

Watchmakers – virtuality, narration and re-reading

Setting questions instead of answering them is a fundamental aspect of creative work. Things are set in relation to each other, continually allowing new interpretations to be developed. Lena Séraphin's short film, *Watchmakers*, aims to employ this kind of potential for re-viewing and continuous re-interpretation. In the work, the repetitions, the procedural nature of the reading and the unravelling of meaning act as an abstract process. *Watchmakers* is a series of openings offering the viewers an opportunity to weave together the narrative threads.

Some call us humans the story-loving and story-reliant "Homo narrans", the storytelling human. Stories have been told through myths and folk-tales throughout history. Stories are temporal entities with a beginning, middle and end. Today, for example, Hollywood produces entertainment films with these kinds of stories, and people often assess them on the grounds of how well they are understood. All that is peculiar, mystical or breaks narrative conventions is easily considered too difficult and demanding. Still, what heightens the narration are the mysteries and gaps that leave room for readers' imaginations. Sometimes the most creative solutions are based on an associative process that does not conclude the narrative with a logical explanation.

The closed narrative can be perceived as a culturally acquired process. The human psyche, however, does not always work as systematically even if our mental well-being often requires us to be able to structure our lives in a coherent, narrative-style form - at least to an extent. For example, our memories do not always work on a temporal continuum even if our conscious thoughts aim to arrange things on a temporal and spatial continuum. We should not equate memories and the past but, instead, we should think of memories as the present's means of accessing the past. The past and present are interwoven within memories, and events and sensations can activate memories even subconsciously.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze talks about the virtual in connection with memory. However, this virtuality should not be confused with the technologically produced simulation or so called virtual reality. For Deleuze, the virtual is a philosophical concept; it is a universe of possibilities located between the abstract and concrete, and it

is simultaneously present and absent. According to Deleuze's philosophy, life is full of different continuously connecting and dispersing powers - virtualities - that are simultaneous and substantial like options are. The virtual is characterized by an idea of a fold. When the inside and outside are folded together, the prime mover cannot be distinguished from its consequence. For example, the wind and a wave are both part of the same movement.

Cinema offers good examples of virtuality. David Lynch is, out of all contemporary filmmakers, the master of virtuality. When interviewed, Lynch refuses to interpret his films too much because of the threat of art becoming empty if over-explained. He emphasizes the viewers' ability to make conclusions using their own intuitions. Not all the abstractions created by the director need to be revealed, and sometimes openings can be more interesting than conclusions with the explained and unexplained merging together. *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) provide clues and openings, yet no single narrative-based conclusion.

The viewers of *Watchmakers* encounter different layers of the same situations which add to, yet break, the narrative logic. The film creates structures of meanings based on breaking, counterfeiting and losing. A woman's watch has stopped; a man's watch may be a fake; an old man has lost his watch, sense of time and, at the same time, perhaps even his identity. The watch is the central sign of the film: breaking, counterfeited and lost. The film decodes its own signs and constructs a metameaning based on the process of decoding itself.

The film's protagonist is the shop with its watches, clocks and other objects. The characters are functional rather than psychological units. The camera angles are repeated with differing overtones. The characters' lines vary over and over again in each repeated scene, and the elements of the story are retold. On the different layers, the characters appear to merge and fold together. Each of the characters act in turn as the shopkeeper and the thief-like crook who invades the others' space. The only named character is Alisa, a woman whose name the old man keeps calling in vain. The call results to nothing, and in the end, the CCTV screen lies empty.

Watchmakers offers several clues but no final conclusion, allowing the viewers to

develop the story further in their minds. The gaps and paradoxes of the text act as fuel. Maintaining rather than revealing a mystery requires more skills and a tighter grip of the work on the part of the director. Watchmakers is characterized by a creative return to the new and changing, to the possibilities that life offers through virtuality. Ultimately, crime and guilt are constructed in the viewers' minds. The viewers act as judges, and their values and willingness to judge become the quintessential question of the work.

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