

ARTICLE

An Intimate Encounter: Negotiating Subtitled Cinema

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The question of subtitling has received little attention in Film Studies, despite being the primary means by which foreign-language cinema is experienced. Current literature focuses on important matters of language and translation, but there are other aspects that exceed these matters when we watch subtitled films, aspects which are able to affect and move viewers without relying on explanation through translation. My paper shows how viewers have to negotiate these affective elements in order to apprehend foreign-language films, with special attention on their indeterminate characteristics that escape representation. It considers the negotiation of subtitled cinema from numerous theoretical perspectives. Gilles Deleuze's film-philosophy is popular in Film Studies for its theoretical flows and lines of flight, but this paper engages another Deleuzian thread—one of gaps and fissure—in order to explore the indeterminate negotiations of subtitled films. But in thinking about subtitling, we also have to reconsider the constitution of media. Cinema is not just made up of individual parts; rather, it is made of many interacting media, which cannot be separated. I argue that subtitled cinema consists of multiple affective elements that go beyond the interpretive methods of language and translation, and that the practice of negotiation is one way to apprehend them. In conclusion, this article, by exploring non-linguistic issues, argues that subtitling is not simply supplementary to cinema.

Main Text

As I watched a subtitled version of *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (Werner Herzog, 1979) on YouTube recently (**Figure 1**), my attention was drawn away from the film itself and towards the translation on several occasions. Once, as the lead character Bruno is talking to his wife before he leaves to visit Count Dracula, the subtitling disappeared as he spoke; it vanished mid-sentence, and did not reappear until the next scene. Left without translation, it felt like I missed out on several sentences in this important scene. Regardless of how I reacted to this error—irritation, impatience, or indifference—something is missing from the film; its representational transparency breaks down and is revealed as a construction. What does it mean for viewers when engagement with the film and its dialogue founders in such a fashion? A second time I was drawn towards the translation was when the innkeeper accosts Bruno as he rests on his journey. In this scene, the subtitling seems to interact with the film dialogue in a way that exceeds its role as translation. Dialogue in this tense scene is sparse, and there are long pauses between speech. I waited in anticipation for the next line of dialogue and for the next subtitle. My expectation added to the suspense



Figure 1: A fansubbed version of *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* (Werner Herzog, 1979) on YouTube [no longer available].

of the scene. It almost seemed intentional, as if it were an aesthetic effect. Here, I anticipated something as a viewer. What does it say about translation and subtitled films when viewers' experience is guided in this way?

Needless to say, these kinds of errors are familiar to viewers of foreign-language films. Imperfections are part of the experience of subtitled cinema—assimilated or at least accepted by viewers as a necessary trade-off that highlights the inadequacy of translation. Picking this film arbitrarily—a German language 'art film', a 1970s remake of an earlier cinema classic by a well-known film auteur—is not meant to stand in as synecdochic evidence for any general features of subtitled film viewing. Watching an amateur subtitled, 'fansubbed' version of *Nosferatu* on YouTube meant there were more frequent and more significant errors in comparison to a theatrical release or DVD of the film. In both scenes, viewers' engagement with the film is affected by its translation. Individual reactions to this situation differ. What is clear is that these reactions to subtitling extend beyond language or translation in many instances, and that they warrant investigation on this basis.

The above example illustrates the coincidental affective response that is part of subtitled film viewing. This refers to elements of film experience that stimulate viewers in ways that cannot be ascribed to the linguistic or translational features of subtitling. They are coincidental in the sense that they occur alongside linguistic effects, but also in that they are contingent. This is a diverse field of affects: it is not a single type of response, nor is it opposed to the conditions of language or translation. In the first instance, it denotes a wide range of experiences that cannot be reduced to a single type of description—'affect' names an unbounded set of responses—and in the second instance, it is present also in and through language and translation, rather than being a separate mode of experience. Thus there is a *potential* affective dimension to subtitled film experience, even if each viewer does not feel it all the time. At times when this potential is active, viewers may feel something and react in a way that would not have been possible in the untranslated version of the film. This affective potential calls for an approach beyond the sole concerns of language and translation.

Subtitling is the intimate encounter between multiple terms, sets of discourses, and formal elements. This expression, concerning subtitling's 'intimate encounter', was originally used in passing (Leleu, 2006: n.p.), but it signals something important. Subtitling enacts an encounter between distinct representational and formal registers: linguistic text, graphic marks, disembodied speech, and the audiovisual cinematic image. This means that subtitled cinema consists of a web of entangled meanings, but also experiential aspects that exceed meaning and translation. Subtitled films invite us to negotiate between all of these aspects. This negotiation is a heuristic practice that allows viewers to follow their own path of engagement; it is a negotiation that can bring viewers into an intimate and potentially transformational encounter with cinema. What may seem like an obvious claim—that subtitled films contain affective elements beyond their translational effects—has not been adequately addressed in the existing film theoretical literature on subtitling. Viewers' engagements with the play of material, visible, and invisible forces in subtitled films have yet to be addressed on a sustained basis. This concerns not just what viewers read or do not read: it is as much about what forces of affect and transformation are experienced.

This article examines subtitled film experience through this path of negotiation and the potential for affective transformation. The first section engages with current literature on the linguistic, translational effects of subtitling, showing how it signals towards subtitling's other forces, which I explore from the perspective of affective transformation. I argue that a critique of representational approaches to subtitled film is needed. Post-structuralist theories seem to offer one path, but they remain too fixed on linguistic effects for this task. I argue that apprehending subtitled cinema through affective forces is more valuable, and explain the potential of these forces for transformative cinematic experiences. The second section puts forward the practice of negotiation as a way to apprehend the multiple, indeterminate encounters in subtitled film. 'Apprehending' rather than 'comprehending', as I put it throughout this essay, suggests the feelings of apprehension and doubt that are fundamental to cinematic experience. This is a more personal approach that

allows the affective potential to emerge. I illustrate the practice of negotiation with reference again to *Nosferatu* and to a scene in Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo / 8½* (1963). The third section shows how the affective force of subtitled film viewing has been understood from a Deleuzian perspective in different ways. But Deleuzian negotiations are replete with gaps as well as flows. I consider what this might mean through two critics' work and, in the fourth section, explore the peculiar subtitling of Jean Luc Godard's *Film Socialisme* (2010) in this light. Negotiating this film and its subtitling in a Deleuzian manner does not lead to a response based on meaning, as a representational-hermeneutic approach would seek, but to an affective response that appreciates the indeterminate relations between parts of the film. Negotiation tends towards separating elements of film experience from each other. The fifth and final section argues that practices of negotiation need to appreciate the constitutive hybridity of media. In videogaming, for example, graphical text is a central element, despite being external to the storyworld. Media relate to one another in complex and unknown ways, and extrapolating this insight, we can say that subtitled cinema performs a similar assemblage of media. I conclude the article by positing a new conception of subtitling's role in cinema: not one that is supplementary, but one that is fundamental.

1. Affective potential of subtitled film experience

Subtitled film experience consists of an affective potential that goes beyond the interpretive methods of language and translation. These are the privileged topics of current literature on subtitled cinema. This literature concerns the fidelity, authenticity, and ideology of translation, the critical category of foreignness, the politics of the voice, and the complex relations between text and the audiovisual image, to name a few things. A quick review shows us this. For Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour, the idea of subtitles animates discussion of 'translation, otherness, representation, national identities, and the tasks of cultural interpretation' (2004: 25). These are all significant topics worthy of discussion. In addition, there is a creative, productive moment in subtitling, as Carol O'Sullivan explains: 'Translation is by its very

nature repetition—a re-performance, a re-drafting, a re-wording—but also an iterative process of back-and-forth movement between two texts and languages' (2011: 62). But there are also less neutral views on subtitling and translation: 'It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textual violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign' (Nornes, 2007: 155). For Nornes, cinema should be considered as an experience of translation and of the foreign. This should take place on the level of spectatorial experience and engagement, but also be a conscious effort through the experimentation of filmmakers and subtitlers. This criticism remains concerned with translation as a linguistic issue. Beyond translational matters, subtitles are, for Dimitris Eleftheriotis, 'an integral component of the machinery of film' (2010: 179). Questions concerning the foreign are still too narrow to address the range of what happens in the engagements with subtitled cinema. Indeed, the terms of the foreign might be opened up to include formally foreign cinematic elements, as in Egoyan and Balfour's edited collection (2004). So there have been steps made towards appreciating subtitled cinema in ways that exceed language and translation. The effects of language, text, and ideology are undoubtedly important, and the conclusions in these studies are insightful. They appreciate subtitling's extra-linguistic forces and effects to varying degrees, but this dimension can be pushed further, and should be, if we are to apprehend the affective stakes of subtitled cinema.

Any approach attempting to apprehend the affective potential of subtitled cinema must be based on a tacit critique of representational methods. Representation is a privileged system of knowledge and being that orders scholarly approaches. It works by observing the world and creating an image of it in whatever form—whether it is in art, politics, or humanities research. As such, it is based on a transcendental view of the world, where there is a separation between mind and body, subject and object, and things and ideas. According to this schema, humans are the privileged creatures, as advanced levels of knowledge, linguistic communication, and self-reflection set them apart from other things in the world. Everything else is relegated in importance. Representation is perpetuated through academic methods as a powerful underlying metaphysics.

For the most part, the subtitling literature mentioned above works within the bounds of transcendental, humanist systems of representation, and this fails to address a wider range of cinematic experiences; namely, that which escapes conventional meaning or linguistic description. These hermeneutic methods have been found wanting. We need a non-representational, non-human approach to subtitled cinema. Considering viewing practices in terms of affectivity and negotiation opposes classical formulations of film experience, in which viewers are passive receivers of content and meaning, and viewers of subtitled film receive a translation in a language other than their own. By exploring the figure of negotiation in the next section, it is my aim to signal the limits of representational approaches to subtitled cinema and to rethink their methodological basis.

The terms of this debate may sound amenable to post-structuralist analysis, as post-structuralist theorists argue that speech, with its immediacy and presence, has been privileged over writing throughout the history of philosophy. Subtitling has in fact been discussed with reference to Jacques Derrida before. Here is Nornes on this phenomenon of 'phonocentrism' in translation:

Jacques Derrida wrote of a phonocentrism built on a conception of communication that began with an ideal stability of meaning, something many models of translation assume in their search for secure equivalencies between languages. (Nornes, 2007: 102)

Subtitling, as a media of communication, participates in this scheme by attempting to transcribe some original speech into segmented lines of graphic text. But it never refers to just itself. This is signalled by another critic, Kathleen Lundeen, who understands subtitling as a supplement to speech, as a superfluous 'visual supplement' designed to make speech more accessible (1999: 60). But like writing and other graphic supplements, there is an excess of signification: subtitling 'exceeds' translation in multiple ways (Lundeen, 1999: 62). Post-structuralist theories seem to offer a suitable framework for exploring subtitled viewing through their critique of representation, but they too remain beholden to language; language is their

ultimate referent. This task of moving beyond the sole representational, linguistic, and human concerns of subtitling requires something else.

Appreciating subtitled viewing through affective forces is another approach. This refers to emergent moments when we are awed, bewildered, confused, and otherwise emotionally stimulated by cinema's affective apparatus. They are non-human moments too—not relying on the frame of the human, as they escape the depredations of 'meaning' and 'understanding'. Think of the great moments of cinema that rouse you: we cannot adequately convey these moments through transcribed dialogue in the form of graphic text. At the same time, there is an affective power when we watch subtitled cinema. But affect does not designate a single type of experience. It emerges, as one critic puts it, as a 'non-representational variable' (Pérez-Gonzalez, 2012: 338). In other words, subtitles are contingent and transformative interventions in the film, rather than just static signifiers. Among these, I count the feelings elicited in the *Nosferatu* example. In my viewing of the film's translated version on YouTube, I was moved in a way that would not have been present in the original, untranslated version. While these experiences exist as variables, they exist also in a potential state for different viewers and at different times. My emotional reaction to the film may contrast with the next viewer's boredom or lack of concentration. The contingencies of film exhibition and reception impinge on the latent and arbitrary character of film experience. From these conditions and relations, the affective potential of subtitled viewing emerges.

Affectivity challenges the interpretive power of representational methods. Few studies of subtitled viewing have engaged with this kind of experience. Short essays by Tessa Dwyer (1997; 2002) and Giorgio Hadi Curti (2007) address film theory's shortage in this regard by way of reference to Gilles Deleuze's film-philosophy and non-representational theorisations of cinema. Deleuze's peculiar take on film theory as a form of negotiation offers a way to think about subtitling and translation. I shall come to these sources in more detail below. This affectivity is not a new or recent phenomenon; rather, indeterminate relations like these are fundamental to film experience. They resist objectification and thus escape the critical attention of standard approaches to subtitled viewing. Listing all the things that escape linguistic

objectification in subtitled viewing would defeat the purpose of identifying them. In the *Nosferatu* example, I alluded to the vague feelings I had as I watched. The abstract dynamics at work here cannot be pinned down in a concrete way. The perspective that I propose stresses the indeterminate and affective potential of subtitled film experience. But we still need to rethink what happens when we experience subtitled cinema in a way that accounts for these abstract operations. The keywords of phenomenology, affect, embodiment, and sensation are common in recent theorisations of cinematic experience (Barker, 2009; Beugnet, 2007; del Río, 2008; Sobchack, 2004). The encounter with subtitling in all its extra-linguistic complexity requires these kinds of understanding. But we need numerous perspectives here to counteract any totalising critical tendencies. Leaning too heavily on them may lead us to disregard the other elements of cinematic experience.

2. Practices of negotiation

I propose the practice of negotiation as a way to apprehend the multiple affective elements of subtitled cinema. This conceives film viewing in a way that accepts its variables and contingencies, whether in the film theatre or at home on a computer screen. Instead of looking for the nature of meaning or for slippages in meaning in subtitled films, negotiation appreciates the less perceivable, fleeting moments of cinema. It does not aim to categorise the full range of cinematic experiences on a totalising scale. It also involves a personal engagement that appreciates individual involvement without offering an objectifying view of film experience. Active, individual negotiation is central to this engagement. These characteristics allow subtitled cinema's affective potential to emerge. Without aiming for a predefined endpoint in our analysis, we can understand subtitled viewing as a more dynamic experience, as more hands-on and heuristic than passive and hermeneutic. This type of negotiation is relevant to film experience in general; cinema is made of many elements like landscapes, languages, and other types of media. What distinguishes subtitled practices of negotiation is not just their textual and graphical markings, but also the particular stimuli that are not present in the untranslated film. We have to negotiate all of these

things in subtitled viewing. They are added onto the original film, and require extra effort on the part of viewers. Again, these stimuli exist in a latent state based on individual viewers' levels of engagement with the film. It is hard to say how people react to cinema on an individual and differential basis, but it is clear that the process and practice of negotiation is a central element.

To illustrate this process of negotiation, we can look at film examples. It is apparent in any of the chaotic scenes from Italian director Federico Fellini's films—the harem scene in *Otto e mezzo*, for instance (**Video 1**). Many characters from different social and national backgrounds play in this scene, which is one of the lead character Guido's reveries about the women in his life. They talk, shout, and sing, their voices adding to the scene's visual confusion. The subtitling is unable to deal with this babble, which is too quick and too disorderly to be represented accurately by textual means.

For the foreign language viewer, looking for some meaning to navigate this scene, in the form of neatly arranged subtitling, has little advantage. This path may quickly lead to a sense of being overwhelmed by the multiple sources of dialogue and action. What is already a chaotic scene is made even more textually complex by the addition of subtitles. Adopting the practice of negotiation, on the other hand, is



Video 1: The scene of Guido's Harem with English subtitling from *8½* (1963) directed by Federico Fellini and distributed by Criterion Collection [video credit: posted by the Open Library of Humanities on Vimeo].

more fruitful. It accepts the variables and limits of verbal representation and allows us to apprehend the affective elements of the scene. We may still feel confusion, but it is not opposed to enjoyment of, or engagement with, the film. In this light, we can appreciate the visual and verbal rhythms, the artfulness of the direction, and the interplay of these things with the whimsical subtitling. These things signal the affective potential of subtitled cinema, if only we negotiate and concentrate not so much on finding meaning through subtitling.

This example can be compared to my negotiation of *Nosferatu*. As detailed above, I felt bemused with the breakdown in subtitling and also felt like the film and its translation interacted in some way. These are things in the film; in other words, textual or filmic elements. I also had to negotiate the particular conditions of exhibition—the amateur, ‘fansubbed’ version of the film on YouTube that I encountered. Both these elements, textual and extra-textual or social, are part of the negotiation of subtitled cinema. ‘Fansubbing’ is the translation of films by audience members who, for one or a number of reasons, produce their own subtitled version of the film. It might be a rare film that has not been previously subtitled, or the fansubber might be unhappy with existing translations of a film they enjoy. These people are amateurs, for the most part, with little or no experience of professional translation. Due to this, the quality of fansubbed translations varies widely. This is a recent phenomenon in audio-visual media that can be attributed in a large part to developments in technologies of distribution, which takes place primarily online (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz-Sánchez, 2006; Massidda, 2015). My experience with the fansubbed version of *Nosferatu* was significantly different than if I had seen it in a dedicated cinema. I encountered correct and partially correct translation, subtitles that fulfilled a translational role and ones that exceeded it, and the vagaries of online streaming, which interrupted my viewing experience, to name three points of negotiation. Each of these points was mediated by the intricate politics and economics of watching a fansubbed version of this film online.

The practice of negotiation is a valuable heuristic because it allows subtitling’s various discourses and formal registers to be apprehended in a way that allows their affective potential to emerge. This mode of viewing is aimed at apprehending, a figure of doubting, rather than understanding or reconciling these multiple elements, as these



Figure 2: The scene of Guido's Harem with English subtitling from *8½* (1963) directed by Federico Fellini and distributed by Criterion Collection.

are figures of representation and remain too transcendental to allow viewers a more intimate affective engagement with the film. They remain too transcendental because they seek to fix a meaning on film. The analysis of films and media in this article is thus not intended to uncover any meanings, but to appreciate the way subtitles set us on a course for an affective encounter that is distinct from the original, untranslated film experience. In *Otto e mezzo*, I witness the harem scene's mayhem, take stock of the many characters, and the various languages they speak, and prepare myself to be bombarded with multiple levels of dialogue, clamorous voices, and incomplete text (**Figure 2**).

When the subtitles come, my eyes flit between text and image and I try to separate out the voices, to make sense of them. But the sense does not come. I learn to accept this, and I feel more at ease. This is the heuristic practice of negotiation at work. Understood as a complex set of processes, rather than a merely translational tool, we can appreciate subtitles for the kinds of transformational cinematic experiences they bring about, in which we move from one spectatorial state to another.

3. Deleuzian Negotiations

Gilles Deleuze's approach to cinema, which is based on a rethinking of the relation between art and the world, offers a useful way to consider the negotiation of subtitled cinema. Throughout his two *Cinema* books (2005a; 2005b), it becomes clear

Deleuze is not using individual films simply to exemplify his theoretical points. Cinema, rather, puts forward its own original and distinct 'concepts'—it produces sensations and creates concepts. As such, no external or imagistic account of cinema is necessary. Deleuze's form of film theory is peculiar, as we see below. He discusses cinema in order to account for the effects it has on its viewers and on the world. Here, again, we find a critique of representational methods, which presuppose a separation between cinema and the world.

The affective force of subtitled film viewing has been understood through such a Deleuzian, non-representational perspective by two scholars: Tessa Dwyer likens Deleuze's approach to film theory-as-interstitial practice to the experience of subtitling (1997; 2002), and Giorgio Hadi Curti has considered the bodily transformations enabled by subtitled viewing (2007). Because of his rethinking of the relation between art and the world, and the critique of staid representation therein, we commonly think of Deleuze as a great vitalist thinker of life, flows, fluxes, and lines of flight. Cinematic images affect thought directly in what Deleuze calls 'a shock to thought' (2005b: 156). This is one version of Deleuzianism, but his thinking of the void, and of the gaps in knowledge, perception, and communication should also be acknowledged.

Dwyer recognises this, and shows how Deleuze occupies the critical interstices between film theory and philosophy. In the two *Cinema* books, references to philosophers and to filmmakers stand alongside each other and frequently perform the same illustrative function, despite the disparity between the history of philosophy and the much shorter legacy of film theory. This is where the novelty of Deleuze's *Cinema* books lay upon their initial reception: he does not oppose philosophy and film theory, or claim primacy for one over the other. Here, film theory is an interstitial practice, a hybrid form. Dwyer writes:

In professing his commitment to the interval, the gap, the "and," and the "in-between," Deleuze effectively stops film theory in its tracks. By effecting this pause, he actually produces a change in direction, a navigational maneuver. (1997: 164)

Dwyer appreciates the differential encounters between formal and discursive registers at work in Deleuze, subtitling, and film theory, as well as the indeterminate sites in-between. She compares his methodology to the processes of subtitling and dubbing because each approach adopts difference between discourses as its structuring principle: in Deleuze, film theory meets philosophy; in subtitling, an original discursive system meets another (**Figure 3**). Dwyer argues that subtitling and dubbing 're-negotiate' the terms of Deleuze's work on cinema, as they require 'intersemiotic translation, or translation between unlike and incommensurable terms' (2002: 63). This produces a 'methodology structured upon holes, intervals and gaps' (Dwyer, 2002: 62). In this light, subtitling's encounter with its outside can be apprehended by adopting a practice of negotiation.

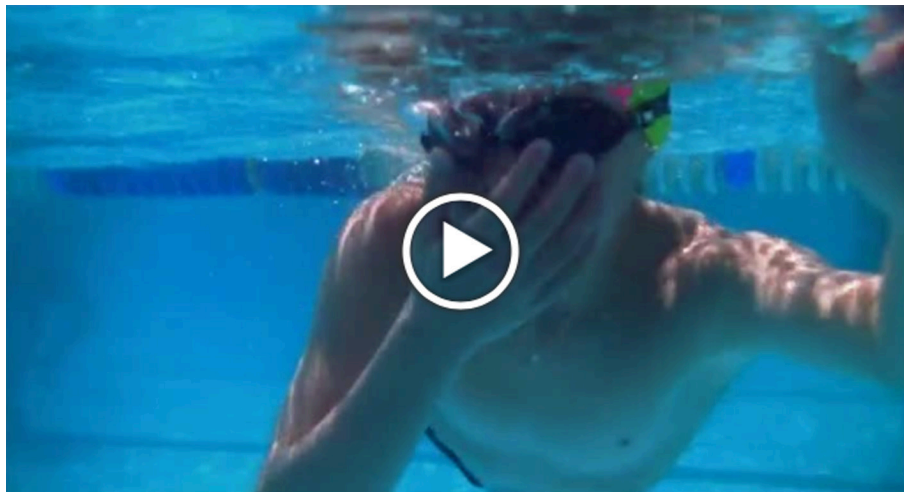
Curti addresses another way to apprehend subtitled viewing. He considers subtitled films as a transformational experience in the context of Deleuzian non-representational theory. In this frame, the task is to analyse the effects and functioning of subtitling, rather than its meaning or representations (Curti, 2009: 205). Curti engages with the Russian film *Night Watch* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2004), which was



Figure 3: The doubly subtitled Gilles Deleuze, in interview [source: YouTube documentary].

treated with experimental subtitling upon its international DVD release. Its 'living subtitles' are animate and move around the screen in various ways that respond to the film's action. They pulse, deform, and disintegrate according to diegetic action. There is a swimming pool scene, for example, where a boy gets a nosebleed and his subtitled dialogue, 'come to me', which is already in red font, graphically transforms into what looks like blood coming out of his nose (**Video 2**). There is much potential for this type of creative intervention in cinematic translation, as we shall see in the next section. As Curti explains, *Night Watch's* subtitles have a transformative potential, and need to be considered beyond simply representational concerns. He understands this in terms of the bodily effects on viewers.

Both of these critics raise key issues on negotiating subtitled cinema beyond the framework of linguistic translation. In her essay, Dwyer spends a lot of time on Deleuze's method, without fully engaging in traditional film analysis. Her decision not to engage in close film analysis falls in with non-representational strategy. This kind of methodological innovation is welcome and necessary. Non-representational approaches to film require us to rethink how we do film analysis, and Dwyer's



Video 2: The swimming pool scene from *Night Watch* (2004), directed by Timur Bekmambetov and distributed by Twentieth Century Fox [video credit: posted by the Open Library of Humanities on Vimeo].

response is to engage Hong Kong action films—*The Killer* (John Woo, 1989) is her primary example—through negotiating the formal operations of subtitling. Her analysis leaves us with no clear programme on how to proceed with non-representational approaches to cinema study, as they are not amenable to systematic approaches. Curti, too, attempts to push analysis of subtitled films beyond traditional translational concerns like accuracy, fidelity, and authenticity, and his approach positions subtitles as affective bodily expressions, rather than as signifiers of linguistic meaning. This is one way of moving towards a scholarly understanding of what is at stake in affective and transformational film experience.

This Deleuzian approach nuances the concept of negotiation, which I understand here as a process and practice of film viewing beyond the usual negotiations of multiple filmic elements. It signals the indeterminacy of these elements, and how they perform gaps in meaning. The emphasis on Deleuze also helps to justify a non-representational approach to subtitled film viewing. Close reading, case studies, and hermeneutic methods are all part of the structure of the humanist edifice that non-representational and affective encounters resist. Dwyer points out that the interpretive norm of close reading, where scholars dissect film scenes in detail in order to illustrate their theoretical ideas, 'effectively denies [film theory's] radical indeterminacy' (1997: 554). Attempting to rationalise, to provide 'proof' of certain film-theoretical arguments is not the critical gesture that is needed. We need instead to open ourselves to uncertainty. Deleuze works in this uncertain and incommensurable gap between film and theory. His *Cinema* books engage the instabilities of this gap, while attempting to preserve the unique energies of each term. The method of negotiation suggests the material and vital forces that become apparent with the opening up of this gap. Representational models accommodate the interplay of discourses, but they do so in a way that smoothes over their differences in favour of producing binding and transcendent meanings. A practice of affective negotiation, on the other hand, appreciates that theory and filmic relations remain irreducible to each other: they have to be apprehended on their own terms, and without a set of pre-determined interpretive principles. In this way, Dwyer and Curti are right to persist with abstract film-philosophical theorisation. They elaborate important non-representational

approaches to subtitled film experience. The Deleuzian perspective on negotiation is one of fissure as well as flow. Exploring this is one way to nuance understanding of the practice and process of negotiation.

4. Negotiating *Film Socialisme*

We can explore this practice of negotiation further through a film example. Jean-Luc Godard's *Film Socialisme* (2010) experiments with subtitling and challenges normative conceptual practices of reading subtitled films. Godard is not concerned with making the film fully comprehensible in a linguistic sense: its subtitling acts as another layer in the film's constitution of cinematic elements. For these reasons, adopting practices of negotiation better places us to apprehend the film and its subtitles. Despite his own wishes to show an untranslated version, Godard presented *Film Socialisme* at the 2010 edition of Cannes Film Festival with what he called Navajo English subtitling. One critic has usefully parsed the linguistic aspects of this:

- All subtitles are composed of a single line, with one to five words per subtitle.
- Subtitles are mostly composed of two (40.7% of total) or three words (49% of total).
- There are wide spaces between the words, which are generally written in lower case, with the exception of proper nouns.
- There is no punctuation anywhere in the subtitles. These two elements mean that it is very hard to know when one sentence begins or ends, and whether it is affirmative, interrogative, etc.
- Verbs are (almost) never conjugated (tenses have to be guessed at).
- There are (almost) no pronouns or articles.
- Two or three words are sometimes aggregated to form a single word.

(Bréan, 2011: n.p.)

Due to this lack of linguistic and grammatical order, viewers have to work on a level unfamiliar to their prior cinematic experiences. Negotiation with an unfamiliar and



Video 3: The opening with 'Navajo English' subtitling of *Film Socialisme* (2010), directed by Jean-Luc Godard and distributed by New Wave Films [video credit: posted by the Open Library of Humanities on Vimeo].

uncertain subtitling style is required to apprehend the film's experimental translation strategies. Its disruptive strategies push against the act of translation, even resisting communication in general (Niessen, 2013: 4). Subtitling and translation act here in a way that demands analysis from an extra-linguistic perspective. Negotiation provides one useful heuristic.

The opening of the film provides a useful diagnosis of the affective and transformative potential of subtitling (**Video 3**). At the beginning, the open space of the Mediterranean appears after the credits and without preamble, with the lush majesty of its midnight blues. As the scene plays on, the vessel – the ill-fated *Costa Concordia* on which the action unfolds – is not apparent yet. Despite the complex strategies of narrative alienation the film develops, it contains some striking images. The interplay between these images, which are some moments of real beauty in a traditional film-aesthetic sense, and Godard's disruptive strategies is significant. The clash of beautiful or sublime, in these images of the Mediterranean, and a tone of wilful and flippant obscurity, familiar across Godard's work, is given added complexity through the encounter with an unfamiliar form of subtitling. It is stylised, which contrasts with the usual

stylistic transparency of subtitling. The first dialogue we hear is two off-screen characters conversing:

B. Maris: L'argent est un bien public.

Alias: Comme l'eau alors?

B. Maris: Exactement.

To the French speaker there is nothing unusual about this dialogue. It is when Godard brings the film to Cannes and is forced to bring it with English subtitling that it gets interesting. The subtitles for these three lines of dialogue simply read:

money public water

There is no punctuation, sentence structure, or the usual clarity and efficiency we have come to expect from subtitling here. Watching with the scenarist's notes in hand (Godard, 2010), the characters in this sequence can be identified as B. Maris, Alissa, Mathias, Constance, and Ludovic. Their location in relation to each other and to the image is unsure, and our sense of their relationships with each other is tenuous. Who these people are is unknown. Beyond this narrative confusion, it is soon apparent that the film's subtitling is not what we have come to expect or require. In fact, it seems to be a unique style of subtitling, for which there are no terms of reference. Rather than clarifying what is being said, the subtitling further complicates the encounters between text, image, speech, and writing. It operates not only on the dialogue, as normal subtitling does, but produces an extra aesthetic or formal layer in the film. Apprehending this extra layer is not straightforward, nor is it directly comparable to other cinematic traditions. This is where traditional representational analysis and close readings founder. A different approach is needed. The practice of negotiation appreciates what lies beyond language and translation here.

The film sets us on a course of spatial and material negotiation of its subtitles. They are located in a subordinate position near the bottom of the screen, but their importance is commensurate with the image due to their renewed aesthetic function. These contrastive qualities encourage the frame to be carved up into hierarchised

areas, which do not pre-exist the subtitled version. Constant encounters between the audiovisual image and the subtitles complicate, rather than clarify, engagement with the film. Attention is directed away from the image and towards the translated text. Having to read the subtitles and then engage with the original image, or vice versa, disrupts the idealised viewing experience, which is usually just concerned with visual filmic space. The materiality of subtitling, then, is evinced by constant oscillation between the narrative depth of the film and its surface where the subtitles unfold. It is pronounced when dialogue returns after there has been a stretch without speech, when viewers have become accustomed to looking at the image without having to negotiate the subtitles. Godard plays on these spatial, temporal, and material relations. The film's subtitling calls on its viewers to make a decision regarding interpretation: what patterns emerge, what syntax can be consolidated from the titles, and so on. But it also exceeds this kind of intentionality. It circulates in a sphere of uncertainty, where the relations between money, the public, and water are indeterminate. Accepting this indeterminacy leads viewers to a different kind of engagement based less on sense making and intentionality and more on affective forms of experience. Even accepting that this interpretation-indeterminacy binary is not entirely adequate, there is a kind of submission to doubt that I would like to suggest is not typical of classical representational frameworks of spectatorship.

The *Film Socialisme* example illustrates the practical response and transformational potential of practices of negotiation. First of all, it signals breakdown in language and meaning, in transcendental representational systems. This is the standard film theoretical response to issues in subtitling, as we can see in the film's commentators (Bréan, 2011; Niessen, 2013). Second of all, through our modified Deleuzianism—the one of gaps rather than connection—we begin to see the constitutive gaps of film experience. Aspects of the practice of negotiation particular to subtitled modes of experience are disorderly. It engages with fissure and indeterminacy—characteristics of the Deleuzian mode of negotiation. Encounters between spatial, temporal, and material elements in subtitled films pose a challenge, to which the heuristic practice of negotiation may respond. Rather than starting off with some idealised conditions, it is important to acknowledge the fundamental indeterminacy and instability of

film experience. If we are to conceptualise subtitled viewing practices afresh, this starting point saves us having to correctively work backwards. Apprehending a film like *Film Socialisme* and its experimental subtitling is an unfamiliar undertaking. It creates a novel set of formal and aesthetic conditions and film scholarship does not have a large or established vocabulary with which to deal with this. I propose methodological terms like *encounter*, *negotiation*, *affect*, and *transformative experience* as ways to understand the broader set of processes at work when we apprehend subtitled cinema. These terms account for the broadened range of spectatorial activities in subtitled film experience. This is not to renounce the complexity of film spectatorship in the first place, or to abandon the issues posed through representational approaches. We can, however, appreciate more fully the range of experiences cinema brings about by rethinking our approaches. With this said, we have to think about the methodological limitations of negotiation and Deleuzian perspectives.

5. Media Hybridity and Negotiation

All media are made up of multiple elements, including bits of other media; with cinema, this is especially the case. The concept of negotiation, as it has been explored in this article, tends to conceptualise film experience as made up of discrete elements: visual images, spoken dialogue, and written, translated text. However, considering these elements individually might not be a useful critical move. The propensity towards transcendent categorisation appears again, threatening to overshadow the complex processes and relations in which all media are implicated. This complexity is glossed over when attempts are made to reduce the functioning of media to representational frameworks. Media interact with each other and with other elements outside themselves. They do so in ways that exceed explanation, intention, and even perception. We can counterbalance the tendency towards separation by addressing the constitutive hybridity of media. Doing so also provides some critical distance from the Deleuzian perspective on negotiation explored above.

Subtitling and videogaming make for an interesting comparison in terms of the alternate processes of textual and affective negotiations involved in each, and how each relates to the hybridity of media. Videogames consist of a level field between

story world and external graphical elements. The graphical user interface (GUI) is made up of images, icons, and texts that lie outside diegetic action. It is difficult to conceive contemporary videogames without home screens, pause menus, and in-game overlaid text—including, but not limited to, subtitling. But these elements make sense of diegetic action. Negotiation of graphical elements in videogame is a requisite set of actions; gamers know this when they turn on their consoles. Unlike subtitled text, they are an original part of videogame media. Whereas, in cinema, subtitled text is, for the most part, added post-filmically and without aesthetic intention, in videogaming, it is a central element that does not transcend its material, spatiotemporal conditions. Despite their differences in origin, both videogames and subtitles require negotiation and both set us on a course of affective transformation. Which aspect matters here—cause or effect, process or affect—depends on the theoretical perspective from which it is approached. This allows us to add one final piece to the puzzle of negotiation, concerning the hybridity and relationality of subtitled cinematic media.

Recent transformations in media cultures and technologies have led to various reconceptualisations of how media systems are organised and relate to each other—in other words, their ontological status. To name two: there is Henry Jenkins's idea of convergence culture (2006), in which the circulation of media content as well as the participation of its consumers is paramount; and there is Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's idea of the remediation of media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), which explains how computing has refashioned older media. A big part of Jenkins's account of media convergence is the rise of participatory culture. The *Nosferatu* example, which is based on an amateur fansubbed version on YouTube is apposite here. YouTube is a relatively novel media phenomenon in its models of uploading and dissemination. The 'media' we are referring to in this case includes not just the images and subtitled words that are visible and legible on the screen, but also the audience members, the 'fansubbers' and 'prosumers', that created this version of the film. As in the example of videogaming, what matters here is the process and practice of negotiation that forms a significant part of our experience of subtitled cinema, and not details of the origins of its individual parts. Subtitled cinema is made up not so much of discrete

elements but a complex network of processes, relations, and desires. Not all of these lie within the agency of humans. External forces in the interactions of media, such as artificial intelligence or the geophysical basis of media, play a role also. Here, the agenda is no longer to ask 'what is media?', but is about how media interrelate to each other and to external elements in non-instrumental and non-humanist ways. We approach this situation not by asking an ontologising question—in other words, representational and humanist—as in discussions of convergence and remediation, but by thinking about how to apprehend this media assemblage. Practices of negotiation are one way to do this. Negotiation is sceptical towards transcendental categorisation, appreciates affective potentials, and is attentive to the hybridity of media and interaction outside the frame of human action and reason.

6. Conclusion

In light of the themes explored in this article, we can conclude that subtitling is not merely supplemental to cinema. Rather than separating out subtitled cinematic images into their individual constituent parts, they can be understood as a complex set of relations and processes. Subtitling is a fundamental part of cinema in numerous ways: historical, linguistic, and affective too. This article has offered some methodological proposals for analysis of subtitled cinema beyond what has been offered in the relatively small film-theoretical literature to date. This analysis of subtitling and approaches to subtitled cinema can be understood in relation to the critical tendency that seeks to get beyond traditional interpretive and representational structures of film experience. A host of transformational experiences that were previously absent in this field of discourse are opened up for further analysis: the multiple and indeterminate parts of watching subtitled films. This is why I have stressed subtitling's affective *potential*. When we apprehend cinema as a locus of amorphous and potential relations, the heuristic scope is expanded. The stability attributed to cinema by traditional film theory, on ideological grounds, is challenged by accounts of the instability of cinematic representation. Understanding subtitled cinema on the level of affective and transformative experiences has thus been offered as an antidote to well-worn forms of cinematic analysis. Further analysis of the performative

subtitling in *Film Socialisme*, for example, could be undertaken. This form of cinematic expression is only beginning to be explored by filmmakers and fansubbers, as well as recent television series like *Sherlock* (BBC) and *House of Cards* (Netflix). New technologies open up potential for further formal innovations, like the fansubbing in *Nosferatu*. Research on creative subtitling could respond to these innovations—a new set of aesthetic possibilities in the history of cinema. Already some scholars in translation studies have begun to explore this work (Foerster, 2010; Pérez-González, 2012; McClarty, 2014).

Subtitled cinema involves a redistribution of spectatorial attention. Moving beyond the idealised frame of spectatorship, it should be remembered that this attention is finite—a certain economy of attention. On the linguistic level, it is clear that subtitles go beyond what can be processed representationally through their spatiotemporal excesses. But there is a host of other excesses involved. These are the multiple and shifting activities of watching, listening, but also reading, translating, and even problem solving (Naficy, 2004: 146). I am not claiming that negotiation is not proper to cinematic experience in the first place—recall cinema's early deprecation as a bastard art, which involved its combination of already existing art forms—but that engagement with subtitled cinema enacts a peculiar set of negotiations, which deserve critical attention on their own terms. A range of other activities supplements the classic audiovisual engagement. These are processes that transform through time as films develop, but also in the space of the film's reception, where the indeterminate rhythms of the body and sensorium, of social relations, and of aesthetic engagement proliferate. To concentrate our entire intellectual energies on the dialogue or diegetic action in *Nosferatu* or *Film Socialisme* would clearly be to miss out on some important aspects of the overall cinematic experience. The possibility of escaping language and representation is a heavyweight issue. But rather than take on such a task, the modest engagement with speculation and acceptance of indeterminacy is one response to the aporia of humanist methods. Negotiation as a practice works through these conditions. Beyond Deleuzian approaches, this criticism could go all the way down in any reaction against representational systems. It signals the

inexorable presence of language, even in moments where it is being resisted, as in post-structuralist theories, which I considered earlier.

Juxtaposing Deleuze and subtitling through negotiation of both—the strategy in this article—elaborates the differential constitution of each of these, where individual parts are blurred and cannot be separated from their interrelations. The argument through negotiation leads to the point that an affective or transformative encounter in subtitled film experience demands forms of analysis that exceed the bounds of traditional close reading. I argued that this kind of negotiation is relevant also to subtitled film experience. The processes are comparable, in their synthesis of different registers of experience—aural, visual, graphic, aesthetic, textual. Standard film theories will look at elements individually. We should take them together in order to nuance the concept of negotiation. Developing the theoretical heritage of Marshall McLuhan rather than André Bazin, this approach to media hybridity and film experience is about cinema as media rather than cinema *qua* cinema, which is more in line with Bazin's directly ontological project. It is about understanding subtitles as media and subtitled cinema as a hybrid, relational experience. We learn, in fact, that all media is hybrid. This is difficult enough to accept. Accepting that media work beyond and without our human frames of understanding, then, is the next step.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Laura Rascaroli for guidance through earlier versions of this essay, and to each anonymous peer reviewer for their responses along the way.

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How to cite this article: Flynn, N 2016 An Intimate Encounter: Negotiating Subtitled Cinema. *Open Library of Humanities*, 2(1): e1, pp. 1–28, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/olh.14>

Published: 27 January 2016

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