WHEN ONE FRAME IS NOT ENOUGH

From Still Photography to Virtual Reality

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Abstract

American art critic Clement Greenberg wrote the following about modern art:

> A modernist work of art must try, in principle to avoid dependence upon any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium.
>
> (Greenberg, 1965)

In other words, an artist should strive to use the medium's inherent characteristic to create essential expressions that you could only present in that particular medium. Many art critics and scholars used this medium – specificity discourse as a measure of quality, and even dismissed artworks that did not follow this tradition. In post-modern criticism, Greenberg's theory has been criticised for being too specific and it has been argued that an analysis of art cannot be reduced to the single properties of an artistic medium without taking into account the aggregation of all these properties and the presence of an audience in relation with them (Krauss, 2000).

From an artistic perspective, it is easy to disregard Greenberg's position and argue that nothing should restrict the imagination of artist and that this medium-essentialist perspective has little to offer for artistic practices, but I believe we can learn from analytical processes and theoretical concepts. In this article, I will re-visit some of these theories, scrutinize them and turn the perspective upside down. Instead of critiquing or analysing artwork, I will look at this from an artistic research perspective and propose a comparative medium specificity table that might help the artist's creative processes. Through practice-led research and reflection about our own work, I hope to shed light on some important processes and knowledge that can be helpful for the artistic community.

Keywords

Documentary, virtual reality, artistic research, photography, exhibition, reception, cinema

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1.   EXHIBITION OFFSHORE ID

In 2018, my colleague Marie von Krogh and I made a documentary exhibition in cooperation with the Norwegian Oil Museum with the title "Offshore ID". The main purpose with the exhibition was to present how the life of the offshore oil worker is affecting his/her personality. How an occupation can create a schizophrenic lifestyle and with a rhythm, not custom to social conventions and family expectations.

At first it was planned as a photography exhibition, but we soon realised a bigger potential if we combined several media. A chance to get closer, more emotional and create a deeper understanding for the overarching theme. This led to an exhibition space divided in three parts: A classical gallery space with photography (40 stills), a small cinema with a 3-screen projector documentary (ca. 15 minutes), and a rigged rail with a Virtual Reality/360 video experience (6 min.). This gave a broad communicative palette with different media and different spectator positions and possi-

bilities. We defined the main position differences and goals between the media as the following:

◆ First part: An active hermeneutic position (photography and text). *See them.*
◆ Second part: An active viewer position (3-screen documentary). *Understand them.*
◆ Third part: A subjective experience position (virtual reality). *Be them.*
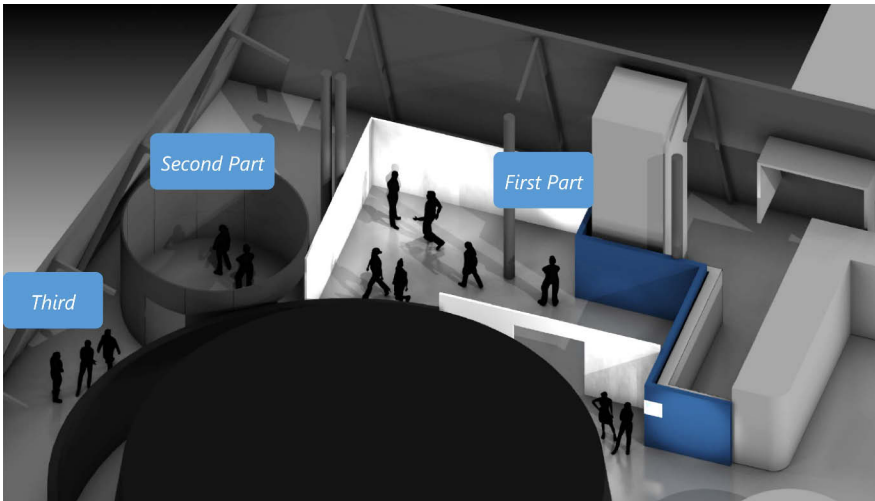
Exhibition space Norwegian Oil Museum (2018)

As this overview shows, our goals were connected to both the reception position and the medium-specificity. Another aspect is the perception and narrative perspective, which I will discuss thoroughly when I compare the inherent characteristic of these three media. In the conclusion, I hope to sum up our experience with the exhibition and whether we achieved what we intended, based on the concept about the medium-specificity thesis and how the synergies between the three parts played an important role.

2.   MEDIUM-SPECIFICITY

Medium-specificity comes from art criticism, and it is a concept in aesthetic theory. Clement Greenberg (1941) believed that "the unique and proper area of competence" for a form of art corresponds with the ability of an artist to manipulate those features that are "unique to the nature" of a particular medium. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1776) had more or less the same view: "an artwork, in order to be successful, needs to adhere to the specific stylistic properties of its own medium." Noel Carroll (1988), who has been a vigorous critic of medium-specificity arguments, sees Lessing's argument as an attempt "to extrapolate from the structure of the medium" to the "appropriate subject matter of the medium" (p. 21). In Carrol's (1988) view, the medium-specificity thesis usually forms recommendations rather than descriptions.

As a recommendation, the specificity thesis appears to have two components. One component is the idea that there is something that each medium does best. The other is that each of the arts should do what differentiates it from the other arts. These two components can be called the excellence requirement and the differentiation requirement. The two can be combined in the imperative that each art form should explore only those avenues of development in which it exclusively excels above all the other arts.

This is an interesting statement that could resonate well within the artistic community, but the challenge then is to pinpoint exactly what, for instance, Virtual Reality does best. At the same time, it is important to understand how different media often start aping older media. Film initially imitated theatre; photography painting; and VR imitates film. They often borrow from and lean on the conventions of an earlier medium; for example, film used the same narrative conventions as theatre, and one scene was often shot in one take. It was not until Porter, and later Griffith, started to explore the more radical use of editing and parallel action that film became a unique medium and artists found new ways the medium could excel. This development also has reception implications because the spectator has to learn new ways of interpreting the different media and understand the hermeneutic communication process. This is most obvi-

ous in the evolving medium of Virtual Reality, and I will come back to this later in the article.

In post-modern theory, scholars have argued that the artist should challenge the boundary of medium-specific requirements, thus creating a pure art free of medium convention. Alessio Chierico (2016) sums up this artistic choice in post-media practice:

A research into the aesthetic possibilities of new media can be developed with both the use of the technical possibilities offered by the medium or with interventions, which 'misuse' these same possibilities. This divergence can be reduced in the two following approaches: a method which follows the script given by the design of a medium, or a method which does not follow this script. The first case is about an exploration of the medium aesthetics, which is done 'exploiting' the technical potentials it offers, in this sense we will have a formalism. On the other hand, we find an opposite way to develop an exploration of medium aesthetics, made by 'enquiring' its technical potentials, and excavating under their smooth surface.

3.   MEDIA-SPECIFICITY TABLE

In this project, our approach is based on both methods. We explore the medium aesthetics and technical potential, but the main focus is actually on the communication level and the reception position of the viewer.

Based on the goals of the three parts in our exhibition, we can make a table where we try to formulate the excel requirement and differentiation requirement of the three media at hand. This table is not exhaustive, but it takes into consideration the differences and excel qualities in a comparative manner, and from a creative starting point.

	Photography	Film	Virtual Reality/ 360 Video (3DoF)
Perceptual Immersion/ Immediacy	Low	Medium	High
Expressiveness	Low	High	High
Reception Position	Hermeneutic	Active	Variable
Time	Open	Closed	Closed
Narrativity	Low	High	Medium
Interactivity	Yes (indirectly)	No	Yes (3DoF)
Emotionality/Closeness	Medium	High	Medium
Aesthetic Foregrounding	High	Medium	Low

This table requires some comments, and some measures are more open to debate than others. I have tried to describe which qualities the different media are prone to. This does not mean that, for example, photography cannot be expressive. It is an attempt to describe the sensitivities of the media themselves, and how this can steer the artistic process. The medium of VR/360 video needs some extra specification. In this project, I define VR/360 as a video in closed time filmed with a 360 camera and shown in an HMV (head mounted display) with only 3 degrees of freedom (3 DoF). The qualities of a CGI-based (computer-generated imagery) environment with interactive controllers and 6 degrees of freedom would of course have different medium qualities.

I will now try to elaborate on the different excel qualities and discuss the media. The first one; Perceptual Immersion, has to do with to what extent the spectator is immersed in the story universe from a perception-psychology perspective. When we look at a print of 30 by 40 cm, we are doing exactly that; looking at it, we are not immersed in the scene, but we are invited into hermeneutic activities that can immerse us, but this is a result of the interpreting process. In VR, however, you are perceptually immersed within the story universe, and the 360 video and ambisonic sound underline this feeling. The brain is tricked into believing that your body is in a place that you are not.

With expressiveness, I mean audiovisual dynamics; to what extent can you use the sound and image to overwhelm the audience, from pianissimo to

fortissimo? It is obvious that this is easier in film and VR than in photography. The reception position is a bit more ambiguous, but the conventions suggest that in a gallery space with an open time unit (you can use as much time as you want per picture), the spectator is more disposed to hermeneutic activities. In film, where you have a narrative in closed time, the audience does inferring processes but does not normally have the time to do longer hermeneutic reasoning. In more avant-garde video art where the video is looping, of course, the spectator position is of a different nature and closer to the hermeneutic one. In VR, it is even more complicated because the inherent characteristic of the medium is subjective, but I will argue that the reception position can still vary. Normally, the narrative or experience is bound to this subjectivity and the spectator is just reacting to the story world directly, but as in our case, an artist can challenge these boundaries if one give the spectator time to interpret more than just the perceptual top-down processing.

Narrativity is a complex matter; by narrativity I mean the quality or condition a medium has for presenting a narrative. Can you tell a story in one picture? Some, at least photographers, would answer yes, but others, like medium-specificity theorists, would disagree. Narratologists would state that narrative is a function of time and therefore, a single image cannot contain a full story. Why is VR less ideal for narratives? I will come back to this later in the article, but it is connected to inherent subjectivity and interactivity of the medium.

Interactivity should be obvious, and in this table I only consider VR equal to 360 video in closed time where the only interactivity is the 3 degrees of freedom (roll, yaw, pitch). In photography I define interactivity indirectly in the way that you can go back and forth to different images and choose yourself how much time you spend on each.

Emotionality/closeness is a difficult quality to rate and it is of course dependent on the artist's ability to communicate, and whether an emotional response is a goal at all. For many viewers, emotions are closely connected to the narrative immersiveness more than the perceptual immediacy. Therefore, I argue that film has the best prerequisite for emotionality because of its narrativity and expressiveness.

The aesthetic foregrounding is to what extent the aesthetics in a medium may be appreciated on its own term. For example, in photography, one can appreciate a composition and linger only with the placement of the elements, but in cinema, the composition is often subordinated to the story. In VR, there is no frame at all, and I would argue that the aesthetic foregrounding therefore is low, but this does not mean that the experience as a whole cannot be aesthetic.

To sum up; all these qualities are open to manipulations, but from an artistic medium-specificity perspective, I will argue that these different qualities or sensibilities are important to discuss.

4.   WHAT IS A FRAME?

> Photography is, for me, a spontaneous impulse coming from an
> ever attentive eye which captures the moment and its eternity.
> – Henri Cartier-Bresson

Photography is an intuitive art where painting is a meditation and painstaking process of getting the composition, brush, stroke, and colours right. Of course, a photographer works a lot with composition, lighting, and colours, but very often, at least in documentary photography, the goal is what Cartier-Bresson points out; the spontaneous event that captures the theme already in the mind of the artist. Medium-specificity theorists claim that photography excels at two things; the direct indexical link to the pre-filmic event and the ability to freeze that moment onto a celluloid film or a light-sensitive chip. The indexical link is very important in documentary photography, but from the creative point of view, the latter is more interesting. By freezing a moment, one heightens the importance of exactly that frame. It is the freezing of the frame that gives emphasis to the picture and what it communicates. A photographer instantly knows whether the picture just taken is good or not, because of the impulse process between the thematic thought and what reality presents in front of the camera. The thematic thought is what steers the attentive eye, and the shot is taken by impulse.

5. BLESSING AND CURSE

To freeze a moment is both a blessing and a curse. To understand it, this citation from Susan Sontag (1977) can help us:

> The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say: "There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit – what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way." Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.

This invitation is a gift that in many ways separates photography from film. As shown in the table above, the spectator position is hermeneutic. The audience has time to deduct and speculate, but there is a fine line between a picture that intrigues you and a picture that is too open and difficult to comprehend. On the other hand, there is a risk for a too closed picture that only has surface and no depth.

To keep the interest of the viewer, it has to offer something beyond its own surface. Roland Barthes wrote extensively on this, and in his last book, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes (1981) tries to define what exactly touches him about some photographs. He divides this into two famous terms, studium and punctum:

> What I feel about these photographs derives from an average effect, almost from a certain training. I did not know a French word which might account for this kind of human interest, but I believe this word exists in Latin: it is studium, which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, "study," but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by studium that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally … that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions.

And then Barthes (1981) goes on to define the punctum:

> The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time it is not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that it also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds, are so many points. This second element which will disturb the studium I shall therefore call punctum; for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).

These terms have been analysed and discussed by many scholars, but I will not go into a theoretical discourse here. The core of Barthes's argument is that the punctum is something in addition to the duality of the photography, often an unintended detail in the picture, and more importantly, it could be a subjective notion of the viewer's own memory. As Barthes (1981) says,

> ... occasionally (but alas all too rarely) a 'detail' attracts me. I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eye with a higher value. This 'detail' is the punctum.

How can an unintended detail be a part of a conscious photographer's work? It often has to do with the intuition and time spent with the human milieu that one tries to portray, a hunch of something that can suddenly change the interpretation of a picture. Identification can also play an important part for the hermeneutic process. In our case, we could expect that the audience knew or even had a close relation to people who work in the oil industry, or at least they have a certain idea about how the offshore routine is. On another level, everybody can relate to parents, kids, longing, worrying, boredom, farewells, and sorrow.

6. ANALYSIS

In some pictures in our exhibition, the context or studium is quite clear, but in others more information is needed, and here the text following the photography could give a punctum effect. Now I will present three photographs and comment on them briefly on the basis of the comparative table above. They are deliberately chosen to show how vast the communication possibilities are, still, within only one medium.

Marie Von Krogh (2018)

In this photography, one can appreciate the aesthetic quality by the composition and lighting. The division between the main object and the others and how the light underlines the facial expression of the young man. The frozen moment invites us to interpret the situation and an atmosphere of suspense. One can speculate about the story behind the picture, but it is not obvious without a text; thus, the narrativity is low.

Marie Von Krogh (2018)

This picture is immediate and maybe not so open for speculation, but there is a poetic emotionality, and the context given by the informative text deepens the emotional potential, and the identification can give a punctum effect in Barthes's sense.

> "Stine Haaftun Karlsen has been on maternity leave with daughter Vilde for nine months. Early tomorrow morning, she will be taking a taxi to Flesland heliport and going offshore for the first time since giving birth."

With the text, we get the full narrative and, in a way, the image captures the peak moment of the story. The expressiveness is quiet, but the closeness/emotionality is high because we can sense the love and care for the baby.

Marie Von Krogh (2018)

This image is interesting because of its narrative perspective. Here the viewer is put in the shoes of the offshore worker, and we see the view from a cabin. No people to look at here, but because of the symbolic meaning of the star against the grey sky and dark sea, one can sense the loneliness of the place. The Christmas connotation is underlined by the title: Advent on Troll C platform. So even if the perceptual immersion is low, compared to the VR medium, we can still get the perceptual vantage point of view of the offshore worker.

Let us now compare these images in the light of the suggested table above. The common key qualities, I would argue, are the hermeneutic possibility given by the open timing and the appreciation for the aesthetic quality. The narrative aspect is not so evident in the first and third picture, but in the second there is a stronger narrative because of the info text that creates a sense of time. The present, which is the photograph and the future, which is in the text. The emotionality is therefore stronger in the second photograph, but there is a specific mood also in the first and third picture. When it comes to perceptual immersion, we are more immersed in the third picture because we have an imaginary subjective POV.

7.   TRUTH 24 FRAMES PER SECOND

The famous citation of Jean-Luc Godard that cinema is truth 24 frames per second and that every cut is a lie can be a good starting point for the discussion on what the differentiate and excellence qualities of cinema are. For cinema, and especially for documentary film, the indexical link to the pre-filmic event is key and gives an authority and authenticity that no earlier medium can match. Maybe with the advent of virtual reality this will change, but still film has both an immersive quality and a narrative power that is unchallenged.

For Rosalind Krauss, the structural film movement during the 1960s proclaimed the end of 'medium-specificity' because it revealed that video is a medium constituted by a great heterogeneity of parts, which perform a large number of activities. For this reason, Krauss (2000) sees the video as a medium in which heterogeneity cannot be found any "essence" or "unifying core" (p. 31). In other words, since the cinema can contain any other medium including words, audio, photography, music, poetry, painting, etc., the essentialists' perspective disappears. However, there are still qualities and aspects one can try to point out as cinematic. Actually, a big discussion among both scholars and directors has been to try to define pure cinema, and of course, here we can find a variety of theoretical discourses and filmmaking traditions.

8.   IMAGE VS CUT

Film critic André Bazin wrote extensively on both photography and film, and his essays can be seen as a strong advocate for the realism style. He was a firm believer in the image, mise en scène, and the long take for two reasons:

a)   It maintained the unity of space and the relationship between the objects within that space.

b)   It gave the spectator, according to Bazin (1967), the freedom to direct his/her own control over the viewing process, including what to look at, in what order, for how long, and to make their own syn-

thesis of that viewing process. Together they maintain the ambiguity – the existential ambiguity present all around us in life – of that space.

On the other side of the spectrum, one finds the montagists who believed that the essence of cinema lies in the cut, the ability to assemble images together, and create a new meaning. This tradition can be traced back to Kuleshov and his famous experiments combining the shot of an actor's face with consequently a bowl of soup, a dead child, and a pretty woman. The footage of the actor was the same expressionless gaze. Yet the audience raved about his performance, saying that first he looked hungry, then sad, then lustful. Sergei Eisenstein (1949) developed theories of montage to a complex system of different methods: Metric, Rhythmic, Tonal, Overtonal/Associational, and intellectual montage. These concepts became overly theoretical, and the audience had problems to interpret the meaning when Eisenstein tried to put his ideas into practice in films like *Oktober, 1928*. However, the ideas of Eisenstein had an impact long after his death, including the idea of montage where the editing of shots rather than the content of the shot alone constitutes the force of cinema.

Let us now go back to the comparative table and see how these two positions fit with the suggested excel qualities of the medium. The two most interesting aspects are the spectator position and the narrativity. In classic Hollywood cinema, everything is subordinate to the narrative; editing, cinematography, movement, music, etc. should always support the story and not accentuate itself. The spectator is immersed in the story universe and infers what is happening to the characters. Many spectators can state, "I was totally lost into the film," meaning that they were hypnotised by the experience. Thus the narrativity in cinema can be high, but it is not always the wish of the artist. I will discuss this when I reflect on our exhibition film. From an experimental montagist's perspective, the goal is not to immerse the spectator in the narrative, but rather to make them think about the juxtaposition of images and make their own judgement of what is presented to them. This presupposes a more active conscious viewer position. Another important trait of film, at least when showed at a big screen, is the perceptual immersion that is much higher than in still photography, but lower than in VR. A big screen and surround sound also give

the opportunity to be very expressive with the audiovisual content, and this is exploited fully in the typical blockbuster movies.

The function of time is a crucial feature that separates photography and cinema. In the table, I purposely used the words open and closed to describe this because in photography I see this as an asset. By open time, I mean that the photography itself is freed from the condition of time, as Bazin also states, but equally important is the time that a spectator can spend with the photograph. It is open. You can interpret, speculate, enjoy, read the image text, come back to the photography, appreciate the composition, meditate, and then move on when the hermeneutic process comes to an end. In many ways, one can define this as an interactive process, not like in Virtual Reality games where you can alter the environment and sequence of events, but as an implicit action in the cognitive progression.

Cinema is a very different experience. The time is flowing, and you can experience a narrative in present time, but the time is closed, fixed. You cannot stop the film and contemplate on your own thoughts; you have to take in the steady flow of audiovisual stimuli, and the brain is processing information as it comes along. That is why rhythm is key in the medium of cinema. A director has to balance information through time, and this is a very complex and difficult task. Not only the combination of audiovisual impressions needs to be considered, but also the cognition process of the spectator.

Emotionality/closeness can be high in cinema, but it depends on several factors; the most obvious being the narrative. If the audience is connected with the story, it is through characters and their actions during different events that make the audience emotionally engaged. A more direct way is to use the perceptual immersion and the audiovisual expressiveness to make the spectator feel the elements of the story universe tactilely through sound and sight.

9.   EXHIBITION FILM "OFFSHORE ID"

The film was, as mentioned earlier, a three-projectors-screen documentary with an aspect ratio of 3840*720 px. This choice was made for two important reasons: first of all, the extensive use of archive footage that was only SD resolution (720*576) and filled only one third of the screen. Secondly, in order to have the expressive possibilities to use full 4k footage to immerse the viewer perceptually in certain scenes.

Sigmund Trageton (2018)

The film is a portrait of three oil workers in three stages of their life, and their thoughts and experiences of living an offshore life.

Sigmund Trageton (2018)

This is combined with archive footage to give a historical and cultural perspective as well.

1.   Montage Structure

The film is not a traditional narrative. It has a categorical/associative structure based on montage editing and the active interpreting process of the audience. It is the juxtaposition between the different statements from the three oil workers that gives the film its depth, and the disparity with

the cooperate film perspective gives a certain humourous flavour. One could argue that this film does not take the advantages of the inherent narrative power of the film medium, but as I discussed above, it is difficult to define pure cinema and it is not the goal of this article to have an essentialistic point of view, but rather a creative perspective on the possibilities.

2.　Expressive Moments

In some key parts of the film, space is deliberately created for expressive audiovisual moments where you can feel the natural elements of the ocean and the solitude of being an offshore worker.

View from the "Draugen" platform TC 06:50, Sigmund Trageton (2018)

The voice of Ann Elin heigthens the emotional impact: "One striking aspect of working offshore is that if something happens at home, it is amplified ten thousand times out here. If somebody has to go to the hospital or something, you feel very helpless. You are far away."

Equally important as the big screen and surround sound is the rhythm of the editing. You have to make space and dynamic room for the sudden audiovisual surprise. In other words, the ending of the sequence before should be quiet.

3.　Reception Position

In the table, I suggest the viewer position is active, meaning that the audience infers the information as it comes along to form the narrative. But this cognitive process is not as concious as in photography. We are drawn into the film universe. However, in the exhibition film, I would argue that the viewer had to interpret more conciously than in a classic narrative

Hollywood film because of the montagist/associative structure of the film.

Flashback in Montage TC 06:01, Sigmund Trageton (2018)

4.   Mise En Scène and Montage

The scene above is one of the more emotional scenes, where we see Hans Olav Meland looking back at himself 30 years earlier in a documentary made by the Norwegian National Broadcaster. The emotional depth lies in his reaction to his thoughts expressed 30 years earlier and the time that has passed; the imprint of a lived life that the face conveys. By combining three frames in one image, one gets both the Bazian advantage of the mise en scène and the emphasis of the montage (passage of time). Three images that together create a new meaning, but still with the freedom for the audience to direct his/her own control over the viewing process, including what to look at, in what order, for how long, and to make their own synthesis of that viewing process.

To sum up, we tried to let the audience meet the workers and get to know and understand them through a montage-style documentary that took benefit of the cinematic quality of juxtaposition which, as I discussed above, has been one of the main excel qualities in the discourses around what is pure cinema.

10. INSIDE THE DIGESIS

Some Virtual Reality evangelists call traditional cinema "flat film" and VR the "new audiovisual medium of the 21st century". Others, like director Alejandro González Iñárritu (2017), have a more complex view:

> Cinema is Frame. Cinema is length of the lens, cinema is editing. The position of the images that creates time and space. VR, even when it is visual, is exactly all that cinema is not.

Iñárritu presented a VR film in Cannes 2017, called *Carne y Arena,* that the president of the festival, Thierry Frémaux, called a Lumière moment. He saw it as the birth of a new art form. Iñárritu (2017) stated that it was the expressiveness of the medium that appealed to him. The fact that the viewers could experience what it was to be a migrant, not rationally, but directly on their skin.

The most obvious characteristic of VR and 360 video is the perceptual sensation that you are actually in a place that you are not. Because of the visual cues, the bottom-up process tells you that you are inside a world surrounded by the diegesis. This experience is unlike all other media, including traditional cinema. The expressiveness and possible emotional impact is therefore unprecedented. A paradox, then, is that from a narrative point of view, you have a very restricted perspective on the diegesis, because if the director wants to stay faithful to the visual perception, they can only show you events in that specific place and from that specific perspective (Trageton, 2018).

Edward Branigan (1984) describes narration as a dialectical process taking place between the spectator and a film and realizing a narrative (p. 38). Later, he goes on to define narration as "the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge, which determines how and when the spectator acquires knowledge, that is, how the spectator is able to know what he or she comes to know, in a narrative." (Branigan, 1992). Masterful directors are able to regulate and distribute this knowledge through the cinematic language, but in VR the spectator is free to interact with this material because of the 3 or 6 degrees of freedom.

In cinema, the narration can easily switch between different levels from internal focalisation to a non-diegetic level outside the story universe. This can also be done in VR, but then again, you risk confusing the audience's perceptual perspective. Even a single cut can be problematic. In traditional cinema, you have a certain control over the spatial jump between two shots because of conventions, but also due to perceptual psychology.

An editor is always very sensitive to eye-trace and movement to make the cut invisible, and 80 years of classic cinema continuity editing have taught the audience the conventions of film language. In VR, where you do not have the restriction of the frame and the spectator is free to look everywhere, it is very hard to steer the viewer's attention, thus making a spatio-temporal change confusing instead of intriguing. This is the reason why I, in the comparative table, have stated that the emotional closeness is the medium; it is causally connected to the narrativity.

I have stated that the reception position is variable. Due to the perceptual cues, it is subjective, but because of its strict narrative perspective, this limitation can be used to reach out for a more poetic structure. I will argue that the position in our exhibition's VR experience invited the spectator to be more hermeneutic.

11. ON/OFF (6 MIN.), A VR EXPERIENCE OF PRESENCE AND DETACHMENT

The main argument for using VR was to bring the audience into the physical space of an oil platform, but also the detachment space of being away and emotionally alone, since you could not interact with the people in

those spaces. Of course, the VR medium itself is perfect for gaming and interactivity, but this was not our goal here. The main excel quality we explored in this film was the perceptual Immersion/Immediacy. The first image is inside a helicopter, where the spectator is transported to the Troll C oil platform accompanied by music and the ambisonic sound of the helicopter.

The structure of this 360 video is poetic categorical. No strong narrative with many changes in narrative levels. A pure 1. Person/internal focalised depiction with scenes from an oil platform, intercut with scenes of typical leisure activities onshore between the trips. The interactivity was limited to 3DoF, and there were no possibilities to interact with elements in the video like choosing scenes or jumping around in the sequence, so in this sense time was closed/fixed.

**Offshore at the Troll C platform
TC 00:20**

**Onshore hiking around a lake
TC 01:29**

The suggested table states that the reception position is variable. In our case, we deliberately slowed the rhythm and pacing of the video so the spectator had time to immerse themselves in the diegesis, and at the same time had the possibility to contemplate over the thematic ideas of the full exhibition. It was therefore important to us that the 360 video should come at the end of the exposition, after the photography and 3-screen documentary. This contemplation effect would not have been possible if the VR production had been an intense narrative with a super expressive audiovisual style.

Offshore coffee break TC 02:40

Onshore at the pub TC 03:46

As mentioned above, the emotionality/closeness is very much connected to the narrativity, but through an active hermeneutic viewer process that infers the contrasts between the offshore/onshore life, I will argue that this VR experience had a different impact than a normal observational documentary would.

12. CONCLUSION

In this article, I set out to investigate whether medium-specificity theories can help us to pick out different qualities in different media. Even though many scholars today look at these theories as outdated and irrelevant, I will argue that they can give a fruitful starting point for a more creative and pragmatic direction. The suggested table is, as I have shown, not a descriptive one, but a normative suggestion open for debate. It is important to understand both the inherent technological architecture of different media and the communicative qualities. To make this even more complex, one also needs to take into consideration the development of conventions and style, as well as the reception position of the audience.

So did we succeed in our use of the different media? And did the audience get the experience that we wanted to give them? Of course, this is very difficult to measure, but based on the observation and feedback from viewers and how they spent the time in the different parts of the exhibition space, we concluded that the first two parts were the most successful. The way the audience interacted, in the gallery space, with the images, and how

they spent time with the text pamphlet was rewarding. The fact that most of the spectators stood and saw the full 15-minute documentary in the open cinema space was also a sign of satisfaction. The last part with the VR experience was more mixed, and one can only speculate about the causes without doing a qualitative study. I would consider a two-folded reason: the VR technology has been hyped, and many spectators expect a super kinetic expressive experience when they see VR equipment at display. Our film was the opposite. The other part has to do with narrative rhythm or reception mood. The 3-screen documentary, even if it did not have a strong narrative, was still focused and easily comprehensible. Going directly from the small cinema to the VR installation presupposed a change in narrative rhythm. The VR experience was somewhat different; very open and poetic, but also easy to dismiss if the reception mood of the spectator at that moment in time was off beam.

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Trageton, S. (2018) *Virtual reality, a question of subjectivity and authenticity?* Portugal: AVANCA CINEMA, Cine Clube de Avanca.

EXHIBITION

Trageton, S., & Von Krogh, M. (2018). Norwegian Oil Museum, Norway

Trageton, S. (2018). Part 2: 3-screen documentary.

Trageton, S. (2018). Part 3: VR experience.

Von Krogh, M. (2018). Part 1: Photography.

CV

Sigmund Trageton works as an assistant professor in audiovisual storytelling at the University in Stavanger, Norway. He has a background as a director/cinematographer and started his academic career 15 years ago. Trageton holds a Master of Arts from the University of London (2009) and tries to combine artistic production with practice-led research. His

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