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IDEOLOGY PLACEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF CINEMA'S EMANCIPATION FROM NARRATIVE VIA ATMOSPHERE**

Abstract

As advertising transitioned from intrusive propaganda to seductive experience, it freed its visual dimension from the constraints of representation and allowed it to develop in a process of free experimentation, much like the avant-garde tendencies in contemporary art. When this new aesthetic found its way into cinema, it also allowed TV series and later films to break free from narrative and exploit the full potential of cinema as technology. With its emancipation from narrative, cinema became less representational and increasingly science-fictional at the level of (visual) form. This process thus opens up new aesthetic and technological perspectives that appear alien in their distinction from the narratives we were used to in classic cinema. At the same time, this new, technologically mutated cinema also tends towards horror at the level of content. In this paper we will illustrate this transition from cinema based on narrative to cinema based on atmosphere, through an analysis of several examples: *Underwater, Euphoria, Too Old to Die*

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Young, *Blade Runner 2049*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Neon Demon*, *It Comes at Night*, *Thelma*, *Life* and *The Blackcoat's Daughter*.

Keywords: ideology placement, atmosphere, science fiction, horror, cinema, technology, alienness

INTRODUCTION

Watching *Underwater*,[1] a visually striking masterpiece of a new wave of science fiction and horror hybrids, one gets the impression that it represents a culmination of a silent revolution in science fiction and horror cinema – silent in the sense that it contained no political agenda, no declarations and no manifestos, but was a purely visual and technological revolution in the original meaning of the word, as a return to cinema's original but now forgotten promise to abolish narrative-dominated media.

Underwater is Lovecraftian not only in the most obvious sense (through its depiction of a giant otherworldly eldritch monstrosity), but also in the sense that the plot and characters are merely vehicles for the experience of cosmic horror rather than centrepieces around which the film would revolve. However, it is also hyper-Lovecraftian in the sense that the experience of cosmic horror can only be described in literature, whereas cinema can actually realise it through the use of advanced computer-generated visual effects. Visual effects have a function that challenges rather than complements the traditional use of narrative in cinema, i.e., a use that has been inherited from literature and theatre and has prevented the full development of cinema's potential as a cultural technology.

What made this silent revolution possible was the unfolding of said possibilities of cinema in a low genre that had been overlooked and ignored by narrative and could, therefore, develop independently from it: advertising in its various contemporary forms, including music videos. Experiments with non-narrative visual forms subsequently invaded cinema proper in two ways: by replacing narrative messages with visually induced and technologically mediated atmospheres and by transforming science fiction and horror as – genres most open to technological experimentation. While recent science fiction contains

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[1]   *Underwater* (2020), dir. Wiliam Eubanks, 20th Century Fox.

the results of the silent revolution in cinema on the level of form, recent horror contains them on the level of content, as an alien experience. Both also tend towards a mutual hybridisation, since the use of alien perspectives always evokes horror, and playing with horror at the level of content always requires alien perspectives of science fiction.

THE END OF IDEOLOGY PLACEMENT

When cinema still counted as a stand-alone artistic entity, i.e., before the advent of mass internet distribution of media content through streaming platforms and before the dominance of film began to break down with the advent of more-than-TV series, a critique of ideology in film used to be relatively easy because ideology featured in cinema in just two simple ways: as pre-algorithmic advertising and as pre-capitalist propaganda.

Pre-algorithmic advertising was an intrusive promotion of certain products and consisted of old-fashioned ads of modest effectiveness (the main problem with old-fashioned advertising on television was to prevent viewers from changing the channel when commercials came on, so ads were usually placed before key scenes in a film). In the films themselves (as opposed to the insertion of advertising unrelated to the film when it is shown on television), old-fashioned advertising took the form of product placement. Such product placements were more or less subtle, but in most cases it was not difficult to recognise, expose, and criticise them as expressions of consumer ideology or the like because the advertising in films was just as simple, awkward, and intrusive as the advertising outside cinema.

Another way ideology worked in the film was the old-fashioned way, which was, if we used an analogy to product placement – ideology placement. Just as early capitalism first adopted certain pre-capitalist social relations of production before it could develop its own new, genuinely capitalist social relations and subsequently discarded the old ones in the process of real subsumption (Krašovec 2021), so it first adopted and used (until the late 20th century) pre-capitalist forms of ideology and only later began to replace them with new, capitalist ones. Pre-capitalist ideology in capitalist use takes the form of propaganda, i.e., a technique of mass broadcasting with historical origins in the *ancien régime*, whereby a particular group of people imposes certain forms of thinking on the rest of society. This old-fashioned form of propaganda is,

in developed capitalism, experienced as annoying, forced, and intrusive. When it enters cinema, it is not difficult to recognize and criticise it as ideology. Any film that contains traditional propaganda can be exposed as promoting this or that (racist, sexist, colonial or, on the other hand, liberal, progressive, etc.) ideology.

Both forms in which traditional propaganda invades cinema (as product placement and as ideology placement) are similar to each other: old-fashioned advertising is also a kind of propaganda. However, after a common beginning and early similarities between political and economic propaganda when early capitalism still used *ancien régime* techniques of political propaganda for its own economic purposes, their later development became divergent (both within and outside cinema).

From the mid-1960s onwards, economic advertising ceased to be propaganda. Modern advertising techniques abandoned the old, simplistic jingles and replaced them with more intelligent copies, which no longer aggressively promote a particular product but are rather witty plays on words that also incorporate avant-garde visual and sound techniques and value attraction over imposition. Advertising is thus no longer an imitation of propagandistic intrusiveness but an imitation of seduction (Baudrillard [1979] 2001). This is also evident in the visual style of contemporary commercials, which no longer emphasize the benefits of the products advertised, but the allure of graphic design, colours and typography in an attempt to lend charm and coolness to a particular product or brand.

Mid-20th century critical theory has already taken note of this breakthrough in advertising as a transition from a pre-spectacle within the society of needs to an actual spectacle within the society of desires (Situationist International [1962] 2006). As predicted by Tarde ([1902] 2007), advertising broke away from the limited circuits of needs and began to arouse potentially unlimited desires, in line with the capitalist imperative of a boundless expansion of economic production (Heinrich [2004] 2012, 102). In advertising and marketing literature, this shift is described as a shift from advertising products to advertising experiences of particular atmospheres (Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012).

However, although advertising underwent the aforementioned aesthetic, visual, and discursive changes, transforming from intrusive to seductive and evolving from crude propaganda techniques to aesthetic experiences, it was still focused on products. Thus, the most avant-garde forms of advertising had to emerge elsewhere – first as music videos (MTV era in the 1990s) and later as opening sequences of TV series

(HBO era in the 2000s). Music videos and opening sequences of TV series are still forms of advertising, except that the advertised product is the advertising itself, i.e., there is no difference between them – music videos advertise a visual and aural experience of a particular song, using film techniques, avant-garde graphic design, and animation; TV opening sequences are not advertisements for anything else and are themselves parts of the TV series they introduce. The difference between advertising and the advertised disappears.

As mentioned, capitalism initially adopted the political propaganda techniques of the *ancien régime* but later discarded them and replaced them with advertising as seduction. This transition from the techniques of imposition to the techniques of seduction also shifted the focus from text, discourse, language, and meaning to images, typography, graphic design, animation, and sound and from a discursive, text-based narrative (which also includes, or at least enables, a critical reading of ideology) to a sensual and affective experience – ideology is now no longer a message with a discursive meaning that needs to be decoded, but an experience of a certain atmosphere.

This raises certain problems for a traditional theory of ideology based on text, language, and discourse (Kittler [1986] 1999, 1–19) and corresponds to a broader and longer process of the decline of writing as a dominant media form (Leroi-Gourhan [1964] 1993, 187–216) and its displacement by visual media based on digital technologies (Flusser [1987] 2011). On the other hand, contemporary cinema has no problem accepting and incorporating the aesthetics of commercials and music videos in a process in which advanced visual techniques, initially seen only in the opening sequences, are beginning to define the aesthetics of TV series as a whole. In the 2000s, TV series evolved from the low culture of television to the high culture of cinema, only to again hybridize with elements of low culture (advertising, music videos) in the 2010s without ever losing their quality or appeal. As advertising and music videos become more sophisticated and refined, it is also increasingly rare to find crude and direct product placement in contemporary television. What we encounter instead is a hyper-aestheticised experience placement, where displays of fashion and interior design are mixed, gestures and facial expressions are mixed with computer-generated visual and sound effects, and language is the function of atmosphere rather than narrative.

ATMOSPHERE PLACEMENT IN *EUPHORIA*
AND *TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG*

In such a situation it is hard to identify this or that ideology in TV series and criticise them in the traditional way – we can only say that this or that TV series works for us (or not) or that we like it (or not). They resist analyses that look for false consciousness, ideological manipulation, or (mis)representation. Two interesting examples of TV series that are both aesthetically and visually avant-garde as well as productive of a special atmosphere are *Euphoria*[2] and *Too Old to Die Young.*[3] Both are, in a way, ideological, but what is ideological about them cannot be reduced to a discursive political message. They contain several scenes that look like extended music videos (the car chase in the fifth episode of *Too Old to Die Young* could also be used as a stand-alone music video for the soundtrack, Barry Manilow's 1974 song Mandy), and their use of colour and lighting is similar to contemporary commercials. Both are examples of the next generation of TV series developing their own high-tech aesthetics resistant to any kind of ideological critique developed through analyses of traditional television and film.

Too Old to Die Young is the more right-wing of the two – not so much because it conveys right-wing messages or ideas, but because of its atmosphere of coldness and cosmic indifference to life, interspersed with outbursts of cruelty and senseless violence, which is precisely an affective atmosphere of fascism (Dick [1962] 1992, 32–33). When we watch *Too Old to Die Young*, we can sense a total non-attachment to anything, a Buddhism without compassion, a dark mindfulness that counters the indifference of the universe towards us with its own indifference towards the universe. Nicholas Winding Refn has been developing his own unique brand of horror as a kind of dark, esoteric Buddhism (as opposed to the exoteric, nice guy mainstream Buddhism of figures like Richard Gere), at least since *Valhalla Rising*.[4] The non-attachment, expressed in the facial expressions of the main characters and in their silence and combined with visual and acoustic effects causes the viewer to experience an unsettling empathy that doesn't refer to a specific affect but to the complete absence of affect, i.e., depression. Although Refn's

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[2]   *Euphoria* (2019), created by Sam Levinson, HBO.
[3]   *Too Old to Die Young* (2019), created by Nicolas Winding Refn, Amazon Prime.
[4]   *Valhalla Rising* (2009), directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, Nimbus.

characters, at least since *Drive*,[5] are often misdiagnosed as autistic, they actually enact depression as the endgame of non-attachment. Depression as zero affect is the *sunyata* of Refn's dark esoteric Buddhism and is perfected in *Copenhagen Cowboy*'s[6] Miu. Refn's films and TV series do not propagate this or that ideology at the level of their message but allow us to see the (social) world as it feels from the perspective of depression when all emotional investment in and attachment to the world ceases and its senselessness and violence is cast in a stark light. Waves of violence feel both inevitable and unmotivated and as beyond morality and causal explanations (Krašovec 2023b).

While depressive atmosphere(s) have always had a complicated history with right-wing thought and culture (Fox 2009), *Euphoria*, on the other hand, seems more left-wing – not because it seeks to impose a particular discursively formulated left-wing ideology on its viewers, but again because of the atmosphere it creates through its specific aesthetics. What used to be ideology placement (by analogy with product placement) is now a placement of visually (and aurally) stimulated affective experiences, and what makes *Euphoria* special is that it is one of the rare examples of left-wing affective experiences that does not feel forced or ideological in the old-fashioned way. While many recent TV series (such as *Sex Education*)[7] – while well-written, well-acted, well-filmed, and well-produced – feel off because of their frequent use of the old-fashioned ideology placement (Christian characters are always portrayed as mean hypocrites, the ensemble of main characters always look like their identities were picked straight out of a diversity handbook and statements on reprehensible right-wing issues like incels are always the exact replications of opinions propagated by leading liberal media voices), *Euphoria* perfectly captures the flow of current cultural mutations.

Euphoria is a great example of a general tendency in the development of its media since cinema as technology can only develop freely in marginal areas (detached from the constraints of narrative and the tradition of theatre and literature), e.g., in advertising and music videos, which are considered irrelevant from the perspective of "serious cinema." However, once they are developed far enough, these non-narrative forms begin to invade and overwhelm cinema as a whole. The entry point for their invasion is the opening sequence of a TV series, but it does not stop there

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[5]   *Drive* (2011), directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, FimDistrict.

[6]   *Copenhagen Cowboy* (2023), created by Nicolas Winding Refn, Netflix.

[7]   *Sex Education* (2019), created by Laurie Nunn, Netflix.

– *Euphoria* is an example of a hybrid form in which narrative, characters and their mutual relationships, as well as story arc(s), are still present, but are modified and augmented through the use of visual and sound techniques first developed in advertising media. This additional layer of technological effects is precisely what makes it possible to translate what would otherwise be a crude, direct ideological message into an affective atmosphere. In other words, the ability to create an atmosphere is a function of the technological development of computer-generated graphics, effects, lighting, and sound.

Euphoria functions as a smooth and seamless ideology-as-atmosphere placement, where the visual and aural sophistication is not a function of the ideological message but rather is that message itself. We can measure the evolution of the medium by comparing *Euphoria* to the iconic 1990s teen TV series *Beverly Hills 90210*,[8] in which young adults also play teenagers caught up in the culture wars of the time, but *Beverly Hills 90210* is much cruder by comparison. For example, while one of its characters, Donna, when caught smoking in a car park behind the school, is scolded by her classmates (old-fashioned direct ideology placement in a discursive form), *Euphoria* functions not by judgment enacted through discursive instruction but by establishing a relationship of affective empathy with emotionally and existentially complex situations of interracial sexual relations, addiction, mental health problems, body dysmorphia, depressive hedonia (Fisher 2009, 21–22) and toxic social relations. In other words, *Euphoria* does not delineate right from wrong or normal from deviant but makes us feel complex and ambivalent situations such as transitioning, addiction or social exclusion. Much like Gaspar Noe's *Climax*,[9] which does not represent a bad trip but lets us experience it with all the disorientation, nausea, and cognitive fractures that come with it, *Euphoria* is not a representation of the lives of Generation Z and the current culture wars, but their emulation and at the same time a part of them (new media production is an inseparable part of current lifeworlds and everyday cultures and not a separate level of their representation).

In this sense, *Euphoria* is beyond morality (since any moral judgment necessarily presupposes a separation of judgment from what is being judged): drugs are not an evil that corrodes our societies, but an inevitable part of a society of constant stimulation (Crawford 2023),

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[8]   *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990), created by Darren Star, Fox.
[9]   *Climax* (2018), directed by Gaspar Noe, Wild Bunch.

so that the question is not drugs yes or no, but drugs how and when; queering is not a political programme or message, but an experiment with unpredictable results; making money with OnlyFans is not a disgrace, but a social game among many other; being right-wing is not an ultimate evil, but another affective constellation (obsessive-compulsive disorder, repressed homosexuality). The experience of the affective atmosphere of Generation Z, which *Euphoria* makes us feel, is a situation where there is no good and evil, no right and wrong ideas, and no right and wrong sides of history. Today's culture is a war zone with many micro-atmospheres whose weapons are not moral or political values but attraction. Traditional ideologies, morals, and political programmes are being displaced by a multitude of visuals, gestures, facial expressions, speech styles, and soundtracks without any transcendental evaluation criteria. Culture war is a matter of taste, desire, and affect.

The atmosphere of the right side in this culture war is cold, obsessive, depressive, non-attached, (self)destructive, and nihilistic, while the atmosphere of the left side is hedonistic, burnt out, anxious, and hyperactive. From the perspective of traditional politics and morality, such affective micro-atmospheres necessarily appear pathological. However, if we put moral prejudice aside, the current affective micro-atmospheres are not a deficiency in terms of the eternal values of reason and judgment but an effect of the process in which forms of power based on discipline (and old media technologies such as writing) are losing control and top-down command systems are giving way to chaotic and unpredictable horizontal power relations (Deleuze [1990] 1992).

SCIENCE FICTION CULTURE

As early as 1971, Ballard (1971) noted that everything was becoming science fiction and that all cultural forms were tending towards something that used to be a marginal and pulp genre. However, science fiction's growth in cultural significance never consisted of its convergence with the forms and criteria of bourgeois high culture – it was (and still is) rather the other way round: bourgeois culture itself was forced to become more and more technological and alien and less and less theatrical and poetic. Bourgeois culture, based on the written word, could not escape the effects of the cultural mutations associated with the new media technologies, but that does not mean it took them well. (Post)bourgeois culture is currently a war zone, an Alamo of the humanist spirit, full of

emergencies, security measures, nervous twitches, and general irritability (Krašovec 2023a).

The technological acceleration of culture is a nightmare for (post) bourgeois culture, as it does not respect its procedures and criteria but invades and transforms its main cultural forms, such as literature and cinema, that used to be the epitomes of a humanistic spirit. Today, both literature and cinema are sites of alien invasion from the future. While humanist writers still write about social life and existential questions, Chinese science fiction superstar Liu Cixin (2013) diagnoses the current state of literature as follows: "[...] literature has always given me the impression of indulging an intense anthropocentric narcissism." In his programmatic essay, he highlights star constellations, galaxies, the laws of physics, and the universe itself, rather than human individuals, as the main characters of the literary text. In comparison, the great motifs of traditional literature appear as petty brooding of marginal and hopelessly self-absorbed creatures.

The innovations of science fiction, which is mainstreaming itself in line with a ubiquitous technologisation of everyday life, are transforming culture into a grey zone where high and low cultures swap places. High is replaced by hype and is no longer defined by exclusive bourgeois cultural institutions and rituals but by massive viral affective contagions (Sampson 2012) mediated by new media technologies. In light of this, all of today's culture is sci-fi, even if its subjects and materials do not fit the criteria of the genre – DJ sets, TV series, music videos and cinema are all, even if their content is not, science fiction at the level of their material production and sensory reception. Only Jonathan Franzen can still write without the internet. Introspective, lyrical, existential, and other forms of culture centred on human stories and dramas alone, are no longer elite culture but examples of obstinacy and anachronism. At the same time, even what remains of traditional literature and narrative-bound cinema is no longer faithful to the canonical procedures of bourgeois culture. According to Moretti (2013, 169–187), Ibsen was still able to hold his gaze in the face of the abyss of techno-capital and its cold indifference to bourgeois life and culture, while today's (post)bourgeois literature and cinema mostly ignores the world of automated and autonomous capital (Camatte 2014), preferring existential reflections and social chronicling instead. Science fiction (in its broadest sense), on the other hand, captures and transforms the great motifs of obsolete bourgeois culture. The big

questions of what it means to be human and what makes us so are now asked by *Blade Runner 2049*[10] and *Ghost in the Shell*.[11]

Science fiction in cinema today is both hybrid and ambivalent. Occasional slow close-ups of the protagonists' faces meditatively pondering the metaphysical questions of human identity and existence offer traditional cinephiles (who otherwise abhor the science fiction aesthetics of high-tech visual culture forms such as commercials and music videos) a chance to tune in but also elicit cringe from science fiction fans; while, on the other hand, the stream of computer-generated and mediated images and animation that captivates fans makes cinephiles (who have forgotten that cine in their title means kinetic) spacesick (as the equivalent of seasickness, but on spaceships).

Bourgeois culture, however, does not go gently into the night. There is still a certain cultural inertia, especially around art cinemas and film festivals, that is, producing films that expose burning social issues of the present or cut deep into intimate human relationships. Reflection, once a philosopher's stone of traditional bourgeois culture, is now a form of bad conscience and a method of penance for the ecstasy we feel at the sight of hypnotic computer-generated effects, which are becoming less and less special and more and more ordinary and integral parts of cinema itself, regardless of its genre. The new, fast, mutant science fiction films do not make us think but draw us into their zone (which is exactly the opposite of the bourgeois comfort zone, involving slow, peaceful, and deep contemplation) – although watching science fiction effects involves frenetic sensory and brain activity, it does not give us time to think.

Since narrative tends to hold cinema hostage and subject it to the archaic constraints of theatre and literature, science-fiction cinema is at its best when it frees itself from the inhibitions of narrative. Adherence to narrative would force cinema into a depiction of human relations and the social world while abandoning narrative releases its true technological and cultural potential, which goes beyond what literature and theatre can offer, as foreseen by the Soviet avant-garde filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1985). Contrary to Vertov's bold predictions, however, film technology had to wait almost a century before it finally came into its own, and contrary to his expectations, the emancipation of film technology came not through revolutionary rupture but through the lowest and most commercial forms of capitalist culture.

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[10]   *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), directed by Denis Villeneuve, Warner Bros.
[11]   *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), directed by Rupert Sanders, Paramount.

For example, *Neon Demon*[12] is a hybrid mixture of music videos and advertising-inspired visuals rather than a traditional film with a linear narrative. It draws on low, commercial cultural forms that were never under the spell of narrative and were, for that reason, able to fully exploit the possibilities of film technology and to combine them with computer graphics and animation. Even in the scenes that follow a traditional cinema-as-drama template, for example, a scene showing an audition for new models, *Neon Demon* seems as alien and frightening as in the more explicit horror scenes. Even though the film has no meaningful message at the level of content, *Neon Demon* shows what cinema is capable of when it emancipates itself from the narrative. To paraphrase Deleuze's ([1962] 1983, 57) Nietzsche: narrative separates cinema from what it can do.

The narrative perspective characteristic of anachronistic cinema-as-drama is always anthropocentric, i.e., an experiential perspective of the individual human subject, and thus a perspective that is limited and inhibiting in comparison to the ones made possible by film technology. While cinema as drama uses this first-person perspective and its familiar angles and distances, cinema mutated by science fiction culture does not represent the social world or imitate its perspective(s) but opens up perspectives that are invisible and inaccessible to the organic eye (Vertov 1985). Thus, new perspectives made possible by the use of all the possibilities of film technology do not lead to reflection (on the contrary, reflection is what we do with familiar perspectives since films that make full use of their technological possibilities exceed human mental reaction time and do not leave time and concentration necessary for reflection as a form of mental peristalsis), but rather to something closer to vertigo.

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR HYBRIDS

At the first film projections, visitors fled not because they were afraid of the image of the speeding train but because they were afraid of the radical alienness of the new perspective made possible by the cinema technology itself (while a speeding train was a familiar sight, seeing it from a new perspective as if lying on the tracks was not). Such alien perspectives were soon (at least temporarily) domesticated by cinema as drama, where the perspectives were always familiar ones, i.e., either a first-person view or a side view of social events, but the potential of

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[12]   *Neon Demon* (2016), directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, Amazon MGM.

horror remained at the core of cinema as a technological and cultural form. It is precisely this potential for the horror that makes cinema so attractive and irresistible, and films that move us or make us think have their potential cancelled out by narrative (we can be moved by poetry or made to think by articles in *The Guardian* but there is nothing especially cinematic about either experience). A static or slow-moving camera simulating a perspective familiar to everyday life (the same human faces and body parts from familiar angles) is the feature of cinema as drama, while science fiction cinema favours action, movement, and speed over dialogue and contemplation, and tends to replace linear storylines with time-travel loops, and psychological development of human characters with explorations of the inhuman, machinic or alien subjectivities beyond human psychology.

Contemporary science fiction developments might mean that cinema as a technological and cultural form is finally coming of age, as the main character Matsoko Kusanagi puts it in the final scene of the original animated version of *Ghost in the Shell*.[13] Just as children stop behaving childishly when they grow up, Kusanagi also gives up her human ego and personal identity and begins to explore the possibilities of machinic subjectivity. From this perspective, childhood would be something limited, like cinema bound by patterns it inherited from literature and theatre, and cinema's coming of age would mean that it abandons the childlike narrative and begins to mutate into a purely visual-cinematic technological and cultural form. It would also mean that human characters and their psychology would play an increasingly diminished role and that visual effects, movement, and montage would play an ever greater one. This would be science fiction at the level of form or cultural technology even in cinema that does not feature aliens or spaceships.

Perhaps an era when science fiction was defined by specific content was the infantile, immature era of the genre, which is now coming to an end. Traditional science fiction films were often just costume dramas or space operas, essentially dealing with the same existential questions that drama films do and adding space scenography to the still earthly, too-earthly themes. In contrast, adult science fiction cinema is science fiction not in what it tells but in what it does – from this perspective, the new 2017 version of *Ghost in the Shell*, despite a disappointing narrative about human identity that falls far short of the original version's insights

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[13]   *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), directed by Mamoru Oshii, Shochiku.

at the level of content, is, at the level of form, closer to the futuristic montage and animation of the opening sequences of cult HBO series (such as *True Blood*[14] or *True Detective*[15] or Rihanna's music videos than it is to its costume drama genre peers of the past.

There is no linear, continuous process of development from space opera to today's science fiction. The latter rather stems from cultural niches and interstices, overlooked by narrative and free from the critical gaze and bourgeois judgments of taste: teasers, trailers, opening sequences, music videos, and commercials. Only when it succeeds in detaching itself from narrative and drama can cinema actually develop as cinema, and it is this formal development and not any specific content that makes cinema science fiction at the level of technological form. On a visual level, that is, on a level where the film touches us directly and without the mediation of narrative, the dystopian atmosphere of *Blade Runner 2049* is not so much a techno-visual representation of a mental reflection on future society (although it contains narrative, the narrative of *Blade Runner 2049* is more a retroactive rationalisation of its techno-visual images than their driving force), but rather a technological effect of the film itself in the present. It is experienced as a dystopian horror not so much because it allegorically says something about our present society or its possible unpleasant futures, but because it deviates so drastically from the everyday perception of society as drama and life as a scenario. This discrepancy, in which we see not the expected and the familiar but radically alien perspectives, angles, and speeds, reawakens the primary experience of cinema as an ecstatic vertigo that combines euphoria and anxiety. After a century of the predominance of cinema-as-drama, it is the hyperkinetic special effects of contemporary science fiction that revive cinema as horror on the level of (technological) form.

As soon as it emancipates itself from narrative and drama, today's technologically infused and mediated science fiction cinema begins to lean towards horror. A recent example is *Life*,[16] a hybrid of science fiction and horror that does not deal with human issues and is not a drama on a spaceship, but an encounter with a radical, terrifying, and violent alienness. Cinema is an ideal medium for horror because of the primal alienness of the cinema experience itself, and horror has been inextricably linked to the experience of film as technology since its

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14   *True Blood* (2008), created by Alan Ball, HBO.
15   *True Detective* (2013), created by Nic Pizzolatto, HBO.
16   *Life* (2017), directed by Daniel Espinosa, Sony.

inception. It is, therefore, not unusual that science fiction cinema, when emancipated from narrative, also tends towards horror on the level of content. Cinema technology – unlike horror literature, which can only describe an experience of horror due to inherent technological limitations of the medium of writing (Kittler [1986] 1999) – can actually enact an experience of horror in its fullness.

This process of hybridisation between science fiction and horror can also be observed on the other side – in the horror genre. Whereas traditional horror films were, similarly to traditional science fiction, costume dramas with vampires and zombies and allegories of human society with its mundane, all-too-human evils, more recent and advanced horror cinema is increasingly becoming both horror as technology at the level of form and horror as an experience of radical alienness at the level of content.

An example of the first case is *Thelma*,[17] which very much follows the conventions of coming-of-age drama in terms of its content and whose story has nothing particularly horrific about it – childhood psychological abuse, guilt, controlling parents, emotional blackmail, and so on are nothing unusual or alien to human society and daily life. On the other hand, *Thelma* counters its main narrative with a number of high-tech horror scenes that lean more towards the aesthetics of music videos and commercials than traditional cinema, such as disorienting sudden shifts in perspective during a psychogenic seizure in a swimming pool scene, or unsettling stroboscopic lighting effects during a neurological examination scene. If one were to watch *Thelma* as a drama, one would get an unexceptional story about the claustrophobic experience of growing up in rural Norway and the subsequent difficulties in establishing and maintaining intimate relationships due to the religious repression of female sexuality. However, the main character Thelma's inexplicable supernatural mental condition serves as an entry point for genuine horror scenes. Since they are not a function of narrative, these horror scenes do not so much illustrate the story as hijack it as alien invaders that take advantage of any gap in the narrative to sabotage it. What started as a move away from propaganda to seduction in the context of advertising found its final form as an intense experience of horror-as-technology at the level of form in the context of cinema.

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[17]   *Thelma* (2017), directed by Joachim Trier, SF Norge.

An example of the latter – horror as an experience of radical alienness at the level of content – is *It Comes at Night*,[18] whereby the final escalation of violence and murder is a *non sequitur* in relation to the preceding narrative development of the film since nothing hints at or leads to it. On the contrary, the two families who meet in a dystopian situation of an outbreak of a mysterious, incurable, and deadly disease try their best to preserve their humanity and act rationally, but they still get caught in a paranoid loop and are drawn into a murderous insanity that is experienced as horror precisely because there is no way to explain it or determine its motive.

Another example of horror as an experience of radical alienness on the level of content is *The Blackcoat's Daughter*,[19] where no attempts are made to explain or even rationalise the gruesome ritual murders, carried out by its teenage protagonists. Instead, the film accentuates the experience of horror evoked by the murders through purely visual, non-narrative techniques. The only clue to the probable cause of the murders is a persistent shadow of a dark, demonic figure, which, however, does not appear as an attempt to explain them but marks the intrusion of something inexplicable and alien. *The Blackcoat's Daughter* is precisely not an allegory of the issues involved in coming of age and the awakening of female sexuality, nor is it a critique of social repression within the education system. The film creates horror effects precisely because it disrupts its own narrative setting and continuity – there is a profound *non-sequitur* that separates teenage witches cutting off their victims' heads from the usual consequences of growing up in repressive school environments.

CONCLUSION

Emancipated from the narrative, cinema opens up a hitherto inhibited technological potential of inhuman perspectives at the level of form. At the same time and at the level of content, human stories and dramas are replaced by horror-inducing encounters with radical, inhuman, and inexplicable alienness. When science fiction cinema merges with horror, there is nothing left to reflect on or to understand, only hypnotic speed and cosmic fear.

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[18]   *It Comes at Night* (2017), directed by Trey Edward Schults, A24.
[19]   *The Blackcoat's Daughter* (2017), directed by Oz Perkins, DIRECTV.

At the same time, this conclusion, of course, only applies to a certain niche of science fiction, horror, and their hybrids in contemporary cinema, while cinema as a whole is in no way beyond narrative, and drama is still the most common and dominant cultural form in cinema. The point of this essay was not to show that all of the cinema will or must get rid of narrative, but rather that some of it can and did (to an extent) and, in the process, realised more of the potential of cinema as a technology than more ordinary films; and that sticking to narrative, inherited from written cultural forms such as literature, acts as an inhibition on mentioned technological potentials of cinema.

Another important takeaway is that commercial cultural forms, rather than being predictable, schematic, and boring, as was a common accusation against it in the 20th-century critical theory (Adorno and Horkheimer [1948] 2002, 94–136), are today at the forefront of avant-garde experimentation and innovation precisely because they are not burdened by narrative. And since science fiction and horror are cinema genres least susceptible to narrative, this is where the most interesting fusions take place at the level of both (technological) form as well as content.

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ПЛАСИРАЊЕ ИДЕОЛОГИЈЕ У КОНТЕКСТУ ЕМАНЦИПАЦИЈЕ ФИЛМА ОД НАРАТИВА ПУТЕМ АТМОСФЕРЕ[**]

Резиме

Рад објашњава развој скорије научне фантастике и хорора у филму у контексту остварења авангардног потенцијала кинематографије као технолошке форме која се може еманциповати од наратива, значајног за књижевност и позориште, и тиме развити сасвим ново и другачије културно искуство од оног заснованог на тексту. Док је већина савремене кинематографије још увек везана на наратив, предност научне фантастике и хорора је да су више отворени и доступни за споменути тип формалног експериментисања који се крајем 20. века развио у комерцијалним облицима културе, пре свега у оглашавању. Основна теза рада је да научна фантастика и хорор нису (више) маргинални жанрови, него простор најбитнијих авангардних експеримента у данашњој кинематографији; и да комерцијална визуелна култура, из које вуку своју инспирацију, није ниска него прото-авангардна управо јер није – за разлику од буржоаских културних форми – везана уз текст и наратив. У овом раду се доказује како је оглашавање прешло из наметљиве пропаганде у заводљиво искуство, ослободило своју визуелну димензију ограничења репрезентације и омогућило јој да се развија у процесу слободног експериментисања налик на авангардне тенденције у савременој уметности. Када је ова нова естетика,

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прво развијена у културно маргиналним жанровима као што су рекламе и музички спотови, нашла свој пут у кинематографију, такође је почела да трансформише ТВ серије и касније филмове, омогућавајући им да се ослободе наратива и искористе њен пуни технолошки потенцијал. Својом еманципацијом од наратива везаног за књижевност и позориште, кинематографија је постала мање репрезентативна и оријентисана на приче о људима и њиховом животу те искуствима, а све више научнофантастична на нивоу (визуелне) форме. Овај процес тако отвара нове естетске и технолошке перспективе које изгледају страно по свом разликовању од наратива на које смо навикли у класичној кинематографији. Истовремено, ова нова, технолошки мутирана кинематографија такође тежи хорору на нивоу садржаја – хорору у смислу стране атмосфере која нарушава и поткопава наратив. Рад се састоји од увода, четири поглавља и закључка. У уводу се описује „тиха револуција” у визуелној култури касног 20. века која почиње са формалним и технолошким експериментима у оглашавању које се онда преносе у музичке спотове и у раном 21. веку преплављују кинематографију, првенствено научну фантастику и хорор. У првом поглављу „Крај пласирања идеологије” анализирали смо историјске промене оглашавања у 20. веку и закључили да капиталистичко оглашавање прво преузима облике (политичке) пропаганде, карактеристичне за *ancien régime* и употребљава их док не развије своје, капитализму примереније облике оглашавање који се не темеље толико на убеђивању него више на завођењу и не промовишу толико неку идеју или производ него више атмосферу и афективно искуство. У другом поглављу „Пласирање идеологије у *Euphoria* и *Too Old to Die Young*” ту тезу применили смо на споменуте ТВ серије које јесу политичне, али не на начин наметнуте идеологије у дискурзивном облику него управо на начин креирања левичарске (*Euphoria)* и десничарске (*Too Old to Die Young)* атмосфере, креиране визуелним средствима. У трећем поглављу „Научно фантастична култура”, анализирали смо научну фантастику у филму и растуће тежине техно-визуелних форми, у којима научна фантастика представља авангарду у савременој култури уопштено и расправљали смо о проблемима који представљају за класичну, уз текст, рефлексију и наратив везану, буржоаску културу. У четвртом поглављу „Хибриди између научне фантастике и хорора” анализирали смо неколико примера и показали да су споменути жанрови битни јер су најдоступнији

за нову визуелну естетику, тј. грађење атмосфере и превазилажење наратива технолошким средствима, док је њихова међусобна разлика у томе да научна фантастика ту страну атмосферу више гради на нивоу форме, док је хорор гради на нивоу садржаја. У закључку смо сажели основне тезе и закључке рада и додали да представљена анализа не важи за савремену кинематографију генерално (јер је она још увек доминантно везана уз наратив) него само за одређене нише унутар ње које нису превладавајуће квантитативно него су битне више због својих авангардних квалитета.

Кључне речи: пласирање идеологије, атмосфера, научна фантастика, хорор, кинематографија, технологија, страност