

University of Salford

THE DISPASSIONATE MIRROR
Towards a Transcendental Narrative in Film Practice
PHD PUBLISHED WORK
By
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...to the many people who participated in the making of the films One Day Tafo, Reunion and Signs of Life, especially Janet. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Derek Scott, for his encouraging and inspirational advice and guidance.

THE PHD PACKAGE

This PhD package includes the following elements:

- *One Day Tafo* (70 minutes) on DVD.
- *Reunion* (50 minutes) on DVD.
- *Signs of Life* (70 minutes) on DVD.
- *One Day Tafo, Reunion* and *Signs of Life* on one VHS tape.
- *Critical Commentary*.

It is recommended that the films be viewed in the above order prior to the reading of the Critical Commentary.

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INTRODUCTION

Abstract

The use of Zen – advertent or inadvertent – in the practice of artistic creation is not new. From Japanese Haiku poetry, the early poetry of Wordsworth and even aspects of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, to the paintings of Cézanne and Dali, to the novels of Ben Okri and the work of Samuel Becket and Peter Brooke, we see differing efforts to transcend the dominant mode of understanding ourselves and the world around us: namely that of the duality of thought, of the kind our conscious, logical intellect can comprehend. One could even point to contemporary physics – and in particular the physics emerging out of quantum mechanics¹ – to see that efforts to transcend the limitations of our own intellect in the quest to understand the phenomena of life are not confined to artists. One could describe this quest as spiritual, in that it is concerned with understanding life predominantly through feeling.

As a relatively young art form, first conceived and developed within a mechanistic paradigm, the film medium does not have a tradition that both filmmakers and audience alike can relate to in terms of transcending modes of dualistic thought and exploring our spiritual nature. With some notable exceptions who remain on the whole on the fringes of popular film culture – Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer and Tarkovsky being the most prominent of these – filmmakers have been confined to working predominantly within the idiom of cause and effect, conflict and resolution, and the logic of psychologically explicable character motivation and consequent plot development. With relatively few reference points, the process of examining and exploring the film form beyond this psychological realism is difficult, not least because of the economic restraints that have traditionally hampered innovation within filmmaking. While our conscious thoughts and emotional lives are amply studied within the bounds of largely Freudian and humanistic psychology, there remain aspects of human experience – feelings connected to our transcendental natures - which film does not adequately explore or express.

Here, I shall seek to illustrate and evaluate the efforts I have made as a practicing filmmaker through three films – *One Day Tafo*, *Reunion* and *Signs of Life* – to explore and develop a film form which seeks to reveal a truth about myself and the world in which I live: a truth which goes beyond what may be psychologically and intellectually explicable, a truth which is essentially experiential and devoid of traditional concepts of meaning. I am tempted to refer to this as ‘Zen and the art of filmmaking’.² For me, this work is only the beginning of a life-long process, the outcomes of which I hope others may be able to use for further research and exploration.

¹ See Capra, F., *The Turning Point* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1982).

² See Pirsig, R. M., *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (London, Corgi, 1989; orig. pub. Bodley Head, 1974).

The Films: An Introduction

The films put forward for this PhD submission are *One Day Tafo*, *Reunion* and *Signs of Life*.³ They have been chosen because they form a trilogy, both in terms of content – the exploration of identity which goes beyond psychology and encompasses the transcendental - and in the form – the exploration of an, essentially, experiential approach to language, as opposed to representation through intellectually explicable meaning. These unifying qualities shall be discussed later.

All three films were produced, written and directed by myself. Additionally, I edited *One Day Tafo* and *Reunion* and did the camera-work on *Reunion*. These works are truly independent, in that they were not produced to fit any strand or comply with criteria laid down by broadcasters or investors. Nevertheless, I was able to draw on not only the expertise and creative contribution of my production teams, but on a number of advisors and contributors who have all been invaluable in helping shape the films into what they are.

One Day Tafo

One Day Tafo was first commissioned for development by The Danish National Film Board and Danish Television (DR1) in 1989. Following research and development, the Danish National Film Board invested in the film and it went into production in early 1990 and was completed in January 1991. Channel Four television invested in the film during production and they subsequently gave it a first screening in 1991. The film won the bronze award at the Houston International Film Festival that year and was later invited to compete in the documentary section of the San Sebastian International Film Festival. International sales are handled by Documedia International Films, London.

The film was shot in predominantly Ghana with significant sequences shot in Denmark and a few additional sections shot in the UK. Post-production was carried out in Leeds.

Reunion

Reunion was commissioned by Channel Four Television in 1994, following some initial shooting funded by North West Arts Board, which took place in 1993. It was completed in 1995, during which it received its first broadcast on Channel Four Television as part of the Midnight Underground strand. International sales are handled by The Arts Council's Film Unit, London.

The film was predominantly shot in the north west of the UK, with some shooting taking place in Cambridgeshire. Post-production was carried out in Manchester.

³ See appendix for credit listing and technical details.

Signs of Life

Signs of Life was an independent production financed predominantly by North West Arts Board, with additional finance coming from Valance Film Limited and the Danish company Blue Mountain Productions. The film went into production in 1997 and was completed in 1998. Following a screening at the Edinburgh Film Festival's Expo section in 1998, the film is now being distributed by Documedia International Films, London.

This film was shot entirely in the north west of the UK and post-production took place in Manchester.

Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this evaluation is to support the main submissions, which are the films *One Day Tafo*, *Reunion* and *Signs of Life*. It is my aim that the films themselves will evidence the nature of my research and provide the outcomes.

The making of the films involved extensive and varied research, not only into the content of their subject matter, but into the form of the cinematic language. Background research into content through books and periodicals was supplemented by interviews with potential and actual contributors, picture research, archive research, location research, historical research and an exploration of cinematic forms. Each of the three films was about 18 months in development and production.

This evaluation's purpose is to put the exploratory outcomes of the films into a context, as well as highlight key themes of research and innovation. I have deliberately sought to reflect the wide ranging type of sources of reference as they have affected my work as a creative artist. Research into a creative process is at best challenging, due to its ephemeral nature, but, perhaps, particularly challenging in this case, as I seek to understand qualities of filmmaking which transcend more common approaches to the dichotomy of the discourse on classic narrative approaches to filmmaking.

NECESSITY

My Role as Artist

My influences, and the context within which I work, are eclectic. This has its roots in the very heart of my being: my Danish father was in his nature, professionally and culturally speaking, scientific⁴ in his view on life; my Ghanaian mother, conversely, is spiritual⁵ in her outlook on life. I am the consequence of a 'marriage' of cultures which in a broad sense are rooted in vastly differing perspectives on the phenomena of life. In fact, I was born in Ghana, moved to Denmark as a child, where I spent most of my childhood and young adulthood, with a period of schooling in Britain.⁶

These basic facts are highlighted here because they are of fundamental importance when discussing the context and form of my work. Not only because, as the French poet Paul Valéry claims, '... there is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography',⁷ but because the very core of the themes I seek to explore are ultimately concerned with identity, and the emerging form I am developing seeks to transcend apparent dichotomies of culture, form and content.

Being multi-racial and multi-cultural has had three broad effects. First, I have not been able to root my sense of creative identity within a particular and definable cultural context and, as a consequence, my key creative reference points not only tend to be eclectic, but cross-cultural. Second, this cross-fertilisation has been instrumental in defining my interest in themes of identity; in particular identities which transcend socio-cultural explanations of who and what we are. Third, the seemingly conflicting elements which constitute my socio-cultural background,⁸ have been instrumental in developing my interest in exploring an aesthetic which transcends seemingly contradictory elements within the cinematic form.

The need for me to create a cultural product is born out of faith, or an inner will to search for a truth. Or as the Chinese Zen master, Hui-neng (638AD-713AD) put it: 'If thou comest for the faith, stop all they hankerings. Think not of good, think not of evil, but see what at this moment thy own original face doth look like, which thou

⁴ Dr P K K Knudsen was a surgeon by profession and a specialist in tropical medicine. Much of his professional life was spent in Ghana.

⁵ Dr C O Knudsen, anthropologist, whose doctoral thesis, 'Distant Spiritual Healing' (University of Derby, 2000) concerns itself with the very conflicts between spiritual and scientific approaches to medicine.

⁶ In fact my father was half English.

⁷ Valéry, P *The Art of Poetry* (London: Pantheon, 1958).

⁸ What can be generally described as the predominantly 'pragmatic scientific value system' of Danish society and culture, with notable exceptions such as Søren Kirkegaard, and the traditionally, so often called, 'superstitious 'spiritual value system' of Ghanaian society and culture.

hadst even prior to thy own birth⁹. This search for truth is, of course, not unique in art, nor indeed in cinema. However, to seek truth in which ‘there is nothing to gain, nothing to understand¹⁰’ and in which experience and feeling are the only facts, takes us into the territory within which my work increasingly operates and separates me from many others. It is a territory in which the dominant forms of logical cause and effect, and the dualism of opposites, lose their shape and context.¹¹ The aim of my work could be described as trying to reveal a truth primarily experienced and felt, without recourse to explanation.¹² As Paul Schrader put it: ‘The enemy of transcendence is eminence, whether it is external (realism, rationalism) or internal (psychologism, expressionism). To the transcendental artist these conventional interpretations of reality are emotional and rational constructs devised by man to dilute or explain away the transcendental’.¹³

While my deeper motivations for creating my work may remain a mystery in this context, there is a logical argument for the need for me to make a contribution to the continual evolution not only to the moving image, but also, through this art, to the development of our perception of aspects of our lives. My overwhelming feeling is that socially and culturally, we are pre-occupied with the physicality of life, the symptoms of our actions, and the intellect as a dominant tool for comprehension; this at the expense of our intuitions and feelings. In my art, I seek to address what I call a ‘spiritual anxiety’; an anxiety which, for me, not only lies at the heart of many problems in contemporary Britain, but an anxiety which is not adequately addressed in the cinematic medium.

Nevertheless, I detect a need in people to explore this ‘other side’ of our psyche: the increased interest in non-institutionalised religious expression, despite the decline of the Christian Church; the anti-capitalisation movement and its questioning of the ethics of the market economy; the increasing acceptance of holistic medicine; the continual interest in the occult, the popularity of mysticism on television, to name but a few examples.

The Problem of Reductive Thought Patterns and Explication

In pursuit of a transcendental perspective of subject matter, the classic narrative approach immediately poses problems. Firstly, while it is possible within the

⁹ *Zen Buddhism, Selected Writings of D T Suzuki* (New York, Image Books 1996) p71.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p74.

¹¹ For example, as I will be discussing later, fact and fiction, dream and reality, conflict and resolution.

¹² See, for example, C S Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain*, in which he, amongst other things, discusses the experience of the ‘numinous’ – or awe – as a fact. (London, Geoffrey Bles, 1940).

¹³ *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York, Da Capo 1972) p11.

paradigm of the classic narrative to make a film about ‘spiritual matters’, the fundamental problem is that the language one is using to deal with the subject is built around dualistic thought patterns which in itself reduces a subject matter that is essentially inexplicable, to something explicable. This has been, for me, a prohibitive factor in expressing the very qualities of transcendental experience. In Islam, for example, it is forbidden to create a visual representation of Allah, in the belief that Allah would be reduced to something he is not¹⁴. Within film, Robert Bresson raises a similar concern in a different way in his *Notes On Cinematography*: ‘No psychology (of the kind which discovers only what it can explain).’¹⁵

The classic narrative has a long standing tradition, first established by Aristotle in his seminal work *Poetics*. This is essentially a Western tradition, harnessed and developed within the context of a mechanistic view of life that evolved in Europe during the past two millennia, and by now extensively studied in numerous texts for story-tellers in various media, including filmmaking. The ingredients of premise, protagonist, aims, obstacles, dramatic questions, character motivations and identifications, expositions, plot developments, crises and climaxes¹⁶ all serve to engage the audience in a narrative whose aim is to move the emotions with the use of essentially a dialectic of conflict and opposition. This is achieved by establishing a matrix of understanding, in which we understand, intellectually, the cause and effect of the action and its consequences.

More often than not, this is a linear process, even if the narrative itself might not be linear in construct. While the temporal time and space of the film may be arranged in a large variety of ways, the logic of establishing the premise, the protagonist and her aims will nevertheless usually be required towards the beginning of a given narrative in order to render the cause and effect of actions and events valid. The effect, if not indeed the purpose, of such a paradigm is to explain.¹⁷ The temporal logic of a classic narrative needs to make sense to our intellect, even if the intellect is reached via our self assertive emotions.¹⁸

However, what of the film narrative which does not seek to explain? What of the narrative that seeks to incorporate the inexplicable and engage the audiences

¹⁴ Compare this to certain Christian faiths such as the Church of the Latter Day Saints, who have direct representations of God in human guise.

¹⁵ Bresson, R., *Notes on Cinematography* (New York, Urizon Books, 1977) p39.

¹⁶ See, for example, Cherry Potter’s excellent overview of key classic narrative ingredients in *Image, Sound & Story: the Art of Telling in Film* (London, Secker & Warburg, 1990) p86-p89.

¹⁷ Even in a classic film such as Billy Wilder’s *Sunset Boulevard* (1949), in which we start at the end and then enter into a film that is entirely in flashback, the protagonists aims and the premise are quickly established within the flashback. In fact the very premise of the film itself is to ‘explain’ how and why the main protagonist is floating, dead, in a swimming pool.

¹⁸ See Arthur Koestler’s discussion of self assertive emotions and participatory emotions in *The Act of Creation* (London, Pan Books, 1970).

participatory emotions in feelings and issues around transcendence?¹⁹ Can a narrative language which predominantly operates on a level of psychologically explicable cause and effect adequately deal with feelings and issues that lie outside this paradigm?

Secondly, the very distinction intrinsic in the divisions of film form into fact and fiction poses me a problem which I have sought to address in my work. It is a distinction which I think originates outside of film and reflects a development in Western thought in which we have increasingly sought to distinguish between dream and reality, imagination and fact, mind and body. This is a tendency perhaps most starkly expressed by Descartes.²⁰ Though there are many who have, of course, challenged these intrinsic divisions, the intellect itself, and its dualistic approach to understanding, perpetuates distinctions in order to explain. As C. G. Jung reminds us, 'without consciousness there would, practically speaking, be no world, for the world exists as such only in so far as it is consciously reflected and consciously expressed by the psyche. *Consciousness is a precondition of being.* Thus the psyche is endowed with the dignity of a cosmic principle, which philosophically and in fact gives it a position coequal with the principle of physical being'.²¹

If one is to see the human being in all her glory, then it does become necessary to look at all aspects of that being. That is, the conscious, revealing itself above the surface of the water, and that vast unconscious which lies below the surface and is, by its very nature, beyond the reach of the intelligible. Not only that, the implication of Jung's proclamation is that the perceiver and the perceived are ultimately one, and that the process of conscious perception must involve the 'inner and the outer reality'. Or as Stanley Burnshaw put it in his book on poetry, *The Seamless Web*: 'So immense are the possible combinations of external forces alone that it seems ludicrous to discuss them in terms of what we now know or in time hope to know. The more promising course has been to learn our bodies and then from within to look outward. And we have come upon one finding with which all that may be discovered will have to accord: *the entire human organism always participates in any reaction*'.²²

It is popularly assumed by audience and producers alike,²³ that the fiction film and the factual film deal with two fundamentally separate aspects of human experience, even

¹⁹ Where the self assertive emotions are those that reinforce our individual identity (fear, anxiety, lust, anticipation, anger, rage and so on, often associated with the sympathetic nervous system's dilemma of 'fight or flight') and the participatory emotions – which I shall refer to as 'feelings' – which relate to the dissolving of the individual ego into a greater whole (rapture, awe, compassion, longing, love and so on, often associated with the parasympathetic nervous system). See *ibid.*, p271.

²⁰ See Decartes, R., *Discourse on Method* (New York, Hackett 1980).

²¹ Jung, C. G., *The Undiscovered Self* (Little, Bwon & Co.) p46.

²² Burnshaw, S., *The Seamless Web* (New York, George Braziller, 1971) p10.

²³ The Danish television station DR1 pulled out of the production stage of *One Day Tafo* because they felt it was not a documentary. This is an indication, too, of the fact that these distinctions have been institutionalised.

though there may be some cross fertilisation of approach, and that one approach somehow represents reality, while the other somehow represents fantasy or imagination. While some filmmakers and commentators expend effort on trying to define these distinctions, I have found in my own experience, as Teilhard de Chardin explains, that '[...] the more we split and pulverise matter artificially, the more insistently it proclaims its *fundamental unity*'.²⁴ This very unity is in its essence transcendental. To distinguish 'artificially' between fact and fiction, dream and reality, observer and observed, has therefore struck me as contradictory in discovering a truth not only about the psychology of my human subjects (and myself) but the very transcendental nature which unifies us with everything else. When I look at myself – and I assume my subjects to be like me in this regard – I operate and react to life as one unit: dreams, fantasies, physical experiences and reactions, all blended into one living unit.

The search for a unity of creative vision and expression has led me to the challenge of exploring the dichotomy of fact and fiction in order to ask: how can I unify (referring back to Burnshaw) the cinematic narrative with a view to transcending the intrinsic divisions which dominate current practice?

Thirdly, and finally, there is the problem of what Robert Bresson calls 'the terrible habit of theatre'.²⁵ This is especially a 'habit' in Britain, where the theatrical and literary traditions are so strong, that the cinematic language of most films, with some notable exceptions such as Derek Jarman and some of the documentaries of the Grierson era,²⁶ has been dominated, if not drowned, by the legacy of theatre and literature. One consequence of this is, of course, that Britain is considered by many to have a strong drama tradition in television. It is rare to see a British theatrical feature film which is not based on a novel or a stage play. The literary or theatrical source of a film does not in itself predicate the exploitation of the strengths of cinematic form, but the fact that the cinematic form is used primarily to record dramatic events reinforces this tendency.

It is interesting to note that prior to the advent of sound in film, there seemed to be evidence of the emergence of a new visual aesthetic²⁷ which was quickly superseded by theatrical techniques the moment lip sync became a possibility with the cinematic character. This influence has been, to a large extent, an impediment to the evolution of the film form in that visual and recording machines have been largely used to film dramaturgical events and situations. The mere emphasis on the dramaturgy of a script

²⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, P., *The Phenomenon of Man* (London, Fontana Books, 1970) p45.

²⁵ Bresson, R., *Notes on Cinematography* (New York, Urizon Books, 1977) p2.

²⁶ Good examples might be Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993) and Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934) which in very different ways are cinematically poetic.

²⁷ See, for example, Dreyer's *Vampyr* (C Th. Dreyer Filmproduktion, 1932) and Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1932), both made right on the cusp of the introduction of sound and both of which eventually had sound versions made.

prior to shooting reinforces this point. To continue with Bresson, ‘ the truth of cinematography cannot be the truth of theatre, nor the truth of the novel, nor the truth of painting. (What the cinematographer captures with his or her own resources cannot be what the theatre, the novel, painting capture with theirs.)’.²⁸

In other words, I ask myself: why make a film as opposed to create a stage play?²⁹ There must be something about this medium and its form which makes me feel I can see and explore things in a way that I could not do in theatre. In my work, I have therefore sought to discover, in the film form, what it is about the language that I can develop to, as a Heineken television beer advertisement once put it, ‘reach the parts that no other beers cannot reach’. The question arises: how do I develop the cinematic form to go beyond the function of primarily capturing and ordering essentially dramaturgical events?

The problems of the reductive thought patterns and explication that I have identified above, are naturally linked: the cause and effect of dominant narrative approaches, the dichotomy of fact and fiction, and the overwhelming theatricality of imagery. It must be pointed out that the economic circumstances surrounding film production, which are rapidly changing as a consequence of developments in technology, have had an influence on the evolution of the form. Many filmmakers have expressed ambitions to challenge and develop the form, but few have had the opportunity to succeed in the task. Nevertheless, an important group of filmmakers, whom I shall now go on to briefly discuss, has been instrumental in evolving film forms which have allowed the medium to explore the transcendental aspects of human experience, and these filmmakers are an important part of the context within which I present my films.

The Context

There are a number of filmmakers who could be said to have in some way or other contributed to the development of a transcendental realism, in which the motivations of narrative go beyond the psychology of cause and effect and are driven primarily by our feelings of transcendence. The work of Joris Ivens,³⁰ Michaelangelo Antonioni,³¹ Paulo and Vittorio Taviani,³² or, indeed, Jean Rouch.³³ Provide examples. However, I

²⁸ Ibid., p5.

²⁹ Particularly as you will see from my biography in the appendix, I have also directed theatre.

³⁰ See, for example, *Rain* (1932), in which the meaning of the film is purely meant to be experiential.

³¹ See, for example, *L’Aventura* (1959), in which the indescribable relationships between characters and environment provide for motivations beyond psychology.

³² See, for example, *Kaos* (1984), in particular *The Epilogue*, in which we see a transcendental moment generating participatory feelings beyond logical comprehension.

³³ See, for example, Jean Rouch’s evocation of ritual in *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955).

shall here concentrate on discussing a specific group of filmmakers whose efforts at creating an approach to cinematic narrative is explicitly focused on exploring our transcendental natures and developing the cinematic language accordingly.

Three historical figures already identified by Paul Schrader³⁴ stand out: Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson and Carl Th. Dreyer. Beyond these three, I would add Andrey Tarkovsky and Victor Erice, with individual films by Johan Van Der Keuken (*The Long Holiday*, 2000), Samira Makhmalbaf (*Blackboards*, 2000), Todd Haynes (*Safe*, 1995), Sergei Dvortsevoy (*Bread Day*, 1998) and Akira Kurosawa (*Dreams*, 1990)³⁵ being further examples of the transcendental approach.

The work of Ozu and Bresson is of particular importance when discussing the emergence of a transcendental narrative form, as is that of the younger Tarkovsky, and they are highly relevant in the context of discussing my work. They both consciously sought to find the language not merely to describe or represent the transcendental reality, but to make the audience feel it intuitively through the experience of watching their films. Not only that, but the fact that Ozu had his roots in Eastern Zen art and culture, while Bresson had his in Western Christian art and culture, combined with Tarkovsky's unique orthodox Christian perspective, gives us an interesting comparison on differing approaches to achieving similar aims.

It is not the intention here to go into an analysis of these filmmakers' work in the context of socio-cultural influences and cinematic aesthetic, but to highlight their research and development of the language as it pertains to my research and development. Though there are clearly religious connections and issues that are brought to bear on any discussion of transcendence, I am inclined to accept R. H. Blyth's assertion that 'the poetical and the religious are identical states of mind... to the religious all things are poetical... to the poetical all things are religious'.³⁶ Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer and Tarkovsky have been major poetical influences on cinema and in particular on other filmmakers from a variety of different cultures. However, very few have taken up the challenge and consciously built on their work in terms of a vigorous pursuit of transcendental narrative approaches, though many have used stylistic elements to further the classic narrative approach.³⁷

³⁴ Schrader, P., *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (New York, Da Capo, 1972).

³⁵ Intriguingly, with Van Der Keuken's *The Long Holiday* and Kurosawa's *Dreams*, we are talking about the last films prior to their deaths. In the case of Tarkovsky, there is little doubt that as his career progressed his films became increasingly directly transcendental in their content and form.

³⁶ Blyth, R. H., *Zen In English Literature And Oriental Classics* (Tokyo, E. P. Dutton, 1960) p33.

³⁷ See, for example, the visually austere approach of Aki Karusmakki in *Drifting Clouds* (1996) and its connection to Bresson, and Paul Schrader's experimentation with narrative structure in *Patty Hearst* (1988) and its connections to Ozu.

Ozu

There are two general aspects of Ozu's work which are of relevance here. On the one hand, his approach to story and plot structure, and on the other his extraordinary disciplined, Zen-like, approach to his imagery.

Unlike other filmmakers I shall be discussing, Ozu enjoyed enormous popularity in Japan. His adoption of an essentially melodramatic subject matter and its amalgamation with a Zen aesthetic made his films both accessible and richly spiritual. Yet it is clear that he consciously strove to break with well-established practice in cinematic story-telling and character motivation. 'Pictures with obvious plots', he said, 'bore me now. Naturally, a film must have some sort of structure or else it is not a film, but I feel that a picture isn't good if it has too much drama or action... I want to portray a man's character by eliminating all the dramatic devices. I want to make people feel what life is like without delineating all the ups and downs'.³⁸

Indeed, in the last 13 films he made between 1949 and 1962, his scenes and sequences are not driven by externalised dramatic action, but have a stillness about them which invites us to feel our way into the experience without recourse to having to identify cause and effect and thereby a rationalisation of the experience. We are not witnesses to dramatic moments, turning points, conflicts and resolutions which make up key ingredients in a classic narrative, but are taken through a subtle process very akin to the Zen Satori³⁹ experience. It is a process which nevertheless has a clear structural approach not only within specific scenes, but within the macrocosm of the overall plot structure.

Paul Schrader describes Ozu's consistent approach to plot structure like this:⁴⁰

1. 'The everyday: a meticulous representation of the dull, banal commonplaces of everyday living'
2. 'Disparity: an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment which culminates in a decisive action'
3. 'Stasis: a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it'.

Contrary to the classic narrative's attempts to engage our self-assertive emotions in a process of psychologically explicable actions and events, we are in an Ozu narrative asked to immerse ourselves in a scene or a narrative for its own sake. The viewer is not

³⁸ Richie, D., *The Later Films of Yasujiro Ozu* (Film Quarterly, 13, autumn 1959) p21.

³⁹ 'Satori may be defined as intuitive looking into, in contradiction to intellectual or logical understanding. Whatever the definition, satori means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistic mind'. Suzuki, D. T., *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London, Rider, 1991) p88.

⁴⁰ Schrader, *Transcendental Style In Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, p39-53.

led, but is provided with an experience, devoid of the conflict-driven drama normally used to evoke our self-assertive emotions, which we are asked to transcend with our participatory feelings. The protagonist's aims, premise, obstacles, climaxes and turning points are largely absent. Instead we have 'disparity', revealing a crack in the surface of what we are all familiar with and, as Leonard Cohen puts it, 'that's how the light gets in'.⁴¹

A good example of this approach to plot and scene structure is *Tokyo Story* (1959). One of his many family cycle films, the plot follows the above structure and is, in terms of what we would expect of a classic plot, deceptively basic. An elderly retired couple living a quiet, peaceful life in Kyoto are to visit their children and grand children in Tokyo. When they get to Tokyo, they discover a 'disparity' between themselves and the modern lives their children have adopted and feel alienated. They decide to return home to Kyoto early.

If one could mark out a common feature between this and a classic narrative it would be the importance of 'change' as an outcome. But where the classic narrative's 'change' more often than not is one of an external, physical change resulting from the fall out of causes and effects, nothing has happened in *Tokyo Story* of an external nature. Not even a psychological change.⁴² Yet something important has changed; the change in question is one of a transcendence of that which has remained physically constant, giving us a new perspective of the film's underlying theme; a perspective not limited by psychology, but a perspective felt and perhaps largely unexplained.

As with the overall narrative, Ozu works this structure within individual scenes. Most of the scenes in *Tokyo Story* revolve around relatively un-dramatic events. Similarly, one sees the 'everyday', 'disparity', 'stasis' structure. A simple conversational scene between a number of characters may start with 'normal' formalities, then develop to a point where a character is visibly disparate, before returning to a sense of formal 'normality' once again.

Reinforcing this approach to plot is, of course, Ozu's well-known and unique approach to his visualisation. Like the other filmmakers I will be referring to, Ozu developed a unique formal approach to the way he utilised the medium's key components: the visual image and sound. It was a rigid approach, arguably related to the rigours of Zen-based creative arts such as Haiku poetry or Noh theatre.

This approach to visualisation could be summed up as having four basic features: the static shot; the static angle always from one third up from the vertical height of the primary subject; the coda, being linking shots or brief sequences which seem to have

⁴¹ 'Anthem', from the album *The Future*, Sony Music Entertainment, 1992.

⁴² It is perhaps interesting to note the irony in Ozu's use of 'story' in the title.

no relevance to the rest of the narrative; and his spatial approach which sees him work with a 360° space between action points as opposed to the dominant norm of 180°. ⁴³

I have briefly drawn attention to these unique features to draw attention to the importance I believe rigorous form has in developing a transcendental narrative. In particular because form, content and function are inseparable in the work of Ozu, as they are in my own work, and it is a common feature across the work of transcendental filmmakers. Where the tendency in the classic narrative is to use form to represent a dramaturgical situation – hence the development of the 180° rule as a benchmark for establishing representations of ‘realistic’ spatial relationships - Ozu creates a graphically based spatial relationship which can only exist within the paradigm of the film. Likewise with the static shots and his low-angled perspectives; all combine towards a unity between subject and function to such an extent that it becomes impossible to discuss his films in terms of representation without doing them injustice.

Bresson

The difficulty of such a discourse also exists when discussing Bresson. Given his inimitable contribution to cinema, it is perhaps surprising that so little has been written about his films in English. Where Ozu’s work draws on a rich tradition of Japanese transcendental arts, Bresson, comparatively speaking, would appear to have been working in a vacuum. Perhaps this, and his essentially experiential approach, provides less for the academic to examine in terms of the representation of dualistic modes of discourse.

Though, like Ozu, Bresson’s films often have a similar tripartite plot structure in terms of character development in particular; ⁴⁴ his films also very much operate within the paradigm of cause and effect. Unlike the classic narrative’s psychologically explicable cause and effect, Bresson’s use of the cause and effect is designed not to place the action within the classic narrative’s motivational matrix but, on the contrary, to take us into the territory of the divine, a territory of the sensory experience of the transcendental. ‘There is an Absolute in this Universe. But it lies beyond language and even being’. ⁴⁵ He continues: ‘The Absolute does not influence people in the way that one thing acts on another. It is simply at the heart of their freedom, it is its soul’. ⁴⁶

And, like Ozu, Bresson developed a rigorous approach to film form: one of poverty. His approach to casting is an example of this, where he works with performers who

⁴³ See Bordwell, D., *Ozu And The Poetics of Cinema* (New York, Princeton, 1994) p94.

⁴⁴ Normality/disparity/normality-transcendence, where in Bresson’s case ‘disparity’ could be described as ‘the decisive moment’.

⁴⁵ Ayfre, A., *L’univers de Robert Bresson* (Tele Cine no. 70-71, November 1957).

⁴⁶ It is perhaps interesting to note that in Bresson’s later films, the notion of ‘freedom’ is substituted by notions of ‘predestination’.

have never appeared on screen before and then refers to them as ‘models’⁴⁷. However, in relation to my work, I would like to draw attention to two elements of his work: firstly, the relentless focus on action and reaction; secondly, his juxtaposition of sound and image. Both are related, of course, and play off each other, particularly as the sparsely and simplicity of Bresson’s work creates a heightened sensitivity between the elements of his films.⁴⁸

Most films utilising the psychological realism of the classic narrative depend, as discussed earlier, on the dramaturgy of performance - that is, the actor and her range of emotional codes. In the case of Bresson, he sets out deliberately to challenge this approach: ‘Cinema seeks *immediate* and *definitive* expression through mimicry, gestures, intonations of voice. This system inevitably excludes expression through contacts and exchanges of images and of sounds and the transformations that result from them’.⁴⁹ Bresson has taken this one step further by focusing specifically on the action part of the body. We will often see torso shots, shots of just a hand carrying out an action, the feet walking or hesitating, shots of objects and, importantly, shots of looks – that is, the eyes, often linking specifically to objects or actions. By avoiding the codes of drama (essentially performance driven), he seeks to juxtapose pure cinematic action. The actions and interactions themselves become the objects of our attention, heightening our awareness of our ‘normal’ world.

Importantly, action in a Bresson film is not confined to what we see. Indeed, much of the action is taking place within the soundscape. Where it is standard practice to predominantly use sound to reinforce the reality of the images by paraphrasing and supplementing,⁵⁰ Bresson uses the action within the sound as an equal to the action within the image. In doing this, he creates tensions through juxtapositions which add a ‘supernatural’ level to the experience.⁵¹ By reassembling images of bits of reality in

⁴⁷ ‘No actors. (No directing of actors). No parts. (No learning of parts). No staging. But the use of working models, taken from life. *Being* (models) instead of *seeming* (actors)’. Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, p1.

⁴⁸ “The supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise. Real things seen close up”. James Blue, Excerpts from an interview with Robert Bresson, June 1965, Los Angeles 1969, quoted from Schrader, 1972.

⁴⁹ Bresson, p19.

⁵⁰ There are examples of this not being the case, in a limited sense, in some thrillers and notably, for example, one interesting instance in Werner Herzog’s *Aguire, The Wrath of God* (1972) where the sound of Aguire’s henchman whistling in certain scenes suggests the action of killing being carried out while we may be looking at completely different action.

⁵¹ This practice is endemic in Bresson’s work, but good examples of this can be seen in the murder sequences in both *A Man Condemned To Death Escaped* (1956) and *L’Argent* (1983). In both films, we hear the activity leading up to all the murders, while looking at the effects and, indeed, the actual deeds themselves are neither heard nor seen.

this way from the details of actions, he creates a cinematic aesthetic very different to the aesthetic of dramatic realism in classic narrative.

It is perhaps worth mentioning another aspect of Bresson's approach to action, as it relates to my work: Bresson's use of narration. Many of his films⁵² use narration as a key feature, and this is usually in the form of narration by the main protagonist. While this is by no means uncommon, the function that this narration performs is. A good example of this is in *A Man Condemned To Death Escaped* (1956) in which our narrator primarily repeats contemporaneously the action we are seeing or hearing. In other words, the function of the narrator is not to reflect on the action, or to explain or put it into context, but, in line with Bresson's general objective, to help reinforce our attention to the detail of the action, as an action. This redoubling has the effect of further heightening our awareness and relationship to the pure action, solidifying the experiential relationship we have to the film.

Tarkovsky

Andrey Tarkovsky's work, though also transcendental in nature, is very different to that of Ozu or Bresson. He does not exercise rigour and precision in the same poverty-driven way, but instead achieves his aims with relatively luscious imagery, inspired by the iconographic traditions of orthodox Christianity, poetry and the Russian landscape. Two particular aspects of his work relate to mine: his work on challenging temporal time and memory; and his use of movement of frame and within frame.

Where Ozu and Bresson used the juxtaposition of what one can only describe as 'factual actions'⁵³ as their inroad into the transcendental, Tarkovsky's narrative imagery relies more on the representation of inner worlds. The past and the present, dream and reality, thought and expression, all intermingle to create a single matrix of reality which he considers to be the consequence of sculpting in time.⁵⁴ While some of this 'sculpting in time' is achieved with the content of the imagery, much of it is achieved in the aesthetic of the cinematic images. This is particularly the case with films from *Mirror* (1975) onwards.⁵⁵ I shall here concentrate on briefly mentioning the role of movement in achieving this seamless interplay between inner and outer worlds, and the temporal play on past and present.

⁵² *A Man Condemned To Death Escaped* (1956), *Diary Of A Country Priest* (1951) and *Un Femme Douce* (1969) to name some notable examples.

⁵³ That is, sticking very much to an iconic relationship between the diegetic and non-diegetic concepts of both time and action.

⁵⁴ Tarkovsky, A., *Sculpting In Time* (London, Bodley Head, 1986).

⁵⁵ *Mirror* (1975) is undoubtedly Tarkovsky's most overtly autobiographical work. If one looks at the opening scene, in which a young mute man is made to speak for the first time in a long while through hypnotic therapy, it is clear that Tarkovsky is making an allusion to his new found ability to speak cinematically.

As I have discussed, the classic narrative's foundations lie in the cause and effect of psychologically explicable motivations and actions. Consequently, most movement of frame and within frame is tied to this paradigm. For example, the perspective of the camera is established as a faithful and objective perceiver of action, which itself is explicable, or the perception is, for example, the point of view of a character, whose motivation and placement within the scene is understood in terms of the cause and effect of the action. If we particularly look at Tarkovsky's films from *Mirror* (1975) onwards, we find that movement within the frame and the movement of the frame usually is independent of the dramaturgical action, yet does not represent the perspective of any of the characters in the film. What we are left with is an experiential sensation of the presence of a perceiver both present and not present, an omnipotent observer whose interest in the action seemingly is far removed from what we are used to in our 'normal' lives.

The general effect of this is to introduce us to a supernatural perspective on a situation, introducing us to the transcendental qualities of the life perceived.

Dreyer

Carl Dreyer's last three fiction films⁵⁶ represent the best examples of his efforts at revealing the transcendental through the cinematic form. Like Ozu and Bresson, he developed a precise and austere cinematic style which one could argue had its roots in the austere Lutheran tradition of Scandinavia. Interestingly, all three films have their roots in stage plays⁵⁷ and revolve around set piece dramaturgical situations. Nevertheless, his approach to dramaturgy, performance and to cause and effect are far removed from the traditions of classic narrative, first developed within theatre. For example, his use of eyes and eye-lines in *Gertrud* (1964) is more akin to Ozu in the way that he breaks with traditional concepts of diegetic space; his characters are always looking past each other and never at each other and the interaction between characters is not one of action/reaction, but rather action/action. And like Ozu, the pattern of his plot structure is very much one of normality, disparity, normality/transcendence.

However, the aspect of his work that I particularly draw attention to here is his use of the set; and in particular in relation to the normality, disparity, normality/transcendence paradigm. *Gertrud*, his last and perhaps most accomplished work, provides a good example of this. Gertrud, the wife of a prominent businessman and politician, is largely confined to a life in a luxury flat. This flat, and three other key interior locations, perform an important role in revealing the changing inner life of the main protagonist. Through the film, for example, the scale of the props and the flat change ever so subtly to reveal a differing spatial relationship between Gertrud and her surroundings. Where in the beginning, the objects and the space dominated her, at the

⁵⁶ *Day Of Wrath* (1945), *The Word* (1955) and *Gertrud* (1964).

⁵⁷ Hjalmar Söderberg (*Gertrud*), Kaj Munk (*The Word*) and Hans Weirs-Jenssen (*Day of Wrath*).

end, the scale of her surroundings have literally changed to such an extent that she clearly dominates the objects and the space she is in, reflecting the inner liberation she has achieved. Another example would be the first time she makes love to her lover in his flat, in which the experience of the transition from the platonic to the physical is once again primarily revealed through the spatial relationship between lovers: the move of the characters from a lounge with a piano through a prominent door to an adjacent bedroom and then the fact that the whole experience is revealed not directly but through the presence of the action with the use of shadows on the bare bedroom wall, seen from the lounge through the door demonstrates how Dreyer uses the space as a major tool in creating our experience. A final example, is the use of an overlarge mirror on a bare wall, through which Gertrud sees herself in the beginning of the film, revealing a vision of her that is different to what we see when looking at her directly.

On the one hand, Dreyer is sparse with his sets and props, yet they are active elements in his creation of a transcendental quality through which we experience the narrative and the characters. While set design is of course important in any film, the difference between Dreyer's use of the set and that of most classic narratives, is that he employs the set not merely to paraphrase the action, nor merely to strengthen the iconic reality of the action, but to add another dimension to the experience in a similar fashion to Tarkovsky's use of camera movement, Bresson's use of the juxtaposition of detailed action in picture and sound or Ozu's graphical approach to spatial continuity.

Other Filmmakers

While Ozu, Bresson, Tarkovsky and Dreyer constitute a group of filmmakers whose entire oeuvre is dedicated to the development and expression of a transcendental form, which, as a consequence, provides the foundation for my cinematic exploration, there is naturally a range of other filmmakers whose works, in part, also provides a context for my work.

With respect to the unifying of fictional and documentary forms, Haskel Wexlar's *Medium Cool* (1967) provides an example of an early attempt at marrying fiction and documentary forms by placing a love story in the context of the actuality of the Chicago riots of 1967 and depicting this in a style associated with documentary. However, his intention, and the outcome, was not to introduce a transcendental aesthetic. Victor Erice's *Quince Tree Sun* (1990) which explores the creative efforts of a painter to paint a tree in his back yard does, on the other hand, seek to use the poetic mixture of fact and fiction in a seamless effort to reveal the transcendental qualities of the creative experience. Not only does he utilise the mixing of forms, but the breaking down of the differences between diegetic and non-diegetic time⁵⁸ are a significant factor in his experiential approach to narrative.

⁵⁸ In other words, so called 'real time'.

While a number of contemporary documentaries utilise fictional elements in their work in the form of 'dramatisations',⁵⁹ or 'drama reconstructions',⁶⁰ there is no attempt in these programmes to integrate the forms to such an extent that they become seamless, nor, indeed, to use whatever new form that may emerge to explore the experiential aspects of transcendental life.

In fact, it is the fiction filmmakers' adoption of documentary cinematic codes who have made most use of the merging of forms to enhance the experience of the classic narrative⁶¹. Nevertheless, it remains an adoption of form to reinforce existing approaches to classic narrative.

Individual documentary filmmakers such as Joris Ivens have sought, in such films as *Rain* (1932) and *A Tale of The Wind* (1988), to in some way convey transcendental qualities experientially, as has the Russian filmmaker, Sergei Dvortsevov in his documentary, *Bread Day* (1998). Johan Van Der Keuken in his last film, *A Long Holiday* (2000), demonstrated in the final sequence the transcending process of death through experiential imagery.⁶² Within the field of anthropological filmmaking, Jean Rouch provides a rare example of a filmmaker concerned with transcendental perception and expression, though in later work he seemed to turn more towards the sociological film. As Anna Grimshaw points out, *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955), for example, '[...] disturbs the body as much as the mind. Indeed, the extreme physical responses provoked in an audience seem to mirror those manifested by possessed cult members, prompting questions about the extent to which *Les Maîtres Fous* (1955) is not just *about* possession but is an occasion *for* possession.'⁶³

In Summary

While one could go through numerous examples of individual films or individual sequences⁶⁴ which could demonstrate a level of transcendental realism in form and content, apart from the four filmmakers particularly discussed above, it would be hard, if not impossible, to identify further examples of filmmakers whose documented oeuvre was dedicated to the research and development of transcendental narratives. Perhaps the changing nature of the film and television industries has not allowed such research and development to reach the screen, in which case universities may provide the ideal forum for further exploration. At this moment, I would argue that my

⁵⁹ For example, *Crimewatch* UK (BBC) or *999* (BBC).

⁶⁰ For example, *Sunday* (Channel Four, 2002) or *Bloody Sunday* (Granada, 2002).

⁶¹ For example, Daniel Myrick's and Eduardo Sanchez' *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and Woody Allen's *Husbands and Wives* (1992).

⁶² We the viewer were invited to observe river boats on the Rhine for about 10 minutes, the images gradually drifting out of focus, the sound gradually fading, while a lone saxophone player, increasingly struggling for breath, plays a sombre solo.

⁶³ Grimshaw, A., *The Ethnographer's Eye* (Cambridge, Cambridge 2001) p94.

⁶⁴ See Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990), Todd Haynes' *Safe* (1995), Michaelangelo Antonioni's *L'Aventura* (1959) or *The Passenger* (1972) as further examples.

- approach and research and development area is unique in the sense that I am trying to pick up from where Ozu, Bresson, Tarkovsky and Dreyer left off and work within a British context, where this type of filmmaking is virtually unknown and unexplored.

POVERTY

One Day Tafo

Fact and Fiction

One Day Tafo emerged out of a personal and creative crisis. For some time I had wanted to make a documentary film about my father and his time in Ghana during the changeover from colonial rule to independence in the late 1950s. His early death in 1988 prompted me to put a documentary proposal to the Danish National Film Board, in which I sought to make a documentary film about Ghana, its connection to Denmark and the notion of a ‘marriage of cultures’, exemplified by my being half Danish and half Ghanaian. From having started with a vague notion of an ‘objective’ documentary, circumstances were leading me towards the notion of a more personal documentary.

Having graduated from film school some years earlier, where we had been taught documentary and fiction as separate entities, my creative mind was accustomed to separating out the work I was developing into fiction and documentary.⁶⁵ The debate about the differences between fiction and documentary is primarily an academic one, and largely revolving around what I would call an ethical crisis in the relationship to actuality. Where the debate within fiction predominantly revolves around aesthetics and representation, when coming at it from the documentarist’s perspective, this crisis tends to revolve around ideologies of truth, fact, actuality and power.⁶⁶ In short, the very word ‘documentary’ suggests documenting or gathering impartial evidence, but getting in the way of this is a conscious operator of a medium which clearly involves manipulation.

My creative crisis in the development of *One Day Tafo*, first started when I commenced the research for the project in Ghana. I found it difficult separating out my own experience and feelings about this experience from the actuality of the events before me. Visiting ruined slave castles, for example, would bring up images in my mind of the atrocities that occurred some 500 years earlier. Many of these events had indeed been documented in various written accounts of the time, as well as various official trading records. The question would arise: what am I going to add to this knowledge? Likewise, when dealing with the poverty of the developed world, the question of ‘documenting’ somehow seemed inadequate.

⁶⁵ This despite the fact that one of my earliest film school films was in fact a creative merging of fiction and documentary: *Stray Dogs Can’t Find Their Way Home* (York University, Toronto, 1980). This was a film my tutor loved and thought was a fine work, yet he did not pass it because he insisted it was not a documentary, as had been requested in the assignment brief. Subsequent work had to conform with expectations related to either fiction or fact.

⁶⁶ Including the relationship between observer and observed.

The first attempts at developing a treatment/script for the film revolved around notions of documenting actuality – that is, separating out object and observer, with the assumption that there is an actuality that is separate from the perceiver.⁶⁷ In practice, this included such elements as the use of a non-diegetic narrator, objective camera aesthetic in which the presence of the observer is hidden, strict non-intervention in the action and a narrative whose flow was entirely determined by the subjects in the film and their lives.

However, this approach I found to be obstructing my aim of creating a work that would go beyond actuality and reach themes that transcended socio-economic, historical and psychological evidence of what I saw before me. Without wanting to reduce the core theme by explaining it, I would simply say that I was after exploring and discovering themes of unity that connected people and peoples across time, cultures and predicaments.

What emerged was a process akin to that experienced by such creative people as Mozart, Kipling and Spire, in which I sought to unlearn all that I had learned about film, to break down preconceptions and assumptions about film form and to simply act as a medium.⁶⁸ What emerged was a poetic film, from which I have subsequently been able to galvanise reflexive considerations and place within a research quest, as defined within this paper.

While there are no hard and fast rules defining the fiction and factual genres, one can look at common practice and deduce certain features which help audience and filmmaker alike categorise a film. I shall here try to identify some key practical components of *One Day Tafo*, which I have employed in the breaking down of the dichotomy that exists between the fictional and factual genres in my effort to create an experiential film which seeks to discover what Teilhard de Chardin called the ‘fundamental unity’.⁶⁹ In the following sections, I will discuss three broad elements of the film *One Day Tafo* with which I have sought to develop a cinematic strategy for exploring the possibilities of breaking down the dichotomy that exists between the factual and non-factual in an effort to develop a new aesthetic.

1. *Perspective*. The idea of a discarnate presence, through whom events are perceived and which responds to factual events would not, in the general sense

⁶⁷ I refer here to Jung’s notion of ‘consciousness is a precondition of being’. Jung, p.46.

⁶⁸ See Stanley Burnshaw’s impressive list of quotes from prominent creative artists concerning the issue of how work emerges. ‘My ideas come as they will, I don’t know how’ (Mozart); ‘When your Daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously. Drift, wait, and obey’ (Kipling); ‘All truly poetic thought begins to sing by itself, unless the poet is clumsy enough to prevent it from singing’ (Spire). Burnshaw, p53-54).

⁶⁹ Teilhard de Chardin, p45.

of documentary, be considered actuality. Even in fiction, where so called 'artistic licence' or 'imaginative licence' allows for non-factually based perspectives, such an approach is relatively rare. This is not to say that a film – documentary or fiction – could not deal with a discarnate subject matter, or even characters,⁷⁰ but that the very core of the perspective, perhaps even the viewer, is considered discarnate in nature.⁷¹ It is a theme I have sought to develop in all three films submitted.

In *One Day Tafo*, I have sought to introduce such a notion, which may be considered as belonging to the matrix of fiction and fantasy, into my treatment of actuality. Initially, this takes the form of dual narrator; myself, in part the subject of the film and represented in actuality within the imagery, and that of an unidentified voice, a child's voice, a girl's voice, at that. The narration takes the form of a poetic conversation, the discarnate narrator asking the other narrator to continually look, seek and question. No attempt has been made to place even this discarnate narrator within a psychologically explicable context, such as, for example, that this voice is somehow my younger self come alive again. The casting of the voice was critical to this, in that the gender, while close to being androgynous, nevertheless is female.

This girl's voice is one that starts and ends the film, in fact it is the voice that drives the whole narrative. It's presence is set back in the sound mix, compared to my narration, and at times it floats in and out, suggesting a fragility one may indeed associate with a state of mind.

This interplay between the discarnate and the physical is reaffirmed in a number of other ways, one of which is within the narrative structure, which I shall discuss later. Both within the images and sounds, as well as their juxtaposition, the notion of the discarnate perspective is further developed.

The gently probing camera shots, often seeing what I, the physical character, have not yet seen, as for example in the opening sequence, are driven primarily by the motivation of the discarnate presence. The shift from the well ordered entirely tripod mounted sequences in Denmark, to the entirely handheld shots in Ghana; the introduction of me as a character, discovered, rather than introduced; the high-angled shot from behind as I look out across the sea in Århus harbour, followed by the drifting sounds from a distant time and place;

⁷⁰ Jerry Zucher's *Ghost* (1990) or Anthony Minghella's *Truly, Madly, Deeply* (1991) for example.

⁷¹ In fiction, one may cite such disparate works as Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1949) in which the narrator of the film is dead, nevertheless, this character does appear in all of the film as a living character, since the film is told in flashback. More appropriate would be to mention Andrey Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975) where the very fabric of the visual imagery throughout the film suggests the perspective of a discarnate presence as an observer of events.

the disembodied faces being introduced to me, imaginary faces, perhaps, again calling to me across time and space; the voices I hear, virtually emerging out of the walls in the slave castle at Keta; the silence of the parrot story juxtaposed with the absent mother's siren-like singing; and, perhaps, above all, my physical absence from the entire Ghanaian section of the film, while the discarnate narrator confirms my own discarnate presence in a place I only seem to be dreaming of.

2. *Actuality, Memory and Dreams.* This notion of absence should be expanded, for it is indeed in this 'absence' that the true merging of fictional and documentary codes really occur. The discarnate presence having discovered me in Denmark, I am then transported by this compelling presence to another world; a world where actuality, memory and dreams freely co-exist. While the opening Danish sequence does have one or two elements of the mixing of memory and current actuality, this is meant to form part of an evolving consciousness that only fully materialises itself in the Ghanaian section of the film.

Right from the transitional sequence, I have sought to merge actuality and fantasy, in that the faces in themselves are clearly 'actual ordinary people', yet visually disassociated from a context which might reaffirm this, juxtaposed in a linear sequence which suggests a dream, yet contextualised within music which has the rawness and immediacy of actuality. This is then immediately followed by an experientially driven sequence around slavery, clearly a historical event, contextualised within the actuality of the present, yet brought alive by an imaginary narrative played out entirely in the soundscape.⁷² The camera, while in the Danish sequence was clearly separated from me by virtue of being able to see my physical presence, within the Ghanaian context, during this transitional process, becomes the 'eyes' of a discarnate spirit – my own 'eyes', divorced of its physical presence.

With this transition, I sought to set the tone and the diegetic context for the rest of the film. The discarnate perspective, driven by the girl's narration, allows the film to enter into a world where there is no discernable differences being made between actuality, memory and dreams.⁷³ The interviews,

⁷² This particular sequence was partially inspired by the controversial approach taken by the Danish historian, Torkild Hansen, when dealing with history, in which he would at times create imaginary conversations between historical figures and himself while visiting sites of historical significance. These discussions would be based on carefully researched primary sources. See Hansen, T., *Slavernes Kyst* (Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 1967).

⁷³ There is a thematic reason as well. As Jung discusses in his essay 'Archaic Man' (Jung, C.G., *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, London, Routledge, 1933, chp. 7), I am apt to believe that the traditional African view of life did not separate actuality, fantasy and dream into separate realities but incorporated all aspects of life into one

traditionally a rock of the narrative documentary genre, are conducted in a decontextualised space with references to the earlier dream sequence of faces. Even the girl's narration varies from giving us factual information, as one may expect from a traditional documentary, to relaying poetic impressions, right through to entering into a dialogue with me, the discarnate soul experiencing from afar.

Where the attempts at mixing documentary and fiction usually relate to butting dramatic reconstructions together with actuality,⁷⁴ I have largely sought to create multi-layered imagery where these different approaches co-exist simultaneously, with a view to transcending the dualistic approach to viewing experience. These are not separate realities, one used to motivate, justify or explain the other, but one single new reality in which the dream could not exist without the memory, which could not exist without the actuality and so on.

The imaginary tyre boy rolling his tyre through the actuality of the street; the radio boy leading me away from the actuality of my school into an uncertain political realm, again itself emerging out of a traditional folktale, fictionalised; my old home in which I mix the memories of food (reconstructed), memories of childhood (archive) with the actuality of the contemporary inhabitants eating;⁷⁵ the juxtaposition of childhood memories, by using archive of myself in the swimming pool, with the actuality of young Ghanaian boys staring through a fence, as if at me. These are a few examples of this layered approach to the merging of the genre.

3. *Characters and Subjects.* If one talks of the layering of actuality, memory and dream in the context of imagery, this, naturally, relates to characters and subjects, too. In the first instance, the subject is autobiographical. In the beginning, and briefly at the end, I am seen as a physical subject, treated in such a way that I am perceived to be actual. Yet, one other main character is also the discarnate narrator, who in terms of cinematic codes can only be described as fictional. As the film progresses, the intention is to increasingly allow myself to become a fictional character, using in part methods described in sections one and two above. This shifting from subject to character and

overarching reality, each element able to freely interact with the other. Hence Westerners propensity to describe some actions of traditional Africans as based on 'superstition'.

⁷⁴ See my earlier discussion of this point. Usually, this approach leads to a re-affirmation of the differences in the two broad genre.

⁷⁵ There is an interesting little detail in this eating scene which I deliberately allowed to happen, as it fitted perfectly with my intentions. Normally, Ghanaian's would not eat with a knife and fork in this formal manner, yet in this scene they do. My presence prompted actions which revealed perhaps a hidden awkwardness in the emerging Ghanaian middle class about their traditions and their appropriation of western traditions, very much a theme of the film.

character to subject is a recurring feature of the film, again relating to the shifting between documentary and fictional codes. Indeed, part of my intention was in a sense to displace myself as an adult subject by a series of young boy characters through the film.

Starting with the Danish boys around the totem pole, these boy characters increasingly become not only my guides on my journey, but, perhaps, also me; both memory and actuality. Actuality in the sense that these were boys picked from the community and, particularly in the Ghanaian sequences, play out their parts in actuality contexts, memory and dream in the sense that the events they created were in part created from my memories and dreams.⁷⁶ A specific shot can be used as an example: at the petrol station in Tafo, the tyre boy runs through the petrol station while a taxi comes to fill up and three young women carry firewood across the forecourt. This shot was in part constructed from a dream. The tyre boy was lined up and we waited for a car to emerge. Fortuitously, the three young women were arriving at just the right time and the character was instructed to carry out his task, while the actuality played itself out to perfect timing. Within one shot we have subjects and characters combined in an actuality, which was partly dream.

We also see these shifts in the transitions from one sequence to the next. For example, the tyre boy taking us to my old school (from character to actuality subjects); or the radio boy leading me away from the school (actuality subjects to character). And once we emerge into the parrot story, we are transported into pure folklore, where even a parrot becomes a character.

There are a number of challenges that emerge out of an exploration of this nature. One, there is the danger of alienating an audience by undermining their usual reference points in terms of genre codes; two, the credibility of any discarnate presence needs to be assured; and three, the shifting nature of the presence of a central protagonist whose aims are not defined within the paradigm of psychology could, for an audience so used to this being the case, lead to difficulty identifying with a narrative. This latter point will be discussed further in the subsequent 'Narrative' section.

The key to tackling the potential problems of the credibility of the discarnate presence and the potential undermining of reference points for the audience in terms of familiar genre definitions, lies in the fact that this film set out to be an experiential film.⁷⁷ I

⁷⁶ I am reminded of a definition J.L. Godard is supposed to have postulated for the only difference between documentary and fiction; that in a fiction film you pay your actors and in a documentary you don't. Indeed, that separation does occur in *One Day Tafo*.

⁷⁷ It is perhaps also worth mentioning at this point that *One Day Tafo*, as well as *Reunion* and *Signs of Life*, was never intended for mainstream audiences, but for audiences prepared to engage with something different and innovative.

shall later discuss the narrative and imagery elements employed to try and tackle these potential problems.

However, one area that ironically proves the notion of an experiential relationship to the film, lies in the voice of the discarnate narrator. As I have sought to avoid the association of this voice somehow being my younger alter-ego, I have cast a girl. Nevertheless, a girl with a voice getting close to an androgynous voice, for my view was, and still is, that such a discarnate voice should be genderless. Casting for this proved immensely difficult and my feeling is that if I had truly been able to cast a voice where it was impossible to say whether female or male, the effect would have been that much greater.⁷⁸ Whether this would have been technically possible at the time, I don't know. If this film were being made today, I would certainly be exploring some of the new digital technology readily available, in order to manipulate the voice, as I believe it would now be possible to achieve such an effect.

Narrative

As discussed earlier in this paper, the heart of the classic narrative is the predominantly psychologically explicable character motivation and its relationship to narrative aims. What *One Day Tafo* seeks to achieve in this regard, is to present a protagonist whose motivation and aims cannot predominantly be reduced to psychology, but a protagonist who possesses predominantly transcendental motivations and aims.

The initial intention was not to make myself the protagonist, but as the project transformed from being an objective documentary about 'found' protagonists, to being a more personal film, I eventually emerged as a protagonist; partly because my personal background provided a microcosmic perspective of a macrocosm.

As a consequence of the creative crisis described in the Fact and Fiction section above, a different approach also emerged to character motivation and narrative structure. This was to be an approach with echoes of the work of Ozu and Tarkovsky in particular.⁷⁹

1. *Character Motivation.* The central motivation and aim of the protagonist in *One Day Tafo* is a mere inkling, then an indefinable feeling, eventually a longing. These are spiritual feelings, for which there is no psychological premise within the diegetic of the film. Indeed, it is the discarnate voice that starts the whole narrative with a simple statement: "This is how your old soul first saw its homeland." It is the discarnate narrator who finds the protagonist (me) in the street and begins to put questions into his (my) mind. Questions that lead me to the waterfront, then into a narrative whose shape is formed, not

⁷⁸ While Channel Four Television were happy with the choice of narrator, a similar girl's voice for the Danish version was rejected by the Danish National Film Board. They insisted on the use of an older female voice.

⁷⁹ For example, *Tokyo Story* (1959) and *Stalker* (1979).

by obstacles and challenges, but by sensations and impressions. An important element of this ephemeral experience is, of course, that the protagonist is never associated physically with the locations for the bulk of the film – Ghana.

The desired affect is to engage the audience more in the experience of these sensations and impressions, than in the issue of the protagonist's fate within the psychological dimension of the narrative.

2. *The Transcendental Structure.* The overall narrative structure was engaged in this process, too. Like with Ozu, and Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), for example, a tripartite transcendental narrative was employed.⁸⁰ Unlike both these examples, the 'disparity' section of the film does not involve the physical presence of the central protagonist. Through the physical absence, and the consequent focus on impressions and sensations, the disparity becomes a disparity between environments, between cultures, a disparity only visible as a consequence of the 'marriage of cultures'. This disparity is further heightened by the relationship between the two narrators, highlighting the differences between what is sought and what is found.

Key to the tripartite approach to the transcendental narrative is the fact that nothing has physically changed. The Danish world from which I look out across the sea of time and space remains constant; the film ends where we left off at the beginning and only the light changes suggest that time has subtly passed. And yet everything has changed in that our view of the physically constant is transcended.

3. *Shifting Paradigms.* Nothing has changed, yet everything is different. This is indeed reinforced in a couple of other ways. The transition to the largely ephemeral world of contemporary Ghana in the film is initially through history, while the reverse transition is very much a contemporary one. While the faces and sounds of a distant, perhaps even collective, memory facilitates the initial means of exploration, it is the shared moon that provides the physical and spiritual connection that is both actual and metaphoric, collective and individual, distant and close, infinite and immediate.

It is a shift also mirrored in other aspects of the film. Within the Ghanaian section, we see the gradual shifting from the personal circumstances of my family, to the actuality of contemporary Tafo, then into a mythological world of folktale, finally to end up with generic imagery of the struggles of life reflected in imagery around birth, food, water, fire and light. If we look at the shifting paradigm of the whole film, we see a gradual shifting from the purely material, through collective history to personal history, then into the spiritual. Within the overall tripartite narrative structure, the aim is to present this broad shifting undercurrent to underpin the change that does occur in consciousness,

⁸⁰ See the earlier section on Ozu.

but which is not immediately visible in the stasis of the surface of events and characters, as discussed in the section on the transcendental narrative structure.

Imagery

1. *The Experiential.* I have approached the imagery of *One Day Tafo* in terms of layers; the intention is that the primary relationship between viewer and film would be experiential, strengthened by both collective and individual associations and lastly supplemented by symbolism. In other words, to use the terms of semiotics briefly, I have taken the view that the primary relationship between signifier and signified is an iconic one, then followed by an indexical relationship and, lastly, a symbolic one.⁸¹

While of course the meaning of the words (symbols) play an important part of the narrative, it is primarily the juxtaposition of sound effects and images through which the experience of the film is created. Even the textural qualities of the discarnate narrator's voice (iconic) play a critical role in creating the associative (indexical) relationship between the two narrators, more so than does the content of the words (symbolic).

On the basis of this premise, the sensations of sound and images and their ability to create associations was of primary importance. There are both subtle and overt examples of this throughout the film: the use of tripod shots in the Danish sequences, compared to hand held shots in the Ghanaian sequences; the use of tracking shots in the telling of the experience of the death of the girl by the wall in Denmark; the tight, square visual compositions in the Danish sequences; the sensations of the Ghanaian faces fading in and out in the transition to the Ghanaian section of the film; the whole slavery sequence and the use of sound and the moving camera; the sensation of following the tyre boy through Tafo; the long tracking shots through the school and accompanying sound; the editing patterns in the parrot story; the long reflective shots of daily struggles in the final Ghanaian sequence; all of these examples are illustrations of how the film is primarily aimed at being experiential.

This does not mean that there is no symbolism in the film, for there is. However, symbolism plays a less important role than do the simple experiences created and the associations the viewer may draw from this. In terms of symbolism, the least important of the layers of the imagery within the film, one might point to the totem pole and its cross with its references to the

⁸¹ Compare this with other time based arts such as theatre (symbolic to indexical to iconic) or music (indexical to iconic to symbolic). It is the prioritising of these semiotic relationships that in part reinforce my opinion that as a form, music is more closely related to film than theatre in that the intellect plays a larger role in the relationship between viewer and work in theatre than in both music and film.

role of Christianity in my childhood, or the fact that the parrot is often used a symbol in West Africa to denote dictators.

Part of the challenge of the exploration evidenced in *One Day Tafo* is that of the search for a simplicity of form and content. To be able to crystallise complex philosophical, emotional and spiritual considerations into a focused and coherent narrative is a centre piece of this research. While it was never the intention of this film to posit answers,⁸² there remains an issue around, perhaps, raising or presenting a central paradox which would encapsulate, and therefore bring to the fore, the core theme.

This will, in large measure, involve the development of the language itself and to this extent, *One Day Tafo* has laid the foundation for the subsequent research efforts, evidenced in *Reunion* and *Signs of Life*.

Reunion

If *One Day Tafo* sought to explore a reality, *Reunion* could be said to seek to make sense of one. *Reunion* is, in many ways, a direct development from many of the formal and contextual discoveries made in the making of *One Day Tafo*. Many of the fundamental assumptions, predispositions and issues relating to form also apply to the making of *Reunion*, with refinements, approaches and elaborations further developed. Consequently, the discussions of *Reunion* and *Signs of Life* will be briefer as they draw on many of the fundamental issues discussed in greater depth with respect to *One Day Tafo*.

A couple of important distinctions apply: where *One Day Tafo* takes its starting point from autobiography, socio-cultural comparison and history, *Reunion* takes its starting point more directly from feelings, with all their inherent abstraction;⁸³ and where *One Day Tafo* was able to draw on the rich imagery of the 'exotic' (certainly as far as western audiences are concerned, indeed, also as far as I was concerned, given the length of time I had been away from Africa), *Reunion*, draws its imagery from the contemporary, everyday and mundane.

In relation to form, issues of complexity versus simplicity are tackled with a more direct approach and the paradoxes of dominant perspectives in life are directly explored.

⁸² It could be said that *One Day Tafo* in one way ends by asking the same question that the Orson Welles character in the Caryl Chessom film *The Third Man* (1949) claims every intelligent man asks himself: "Why did God create all of this and what do I do next?"

⁸³ I do not by this mean that feelings are abstract, but that in their essence there exists a formlessness, though, as I have argued earlier, this is as real as physical actuality.

If there is one thematic discovery in *One Day Tafo* it might be that of the spiritual relationship between people, peoples and environment. *Reunion* builds on this by trying to understand an aspect of spirituality within the context of the immediate and secular. Imagine my walking away in the final shot of *One Day Tafo* into the contemplation of *Reunion*. ..

Fact and Fiction

With regard to perspective within *Reunion*, the idea of the discarnate narrator is further explored. While this character is an agent for the actions (mental or otherwise) of the protagonist (me) in *One Day Tafo*, he is, in *Reunion*, effectively the central character with his own motivations aims and obstacles. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion within the film that he is in fact a specific person who is deceased. His presence in the narrative remains entirely outside the physical realm of the story, though always present, yet he has a relationship to the main fictional character within the film. He is, therefore in this sense, a fictional character. Nevertheless, his engagement with the narrative is not confined to the fictional parts of the film, but also the parts one would term actuality; in particular, the sequences with the spiritualist medium.

Unlike *One Day Tafo*, where the fictional and factual elements were often juxtaposed within the same imagery, the relationship between fact and fiction in *Reunion* takes on a slightly different nature. The fictional sequences – predominantly revolving around the woman who has lost her husband – are used to contextualise the factual sequences – predominantly the sequences involving the spiritualist medium – and vice versa. They play off each other and the linking element is the unseen central character, who is freely able to move between both.

In addition to this, our unseen central character performs two roles, also bringing together the elements of fact and fiction. On the one hand he is a fictional character, trying to interact with another fictional character in the story; on the other he simultaneously performs the role of objective narrator when we are in the factual sequences, which one might well see in a traditional documentary.

Narrative

The central character's position within the narrative has some ingredients of the classic narrative. There is a premise: he has died and is separated prematurely from his partner. There is an aim: he is trying to get through to his partner, so that she can learn that he is still there and to address her sense of loss with love. There are obstacles: like the dominant view of society around her, she does not believe or suspect that his presence is still palpable.

Nevertheless, the narrative is obliquely structured around the tripartite structure also present in *One Day Tafo*: normality, disparity, normality/transcendence. Normality in the sense that everything at the end is no different, physically, to the beginning; the

unseen central character can move freely in his abstraction, as before, the female character can still not recognise his presence and the spiritualist medium continues her work. Yet despite this normality at the end, there are suggestions that things have changed and that a central paradox has emerged: that the spiritual is both separate and a part of everything that goes on around us.

This paradox is further reinforced by the notion of coincidence. In the classic narrative, the notion of coincidence doesn't sit well, simply because the very term coincidence suggests events and actions that have no explanation; in other words, they do not fit in with the psychological paradigm necessary for the classic narrative, whose structures and outcomes are closely aligned with cause and effect. Yet in *Reunion* coincidence, particularly towards the end of the film, forms a central plank of the narrative. Indeed, the factual sequences around the spiritualist medium and her work could be described as being based on coincidence, too, dependent on one's beliefs.⁸⁴

Imagery

As with *One Day Tafo*, the interplay between sound and images in *Reunion* forms a central plank of the film's overall imagery. In particular, the juxtaposition of sound and image has been used to express the experiential sensation of multiple dimensions of reality. Examples include the pitched tone of creation, evolving into music as the images evolve into a palpable world; the sounds loaded with information floating around us, seemingly lost within the technology we see before us; the changing texture of the sound as the spiritualist medium travels to her church to carry out readings, and its relation to the increasingly abstract images giving the sensation of that subtle changing of a state of mind.

The entire film consists of moving shots. Apart from the session with the spiritualist medium, every shot in the film is a slow moving shot. This is designed to enhance the sensation and the feeling of the presence of the central character and his probing. The camera is able to look at the unusual, even look at them, at times, from slightly unusual angles, as is, for example, the case in the spiritualist medium's home prior to us discovering her, or in the penultimate shot of the film where we travel into the head of the female character, or, indeed, when we follow the central character into the forest where she scatters the ashes. All these moving shots and angles are designed to give this sensation of a presence, outside or beyond the reality of the immediate action before our eyes.

⁸⁴ In public screenings where I have been present, I have been witness to a wide range of reactions: from total disbelief that the scenes with the spiritualist medium were 'real', through open-eyed curiosity, to tears from people who have been able to recount directly comparable experiences. Furthermore, debates often emerge in which the issue of what constitutes reality is heatedly debated. For me, this is vindication of the film's functional intentions.

In the case of the factual sequence in which the spiritualist medium does her readings, the camera technique changes. Here, a raw, rough approach to the moving camera was called for to enhance the immediacy and unpredictability of the situation at hand, drawing on existing tendencies to use such codes associated with observational documentary.⁸⁵

With reference to earlier comments about the semiotics of imagery, all these cinematic codes were employed to draw on existing associations based on established codes generally associated with fiction and factual films.

The subject matter in *Reunion* poses some strong challenges when trying to create an aesthetic which encompasses fictional and factual languages. The key challenges revolve around the difficulties of making transcendental reality palpable, while avoiding reducing it to something it is not. The poetry that this approach offers opportunities for, does allow for an expansion of the language that may allow for a different, perhaps deeper, understanding of this kind of theme.

One of the problems of establishing the central character as an entirely discarnate character, is that it gives the viewer no choice. This is particularly relevant when dealing with a subject matter where the objective is to take the viewer into a different realm, a different perspective. The central character's position within the narrative makes this a *fait accompli*. Where in *One Day Tafo* the discarnate narrator was not the central character and only formed part of the narrative drive, in *Reunion* the entire narrative depends on an identification with the discarnate character.

Signs of Life

This problem of identifying with a discarnate character I was to return to in *Signs of Life*, while also trying to further explore the theme of a wider reality, in which distinctions between actuality, feeling, dream and imagination is a figment of our thought patterns. As with both *Reunion* and *One Day Tafo*, the notion that relationships between people, as well as between people and their environment, is more than a physical or psychological one and that many of the problems we have are often related to our inability to put our lives into a wider perspective, lies at the heart of the film's themes.

⁸⁵ Indeed, this sequence is entirely observational, but a steadier more fluid use of the camera could have been employed. However, given the extraordinary events, any use of camera techniques leaning more towards codes one would associate with fiction may have undermined this authenticity.

Fact and Fiction

Within any broad definitions, *Signs of Life* is a fiction film. Most of its codes point in this direction.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, as can be said of many fiction films, its roots lie very much in the factual. In addition to the extensive medical research carried out for the film about the condition popularly known as 'permanent vegetative state', its mood and the tone of the relationships, including that between patient, relatives and medical staff, was heavily influenced by an account told to me by one of my aunts who sat vigil over her dying husband for weeks on end while he was in a deep coma.⁸⁷ Prejudices about life and death became all too apparent to her and it is around some of these issues that the film's narrative is built.

While *Signs of Life's* genre may separate it out from *One Day Tafo* and *Reunion*, most of the other elements which provide an ongoing research and exploratory narrative do not.

Narrative

Two of these ongoing research preoccupations are: the exploration of the transcendental narrative; and, the perspective on that narrative.

Bearing in mind the problems identified with the character perspective in *Reunion*, the notion of the discarnate character is still relevant to *Signs of Life*, but takes on a more complex form. Though the central character is physically present in the film, that physical presence takes no active role in terms of willed action in the story, due to her condition. Nevertheless, as in *Reunion*, the central character's attempts to intervene and take part in that realm of the visual action is very much alive in the soundscape of the film, and, later, in the images; we are, in fact, engaged in a split between mind and body. While the mind wills action, the body cannot respond. Equally, from the other side of this divide, the mother and other characters seek to interact with the central character, but are unable to make that leap into 'mind'. However, as shall also be seen when the imagery of the film is discussed, the perspective of the story is rigorously that of the young woman, the central character; not as experienced from a physical persona, but from a mental persona, initially trapped in a particular frame of mind.

This rigorous approach to perspective does enable the film to work with several layers of reality simultaneously. This is seen partly in the imagery, but, significantly, also in the characters that interact with the central character. The world that she inhabits, and increasingly becomes aware of, is one in which multi-dimensional persons interact with her. Differences apply to the differing realities: for example, the characters within the physical realm tend to identify with the central character through her body, her

⁸⁶ Codes of casting, performance, set design, camera and lighting, sound and so on.

⁸⁷ Coincidentally, while we were in production, Jean-Dominique Bauby's best selling account of his own paralysis that left him only able to move an eyelid, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* was published. (London, Fourth Estate, 1997).

physicality, whereas the ephemeral characters look directly at the camera, which she has come to associate with herself. There are moments when the nurse momentarily seems to be on the verge of being able to transcend this divide, suggesting that this may indeed be possible, if one were to become in tune with these inklings and feelings that manifest themselves in the mundane day to day life. This separation of 'soul' and 'body' is, of course, central to the theme of the film and the very notion of identity. It is the central character's aim to try to get her mother to see her, the real her, which she learns transcends her physicality.

The tripartite transcendental narrative is also employed in *Signs of Life*, but with a significant difference. The normality is that state of life where the young woman can neither live nor die, but the disparity is in a sense an inverse of what we would normally call disparity, in that it is a moment of liberation and union. This inverse disparity takes the form of the young woman being able to intertwine the 'mind' of herself and her mother, in a world where dreams, reality and the spiritual are one. While nothing physically changes in the film, this inverse disparity changes everything and allows for a transcendence of the normality situation.

This transcendental narrative approach is, nevertheless, also tinged with elements from the classic narrative. There is a premise: the suicide, brought on by a disappointed life. There is a shifting aim for the young woman: initially to die, then to live and get through to her mother. There are obstacles: that great divide between mind and body, reinforced by prevailing attitudes and medical opinion. There is even a climax: will the mother, effectively, view her as dead or alive.

It is through this finely balanced approach to the transcendental and classic narratives that the film seeks to explore modes of cinematic address which may engage the audience in that perspective on living, as experienced through the film, which encompasses the material, the psychological and, importantly, the spiritual.

As a story, nothing really happens. Yet when the mother opens the young woman's eyes at the end, we know that a momentous change has taken place.

Imagery

The content of the narrative and the approach to the form of the imagery have been closely tied together to form a whole where content and form are inextricably linked.⁸⁸ This has been possible by developing two particular approaches to the imagery. First, by completely aligning the imagery to the perspective of the young woman, the central character; second, by focusing the imagery almost entirely on the experiential.

Right from the start, the images and sounds are locked into the point of view of the young woman. The visual and aural perspectives are limited in a similar way to the

⁸⁸ See discussion in section on 'The Problem of Reductive Thought Patterns and Explication'.

way the young woman is limited, immediately creating an experiential relationship to the narrative. The nurses and doctors coming in and out of view, the near death experience, the perspective from the bed, all designed to not merely illustrate the state she is in, but actually to generate a similar experience in the viewer. Later, when the whole texture of the environment changes and the camera moves, and we then travel with her, similarly, the sheer relief of freedom and liberation, again, not illustrated in the dramaturgy and then captured in the camera, but actually experienced.

We see this experiential approach in the sound, too. The initial breaches of the conventional reality happen in the sound, intermingled with the steady monotonous beeping of the physical reality of the life support machine. The fleeting voices coming and going, the tensions created by what is seen and not heard and what is heard and not seen also serve to enhance the experiential approach to telling this story.

For audiences that are used to the representation of a story primarily through the imagery capturing dramaturgical events driven by the psychology of cause and effect, *Signs of Life* may well be a test. Some shots in the film are over 7 minutes long, unusual in the contemporary cinematic climate where fast cutting is the norm, but it is an attempt at exploring a new cinematic aesthetic which may touch its audience in different ways.

Notwithstanding some issues arising out of technical limitations,⁸⁹ there are a couple of challenges that the making of *Signs of Life* brings to light. One is looking at variations in the exploration of perspective. So far, I have been working with the use of a discarnate character, and, in this context, the use of narration, in all three films in order to highlight differing perspectives on reality, but I would like to look at variations to this approach. Another might be: how can one further refine and develop the notion of the merging of fact and fiction, transcendental narrative and the classic narrative in search of a cinematic aesthetic which allows for new and radical perspectives on life around us?

⁸⁹ The consequence of an extremely low budget.

CONCLUSIONS

Unity

The content and form of the films *One Day Tafo*, *Reunion* and *Signs of Life* have roots deep in my own psyche. They reflect, in a variety of ways, dualities within my cultural and personal heritage which I seek to understand and reconcile. Furthermore, these dualities are present in my surrounding culture and result in problems which I have used the films to explore. I see around me problems emerging largely from limitations in the way we understand and perceive the phenomena of life and the challenges we face. The tensions emerging as a consequence of separating between the physical and the spiritual, fact and fiction, truth and illusion, reality and imagination, randomness and design, are all tensions that I feel lie at the heart of our inability to solve certain fundamental problems; not merely on a sophisticated philosophical level, but also, as I hope my films and this evaluation demonstrate to some extent, on the practical, even mundane, level. In the making of *One Day Tafo*, *Reunion* and *Signs of Life* I have aimed to challenge the very way in which we perceive and understand, both in form and content, and as a consequence to develop a cinematic aesthetic which is capable of transcending our dominant modes of perception and expression.

These dominant modes of cinematic expression are driven by the classic narrative's paradigm of psychological motivations, aims and obstacles, resulting in an aesthetic based around the cause and effect of conflict. This is a paradigm which reflects the dominance of the western scientific value system which promotes dualistic thought patterns based around provable physical phenomena, consequently negating the existence of spiritual feelings and values as an equally prevalent reality in people's lives. It is an omission reinforced by our tendency to perceive within limited dualistic thought patterns, reinforced within cinema, for example, in such distinctions as fact and fiction, reality and fantasy and all the cinematic techniques that evolve as a consequence of these modes of thought.

Nevertheless, some filmmakers have throughout the history of film sought to challenge these approaches. Particularly influential in my cinematic exploration, has been the oeuvre of Ozu, Bresson, Tarkovsky and Dreyer – as well as individual films by Rouch, Haynes, Kurosawa and others - whose work was framed by their consistent commitment across entire lifetimes to the development of a transcendental aesthetic. Each of these filmmaker's approach was unique, yet strands of commonality are present: in particular their emphasis of the experiential, their move away from using cinema as a recording of dramaturgy and their exploration of narratives based on character motivations beyond psychology.

These are strands I have picked up on in my work for further exploration and research. Exploring the use of the discarnate central character, the further development of the notion of a tripartite narrative structure, the merging of fact and fiction, dream and reality, and concentrating on the experiential approach to imagery, I have sought to

introduce into my films a strong sense of the transcendental and to break down our preconceptions of how we define and perceive life around us.

A number of problems and challenges emerge out of the outcomes of such an exploration. One must, of course, remember that the cinematic form is a means of communication and it is therefore predicated on others understanding the language; certainly understanding it enough to be able to engage with the developments and evolution that may be taking place in the language.⁹⁰ To this end, one may ask, how far can one depart from the classic narrative before it starts to become counter productive?

There is also a potential danger in the use of the discarnate character; while on the one hand serving the purpose of exploring other dimensions and other modes of interaction, it could, if one is not careful, end up reinforcing the very divides one is hoping to bridge. This is an issue I hope to address in subsequent work.

The Dispassionate Mirror

The continued challenge is to create a cinematic aesthetic that seamlessly allows the physical, mental and spiritual to coexist as a whole, or, put slightly differently, allows the physical, mental and the spiritual all to be present simultaneously and inextricably. In particular, perhaps, the challenge here is how to incorporate that largely alien quality - that transcendental spirituality - into an expressive form which has, to a great extent, ignored this quality and consequently has no established mechanisms to deal with it.

Paradoxically, this transcendental quality itself contradicts language. As Suzuki quotes the twelfth century Zen master, Tai-Hui, as pointing out: 'The truth is not to be mastered by mere seeing, hearing, and thinking. If it is, it is no more than the seeing, hearing, and thinking; it is not at all seeking after the truth itself. For the truth is not in what you hear from others or learn through the understanding. Now keep yourself away from what you have seen, heard, and thought, and see what you have within yourself. Emptiness only, nothingness, which eludes your grasp and to which you cannot fix your thought. Why? Because this is the abode where the senses can never reach. If this abode were within the reach of your sense it would be something you could think of, something you could have a glimpse of; it would then be something subject to the law of birth and death.'⁹¹

⁹⁰ This should not be confused with audience ratings or commercial success. Arguably, some poets, for example, who have been little read have had significant influence on the development of language.

⁹¹ Suzuki, D. T., p. 141.

While we may not be able to directly see, hear or think our way to the truth of that transcendental 'emptiness', we must nevertheless be able to feel it by creating a form which somehow allows for this transcendence to be experienced.

One could perhaps see this form as a dispassionate mirror, revealing our self-nature as it really is. I see my films as such a mirror, and the process of making them, as a process of refining that mirror to be increasingly dispassionate.

In my practice, this refining of the mirror could take the form of a further exploration of juxtaposing detail, both within the *mise-én-scène* and in the editing, in the Bressonian sense, the further development of the tripartite narrative structure, perhaps within the context of new technological developments that allow for new modes of presentation and interactivity, and the development of layering of the experiential aspects of imagery, such as fact and fiction.

It is perhaps worth reminding ourselves that, comparatively speaking, the moving image is a young medium and that the potential for research is significant.

APPENDIX

Creative Notes

The following constitutes selected extracts from personal notes I made during the productions of submitted films.

1. I have a definite notion, a strong drive, a restless craving to search for an abstraction, a spirit, an energy, a force - whatever - that animates me and my world. I somehow want to trace, to feel, to handle, to experience this abstraction in its purest form. This is not a drive I seem to have any control over.
2. A mystery is not necessarily there to be solved; but there to make you think, experience, feel and seek. And out of all of this, perhaps emerges a living creation.
3. I feel the sense of crisis in my culture; as if my culture is trapped in a rigid cage of definitive notions, bursting dangerously at the seams. So many of humanity's problems cannot be adequately or fundamentally tackled because of our narrow and rigid perception of life. It is an invisible crisis... slowly creeping in on us. How often have I found myself unable to solve a problem simply because of the limitations of my perception?
4. As in a mother, my imagination is the womb within which a work is conceived and developed. The more I can allow this work to grow and mature without my conscious intervention the better. When ready, labour begins⁹².
5. I am moved by those people and their creations who have learned to discover their unique characteristics and have created inimitable creations. These are not just people in the arts and sciences, but so called ordinary people who have forged a life and vision only they could have done. Learn to articulate with the very qualities that separate me from others. The paradox is that only this way can I hope to discover what we all genuinely share.
6. Being born of mixed cultural and social parentage and raised and educated in four countries on three continents, it seems to me that I was not born into a particular culture in which there were specific problems and conflicts that I, as an artist, would address. I seem to have been born nation-less with no particular cultural identity which would provide me with either comfort or my driving source of conflict. Why...? Being suspended between cultures, as I am, will I inevitably be concerned more with the ethereal, the spiritual, the invisible

⁹² Arthur Koestler has explored what he calls the 'ripening effect' in the context of scientific developments. See *The Sleepwalkers* (Arkana, 1964).

things that connect people and cultures? I am like a spider, connected to different points, living in thin air between one solid thing and another.

7. Experience, not meaning... Meaning suggests something static, something finite and final.
8. Articulation: the process of materialising experience, to give feelings shape and form, to create a language which expresses that which is in itself beyond language.
9. By continually trying to articulate myself, I discover more about myself and my 'Abstraction'. Those first grasps at indefinable objects, or uncertain steps, of a child, or its first sounds, are the yardsticks by which it explores further. Those first steps into the unknown are what gives a child a taste of its own destiny. Don't hold back; there are times one leaps without feeling ready; feeling ready is only something one can feel in retrospect.
10. If I can truthfully say that an articulation came from the depths of my being, filtered through all the experience and aspirations of which I am made, it doesn't matter if it seems simplistic and incomplete. Say it, articulate it. Allow it to the surface; it is probably a first step in a larger articulation, the end of a string to which other things are tied.
11. If I fail to in some way expand a given language, I cannot claim to have fully discovered what is unique within myself. The expansion of the language need not be conscious, nor drastic. The only way I can be sure, is to constantly be pushing myself into perpetual change, to be constantly on the edge of uncertainty which constantly challenges my faith and courage, only for them to be strengthened in the end.
12. When I think of experience, it's not necessarily what happens to me that is important, but what I feel about it... Look at your subjects this way.
13. Accept that everyone's conscience demands different things of them.
14. I am ultimately not responsible to my ego, anyone else's ego, laws, conventions and moral codes: my deepest conscience, the one that goes beyond social indoctrination, is what I must follow. This conscience is my intuitive voice whispering in my ear, in an effort to steer me through my experiences. I must learn to hear this voice, to recognise it amongst the bombardment of the voices of prejudiced morality.
15. Without humility towards my subject, I will fail to see its essence. My subject will become polluted by my own arrogance.

16. How can I fail to be humbled by the overwhelming feeling of the presence of an omnipresent spirit - life itself? How can I fail to be humbled by the means to articulate the inarticulable, to reveal the hidden, to touch the untouchable? How can I fail to be humbled by the presence of another human being moved by something I have created?
17. Confusion can be a positive sign of an inquiring mind which is constantly re-appraising. If confused, I shouldn't be discouraged. Quite the contrary, I must take it as a healthy sign and make the most of it⁹³.
18. Vision is the result of the hard, and at times painful, work I have put into gaining a higher awareness through exploration. And the more refined my vision becomes, the more I will feel like a child discovering a new world for the first time.
19. The more possessions I have, the more of my life is concerned with keeping these possessions working. It is the same with filmmaking: it is easy to become a slave to the complex machines, to the mechanisms of finance and the routines of the trade.
20. People often think of children as particularly creative. Why ? Could this not be that children often juxtapose what for us adults are unrelated ingredients, only to be pleasantly surprised when such a combination makes us see afresh? Never lose this sense of childish exploration, in which I might combine elements which conventional wisdom tells me should not be combined.
21. Sound and image are different dimensions of the same experience. They must co-exist and be inextricably entwined.
22. "To be, or not to be", that is indeed the duality of light and sound as our senses perceive them: light and dark, sound and silence. But this principle goes beyond the basic elements to the mood, the movement, the emotional and intellectual aspects; all governed by their own duality. Only the spiritual qualities of the film - that formless "white light", the heart and soul of the film - is not subject to laws of duality.
23. The primary purpose of constructing images and sounds is not to create meaning, but to create the means to an experience. The experience will then trigger associations in the audience from which they can then construct their own meaning (if they need to or want to).

⁹³ An interesting development of this theme can be found in Robert Graves' poem *In Broken Images*.

24. Make the everyday experiences of daily life epic in scope: life is full of small, momentous moments; seek to discover these, to reveal their beauty and power. The microcosm and macrocosm are one.
25. Do not underestimate the simple fact that becoming familiar with a face is also to become familiar with a person⁹⁴.
26. Explore the spaces that characters are about to occupy or have occupied; it may be in these spaces that you will discover things about them and their destinies. Also, our eyes and ears have become so accustomed to seeing and hearing action, without understanding what is happening beyond the events or the action.
27. Do not think of events following a straight cause and effect line. Think of them as electrons, protons, neutrons, planets, suns, galaxies, clusters and so forth.
28. Structure my scenes and sequences like a Cézanne painting: with strokes of pure colour, which only make sense in the context of the whole⁹⁵. He creates perspective and image to reveal the soul of a landscape, which we would otherwise not have seen. Create my imagery, scenes and sequences to specifically fit into a whole, without which they would be meaningless.
29. In Zen they talk about paradoxes being at the heart of truth⁹⁶, so work with the paradoxes of image, sound, movement. The paradox of looking at something, yet not seeing; hearing when there is no source; the view being still in the face of movement, a character willing action but not acting⁹⁷. All help to reveal a truth about a situation.
30. Juxtaposition is at the heart of the film language. Think of nature: the basic building blocks of nature are few in variety, plentiful in quantity and relatively simple. Yet when juxtaposed in different ways, we end up with an array of infinite numbers of variations - like, for example, the human face.

⁹⁴ Travelling on the tube late one evening from north to south London, I remember how I was alone with one other man sitting opposite me. For over half an hour I looked at his face. Not a word was exchanged, yet I felt I knew him well.

⁹⁵ 'To look upon nature is to discern the character of one's model. Painting does not mean slavishly copying the object: it means perceiving harmony amongst numerous relationships and transporting them into a system of one's own by developing them according to a new, original logic'. Paul Cézanne from *Cézanne By Himself* (ed. R Kendall, McDonald Orbis, 1988, p 298).

⁹⁶ See D T Suzuki, p 115.

⁹⁷ A good example being the ending of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*.

31. When exploring a theme, don't necessarily commit yourself to a particular genre. Free yourself from these imprisoning definitions, so that your theme and subject can freely find its own unique genre – each film different, each film free and responsible.

32. In a film, what you see and hear is all you get. The world to which you respond is there in image and sound. These images and sounds are not symbols through which you perceive something else. Nor do you need to rely on performers to convey this world; people are people, dogs are dogs, wooden horses are wooden horses. The machines take their imagery directly from our physical reality, as close as is possible to achieve with a machine, in order to present them, re-arranged. The artificial comes across as artificial, the real as real. People acting come across as people acting, while people who are, are people.

Production Details

One Day Tafo

Length: 70 minutes.

Original Format: 16mm film, colour.

Production Company: Erik Knudsen Films in Association with the Danish National Film Board and Channel Four Television.

Producers: Kwaku Oware and Janet Knudsen.

Writer/director: Erik Knudsen.

Music: Erik Knudsen and the Kukurantumi Female Choir.

Photographed by: Simon Wilkie.

Sound Recording: Jet Homoet.

Production Management: Karsten Ginge and Eddie Boateng.

Editor: Erik Knudsen.

Featuring: Christiana Knudsen, A. A. Twumasi-Ankrah, Joanna Adarkwa, Sibri Moche, Alexander Boateng, Offey Nyanko Sadrak and Daniel Opong Amoah.

Reunion

Length: 50 minutes.

Original Format: 16mm film and Betacam SP, colour.

Production Company: Erik Knudsen Films in Association with Channel Four Television and the EU's Media Programme.

Producers: Erik Knudsen and Janet Knudsen.

Writer/director: Erik Knudsen.

Music: Mick Wilson.

Photographed by: Erik Knudsen.

Sound Recording and Design: Alf Bower.

Production Management: Janet Knudsen.

Editor: Erik Knudsen and Jon Bennett.
Featuring: Mavis Pittilla and Kit Carradice.

Signs of Life

Length: 70 minutes.
Original Format: 16mm film, colour.
Production Company: Valance Film Limited in Association with North West Arts Board and Blue Mountain Productions.
Producers: Erik Knudsen and Janet Knudsen.
Writer/director: Erik Knudsen.
Music: Braham Hughes and Erik Knudsen.
Photographed by: Malcolm Keys.
Sound Recordings and Design: Alf Bower.
Production Management: Janet Knudsen.
Editor: Tim Chisholm.
Production Design: Sue Booth.
Featuring: Jane Jefferson, Kit Carradice, Chris Brailsford, Richard Heap, Nicola Gardner and Phillip Fowler.

Selected Filmography

999, BBC (2000).
Aguire The Wrath of God, Werner Herzog (1972).
L'Aventura, Michaelangelo Antonioni (1959).
Blackboards, Samiri Makhmalbaf (2000).
Blair Witch Project, The, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez (1999).
Bloody Sunday, Granada TV (2002).
Blue, Derek Jarman (1993).
Bread Day, Sergei Dvortsevov (1998)
Crimewatch UK, BBC (2001).
Day of Wrath, Carl Th. Dreyer (1945).
Diary of a Country Priest, Robert Bresson (1951).
Dreams, Akira Kurosawa (1990).
Drifting Clouds, Aki Karusmakki (1996).
Femme Douce, Un, Robert Bresson (1969).
Gertrud, Carl Th, Dreyer (1964).
Ghost, Jerry Zucher (1990)
Husbands and Wives, Woody Allen (1992).
Kaos, Paulo and Vitorio Taviani (1984).
Late Autumn, Yasujiro Ozu (1960).
Long Holiday, The, Johan Van Der Keuken (2000).
Maitres Fous, Les, Jean Rouch (1955).
Man Condemned to Death Escaped, A, Robert Bresson (1956).
Medium Cool, Haskel Wexlar (1967).

Mirror, Andrey Tarkovsky (1975).
One Day Tafo, Erik Knudsen (1991).
Passenger, The, Michaelangelo Antonioni (1972).
Patty Hearst, Paul Schrader (1988).
Quince Tree Sun, Victor Erice (1990).
Rain, Joris Ivens (1932).
Reunion, Erik Knudsen (1995).
Safe, Todd Haynes (1995).
Signs of Life, Erik Knudsen (1998).
Song of Ceylon, Basil Wright (1934).
Stalker, Andrey Tarkovsky (1979).
Stray Dogs Can't Find Their Way Home, Erik Knudsen (1980).
Sunday, Channel Four Television (2002).
Sunset Boulevard, Billy Wilder (1949).
Tale of the Wind, A, Joris Ivens (1988).
Third Man, The, Caryl Chesson (1949).
Tokyo Story, Yasujiro Ozu (1959).
Truly Madly Deeply, Anthony Minghella (1991).
Vampyr, Carl Th. Dreyer (1932).
Word, The, Carl Th. Dreyer (1955).

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Biography

Erik Knudsen was born in Ghana to a Danish father and a Ghanaian mother in 1956. He grew up, and was primarily educated, in Denmark, with a few years of schooling in Britain. After a stint of Law studies at Århus University in Denmark, he then went on to study film production at York University in Toronto, Canada, from where he graduated in 1983. He returned to Britain in 1984, where he has lived and worked since.

His latest film, the documentary film *Bed of Flowers*, was completed in February 2001. *Signs of Life*, a fiction feature film, was completed in June 1998. *Reunion*, was completed in 1995 to a commission by Channel Four Television. Before that, *One Day Tafo*, commissioned by the Danish National Film Board, shot on location in Denmark and Ghana, won the bronze award at the 1991 Houston International Film Festival and was subsequently invited to compete in the 1991 San Sebastian Film festival in Spain. This film was also broadcast by Channel Four Television.

Prior to these films, Erik scripted and directed more than half a dozen short films, including *Stray Dogs Can't Find Their Way Home* and *The Chastity of Jenny*. He has optioned a number of screenplays to other producers, such as *On A Starry Night* to Strawberry Vale Productions, London, and *Whose Gambit* to Brian Eastman at Carnival Films, London.

A former musician, singer and song writer, he has also directed more than a dozen Fringe stage productions in London and Toronto, including Wedekin's *Spring Awakening*, Wilde's *Salome*, Camus' *Caligula* and Pinter's *The Room*. Programmes for radio constitute an important body of work, including extensive work for the BBC World Service such as the 20 part drama, *Against The Law*, 2 x 20 part series on African literature, *African Voices I & II*, and the serialisation of his short stories *A Dream Come True*, *The Birthday* and *Albert's Betrayal*.

Formerly a lecturer in film and television production at the University of Salford in Manchester, and a director of the Lancashire Film & Video Summer School, Erik was,

between 1997 and 1999 the Course Leader and Head of Production of the PG Dip/MA Film Production (fiction) programme at the Northern School of Film and Television at Leeds Metropolitan University. He is currently the Course Director of the MA in Documentary Production in the School of Media Music and Performance at the University of Salford, Manchester. He regularly conducts guest workshops at international film schools, such as the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Television in Cuba, where he is now Head of Editing, the Scriptnet 2000 project and the ANIWA film festival, both in Ghana. He is an External Examiner on the media production programmes at the University of Lancashire and at Barnsley College. He is also an advisor to North West Arts Board and a former director on the board of the Horse and Bamboo Theatre Company in Rossendale. Television appearances have included contributions to the filmmaking programmes within BBC 2's Arts and Crafts Show.
