity. Similarly, only such a stable self requires the certainty of knowledge (promised through the ‘metaphysical’ endeavours of dialectical language) to mirror its own illusory stability.

In contrast to the above mentioned progression towards an increasingly restricted economy, which manifested in the dominance of dialectical language in western culture, there occurs, in Nietzsche’s language, a recommencement of ‘dialogue’ with the abyss of possibility (i.e. endless open-endedness) and time. Nietzsche embraces this abyss of endless possibility by acknowledging the utter metaphoricity of language. In so doing, he reveals that the move towards a successively more restricted economy is the product of Apollonian illusion, made possible only by suppressing the reality that time erodes all meaning.

In terms of Heidegger’s language, this ‘dialogue’ with the abyss of (endless) possibility and time takes place in the poetic ‘language’ that emphasises the ‘community’ of the ‘Fourfold’, and is underpinned by a more protean sense of self. The ‘Mortal’ is always co-constituted by its relationship with the other members of the ‘Fourfold’. This influence of the ‘Earth’, ‘Sky’ and the ‘Divinities’, from which benefaction may issue or cease at any unpredictable moment, ensures that, of necessity, such co-constitution embraces the abyss of (endless) possibility just as it dissolves the validity of any rigid conceptual grid applied to an ‘objectively present’ world by a (supposedly) stable Cartesian subject. This interplay echoes Nietzsche’s appreciation of the omnipotence of time that cannot be successfully countered by Apollonian illusions.

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147 It is important to take cognisance of Nietzsche’s observation because *ressentiment* (Cf. notes 49 and 100) underpins not only dialectical language but also the language of representation that characterises contemporary visual mass-media, as will be discussed in the following sections.

148 ‘Metaphysical’ is used here in a different sense to Nietzsche’s use of the term in *The Birth of Tragedy* (Cf. note 43).

149 In this way, both Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s respective languages, at an Apollonian level (of reflection), echo elements of the *proto*-drama in a manner reminiscent of *dramatic* Attic tragedy (See - Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 7.v. The *proto*-drama and *dramatic* tragedy).

150 That is, not the abyss of the Gorgo (See – Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy : 2. The Gorgo, Dionysus and Apollo), but rather the ‘Dionysian’ abyss valorised, at a philosophical level, by Nietzsche because of the way in which ‘proximity’ to it dissolves all stable ‘facts’ into infinite possibility. For Heidegger this infinite possibility occurs in the perpetual (inter)play and co-constitution that occurs between the members of the ‘Fourfold’.

151 Cf. note 103.

152 As will be discussed at the end of this chapter, this same ‘dialogue’ that subverts *ressentiment* and dialectical language is paralled by the ‘dialogue’ opened up between Aronofsky’s film language and the ‘abyss’ of possibility that lurks beneath the structures of mainstream cinema. While the contemporary visual mass-media constructs subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian ego (Cf. note 109), Aronofsky’s critical film language subverts that process by destabilizing mass media’s language of representation and facilitating instead the construction of a more porous, protean subjectivity.
I discussed the above in Chapter One, Chapter Two and in the Intermezzo, where I focused on Heidegger’s essay *The Age of the World Picture*. This was done because Heidegger’s thesis in this essay forms a useful conceptual bridge between the theory gleaned from the above-mentioned philosophical and literary texts and the phenomena of cinema and the mass media, which will be discussed in this chapter.

In *The Age of the World Picture*, Heidegger attacks dialectical language that masquerades as being capable of representing the world in its entirety as a picture or system. The result of the dominance of this perspective is that the ‘represented’ world and humanity are reduced to a commodity/resource to be exploited, in the interests of catering to the conceptual, and ultimately technical, needs of a Cartesian subject. In other words, through this process, the Cartesian ego finds a realisation of its need to have its integrity mirrored by the integrity and ‘validity’ of such representations. This process, and its conceptual result, fly in the face of the reality of the steady erosion of all meaning by time, and are thus underpinned by the disposition of *ressentiment*.

As an alternative, Heidegger contrasts this modern Cartesian desire, for the illusion of stability, with the pre-Socratic Greek ‘perspective’ of openness, characterised by an appreciation of the limits imposed on knowledge by *aletheia*. In terms of this perspective, humanity dwelt within a world that did not stand before it as a commodity to be exploited. Similarly, there did not exist an impetus to represent it, control it or reduce it to a commodity because the prevalent epistemological perspective, underpinned by *aletheia*, was accompanied by a more open and porous sense of self that did not perpetuate and propagate *ressentiment*.

There is a demonstrable similarity between dialectical language, as discussed in relation to philosophical and literary texts in Chapters One, Two and the Intermezzo, and the visual ‘language’ at work in contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema.\(^{153}\) The value of Heidegger’s criticism of dialectical language, as found in the Intermezzo, in relation to his essay *The Age of the World Picture*, is that it applies, in many ways, to the visual language of contemporary mass media, as both are underpinned by the same epistemological and ontological presuppositions. More importantly, the alternatives that Heidegger proposes to the (Apollonian) hegemony of dialectical language in modernity (discussed above) have also become realizable, at a cinematic level, in postmodernity.\(^{154}\)

I begin Chapter Three by exploring the numerous parallels that exist between the visual language of the mass-media, in the contemporary ‘age of a world picture’, and dialectical language that underpins modern science, as analysed in Heidegger’s *The Age of the World Picture*, along with

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\(^{153}\) As mentioned in the Introduction, I regard ‘language’ here in the most general sense as *logos*, or complexes of meaning-relations (Cf. note 3).

\(^{154}\) Cf. note 152.
the epistemological and ontological implications of these parallels. I begin by discussing Heidegger’s distinction between Greek and modern science to illustrate the degree to which modern science is underpinned by the Cartesian ego and the desire for absolute ‘truth’ and clarity. I then show to what extent the visual language of the mass media is underpinned by the same Cartesian ego and disposition towards certainty, before going on to compare the two ‘languages’ in terms of their respective maintenance of the world as the ‘standing reserve’, and the presence within each of ressentiment.

This exposition is followed by a consideration of Baudrillard’s account of the hegemony, in the contemporary era, of the visual language of the mass media and mainstream cinema. According to Baudrillard, the visual language of the media is no longer merely a part of society but rather constitutes society in its entirety. I then consider Adorno and Dana Polan’s criticism of cinema and their arguments concerning the possibility or impossibility of critical cinema, along with why such perspectives lead to intolerable pessimism in the contemporary age. That is, if the contemporary age is dominated by a visual rather than discursive language, and if there is no room for critical cinema within this visual language, then there is no longer any possible means to resist the axiological hegemony of the status quo.

However, the possibility of critical cinema rests on a theoretical understanding of what constitutes the visual language of the mass media and mainstream cinema, and how it, in turn, contributes to the constitution of a kind of subjectivity compatible with the Cartesian ego produced by dialectical language. This understanding gives theorists the conceptual means to comprehend how film can function (pace Adorno) as cultural critique, something that is imperative in the face of Baudrillard’s pessimism concerning the degree to which the visual language of the mass media has attained hegemonic status. The totalisation of a restricted economy, or the ‘monologue’ of a pure Apollonian voice, is tantamount to stasis or death. In order to avert the danger of this situation a ‘dialogue’ must be maintained between Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions in order to facilitate the perpetual production of new and dynamic possibilities.155

However, in order to identify the constitutive features of this visual language, and thereby identify the ‘nature’ of critical cinema, it is necessary to move beyond the general philosophical discussion of the previous two chapters (and the first section of this chapter) and to engage in an investigation into the actual nature and origins of this visual language.

155 A good example of the need for this ‘dialogue’ occurs in politics, in relation to the question of democracy. A form of democracy that is not open to constant critical appraisal and amendment, in the interests of moving towards a fuller and more ‘just’ form of democracy, is inherently oppressive and undemocratic. Similarly, in terms of justice, a judicial system that does not engage with the question of justice, constantly, in the interests of extending and broadening the concept, cannot be said to approximate justice. Both justice and democracy are processes that involve a perpetual ‘dialogue’ between Apollonian and Dionysian dispositions that facilitates the development of new and dynamic possibilities.
In doing so I will consider the fundamental importance of Dickens’ narrative style for Griffith’s development of the film language that, in turn, informed and continues to underpin the visual language of contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema. Dickens, as a literary artist, was an inheritor of the Homeric legacy (via Plato) of the Apollonian logos involving an impetus, in literature, towards an increasingly restricted economy. The narrative structure and style of his fiction influenced film language via Griffith, and thereby tied Griffith’s film language (and its later manifestation as the visual language of the contemporary mass media) that much closer to dialectical language.

Following this I will consider Griffith’s development of cinematographic techniques and his communication/translation of certain Apollonian narrative structures (namely, montage of tempo and cross-cutting) from Dickens’ literature into his film language. While Griffith may belong to ‘history’, there is a continuity between the axiological elements inherent to the film language he developed and those belonging to the visual language of contemporary mainstream cinema. To illustrate this continuity I compare Griffith’s The Lonedale Operator (1911) to James Cameron’s Terminator II: Judgement Day (1991). As further evidence of such continuity, I then consider the relationship between naïve Homeric Apollonian art, the narrative technique of cross-cutting (inherited by Griffith from Dickens), and the phenomenon of Apollonian resolution in the final scenes of Howard Hawks’ The Big Sleep (1946) and David Fincher’s Fight Club (2000). Despite the fact that these examples work with different visual metaphors, they all not only operate along the lines of similar Apollonian narrative structures, but their respective visual metaphors all support a bourgeois axiology, patriarchy, capitalism and the morality of the Christian meta-narrative.156

By his own admission, Eisenstein’s cinematography was also heavily influenced by Dickens’ narrative fiction. However, in much the same way as Brecht subverted ‘traditional’ bourgeois theatre by parodying its structures in his plays, Eisenstein employs the same narrative structures as found in Dickens’ and Griffith’s texts but with very different visual metaphors and ‘resolutions’. The effect is both a parody and subversion of the axiology supporting and supported, both explicitly and unconsciously, by Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction.

156 According to Lyotard, a meta-narrative is an over-arching narrative of legitimation, or an apparatus of legitimation, that acts as a “homogenizing force...marshalling heterogeneity into ordered realms; silencing and excluding other discourses, other voices in the name of universal principles and general goals” (Storey 1998:174). The morality of the Christian meta-narrative is imbribated with both patriarchy and capitalism. Shlain points out that it is no exaggeration to assert that Paul invented the religion called Christianity. He goes on to propose that “the conversion of Jesus’ oral message into the written word was an important reason woman fared so poorly in Pauline Christianity...Paul’s Trinity consists of a Father, a Son, and...a Holy Ghost...[as opposed to a Mother, which] further neutralized the power of [women or] the Goddess” (Shlain 1998: 231-235). Moreover, from the 17th century on, Christianity declared idleness to be rebellion against God and maintained that “sloth...led the round of the vices and swept them on” (Foucault 1965:56). It thus lent support to the means-end economy of capitalism, and resulted in discrimination against the unemployed, the poverty-stricken and those incapable of working.
To illustrate this point I compare and contrast Dickens’ use of a variety of different forms of literary montage with Eisenstein’s amendments of these forms and his translation of them into cinematic montage. In Eisenstein’s use of montage, because it is derived from Dickens’ fiction, there exists a tension between the narrative structure and the visual content that marks the birth of a critical cinema which engages with the axiology of the bourgeois status quo (albeit through parody). However, Eisenstein does not stop here, but rather proceeds with this subversion through the use of an array of other cinematographic techniques and narrative elements that contrast with those that underpin mainstream American cinema. In the following section I discuss the absence of any definite hero/heroine in Eisenstein’s films, along with his use of alienating cinematographic techniques that demand a critical response from the audience.\(^{157}\) I also consider his use of montage of rhythm to break the continuity of the narrative in order to prevent (or at least disrupt) the ‘collective mesmerisation’ of the audience by the projected image.

However, because of the presence of the Marxist meta-narrative within Eisenstein’s films, which obliged all meaning to gravitate around this inherently restricted economy, his critical cinema never attained as radical an edge as the texts of Nietzsche and Heidegger. In postmodernity, however, because of a general incredulity towards all meta-narratives, such radical cinematic perspectives have become possible to a greater degree than before. This does not involve a denial of the Apollonian altogether, but rather a resurrection of a ‘dialogue’ (which was largely an Apollonian ‘monologue’ in modernity) in which the more general economy of postmodernism strains against the limits of the more restricted economy of modernism. Lyotard maintains that “Postmodernism…is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state, and that state is constant” (Lyotard 1984:79), and he hereby recognises the tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, which is tantamount to the tension between modernism and postmodernism.

By virtue of their stylistic features, Aronofsky’s films fall into the ‘category’ of postmodern cinema. They engage critically with the modernist visual language at work in mass-media and mainstream cinema by remembering the ‘abyss’ of possibility upon which it actually rests, but necessarily attempts to silence.

In the following chapter (Chapter Four) I will show how Aronofsky, following Eisentein, subverts the visual language of mainstream cinema in a manner that mirrors Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s subversion of dialectical language. Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s and Aronofsky’s respective ‘languages’ facilitate the construction of a more porous and protean subjectivity that contrasts with the

\(^{157}\) Not only was Eisenstein a contemporary of Brecht, but many of his film techniques bear an overwhelming similarity to techniques employed by Brecht. Ultimately, both endeavoured, through the use of these techniques, which facilitate critical engagement with traditional narrative forms, to promote the Marxist perspective.
construction of Cartesian egos through dialectical language (or through the visual language of contemporary visual mass-media). They also make conspicuous the possibility of a more open-ended, ‘poetic’ language that ‘dwells’ in close proximity to the abyss of (endless)possibility that is language.

2. The visual language of the mass media and dialectical language

The visual language of the mass-media and mainstream cinema should not be seen as a distant cousin to the dialectical language that Heidegger considered as facilitating the ‘Age of the World Picture’. The features found in both dialectical language and this visual ‘language’ are the metaphysical pursuit of the exactitude of ‘truth’ as representation, a privileging of the Cartesian ego, the propagation of the view of the world as the ‘standing reserve’, and the underlying disposition of re sen timent, none of which is independent from the other. Heidegger contrasts the modern pursuit of the exactitude of truth with Greek episteme... Greek science was never exact, precisely because, in keeping with its essence, it could not be exact and did not need to be exact. Hence it makes no sense whatever to suppose that modern science is more exact than that of antiquity...[Similarly n]o one would presume to maintain that Shakespeare’s poetry is more advanced than that of Aeschylus (Heidegger 1977:117).

Just as there existed fundamental differences between the epistemic perspectives of Shakespeare and Aeschylus, which translated themselves into different ideas of the self, so too there exist immense differences between modern science and Greek science. These differences are most evident in the disposition, inherent to modern science, that seeks certainty, complete unequivocal clarity and transparency in contrast to the appreciation, in Greek science, of the phenomenon of aletheia. Modern science is imbricated with dialectical language in much the same way as is the visual language that operates in contemporary mass media. Just as modern science posits the validity of indisputable scientific ‘facts’, the media represents certain images as the ‘truth’ and, like modern

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158 Aeschylus’ tragedies, insofar as they echo the Dionysian voice of the proto-drama, involve a more porous, open and fluid sense of self than the more integrated self reflected in Shakespeare’s tragedies, although Shakespeare’s tragic heroes/heroines are far from fully integrated.

159 Again, the development of quantum mechanics and Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle have severely problematized Heidegger’s criticism of science. Nevertheless, insofar as most of the natural sciences and social sciences are still pursued along the lines of a rigid subject-object dualism, and insofar as such a dualism holds sway at a popular level, Heidegger’s schema still has merit.
science, considers it possible to represent the world in its entirety.\textsuperscript{160} However, within both increasingly ‘restricted’ dynamics the corner-stone remains the ‘stable’ Cartesian ego, while behind both endeavours there necessarily exists the latent impetus to ‘forget’ the tides, tempests and motion of metaphoricity that has always plagued the ocean of language. The concept of the Cartesian ego is not only sustained through an arbitrary linguistic privileging of the ‘self’ inherent to dialectical language, but is also simultaneously (implicitly) supported, valorized and entrenched by prioritising the unified image in the visual language of the mass media through \textit{whatever} is communicated by the mass media, and by the very \textit{manner} in which the mass media communicates to its audience.\textsuperscript{161}

As evident in Plato’s allegory of the cave, in Book VII of the \textit{Republic}, dialectical language seeks to make clear that which was obscured by an uncritical attitude. Through this clarity of insight it purports to arrive at certainty of knowledge, which, in turn, entrenches and stabilizes the integrity of the self by extending that self’s control over the world. Similarly, the images of the mass media are presented as possessing complete veracity and validity, and are orientated around and validate the ego of the viewer insofar as they serve up images to that ego. The viewer/ego, armed with the ubiquitous remote control and the possibility of several hundred channels, almost literally, has the world (as a representation or picture) at his/her fingertips.\textsuperscript{162} As such, the world and all the events that take place within it become regarded as something to be exploited in the interests of ‘entertaining’ the viewer/ego, a perspective which thereby reduces the world, and humanity, to the level of the ‘standing reserve’,\textsuperscript{163} in much the same way as dialectical language.

As discussed in the \textit{Intermezzo}, dialectical language is underpinned by the \textit{spirit of revenge} against time. Only a stable, integral self is capable of such \textit{ressentiment}, which becomes manifest in the attempt to assert the ‘stable truth’ of unequivocal ‘facts’ within a sea of language. This impetus underpins metaphysical thinking where the Cartesian pursuit of a stable metaphysical \textit{Grund} has been perpetuated by “[t]he whole of modern metaphysics taken together…[which] maintains itself within the interpretation of what it is to be and of truth that was prepared by Descartes” (Heidegger 1977:127).\textsuperscript{164} At a popular level,\textsuperscript{165} the visual language at work in contemporary mass-media is

\textsuperscript{160} A good example of this is CNN’s global ‘system’ of news coverage. Evidence for the credence and validity granted to its images occurs daily in the manner in which the different economies of the world fluctuate as a result of negative or positive news coverage.
\textsuperscript{161} This will be discussed further in the following section with regard to Griffith’s endeavour to ‘entertain’ his audience.
\textsuperscript{162} A good example of the degree to which this type of relationship with the world has become the norm can be found in Taiwan. My own experience has confirmed that some inner city children in the metropolis of Taipei often recognise a cartoon lion, or a lion icon on a computer screen, as being more ‘real’ than a photograph of a real lion.
\textsuperscript{163} For a discussion of the ‘standing reserve’ see – \textit{Intermezzo}, Heidegger’s \textit{Age of the World Picture} : 4. Constitutive elements of dialectical language and Heidegger’s proposed alternatives.\textsuperscript{\textit{164}} Cf. notes 108 & 146.
\textsuperscript{165} Again, because the intricacies of Kant’s ‘transcendental turn’ remain inaccessible to the greater part of the population of western culture, the idea of the integrity of the Cartesian ego, receiving additional support from religious meta-narratives
informed and motivated by the same latent tendency of ressentiment, in that it contains the belief in the possibility of representing the world in its entirety, and the desire to represent events as they ‘really’ are/were. However, this pageant of mediated images masquerading as ‘truth’ or ‘fact’, much like the pursuit, in dialectical language, of a stable Grund, cannot ever realize its goal of metaphysical certainty as a result of the nature of language. Nevertheless, this attempt is continually translated and communicated into the various media frenzies which figuratively ‘rip apart’ historical socio-political events in an effort to get to the ‘real’ truth or the ‘heart of the issue’. Within the compass of a linguistic system dominated by a dialectical impetus, these media frenzies feed a global audience’s voracious appetite for images that promise such ‘truth’.

A good example of this metaphysical disposition is that of the CNN news coverage of the September 11th destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. It involved a myriad of different camera shots and angles of the event, replayed hundreds of times over a period of several weeks, in an effort to cater for audiences’ desire to know what ‘really’ happened. The scenes were followed up with a nearly-incomprehensible deluge of dialogue from a plethora of perspectives, all of which tried desperately to ‘get to grips’ with the event, and to ‘get to the bottom’ of things. Moreover, in the absence of such dramatic or sensationalist representations, fictional films are valorised insofar as they represent a period, an event, a war, etc., as it ‘really was’.

Heidegger’s argument, in The Age of the World Picture, was against western culture’s inherited dialectical language (which he describes in terms of representation) that seeks to isolate, appropriate, and thereby ‘explain’ the world as an object or ‘picture’, as “something…in place before oneself…not…represented to us, in general, but…in all that belongs to it and all that stands together in it – as a system.” (Heidegger 1977:129). However, there is little or no difference between this and political ideologies, continues to exercise influence at a popular level, and underpins the perpetuation and propagation of dialectical language.

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166 “In a [post-structural] Lacanian view of language a signifier always signifies another signifier; no word is free from metaphoricity (a metaphor is one signifier in the place of another). Lacan talks of glissement (slippage, slide) along the signifying chain, from signifier to signifier. Since any signifier can receive signification retrospectively, after the fact, no signification is ever closed, ever satisfied” (Sarup 1988:13). As such, there is no possibility of arriving at any final, eternally stable ‘truth’ or ‘fact’.

167 This absence is orchestrated by executive decisions on the part of multi-national corporations that deem only certain representations as significant, while excluding most of the ‘horribly dramatic’ events occurring daily in the Third World. Alternatively, these events are represented globally in the interest of manipulating the stock market, a process that ‘proves’ the absolute credence and validity granted to the mediated image. However, in doing so, the mass media thereby reduces the events, and the people who suffer through them, to the level of the ‘standing reserve’ within a means-end economy.

168 For example, Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan (1998) was not only vaunted as the most ‘realistic’ war film to date, but also earned Spielberg a medal from the United States Army for the degree to which his graphic re-presentation of the D-Day landings approximated reality and thereby ‘reconnected’ the American people with the U.S. military forces and made them aware of their daily sacrifices in the front lines. Spielberg received the “Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service...Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen of the Pentagon on Aug. 11, 1999...presented Spielberg with the award in recognition of the impact his movie ‘Saving Private Ryan’ has had on the American people” (http://www.defenselink.mil/photos/Aug1999/990811-D-29875-042.html).
dialectical disposition towards the concepts of ‘world’ and ‘truth’, and the dominant disposition that prevails within the visual language of contemporary mass-media. Hence, although Heidegger states quite explicitly that the “world picture…does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture” (Heidegger 1977:129), it is precisely the capacity of contemporary visual mass-media to engender in an audience the conception of the world as an image through represented images,\textsuperscript{169} that makes dialectical language and the visual language at work in the mass media virtually synonymous. The represented image constitutes the world not simply as a picture, but as something that can be represented and explained entirely, and be thoroughly articulated in terms of a system. The degree to which we grant credence to the validity of such ‘definitive’ representations, in turn, is relative to the degree to which the epistemic perspective of dialectical language, against which Heidegger and Nietzsche have argued, has triumphed.\textsuperscript{170}

3. Baudrillard, Adorno and ‘intolerable’ pessimism in the contemporary era

According to Baudrillard, the triumph of visual language is complete. In The Transparency of Evil, he sums up the hegemonic status of the media in the contemporary age when he states that, “One day the image of a person sitting watching a television screen…will be seen as the perfect epitome of the anthropological reality of the twentieth century” (Baudrillard 1993:13). According to Baudrillard, contemporary culture is no longer a ‘discursive’ culture but rather a ‘visual’ culture, i.e. the greater population no longer discusses or argues, but rather simply watches. Susan Faludi lends support to this when she states that contemporary “Ornamental culture has proved the ultimate expression of the American Century, sweeping away institutions in which men felt some sense of belonging and replacing them with visual spectacles that they can only watch and that benefit global commercial forces they cannot fathom” (Faludi 1999:35). Similarly, Baudrillard argues that, in the contemporary age, there is little or no life outside of the mediated image, and that engagement with the hyper-realism of mediated reality has reached such critical proportions that, in many instances, engagement with the world can only take the form of a parody of something witnessed through the media.\textsuperscript{171} Baudrillard gives a good illustration of this point that involves certain people in England who, inspired by advertisements for sun beds that featured images of suntanned people (supposedly on holiday), gathered “every weekend…in dreary, drizzly York and Birmingham…and act[ed] not as if they were

\textsuperscript{169} Cf. note 160.

\textsuperscript{170} By implication, the tension that exists between a Nietzschean or Heideggerian voice and dialectical language, amounts to a tension between the critical voice of Aronofsky’s film language and the visual language of the mass-media. Aronofsky’s subversive film language will be discussed at the end of this chapter and in detail in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{171} An example might be when a trip to the beach is inspired less by the desire to see the sea, and more by a compulsion to imitate characters from films or T.V. who appeared in scenes that were shot on the beach.
on holiday but as if they were in an advertisement for holidays” (quoted in Storey 1998:179). The reason for the impossibility of operating outside of the paradigm of mediated reality, in certain societies, is the result of the hegemony of the visual language, supported by dialectical language, which has left no space for any different or critical voice. For example, “In America cinema is true because it is the whole of space, the whole way of life that are cinematic. The break between the two, the abstraction…does not exist: Life is cinema” (Baudrillard 1988:101) and the hyper-real. Baudrillard gives the following examples to illustrate to what degree this is the case.

I saw an American tourist on television enthusing about the beauty of the English Lake District. Searching for suitable words of praise, he said, ‘It’s just like Disneyland’…. [Again,] I recently visited an Italian restaurant in…Northumberland, in which a painting of Marlon Brando as the ‘Godfather’ is exhibited as a mark of the restaurant’s genuine Italianicity” (quoted in Storey 1998:179).

What the above intimates is the collapse of the ‘real’ into the ‘hyper-real’, the creation of the situation in the contemporary age in which hyperrealism predominates as the characteristic mode of experiencing the world.¹⁷² In this situation the Cartesian subject-object duality continues unabated, except for a modification involving the object, whereby ‘objects’ represented through the media have usurped the primacy of objects of immediate empirical experience. Not only is the Lake District reduced, conceptually speaking, to yet another simulacrum, a move which dissolves its uniqueness and idiosyncratic beauty, but the rich historical, cultural, aesthetic and philosophical legacy of Italy is dissolved and reduced to a representation of a very small part of Italian culture, namely the Mafia, involving a two-dimensional sketch or parody. Similarly, Marlon Brando’s character in Coppola’s The Godfather (1972), his screen persona, is seen to usurp the primacy of Marlon Brando the individual, born in 1924, in Omaha, Nebraska, a descendant of Irish immigrants.

Faced with Baudrillard’s pessimistic outlook, it would be timely to consider Adorno’s criticism of film to understand the need and obligation, in the contemporary era, to find a form of critical cinema. Adorno does not consider cinema as being capable of promoting critical reflection. For Adorno (as mentioned earlier), “film presents…mimetic impulses which prior to all content and meaning, incite viewers and listeners to fall into step as if in a parade” (Adorno 1981/82:203). That is, cinema operates entirely as a form of ideological apparatus in that, unlike reading or discussion, viewing projected images is an entirely passive activity that collectively ‘mesmerises’ its audience. The audience or viewer, alone in the darkness, is not only isolated and discouraged from engaging in

¹⁷² That is, in an age of hyper-reality, there is (little or) no life outside of the mediated image because mediated reality is considered more real than reality.
Adorno emphasises the passive role of the spectator in his analysis of the power of cinema and focuses on how cinema constructs an ideological subject by eroding the viewers’ critical faculties. I agree with Adorno up to a point, but argue that there is room for a critical cinema. I maintain that the role of the narrative is as important as the image/spectacle in relation to the construction of subjectivity. That is, I grant the ideological and affective power of the image, but insist on the equivalent power of *logos* to construct a subject. I assert that film works equally at the paradigmatic level (what belongs with what) and the syntagmatic level (what follows what), and that both image and narrative structure can construct ideological subjects, but that they can also be used to subvert these. This is primarily because of the possibility of a tension between (and within) narrative structure and image, an Apollonian-Dionysian tension within film that can facilitate the subversion of film as an ideological apparatus.

Dana Polan maintains that the phenomenon of the bare ‘spectacle’ of the projected image seduces an audience, and that the “very fact of showing (regardless of what is shown) becomes a spectacle (and speculatively seductive) in the way it blocks, ignores, shuts out, other forms of cognition” (Polan 1986:63). In other words, viewing the spectacle of film, unlike engaging with a written text, does not encourage critical reflection but rather lulls audiences’ critical faculties to sleep, reducing the possibility of critical resistance to what is shown. Moreover, according to both Adorno and Polan, cinema is, in principle, governed by the orders of the cultural discourses that dominate the context of their production and consumption, because they are made as commodities to appeal to a mass-market. In order to remain appealing to a mass market (i.e. to be ‘marketable’), a film is required to be entertaining rather than thought-provoking, which means that it cannot stray too far from the axiological ‘comfort zone’ of the masses (i.e. the conceptual framework of the average person). Finally, repetition of the values of the social status quo from film to film makes them seem ‘natural’, in much the same way as, according to Nietzsche, dialectical language considers its ‘facts’ as natural, because it has forgotten their metaphoricity. All of this, Adorno argued, converged to ensure that the very “cinematic apparatus [was]…infused [with]…the capitalist ideology which no film can escape” (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Marxist_film_theory). The very fact of showing them therefore facilitates the increasing hegemony of the social or political status quo.

To this Adorno adds the related concern that, “among its functions, film provides models for collective behaviour” (Adorno 1981/82:203). In other words, film viewing, for Adorno, contributes to

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173 That is, this tension operates within both narrative and image, depending on the structural dynamics between and within them.
what he calls ‘reification’, by which the *particularity* of the individual, integral, autonomous subject is dissolved and, while the integral subject itself is not dissolved, it does become interchangeable with all other subjects similarly constructed through reification.

Reification reflects the progressive homogenisation of ‘truth’; its narrowing into universal, abstract concepts imposed from above by a general meta-subjectivity, to which particular, empirical subjects are constrained to submit, effectively denuding humanity of its capacity for the kind of critical reflection necessary for effective social change (Hurst 1998:33)

In short, the way in which cinema diminishes an audience’s critical faculties makes the audience that much more receptive to the ideological perspectives represented in the narrative, not exclusively at the level of overt content/image(s), but also, importantly, at the more covert level of the film’s narrative structure.

However, Adorno’s perspective concerning the impossibility of critical cinema takes on ominous tones when considered in the light of Baudrillard’s social-theoretical observations. As mentioned earlier, Baudrillard maintains that contemporary culture is no longer an argumentative ‘discursive’ culture but rather a culture that simply ‘watches’ in a passive, uncritical fashion. However, if Baudrillard is right then mediated reality is not a part of contemporary culture but rather the whole of contemporary culture. Yet if this is so then one has no option but to adopt Adorno’s pessimism with regard to the impossibility of critical cinema, which would result in having to acquiesce to the intolerable situation of there being no longer any possible means to resist hegemonic axiological systems. That is, if the contemporary era is no longer an argumentative ‘discursive’ culture but rather a viewing culture, and if cinema does not contain the possibility of any critical form, then there remains no room for any critical engagement with the powers that be. However, as critical cinema *is* possible, as I shall argue, the future does not appear so bleak.

4. The possibility of a critical cinema

The above social-theoretical observations and criticism of film certainly have merit, for film, because of its mass audience, has enormous power not only to entrench the status quo through diminishing the audience’s capacity for critical resistance, but also to perpetuate and propagate the entire axiology of the status quo, through actively supporting and fostering certain ideologies over
others, as is evident in Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915).\(^{174}\) However, in spite of Adorno’s criticism of cinema, and Baudrillard’s pessimism, I maintain that critical cinema, using the same covert narrative structures as mainstream cinema in combination with alternative images/content, can subvert mainstream cinema’s support of such an axiological hegemony along with its corresponding construction of ideological subjects.

This is because the lack of concord between narrative structure and image makes the covert narrative structures conspicuous, and thereby diminishes their capacity to dupe an audience into believing in and adopting the constitutive features of such a hegemony as normal. Eisenstein’s critical cinema engaged in this way with the narrative structures within mainstream cinema that perpetuated and propagated the validity and legitimacy of capitalist class structures, patriarchy and the morality of the Christian meta-narrative.\(^{175}\) However, admittedly, he did so in the interests of supporting another set of Apollonian structures, namely those informed by the Marxist meta-narrative. (It is only later, in something like Aronofsky’s postmodern critical cinema, that a more Nietzschean or Heideggerian subversion of mainstream cinema becomes possible. This will be discussed in further detail at the end of the chapter).

In order to understand how the subversion of mainstream cinema by critical cinema takes place, it is necessary to move away from the general philosophical discussions of the previous two chapters (and the above sections), and to delve into the actual or specific features of visual language, in order to examine exactly how it shapes subjectivity along certain lines. This necessitates going back to the origins of visual language in the films of D.W. Griffith, along with a consideration of the ways in which the fiction of Charles Dickens influenced Griffith’s film texts.

It is imperative to consider Dickens’ ideological influence on Griffith since this resulted in a continuation and perpetuation of an overt Apollonian disposition in Griffith’s film language. This, in turn, communicated itself into the visual language at work in mass media and mainstream cinema that, as discussed above, mirrors dialectical language and has attained hegemonic status in the contemporary era. An investigation of the origins of this visual language in the work of Griffith (and Dickens) is necessary in order to establish a clearer picture of the constitution of this language. This, in turn, will facilitate an exploration of the nature of critical cinema that can subvert the axiological hegemony maintained through visual language.

\(^{174}\) Despite its overt racist content, Woodrow Wilson gave his stamp of approval to the film and maintained that it was not only historically accurate but also “‘history writ with lightning’. Like Woodrow Wilson, many whites felt it a truthful and accurate portrayal of racial politics, so much so that they flocked to join the rejuvenated Klu Klux Klan” (http://www.library.csicuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/birth.html).

\(^{175}\) Cf. note 156.
i. The influence of Dickens’ fiction on the film language of D.W. Griffith.

Griffith was to the American public, early in the 20th century, what Dickens had been to the British public in the 19th century, namely a source of gripping entertainment and, more importantly, a constant source of covert validation and legitimation of the axiology of the status quo. However, it is important to see this axiology less as the product of one individual’s volition, and more as the continuation of the move towards an increasingly restricted economy, evident in literature from Homer to modernity. Dickens was a literary heir to, and successor of, this legacy, evident in the Apollonian resolutions in his narrative fiction and the overall Apollonian form of his literature. Although, at the level of philosophy, Kant’s ‘transcendental turn’ had occurred during the 18th century, the huge demand of the 19th century public for Dickens’ fiction is evidence of the continued desire (at a popular level) to see and hear echoes of a stable (if illusory) Apollonian perspective, forever denied western culture (in philosophical terms) from Kant onwards. Dickens’ literature, like its literary predecessors from Homer onwards, reflected and reinforced the emergence of an increasingly integral Apollonian (sense of self, and in the modern era,) subjectivity, despite the subversive counter-trend that posited a ‘split-subject’, initiated by Kant and recognised philosophically in the subversive ‘voices’ of figures like Nietzsche and Heidegger. This Apollonian subjectivity is mirrored as much in the covert support for the axiology of the status quo found in Dickens’ novels (i.e. the formal aspects of his novels rely on a narrative structure that leads to resolution or ‘closure’ of some kind), as in the overt content of his fiction involving the lives and sentiments of his main characters. For example, in David Copperfield, “David’s way of life is…Apollonian, walking a straight way to success and happiness” (http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/dickens/archive/_general/g-saijo.html), while in Our Mutual Friend, the Apollonian impulse manifests in John Harmon’s predominant disposition. The central character of John Harmon discovers that his inheritance is conditional upon his marrying someone whom he has never met, namely Bella Wilfer. In order to win her affections, John is obliged to conceal his real identity from her and often “assumes an Apollonian tone” (http://huwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/OMF/mackay.html) in doing so.

176 The Apollonian form of Dickens’ work becomes blatantly obvious when compared to the writings of, for example, James Joyce, whose texts are shot through with the subversive ‘Dionysian’ unconscious promptings and everyday meanderings of his characters’ thoughts. In contrast to this, “In his biography of Dickens[,] Forster…shows with what mercilessness Dickens sometimes ‘cut’ writing…This…emphasizes that sharp [Apollonian] clarity of representation towards which Dickens strove…to say what he considered necessary” (Eisenstein 1949:212).

177 Cf. note 146. Later, this ‘split-subject’ was again recognised in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.

178 There is no recognition of the ‘split-subject’ in the character of John Harmon as he is completely aware of the nature of both sides of his identity, and in complete ‘control’ of both of them. In other words, while there might be a duality to his character, the two parts form an integral whole without the slightest recognition of the presence of any dark ‘abyss’ of...
In turn, this impetus towards a more restricted economy continued and communicated itself into mainstream film language through the work of Griffith, primarily because Griffith’s narrative technique was greatly influenced by Dickens’ narrative style. Griffith’s films repeat the Apollonian motifs that are so much part of Dickens’ novels: the same final and inevitable success of the hero and heroine; the return of order (for all intents and purposes, a final or conclusive return) after chaos; and the re-establishment of the traditional power structures and values, already entrenched as hegemonic bourgeois culture. Like Dickens, Griffith’s primary aim was to produce texts that entertained the public. Playing to a bourgeois gallery, his films provided entertainment by reflecting rather than challenging the ‘provincial’ language of the bourgeoisie, which was imbricated with capitalism and patriarchal power structures, and which operated against the backdrop of a ubiquitous belief in the validity of the Christian meta-narrative and its sense of morality.\(^{179}\)

Eisenstein maintains that Dickens’ and Griffith’s “tender-hearted…morals go no higher than a level of Christian accusation of human injustice and nowhere…is there sounded a protest against social injustice” (Eisenstein 1949:234). This lack of critique of the entrenched hierarchical social order in the work of both Griffith and Dickens relates to their Platonic inheritance.

As discussed earlier, in the middle to late Platonic Dialogues there occurs a degree of conceptual sedimentation around certain ideas and, in the Republic, it is clear that Plato has relinquished the open-endedness of the earlier Socratic enquiry in favour of his own very specific ideas, which he communicates, through the figure of Socrates, to his interlocutors. The Apollonian conceptual architecture of the class structure in Plato’s Republic is, on Plato’s account, arrived at through reason, which implies that it is somehow ‘natural’ or necessary, and therefore the best social structure within which to accommodate and nurture a community of ‘just souls’.

According to Plato, the right to command belongs to some by virtue of their composition, because God has composed them of “gold…[while] others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries; [and] others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron” (Plato 1952:340). Each soul has a specific nature (gold, silver, brass or iron) and perfect justice means that each must be nurtured, educated, ordered, and set to work according to its specific nature. An ordered social hierarchy, in which inherently unequal souls are sorted according to quality and like placed with like, is consonant with perfect justice.\(^{180}\)

\(^{179}\) Eisenstein 1949:234

\(^{180}\) Later in Book IV of the Republic, Plato goes so far as to assert that “justice [is]…doing one’s own business, and not being a busybody” (Plato 1952: 349). This statement contains the imperative to accept one’s lot and to do one’s duty without questioning the legitimacy of, or engaging critically with, the social hierarchy.
Platonic society and the just soul are therefore linked in the sense that the just soul is the one that knows and accepts its place in the hierarchically ordered community. Plato, in short, posits an isomorphism between the just soul and the just community. Dickens’ 19th century literature, and Griffith’s 20th century films, reflect an analogous isomorphic and co-constitutive relationship between the Cartesian ego of the reader/viewer and its social matrix, in this case reflecting class and power structures ordered by the requirements of capitalism and patriarchy, which are supported and legitimated by the predominant religious meta-narrative.

Because of this isomorphism, a critical enquiry into the validity of the class-structures of Plato’s Republic would simultaneously have disturbed, challenged and disrupted the integrity and stability of the ‘just’ soul. Similarly, any rigorous social criticism in the 19th and early 20th century would not only, in principle (if not in effect), have subverted the social or class structures dominant at the birth of film language, but would also have subverted the very subjectivity informed by those structures. This is important in that the lack of critical engagement with the dominant discourses of class and power, in the work of both Dickens and Griffith, indicates a popular ‘mesmerisation’ by the status quo in which the validity and ‘righteousness’ of existing social/class structures was taken for granted.

This lack of desire for change (or resistance to change), in turn, indicates the presence of an Apollonian tendency that seeks to maintain the integrity and stability of the sense of self through the continued support of existing social structures. Thus, despite the occasional echo of a criticism of ‘human injustice’, the result of the presence of this Apollonian impetus is that the axiology of the 19th and early 20th century bourgeois status quo in western culture remains as unchallenged in Dickens’ literature as it is in Griffith’s film language. However, as Griffith was the ‘father’ of film language, this Apollonian tendency was transferred intact (i.e. without critique), via cinematographic techniques developed by Griffith, into the later visual language of contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema.

ii. Griffith’s cinematographic techniques and development of narrative in film

Although Edison made a significant contribution towards film projection, the birth of cinema, as cultural artefact, is more properly traced to the films of D.W. Griffith. His substantial contribution

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181 Such a just soul could only be ‘just’ in relation to the privileging of reason, through which, and in terms of which, the class structures of the Republic where arrived at. Any subversion of the validity of the class structures would impact negatively on the authority of reason, and this in turn would impact negatively on the just soul as it owed its genesis to such reason.

182 While this might be true at a popular level, it must be remembered that Marx and Engels delivered a formidable criticism of the social injustices of capitalism.
towards the development of cinematographic techniques and narrative structure in film formed the starting point of the genesis of the visual language that came to dominate contemporary mass media and mainstream cinema. Griffith stands out from the milieu of early directors such as the Lumière brothers, Edison, George Méliès, etc., not only because of his revolutionary use of camera angles and his introduction of a new acting style but, more importantly, because of his editing techniques and the development of new forms of transition between scenes. Griffith, to a large extent, fathered and developed all the above-mentioned techniques so that by “1915...[he] had perfected what [was]...deemed a ‘universal’ language of film” (Jordaan 1999:13).

Prior to Griffith’s films, the camera had remained stationary for the duration of the scene and simply recorded the event or acting from much the same position as that of a stationary spectator at a stage-play. Griffith was the first to move the camera in order to achieve the close-up and long-shot, along with devising new, more subtle and ‘realistic’ acting styles to compensate for the nearness of the camera focus, a proximity which made the old flamboyant or overly-dramatic stage-acting style redundant. Furthermore, before Griffith, only crude use was made of straight cuts to link scenes together in an attempt to string together a basic narrative, for example in Edison’s The Gay Shoe Clerk (1903).183 “Griffith use[d]...intricate editing and film techniques such as [the combination of] alternating close-ups and long shots from varying camera angles” (http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USA_griffith.htm), and developed the all-important ‘fade to black’ and ‘iris shot’ transitions between scenes. He also fathered the focus on specific objects for symbolic purposes “or to serve as visual icons for emotional states” (Jordaan 1999:15).

Yet it is interesting to note how almost all of Griffith’s cinematographic techniques mirrored features of Dickens’ narrative style. For example, Dickens opens the Cricket on the Hearth with “The kettle began it!” (Dickens 1950:1), and Eisenstein maintains that the image that springs to mind as a result of this statement is comparable to the image produced by the close-up as developed by Griffith, where such a close-up or focus on an object contains symbolic value that contributes to the narrative. Eisenstein even finds a ‘dissolve’ in Dickens where, in the Third Book, Chapter Fifteen, of A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens describes “Six tumbrels [which] carry the day’s wine to La Guillotine” (Dickens

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183 Edison’s film runs for only a few minutes and consists of a single scene made up of several shots joined together by straight cuts. In the narrative thus produced, two ladies (men dressed as women) approach a shoe clerk to buy a pair of shoes. During the process of purchase the chaperone falls asleep and the shoe clerk steals a kiss from the younger ‘lady’. However, when the chaperone wakes up and sees them, she assaults and reprimands the shoe clerk. The acting style is very much exaggerated and highly reminiscent of stage-acting. Not only did Griffith develop a new acting style, but he also developed and improved on the clumsy editing and camera techniques of his predecessors. Most importantly, he developed and extended the narrative of his films to epic proportions, and established all of this as the dominant film language of mainstream cinema from The Birth of a Nation(1915) onwards.
1970:399) and then adds later, “Change these back again to what they were…and they shall be seen to be the carriages of absolute monarchs, the equipages of feudal nobles” (Dickens 1970:399).

However, space and the scope of this dissertation do not allow for a detailed investigation of the Apollonian nature of all of the above mentioned cinematographic techniques. Instead, I will focus on two key narrative structures, namely montage of tempo and cross-cutting. I do so not only because both were taken from Dickens’ literature by Griffith and communicated into cinematographic techniques, but also because an investigation of the role they play in both Griffith’s and Dickens’ fiction reveals, with clarity, the underlying presence of an Apollonian disposition. Both montage of tempo and cross-cutting not only conspire with, and add emphasis to, the overt ideological content of Griffith’s films, but they also carry the trace of the Apollonian move towards a restricted economy (inherited from Homer and Plato via Dickens’ texts) that sacrifices a critical edge in favour of order and resolution.

### iii. Montage of tempo

Montage of tempo involves increasingly rapid inter-cutting between different shots within a specific scene made up of the different shots. The represented events within the respective shots are communicated as happening in different places simultaneously and, as they ‘approach’ each other in time and space, the inter-cutting between them becomes increasingly rapid in order to heighten tension. In the final scene there usually occurs a meeting of the respective represented events within the same frame.

A good example of montage of tempo is found in Griffith’s famous one–reel film The Lonedale Operator (1911), long “celebrated for its flamboyant and advanced editing...[,] which intercuts [between] three primary spaces – the telegraph office interior, the criminals outside, and the rescue train – with an escalating rhythm” (Simmon 2000:37). As the rescue train with the boyfriend of the Lonedale operator’s daughter approaches the station, so the criminals succeed further in their attempts to break into the station, while the Lonedale operator’s daughter exhibits increasing distress in the telegraph office interior. The inter-cutting between these scenes increases in speed until finally the criminals break into the office of the helpless girl, ahead of the arrival of the train. However, she outsmarts them by threatening them with a spanner disguised as a gun and thereby buys herself a few

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184 I use montage of tempo and accelerated montage interchangeably.

185 One should add, on a cautionary (or cautiously optimistic) note, however, that it is doubtful whether a restricted economy in social, political or even economic terms could ever become ‘total’ to such an extent that no sign of excess or waste (the marks of a general economy) could or would be detectable, as I have argued regarding Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality. This dissertation, for example, would be unthinkable under such ‘totalised’ conditions, as would be the work of someone like Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and others. Neither would a critical cinema be possible.
precious moments until her boyfriend arrives on the train and rescues her. At this point the two vagabonds doff their caps, admit the justice of their own arrest and bow before the class superiority of the operator’s daughter.

The montage of tempo is Apollonian in that it contains a distinctive structure and order, and the above sequence illustrates all three of the quintessential phases. Firstly, there is a focus on the character of the hero and/or heroine, which facilitates the audience’s identification with them. Secondly, there occurs some threat to either the heroine and/or hero, and the impending danger and their struggle to neutralize this threat creates tension. Finally, there occurs a resolution involving the neutralization of the threat. All of this is represented to the audience in a way that situates them in the position of an ‘ideal’ (Apollonian) spectator, with the tension created being predicated upon their overview of the events from a vantage point denied to the characters involved in the represented events. The point of a montage of tempo is to create ‘entertaining tension’ in order to draw the audience into the narrative of the film. This tension, in turn, is predicated on the presence of an Apollonian need to see a form of ‘amiable’, and apparently conclusive, resolution in relation to the montage, while it simultaneously perpetuates and propagates this need through ‘rewarding’ the audience with just such a resolution after an initial period of uncertainty.

However, this ‘entertaining tension’ also contains the fostering of a non-critical perspective. The dulling of critical faculties in relation to the projected image is intricately involved with both the overt represented content and the covert narrative structure by means of which it is represented. This is because the narrative structure of the sequential representation is integral to the creation of excitement and tension that further obfuscates any critical appraisal of the represented content.

In terms of cinema, the montage of tempo is predicated on a capacity for advanced editing that can facilitate smooth and rapid transitions between scenes. This establishes the montage of tempo as a ‘micro-unit’ of the overall narrative, during which the rest of the narrative is easily temporarily forgotten in deferment to the desire to see resolution in relation to this ‘micro-unit’. By design, the montage of tempo encourages even greater spectator/viewer involvement with the represented images than the other more staid images of the supporting narrative. Because it is difficult for a spectator to remain detached when watching a montage of tempo, the result of its use in The Lonedale Operator (1911) not only involves a tension that keeps the audience riveted to their seats, followed by the reward of an amiable resolution, but also involves the covert legitimation, through the resolution, of the narrative.

186 The difference between this Apollonian dynamic and the contrasting Dionysian dynamic of alternating dissolution and re-constitution must be kept in mind throughout the present discussion.

187 Admittedly, the narrative of The Lonedale Operator (1911) only consists of a single montage of tempo, whereas in The Birth of a Nation (1915) montage of tempo is employed on several occasions and thereby forms micro-units of the narrative.
the validity of the power structures of the status quo. This occurs because those power structures form the unquestioned ‘inconspicuous’ backdrop against which the events play out.

To be specific, in the film the hero and heroine vanquish the vagabonds, defined as much by their poverty as by their dark attire as the villains, and re-establish the class structure of the social hierarchy as it existed prior to the villains’ attempts to steal the Lonedale Company’s money. In doing so the hero and heroine also act in support of the company and entrench its authority and power, which rests on the possession of, and right to, capital. Furthermore, that the entire episode is, in a sense, the result of the absence of a strong male figure, namely the Lonedale Operator, who absents himself from work for the day through illness and is replaced by his daughter, constitutes an indictment of a woman’s capacity to do a man’s job. Yet all of this remains ‘hidden’ by the tension of the covert narrative structure of the montage of tempo that draws on audiences’ Apollonian need for an amiable resolution, while suppressing any critical engagement with the overt content of the images.

Furthermore, this contributes to the Apollonian nature of audiences’ subjectivity in that such a narrative ‘progression’ becomes considered as normal and representative of the ‘pattern’ of life and the world. I.e. Apollonian resolution involving the return of order after chaos, the re-establishment of traditional power structures and the inevitable success of ‘righteousness’ come to constitute a world view and become something that is ‘expected’ by the audience, not only in terms of mediated reality but in terms of their ‘immediate’ reality.188 It is for this reason that, as mentioned earlier, Baudrillard claims that in postmodern America “cinema is true because it is the whole of space, the whole way of life that are cinematic. The break between the two, the abstraction…does not exist: Life is cinema” (Baudrillard 1988:101)

iv. Cross-cutting

Just as the presence of an Apollonian impetus is reflected in the resolution of the montage of tempo, in the above mentioned example of the Lonedale Operator (1911), so too is its presence evident in the narrative strategy of cross-cutting. It would be timely at this point to identify the distinctive features of cross-cutting to avoid confusing it with the montage of tempo. Cross-cutting involves cutting between different scenes each of which contains a substantial part of the content/dialogue of the narrative. At first they may not seem to be related but, as the narrative unfolds, an underlying motif or theme reveals them as linked together and constitutive of a single narrative.

188 Aronofsky plays with this theme in Requiem for a Dream (2001) where the central characters, whose lives are steadily crumbling around them, continually repeat the sentiment that ‘everything will be okay in the end’. However, the narrative does not end on any such positive note but rather subverts the idea that narratives, and life in general, end in amiable Apollonian resolution.
The whole principle of cross-cutting is entirely Apollonian in that full appreciation of this narrative technique can only occur upon completion of the narrative when, in retrospect, the content and dialogue of the various sections are seen to fit together in a perfect whole (not unlike pieces of a puzzle when they are finally placed together in the correct order). Popular affection for literature or film underpinned by this Apollonian impetus, denotes the prevalence of a belief in the validity and integrity of a stable sense of self, in that such a self relishes an aesthetic experience that confirms coherence and wholeness because it sees in it a reflection of its own illusory stability and integrity. Similarly, in such art, the stability and integrity of the social and class structures, through which such an integral self is constituted, are also reflected and validated.

The Apollonian influence of Dickens’ fiction made its presence felt in Griffith’s work where he employed advanced cross-cutting within the narratives of his films, and justified his use of this technique with reference to Dickens, saying “Doesn’t Dickens’s write that way?” (Eisenstein 1949:201). Although Griffith’s film *Intolerance* (1916) failed with the public because of his inclusion of this literary technique within its narrative, this represents less a popular rejection of such a narrative strategy and more a lack of film literacy amongst early film audiences. The audience of the time, while very familiar with such cross-cutting at the level of literature, experienced great difficulty in interpreting a visually represented narrative that employed the same technique. However, this was soon remedied to the extent that the visual language at work in contemporary mass media relies *heavily* on cross-cutting. Thus, not only was Griffith’s film prophetic in its vision and scope, in that it constituted a forerunner of much later films whose success resulted from their employment of the same type of narrative structure, but it also promoted the orientation of the visual language of contemporary mass media around a predominantly Apollonian disposition.

v. The axiological continuity from Dickens, through Griffith, to contemporary mainstream cinema

As discussed earlier, the visual language at work in mass-media and mainstream cinema is an inherently Apollonian language that, insofar as it contributes to the constitution of subjectivity, including a sense of self, both nurtures and facilitates a need for Apollonian ‘resolution’ in a narrative.

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189 “Griffith cross-cut from exposition of one story to the exposition of another story…from climax to climax…Without fanfare or weighty intellectual justification, Griffith was making an unparalleled experiment in film form…However…[he] lacked the aesthetic and intellectual complexity to pull it off, and the experiment failed miserably” (http://alumni.imsa.edu/~mitch/titles/intolerance.html).

190 For example, the narrative structure of Robert Altman’s hugely successful *Shortcuts* (1993) operates along similar lines to Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) involving cross-cutting between a myriad of scenes and characters who are all in some way connected.
At the overt level of content, as discussed above, this manifests in narratives that, rather than questioning the axiology of the status quo, perpetuate and reinforce inherited values and norms in an effort to maintain the integrity of Apollonian social hierarchies that, in turn, lend a sense of integrity and stability to the sense of self. At a covert level, this involves the presence of Apollonian narrative structures (i.e. montage of tempo) that often conspire with the overt ideological content of the narrative, and contain within themselves techniques which serve Apollonian order and form, involving some final closure or resolution (e.g. cross-cutting).

What Eisenstein points out about Griffith’s films in *Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today* in *Film Form*, is also applicable to contemporary mainstream Hollywood productions. He states that “[I]n order to understand Griffith…[o]ne is obliged to comprehend this second side of America…[involving a culture at once] traditional…patriarchal…[and] provincial. And then you will be…less astonished by this link between Griffith and Dickens” (Eisenstein 1949:98).

Just as Griffith’s audience was not particularly critical of the parentage of his films in the Victorian novel, so too contemporary audiences are less inclined to observe the links between axiological elements in contemporary films and those that lurk within Griffith’s early film texts. The same themes which formed an integral part of Dickens’ novels, namely the final and apparently inevitable success of the hero and heroine, the return of order after chaos and the re-establishment of old power structures, are as much alive in contemporary mainstream cinema as they were in Griffith’s ‘one-reelers’.

In James Cameron’s *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991), the narrative echoes the same traditional and patriarchal elements found in *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) and the standard Western, from the Terminator’s (Arnold Schwarzenegger) rescuing of Sarah Conner (Linda Hamilton) and her son John (Edward Furlong) through his victory over the T-1000 (Robert Patrick), to his superior ‘resoluteness’, objectivity and insight which see him finally tower, not just physically but also ‘existentially’, over the character of Sarah. This is not to say that the character of Sarah Conner is, underneath it all, a carbon copy of the Lonedale Operator’s daughter, as a whole array of new ‘power dynamics’ and social perspectives are opened up through her character that differ from those opened up by the character of the heroine in Griffith’s 1911 film. Yet, nevertheless, while this ambiguity involving her character is allowed its moment, the old traditional power structures of patriarchy are soon re-established.

For example, in the *Lonedale Operator* (1911), the heroine succeeds in holding the villains at bay with a ‘fake’ gun, outsmarting them and thereby *temporarily* saving herself and the money of the company until such a time as her boyfriend arrives with the ‘real’ gun and consolidates her victory. Similarly, in *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991), while Linda Hamilton’s character is, through her
martial skills and physique, a match for any ‘action-hero’, the narrative resolves itself along similar lines to *The Lonedale Operator* (1911). In the final scenes when Sarah battles the T-1000 (Robert Patrick) with a 12-gauge shotgun, her best efforts succeed only in blasting it to the edge of the furnace, at which point she runs out of ammunition. She thus gains only a *temporary* reprieve for her son John (Edward Furlong) as the T-1000 soon recovers from her assault and prepares to counter-attack. Yet, before it can begin, the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) comes to the rescue with a 40mm grenade launcher (i.e. a ‘bigger’ gun) and blasts the T-1000 *into* the furnace, destroying it.¹⁹¹

The fact that the Terminator manifests in the form of Schwarzenegger, as opposed to someone who possesses a more inconspicuous and less masculine physique, despite the fact that the Terminator’s strength is supposed to lie in machinery and not in the ‘plastic-skin’ of muscles and tissue which merely serves as a covering, clearly supports this association of *masculine* power with the Terminator.

Sarah’s words are also ambiguous in that, despite her martial skill and degree of machismo, that would rival the authority of any would-be father-figure, and despite her inscribing the words ‘no fate’ on the table in a declaration of the open-endedness and possibility of the future, she still desires the ‘father-figure’ of the Terminator as a role model and protector for her son. This ‘traditional’ female disposition or perspective, lurking in the peripheral shadows of the narrative, moves a little more into focus after the T-1000 has been vanquished, and after John has thrown the arm of the ‘original’ Terminator and the computer chip into the furnace. At this point Sarah Conner states “It’s over…”, but her statement is immediately contested by the Terminator and shown to be premature.¹⁹² The Terminator, more vigilant and objective than she is, reminds her of the difficult truth that must still be faced, namely that *he* is the last piece that must be destroyed before it will all be over. She acquiesces to his authority and complies with his imperatives stoically and unquestioningly, although her expressions and slowness of movement connote resistance to the idea, and thereby bear testimony to the conflict within her that arises from her ‘feminine weakness’ and emotional attachment to the Terminator. The Terminator is then lowered into the furnace in a scene reminiscent of many a western in which the cowboy rides off into the sunset while the woman/mother and child look on longingly.¹⁹³

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¹⁹¹ Although to the more critical audience the Terminator cannot represent patriarchy because it is a machine/robot made by other machine/robots, this contention remains, at best, something highly ambiguous because for the greater audience Arnold Schwarzenegger *does* represent the epitome of male power with his machismo, strength, stamina and capacity to endure pain.

¹⁹² Her premature statement that everything is ‘over’ is a manifestation of her desire to see the destruction cease before it results in the destruction of the Terminator, as a result of the degree to which she has begun to develop an emotional attachment to it.

¹⁹³ Even the Terminator’s final ‘thumbs up’ gesture is an inter-textual reference to various ‘gung ho’ characters from an array of films within the genre of the Western.
and which thereby, by means of these visual parallels, echoes and reinforces the patriarchal axiology of such films.

Moreover, the final resolution in Griffith’s *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) constituted a moral indictment of those (i.e. the vagabonds) who tried to challenge the social hierarchy. As discussed earlier, this perspective was the result of western culture’s Platonic legacy that facilitated the conceptualisation of social/class structures as natural, normal and ‘indisputable’. However, the Platonic legacy also involved the privileging of the self’s capacity for reason, such that the ‘just soul’ was obliged to negate the excesses of the body’s demands in the interests of operating in accordance with the dictates of the *Republic*. The presence of a Christian (-Platonic) moral perspective is as present in the resolution of *The Lonedale Operator* (1911) as it is in Cameron’s *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991), with the difference that, in Cameron’s film, it operates as an echo behind Sarah’s words that express the desire for ‘reliability’ and ‘otherworldly’, Apollonian, Platonic stability.194

At one point in Cameron’s film, during the scene in the desert where the characters of Sarah, John and the Terminator meet with an arms dealer, Sarah stares out at the Terminator as it plays a game with her son. “[A]s Sarah’s own voice-over puts it, ‘[the Terminator] would always be there and would always protect him [i.e. John]. Of all the would-be fathers, this machine was the only one that measured up’” (Pfeil 1993:245-246). She states that no human male could ever measure up to the ‘machine’ in front of her, and her sentiments thus contain an indictment of human (male) weakness and its propensity for ‘vice’ and a valorisation of the Terminator’s overcoming of these elements. This contains an echo of the Christian meta-narrative’s moral condemnation of the ‘weakness’ of the body’s needs and desires,195 inherited from Plato (as discussed above), along with a valorisation of an Apollonian (or Platonic) disposition, achieved through reason. Later, the tension and pathos of the final scene, in which the Terminator is lowered into the furnace, attain their poignancy because Sarah is obliged, in the interests of averting a future apocalypse, to relinquish the ‘Apollonian’ figure of the Terminator. Had she, in the interests of humanity, submitted to reason and demanded the destruction of the Terminator of her own accord, she would have attained the status of a rational, ‘just’ soul. However, as discussed, this possibility is subverted because her sentiments that all is finally ‘over’, after the destruction of the T-1000, are contested by the Terminator who maintains that it is still necessary for it to ‘self-destruct’. This move salvages the authority of patriarchy (associated with the

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194 That is, the Terminator is suitable as a father figure because he is ‘completely’ reliable and ‘above’ the weaknesses and vices of mortal men.
195 Cf. note 91.
Terminator) and results in the resolution of the narrative along comfortingly familiar and traditional lines.\textsuperscript{196}

What is of concern is precisely the phenomena of these comfortingly familiar structures, where the need for the presence of such structures in mainstream cinema allows for the introduction of new ‘power dynamics’ only in the most ambiguous of ways and in the most open-ended and tenuous manner. These new ‘power dynamics’ are allowed to sally forth only briefly into uncharted territory before resolving themselves in ways that echo ‘traditional’ axiological frameworks and ideas, orientated around the desire for the maintenance of the status quo.

As discussed earlier, Dickens’ literature is a part of the literary move towards an increasingly restricted economy from Homer to modernity. Insofar as Dickens’ fiction, which is constituted by (and reflects) Apollonian art, inspired Griffith’s film language, this Apollonian impetus became translated into the visual language inherited, ultimately, by contemporary mass-media and mainstream cinema. The presence of ‘comfortingly familiar’ structures, within Dickens’ literature and contemporary mainstream film, which demand an amiable resolution to the narratives, reflect a distinctly Apollonian impetus and a clearly identifiable relationship with Homeric naïve epic.\textsuperscript{197}

The nature of this relationship becomes clearer in the light of Nietzsche’s remark on Homeric epic, namely that it constituted “naïve art…a secondary phenomenon…like dreams…: its visionary illusion…needed to redeem the horror and suffering of existence” (Silk 1981:66). Similarly, through the inclusion of an amiable resolution in film-narrative, the ‘abyss’ of chaos and possibility inherent to language is silenced and covered over with a sense of order.\textsuperscript{198} The narrative of \textit{film noir}, by definition, is meant to skirt the edge of language and possibility, as it plays out against the backdrop of a view of the world and life as an ‘abyss’. However, at the level of mainstream cinema, even this genre is littered with examples of films whose narratives contain ‘resolution’ that result in their failure as \textit{noir}.\textsuperscript{199} This, by implication, shapes the subjectivity of the viewer as something increasingly integral and stable, in much the same way as the naïve Apollonian art of Homeric epic predisposed the self towards (increasing) integrity and stability.

In the final scene of Howard Hawks’ \textit{film noir}, \textit{The Big Sleep} (1946), despite the wailing sirens of the arriving police cars and the death and mayhem of the preceding scenes, Humphrey Bogart’s

\textsuperscript{196} Although at one point in the film the Terminator reveals that he has been programmed to accept orders from John (Edward Furlong), who is only a boy, it must be remembered that, in terms of the narrative, John is also the future patriarch of the ‘free world’.

\textsuperscript{197} With regard to this, it is interesting that the generation that succeeded Dickens desired to break away from his ‘naïve’ form of literature and demanded change. “Leslie Stephen epitomized all this in his essay in DNB, writing that ‘Dickens’s merits [were] such as suit the half educated’” (http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/dickens/archive/general/g-sajio.html).

\textsuperscript{198} Cf. note 111.

\textsuperscript{199} In Chapter Four I will discuss Aronofsky’s neo-\textit{noir} film \textit{Pi} (1998) that subverts this narrative tendency in mainstream cinema by embracing the ‘abyss’ of life instead of shying away from it.
character pledges his allegiance to, and love for, the *femme fatale*, played by Lauren Bacall, i.e. the film ends with the idea that ‘goodness’ and love will prevail, which is counter to the theme of *noir*.\(^{200}\)

This conclusion allows the audience to leave the theatre feeling that the love between Bogart’s and Bacall’s characters will prevail, despite the difficulties ahead, and thus that the ‘dream of the film’ will go on despite the end of the narrative itself.

More than fifty years later, in David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (2000), a later postmodern neo-*noir*, the same process of resolution involving the re-establishment of the values of patriarchy, capitalism and echoes of the morality of the Christian meta-narrative, arguably, still occurs. Edward Norton’s character orchestrates the destruction of several towering credit card companies under the influence of his alter ego, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt). However, his character is finally able to relinquish this alter ego, a move which is mirrored by his love interest, ‘Marla Singer’ (Helena Bonham Carter), relinquishing her tortured, defensive and independent disposition in favour of a more ‘traditional’ female attitude, evident in her exhibiting concern for his self-inflicted injuries in the final scene. Here they also symbolically hold hands while the high rise buildings of the credit card companies fall and the music plays.\(^{201}\) That they appear to be prepared to face the consequences of Edward Norton’s character’s actions together intimates that they will prevail, despite whatever judicial retribution is in store for them.

Moreover, the restoration of old power structures and moral norms sees Edward Norton’s character relinquish his homo-erotic relationship with the character of Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) and *Fight Club* for a heterosexual relationship with Marla, just as Marla Singer relinquishes her independence and gets ready to stand beside her chosen patriarchal figure.\(^{202}\) Again, as with *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (and to a certain extent *The Big Sleep*),\(^{203}\) new power dynamics and sexual perspectives may be entertained during the film, but at the end of the narrative the demand for

\(^{200}\) Bogart’s character’s response to the *femme fatale* in *The Big Sleep* (1946) contrasts markedly with his character’s response to the *femme fatale* (Mary Astor) in the 1941 classic *The Maltese Falcon*. In this film there also occurs resolution in the final scene, but it involves a stern, rigid, moral condemnation of the *femme fatale* by Bogart’s character (Sam Spade), the quintessential patriarchal figure. In *The Big Sleep* (1946) the post-war empowerment of women in society is evident, but it is matched by increased objectification of women by the hero.

\(^{201}\) The character of Marla Singer subjugates herself by adopting this disposition towards Edward Norton’s character. Throughout the narrative, Edward Norton’s character both accepts her (when his alter ego of Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, is dominant) and rejects her (when his own personality is dominant). She, only experiencing Edward Norton’s character (Tyler Durden is a figment of his character’s imagination), nevertheless ‘returns’ to him after each rejection. Finally, when she ‘temporarily’ rejects *him*, she is kidnapped by his henchmen and brought to him. At this point she sees his self-inflicted injuries and instantly forgets all of his past ‘abuse’ of her. She not only exhibits concern for his wounds, but even goes so far as to stand beside him and hold his hand as the high rise buildings fall. Despite her earlier vociferous verbal attack on him (and protestations against having been kidnapped), and despite her apparently ‘independent’ demeanour, her actions mirror those of a submissive ‘wife’ who constantly returns to, and forgives, an abusive husband.

\(^{202}\) Cf. note 156 &201.

\(^{203}\) Cf. note 200.
resolution obliges the narrative to approximate more traditional, patriarchal, capitalist values,\(^{204}\) asserted against a backdrop that contains echoes of the morality of the Christian meta-narrative and its Platonic undertones.

With regard to the presence of these comfortingly familiar structures, Eisenstein sums up a large section of mainstream American cinema, both past and present, when he asserts that there exists a “spontaneous, child-like skill for story-telling, [that is] equally typical for Dickens and for the American cinema, which…surely and delicately plays upon the infantile traits in its audience” (Eisenstein 1949:201). The infantile traits and needs are, essentially, the need to be entertained and transported through fiction to some realm where not only does good always triumph, but where the idea of the good remains unproblematic.\(^{205}\) At worst, there occurs a constant repetition of the same old themes or narratives, while at best we find new and innovative articulations of ‘similar’ narratives that strain against the limits of the old narratives, yet are constrained by the weight and dictates of what has become instantiated as the visual language of mainstream cinema. Quite simply, this language demands resolution, and narratives which have become comfortably familiar facilitate clear resolution, such as the re-constitution of old power structures and values, along with the inevitable victory of the hero/heroine, etc. As mentioned earlier, the prevalence of such Apollonian resolutions in mainstream cinematic narratives is not devoid of implications for the Cartesian ego of the viewer, at an epistemological and ontological level. By virtue of entertaining and kow-towing to the need of such an ego to be entertained, such narratives privilege, sustain and propagate the belief in the integrity and stability of that ego. In other words, where the content of such narratives involves constant Apollonian resolution, it also covertly validates and legitimates an Apollonian perspective, which informs and shapes the viewer’s ego accordingly.

\(^{204}\) In the narrative of *Fight Club* there occurs the destruction of buildings that house credit card companies, and with it, presumably, the capitalist economy of America, if not the world. That is, because ‘fight clubs’ are represented as springing up in all the major American cities, Project ’Mayhem’, or the destruction of these buildings, takes place at a national level, and because of the significance of the American economy in the world, such destruction would impact on the global economy. However, before valorising the film as a call for Marxist revolution, it must be remembered that the ‘destruction’ only takes place within the narrative of the film, while in ‘reality’, the very multi-national companies that are ‘criticised’ in the film not only benefit through the ticket-sales of the film, but also utilize the film to advertise their products (i.e. through product placement). Also, insofar as audiences identify with the characters, the film allows them the opportunity, through the final scene, to ‘vent’, in a harmless way, their anti-capitalist sentiments, which further dissolves the possibility of social revolution.

\(^{205}\) For example, even though the hero (and heroine) may have engaged in killing and the wholesale destruction of property, they are usually somewhat vindicated because of the ‘righteousness’ of their actions. Alternatively, as in *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), the social inequalities that produce poverty and ‘villainy’ never become conspicuous because the narrative contains within it a validation of the ‘righteousness’ of a capitalist economy and class structure.
5. Eisenstein’s subversion of the Apollonian structures of mainstream American cinema through the use of montage

[T]he more vociferous complaint that the Russian filmmakers had was with the narrative structure of Hollywood filmmaking. They believed, as many Marxists since believe, that Hollywood cinema is designed to draw you into believing in the capitalist propaganda...[and contains] device[s] to make you align yourself with this unhealthy ideology (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_film_theory).

Griffith never denied the ‘parentage’ of his cinematographic style and rather justified his work in terms of a valorisation of Dickens’ narrative style. Eisenstein also states in his essay Dickens, Griffith, and Film Today that “one need only alter two or three of the character names and change Dickens’s name to the name of the hero of my essay [i.e. Griffith], in order to impute literally almost everything told here to the account of Griffith” (Eisenstein 1949:213). Yet Eisenstein and the young Soviet film makers were not uncritical in their adoption of Griffith’s cinematographic and narrative style. Eisenstein writes instead that Soviet cinema “is neither a poor relative nor an insolvent debtor of his. It was natural that the spirit and content of our country...in themes and subjects, would stride far ahead of Griffith’s ideals” (Eisenstein 1949:233).

As discussed above, Griffith adopted a great many of Dickens’ narrative techniques and structures, along with the implicit (Apollonian) axiological perspectives contained within Dickens’ texts. Eisenstein also admits to learning a great deal, in terms of cinematography, from both Dickens’ novels and Griffith’s films; however, his films contain a far more critical edge. Where in Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction the Apollonian narrative structure was in concord with the Apollonian content of the images, in Eisenstein’s films there exists a tension between structure and image. Eisenstein borrowed purposefully from the narrative structures of Dickens’ and Griffith’s texts that, through common use, had become associated with amiable resolutions and the entrenchment of the traditional axiology of the status quo. However, in terms of the overt content of images, Eisenstein’s films subvert any possibility of such resolution just as they constitute an indictment of the ‘traditional’ axiology.

For example, in Strike (1924), Eisenstein plays with Dickens’ use of montage in Oliver Twist that involves the repetition of an image. In Chapter XIV and XV of Oliver Twist, two old gentlemen await Oliver’s return, one maintaining that he will return while the other argues that he is a thief and that he has disappeared with the money in his pocket and the valuable books entrusted to him. In ‘reality’, Oliver has been accosted by Nancy, Fagin and the gang of pick-pockets and is hence prevented from running his errand. The succeeding narrative includes a return to the image of the watch between the two old men three times, along with descriptions of the growing darkness outside
the room where they sit and wait for Oliver’s return. This repetition articulates the passing of time and the increasingly tense emotions that prevail between the two men. The intrigue and tension of the montage rests on the two old men’s ‘misunderstanding’ of Oliver’s dire circumstances, and their resultant negative evaluation of his character. However, with regard to the ‘unfairness’ of the social conditions that produce Fagin’s and Sikes’ criminality there remains a conspicuous silence in the text, while similarly the legitimacy of the old men’s wealth and the economic system in which they operate, remain unquestioned. This is the result of the reader’s attention being drawn to Oliver’s predicament, the urgency and intensity of which are caused by the presence of two-dimensional characters in the narrative, i.e. either completely ‘good’ or ‘bad’ as reflected later in Griffith’s *The Lonedale Operator* (1911), and the desire to see an ‘amiable’ resolution to Oliver’s dilemma.

In the scene towards the end of Eisenstein’s *Strike* (1924) during which the striking workers are attacked by the Cossacks, there occurs a similar montage of repetition, involving the same structure as found above in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. The montage consists of the image of two children sitting high up on the roof of a building and playing, despite the horrific events which are occurring below them. As the reprisal intensifies in brutality, the Cossacks gain access to higher and higher levels of the buildings, and the children’s game intensifies in its violence. The final time we see the children is when a Cossack has reached them, picked one up and hurled him/her from the rooftop. If the repetition of the image of the children can be said to be comparable to the repetition of the image of the watch in Dickens’ text, and if the increasing violence of the children’s game can be said to be comparable to the increasing darkness which overtakes the watch between the old gentlemen, then the whole structure of Eisenstein’s montage can be said to have been lifted straight out of Dickens’ novel.

However, where in Dickens’ use of the same montage structure, the tension and emphasis had centred around a simple ‘misunderstanding’ on the part of the old men concerning Oliver’s predicament, instead of the inherent ‘unfairness’ of the social structures that produced the villainy of Fagin and his group, in Eisenstein’s film there is no ‘misunderstanding’ whatsoever. Through parodying Dickens’ use of this narrative structure, Eisenstein’s film blatantly articulates the brutality and intolerable ‘unfairness’ inherent to a social system that reduces humanity to the level of animals. Although Eisenstein makes use of montage structurally similar to the montage found in Dickens’ novels, he subverts the covert support of the power structures and hierarchies that reside in the shadows of Dickens’ fiction, through the use of alternative overt images that undermine the

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206 The image of the watch is returned to twice in Chapter XIV and a third time at the end of Chapter XV where the darkness of the labyrinth of narrow courts, along which Oliver is forced, is mentioned again in connection with the watch insofar as “the two old gentlemen sat, perseveringly, in the dark parlour, with the watch between them” [My Italics] (Dickens 1949:108).

207 This becomes horrifically clear later, during the montage of rhythm in which the slaughtering of cattle is juxtaposed against the army’s massacre of the striking workers.
possibility of any Apollonian resolution. It was for this reason that *Strike* (1924) became known as a ‘memorial’ film in that it represents only the atrocities of the Czarist regime. It does so in memory of fallen comrades and hence the narrative, unlike that of *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), does not resolve itself on a ‘positive’ note through a depiction of the successful Communist revolution.

Similarly, Eisenstein’s above-mentioned montage of repetition in *Strike* (1924) also parodies Griffith’s montage of tempo in *The Lonedale Operator* (1911). In Griffith’s film the arrival of the ‘hero’, who has the backing of both the government and religious/moral authorities, results in the salvation of the innocent, defenceless party, namely the Lonedale Operator’s daughter. However, in Eisenstein’s *Strike*, the arrival of those who would traditionally have been considered the ‘heroes’, i.e. the Cossacks (because of their backing by, and of, the government and religious/moral authorities) results in the murder of the innocent, defenceless parties, namely the two children.208

Although the Marxist meta-narrative is itself entirely Apollonian, dialectical, and indebted to Hegel, when used as a critical tool against capitalism and bourgeois provincialism (imbricated with the Christian meta-narrative) it can subvert the integrity of these (equally) Apollonian power structures because the conflict between two meta-narratives is itself a challenge to the idea that the world can be thought of as a unified whole. Similarly, when the narrative structure of fiction (i.e. the narrative structure found in Dickens’ and Griffith’s work) that has usually been used to lend implicit/covert support to traditional power structures is employed with a different overt visual content (e.g. images of a Marxist victory), subversion of the axiology of capitalism, patriarchy (at least formally) and the Christian meta-narrative occurs through parody and implication.209

A further analysis of Dickens’, Griffith’s and Eisenstein’s respective use of the narrative structure of montage facilitates a good illustration of the way in which Eisenstein uses parody to subvert the axiology of the status quo. For instance, in *Dombey and Son*, when Mr. Dombey wants, covertly, to open his writing table (which had formerly belonged to his wife, now deceased), Dickens writes, “He carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now – having previously locked the room door – with a well-acustomed hand” (Forster 1927:23).210 Eisenstein

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208 Furthermore, the ink that spills across the map of the district in *Strike*, during the tussle between the worker and the grotesque military officer, might be considered as a ‘subtle’ montage that harks back to the montage ‘scene’ that interrupts Chapter Five of *A Tale of Two Cities* with, “A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street…[and a]ll the people within reach…suspended their business…to run to the spot and drink” (Dickens 1970: 59). However, where Dickens’ images contain negative connotations concerning the impending bloodlust of the masses or proletariat, Eisenstein’s images imply the same of the army officers and repressive Czarist regime.

209 In a similar sense, Brecht subverted ‘traditional’ bourgeois theatre through a parodying of its structures in his plays. As Eisenstein states, ‘This scene does not appear in the final version of the novel…[but was] cut out…on Forster’s advice; in his biography of Dickens Forster preserved this passage to show with what mercilessness Dickens’ sometimes ‘cut’ writing…This…emphasizes that sharp [Apollonian] clarity of representation towards which Dickens strove…endeavouring with purely cinematic laconism to say what he considered necessary” [My Italics] (Eisenstein 1949:212).
maintains that the purpose of the phrase ‘having previously locked the room door’ was to facilitate the montage or juxtaposition of the images of the closing of the door with the opening of the writing desk, which resulted in a “brilliantly caught rendering of the transient thievery of the action, slipped between the preliminary action and the act of reading another’s letter” (Eisenstein 1949:211). Here, just as in Griffith’s The Lonedale Operator (1911), the tension and intrigue caused by the montage ‘hide’ the fact that the social structures that prevail throughout the narrative, and which also constitute the reader’s world, are not being engaged with but rather merely reflected. In other words, the covert nature of Dombey’s actions, as detailed in the montage, draw the reader into the narrative through representing a homely domestic intrigue with which all can easily identify without questioning it.

However, at the same time, the ‘hidden’ content of the narrative, involving the implicit normalisation and legitimation of the social and power structures reflected in the text, constructs the subjectivity of the reader in a subtle yet powerful way. Dombey and Son contains no indictment of patriarchy or capitalism, but rather validates both. Similarly, while the tension that exists between Dombey and his wife reflects the general malaise underpinning Victorian bourgeois marriage, there is no intimation of the existence of any radical alternative to this situation, outside of the norms and structures of that society.

In The General Line (1929), Eisenstein also uses a montage of oppositional contrasts structured in the same way as Dickens’ montage. However, through the juxtaposition of its images, it parodies the more traditional use of such oppositional contrasts in literature, and is both critical and explorative of social issues. This montage must be seen against the backdrop of the opening caption of the film which states, ‘Not ten, not twenty, but exactly one hundred, one hundred million illiterate, ignorant, backward peasants, were left a legacy by the old order of strip cultivation and starvation’. Just as the narrative of the film remembers the moment of radical social change (i.e. the Revolution and usurpation of the ‘old order’), so too this specific montage remembers and engages with the current social problems of ignorance and starvation.

The montage begins with the scene in which Marta Lapkina (the ‘heroine’ of the film) sits alone and poverty-stricken in her farmyard, without a horse for ploughing. This scene is followed by one in which she goes to a rich landowner to beg the use of his horse. This scene is followed by

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211 It does so through the character of Dombey himself, whose power results from him being male and involved with commerce/shipping. Dombey’s main ambition is to have a son so that he can entitle his business ‘Dombey & Son’, and he rejects his daughter Florence because of such patriarchal privileging. Furthermore, after the death of his young son he is in need of another wife to give him an heir, and Edith Skewton is virtually sold to Dombey by her mother. This theme of marriage as a form of prostitution features again when Edith ‘sells’ herself to John Carker in order to gain her freedom from Dombey. Although Dombey’s marriage and business crumble, the narrative finally resolves with this patriarch finding love, happiness and salvation with his married daughter, whom he previously rejected, while he also gains a second ‘family’ (and chance at life) through her son and daughter.
quoted above from Dickens’ novel, regarding Dombey’s journey to the writing desk, is interrupted by a mention of the degree to which such covert surveillance is habitual for Dombey, so too Marta Lapkina’s journey to the rich landowner is interrupted by a use of montage that communicates the degree to which such poverty and need are perennial problems for the peasants. Between the scene in which she sits in the farmyard and the scene in which she leaves for the landowner’s estate, the image of a hugely pregnant peasant woman, along with the caption ‘The Peasants’ Spring’, is inserted. This image is then juxtaposed, to great ironic effect, against another image of the ribs and loose skin on the back of a starving cow who is incapable of giving milk. The camera intercuts between the pregnant peasant and the cow twice for emphasis. This juxtaposition of images necessitates a critical appraisal of the material, and this facilitates a certain degree of alienation from the narrative, while the ‘second’ meaning produced promotes critical social awareness of the link between ignorance and starvation, and the continuing social legacy of the old order that needs to be combated through planning and the introduction of communal existence.

Again, just as in Dickens’ fiction, where the opening of the table was juxtaposed against the closing of the door, so too in Eisenstein’s film three different scenes illustrating the value of a horse for farm labour are juxtaposed against the absence of any horse on Marta’s farm, after which the camera follows Marta as she leaves on her journey to the landowner. However, where in Dickens’ fiction the contrast, between the opening of the table and closing of the door, added to the covert nature of Dombey’s actions and ‘drew’ the audience into the narrative through the intrigue of the scene, in Eisenstein’s film the juxtaposition of images alienates the audience from the narrative. Also, where Dickens’ montage excites and intrigues the reader while never questioning the legitimacy of Dombey’s wealth and power, Eisenstein’s later juxtaposition of images of Marta’s bony hands and feet against the fat jowls of the rich landowner constitutes an indictment of the unequal distribution of wealth and property.

Another montage that Eisenstein identifies in Dickens’ fiction is that of the ‘movement’ at the beginning of Chapter XXI of Oliver Twist. This montage involves the gradual progression from stationary, silent objects in the darkness to bustling, noisy objects in the light. However, in reflecting the process of the beginning of the day and the beginnings of commerce and trade, it also articulates such a capitalist situation as perennial, inevitable, and inalterable. The chapter begins with the following images:

It was a cheerless morning…There was a faint glimmering of the coming day in the sky; but it rather aggravated than relieved the gloom…There appeared to be nobody stirring in that quarter…[These images are followed by increasingly animated images, namely] the day had fairly begun to break. Many of the
lamps were already extinguished; a few country wagons were slowly toiling on...a stage-coach...rattled briskly by...The public houses, with gas-lights burning inside, were already open...[These images, in turn, are followed by lively images, namely] the noise and traffic gradually increased...it was as light as it was likely to be...and the busy morning of half the London population had begun (Dickens 1949:152).

In Battleship Potemkin (1925), Eisenstein parodies this structure by using it as a forerunner to a montage of tempo whose resolution completely negates the above idea of the capitalist situation as perennial, inevitable, and inalterable. After the massacre of the population on the Odessa steps by the Czarist troops, and the bombing of the General’s headquarters in reprisal, a troubled night descends upon the crew of the Potemkin as they await the dawn and their confrontation with the oncoming squadron, whom they believe to be loyal to the Czar. The same structure of montage, involving the progression from darkness to light, and from the quiet of the night to the frenetic activity and movement of the dawn, when the squadron are sighted, mirrors the above progression found in Dickens’ Oliver Twist. However, where in Dickens’ fiction the structure of this montage underpinned a covert valorisation and legitimation of the commercial activities of capitalism, in Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin (1925) a radically different possibility is (visually) articulated.

Eisenstein achieves this by imbricating the montage of movement, as mentioned above, with a montage of tempo in which the Battleship Potemkin and Torpedo-Boat 267 race out towards the squadron believed to be loyal to the Czar. As they approach the squadron the tempo of the intercutting increases dramatically, and the focus involves the rapidly-moving pistons, gears and valves in the Potemkin’s engine room, along with shots of its billowing smoke-stacks, its guns and sailors arming for battle, and its bow making tremendous headway through the sea (constantly juxtaposed against the oncoming squadron on the horizon). As the opposing flagship approaches, the Potemkin’s crew run up the signal “Join...us!” Again the scenes quickly cut between the bow, the smoke-stacks, the guns of the Potemkin and the sailors taking aim. The next caption reads, “The enemy is within range.” There is another shot of the Potemkin’s three main guns taking aim, the red flag fluttering in the wind, and the oncoming squadron. Finally, the caption “Will they fire...or...[won’t they]” is interspersed with more shots of the sailors preparing to fire and close-ups of their serious faces, faces which suddenly light up in joy, followed by the caption “Brothers!”, implying that all the crew of the oncoming squadron have similarly thrown off the shackles of the oppressive Czarist regime and taken over the ships, thereby putting an end to the imminent prospect of combat.

Tension is thus built up using the same covert narrative structure of montage of tempo, inherited from Dickens’ by Griffith, and found in the final scenes of Griffith’s Lonedale Operator (1911). However, as discussed earlier in relation to Strike (1924), Eisenstein replaces the overt visual
content that would reinforce the ‘traditional’ axiology of the bourgeois status quo with images that depict a Marxist victory, and thereby subverts bourgeois power hierarchies and class structures through parody.

6. Eisenstein, critical cinema and the further subversion of mainstream American cinema

Eisenstein’s critical cinema consisted of more than merely the above-mentioned parody of mainstream cinema and Dickens’ narrative structures. As stated earlier, the narratives of early mainstream American films were designed to entertain and ‘draw’ the audience in, and one of the techniques for achieving this was the presentation of the audience with a hero/heroine with whom they could readily identify. In Eisenstein’s early films, in contrast to American cinema, it remains impossible for the audience to identify with any one hero/heroine. Where the focus of the narrative in American mainstream cinema is the hero and/or heroine, the focus of Eisenstein’s early films was the people, the proletariat, the workers and peasants. Instead of allowing the narrative to focus entirely on specific characters who were well-known actors or actresses, and hence identifiable as the cornerstone of the narrative, Eisenstein made use of peasants to represent peasants, workers to represent workers, etc. Also, his early films focussed on ‘historical’ events rather than the fictional adventures of a hero/heroine, such that the gravity and weight of the event over-shadowed the individual characters within the narrative and usurped the limelight. This resulted in less need for character development and a correspondingly diminished audience identification with individual characters.

Eisenstein’s *The General Line* (1929) is about the development of collective farming in an effort to overcome the agricultural legacy of the ‘old order’ of Czarist Russia, namely strip cultivation. It focuses on the problems encountered at the beginning of the communal endeavour that were related to the un-critical, un-reflective, ignorant masses of the peasant population and their resistance to the new communitarian solutions of the Party. There is a heroine, to some extent, namely the peasant woman Marta Lapkina who, with the agronomist and a few other Bolshevik stalwarts, endeavours to organise the collective. However, because their successes amount to the successes of the collective or triumphs of the Party attitude over the habitual actions and tendencies of the stunted peasant mentality, they do not really amount to the successes of any one individual at all. Similarly,

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212 “Eisenstein’s solution was to shun narrative structure by eliminating the individual protagonist and tell stories where the action is moved by the group and the story is told through a clash of one image against the next (whether in composition, motion, or idea) so that the audience is never lulled into believing that they are watching something that has not been worked over” (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxist_film_theory).

213 The seriousness of this for the Russians cannot be overemphasized. Ineffective agriculture contributed towards years of widespread famine in Russia. “For Russians, hunger was not a new experience. There had been especially serious famines in 1833, 1840, 1867, 1873, 1891 and 1911. That of 1891 had been the most lethal, but was exceeded by the famine of 1921-22…This famine probably took about five million lives” (Westwood 1973:277-278).
although *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) focuses, initially, on the heroic figure of Prince Nevsky, in the end he is simply one of the combatants who make up the Russian contingent that takes up arms against the Teutonic invaders (i.e. the Germans).\(^{214}\) So too, throughout the film there are many scenes devoted to exhibiting the courage and sense of brotherhood and communal spirit amongst the common people, whose bravery and generosity are seen to contrast with the selfishness, cowardice, and mercenary tendencies of the wealthy. What is of additional interest is the way Eisenstein ‘subverts’ the patriarchal themes of American cinema by showing a female character, Vasilisa, not only arming for battle and fighting, but also being acclaimed, towards the end of the film, as the bravest ‘warrior’ of the day. In many ways Prince Nevsky’s words are meant, quite simply, to echo the ‘social conscience’ of the Russian people, to instil in all a sense of obligation towards the Motherland (in the event of yet another invasion) and to warn of the actions and reprisals that will be taken against cowards. He thus never really approximates the status of the ‘heroic’ figure so important to the narratives of American mainstream cinema. Also, the entertainment value of Eisenstein’s film becomes a secondary consideration when compared to its didactic significance, in that it involves a meta-narrative of the priority of the collective, seen to be greater and more important than any one individual.\(^{215}\)

Another way in which mainstream American cinema ‘drew’ (and still draws) the audience into the narrative of the film was through linking the narrative together by means of inconspicuous continuity editing. This facilitated the increasing mesmerisation of the audience through allowing them to become immersed within a lengthy film narrative. In contrast to this, a second alienating technique employed by Eisenstein in his films of the 1920’s involved interspersing them with disruptive sequences that bore a resemblance to Brechtian ‘distancing’ techniques. Like Brecht’s techniques, they were designed to distance the audience from the narrative and shock them out of their bourgeois comfort zone as passive spectators of objectified art. Just as “Brecht…communicate[d] with the…open-minded, [showing them] both what they are, and…what they could be in…society” (Suvin1984:72), so too Eisenstein’s use of alienating techniques prevented the audience from becoming ‘mesmerized’ by the motion picture and its narrative (through reminding them of the formal character of film). It also demanded that the conceptual space thus formed be filled with a critical appraisal of the images, an intellectual requirement and endeavour almost entirely lacking in American cinema.

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\(^{214}\) The film was released twenty years after the German invasion of Russia during 1918 and perhaps inspired as a result of growing political tension, towards the end of the 1930’s, caused by Germany’s increasingly aggressive foreign policy.

\(^{215}\) This also contrasts markedly with the narratives of American cinema that play out against the backdrop of the Christian meta-narrative, in that, just as such cinematic narratives seek to entertain the individual audience member, so too the Christian meta-narrative (similarly) privileges the individual over the collective, through the idea of the eternal ‘soul’.
A good example of such an alienating technique occurs in Eisenstein’s *The General Line* (1929). The story of the ‘October Collective’ begins with an image of the key figures involved with the collective farm sitting and staring forward at the audience from a bench, as though they too are waiting for the film to start. A close-up of Marta Lapkina, the peasant woman, catches her wry smile briefly before an ‘iris-fade-to-black’ transition takes us to the beginning of the story, already a few minutes into the narrative of the film. What the audience is watching comes across, quite clearly, as a representation of peasants sitting down to watch a representation of their efforts at beginning a collective farm, while simultaneously ‘knowing’ that the audience is watching the same representation. This is very effective in distancing the audience from everything they are about to see through reminding them of the ‘constructedness’ of what they are viewing. This, in turn, subverts the audience’s ‘dissolution’ into the narrative that might otherwise occur through their complete mesmerization by the moving images and identification with ‘un-reflective’ characters within the narrative.

Similarly, in contrast to mainstream American cinema’s continuity editing, a third alienating technique employed by Eisenstein was the use of montage of rhythm, where the images juxtaposed produce new meanings beyond that of the written text of the captions and/or the overall narrative of the film. This differs from the various forms of montage discussed in the previous section, in relation to Dickens’ and Griffith’s texts, because the main purpose of montage of rhythm, like the above-mentioned ‘Brechtian’ alienating techniques, is to break the continuity of the narrative, or in other words, to disrupt the unified continuity editing of the film.

“[T]he early Russian filmmakers took up this approach to film communication…[as i]t seemed to agree with their revolutionary ideas and seemed to be the artistic expression of the Hegelian dialectic”(http://www.wikipedia.com/wiki/Film_editing). However, caution must be taken in drawing parallels between the Hegelian dialectic and the ‘dialogue’ at work in montage of rhythm because, as Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization* (1965), the possibilities for the proliferation of meaning that occur when two images are set in ‘dialogue’ with one another (or when the same image is viewed in two different historical contexts) are infinite and sublime. The single image, with its integrity, stability and wholeness, possesses Apollonian connotations or is dominated by the

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216 Montage of rhythm involves the juxtaposition of conflicting or oppositional images, while montage of tempo involves the endeavour to heighten dramatic tension by inter-cutting, with increasing rapidity, between different shots as they ‘approach’ each other in time and space.

217 It is important to note this because while the presence of the Marxist meta-narrative in Eisenstein’s films prevented them from attaining the critical perspective/edge of Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s language, the absence of any such meta-narrative in Aronofsky’s films, along with their appreciation of the infinite possibility of ‘dialogue’ between juxtaposed images, facilitates their approximation of Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s level of critical perspective.
‘monologue’ of Apollo. However, when placed within the confined space of a film sequence, the juxtaposition of two or more conflicting images that occurs through a montage of rhythm forces them into a ‘dialogue’ with one another that subverts the integral status of each and produces a multiplicity of new meanings. Eisenstein, along with Pudovkin, inherited this technique from Lev Kuleshov, an earlier Russian filmmaker. Lev Kuleshov maintained that

Juxtaposing two unrelated images could convey a separate meaning. In his experiment he filmed Mozhukhin, a famous Russian actor, and shots of a bowl of soup, a girl, a teddy bear and a child’s coffin. He then cut the shot of the actor into the other shot; each time it was the same shot of the actor. Viewers felt that the shots of the actor conveyed different emotions, though each time it was in fact the same shot. Kuleshov used the experiment to indicate the usefulness and effectiveness of editing (http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuleshov_Experiment).

In relation to this, Pudovkin maintained that the art of directing was editing and that the director “by combining [pieces of reality fixed on celluloid]…in his selected sequence, shortening and lengthening them according to his desire…builds up his own ‘filmic’ time and ‘filmic’ space. He does not adapt reality, but uses it for the creation of a new reality” (Pudovkin 1929:61-62). These sentiments are, to a large extent, an echo and a summary of Eisenstein’s position on editing and, more importantly, contain the recognition of the value of montage of rhythm as that which allows the primary function of cinema to be orientated around an intellectual and critical space.

In Battleship Potemkin (1925) is found what is arguably the most famous of Eisenstein’s montages of rhythm, namely the montage involving the juxtaposition of three ‘static’ shots of different stone lions: lying, waking and standing, which gives the impression of the stone lion coming to life and standing up, symbolic of the rising up of the people against Czarist oppression. However, before citing the ‘stone lion’ as an integral part of the continuous narrative of the film, it must be remembered that montage of rhythm not only offers the possibility for the proliferation of meaning, through the juxtaposition of conflicting or ambiguous images, but also creates a critical ‘space’ in the film through ‘breaking’ the continuity of the narrative. “[M]ontage sequences do not contribute to the creation of a unified story world...[at all, and their sole function is to] interrupt the story world created by continuity editing” (Buckland 1998:24). Thus montage of rhythm, not only in terms of its content, but also in terms of the disruptive role it plays in the narrative structure of the film, subverts Dickens’ (and Griffith’s) narrative designs.

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218 Cf. note 1 & 3.
219 Because these shots are ‘static’ this montage contrasts with the continuity of the rest of the narrative.
In The General Line (1929) there occurs another good example of a montage of rhythm in the scene that involves praying masses of peasants chanting, genuflecting and/or crossing and prostrating themselves in a religious procession. This occurs after the caption ‘drought’ has communicated to us their plight. Their poverty and dishevelled appearance contrasts with that of the regal and well-groomed priest, who stares surreptitiously at his barometer which predicts rain. The deception is clear to the audience, namely that with the aid of the barometer he is trying to orchestrate things so that his religious procession coincides with a downpour, an event which would further beguile the peasants into a belief in the value of religion. Eisenstein makes deft use of montage of rhythm that points out the peasants’ ignorance when he juxtaposes images of their reverence with images of bleating sheep. This use of montage could be said to reflect either Nietzschean sentiments, insofar as the religious peasants are compared to sheep, or a Marxist criticism of religion as an opiate of the ignorant. However, in addition to this critical content, the very presence of this montage of rhythm in the film forms a critical moment that disturbs the continuity of the narrative and thereby distances the audience from the representations. Through this Eisenstein subverts not only the axiological hegemony in Griffith’s films and Dickens’ novels that (implicitly) privileges the Christian meta-narrative, but also the Apollonian impetus contained in the continuity of their narratives.

A fourth alienating technique used by Eisenstein was the use of captions containing a play on words and multiple possible meanings, the interpretation of which necessitated critical thinking and distanced the audience from the narrative. This contrasted with the use of captions in mainstream American cinema of the silent era, where captions were used simply to inform the audience of the plot of the narrative in order to draw them into the film. In Eisenstein’s early film Strike (1924), the opening caption states “ALL QUIET AT THE FACT-OR-Y”. However, seconds later the ‘OR’ in ‘FACT-OR-Y’ spirals down and clockwise out of the word and then ascends to the centre of the screen, growing in size until it eclipses the initial caption and thereby forms a new caption, namely “OR[?]”, a caption which questions the validity of any such ‘fact’-ual statements. Although this play on words and letters mirrors the play of the unconscious that, according to Freud, occurs in dreams, in relation to words and symbols, Eisenstein’s film should not be confused with German expressionism (given his Marxist rejection of the ‘decadent’ assumptions of German expressionism regarding the unconscious). Eisenstein writes that

Mysticism, decadence, dismal fantasy followed in the wake of the unsuccessful revolution of 1923…and the screen was quick to reflect this mood. Nosferatu the Vampire, The Street…Dr. Mabuse…reach[ed] out towards us from our screens, achiev[ing] the limits of horror, showing us a future as an unrelieved night crowded with sinister shadows and crimes…Expressionism left barely a trace on our cinema…too alien to
the young, robust spirit and body of the rising class…our spirit urged us towards life – amidst the people, into the surging actuality of a regenerating country (Eisenstein 1949:202-203).

Not only does the question contained in the emerging “OR[?]” remind the audience again of the formal features of the film, so that their critical skills will not, at any time, be lulled to sleep by the narrative, but it also intimates that beneath (or within) the surface of apparent calm and productivity, as articulated in the statement “All quiet at the fact-or-y”, their lurks something subversive.

This prevailing yet obscured discontent is communicated through another very interesting piece of footage that involves a fifth alienating technique employed by Eisenstein. The “OR” caption dissolves into a spinning ventilation fan which serves as a backdrop for disgruntled workers whispering words of dissent into each others ears, after which there is an image of what was ‘originally’ a reflection in a pool of oily water, of workers having a violent discussion against the backdrop of the factory smokestacks. When the workers depart a pair of work boots proceeds into the oily water and disrupts the smooth surface which facilitated a reflection of the image of the arguing workers and smokestacks. However, this ‘original’ sequence of events is represented in reverse, so that the first image we see is that of the disturbed oil/water and work boots, followed by the departing boots and the seemingly miraculous and ‘instantaneous’ calming of the water, which then facilitates the reflection of the group of discontent workers and their discussion against the backdrop of the smokestacks. The meaning of the metaphor is clear, namely that it is necessary to look beyond the apparent surface of busyness (denoted by the boots disrupting the oil or oily water) in order to see reflections of the workers’ discontent, but that the busyness of production precludes the industrialists from gaining such a vantage point which, in turn, causes discontent to grow without being addressed. However, the presence of such reverse footage distances the audience from the possibility of being ‘mesmerized’ or drawn in by the narrative, contrary to the design of mainstream American cinema. Rather, such footage not only breaks the continuity of the narrative, but also, quite literally, reverses such continuity, and thereby makes the audience aware of the utter metaphoricity and illusion of the projected image, against the backdrop of the critical questions posed in the word play of the opening caption.

7. Conclusion

In Eisenstein’s films there exists the promise of the dawn of critical cinematic possibility that rapidly approaches Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s critical perspective. However, although a critical impetus was initiated into visual language by Eisenstein, it was not developed further by him because
of the hindrance of the Marxist meta-narrative within his films, which dictated that the ‘meaning’ of all juxtaposed images must eventually gravitate towards, and be orientated around, the inherently restricted Marxist conceptual economy.

To remove the Marxist meta-narrative from Eisenstein’s films would be tantamount to amputating one of its legs, while a resurgence of Socialist Realism and an uncritical credulity towards a rigid Marxist dogma, because of all the restrictions and limitations contained therein, are not only undesirable but also do not comprise a viable option in the contemporary age. As Lyotard argues, this is primarily because of the general incredulity towards meta-narratives in postmodernity, which has arisen out of the “obsolescence of the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimation” (Storey 1998:174). Yet, while this incredulity precludes the possibility of re-establishing Eisenstein’s critical film language, it opens the door to Aronofsky’s postmodern amendments of such critical cinema.

Eisenstein’s critical film language involved the parody of the ‘Apollonian’ narrative structures found in Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction in order to subvert the capitalist, Christian and patriarchal axiology usually supported by (and supporting) such structures. Also, through reducing the significance of the central hero/heroine in the narrative of his films, he diminished the audience’s identification with them and thereby (to a certain degree) averted the audience’s further immersion within, and mesmerisation by, the narrative. Moreover, in his use of ‘Brechtian’ alienating techniques, montage of rhythm, and the representation of footage in reverse, he facilitated a disturbance and rupture in the usual continuity of the narrative that jerked the complacent audience out of its ‘mesmerization’ by the narrative and took them closer to the ‘edge of the abyss’ of visual language. Similarly, his use of captions that involved a play on words brought an intellectual aspect to film to fill the critical space formed by the other techniques. In effect, his critical film language contained the overt recognition of the metaphoricity of all film images, which entailed a subversion of the illusion of ‘reality’ perpetuated by the ‘realist’ texts of mainstream American cinema.

However, a comparison between Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s and Eisenstein’s respective endeavours reveals the limitations inherent to Eisenstein’s critical film language. While the ‘narrative’ of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* proceeds in a ‘logical’, intelligible fashion, in terms of ‘correct’ grammatical syntax, the philosophical content of Zarathustra’s speeches and dialogue with the other characters subverts any privileging of logic or an Apollonian subject-object dualism.220 This is summed up in the words of the Shadow who questions the *Being* of truth communicated through words when he says to Zarathustra, “I have unlearned with you belief in words and values and great names” (Nietzsche 1961:285). The only ‘truth’ that remains is that “everything has become: there are

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220 Nietzsche maintains that such an Apollonian dualism “arose from the distinction in grammar between subject and object” (Megill 1985:97).
no eternal facts, just as there are not absolute [conclusively graspable] truths” (Schrift 1990:149). The narrative of Zarathustra thus asserts that all that can be said is that nothing can be said ‘for definite’, or at least that nothing that is said will remain true for eternity, thus suggesting instead a multiplicity of truths, a pluralism of truth, impossibly infinite and sublime in its magnitude. Nietzsche’s perspective involves a perception of the fluid, unstable and metaphorical nature of language which, in the absence of any Grund or hypokeimeion, forms the edge of an abyss of meaning.

Similarly, Heidegger valorises ‘authentic’ language as that poetic language which takes us to the edge of the void, appreciates the limits of knowledge and embraces aletheia. Such a perspective involves the idea of “Truth…[as] un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment…Truth is the primal conflict in which…the Open is won within which everything stands and from which everything withholds itself” (Heidegger 1971:60-61). Heidegger’s position echoes much the same philosophical ‘theme’ (rather than ‘truth’) found in Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

However, where Nietzsche’s abyss involves the ‘groundlessness of all meaning’ and Heidegger’s void involves the Abgrund of Being, the terror and freedom of the ‘abyss’ of visual language, to which the audience is brought by Eisenstein’s critical film language, are, as mentioned earlier, diluted and moderated by the presence of the ‘safety net’ provided by the Marxist meta-narrative.

In postmodernity though, the general incredulity towards meta-narratives results in the impossibility of Marxism or any other meta-narrative acting as the above-mentioned ‘safety net’. Rather, there exists the recognition that the individual is constructed through, by and within language, and that the ‘language’ which contributes to the construction of subjectivity is, to a large and increasing extent, the visual language of mediated reality and the mass-media.

As discussed earlier, the visual language at work in contemporary mass-media inherited a great deal from Dickens via Griffith, and is not only part of the linguistic impetus towards an increasingly restricted economy that has gained momentum from Homer to the present, but also contains the same epistemological and ontological perspectives as dialectical language. I.e. through this visual language the world is presented as spectacle to be devoured by a Cartesian ego in much the same way as the world is considered as the ‘standing reserve’ to be exploited by that ego. Similarly, ressentiment is as much at work in the desire, inherent to visual language, to represent the world in its entirety through a

\[221\] From Lacan’s post-structural perspective, “[T]here could not be a human subject without language…it is the ability to speak that distinguishes the subject. It is this feature that separates the social from the natural world. There is no subject independent of language…[and] Lacan insists that we are all immersed in everyday language and cannot get out of it” (Sarup 1988:12).
coherent series of images, as it is in the desire, in terms of dialectical language, to represent and stabilize the world conceptually by considering it as a system.

Thus the subjectivity informed by visual language is largely the same as that informed by dialectical language. I.e. through the media there occurs the same entrenchment of the ontological perspective concerning the integral, stable self that occurs through dialectical language, while both visual language and dialectical language involve the same legitimation of a rigid Cartesian subject-object dualism.

However, if visual ‘language’ is the dominant language of the contemporary era through which subjectivity is shaped, and if this language is predicated on the same ‘Apollonian’ impetus that underpins dialectical language and the narrative structure of Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction, then a subversion of the narrative structure of mainstream visual language constitutes a subversion of the integrity of the ‘Apollonian’ Cartesian ego. Furthermore, by implication, any such subversion also amounts to a subversion of dialectical language, along with all the epistemological and ontological perspectives contained therein. This subversion is achieved, at a cinematic level, through the use of Eisenstein’s techniques in the absence of the conceptual ‘safety net’ of the Marxist meta-narrative. The use of montage of rhythm, jump-cut editing, reverse-footage, the design of new film-narratives which subvert those of long-standing film genres, etc., result in a subversion of the integrity of the Cartesian ego (of the viewer) because this ego is informed, perpetuated and propagated through mainstream visual language.

In pre-Socratic Greece, according to (Nietzsche and) Heidegger, a more porous, fluid and ‘Dionysian’ sense of self prevailed, along with an appreciation of aletheia and the limitations of knowledge. Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s and Aronofsky’s respective ‘languages’ facilitate the construction of a similar porous and protean subjectivity that contrasts with the rigid, integral Cartesian egos constructed through dialectical language and the visual language at work in contemporary mass-media. Through their respective ‘languages’, a more open-ended, ‘poetic’ language, that ‘dwells in close proximity to the abyss’ of possibility (that is language), becomes possible.

In Chapter Four I analyse Aronofsky’s two films, Pi (1998) and Requiem for a Dream (2001), both of which constitute postmodern critical cinema in that they both engage with the visual language at work in mainstream cinema in a manner that mirrors Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s subversion of dialectical language. Through his use of Eisenstein’s critical techniques, analysed above, along with

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222 As mentioned earlier, what has changed with the ‘advent’ of hyperreality is that the ‘object’-pole of the dualism is no longer conceived of in terms of ‘material, extended objects’ (Cf. note 160, 162, 171 & 172), but in terms of images. (See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 3. Baudrillard, Adorno and ‘intolerable’ pessimism in the contemporary era).
the development of a host of other techniques afforded by improved technology, Aronofsky’s critical film language constitutes a subversion of mainstream visual language because it leads the audience to the ‘edge of the abyss’ of visual language. Moreover, in Aronofsky’s postmodern films there is an absence of the conceptual ‘safety net’ of any meta-narrative and, as with Derrida’s deconstruction (critically informed by Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s perspective) there is “no deep essence to keep things on course…[but rather a perception of all as a] contingent assembly of unities subject always to a more radical open-endedness that constantly runs the risk of going adrift” (Caputo 1997:117).
4. Aronofsky's subversion of the visual language of mainstream cinema

1. Introduction

In Lewis Jacob's *The Rise of the American Film*, written in 1939, the author points out that Hollywood, in its fear of losing profits by making enemies, in its mad desire to appease the prejudices of every group, has submitted to an ever-tightening censorship under which it becomes impossible to deal [honestly] with reality. [For example, for almost two full years after the stock-market crash, Hollywood maintained a “hands-off” policy regarding discussion of the deepening depression. Films continued to emphasize sex, sophistication, and spectacle...the public as a whole hated to acknowledge the reality of the economic debacle. (Jacobs 1939:508)

Homer as naïve art was to the Greeks what mainstream American cinema is to the contemporary audience of the mass media, namely a buffer between such an audience and their social/existential reality. Even when Hollywood appears to deal with controversial issues, or seems to be delving into the realm of social criticism, its primary endeavor is related to entertainment, with the ‘featured’ social issue merely constituting the backdrop against which the dramatic struggles of a hero, heroine and villain are played out. Invariably, these struggles edge their way towards a form of amiable Apollonian resolution that tactfully avoids alienating the audience by offering no significant challenge to the axiology of the status quo. Rather, mainstream cinema seeks to ‘appease the prejudices of every group’ that are united in their demand for the proverbial ‘happy ending’ and for an underlying Apollonian narrative structure that does not leave any problematic ‘loose ends’. These attributes, in turn, are considered desirable because they reflect and reaffirm the ‘unity’ and ‘integrity’ of the viewer as a Cartesian ego, the constitution of which arises through the dominance of dialectical language that is mirrored in the hegemony of the visual language of mainstream cinema and mass media. This optimism and ‘unity’ or ‘integrity’ of narrative structure has become the ‘dream’ of mainstream cinema and is grounded in a habit of thought that, as discussed in Chapters One, Two and Three, has been developing momentum from Homer through to the contemporary era.

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223 For a discussion of Homeric naïve art see – Chapter One, Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in Homeric epic and Attic tragedy: 9. The relationship between dramatic tragedy and Homeric epic. (Also Cf. note 6.)


225 For a discussion of the parallels between dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media see – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media: 2. The visual language of the mass media and dialectical language.
As shown, this move towards an increasingly restricted economy manifested itself not only in Homeric naïve art and Platonic dialecticism, but also through Hegel’s philosophy and the narrative style of Dickens’ fiction. Through the influence of Dickens’ fiction on D.W. Griffith’s film language, it became translated into and instantiated within mainstream cinema, and thereby came to underpin and inform the visual language of contemporary mass media. In Griffith’s fiction, the ‘optimistic’ narrative structure of the Christian meta-narrative (informed by a reductive Platonism), involving the idea of an inevitable, amiable Apollonian resolution to the narratives of the lives of the faithful, became manifest in the form of the inevitable re-establishment of power structures, the invariable success of the hero/heroine, and the constant defeat of the villain. This has continued as an underlying tendency within mainstream American cinema through the two key American cultural myths, perpetuated by mainstream film texts, namely “that the truth will always prevail (wrongs will be made right) and that the powerful in this society can be brought down by the little people who are represented [as]…truth-seek[ers]” (Denzin 1995:23).

These assumptions, along with Griffith’s optimistic narrative structure, are shown to be illusory in both Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* (2001) and *Pi* (1998). In *Requiem for a Dream*, not only do the real villains, such as the characters of Arnold (Sean Gullette), ‘Little John’ (Keith David) and the drug dealers, fade into obscurity and remain unpunished, but the ‘little people’, namely Sara (Ellen Burstyn), Harry (Jared Leto), Marion (Jennifer Connelly), and Tyrone (Marlon Wayans) remain victims throughout the narrative and become increasingly distanced from each other and from their respective dreams. Similarly, in his earlier film *Pi* (1998), the narrative articulates the limitations of any language to represent the world in its entirety, and with it, the impossibility of any final Apollonian ‘truth’.

In the *Intermezzo* and at the beginning of Chapter Three the similarities between dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema were discussed. *Pi* (1998), insofar as it deals with dialectical language, constitutes a forerunner to *Requiem for a Dream* (2001) that deals with the visual language of the mass media and its ‘construction’ of contemporary subjectivity. However, because more use is made, in *Requiem for a Dream*, of critical cinematographic techniques that hark back to the work of Eisenstein, discussed in the previous chapter, I will first look at Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* (2001) in comparison to Eisenstein’s work before considering *Pi* (1998) as a neo noir.

In contrast to the visual language of mainstream cinema, Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), through its conceptual angle and overt distancing techniques, that bear an overwhelming

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226 Cf. note 156 for a brief discussion of the links between Christianity, patriarchy and capitalism.
similarity to distancing techniques used by Eisenstein, adopts a critical perspective with regard to all mainstream cinema and visual mass-media. Some of these techniques are present in Pi (1998), and these, together with other techniques unique to the latter film-text, push this neo noir film into the same realm of critical cinema.

Ostensibly, the narrative of Requiem for a Dream involves the death of, and hence ‘requiem’ for, the dreams of the various characters depicted in the film. Yet in addition to this, a more significant hegemonic ‘dream’ that finds its nemesis in Aronofsky’s text is the ‘dream’ that involves the desire, associated with mainstream cinema, for an amiable Apollonian resolution to all narratives. This dream has its hegemony subverted through the recommencement of a dialogue between such Apollonian narrative form and the Dionysian voice of a ‘reality’ that does not correspond to such rigid narrative lines. In other words, the film does not entertain the viewer as a stable, integral Cartesian ego, through perpetuating the ‘usual’ Apollonian narrative structures of mainstream cinema, in a move that would contain implicit support for the ontological illusion of that ego’s stability and integrity, and the epistemological illusion of that ego’s capacity for objective truth. Rather, it takes viewers to the edge of the visual language that contributes to the construction of their subjectivity, and allows them to peer into the ‘reality’ of the abysmal possibilities that haunt this language. This is achieved through the film’s climactic finale that involves a ‘tragic’ parody of the time-honoured montage of tempo of mainstream cinema, in that, in Requiem for a Dream, it is devoid of resolution. In Eisenstein’s work are found similar cinematic parodies, but where his work is underpinned by the Marxist meta-narrative, Aronofsky’s parody has no such conceptual ‘safety net’. Rather, Aronofsky’s parody opens up visual language to the abyss of possibility that lurks beneath its more usual, staid, ‘traditional’ narrative structures. Where these standard narrative structures of the montage of tempo construct subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian ego, Aronofsky’s cinematic parody of them promotes subjectivity as something far more porous, flexible, less integral and less stable, since it questions and problematizes the legitimacy and validity of standard visual language’s representation of reality.

Similarly, in Pi (1998), there occurs a subversion of Plato’s allegory of the cave in which the exclusive privileging of the Apollonian language of reason and mathematics is revealed to be inherently limited in its capacity to represent the world. There also occurs a re-evaluation of the cave as a metaphor for the womb or of a feminine discourse that, although indefinable, possesses great value. However, the implications of the narrative concern the impossibility of dialectical language ever arriving at a stable, Apollonian truth, upon which the Cartesian ego is predicated, and thereby the film

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227 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 5. Eisenstein’s subversion of the Apollonian structures of mainstream American cinema through the use of montage.
opens up the viewer to a dialogue between the ‘Dionysian’ abyss of a more feminine discourse and the (limited) Apollonian language of mathematics.229

The film thereby approximates and parallels Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s acknowledgement of the abyss or void that lurks beneath dialectical language, and which makes possible the constitution of subjectivity as something more porous and flexible.

In Chapter Three I considered Eisenstein’s use of parody to subvert the montage of tempo that formed a cornerstone of mainstream American cinema, along with five additional ‘alienating’ techniques employed by him in his critical cinema, namely the absence of easily identifiable heroes in his texts, his use of ‘Brechtian’ distancing techniques, montage of rhythm, captions involving word play, and his representation of footage in reverse to break (and reverse) the continuity of the narrative. I also discussed the manner in which each contrasted with and subverted the narrative techniques of mainstream American cinema.230 I will follow the same pattern of analysis in dealing with Aronofksy’s Requiem for a Dream (2001). However, as Aronofsky, in the process of rendering his parody of the montage of tempo, highlights certain psychoanalytic elements (in relation to the characters within the film) that also subvert mainstream film narratives, I will attend to these during my discussion of his parody of montage of tempo.

After this I will consider Aronofsky’s Pi (1998) as a neo noir film. However, as the whole debate of whether or not film noir ever existed as a specific genre is still a contentious issue, in the interests of laying a solid foundation for my discussion of Pi as a neo noir, I engage briefly with Marc Vernet’s criticism of the idea of film noir. I maintain that Vernet argues convincingly for the ‘non-existence’ of film noir as a strict genre, but that, with reference to Baudrillard’s theories concerning simulacrum and simulation, neo noir is immune to Vernet’s criticism and possesses all the elements originally thought to be contained within film noir.

Having established the legitimacy of speaking of neo noir as a specific genre, with certain specific features, I will consider Aronofsky’s Pi (1998) as a critical neo noir, and the contribution it makes towards the subversion of the narrative structure and other aspects of mainstream cinema through its social critique, concentration on psychoanalytic themes and reflections of German expressionism.

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229 Mathematics itself is not a restricted economy, unless it involves the practical application of mathematics in the interests of technoscience (Cf. note 114), that is, in the interests of ‘delimiting’ the world by turning it into a ‘standing reserve’ (for a discussion of the ‘standing reserve’ see – Intermezzo, Heidegger’s Age of the World Picture : 4. Constitutive elements of dialectical language and Heidegger’s proposed alternatives). At first, the character of Max Cohen (Sean Gullette) reflects this attitude. However, as the narrative progresses, he becomes aware of the limitations of this perspective.

2. Aronofsky’s subversion of montage of tempo through the use of parody

The ‘learned’ (internalised) narrative structure of the dominant voices of mainstream cinema promise an amiable (Apollonian) resolution at the end of all narratives. This has continued from Griffith to the present as a constant theme within mainstream American cinema, and usually involves the restoration of traditional power hierarchies and class structures, the victory of the hero or heroine, the triumph of conventional good over evil, and other habitual ‘comfortingly familiar’ patterns that facilitate an optimistic conclusion to cinematic narratives. However, ‘reality’, life or facticity never correspond to these rigid Apollonian narrative structures, and involve instead a perpetual sense of ‘lack’.

According to Lacan, we are born into a condition of ‘lack’, and subsequently spend the rest of our lives trying to overcome this condition...As we move forward, we are driven by a desire to overcome the condition, and as we look back, we continue to believe that the union with the mother was a moment of plenitude before the fall into ‘lack’. The result is an endless quest in search of an imagined moment of plenitude...[during which w]e console ourselves with a series of substitutes for a substitute (Storey 1998:93).

In Requiem for a Dream, the pathos of the final montage of tempo is heightened because of the disjunction between the ‘dream’ of the Apollonian narrative structure of mainstream cinema and of the media, generally, which informs the main characters’ subjectivity, on the one hand, and the main characters’ Dionysian reality or facticity, which results in their respective pursuits of a substitute for the lost moment of plenitude graphically ending in abysmal failure, on the other. As mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, two significant American cultural myths perpetuated by mainstream film texts are “that the truth will always prevail (wrongs will be made right) and that the powerful in this society can be brought down by the little people who are represented [as]...truth-seek[ers]” (Denzin 1995:23). Aronofsky’s Requiem for a Dream does not conclude with any such optimism but rather exposes these two cultural myths as illusory because at the end of the film the ‘wrongs are not made right’, and the ‘little people’, namely the characters of Harry, Marion, Tyrone and Sara, remain powerless victims, forever distanced from each other and from their dreams by their respective predicaments.

What is of significance is that the main characters represent ‘us’ (i.e. the viewer/audience of Requiem for a Dream) and thus, insofar as they are duped by the visual language of the mass media,  

231 All such endeavours are, by definition, doomed to fail, yet what is distinctive is the way in which Aronofsky links the characters’ respective quests for plenitude to illusory promises, the pursuit of which leads to their doom.
they represent the way in which we are/have similarly been duped. *Requiem for a Dream* is therefore a self-critical film in that, although it is part of the mass media, it forces us to become aware of, and question, the degree of influence that the mass media have over ‘us’. That is, after viewing the film one is forced to consider the degree to which one is in the same predicament as the pathetic main characters, whose respective attempts to recover the moment of plenitude are not only imbricated with the images of mediated reality, but are also couched within the ‘learned’ narrative structure of mainstream cinema that demands an amiable resolution to all narratives.

Evidence for this occurs when Sara is confronted by Harry on the subject of her growing addiction to amphetamine–barbiturate diet pills. In response to Harry’s question concerning the significance and value of appearing on television, she says, “I’m somebody now…soon millions of people will see me and they’ll like me…it’s a reason to get up in the morning, it’s a reason to lose weight, to fit in the red dress, it’s a reason to smile, it makes tomorrow all right.” Her use of clichés, learned from television advertisements, game shows and mainstream cinema, to articulate her (implicit) psychological turmoil, exposes the frightening degree to which mediated reality promotes limited avenues of thought through the exclusive privileging of certain ‘styles’ of language and certain narrative structures.

Further evidence occurs in the opening scene when Sara, the T.V. addict, ‘speaks’ to her absent husband, Seymour, from her refuge behind the locked door, as her son Harry steals her television set. She says, “This isn’t happening, and if it should be happening it would be all right…in the end its [always] all right.” This sentiment, relating to the need for everything to work out amiably in the end, is echoed later by Harry’s girlfriend, Marion Silver, who repeatedly says, “It’ll be O.K.,” despite their increasingly desperate situation as a result of Harry’s difficulty in obtaining drugs. Sara’s and Marion’s similar responses to their respective predicaments are not merely instances of innocuous ‘wishful thinking’ but bear testimony to the collapse of the language of ‘reality’ into the language of Baudrillard’s ‘hyper-real’, or the visual language of mainstream American cinema, with its ‘necessity’ for inevitable, amiable resolutions at the ‘end’ of all narratives.

Moreover, *Requiem for a Dream* is not only concerned with the death of the characters’ respective dreams, but also with the subversion of the implicit, collective ‘dream’ of mainstream cinema that demands an amiable Apollonian resolution to all narratives, which is represented as (predominantly) constituting the subjectivity of the characters in the film. Denzin lends support to the idea that mainstream cinema plays an important role in the construction of contemporary people’s subjectivity (i.e. both ‘our’ subjectivity and the subjectivity of the characters as represented in *Requiem for a Dream*) when he states that
American cinema created a space for a certain kind of public, communal urban life...[it] elaborated the epistemology of scientific realism already deeply rooted in American culture...[and] reproduced a realistic and naturalistic discourse about the universe of experience and appearance. The movies became a technology and apparatus of power that would organise and bring meaning to everyday lives. They would function as adjuncts to the twentieth century surveillance societies, deploying the cinematic gaze and its narratives in the service of the state (Denzin 1995:14-15).

However, if mainstream cinema contributes significantly to the constitution of subjectivity, then a subversion of the visual language of mainstream cinema, through critical cinema, makes possible a moment in which the habitual patterns of the dominant visual language may become conspicuous to the (reflective) subject who is usually significantly influenced by those patterns.232 In this moment the subject is brought to the abyss of infinite possibility that looms at the brink or edge of visual language, since the utter metaphoricity and metonymic character of all cinematic representations and their narrative structures are revealed to the subject-as-audience, whose subjectivity has been decisively informed in terms of those representations and narrative structures.233 In other words, because subjectivity is shaped by, among other things,234 mainstream cinema, through the subject’s ‘mis’-recognition of mainstream representations and narrative structures as ‘real’, critical cinema, through revealing such representations and narrative structures to be merely fictions, subverts the integrity of the subjectivity informed by mainstream cinema. With regard to Requiem for a Dream, when ‘we’ (as audience) see how ‘they’ (the characters within the film) have been duped by mass-media, we are given the opportunity to reflect on our own situation.

The ways in which Aronofsky does this are both overt and subtle. At an overt level, he mirrors and develops 5 techniques of Eisenstein’s critical cinema, namely the absence of easily identifiable

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232 In Being and Time, Heidegger refers to equipment that, when broken, becomes conspicuous, in that it no longer ‘disappears’ through the habit of use. He states ‘When we discover its unusability, the thing becomes conspicuous. Conspicuousness presents the thing at hand in a certain unhandiness...[Accordingly, w]hen we notice its unhandiness, what is at hand enters the mode of obtrusiveness...Unhandy things are disturbing and make evident the obstinacy of what is initially to be taken care of...With this obstinacy the objective presence of what is at hand makes itself known in a new way as the being of what is still present and calls for completion’ (Heidegger 1953:68-69). Similarly, when the narrative structure of a film, that usually goes unnoticed, does not conclude with an amiable resolution, it becomes conspicuous as ‘lacking’ in some way. That is, the lack of resolution becomes obtrusive and the audience becomes aware of how the narrative obstinately resists completion along the usual lines of mainstream cinema.

233 There are distinct parallels between this perspective, attained through critical cinema, and Nietzsche’s perspective regarding ‘truth’ and ‘facts’ that inform and shape subjectivity. Nietzsche maintains that language is an abyss of possibility in which there are no definite, eternally stable ‘facts’. Instead, he asserts that truth ‘is a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transposed, adorned, and after long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which have become worn out and have lost their sensual power; coins which have lost their pictures and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal’ (Megill 1985:51).

234 Subjectivity is also constituted through language, even if the ‘ego’-component of subjectivity goes back to the mirror phase.
heroes in the text, the use of ‘Brechtian’ distancing techniques, montage of rhythm, captions involving word play, and the representation of footage in reverse to break (and reverse) the continuity of the narrative, all of which will be discussed in the following section.

At a more subtle level, Aronofsky engages in a subversion of what is possibly the most time-honoured spectacle of mainstream cinema, namely accelerated montage or montage of tempo. As discussed, montage of tempo is used to create excitement and tension through implying the possibility of the inversion of traditional power hierarchies, the defeat of the hero or heroine, and/or the death (or injury) of a besieged individual. However, in keeping with the tendency of mainstream cinema, the narrative ‘always’ (or at least, usually) concludes on a harmonious note with a resolution in which the power hierarchies are restored, the villains are vanquished by the hero or heroine, and the besieged individual is rescued.

Eisenstein writes of Griffith that, “Griffith is a great master of montage constructions that have been created in a direct-lined quickening and increase of tempo” (Eisenstein 1949:234-235). As discussed earlier, a prime example of this is Griffith’s The Lonedale Operator (1911), which contains all the quintessential features of the ‘traditional’ montage of tempo. To recap, the narrative concerns the Lonedale Operator who, because of illness, absents himself from work and is temporarily replaced by his daughter (Blanche Sweet). She, in the course of her work, takes charge of a large sum of money belonging to the Lonedale Company. Two vagabonds then attempt to steal the money and force her to barricade herself behind the doors of the telegraph office and send for help. As the train with the hero (i.e. the boyfriend of the Lonedale Operator’s daughter) gets closer, so the villains succeed in penetrating deeper into the telegraph office, while the Lonedale Operator’s daughter exhibits increasing distress in the office interior. Tension is created because the inter-cutting between the three primary spaces of the telegraph office interior, the criminals outside, and the rescue train, increases in rapidity and implies that the separate events, although they occur in different places, are racing towards each other in time and space such that they will soon meet in the same frame. However, when they eventually do meet, the narrative, as mentioned above, concludes with an amiable resolution in which the hero emerges from the crisis victorious, the individual under siege (i.e. the Lonedale Operator’s daughter) is rescued, and the villains are arrested.

The tension of the montage of tempo is underpinned by (and reciprocally reinforces) an underlying bourgeois axiology in terms of which capitalist values are entrenched. For example, the Lonedale Company’s right to capital and the legitimacy of the economic system by means of which

\[235\] Like Eisenstein, Aronofsky uses a ‘double’ commencement of the narrative and an objectification of the audience through the gaze of characters within the film.

\[236\] See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 4. The possibility of a critical cinema, iii. Montage of tempo.
they attained such wealth are never questioned, while the villains are identified as much by their dark attire as by their conspicuous poverty. Moreover, the tension of the narrative results from the ‘possibility’ that the villains might achieve their goal of stealing the company’s money and ravishing the Lonedale Operator’s daughter, which, in turn, would imply their successful challenge to the dominant socio-economic hierarchies and bourgeois class structures.

A forerunner to Aronofsky’s subversion of this narrative structure in *Requiem for a Dream* is found in the scene sequence (discussed earlier) from *Strike* (1924), where Eisenstein engages critically with this underlying axiology through parodying the ‘traditional’ montage of tempo. Towards the end of the film, Cossacks are seen attacking the striking workers and, by the sheer weight and impetus of their brutality, are able to ascend with their horses onto higher and higher levels of the buildings that house the workers. A shot of two innocent children, sitting high above the fracas and playing, is juxtaposed with the ferocity of the struggle below, while the Cossacks succeed in ascending higher and higher up the stairs. Finally the Cossacks reach the highest part of the building and the children, at which point a Cossack grabs one child and throws him/her to his/her death over the side of the high building. Through this Eisenstein subverts the usual narrative progression of montage of tempo à-la-Griffith.

Because he has come to restore law and order, the Cossack constitutes the ‘hero’ from a bourgeois axiological perspective. Accordingly, he arrives and defeats the striking workers who, because of their low social status and poverty, would fall into the category of the ‘villains’, while the children playing on top of the building, because of their youth and innocence, might constitute the ‘besieged individuals’. However, the Cossack (i.e. the hero), after defeating the striking workers (i.e. the villains), proceeds to the top of the building where he murders the child (i.e. the besieged individual), instead of rescuing him or her. Eisenstein’s montage of tempo thus mirrors the restoration of the power structures and social hierarchies in terms of the axiology that underpinned Griffith’s montage of tempo, but reveals such structures and hierarchies to be unjust and unequivocally corrupt.

In *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), Aronofsky goes one step further than Eisenstein in his subversion of the ‘traditional’ montage of tempo. His montage of tempo has its foundations just prior to the period designated by the caption ‘WINTER’. At the end of the previous period, namely ‘FALL’, Sara Goldfarb finally goes insane as a result of her isolation and growing addiction to, and abuse of, amphetamines and barbiturates. The last scene of ‘FALL’ shows her walking down the street, dazed and disorientated, on her way to the television station. The next scene of Tyrone and Harry (now in ‘WINTER’) is of them on their way to Florida in search of drugs, while the next time we see Marion is

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237 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 5. Eisenstein’s subversion of the Apollonian structures of mainstream American cinema through the use of montage.
when she is alone in her dimly lit bathroom, experiencing withdrawal symptoms because of her difficulty in obtaining drugs. Although the latter two scenes are separated from the former by the caption of ‘WINTER’, they should be perceived as connected to it since, in that scene, Sara leaves her home and begins her ‘final’ journey over the edge of sanity just as, after the caption ‘WINTER’, Harry and Tyrone commence with their journey to Florida, a journey that in many ways will be a ‘final’ journey for them too. Similarly, Marion is ‘finally’ forced, through her lack of money and the non-availability of drugs, to make a telephone call to ‘Little John’ (Keith David) and enter into prostitution in order to get both. However, where in the *Lonedale Operator* the montage of tempo culminates in the hero, heroine and villains meeting in the same frame, and where in *Strike* the montage of tempo sees the children and the Cossacks finally meeting in a similar fashion, much to the detriment of one of the children, in Aronofsky’s montage of tempo there is no ‘meeting’ but rather a ‘drifting apart’.

The cross-cutting between scenes involving the four characters, namely Harry, Marion, Tyrone and Sara, gradually increases in speed and brevity until it approximates the inter-cutting of a montage of tempo, during which the four characters are increasingly distanced from each other, not only by space but also by time. Moreover, in addition to this spatio-temporal distance, their individual experiences also distance them, irrevocably, from one another, in a manner that negates the possibility of any final, harmonious resolution to the narrative. Through this Aronofsky offers a parody of mainstream cinema’s montage of tempo that, because it disappoints the audience’s expectations, makes the narrative structure of montage of tempo conspicuous to them. However, the degree to which it becomes conspicuous is relative to the degree to which the characters, in contrast to the ‘traditional’ montage of tempo, are distanced from one another and from their respective dreams, and in the following part of this section I will focus on this. At the same time I will also consider the way in which Aronofsky, through his treatment of the various characters at an iconographic level, uses images to deliver a social critique of, and to subvert, the ‘image’-infatuation of contemporary culture.

In the narrative Sara develops psychosis and is thereby cut off from her son Harry and from the possibility of realizing her dream of being on television. However, her psychosis represents more than just a moment of Aronofsky’s subversion of montage of tempo through parody. Because this psychosis is only separated by a matter of degree from the ‘type’ of subjectivity promoted or cultivated by contemporary mass media, Aronofsky’s thematization of it problematizes the relationship between the mass media and contemporary viewers/audience. Lacan maintains that the ‘lack of lack’ characteristic of psychosis is pathological because it is really the case that, while

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238 For example, Marion’s ordeal at ‘Little John’s’ occurs at night while Tyrone is seen working at the prison during the day.

239 It is also dependent, of course, on the degree to which members of the film audience are sensitive or receptive to Aronofsky’s techniques for making certain things conspicuous.
there is no subject except in representation,…no representation captures us completely. I can neither be totally defined nor can I escape all definition. I am the quest for myself…On the other hand, any attempt to ‘totalize’ someone else, to grasp the other completely, is bound to fall short – no description does the other justice. Moreover, one can only see oneself as one *thinks* others see one (Sarup 1988:15-16).

Sara, along with the other main characters, is infatuated with the idea of attaining a stable and integral identity through the ‘image’. She chooses to see herself not as those around her see her, namely in terms of her facticity involving her personal history, triumphs, failures, personality traits, etc., but rather in terms of how an ‘imaginary’ studio audience might see her, namely as an ‘image’ devoid of failure, loss and lack. For her, the proverbial ‘15 seconds’ of televised fame involving a summarised, superficial and ultimately empty representation of herself, takes precedence over a ‘non-(mass) mediated’ identity, where lack is embraced as an integral part of subjectivity. She develops what Lacan would call a kind of psychosis, or ‘lack of lack’, as the result of her exclusive privileging of her self-image in relation to the game show, where she imagines herself articulating and representing her son Harry’s ‘imagined’ success, health and engagement to the world. With the aid of amphetamines and barbiturates, she engages in a violent repression of her suffering, caused by her lack of company, lack of recognition and the demands of her body, and privileges instead her self-image as she anticipates it being reflected through the mass media, which results in her experiencing a distinct ‘lack-of-lack’, or *psychosis*.

According to Baudrillard (and there seems to be good reason to agree with him) in the contemporary age, as a result of the proliferation of the mass-media and mainstream cinema, there is an infatuation with an imaginary identity that is informed by the media. As such, the media dictates who ‘we’ are and ‘speaks’ us, and to that extent ‘we’ may all be said to risk/approximate psychosis. According to Lacan, psychosis has a linguistic basis.

In the delirium of a psychotic one finds…a form of speaking that “has given up trying to make itself recognized”…[and] precisely because of this solipsism, psychotic delusions exhibit a stereotypical quality that demonstrates the fact that the subject here “is spoken rather than speaking”…the psychotic’s speaking manifests a fundamental “absence of speech” where speech properly involves some degree of creative dialogue (Lee 1990:68).

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240 As Lacan shows, we are all, to some extent, mediated.
241 Cf. notes 160, 162, 171 & 172.
This is precisely what manifests after the final scene of ‘FALL’, when Sara arrives at the
television station to enquire as to when she is going to be on the game show. As she pleads with them
she intermittently says things such as, “We’re giving the prizes away!” Her psychosis, involving the
indistinguishable merging of the ‘language’ of the game show with her own speech, was foreshadowed
in a previous scene, mentioned earlier, in which Harry visited her during the early stages of her diet-
pill addiction, and questioned her about her anticipated appearance on television. As stated, Sara used
clichés from the media, or media programmes, to articulate her psychological pain, and thereby
indicated the degree to which the visual language of the mass media had already begun to usurp the
primacy of her own speech and thoughts.242 This usurpation culminates in her psychotic breakdown at
the T.V. station.

From there she is escorted to a psychiatric hospital where, after the failure of various
treatments, she is subjected to shock therapy that literally cuts her off from the realm of emotions,
evident in her non-expressive facial features when two of her friends come to visit her. Furthermore, in
the very last scene of the film Sara lies on her bed, lost in her delusions, with the voices and lights of
the television show, and ‘images’ of Harry, echoing and flashing now only in her memories. Thereby,
ironically, she is cut off forever from the ‘real’ Harry and his predicament involving imprisonment,
addiction and the amputation of his arm.

In this final scene, her psychosis, and the degree to which it distances her from Harry and her
‘dream’, are not only integral to Aronofsky’s parody of montage of tempo, but also constitute part of
Aronofsky’s attempt to subvert the power of the mass media. His film, as mentioned, has a self-critical
aspect in that it shows and exposes the dreadful power of the media to dictate who ‘we’ are and to
‘speak’ ‘us’. Requiem for a Dream thereby challenges us, in view of this power, to reclaim the power
of creative individual thinking, and it is therefore really a ‘call to arms’ to take the power of the media
seriously and to resist it.

Aronofsky strengthens this ‘call to arms’ and offers criticism of the image-infatuation of
contemporary culture via his treatment of the character of Marion Silver. Through her he reveals the
hypocrisy of an infatuation with ‘beauty’ defined purely in terms of appearances, and shows such
‘beauty’ to be only a beautiful façade haunted, in reality, by horror and anguish. Her dream (i.e. of
attaining ‘wholeness’) involves her identification with, and exclusive privileging of, the image of her
own beauty in a way that is tantamount to addiction.

During the ‘SUMMER’ she articulates the degree to which her reflected image is of
fundamental importance to her when she lies head to head with Harry and whispers, “I love you Harry,
you make me feel like a person.” She doesn’t love Harry for any of his enduring qualities, but rather because an image of her beauty is reflected back to her through his adoration of her. However, simultaneously, the psychological distance between them is articulated through a split-screen in which the left camera focuses on Harry and the right on Marion. The split screen is not only an alienating technique that makes conspicuous the ‘constructedness’ of the representation (as will be discussed in the following section), but it also articulates the impossibility of them ‘really’ communicating or having a relationship because of Marion’s narcissism. Further evidence for her narcissism occurs, during the ‘SUMMER’ period, when she takes drugs alone and stands half-naked before a mirror, adoring her own reflection. Her dream, involving complete intoxication with the image of her own beauty, is facilitated by drugs that silence the subversive voices of discontent that undermine and contradict this image of ‘perfection’, namely those voices that remind her of her facticity involving the problems she is experiencing with her parents, her lack of career-direction, options, etc.

However, as a result of her narcissism, she is as much addicted to Harry’s ‘reflection’ of her beauty as she is to drugs, and when later, through the scarcity of drugs and a lack of money, his ‘reflection’ of her beauty begins to fade, as he draws away from her emotionally, she prostitutes herself with her psychologist, Arnold, in order to get money to buy drugs. In reality, her endeavour is not only geared towards acquiring drugs, but is also geared towards re-acquiring the fading ‘reflection’ of her beauty through Harry’s adoration of her.

Marion attempts to counter the steady ‘erosion’ of her self-image, which occurs through the subversive dictates of her growing addiction that force her into prostitution, by applying make-up. This becomes heavier and darker as the narrative progresses and contrasts markedly with the ‘purity’ of the above-mentioned scene, during the period entitled ‘SUMMER’, when she stood in front of a mirror, alone and ‘free’ of make-up.243

Finally, in the absence of Harry and without money, she is overcome by the impetus of her addiction and pays her first visit to ‘Little John’ to exchange sex for drugs. This leads to a second visit to ‘Little John’s’ apartment where she becomes the object of the gaze of a group of men when she is forced to perform a variety of sexual acts with other women – something that she finds utterly demeaning. Where before, in terms of her narcissism, she was both subject and object, at ‘Little John’s’ apartment she is reduced to a mere object by the men who take pleasure in exploiting her image of beauty. Through this event Marion is forever cut off from her dream, involving intoxication with the image of her own beauty, because after her ordeal it is impossible for her to re-constitute the

243 This is accentuated by the light and haziness of the earlier scene in ‘SUMMER’, which contrasts with the weighty shadows, clarity and deep purple and blue hues that characterize scenes involving Marion during ‘WINTER’.
‘purity’ of that image. Quite simply put, she is never able to look at herself in the mirror in the same way as before.

The loss of her dream, and her separation from Harry through her prostitution, deny the narrative the possibility of resolving itself amiably and thereby play an important role in Aronofsky’s parody of the montage of tempo, while the reflection of the emptiness and pain beneath her beautiful image subverts the illusion upon which the image-infatuation of contemporary culture is predicated.

A similar theme is visually articulated in relation to the character of Tyrone, who is also represented as infatuated with his self-image. During the period entitled ‘SUMMER’, when Harry’s and Tyrone’s drug business was profitable, there occurs a scene in which Tyrone looks at himself in some mirrors that he has bought with his newly acquired wealth. The fact that he purchased mirrors is particularly important because it relates his infatuation with his reflected image to Marion’s (and Sara’s) similar pursuit, i.e. the desire to attain stability and integrity of the self through an Apollonian image that does not admit the existence of subversive Dionysian voices. Lacan maintains that

> the imaginary order is best exemplified by the mirror stage...[when] the subject arrives at an apprehension of both its self and the Other – indeed of itself as the Other...assisted by the...[subject] seeing...its own reflection in a mirror. That reflection has a coherence which the subject itself lacks. But this self-recognition is, Lacan insists, a mis-recognition (Sarup 1988:27).

Although Tyrone is no longer in the ‘mirror phase’, he is subject to a similar ‘mis’-recognition of himself through the image. This involves his identification with the integrity of the image despite the fact that, as a subject created through, by, and within, among other things, language, he is denied such coherence and stability. His desire for such integrity manifests itself in an exclusion or ‘forgetting’ of those factors that destabilize the integrity of his self-image, for example, his criminal occupation that detracts from, and undermines, the image of ‘perfection’ reflected back at him in the mirror.

However, in addition to this, a second theme broached through his character concerns the degree to which romantic involvement is underpinned by the unfulfillable pursuit of the lost moment of plenitude and involved with the figure of the mother. Mainstream cinematic narratives that focus on romance characteristically include some kind of resolution whereby the pursued love-object is either found or found wanting and replaced by a satisfactory alternative (not always another person), without a hint of the link between the desired object and the figure of the mother. From Lacan’s perspective, romance is a discursive practice that maintains ‘that ‘love’ is the ultimate solution to all our

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244 According to Lacan, this occurs somewhere between the ages of six and eighteen months.
problems…[that it] makes us whole…full…[and] completes our being. Love in effect promises to return us to the blissful state of the moment of plenitude, warm against the body of the mother’ (Storey 1998: 96). However, Lacan also correctly points out that we never find such complete satisfaction. In contrast to this, the aesthetic effect of mainstream cinema, as it pertains to romance, relies heavily on a silencing of both the psychoanalytic dynamic of lack, which underpins intimate relationships, and the links between the object of desire and the figure of the mother, and instead promotes a false psychology of the possibility of attaining the moment of plenitude through finding one’s ‘other-half’.

However, in *Requiem for a Dream*, Tyrone’s dream is represented as orientated, unequivocally, around the pursuit of a substitute for the lost moment of plenitude in the womb and for maternal approval, both of which are also represented as forever beyond his grasp. Tyrone, at one point, remembers his childhood and mother, in the presence of his girlfriend, whilst looking in the mirror. This scene involves a play on ‘language’ (images) similar to the manner in which the unconscious plays with words and symbols, where ‘reflection’ could mean both *reflection* in a mirror and a *remembering* of the past. Having set the ‘psychoanalytic’ tone of the scene as such, Aronofsky goes further by representing Tyrone’s thoughts as returning to his childhood where he imagines himself as a small boy, sitting in his mother’s lap and embracing her while saying, “See, I told you one day I’d make it.” Tyrone’s desire for financial success is revealed as underpinned by the desire for maternal approval, and in his brief verbal exchange with his girlfriend, immediately after his ‘reflection’ in the mirror and ‘reflection’ on the past, it is revealed that his girlfriend constitutes a substitute for his lost moment of plenitude. When asked by his girlfriend what he is thinking of, he replies, “I’m thinking of you,” although the images have been of his mother. Moreover, in a later scene during the period entitled ‘FALL’, Tyrone sits alone in his apartment, after his girlfriend has left him, and stares down at a picture as the rain pelts against his window. However, the picture is then revealed to be of his mother and not of his girlfriend.

Aronofsky, by ‘unforgetting’ the psychoanalytic impulses beneath ‘romance’ that involve the figure of the mother, seriously problematizes the ‘aesthetic’ of romance found in mainstream cinema. Also, insofar as both Harry’s and Tyrone’s relationships with their respective girlfriends are represented as underpinned by this dynamic, it is revealed as something that operates beyond the control of the subject. As such, it also subverts the illusion of the autonomy and self-transparency of the Cartesian ego, implicitly perpetuated by mainstream cinema and the mass media.

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245 That is, both the subjects of the characters within the film and the subjects of the audience.
At the end of ‘WINTER’, both Harry and Tyrone are arrested, and in the final moments of Aronofsky’s montage of tempo Tyrone is seen performing hard labour in a Florida prison and dreaming, at night, of his mother. His incarceration cuts him off not only from her and her ‘approval’, but also from his dream of reacquiring the lost moment of plenitude through the substitute of a girlfriend. The tragedy of this contributes to the parody of the montage of tempo in the final scenes that does not facilitate amiable Apollonian resolution.

Harry’s ‘primary’ dream involves the reacquisition of the moment of plenitude through the substitute of intoxication that dulls the pain of his facticity. However, his retreat from his facticity is as much inspired by the ‘image’ infatuation of contemporary culture as the pursuits of the other characters. Aronofsky, in a recent interview, stated that, “The big point of the film [is] that all addictions are the same: coffee, TV, drugs – it [doesn’t] matter what the chemical [is, because]…mainlining coffee and TV is the same as doing it with drugs” (http://aronofsky.tripod.com/interview17.html). Harry, like the rest of the characters, inhabits a culture of the ‘image’ that refuses to acknowledge the ‘Dionysian’ reality of a facticity that does not correspond to the Apollonian integrity of the image. The presence of such facticity causes pain which is then neutralized with ‘drugs’, which can take the form of illegal substances, T.V. or even coffee. The real reason for Harry’s abuse of drugs is revealed after the scene in which he visits Sara and tells her about the television he has bought for her. After seeing her pathetic circumstances and realizing that she is developing an addiction to amphetamines and barbiturates, he leaves and cries in the taxi, at which point a quick montage of rhythm represents a drug fix that he uses to retreat from his pain.

Inspired by the illusory integrity of the image and the ‘image infatuation’ of contemporary culture, Harry’s attempts to resist his facticity result in him becoming separated from his world, which is visually articulated through the use of a ‘split-screen’. This first occurs early in the film, before the title caption, and communicates the psychological/emotional distance between Harry and Sara. When Harry steals Sara’s T.V., he is isolated from her in the right frame, while she, hiding in the next room, is sealed within the left frame. Later, this same cinematographic technique is utilized to articulate the emotional and psychological distance that exists between Harry and Marion where, despite lying naked beside each other and exchanging overtures of love, they are represented as insurmountably separated from each other.

Harry’s relationship with Marion, like that of Tyrone with his girlfriend, is also characterised by the unconscious pursuit of a substitute for the lost moment of plenitude that involves the figure of

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246 Cf. notes 160, 162, 171 & 172, and see – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 3. Baudrillard, Adorno, and ‘intolerable’ pessimism in the contemporary era.
247 Ambiguity exists here because Sara’s addiction to television also separates her from Harry. Similarly, Marion’s narcissism separates her as much from Harry as his infatuation with the integrity of the image separates him from her.
the mother. Evidence for this is the red dress that features prominently in Sara’s imagined appearance on the television game show and in her later delusions. She last wore the red dress to Harry’s high school graduation and there are two scenes during which Harry hallucinates and sees Marion wearing a similar red dress. Harry, like Tyrone, also seeks maternal approval from his ‘substitute’ (namely Marion) for the lost moment of plenitude, and he must win Marion’s affection through feats of ingenuity or daring, in a manner akin to a child who seeks validation through the smiling gaze of the mother. In the scene in which they break into a building and ascend to the rooftop to throw paper jets, Harry wins Marion’s affection because he bypasses the security twice, once through conning his way past the intercom system at the front door and a second time through bypassing the alarm attached to the rooftop door. Yet despite this, Marion purposefully tests him further by setting off the alarm before they leave, giving him the additional obstacle of having to evade the alerted security guards. Again, once they have eluded capture, we see them in the elevator engaging in a game of ‘thumb-wrestling’ which, far from being an innocuous gesture, continues this theme of constant challenge and tension between them. Also, during the ‘SUMMER’ period when he is able to sell drugs and make a profit, he returns home to Marion and tells her of his success, at which point she says, “Come to me!” and rewards his achievements with a ‘maternal’ embrace.248

However, despite all this, Harry’s relationship with Marion is couched within the ‘image infatuation’ of his culture, and therefore operates only at a superficial level, evidence for which occurs at one point during ‘SUMMER’ when Harry tells Marion that he fell in love with her only because of her beauty. As mentioned above, Harry’s ‘primary’ dream, inspired by this ‘image infatuation’ (insofar as it is linked to the promise of ‘wholeness’), involves his negation of his facticity through intoxication. This becomes manifest not only in the way in which he is ‘distanced’ from Marion and Sara, represented through the use of the ‘split-screen’, but also in his request that Marion sleep with her psychologist, Arnold, to get money for drugs.249 Further evidence for the ‘superficiality’ of their relationship occurs in the scene in which Harry, lounging in front of the T.V. as he waits for Marion to come home from prostituting herself, only experiences anguish when he ‘sees’ Marion, through something tantamount to a hallucination, having sex with someone on T.V. In other words, because he only relates to Marion at the level of the image, his verbal exchange with her prior to her prostituting herself, in which she expressed her concerns about visiting Arnold, did not impact significantly on him. In contrast to this, he is greatly affected by the hallucinatory ‘image’ of her having sex with

248 She does not approach him in this scene but rather sits and, opening her arms, consents to his approach and affections.
249 The demands of their addiction, combined with a lack of both drugs and money, place increasing strain on their relationship and begin to distance Harry from Marion. As mentioned, Marion, because of her narcissism, is as much addicted to drugs as to Harry’s ‘reflection’ of her beauty through his adoration of her. She consents to prostituting herself because failure to do so would result in a continued lack of money and drugs that, in turn, would result in her loss of Harry’s ‘reflection’ of her beauty.
Arnold, superimposed upon a television image of a wedding ring. Yet this ‘Dionysian’ facticity (i.e. his hallucination) that does not correspond to his image of Marion is quickly suppressed through a drug fix, visually articulated by a montage of rhythm. This constitutes a counterpart to the earlier scene in which he took drugs in the taxicab to suppress the emotional pain he experienced after his visit to Sara, during which he became aware of her pathetic circumstances and growing amphetamine-barbiturate addiction. It is thus further evidence of the role drugs play in Harry’s ‘dream’ of attaining, and maintaining, ‘wholeness’. 

However, despite Marion’s sacrifice, Tyrone and Harry are still unable to obtain drugs and therefore, in the first scene of ‘WINTER’, they set off for Florida in the hope of finding a new source. In Florida, Harry’s left arm, into which he injects drugs, and which has developed gangrene, causes him to seek medical assistance. As a result, both he and Tyrone are arrested. After this, they are both imprisoned and Harry’s arm is amputated. When asked earlier by Tyrone why he didn’t inject himself elsewhere, Harry stated that his left arm was the only place where he could ‘get it right’. Thus, through the loss of his arm, Harry is literally cut off from his dream that involved the attainment and maintenance of an illusion of ‘wholeness’ via the negation of his facticity through intoxication, which was, in turn, inspired by the (illusory) ‘integrity’ of the mediated image.

The ‘tragedy’ of Harry’s immersion within this mindset, like the predicaments of the others, adds weight to Aronofsky’s parody of montage of tempo. Yet because Harry’s addiction receives its impetus from the demands of an ‘image-infatuated’ culture that refuses to acknowledge human facticity, his suffering also constitutes an indictment of the hegemony of the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media that produces such a culture.

Aronofsky’s montage of tempo in Requiem for a Dream does not culminate in a meeting of the hero, villain and besieged individual in the same frame. Rather, all the victims are separated from one another, not only at the level of the narrative, but also at the level of cinematography and editing, by being placed in four different frames at the end of the montage of tempo. Through this Aronofsky, following Eisenstein, subverts the ‘traditional’ form of montage of tempo with its harmonious resolution and its accompanying bourgeois axiology, while through thematizing the psychoanalytic dynamics that underpin romance, and that are linked to the figure of the mother, he further subverts ‘aesthetic’ aspects of mainstream cinematic fiction. Also, as discussed, because these dynamics are represented as operating beyond the control of the individual, Aronofsky’s thematization of them subverts the ‘autonomy’ and ‘self-transparency’ of the Cartesian ego that is supported and propagated, at an implicit level, by mainstream cinema. Similarly, because montage of tempo is a cornerstone of mainstream visual ‘language’, and because mainstream cinema, arguably, plays a significant role in the construction of subjectivity, Aronofsky’s parody of montage of tempo also subverts the integrity of
the kind of subject or self constructed by mainstream visual language/cinema. It achieves this by facilitating a moment in which the habitual patterns of mainstream visual language become potentially conspicuous, through their non-fulfilment, to the subject who is usually shaped by those patterns.

3. Aronofsky, critical cinema and the further subversion of mainstream American cinema.

In this section I will proceed along the same lines as in the previous Chapter where I discussed Eisenstein’s use of cinematographic and narrative techniques to subvert mainstream American cinema.

i. The absence of heroes and heroines

The cornerstone of any mainstream cinematic narrative is the figure of the hero or heroine with whom the audience can readily identify. Through such identification, the audience becomes ‘drawn’ further into the narrative of the film, and thus these figures facilitate the further mesmerisation of the audience by the projected image. As previously discussed, Eisenstein’s early films of the 1920’s focused more on historical events and played down the role of the hero or heroine, or, alternatively, represented the people as heroes in an effort to minimise this process of identification and mesmerisation. Aronofsky, in *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), goes one step further by utilizing the audience’s tendency to identify with the hero or heroine in a way that subverts the narrative integrity of mainstream cinema and the accompanying construction of subjectivity through visual language, along the lines of the Cartesian ego.

He does this, firstly, by representing characters who are not heroes or heroines but rather ‘victims’ whose situations become increasingly horrific as the narrative progresses. Secondly, in addition to this, the audience’s initial identification with the four main characters, namely Harry, Marion, Sara and Tyrone results in their subjectivity being destabilized or problematized, because these characters are revealed to be impelled towards their respective ends by psychological and social forces beyond their control. The audience’s incapacity for total control is thereby implicitly highlighted through the plight of these characters.

Thus, instead of being entertained and having their subjectivity informed, and confirmed, along the lines of the Cartesian ego in terms of the visual language of mainstream cinema, the audience, through their identification with the main characters, are taken to the edge of visual language and shown the abyss of chaos that prevails beneath any illusion of complete ‘Cartesian’ autonomy and self-transparency.
ii. Aronofsky’s use of ‘Brechtian’ distancing techniques

In order to draw the audience further into the narrative, mainstream cinema masquerades as representing reality through the classic ‘realist’ text. In contrast to this Eisenstein makes use of techniques that bear a resemblance to those employed (later) by Brecht to distance the audience from the text and make them critically aware of the drama or film as constructed artefact.

For example, in *The General Line* (1929), the ‘actual’ narrative of the film only ‘begins’ after a few minutes of footage have already elapsed, during which time we have been introduced to the character of Marta Lapkina and the predicament of the peasants’ poverty caused by strip cultivation under the old (Czarist) regime. As mentioned earlier, after the agronomist declares the collective farm ‘open’, we are presented with the title caption ‘The Path of the October Dairy’, followed by a short scene involving the ‘heroine’, Marta Lapkina, and a few other stalwarts of the collective, sitting on a bench facing the audience. This scene is jarring because it breaches a fundamental law of cinema by making the audience the ‘object’ of the gaze of the characters on screen. In this strange role reversal, Marta and her comrades sit down to ‘watch’ the audience/viewer as they watch the representation of the efforts of the members of the collective, namely Marta and the same comrades who are sitting with her on the bench, watching the audience of *The General Line*. Eisenstein accentuates the irony of this scenario by focussing, briefly, on Marta’s wry smile. Through this alteration in the traditional sequence of ‘beginning’ a film, Eisenstein creates a critical awareness of the representation as a re-presentation by accentuating the ‘commencement’ of the re-presented narrative (i.e. the film that Marta and her comrades sit down to watch) only after the narrative of *The General Line* has already begun to unfold.

Aronofsky uses a similar technique in the opening scenes of *Requiem for a Dream*. This involves a ‘game show’ hosted by Tappy Tibbons (Christopher McDonald) that contains all the quintessential features of the postmodern mass media spectacle. However, it is interrupted, broken into, by the dissolution of the game-show when Harry, quite simply, unplugs the T.V., a ‘distancing technique’ involving a straight-cut and jarring ‘paradigm’-shift which breaks the continuity of the narrative of the film almost before it has begun. The music of the orchestra ‘tuning-up’ adds to the dis-ease of the opening scene involving the argument between Harry and Sara, and only once Harry has stolen the T.V. and exited the building with Tyrone does a falling black and white caption bearing

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251 This ‘mediated reality’ is Sara Goldfarb’s dream that acts as a buffer between her and her painful reality of growing old, being alone and remaining unacknowledged.
252 In addition, it also constitutes a symbolic gesture which, from the outset of the film, articulates the fragility and ‘lack of substance’ behind the ‘mesmerizing’ images of the mass media.
the title of the film, and accompanied by a loud audio component, intrude and declare the ‘beginning’ of the film, already a few minutes into the narrative. 253

However, where Aronofsky parallels the opening of The General Line in Requiem for a Dream, he goes ‘beyond’ Eisenstein in the ‘objectification’ of the audience by the gaze of the characters within the film, which occurs through the hallucinations of the character of Sara Goldfarb. Towards the end of the period entitled ‘FALL’, Sara’s desperation to ‘look’ slim for her promised appearance on television causes her to over-dose on her medication, and the resultant hallucinations, aggravated by her repression of her body’s demand for food, see her torn between the images of the ‘mediated reality’ of the game show and the ‘roaring’ refrigerator, a metaphor for the ‘Dionysian’ demands of her body for sustenance. In her hallucination the ‘hyper-real’ figures of Tappy and a younger, more beautiful Sara Goldfarb exit the realm of ‘mediated reality’ and enter her living room as phantasms who proceed to become increasingly ‘solid’.

In addition to being a visual metaphor for the collapse of the real into the hyper-real and vice versa à-la-Baudrillard, 254 this scene contains an important critical element. When a form of the ‘archetypal’ screen hero, personified by Tappy Tibbons, along with Sara’s desired, projected self-image, manifest in her living-room, they laugh and jeer at her and her living conditions, which Tappy describes as ‘disgusting’. Sara tries to defend herself and her apartment by saying, “Let me explain, I’m old, and alone…[etc.]”, but Sara is not the only one ‘on trial’. When Tappy and the younger, vivacious Sara Goldfarb laugh at the ‘real’ Sara, the studio audience of the game show join them in laughing and pointing. However, of the three shots of the studio audience laughing and pointing, only two of them involve the audience pointing to the left of the screen, at the ‘space’ supposedly occupied by Sara, as she cowers in her chair. A third shot sees them pointing to the right, at the ‘space’ occupied not by the T.V., nor by the aged Sara, nor by Tappy and the younger Sara, but by the viewers/audience of Requiem for a Dream. That is, spatially, the film viewer/audience’s position is situated on the right of Sara, looking left at her, Tappy and the younger Sara.

Thus, for a brief moment, the whole ‘studio audience’ of the game show are laughing at the viewers/audience of Requiem for a Dream who, like Sara, are ‘glued’ to the screen, privileging the realm of the image, and constructing their desires and projected self-images in terms of the visual language of mediated reality, despite the impossibility of ever attaining to the ‘perfection’ of such Apollonian images. 255

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253 Although this technique is used in many mainstream films, it is Aronofsky’s combination of it with other destabilizing techniques in Requiem for a Dream (2001) that makes it critically significant.

254 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 3. Baudrillard, Adorno and ‘intolerable’ pessimism in the contemporary era. Also, Cf. notes 160, 162, 171 & 172.

255 Except, of course, that in this case no such ‘perfection’ is ultimately offered to them.
Where in Eisenstein’s *The General Line*, Marta Lapkina and her compatriots stare knowingly at the viewer, in Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream*, the game-show audience, and to some extent Tappy and the younger Sara, actually address the viewer, implicitly, through the hallucinations of the character of the older Sara Goldfarb.

**iii. Aronofsky and montage of rhythm**

Where mainstream cinema relies heavily on continuity editing in order to construct a continuous narrative that can mesmerise and ‘draw in’ the audience, Eisenstein’s early films are littered with montage of rhythm, or the jarring juxtaposition of images that break the continuity of the narrative, while containing within them a third meaning in addition to that found in the narrative.

Although the juxtaposition involved in any of Eisenstein’s montages of rhythm seems to stand out as the predecessor to Aronofsky’s use of similar montage techniques in *Requiem for a Dream*, due credit must also be given to the somewhat lesser known directors of early Soviet cinema, whose highly intellectual cinematic visions were informed by Mayakovsky’s post-revolutionary literary “protests against the bourgeois, sugary art of his time” (Leyda 1960:129). One such director was Lev Kuleshov and

...the artistic legacy that he handed over to Pudovkin and Eisenstein for further investment, was the discovery that there were, inherent in a single piece of unedited film, two strengths: its own, and the strength of its relation to other pieces of film...Kuleshov maintained that the material of film-work consists of pieces of film...joined together in a particular creatively conceived order...[and that] film art begins from the moment when the director begins to combine and join [them] together (Leyda 1960:175).

These historical considerations hold certain implications for Aronofsky’s *Requiem for a Dream* insofar as his use of similar techniques to those found in the work of Kuleshov, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, imbricates his film with the underlying ‘critical attitude’ of Soviet cinema, which involved a very different film ‘language’ to that of the visual language of mainstream Hollywood productions.

On numerous occasions throughout *Requiem for a Dream*, Aronofsky uses montage of rhythm to disrupt the continuity of the narrative. A variation of this occurs after Harry and Tyrone purchased drugs with the money they received for Sara’s T.V. at the pawnbroker. In general, the

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256 Mayakovsky was the “leading poet of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and of the early Soviet period” ([http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/majakovs.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/majakovs.htm)).

257 In an interview, Aronofsky refers to his montage of rhythm as “Hip Hop Montage” ([http://aronofsky.tripod.com/interviews16.html](http://aronofsky.tripod.com/interviews16.html)), presumably because, while it is a descendant of Kuleshov’s juxtaposition of images, it is far more dynamic.
montages of rhythm that represent substance-abuse involve a rapid succession of close-ups of the apparatus, liquid or powder of the drug, and the dilation of pupils, with the metonymic representations remaining anonymous yet numerically correct. For example, if two people are taking drugs together, for instance Harry and Tyrone, then either the split screen and double camera/duplicate image technique is utilized, or at least two ‘dilating pupils’ are shown during the montage. Alternatively, if only one person is taking drugs, then only one dilating pupil is represented and takes up the entire screen. However, while the disruptive effect is the same, what links the various montages is not the type of image represented, but rather the rhythm with which they are represented. The montages explode onto the screen with the speed and brevity of a drum beat or gun-shot in a hard, sharp, mechanically-compulsive way which communicates the blind power of the demands of addiction.

In *Strike* (1924), Eisenstein used montages of rhythm involving the juxtaposition of images of animals (a fox, an owl, a monkey and a bulldog) with the faces of the spies who had adopted the names of these animals as their code-names. These montages involved the slow dissolution of the image of the animal into the image of the spy, while the rhythm communicated such ‘animality’ as being an inherent part of the spies’ respective natures, as though in a moment of ‘aletheia’ their very *Being* had been ‘unforgotten’ through the montage. The rhythm of Aronofsky’s montage seems, rather, to approximate the violence of the later juxtaposition in *Strike*, of the images of the cow being slaughtered next to the images of the unarmed workers being massacred by troops loyal to the Czar. However, in Aronofsky’s montage the straight-cut is, as mentioned above, accentuated by a drum-like beat. Moreover, where in *Strike* the perpetrator of the violence is known (i.e. the butcher), in *Requiem for a Dream* an anonymity surrounds the montage, which communicates the psycho-pathological impetus and lack of autonomy behind actions perpetuated through addiction.

I use the term ‘psycho-pathology’ as opposed to any reference to ‘physical dependence’, not only because of the psycho-pathological element involved in addiction, but more specifically because of Aronofsky’s use of the same rhythm found in the ‘drug-taking’ montages, in conjunction with a ‘remote-control’ montage that represents Sara’s addiction to television. The anonymity and mechanical compulsion behind her act of using a remote control are, through the montage, articulated as being identical to the demands made on the others by their drug addiction. Also, while both have a disruptive effect on the continuity editing of the film, the montage of rhythm further problematizes the audience’s relationship to the media because it highlights the degree to which this relationship is comparable to an addiction.

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258 This differs depending on the type of drug being consumed because of the different forms of preparation required by the different drugs before they can be consumed.
Another technique found in Aronofsky’s text that has its roots in the juxtaposition of montage of rhythm is that of the ‘split-screen’. In the film, as mentioned earlier, Harry is a drug addict who, in an effort to acquire money, regularly steals his mother’s television set. At a cinematographic level, Aronofsky represents the emotional tension and distance between mother and son through dividing the screen vertically into two frames, with one camera focussing on Harry on the right side of the screen, as he struggles to free the T.V. from the radiator, while another camera focuses on Sara who inhabits the left side of the screen as she hides in another room, having locked the door out of fear for Harry. The contrast between the earlier representation of the ‘mediated reality’ of Tappy Tibbon’s game show, with which the film opens, and the succeeding representation of the emotional turmoil between mother and son in the apartment, along with the screen division in the latter and the different attitudes of focus in the left and right frames, is very jarring when compared to the standard continuity editing of mainstream cinema and therefore adds to the audience’s sense of alienation from the film text.

iv. Aronofsky’s use of captions

Mainstream cinema, during the silent era, used captions to communicate key information about the narrative with the primary aim of, as mentioned earlier, ‘drawing’ the audience into the film. In the beginning of Strike (1924), as discussed in Chapter Three, Eisenstein makes use of a play on words in relation to the opening caption that states ‘ALL QUIET AT THE FACT-OR-Y’. The ‘OR’ spirals down and to the right and then rises again to eclipse the original caption with the word ‘OR[?]’, which questions the validity of any such ‘FACT-UAL’ statements. This critical use of captions demands intellectual appraisal and interpretation on the part of the audience, and thereby removes captions from their erstwhile placid role in mainstream cinema as mere signposts bearing narrative information.

In the beginning of Requiem for a Dream (2001), after Harry and Tyrone have left the building and are wheeling Sara’s T.V. down the street, the orchestra commences playing the theme tune and is accompanied by the ‘loud’ momentary intrusion of the title in the form of a falling black and white caption, which eclipses the entire screen and interrupts the continuity of the narrative. In addition to this, Aronofsky immediately begins to interrupt the unfolding narrative, accompanied by the music of the orchestra, by having black and white ‘credit’ pages, similar to the title caption, eclipse the progression of Harry and Tyrone as they advance towards the pawn-broker. This ‘blacking-out’ of the image of their progression leaves only sections of their journey represented, making it necessary for the audience to piece together a ‘pseudo’-montage of their progress.

Aronofsky continues Eisenstein’s tradition of the intellectual use of captions in Requiem for a Dream (2001) when the captions that follow the title caption divide the narrative into three sections,
namely ‘SUMMER’, ‘FALL’ and ‘WINTER’. The audience is left waiting for a ‘SPRING’ that never arrives, and its absence communicates the hopelessness of the characters’ situation that does not allow for rebirth or renewal. The absence of a ‘SPRING’ caption is therefore linked to Aronofsky’s parody of the montage of tempo that does not facilitate any amiable Apollonian resolution, and is thus an integral part of the (intellectual) subversion of the narrative structure of mainstream cinema.

v. Aronofsky’s use of reversed footage

Mainstream cinema also relies heavily on continuity editing to create the impression of a continuous narrative that can mesmerise an audience. In contrast to this Eisenstein, in Strike (1924), does not merely break or interrupt the continuity of the narrative with a montage of rhythm, but goes one step further by ‘reversing’ that continuity through representing footage in reverse.

As will be recalled, the piece of footage in question originally involved the reflection, in a pool of oily water, of workers having a violent discussion against the backdrop of some factory smokestacks. When the workers departed a pair of work boots proceeded into the puddle and disturbed the smooth surface and the reflection of the smokestacks. However, this ‘original’ sequence of events is represented in reverse, so that the first image seen is that of the work boots disturbing the oily puddle, followed by the departing of the boots and the miraculous and instantaneous calming of the water, which then facilitates the reflection of the group of discontent workers and their discussion against the backdrop of the smokestacks. Eisenstein’s visual metaphor articulates the need to look beneath the apparent business of production to see the growing discontent of the workers, and thus the ‘reversed’ footage not only interrupts (and reverses) the narrative but also contains an important intellectual element of social criticism.

Aronofsky, in Requiem for a Dream (2001), uses reverse footage on two occasions to jar the audience and force them to reconsider the represented events. The first time this occurs is after Tyrone and Harry have recovered from their afternoon intoxication, and sit at an outside street café. At this point a policeman sits down next to them and Harry ‘seems’ to steal the policeman’s firearm. Tyrone and Harry then proceed to throw it back and forth between them while the policeman struggles to regain it. However, a split-second later things return to the moment before Harry’s ‘theft’, with the policeman still sitting next to Harry and Tyrone, at which point the audience realises that the scene has only taken place within Harry’s mind. Again, later, when Marion is forced to visit her psychologist, Arnold, to get money for drugs, she sits in a restaurant opposite him and ‘seems’ to stab her fork into

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259 See - Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 6. Eisenstein, critical cinema and the further subversion of mainstream American cinema.
his hand. However, a split-second later things again return to the moment before her attack and the audience realises that this event has only taken place within her imagination. On both occasions the progression of the narrative is interrupted and the audience is forced to retrace its steps in a way that alienates them from the text and makes conspicuous the ‘constructedness’ of the represented material.

4. Aronofsky’s subversion of mainstream cinema through the neo noir Pi (1998)

i. Introduction

In my analysis of Requiem for a Dream I have focussed on the structural and ‘technical’ ways in which Aronofsky challenges the predominantly Apollonian visual language of mainstream cinema in order, thereby, to give ‘voice’ to the subversive ‘Dionysian’ impulse that makes for critical cinema. I discussed how he makes overt use of cinematographic techniques that encourage the audience to engage critically with the represented material, and how, at a more subtle level, he subverts mainstream visual language through parodying the narrative structure of montage of tempo, in a manner after Eisenstein.

In what follows I shall consider Aronofsky’s earlier film, Pi (1998), to show how a Dionysian ‘voice’ also sounds its echoes in this film at the level of theme, content and visual metaphor. (I should mention that structure and content are difficult to separate, and by using a particular film to focus on one or the other, I do not mean to suggest that either structure or content occurs in isolation of the other.)

In fact, Pi (1998) constitutes a forerunner to Requiem for a Dream (2001) as subversive critical cinema. It contains many of the same overt ‘critical’ cinematographic techniques and a similar subversion, at a subtle level, of the narrative structure of mainstream cinema, insofar as the conclusion of Pi does not allow for ‘clear’ Apollonian resolution. However, in addition to this, Aronofsky further subverts the Apollonian tendency in mainstream cinema through Pi by thematizing, in a critical light, capitalism, (Judeo-)Christianity and patriarchy. He also highlights certain psychosexual dynamics that subvert mainstream cinema’s aesthetic of romance. Moreover, cinematographic aspects of German expressionism, that is, the sharp contrast between light and accentuated shadows, within the text of Pi, reflect the perspective on the world that views it as an ‘abyss’, in contrast to the ‘usual’

260 ‘Dionysian’ here does not mean Dionysian in the Nietzschean sense of the term that involves dithyrambic music and possession of the self by the spirit of Dionysus. Rather, because critical cinema occurs at an Apollonian, iconographic level, I use the term ‘Dionysian’ here to refer to that which resists the Apollonian form and order of the narrative structures of visual language and reveals, instead, the ‘abyss’ of possibility that haunts those structures.

261 As discussed in Chapter Three, these are the three ‘pillars’ around which the narratives of mainstream American cinema have operated, from Griffith to the present (Cf. note 156).
perspective of mainstream cinema that conjures up illusions of the world (and Being) as something stable and controlled. In short, Pi may be characterised as film noir, or better, what is known as neo noir, the debate concerning whether or not film noir exists as a strict genre, notwithstanding.  

These elements in Pi (1998) are significant not simply because of the way in which they subvert the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media, but, more importantly, because of the way in which, through this subversion, the construction of subjectivity along the lines of the Cartesian ego is problematized. That is, the way in which Pi, like Requiem for a Dream, gives voice to a Dionysian perspective, and ‘un-forgets’ the abyss of possibility that lurks beneath the narrative structures of mainstream cinema’s visual language, facilitates the construction of subjectivity as something far more open and porous that parallels the subjectivity valorised by both Nietzsche and Heidegger.

ii. Vernet and Film Noir

Vernet’s primary argument against the idea of film noir being a specific genre stems from the fact that it arose as a concept amongst French film critics when they were exposed to American ‘detective’ films (produced from 1941 to about 1955) after the second world war, to which they had been denied access for the duration of the war. The French critics noticed in these films certain prevalent patterns and themes, which enabled them to define these films as a specific genre. According to the French, the genre offered, through the characters’ dispositions, circumstances, and the backdrop against which the narrative played out, an implicit criticism of the socio-economic structures of capitalist America. Moreover, the subtle yet weighty psychoanalytic subtext that ran through all the films was considered as integral to the genre as the ‘European’ mark of German expressionism that made its presence felt through the use of deep shadows and chiaroscuro lighting.

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262 Marc Vernet’s arguments for the ‘non-existence’ of film noir as a specific genre will be discussed later. It is important to digress briefly and consider these arguments in order to facilitate an appreciation of the conceptual terrain that surrounds film noir, and to establish a ‘firm’ or ‘solid’ foundation for any discussion of neo noir.

263 Cf. note 260.


265 Marc Vernet maintains that film noir has never existed as a specific genre but that it is rather the product of what he calls a European ‘misinterpretation’ of American films. He states that, “Film noir is…an affair of heirs disinclined to look too closely at their inheritance, who take pleasure in regularly putting back into circulation topoi like the femme fatale, the shining pavement of the deserted street, unexpected violence, the private detective…Doubtless there is something true there, but what that truth relates to remains a question: American society, the world history of cinema (German expressionism, French poetic realism and Italian neo-realism), the directors, the actors, the spectators? Complacent repetition is more or less general, rare being those who venture to say that film noir has no clothes…that the classical list of criteria defining film noir is totally heterogeneous and without any foundation but a rhetorical one” (Vernet 1993:2).

266 From the perspective of German expressionism the world was an ‘abyss’ devoid of stable structures and hierarchies in terms of which the individual could orientate him/herself. This was communicated into film through the use of deep shadows and chiaroscuro lighting that hid far more than they revealed, such that infinite possibility loomed in the darkness.
Europeans did not interpret the detective films in the same way as the American public. Instead, they established a hermeneutic key through, and in terms of which, they could understand the plethora of new ‘detective’ films flooding the European market in the post-war years, and this resulted in the creation of the genre that has become known as film noir.

Some French critics saw a socio-economic criticism of capitalism reflected in the situation of the noir detective, who was caught between a corrupt bureaucracy and a criminal underworld. Capitalism, although it made exorbitant profits possible for the lucky few, obliged all to live by their wits in a desperate hand to mouth existence. Thus, according to the critics, the narrative reflected the dire circumstances that existed in the absence of socialism or social welfare. For example, in Hawks’ The Big Sleep (1946), the hero, Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart), is the alienated detective who, having shunned the ‘corruption’ of the authorities, is drawn into a criminal underworld because of the need for money. He is characterised as far more intelligent than both the criminals and police, and it is the insight afforded by this intelligence that allows him to perceive the corruption inherent to the police and legal system, while his (highly individualistic) moral predisposition forces him to reject the comfort and job security offered by such systems. As such, he is forced to act independently and is thereby drawn into the criminal underworld by the femme fatale. The intractability of this dilemma accounts for the cynicism on the part of the hero that, quite often, is revealed to be a thin veneer covering his moral predisposition that manifests itself in his final execution of justice in relation to the criminals.

Other European critics maintain that, at the level of psychoanalysis, the tensions between the characters and the power structures in the narrative constitute a reflection of the human condition and psyche. For example, in Huston’s The Maltese Falcon (1941), the characters’ concern with the pursuit of the ever-elusive statue of the falcon is a metaphor for the pursuit of the forever-unattainable ‘original moment of plenitude’ or ‘l’objet petit a: an endless quest for a non-existent object’ (Storey 1998:93). Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) even goes so far as to articulate the impossibility of re-acquiring such an object, or ‘moment’ when, at the end of the narrative, he describes the falcon as, “The stuff dreams are made of.” The relationships between the detective and the other characters also mirror the tensions within the human psyche and the relationship between the ego and its ‘archetypal’ paternal and maternal figures. For example, the detective is always caught between a government bureaucracy and the underworld of criminals in a way that mirrors the tension of the (Freudian) ego caught between the Superego and Id. There is also usually a ‘maternal’ figure, who often takes the

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Two ‘Expressionist’ films that will be discussed, briefly, are Robert Wiene’s The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919) and Fritz Lang’s M (1939).

267 The detective is by no means ‘morally good’ in the normal sense, but rather ‘morally ambivalent’.

268 The concept of ‘lost plenitude’ was inherited from Freud by Lacan.
form of the detective’s secretary, and in whom he trusts implicitly, and a ‘paternal’ figure, who can be either a friend of the detective or his arch-enemy, but who always guides him in some way.

Furthermore, the *femme fatale* is of crucial importance as the dark and mysterious woman who draws the hero into the plot, as much through money as through the promise of the erotic. The *femme fatale* is a metaphor for the dynamic that exists between Eros and Thanatos, with the tension between her and the detective being a metaphor for the power struggles and impulses that underpin intimacy. In Hawks’ *The Big Sleep* (1946) there occurs an increased use of sexual innuendo in the repartee between the hero Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) and the *femme fatale* played by Lauren Bacall in “the notorious nightclub scene with racy dialogue about horse-racing and saddles” (http://www.filmsite.org/bigs.html). This hints at the sexual subtext that exists not only beneath overt flirtations but also, by implication, beneath seemingly innocuous verbal exchanges, and thereby ‘makes conspicuous’ the way in which simple conversations and actions are underpinned by unconscious or latent impulses. Similarly, in *film noir* there is often the introduction of *risqué* and sexually-ambiguous elements such as effeminate and overtly homosexual characters, for example the characters played by Peter Lorre in Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Curtiz’ *Casablanca* (1942), and elsewhere, whose effeminacy does more than merely contrast with and thereby enhance the machismo of Humphrey Bogart’s characters, in the respective films. Rather, as in the *Maltese Falcon*, where the underlying theme is one of dreams, myths and illusions, Lorre’s character opens up possibilities of alternative forms of eroticism and sensuality, denoted as much by his attire and accoutrement as by his character’s name of Joel Cairo. In *Casablanca*, Lorre’s character enjoys a relationship with Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) that is tantamount to one of verbal sadomasochism, while the character of the French Chief of Police (Claude Rain), who at one point says, “If I were a woman I’d be in love with Rick,” brings an additional element of sexual ambiguity to the narrative.

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269 That is, the creative, erotic instinct and the death instinct, respectively. In *The Ego and the Id* Freud maintains that, “On the basis of theoretical considerations, supported by biology, we put forward the hypothesis of a death instinct, the task of which is to lead organic life back into the inanimate state; on the other hand, we supposed that Eros…aims at complicating life and at the same time…preserving it…and life itself would be a conflict and compromise between these two trends” (quoted in http://www.alastairmcintosh.com/articles/1996_eros_thanatos.htm).

270 Although Curtiz’ *Casablanca* (1942) is not often thought of as a *film noir*, it does contain elements of *noir*, such as the corrupt administration, the criminal underworld and a *femme fatale*. Also, although the character of Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), who is caught between the corrupt administration and the criminals, is not a detective in the ‘traditional’ sense, he nevertheless embarks on an ‘emotional’ journey of discovery, which involves a voyage into his past, as a result of the arrival of the *femme fatale*. Also, as in the narrative of Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), the ‘mythical’ moment of plenitude, which in *Casablanca* involves the opportunity of returning to the ‘Motherland’ of America, remains forever out of the hero’s reach.
Less salient aspects of psychoanalysis, such as the ideas of repression and parapraxis, also find a voice in film noir. This is evident in the scene in Huston’s The Maltese Falcon (1941) where Bogart’s character, after arguing violently with Caspar Gutman (Sydney Greenstreet) and Wilmer Cook (Elisha Cook Jr.) exits the villains’ hotel room and walks towards the elevator where he notices that his right hand has begun to shake uncontrollably. Although he only stares at it briefly, uncomprehendingly, before grimacing and entering the elevator, the inclusion of this brief scene hints at a comprehension and awareness, on the part of the director, of the phenomenon of parapraxis in relation to repressed ideas or emotions. This, in turn, by highlighting the tensions at work within the human psyche that are largely beyond the rational control of the ego, amounts to an implicit Dionysian subversion of the idea of the integrity of the viewer (because he/she identifies with the detective) as an autonomous, self-transparent, Cartesian ego.

Still other theorists maintain that in the shadows and smoke of the early film noirs there lingers the influence of German expressionism involving the spectre of the ‘world-as-abyss’. They argue that the abysmal shadows and obscuring smoke/fog of the representations hide more than they reveal, and that they, together with the ‘red-herrings’, false leads and ‘holes’ in the narrative, that do not tie together at the end, deny the text the possibility of concluding with an ‘amiable’ Apollonian resolution. That is, because of the aporias and half-truths that litter the narrative, critical engagement with the text, like the psychoanalytic process in the face of the hypothesis of the unconscious, becomes interminable.

iii. Neo-noir as simulacrum

Vernet may well be right to suggest that noir, as a genre, emerged merely from a European interpretation of films that were not intentionally made with that framework in mind. However, the situation is different when one talks of neo noir, that is, those films made after 1955, which contain a ‘pseudo’- detective narrative and purposefully mimic themes found in the French definition of film noir. These cannot be dispatched under the label of myopic European error, precisely because of their status as ‘quintessential’ simulacra.

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271 “Freud’s term for these was ‘faulty action’ (Fehleistung), for which his editor/translator adopted the pseudo-Greek scientism parapraxis. The colloquial label is ‘Freudian slip’…Freud’s fascinating 1901 book on the subject…The Psychopathology of Everyday Life…distinguishes errors of speech (Versprechen), memory (Vergessen), and action (Vergreifen). In every case there is presumed to be an unconscious [repressed] determinant of the faulty action” (http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109e/fslip.html).

272 An “aporia [is]…Greek for…puzzle” (Flew 1979:16), but it is commonly used to denote a problem or dilemma that knows of no possible solution and, as such, can only be returned to time and again, ad infinitum.
That is, the more correct Vernet’s argument, the more erroneous appears the French definition and the more devoid of real parentage neo noir appears to become. However, as such, the more correct Vernet’s argument, the more impossible it becomes to dispatch neo noir that, by virtue of the success and validity of Vernet’s argument, attains its status as ‘quintessential’ simulacrum, not only because of the medium through which it is expressed (i.e. film), but also in terms of its visual metaphors that, in accordance with Vernet’s argument, become increasingly ‘marked’ as copies entirely devoid of parentage. Baudrillard states that

Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum. This would be the successive phases of the image:

- it is the reflection of a basic reality
- it masks and perverts a basic reality
- it masks the absence of a basic reality
- it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard1996:77).

Although Baudrillard is dealing with art and representation throughout the history of western culture, at a certain level his schema is applicable to film noir and neo noir. Photographs taken during the Depression would constitute a reflection of a basic reality. A film noir that imbricates these images with a creative narrative involving a detective and a femme fatale masks and perverts the basic social reality it purports to represent. Further, from Vernet’s perspective, film noir arrives only through a masking and perverting of a basic filmic reality, a ‘contorting’ of the facts relating to pre- and post-war film production, not to mention a convenient ‘forgetting’ of examples of film which, in terms of their narrative content and cinematography, undermine the rigid definitions which see film noir as being produced between 1945 and 1955. A neo noir film, in turn, takes as its point of departure film noir’s ‘mis’-representation of a social reality and builds its narrative upon it. From this perspective, neo noir, in its reference to film noir, ‘masks the absence of a basic reality’ upon which it is predicated and, given the evolution of neo noir, has reached the stage where it ‘bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.’

273 “A simulacrum is an identical copy without an original...[when] the very distinction between original and copy has itself...been destroyed.[This occurs through the process of] ‘simulation’. So, for example...it makes little sense to speak of having purchased the original...Dead Man Walking in Newcastle [or] to be told by someone having seen the film in Nashville or Sydney that he had seen the original [while you] had not. Both [of you] would have witnessed an exhibition of a copy without an original” (Storey 1998:178).

274 That is, I speak of simulacrum at the level of the visual metaphors of neo noir, in relation to Vernet’s claims against the legitimacy of speaking of a genre of film noir ‘copies’ (Cf. note 273) ‘originally’ produced between 1945 and 1955.
However, as simulacrum, it does engage critically with other simulacra, namely those of mainstream cinema and the mass media, through ‘remembering’ the abyss of Dionysian possibility that, in turn, subverts the ‘legitimacy’ of the social structures, epistemological concepts and ontological perspectives propagated by Apollonian visual language.\footnote{Apollonian visual language also parades and validates these social structures, epistemological concepts and ontological perspectives as reality, and shapes the (Apollonian-Cartesian) subjectivity of the viewer in terms of them, the process of which is subverted by neo noir.}

iv. Social critique, psychoanalysis and German expressionism in Neo Noir

Everything that Vernet proves as untrue, or at least as ambiguous, about film noir, is, by implication, true about neo noir, because it is modelled on film noir as something possessing the features that Vernet maintains are not contained within it. Neo noir is usually played out against a backdrop that carries with it an implicit criticism of aspects of capitalist society, while the psychoanalytic subtext and motifs merge easily with the German expressionist perspective of the world and life as an ‘abyss’.

At the level of social criticism, David Fincher’s neo noir Fight Club (1999) engages straightforwardly with the issues of reification in a postmodern image-saturated culture, with the character of Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) openly advocating a quasi-Marxist doctrine and social revolution that involves the destruction of the buildings that house the credit card companies. Similarly, Schumacher’s neo noir 8mm (1998) condemns the dominant patriarchal discourse prevalent in contemporary society that results in the horrors of the pornography industry.

At the level of psychoanalysis, the ‘supposed’ underlying psychoanalytic subtext of film noir is also embraced, unashamedly, by neo noir, with good examples being found in Polanski’s Chinatown (1974). Polanski refers back, implicitly, to the horse racing theme in Hawks’ The Big Sleep (1946), which acts as a metaphor for a discussion of sex between Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) and the femme fatale, played by Lauren Bacall. However, Polanski takes it further when Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) visits Noah Cross (John Huston). During their subsequent conversation, which is interrupted by the distant neighing of horses and the clatter of hooves, Noah Cross inquires of Jake Gittes whether or not he is taking Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) ‘for a ride’ literally and figuratively.

The presence or proximity of horses also functions as a motif, in the early part of the film, to denote violent and pent-up sexual tension. All of this intimates that the ‘untameable’ unconscious manifests itself not only as a subtext in speech and action, but extends itself into dwelling spaces...
through concrete representations that mediate between the ego and the latent sexual impulses of the id. That is, the placement or positioning of representations, along with the representations themselves, are revealed as equally underpinned by unconscious sexual motifs. This is found a number of times, from the scene during which Jake Gittes visits Evelyn Mulwray’s home and meets her just after she has returned from riding ‘bareback’, to the scene in which she approaches Jake to hire him and Jake’s office is found to contain numerous references to horses and horse-riding, from the figure of a horse-rider on his table to the plaque of a horse’s head next to his door.

The psychoanalytic dynamic between sex and power also finds a voice in the unstable and often inverted power relationship between the detective and the femme fatale that forms the dominant point of tension throughout any neo noir, while Jake Gittes’ ‘lost moment of plenitude’ is articulated in vague yet significant terms as intertwined with his inability, at some previous time, to prevent some woman (i.e. another substitute for the lost moment of plenitude) from getting hurt in Chinatown. His desire to prevent similar injury to Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway) is related to this experience, while his failure to save her contains the implicit acknowledgement of the impossibility of reacquiring that lost moment.

Also, with regard to German expressionism, neo noirs often refer back, (presumably) consciously, to the classic film manifestations of this artistic movement. For example, in the narrative of Robert Wiene’s expressionist work, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (1919), murders are attempted and sometimes committed by some of the characters whilst they are in a state of somnambulism. This constitutes a metaphor for actions that are undertaken in response to overwhelming unconscious desires, but which are then repressed, ‘forgotten’ or rejected by the conscious mind because of their horrendous nature, i.e. they are relegated to the ‘abyss’ of the unconscious that is seen to lurk behind all conscious actions. Similarly, the question of guilt and responsibility in the absence of rational autonomy, given the functioning of overwhelming unconscious urges, is broached in Fritz Lang’s expressionist film M (1939) when the child murderer Hans Beckert (Peter Lorre) cries out to the enraged crowd in the final scenes saying, “But can I…can I help it?…Haven’t I got this curse inside me? The fire? The voice? The pain?…Who knows what it feels like to be me?” With regard to M, Gary Morris states that the most important aspect “is the sense of doom that colours the film, a fatalism Lang renders through chiaroscuro lighting effects and enormous high-angle shots that suggest a malevolent spiritual presence hovering above the city and guiding its denizens to their doom” (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/29/m/html).

Both of these themes, namely murders committed by an alter-ego, unbeknown to the individual in question, and the problem of responsibility in relation to such crimes, are echoed in the narrative of Alan Parker’s Angel Heart (1987). This neo noir also refers back to German expressionism at a
cinematographic level. In the final scenes, Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke) runs out into the rain away from Louis Cyphre (Robert De Niro) who has just revealed himself to Harry as Lucifer and explained to Harry his obligations to him in accordance with their earlier deal. The scene is captured with the same high-angle shot as found in *M*, that, along with the occasional use of chiaroscuro lighting during the preceding narrative, creates the sense of a malevolent spiritual presence that guides Harry (and the other characters) towards their doom. Also, the terror in Harry’s voice when he engages in a futile attempt to deny the truth of his ‘darker’, murderous side, as revealed to him by Louis Cyphre, betrays the acknowledgment of his ‘belief’ in his guilt. This manifests later in his response to the policeman’s statement of, “You’re going to burn for this, Angel” with, “I know…in hell.” Yet an abyss of uncertainty opens up in relation to the question of responsibility and guilt, which echoes the similar ambiguous conclusion in *M*. This occurs because responsibility is predicated on a certain degree of autonomy that appears markedly absent in all of Harry’s crimes, an autonomy only declared and testified to by Louis Cyphre or Lucifer, a character who by definition is not to be trusted. Parker’s *Angel Heart* (1987) is thus a neo noir that consciously refers back not only to *film noir*, through the characters of the alienated detective and *femme fatale*, but also to German expressionism with its underlying and insidiously subtle perspective of the world and life as an ‘abyss’ of uncertainty and possibility.

### v. Dionysian vs. Apollonian resolution in neo noir

As mentioned earlier, for a neo noir to be successful in its criticism of the Apollonian visual language of mainstream cinema it must let the ‘voice’ of Dionysus speak. That is, it must follow through with its subversion of mainstream visual language, without containing a last minute ‘covert’ valorisation of capitalist social structures, without playing down the power of the unconscious at the end of the narrative to reclaim for the ego (of the viewer) a ‘Cartesian’ autonomy, and without covering over the view of the world as an abyss of possibility to put the ego (of the viewer), once again, on stable ground.

However, many of the above-mentioned neo noirs, to various degrees, operate within the axiological confines of the visual language of mainstream cinema. At the overt level of cinematography, most of them employ continuity editing and refrain from using ‘alienating’ techniques such that the audience is ‘drawn’ into the narrative and, through such ‘mesmerisation’,
critically disarmed. At the subtle level of narrative structure, many of them might be considered as ‘failed *noirs*’ in that their narratives resolve themselves ‘amiably’, or at least end after a clear explanation of the plot has been delivered.

For example, in Parker’s *Angel Heart* (1987), the narrative ends with all the intricacies of the plot being revealed and with the police triumphing through their apprehension of the murderer, namely Harry Angel (Mickey Rourke). In Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999), the narrative concludes with an Apollonian resolution in which the hero, played by Edward Norton, destroys his subversive alter-ego, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), who was responsible for instigating social revolution, and with whom he had a homo-erotic relationship, in favour of returning to the realm of reification and a ‘normal’ heterosexual relationship with the character of Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter). Similarly, in Schumacher’s *8mm* (1998), despite Tom Welles’ (Nicolas Cage) final ‘breakdown’ in his wife’s lap and his request to her to ‘save him’, the final scene involves him raking up leaves in his front yard, as he did before, with the ‘structures’ and gender roles of suburbia having been reconstituted.

Aronofksy’s *Pi* (1998), in contrast to the above, contains no such conceptual ‘back-pedalling’. Rather, from the beginning to the end of the narrative, it allows the ‘voice’ of Dionysus to speak in a way that not only subverts, unequivocally, the dominant themes (or content) of mainstream visual language and its narrative structure, but also, in relation to such subversion, informs a more open and porous subjectivity.

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277 In the narrative of Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999), Tyler Durden works part time at a cinema where he splices single frames of pornography into family films. Throughout the beginning of *Fight Club* there occur ‘flashes’ of images of Tyler in the background. However, this does not seem to me to constitute critical cinematography because one can read it as implying that Tyler is not just a character but a real figure who has spliced images of himself into the text of *Fight Club*, which thereby adds to the ‘legitimacy’ of the film and allows it to masquerade as ‘reality’.

278 As mentioned above, many neo *noirs* operate within the axiological confines of the visual language of mainstream cinema to various degrees. Although in Parker’s *Angel Heart* (1987) the intricacies of the plot are revealed, they are, as discussed at the end of the previous section, revealed to the character of Harry Angel by Lucifer, which problematizes their validity and opens up a view of the world as an ‘abyss’ (of uncertainty). Thus, the ‘resolution’ of the narrative is ambivalent. Similarly, in Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974), although all is ‘revealed’ at the end of the narrative, the absence of justice for things that occur in Chinatown re-presents the world as an ‘abyss’ of dark possibility.

279 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media: 4. The possibility of critical cinema, v. The axiological continuity from Dickens, through Griffith, to contemporary mainstream cinema.

280 It is possible to interpret the end of this film differently such that it approximates a ‘successful’ *noir*. In the opening scenes when Tom Welles (Nicolas Cage) drives to his client, Mrs Christian, he passes a gardener raking up dead leaves that have fallen from tall, gaunt, dead trees. This is prophetic as Welles’ task will be to tidy up the ‘mess’ left by the dead Mr. Christian. In the final scene, as mentioned, Nicolas Cage’s character rakes up leaves in his own front yard. This might be interpreted as him reassuming his gender role in the household, but it could also be seen as him ‘tidying’ up the *mess* or shattered fragments of his erstwhile ‘paternal’ self, the absence of which will entail a lack of stability, security and (illusory) power in the future, in short, a closer proximity to the ‘abyss’ of possibility and uncertainty. However, as discussed earlier (See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media: 4. The possibility of a critical cinema, v. The axiological continuity from Dickens, through Griffith, to contemporary mainstream cinema), these ‘critical’ or ‘subversive’ possibilities are only allowed to sally forth in the most subtle and ambiguous of ways, such that it remains possible for the greater audience to interpret the narrative along the ‘standard’ lines of the visual language of mainstream cinema.
vi. \textit{Pi} (1998) as a \textit{neo noir}

Aronofsky’s \textit{Pi} (1998) not only subverts the visual language of mass media at an overt level, through the use of techniques characteristic of critical cinema, but also at the subtle level of narrative structure in that its narrative, like the narrative of \textit{Requiem for a Dream}, refuses to live up to the expectations of an audience ‘educated’ by mainstream cinema, and ends instead without Apollonian resolution.

As Aronofsky’s use of overt critical cinematographic techniques, and their relationship to Eisenstein’s critical cinema, was discussed in detail in the previous section,\textsuperscript{281} it will suffice just to mention the use he makes of similar techniques in \textit{Pi} (1998). In \textit{Pi} there is a ‘protagonist’, namely Max, with whom the audience can identify, in contrast to his later work \textit{Requiem for a Dream} (2001), where there are no heroes, as with Eisenstein’s early films. Also, less use is made in \textit{Pi} of ‘Brechtian’ distancing techniques.\textsuperscript{282} Yet \textit{Pi} avoids falling into the category of mainstream cinema through Aronofsky’s frequent use of montage of rhythm, or what Aronofsky refers to as ‘Hip Hop montage’, to interrupt the continuous narrative. Although there are no captions in \textit{Pi} that sub-divide the text and interrupt the narrative, and although there is no use of ‘reverse footage’ that, however briefly, reverses the continuity of the narrative, frequent use is made of unstable footage (i.e. through capturing footage with a ‘snorrie’-cam) that makes the camera conspicuous in its non-stability.\textsuperscript{283} This, in turn, makes the ‘constructedness’ of the represented material conspicuous. In addition to this, the surreal character of certain images necessitates critical appraisal on the part of the audience to distinguish between what takes place in ‘reality’ and what takes place in Max’s mind. Also, the entire film is shot in black and white with a very grainy texture and often heavily accentuated shadows that, along with the strange angles of focus and often very jarring and disorientating straight-cuts, constantly alienate the audience from the text.

At the level of content and visual metaphor, \textit{Pi} engages with the narrative structure of mainstream cinema by reconsidering a key Platonic myth that underpins not only dialectical language but also the narrative structure of visual language informed by Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction, namely

\textsuperscript{281}See – Chapter Four, Aronofsky’s subversion of the visual language of mainstream cinema: 3. Aronofsky, critical cinema and the further subversion of mainstream American cinema.
\textsuperscript{282}That is, double commencement of the narrative and the objectification of the audience by the gaze of the characters on the screen.
\textsuperscript{283}The ‘snorrie-cam’ is a camera that attaches to the body of the actor or actress and keeps their face and body in focus while blurring the background as they move.
the myth concerning the final moment of Apollonian resolution that echoes through Plato’s allegory of the cave. As argued in Chapter Three, there exist links between Plato’s dialectical language, Charles Dickens’ narrative style and Griffith’s ‘film language’.284 That is, Plato’s isomorphism, between the just soul and the just community,285 is mirrored in Dickens’ 19th century literature, and Griffith’s 20th century films, which reflect an analogous isomorphic and co-constitutive relationship between the Cartesian ego of the reader/viewer and his/her social matrix. Plato arrived at this system through dialectics, and in Book VII of the Republic Plato gives the allegory of the cave to explain how (what I term) dialecticism is superior to mere rhetoric. According to it

human beings [live]…in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them…Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way…with men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels and statues…Like ourselves, [those chained] see only…the shadows ….which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave (Plato1952: 388).

The cave is a metaphor for the ‘unenlightened’ mind that revels in poetry and rhetoric but resists dialecticism. However one man, presumably Socrates (or perhaps Plato himself), in his quest for knowledge, frees himself from the chains and proceeds to the mouth of the cave/den. Plato maintains that

when he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all…[However, h]e will…grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world…Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water…and he will contemplate him as he is…And when he remembered his old habitation…and his fellow prisoners…he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them (Plato 1952: 38-389).

In Plato’s allegory there occurs an unequivocal privileging of the ‘light of reason’ or dialecticism, personified by Apollo as the sun god, and an overt denigration of the cave, that is both a metaphor for the womb and of a ‘feminine’ language of emotion and poetry.286 Aronofsky’s Pi is

284 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 4. The possibility of critical cinema, i. The influence of Dickens’ fiction on the film language of D.W. Griffith.
286 In the Apology Socrates states, “I went to the poets; tragic, dithyrambic, and all sorts…[and] took them some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked what was the meaning of them…[However,] I am almost ashamed to confess the truth…[namely that] they…say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them” (Plato 1952:
orientated around a similar tension between, on the one hand, the Apollonian language of mathematics, and on the other hand, a ‘Dionysian’, more feminine language of intimacy and emotions, with the struggle between the two taking place within the compass of Max Cohen’s (Sean Gullete) skull. However, in this conflict, the limitations of the more restricted economy of mathematics are revealed, and gradually its primacy is usurped by the language of a more general economy, namely that of emotion and intimacy. However, this usurpation does not result in a negation of the language of mathematics in favour of an unequivocal privileging of a more feminine and holistic language, but rather amounts to the subversion of the binary opposition between the two languages, and thereby a subversion of Plato’s exclusive privileging of reason, or the voice of Apollo, through the allegory of the cave. *Pi* also contains a social critique of capitalism, a thematization of psychoanalytic elements and reflections of German expressionism, all of which subvert aspects of mainstream cinema. However before discussing these, I will present a synopsis of the narrative of *Pi*.

### vi. i. A synopsis of the narrative of Aronofsky’s *Pi* (1998)

The narrative of *Pi* centres around the character of Max Cohen (Sean Gullete), a mathematical genius who is obsessed with finding the ultimate equation that will reveal the metaphysical (mathematical) pattern beneath all events that occur in time and space. His computer, ‘Euclid’, spits out a 216 digit number before it crashes, and Max believes that this set of digits holds the key to the equation. Max, who is caught between the corrupt investment company, Lancett-Percy, and a fanatical Jewish Kabala sect, is therefore the ‘detective’ in pursuit of the ultimate ‘truth’ through this equation. The *femme fatale*, who draws him into the plot with the ‘gift’ of a computer chip to assist him with his research, is Marcy Dawson (Pamela Hart), with his neighbour Devi (Samia Shoaib) fulfilling the role of the maternal figure, while his maths professor, Sol Robeson (Mark Margolis), is the paternal, guiding figure.
In keeping with *film noir*, intermittent use is made of a voice-over that gives background information and puts the images in context. It states,

9:13…Personal note: When I was a little kid my mother told me not to stare into the sun, so once when I was six I did…The doctors didn’t know if my eyes would ever heal…I was terrified, alone in that darkness…Slowly, daylight crept in through the bandages and I could see, but something else had changed inside me, that day I had my first headache…12:45…Restate my assumptions: One – Mathematics is the language of nature. Two – Everything around us can be represented and understood through numbers. Three – If you graft the numbers of any system patterns emerge. Therefore – There are patterns everywhere in nature…So what about the stock market? My hypothesis – Within the stock market there is a pattern as well, right in front of me, hiding behind the numbers…12:50…Press return

Max’s mother is the personification of a more Dionysian or ‘feminine’ language, and a metaphor for the womb or cave who tried to keep him from ‘mesmerisation’ by the ‘light of reason’ but did not succeed. Max’s consequent blinding was only temporary and constituted the ‘dazzling’ effect of the sun spoken of by Plato as something experienced initially by those who emerge from the cave. The information contained within the above-mentioned voice-over gets repeated several times during the film and forms the basic metaphor or ‘primary’ metaphor around which all the other metaphors of the narrative are orientated. Max’s pursuit involves an endeavour to attain the complete understanding promised by Plato, and this involves an unequivocal privileging of the language of reason. However the closer he gets to the ‘answer’ the more he is assailed by blinding headaches and dreams in which blinding ‘light’ pursues him. At the same time the more ‘feminine’ language that he suppresses begins to manifest itself in the form of dreams.  

Shlain maintains that holistic, simultaneous, synthetic, and concrete view of the world are the essential characteristics of a feminine outlook; linear, sequential, reductionist, and abstract thinking defines the masculine. Although these represent opposite perceptual modes, every individual is generously endowed with all the features of both. They coexist as two closely overlapping bell-shaped curves with no feature superior to its reciprocal (Shlain 1999:1).

However, in Max’s case, there is a marked imbalance in that his mathematical genius is matched by his rejection of a more ‘feminine’ language. Sol, his maths professor, advises him repeatedly to take a break from his work, and tells him the story of Archimedes’ discovery of the law

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288 A good illustration of the ‘Dionysian’ quality of these dreams occurs at one point when Max, on the subway, dreams that a stranger begins ‘singing’ to him. This occurs in response to his intense concentration on the (Apollonian) figures of the stock market report in the newspaper.
of displacement whilst taking a bath. He then asks Max the moral of the story, to which Max gives a logically-deductive answer relating to the necessity of arriving, sooner or later, at some result if one persists long enough. Sol corrects him and exhibits a very different and ‘lateral’ way of thinking by maintaining that the answer is to engage in the simple act of ‘taking a bath’, that is, to cease with the obsessive pursuit of an answer. It is no accident that this ‘lateral’ way of thinking manifests in an anecdote that involves water, the symbol of the feminine and the womb. Sol’s advice to Max amounts to an inversion of the Platonic myth of the cave (in which the ‘light of reason’ is privileged), and it contains instead the unspoken imperative that Max should re-acquaint himself with the ‘language’ of the womb, of fluidity and of poetry. Yet Max is initially as resistant to this idea as he is to the advances of his neighbour Devi (Samia Shoaib).

As Max gets closer to the ‘truth’ his headaches get worse and the two groups between which he is caught, namely the corrupt investment company, Lancett-Percy, and the Jewish Kabala group, close in on him. After a blinding headache Max shaves his head and discovers a growth on the right side of his skull. Shlain maintains that

all forms of writing increase the left brain’s dominance over the right. As civilization progressed from image-based communication, such as pictures and hieroglyphs, to non-iconic forms, such as cuneiform, written communication became more left-brain orientated. An alphabet, being the most abstract form of writing, enhances left-brain values the most (Shlain 1999: 67).

Mathematics is the domain of the left-brain hemisphere and Max’s genius is the result of the way in which the growth on the right side of his skull impinges on the activity of his right brain hemisphere and thereby facilitates the dominance of his left brain functions. As such it is the source of both his genius and pain, in that the pain it causes him results from the way in which it restrains the impetus of the Dionysian ‘feminine’ language of a more general economy. This, in turn, allows his left (Apollonian) brain functions free reign to operate and proliferate.

After the death of Sol, Max develops confidence in this more ‘feminine’ language and its corresponding intuitive ‘understanding’, and he decides not to take the drugs he has been using for his headaches. In the absence of medication, the pain of his headache overwhelms Max who, instead of clawing at the place in his skull which causes him pain, attacks the manifestations of the Apollonian language that surround him, namely his immense computer system. At this point in the narrative he finally shifts away from his exclusive immersion within the language of mathematics and ‘re-enters’ the more general economy of a ‘feminine’ language. Further evidence for this hypothesis occurs in the
other elements of his dream, namely the scene in which Devi holds his hand and embraces him as he sobs, while she whispers, ‘Stay with me, Max.’

He finally cuts his ties with his erstwhile predominantly Apollonian disposition by burning the list of 216 numbers computed by Euclid before its crash, and by drilling into the growth on the side of his head that hindered the operations of his right-brain hemisphere. The effects of this act are apparent in the final scene when he sits in the basketball court next to Jenna (Kristyn Mae-Anne Lao), at peace yet unable, mentally, to complete the complex mathematical calculations as he had before. He is not in any state of ‘perpetual mystical bliss’, but rather regards the trees against the backdrop of the sky in the light of his insight (or, presumed insight, given the preceding sequence of events) into the co- or inter-dependence of the ‘languages’ of the general and the restricted economies, and of the organic and inorganic (ants play the role of organic ‘subverters’ that cause his computer to crash), insight which ‘we’ saw developing in him as the narrative progressed.

vi. ii. Social critique in Pi (1998)

The subversion of the Platonic allegory of the cave that occurs in Pi impacts negatively on the narrative structures of mainstream cinema that are inspired by such a Platonic myth via the influence of Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction. As mentioned before, there are two key American cultural myths perpetuated by mainstream film texts, namely, “that the truth will always prevail (wrongs will be made right) and that the powerful in this society can be brought down by the little people who are represented [as]…truth-seek[ers]” (Denzin 1995:23). Pi, through maintaining that any such final moment of unequivocal, Apollonian ‘truth’ is impossible, simultaneously declares the arbitrariness of these two myths.

However, through problematizing ‘truth’, the film also undermines the dramatic effects of the cornerstone of mainstream cinema, namely montage of tempo. The tension of the montage of tempo is predicated on the belief in the ‘absolute’ validity and legitimacy of certain social structures and power hierarchies, to the extent that inversion or subversion of them is ‘unthinkable’. The excitement of a montage of tempo, as discussed earlier, involves the intimation of just such an ‘unthinkable’ inversion of these power/social hierarchies through a threat posed to some besieged individual/s by a villain. However, at the last moment, the hero always arrives to vanquish the villain, neutralize the threat, and thereby facilitate Apollonian resolution to the narrative, which lends implicit confirmation to the

Although Max merely sits and looks (at leaf patterns, shadows, etc.) without being inspired to engage in more calculations, mathematics is still present in the narrative through the discourse of Jenna, who sits with her calculator next to Max and continues to ‘work out’ sums.
validity and ‘truth’ of the power/social hierarchies. Yet, if Apollonian ‘truth’ is revealed as illusory, or at best, a relative term, then the ‘absolute’ legitimacy and validity of the power hierarchies and social structures, necessary for the tension of the montage of tempo, are undermined, and with them the possibility of the montage of tempo being dramatically effective.

Three bourgeois ‘pillars’ of truth, integral to montage of tempo, that were implicitly supported throughout Dickens’ and Griffith’s fiction, and continue to be supported by mainstream cinema, are those of patriarchy, Christianity and capitalism.290

At one point in Pi, the patriarch of the members of the Jewish Kabala sect expounds the ideology and rhetoric of his faith, in terms of which only he is ‘pure’ enough to utter the name of God. This power hierarchy at work amongst the all male group, headed by a Rabbi and beholden to a masculine God, is problematized by Max’s question of, ‘How are you pure?’ Max’s question attacks the mythical foundations of the Kabala sect and reveals it to be predicated, firstly, on the ‘belief’ in the possibility of ‘purity’,291 and secondly, on a ‘belief’ in the superior ‘purity’ of males.292 However, just as patriarchy is revealed to be based on an arbitrary privileging of the masculine gender on the basis of ‘myth’, so too patriarchal religions such as Judeo-Christianity are revealed as resting upon the same arbitrary ‘mythical’ foundations.293

In addition to patriarchy and Christianity, the third and last pillar of ‘truth’ integral to montage of tempo concerns the legitimacy of capitalism, and this also gets subverted in Pi. Through the character of the femme fatale, namely Marcy Dawson (Pamela Hart), capitalism is revealed as entirely superficial, mercenary and, arguably, underpinned by criminal intent, given its inherent exploitative structure. When Max does not deliver the promised equation, Marcy’s façade of politeness slips away to reveal an incredibly hard and ruthless disposition, while her association with thugs who threaten to kill Max highlights the fine line between capitalism and its counterpart in the criminal underworld. This social criticism echoes the criticism ‘found’ in film noir by the French and while, as discussed earlier, Vernet agues for the absence of any such implicit criticism in ‘film noir’, and indeed for the

290 Cf. note 156 for a discussion of the links between Christianity, patriarchy and capitalism.
291 Desmond Lee reminds us of certain aspects of ‘Pythagorean’ influence in Plato’s philosophy that make their presence felt in the idea of a ‘purity’ of thought attained after a great deal of “rigorous intellectual discipline, a training, as we might say, in the technique of exact thinking…aimed…[at] personal experience…[where] the pupil is not a passive recipient of knowledge, but must grasp the truth for himself…[I]t is clear that [Plato]…intended to express in pictorial and poetic form the general philosophic and religious conviction…that the temporal is only the shadow of the eternal, and that the human soul is responsible not simply to itself but to God” (Lee 1955:40). As such, Max’s question also attacks, at an implicit level, the myths that underpin Plato’s philosophy. This links with the overall theme of the narrative of Pi, namely the inversion of the Platonic myth of the cave.
292 The ‘arbitrary’ privileging of males within the Kabala sect has already been discussed above. With regard to Plato’s privileging of males, it will suffice to recall that he only speaks of a philosopher king.
293 Cf. note 156.
non-existence of film noir as a specific genre, Pi, as a neo noir, is completely resistant to his arguments and renders just such a social critique.

Finally, Pi also constitutes a forerunner to Requiem for a Dream (2001) insofar as it offers a critique of any language that masquerades as being able to represent the world in its entirety. In the Intermezzo I discussed how (what I term) dialectical language, according to Heidegger, purports to represent the world as a picture or system, while in the beginning of Chapter Three I discussed the similarities between dialectical language and the visual language of mass media and mainstream cinema, that similarly maintains the possibility of representing the world in its entirety.\textsuperscript{294} Pi offers a critique of any such endeavour, and thereby simultaneously subverts the hegemonic authority and legitimacy of the mass media that, in Requiem for a Dream, wields such power over the characters and shapes their subjectivity.

vi. iii. Psychoanalytic themes in Pi (1998)

In Aronofsky’s Requiem for a Dream (2001), the relationship between the character of Tyrone (Marlan Wayans) and his girlfriend was revealed to be underpinned by his pursuit of a substitute for the lost moment of plenitude with the mother. Similarly, through the image of the red dress that featured prominently in both Sara’s (Ellen Burstyn) fantasies, and Harry’s hallucinations, in which he imagined his girlfriend, Marion Silver (Jennifer Connelley) wearing it, the link between romance and the pursuit of the moment of plenitude was visually articulated. Yet these images and their implications problematize the romance-pervaded aesthetic of mainstream cinema because that aesthetic is predicated on a silence concerning this underlying psychoanalytic link.

In his earlier film Pi, Aronofsky went even further in his thematization of the psychosexual dynamics that underpin relationships. The character of Devi (Samia Shoaib), throughout the movie, is the quintessential personification of the substitute for the moment of plenitude. The first time we meet her is when she meets Max in the stairwell, having brought him some food. At this point Max is looking particularly dishevelled and Devi tries to fix his hair saying, “Your hair! You can’t go out like that, you need a mom.” When Max leaves in a hurry she calls him back to take the lunch that she bought for him, and then gazes after him as he races off. Again, later, when Max is in need of iodine to stain a slide, he knocks on her door and asks her if she has any. Her immediate response is to move closer to him and exhibit ‘maternal’ concern asking, “Did you cut yourself?” Later still, when Max is installing and trying to run his computer with the computer chip he received from Marcy Dawson, he

\textsuperscript{294} Cf. note 97 and see – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media : 2. The visual language of the mass media and dialectical language.
hears Devi next door making love to someone saying, “Do you want to suck on mommy’s nipple? Mommy’s going to make it all better.” At this point Max collapses under the pain of another severe head-ache, betraying a link between this more feminine, intimate and emotional ‘language’ and his pain. This pain is caused by the conflict between his over-privileging of his masculine left-brain hemisphere functions and the demands made upon him by the repressed needs of his right-brain hemisphere. At the end of the film this conflict is resolved in the dream in which Max embraces Devi. However, their (imagined) intimate relationship can never be divorced from Aronofsky’s representation of the psychoanalytic dimensions of intimacy because such representation demythologises the discourse of romance by revealing it as based on the pursuit of the lost moment of plenitude. This, in turn, severely problematizes and subverts the aesthetic of romance as found in mainstream cinematic narratives.

vi. iv. German expressionism in Pi (1998)

The echoes and reflections of German expressionism in film noir, the presence of which Vernet has debunked, involved the perspective of the world as an ‘abyss’, in which laws and social structures were ambiguous and permeable, and where any comfort or security was only a thin veneer that obscured a gaping chasm of dreadful possibility. This was echoed as much in the incongruities and aporias that existed in the narratives, and which prevented Apollonian resolution, as it was mirrored in the cinematography that employed dark and haunting shadows that hid more than they revealed.

Pi, as a neo noir, consciously reflects the elements of the French definition of film noir, which includes the use of heavily accentuated shadows and cinematography that leaves a great deal unrepresented. Similarly, Pi concludes on a note that entails no Apollonian ‘resolution’ at all. Although Max’s relinquishing of his excessive pre-occupation with (Apollonian) mathematics allows him to become more ‘human’, his sense of peace, as he sits with Jenna (Kristyn Mae-Anne Lao) in the basketball court, is the result of his acceptance of the limitations of the language of mathematics to represent the world in its entirety, along with his embrace of the Dionysian, ‘feminine’ language of emotion and intimacy. Yet, simultaneously, this acceptance and embrace entail the denial of the possibility of final, Apollonian ‘truth’, which, in effect, constitutes an acknowledgement of the world as perpetually haunted by the void of infinite possibility. Max finds peace as the result of his embrace

295 For example, Max’s apartment is only ever represented metonymically, such that the extent of his computer system seems sublime in its magnitude and intricacy.
296 Cf. notes 69 & 286.
of the impossibility of ever attaining an Apollonian ‘truth’, and therefore his peace is predicated on the
death of the Apollonian ‘dream’ of the Enlightenment.

vi.v. Conclusion

In both *Pi* (1998) and *Requiem for a Dream* (2001), Aronofsky subverts the visual language of
mainstream cinema and the mass media at both an overt level, through the use of ‘alienating’
techniques that encourage the audience to reconsider the representations as constructed artefacts, and
at a more subtle level, through making the narrative structures of mainstream cinema conspicuous
insofar as his texts disappoint the audience’s expectations. In addition to this, *Pi*, as neo noir, carries
the full ‘critical’ weight of *film noir* behind it in its subversion of the socio-cultural myths, romantic
façades, and stable world view of mainstream cinema.

However, the result of *Pi* is the same as that of *Requiem for a Dream*, that is, they both,
because of their critical perspective, take the audience to the ‘edge’ of the visual language of
mainstream cinema and the mass media, which usually informs and reinforces audiences’ subjectivity
along the lines of the Cartesian ego. By revealing visual language as metaphor, and by opening the
audience up to the abyss of possibility that haunts the narrative structures of visual language,
Aronofsky’s texts, like the implications of Nietzsche’s valorisation of tragedy, and Heidegger’s
mythology of the ‘Fourfold’, facilitate the construction of a more porous and open subjectivity.

That is, instead of perpetuating Apollonian illusions of the subject-as-ego’s capacity for
complete autonomy, or the ability of visual (or dialectical) language to represent the world in its
entirety, Aronofsky’s texts ‘dwell’ in close proximity to Dionysian ‘chaos’ that involves both
subversive unconscious forces and the ‘abyss’ of possibility that lurks beneath the limitations of visual
(and dialectical) language.
Conclusion

Critical cinema should not be seen as something ‘new’, but rather as the (relatively) new manifestation of an older ‘Dionysian’ voice that, from Homer to the present, has constantly subverted the possibility of any ‘total’ hegemony of the Apollonian disposition, along with the possibility of any ‘completely’ restricted economy.

The relationship between, what I have termed, (Apollonian) dialectical language and the integral, self-transparent, autonomous Cartesian ego is mirrored, in the contemporary era, by the relationship between the (Apollonian) visual language of mainstream cinema/mass media and its audience. That is, through propagating and perpetuating the belief in the possibility of representing the world in its entirety through the image, the visual language of mainstream cinema/mass media informs and shapes the subjectivity of its audience along the lines of the Cartesian ego.

However, rather than acquiesce to Baudrillard’s pessimistic view of the contemporary era as a time of the ‘complete’ hegemony of this visual language (which would entail an acceptance of the corresponding impossibility of critical resistance), and rather than accept Adorno’s claims against the possibility of a critical cinema (because of the way in which the features of cinema predispose it towards being an ideological apparatus), I have argued for the existence of a critical cinema.

I maintain that critical cinema plays the role of ‘Dionysian’ subverter insofar as it engages (at an Apollonian level of reflection) with, among other things, the Apollonian narrative structures of the hegemonic visual language (of mainstream cinema and the mass media) and subverts their authority and integrity through revealing them to be Apollonian illusions. In doing so, critical cinema parallels the critical perspectives of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Nietzsche and Heidegger both engaged critically with ‘dialectical language’ and countered its Apollonian myths with ‘Dionysian’ myths, in Nietzsche’s case involving his valorisation of Aeschylus’ tragedies and a ‘will-to-mythologize’ in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and in Heidegger’s case involving the perpetual co-constitution of the subject as ‘Mortal’ in terms of the mythology of the ‘Fourfold’. These ‘alternative’ mythologies subverted both the integrity of dialectical language and the stability of the Cartesian ego (that both reinforces, and is reinforced by, ‘dialecticism’). Through Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s valorisation of their respective ‘alternative’ mythology, the possibility of a more porous and protean subjectivity was

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297 If such ‘total’ conditions really existed, this critical appraisal of the (Apollonian) visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media would be impossible, as would be the work of Derrida, Deleuze and others. Cf. note 185.

298 See – Chapter Three, The ‘age of a world picture’ in mainstream cinema and the mass media: 3. Baudrillard, Adorno and ‘intolerable’ pessimism in the contemporary era.

299 As discussed before, ‘Dionysian’ here does not mean the possession of the self by Dionysus, or dithyrambic music, but rather involves the ‘remembering’, at an (Apollonian) level of reflection, of the ‘abyss’ of possibility that lurks beneath all Apollonian structures, which results in a subversion of the integrity of those structures.
opened up, something which is paralleled, at an implicit level, by Aronofsky through his postmodern critical cinema. That is, his critical cinema not only subverts the ‘integrity’ of the Apollonian narrative structures of mainstream visual language (through an array of cinematographic and narrative techniques), but also, in doing so, subverts the stability and validity of the subjectivity informed and shaped by mainstream cinema and the mass media along the lines of the Cartesian ego.

What is of importance is the way in which the ‘protean’ subjectivity, that results from this subversion, is able to consider the hegemonic (Apollonian) visual language and its narrative structures as fictions instead of as ‘facts’. The porous subject is thus also a ‘perpetually’ critical subject in that it does not succumb to the ‘opiate’ of Apollonian illusions that seek to negate the ‘abyss’ of possibility that lurks beneath all language, and instead keeps that ‘abyss’ in constant view.

Where Eisenstein’s critical cinema, underpinned by the Marxist meta-narrative, operated more at a social or political level, Aronofksy’s postmodern critical cinema, in the absence of any such meta-narrative or conceptual ‘safety net’, operates more at an epistemological and ontological level. Through ‘remembering’ the ‘abyss’ of possibility that haunts all Apollonian structures his critical cinema facilitates the possibility of a perpetual ‘dialogue’ with such structures, and thereby subverts the possibility of any ‘total’ monologue of Apollo that would be tantamount to stasis and death. It is for this reason that critical cinema holds such value for the contemporary era and, as such, should be cultivated rather than marginalized.

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300 That is, both dialectical language and the visual language of mainstream cinema and the mass media. Cf. note 111.
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