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The 'Worlds of Cinema' and the 'Cinema of Worlds': A Heideggerian Phenomenology

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Abstract: Within a range of academic disciplines like film studies, philosophy of film, and narratology, scholars talk about 'worlds.' In this essay, I present various 'ontic' and 'ontological' descriptions of 'world' according to a Heideggerian phenomenology. My aim is to distinguish between what I call the 'worlds of cinema,' which bring about a particular subject-object relationship experienced as absorption, immersion, distraction, or distancing, and the 'cinema of worlds,' where film as art unsettles us as an ontological event, disrupting the subject-object dynamic in which we understand the depthlessness of our Being. Where the once familiar webs of meaning that made up our lives to which movies normally appeal, are now made strange to us through an onto-cinematic event. Here the actuality of my world is only known via its possibilities to which the film, as art, now draws my attention.
Keywords: Heidegger; Phenomenology; Being-in-the-World; Onto-Cinematics; World Fidelity

1. Introduction

Like the 'world' of a novel or computer game, cinema also presents worlds. These are worlds we can either get lost in or ones that can be studied for their lore and universe-building. Films today that pay 'fan service' are scrutinised by the viewer for the accuracy of the world and the mythos depicted; how close to the source material is the director's vision? I want to argue that these two ways of experiencing 'worlds' can be analysed via Heideggerian phenomenology. Moreover, that depending on which of these relations we have with a film, it tells us something about ourselves and, more importantly, about the structure of Dasein. Expanding on Loht's (2017) interpretation of film immersion, where the existential structure of Dasein is mirrored or extended in the cinematic experience, this essay looks at what various meanings 'world' has and how the viewer is orientated towards them. For example, the relationship between viewer and movie as part of the interiority of the filmic experience has been described by Hanich (2010) and Rushton (2009). For Ruston (2009), the experience of 'absorption' is where the spectator goes into the movie, whereas immersion is where the movie

comes out of the screen and surrounds the viewer (Rushton, 2009: 49). Both phenomena tell us about the spatiality of the audience to film and their agency. 'Absorption' implies that the spectator actively engages with the film – to suspend disbelief and enter the fiction before them. De Roo (2024) describes 'absorption' as "the spectator's process of directing their attention to the worldhood of film." 'Immersion,' however, appears more passive in which the viewer is 'won over' by the film, meeting them more than half-way. Both 'absorption' and 'immersion' are about the interiority of the film – in which we detach ourselves from the everyday world and the lives we lead. Indeed, to actively attend to a film is to be inattentive to everything else. To seek absorption or immersion is to find escape, to have our emotions or psychology altered for two hours. To immerse in the possibilities of film simultaneously means letting go of the actualities of one's life and current surroundings. However, 'immersion' and 'absorption' are not guaranteed. We can be brought out of the reality of the movie by any number of competing distractions, from within and without the film. Simply put, if I have no emotional or psychological investment in the story or characters, or something more interesting is happening, my attention will wander. If I am sat in an uncomfortable seat or the audio is too loud and distorted, I will struggle to either be absorbed or immersed. I'm too detached from the film to be won over by it, where slowly I return to my world – of my concerns, tasks and projects. There is, however, another sense in which we can detach ourselves, such as a film critic might, not because we are not enjoying the spectator experience but because we wish to be a different kind of spectator. Critics resist being immersed or absorbed to give an objective analysis of what is happening, to *look at* rather than *peer into*. Those involved in the film industry also speak of the inability to enjoy a film in its totality as they begin to wonder about specific shots, artistic choices, and other ontic aspects of film-making. Whilst they also are distanced from the film-experience, they are immersed in the world of the 'critic' or 'actor.' From within their worlds, the reality of the film is kept at bay. Finally, when film becomes art and not escapism or an object of academic study, is when it becomes unsettling. An onto-cinematic event where we are able to enter a world because we ourselves have worlds, which is what the movie draws our attention to. However, this 'unsettling' is the calling to attention of our Being – a renewed understanding of what it means to have a world and a self that we understand can be lost.

Like Loht's (2017) interpretation of film immersion, the existential structure of Dasein is mirrored or extended in the cinematic artistic experience. It is with art that the grounding of our worlds becomes visible to us. With Dasein, the 'da' is the revealing of what is 'there.' It is within Dasein that the Being of other beings is revealed – which is the "origin of the meaning of Being in general" (Large, 2008: 111). There is a simultaneous concealing and revealing that

Heidegger develops as *aletheia*. For beings to be seen as anything, Being needs to remain hidden. However, when being-towards-death and angst reveal ontological difference, the meaning of beings dissolves, and we are left with the basis of Being which is no-thing (*das nicht*). If we push this Heideggerian interpretation far enough it then raises the question of 'authenticity' through art. Interestingly, Loht (2017) does not include 'fallenness' (*verfallen*), which is a condition of the-They (*das Man*), "the kind of Being of everyday Dasein's understanding and interpreting" (Heidegger, 1962: 211). It will be considered in this essay that if film can become art, it must be able to put us in a speculative or philosophical mode in which we address our own existence, where ontological presence is foregrounded over psychological and cultural phenomena. Here film as art is not about 'escapism,' which all inauthentic modes are, but its modification – an escape from inauthenticity, a truth-revealing onto-cinematic event.

'Worlding' or 'world-making' has taken up the focus of many artists and academics alike (Yacavone, 2014). Where does it 'happen'? Is it only on screen, via the screenwriting, acting, direction, lighting, and so on? Does it come from outside the screen through the spaces we occupy and the technological innovations the cinematic experience is mediated through? Imax, surround sound, theatrical seating, or the 4D experience? It would seem reasonable that a combination of some or all is sufficient (Recuber, 2007). What might be the relationship between spectator immersion and the worlds of cinema, both on- and off-screen? Here, I take it that 'going to the cinema' is part of the 'world-of-cinema' where we already understand the unspoken contract between movie and audience. De Roo (2024) points out that Loht (2017) uses the notion of world 'immersion' ambiguously, which does not adequately deal with the specific mediating effects of cinema. If a movie is anything, it is a medium for having an experience, and if done well, our experience is shaped, guided, and manipulated by the creatives behind and in the film. It is "a direct means of having and expressing a world – given to us as a technologically mediated consciousness of experience" (Sobchack, 1992: 168). The film like any cultural artefact requires pre-existing knowledge for it to make sense and be used correctly. Just as the hammer disappears in the skilled craftsmen's hands, so too the movie becomes imperceptible to the movie-going crowd. We 'know' that they are actors, that it is a 2D representation made possible by an entire industry, that we cannot and should not try to communicate with the people on screen, nor seek retribution or justice for any crimes witnessed. The movie becomes ready-to-hand. In a sense everything about the film disappears – the acting, writing, direction, editing, lighting and so on all become invisible. At its most enveloping, the cinema, the audience, the world around me disappear. This is possible because we understand what films are and what they can do. More recent attempts at analysing 'cinematic world' and

'world-immersion' have come from phenomenology. Sinnerbrink (2024: 1) points out a variety of approaches researchers have used from "Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Heidegger; Deleuzian, affect theory; theories of corporeality, embodied spectatorship; aesthetics of touch (hapticity); gender and queer theories, intersectional approaches, new materialisms".

The spectatorial process by which we are actively or passively brought into or out of the interiority of a film hinges around the worldhood (*Weltlichkeit*) of Dasein. It makes no sense to talk about cinematic worlds without addressing the Being to which worlds belong. Thus, a 'world' in the phenomenological sense is not just something we inhabit, belonging to this or that culture, but the ontological significance of having a world in general. Here, 'world' does not refer to either my specific existence, which is made up of culturally and historically contingent objects, nor does it refer to an objective physical body like nature, but to my ability to tell the difference. What stands Dasein apart is its capacity to understand ontological difference – that I exist in the world in a way that no other object does. This possibility however, for the most part, is concealed from me. What Heidegger calls 'fallenness' (*Verfallen*) is the everyday condition of Dasein by which it misunderstands its own Being in terms of the beings it is surrounded by every day. Here we believe ourselves to be the same as all those other things, which lack worlds. It is 'fallenness' that gives rise to Heidegger's project in which Aristotle conflates the essence of human beings with that of all other beings. This is why the question concerning the meaning of being not only sounds strange but is really difficult to think of, let alone answer. 'Fallenness' along with *das Man* blinds me to my radical individuality. We become so absorbed by the everyday – that my capacity to have worlds is invisible to me. For Heidegger, it is through anxiety that ontological difference and worldhood are revealed to me. I begin to stand out as one Being that does not exist like all other beings, and this is problematic. One way out of this concern is through fallenness, collapsing ontological difference, and continuing to exist like everything else (inauthenticity) or once I understand that Being is mine – a possibility for me to choose whether I take on or reject this responsibility for existing (authenticity).

Here I think our ability to be lost in a film or be shaken out of one is significant. Just as Loht's (2017, 2024) interpretation of film immersion argues that the existential structure of Dasein is mirrored or extended in the cinematic artistic experience, I wish to expand this further. Where the 'worlds of cinemas' routinely absorb us and in which the film and the world we occupy become invisible to us. This ready-to-hand state is a mark of both absorption and immersion. However, it can also push us the other way into the present-at-hand, where we view the film as an object of study, something to be questioned, or is simply present and visible to us

(as many bad films are). Here, the film critic and disinterested filmgoer are not immersed in the fictive world before them but still possess their being-in-the-world. Finally, the 'cinema of worlds' is where movies take on their artistic meaning as a truth-revealing ontological event. A non-representative experience in which the ground for Being is stirred up and Heidegger's 'call to conscience' becomes possible. Elsewhere he calls this "attunement" (*Gestimmtheit*) – "the moment of vision" that "brings existence into the situation and discloses the authentic 'there'" (Heidegger, 1962: 398). An awareness that one is, but is not a thing – but something that is distinctly mine for me to choose. An event by which Dasein recognises itself in its world that awakens its concern for self and world (Heidegger, 1962: 29). Such an event transcends notions of subjective and objective perception found in most phenomenological treatments of cinematic experiences. Why this is significant, is that like the call to authenticity, Dasein understands its shared notion of Being exists in-relation to nothing. What habitually it takes to be so psychologically, culturally or personally unique about itself, i.e., its facticity, is what is most contingent about it – all of those things could be different, yet, Being is needed for any of them to reveal themselves. Onto-cinematic events as art have the potential for this rift or unsettling moment, which we either take notice of or look away from.

2. Heidegger and the Possibility of Cinema as Art

Whilst art and artist have always been mediated by 'technology,' a brush, paint, canvas, chisel, hammer, etc., these, for Heidegger, are constitutive of a work-world, objects grounded in the world by their materiality and functionality. Whilst Heidegger seems to be clear about what he means by art or 'great art' such as painting, music, and poetry – the growing appeal of radio, photography, television, and cinema concerns him. The use of technology in media contains the threat of what Heidegger calls the '*Gestell*' or 'enframing' (Heidegger, 1977: 325). This refers to a mediating structure that connects the body and world (a frame), but at the same time reveals a strangeness – an artifice that invites existential awakening. The disquiet one feels, however, is a necessary part of transcending it. Indeed, for cinema or computer games to become art it must.

One of the great theorists of technological alienation prior to Heidegger was Marx, who share some similarities. Where technology not only replaces us in the world, but we come to self-identify through it, we come to take on the being of technology. The mediation between world, self, and things via technology was a concern for both thinkers. The danger of technology

lies in humans identifying with and through technology. We expand technological metaphors and thinking to all areas of life. Brains become 'computers,' psychological states become 'software,' education is us 'downloading information,' communication becomes 'information' reduced to capital-generating algorithms. Today the ubiquity of 'screens' from smartphones and devices to televisions and cinemas is something that would have resonated with Heidegger. By identifying with and through technology we cease to exist as free humans and side with our captors. While this used to be about mass production in factories, line-assembly, and Fordism, the worker, however, could walk away and 'unplug' – today, we not only take the factory home with us in our pockets, but it is also how we 'unplug.' Where the physical and digital worlds have coalesced; online shopping, smart homes, artificial intelligence, cryptocurrencies, data brokering, second-lives, and digital extended selves – technology is increasingly integrating itself into our subjectivity as a means for the escape and distraction that many crave.

The worry then, as it is now, is in the everydayness and fallenness of Dasein; to relinquish self-responsibility and unthinkingly drift into a non-life of automated habit is now amplified through algorithms that select for our preferences. In an 'attention economy,' it is not only easier than ever to 'escape' by staring at a screen, but it is also actively encouraged (van Krieken, 2019; Williams, 2018). One traditional mode of escape has been via entertainment, in which cinema as a mass popular culture phenomenon was a concern for Heidegger. This event has now been individuated via streaming services, in which the public communal aspect is being lost, and the viewer as consumer stays at home or on their device. Yet, the simple act of choosing what to watch reflects something of our awareness of Being, in that we know we do not want to waste hours watching something terrible. Our time is finite. Indeed, we may never get to choose in the endless doom-scrolling of possibilities that lay before us on the welcome menu, endlessly watching the first few minutes of every film, never committing to and actualising one. This is a neat allegory for the existential dilemma we face with our lives.

Technology, however, is just a tool, and like any tool we can use it well or poorly – it can help us uncover our possibilities or remove them. When writing about technology, Heidegger sees this as a manifestation of the modern subject's unthinking acceptance of Western metaphysics, which has become a barrier to self-understanding. However, everything that conceals also reveals, and the possibility of redemption can be found through our interactions and uses of technology, if it reminds or refreshes our connection between self and world. In line with Western metaphysics, our drive to representation, the correspondence theory of truth, and 'realism' as the primary way we know and experience the world is reified in photography and film. In "The Age of the World Picture", Heidegger (1977) warns about the

mass consumption of technology via photography and cinema, reinforcing this attitude about ourselves and the world. Heidegger is fairly explicit in his condemnation of television and film, which corrupt our experience of time, space, and, ultimately, ourselves. At its most pernicious, cinema acts as entertainment and escapism, but that does not mean it cannot become art. Whilst it seems clear that Heidegger thinks cinema cannot become 'great art,' contemporary Heideggerian cinema scholarship at least holds the possibility open (Loht, 2017; Quaranta, 2020; Rocamora, 2023). One indication is from Heidegger's (1971) essay, "A Dialogue on Language," where he applauds Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* as a film that might "convey a genuinely meaningful disclosure of being" (Loht, 2017: 80).

If cinema is to become art, then for Heidegger it must respond to the call for the meaning and continuation of the human, where art performs this task by transcending its concrete objectness. It ceases to exist ontically. "The artwork is something else over and above the thingly element" (Heidegger, 2011: 145). Heidegger is trying to resist an 'aesthetic' description of art and its reduction to ontic criteria. Art has nothing to do with our subjective experience, nor any objective descriptions about the work. Rather, art is known through 'moods.' '*Stimmung*' in German can be applied to both subjects and objects (Thonhauser, 2021). People as well as things can have moods, e.g., the mood or tone of a room. *Stimmung* however is neither in a subject, nor in an object, but is a relationship that unifies the whole. Neither subject nor object is primary; both arise from my being-in-the-world, which is revealed via moods. The mood of 'fear' reveals its ontic aspects in which particular things stand-out to be feared. It is a response to the external, physical world. The object of my fear is knowable, describable, and analysable, and something can be done about it. Typically, I fear anything that is a threat to my existence, which I learn to avoid. The mood of 'anxiety' reveals the ontological aspect of the world – which is Dasein. Angst comes from the understanding of ontological difference, that my Being is not founded in my being, but the other way around. The physical 'thing' I typically take to be 'me' is not the source of myself; rather, it is my awareness of existing, which itself is not-a-thing. If my Being is not a thing, then it must be a *no-thing*, an absence at the core of my existence. The moods of 'fear' or 'anxiety' are presented by *Befindlichkeit* – often translated as 'attunement,' 'affectedness,' or 'state-of-mind.' As with those English translations, 'mood' and 'state-of-mind' already contain too much association with subjectivity and psychology. *Befindlichkeit* is a spatial metaphor for the fact that one is in a mood, but also for how one is in their world. This is more than just a subjective judgement about how one feels that day. Since Plato, the role of emotions and the inner world of subjective experience have always been inferior to objective knowledge. Heidegger inverts this. 'Moods' precede knowledge. Science

would not be possible if everyone was completely indifferent to existence – where there is nothing worth asking about or trying to uncover. I must care about it and myself before any kind of enquiry can begin. Thus, moods reveal how we are in the world, before any categorical judgement can be made. They give an overall sense of my totality – is my world a happy or sad one? Does it have value and purpose or is it insignificant? Where the mood of fear reveals the ontic aspect of my world (e.g., a physical threat), angst reveals the fundamental ontological structure of my world in general (e.g., contingency of being). My sense of existing is not exhausted by objective scientific description, nor social conventions. I am the sum of the possibilities afforded to me, none of them apart from death being necessary. I am more than my biography, which ultimately rests on nothing. This is troubling, but also enigmatic and mysterious. The Being that I share with all beings, is itself a no-thing. When reflected upon it becomes ineffable; however, we can use art to give it form and sense-making. The reason any kind of objective or empirical enquiry becomes possible is because we are affected by the world and its mystery. The perplexity that it and us both exist causes us to 'look.' We investigate and here begins natural philosophy. Artists do the same; however, maybe they are more sensitive to the mystery of existence and its affecting powers in a way most of us are not. Great artists are able to objectify this 'look' in the artwork, where it shows a shadow of an ontological event, the mystery of Being. Through the materiality of the piece, such that it is not the artwork that is the source of contemplation, but the world it evokes, we find the power of art. Thus, no amount of ontic inspection – the geometry, colouring, composition, or studying of the artist's intentions – will reveal the origin of art.

A film goes from 'movie' (entertainment) to 'cinema' (art) via its ability to invoke a mood. In his own examples, such as Van Gogh's 'A Pair of Shoes,' Heidegger says the work reveals or becomes a 'world.' 'Worlds' disclosed through art are only possible for Dasein who undertakes 'attentive dwelling' – to experience the transcendental non-objective, non-representational relationship to the artwork – to inhabit its world and thereby refresh or renew being-in-one's-own-world (Heidegger, 2011: 150). It has to be considered at least possible that a film can do the same thing, where it renews the world of the viewer by bringing Dasein into the world of the work itself as part of the artistic process. The viewer is neither psychologically nor emotionally invested in the object, where we suspend judgement and become compliant, open to audience exploitation. Nor do we become distanced from the object so that it becomes present-to-hand for us. This is where the film critic finds themselves as they study the object according to some pre-defined criterion of what makes a good film. Rather the 'work' allows itself to be re-discovered – existing as an open region within the existential 'thrownness' of all

beings. A transcendental movement from the ordinary and familiar to the extraordinary and defamiliar, mirroring Dasein's own capacity for re-interpreting the meaning of one's own facticity. This reorientation of concern and care has both the work and the individual transfigure each other. The actuality of the work and myself are re-discovered through new possibilities of being.

What then can the phenomenology of the film experience tell us about the ontological structure of Dasein? I am arguing that as a form of absorption or immersion, movies as entertainment become world-concealing. That is, the world of the viewer is made invisible as they sink into the fiction on screen. The movie also conceals itself, such that in a state of absorption-immersion we do not experience the artifice of the movie, e.g., the actors, the script, the editing and so on. This presents itself as a ready-to-hand state. Generally, we would call this a 'good' film – in which we lose ourselves, have our emotional states altered, and maybe come out with a form of catharsis. We can do this because the movie reflects our worlds back to us. The 'worlds of cinema' mask our own. It does not challenge us – rather, the ready-to-hand experience is possible because we already know what a film is and how it should go. It completely meets expectations. There is a fidelity between what I see, know and experience as a world in my everydayness.

If, however, one is not absorbed or immersed in the movie, then a form of distancing occurs. Here, the movie becomes present-to-hand such that either a movie critic can study the technicalities of the film, or, for the disinterested spectator, they become hyper-aware that they are being shown a movie. This is generally the experience of watching a 'bad' film. I am looking at it, but it does not look at me. I see it, but I do not feel seen. It does not resonate with me. Both the trained movie critic and displeased movie-goer form their judgements by whether it meets their expectations. They both already have an understanding of what a 'good' film is and thus apply their definition. This, too, conceals rather than reveals our worlds. The film critic has intellectual or academic standards to apply. The average person seeks the ready-to-hand of convention as to what they take a film-experience to be, but they may be disappointed. Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey* infamously baffled critics, industry experts, and average spectators alike as it eschew Hollywood norms. It does not have a clear narrative. It is neither character-driven, nor well-acted. It was mostly silent and slow-paced. It ventures into the surreal and confusing using sound and image more than dialogue. It is experiential rather than intellectual. The film critic Renata Adler described it as somewhere between "hypnotic and immensely boring," denoting a "failure of artistry" (Barton-Palmer, 2006: 19). However, not all films have to be of the calibre of *2001* in order to be deemed confusing, boring or bad. For

example, a film that utilises the 'female gaze' can serve to highlight how unrealistic and biased the movie is because 'realism' for a certain demographic is reflected by a 'male,' predominately white-heterosexual, 'gaze' (Butler, 2008; hooks, 2012). Their beliefs, biases, prejudices, and assumptions do not become known to them; rather, they simply see a film with an 'agenda,' unlike all the movies they rate with clear 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' The meaning of those films is so accessible they appear transparent – simply 'there' as a reflection of their world. The world of the misogynist or racist is concealed from them. To highlight any minority experience, or any experience 'other' than theirs, is not only to misrepresent the world but what a movie is. This is generally disruptive for the mainstream viewer, but not to the point of self-reflection or philosophical engagement. *2001* was just dull, not deep, nor profound. The movie critic and average viewer alike reproduce the standards and norms of their worlds. Neither, however, have their worlds brought into doubt – it simply reveals what they already know to be correct, reinforcing who they are and, by doing so, conceals all other possibilities. This I make synonymous with the 'worlds of cinema' in that we accept what we see as either a tacit or explicit verification of our world (negatively or positively). If it is positive, then the world on screen has fidelity with our own. If it is negative, then the world on screen bears the makes of infidelity. It is 'wrong' or 'inaccurate' such that ethnic minority casting or subverted gender roles de-centres the viewer's experience. Black hobbits or a female 007 are not right. Maybe due to my political and moral beliefs such movies scream 'Hollywood liberal agenda.' This form of conflict with what one is presented with only deepens the commitment as to how things are. Aliens and magic can exist, but historically accurate Sikh soldiers in a World War Two epic is "forced diversity" (Miller, 2021).

Where cinema can become art, it must have the power to disclose Dasein's world to it – which comes about not by rejecting or accepting what one is seeing but by engaging with an onto-cinematics of worlding, which I call the 'cinema of worlds.' This opens up the potential for Dasein to reinterpret, find new meaning, and transform its world via the new understanding it has both of itself and art. Indeed, the movie itself enacts this for the viewer, hence why it is the cinema of worlds. Here, the specific medium of cinema can do things other art forms cannot, with space, time, motion, light, sound, colour and image. To maybe see oneself in the shoes of another, as possibly Van Gogh did for Heidegger, to take on someone else's place or story, to be put in a mode of self-reflection and introspection, and to take one's being seriously, is transformative. Indeed, it might be part of the materiality of cinema that it can do these things. Whether cinema can become 'great art,' which Heidegger views as a cultural event, like Greek architecture, remains outside the scope of this essay. However, like great art, the viewer of the

work is changed, their world is disrupted, they no longer feel at home, and a sense of angst creeps in.

Next, I will develop the notions of the 'worlds of cinema,' which is the conventional relationship we have with movies as entertainment or objects of criticism, and the 'cinema of worlds' in which, as art, it discloses the world, forcing us to reflect on Being.

3. The 'Worlds of Cinema' and the 'Cinema of Worlds'

As part of the conventions of movie watching, we prepare a space and ourselves. Here, our environments can assist in altering attentive and critical states. As beings who come from a world where movies are already a 'thing,' certain expectations are already understood. A contract, as it were, between the subject and object. We consent to be lied to. We will need to suspend disbelief in order to join the fictional drama unfolding before us. We pretend for however long that the actors are their characters, that there are no camera crews present, and that the world we are about to enter has its own laws and rules that in our world may be impossible. Gunning (2009) highlights the use of dark and light in altering critical reception and in focusing our attention. Kracauer (1960) goes further, suggesting that within the dark of the cinema theatre, where we are being asked to observe, we lose a sense of self-definition, and a type of resignation takes over us as we are no longer the source of the story, relinquishing control to the screen (Kracauer, 1960: 159). However, even if we are no longer the primary author, the story must be one we are prepared to listen to if escape or immersion is to happen. Ayfre (1964: 140) criticises the modern technological methods of production and distribution, which are designed to either over-stimulate or pacify. He highlights a form of audience exploitation in which appeals to the erotic, violent or sentimental only move the audience at a base psychological or emotional level. It is a form of audience manipulation or exploitation. The people watching become as two-dimensional as the characters on the screen. For a moment the world is reduced and simplified. Ayfre (1964) says that these conditions only provoke escape from the self, which, if we are to confront and change, requires the artwork to reorientate us towards what is difficult. Loht's (2017, 2024) reorientation here is that movies can foster communal attunement. Whilst he does not argue for movies as a large culture-changing event, he does suggest that films have the power to construct shared realities that elicit empathy. By identifying with the characters' lives, we develop a sense of 'Being-with-others' where we connect the fictional narratives with our own. Here, the cinematic experience is a communal

ritual. We join a collective audience, sharing emotions and reactions as one. Whilst Loht (2017, 2024) is arguing for the movie as a shared collective experience that provides us with opportunities to transcend our personal realities and cultivate a sense of collective humanity, this can be done 'inauthentically' as well as 'authentically.' The need to escape from ourselves is why we wish to transcend our personal realities, and the need to disappear into a crowd as an amorphous 'collective humanity' can still be part of the audience's desire to be exploited. This then correlates with a type of mob-mentality of 'the-They.'

Cinema that remains at the ontic level for both the critic and average observer is to be taken in by the facticity of the movie. Just as Scorsese compared Marvel comic book hero movies to theme park rides, it is not just that we are overwhelmed by the entertainment in the same way we are with roller-coasters, bigger, faster, noisier and so on, but that everything is expected (Baker, 2015). A theme park ride is an 'experience machine' – it generates a desire that it attempts to fulfil. There is nothing new except the immediacy of instant gratification, which eventually becomes boring in its inability to satiate. There is also an allusion here in which such movies like Marvel only exist to sell official branded merchandise. In essence, it is not a movie, but a very long and expensive advert for Disney. As with adverts and marketing, emotional and psychological dispositions are appealed to unless one actively resists. Whilst the critic maybe sees overblown and over-marketed movies for what they are, they still must remain an objective observer from within the confines of the 'world of cinema' to which they belong. Whilst it is not something that I have addressed directly in this paper, the question concerning the meaning of Being can reveal itself via the mood of 'boredom' (Heidegger, 1985). This may have less to do with the film becoming art and more to do with the angst at the sense of time wasted, the predictability, the almost clairvoyance of knowing how a movie is going to unfold, that precedes boredom, and ultimately the loss and mourning that comes with such an awareness (Quaranta, 2020). The 'worlds of cinema' seduce and captivate the viewer in a base form of entertainment. This, however, is finite. It suffers the same fate as a life of hedonism. We have a limit. There is a saturation point in which no more thrill, disgust or laughter can be had. This may lead the viewer to consume more extreme cinema or turn towards other media for a quicker, bigger hit. The 'world of cinema' as I am describing it here manifests a form of 'idle talk' (Heidegger, 1962). Dasein's shared everyday world is full of 'chatter,' a pre-ontological, view-from-nowhere, such that it does not belong to anyone in particular. Yet, it is from this chatter that we draw a generic understanding of things and ourselves. As it belongs to everyone, it also belongs to no one, and through this, we absolve ourselves of any self-responsibility. We think, desire, opine, feel, and move like everybody else. The 'worlds' of sociality and cinema can

appeal to this aspect of us such that we can rely on them not to call for the self-questioning of ontological difference. We can be lost in endless screen time that calls for non-thinking, amusing memes that even parody 'thinking' such as 'angry French Camus cats.' Here the world on screen acts as a distraction to only conceal my world further – I either agree with it, moving into a form of immersion or absorption (ready-to-hand), or disagree with it, making *that* world of cinema present-at-hand. The movie here draws attention to things that have no place in my world. The film demonstrates a lack of fidelity to my world – which can be achieved in a number of ways. For the film critic it does not accord with the standards of good film-making, for the disgruntled viewer it could be how unrealistic or provocative casting choices are revealing of the politics of the movie and so on (Butler, 2008; hooks, 2012; Miller, 2021).

Loht (2017) makes the case for movies as modes of communal attunement through our empathetic connection with characters and their worlds on screen because "we appreciate the existence of others such as ourselves because the film world is already worlded in a Dasein-centric way" (2017: 53). We all understand that our lives interconnect with others, with people similar to us, but not identical. Now how we take on the fictive similarities and differences can remain at the level of ontic facticity – this shared world is only 'common' because it shares a fidelity with mine. If I am unable to get past the facticity of the 'female gaze' presented in the movie, for example, as it is not only unrepresentative of how the world is, according to me, but also of what a movie is, then I will not empathise with the characters, struggles or experiences being shown. It is in the 'worlds of cinema' that the facticity of the movie and my own world become identical. Here the viewer is not aware of their world, only that the world of the movie does not accord with it and thus stands out as a 'bad film.' This should be of no surprise for if the intention is to escape into the 'worlds of cinema' we self-select movies, like tools, that we believe will achieve this. Today, however, with home-streaming services and algorithms that reinforce our viewing habits of consumption, worldviews become ever more entrenched as we are over-exposed to the same stories being told in the same way. As with the theme park ride, it is the same automated mechanical motion every time. Here over-representation of how we think the world is comes via the forced suggestions and search results of technology designed to keep our attention (van Krieken, 2019; Williams, 2018). Where choice becomes automated, maybe more than Heidegger could ever have imagined, the individual becomes a determined extension of technology – the dream goal of all marketing.

This, however, is not determinate.

If cinema can become art, it must re-connect us with Being. It must reinvigorate the question concerning the meaning of Being. We move from the ontic to the ontological. From

the objectivity of the film to a questioning of the meaning of objects, including the object that asks the question. Here it is through onto-cinematics, the worlding that cinema reveals, that we come to a sense of our being-in-the-world. What I have called the 'cinema of worlds' is how artistic choices, which are too numerous to list, figure in this existential awakening. A popular take here is on the tensions and transgression between telling and showing or revealing and concealing. For Heidegger, this is performed by art via the primordial interplay between 'world' and 'Earth,' between the ontic and ontological, between categorical and existential space that it constantly veils and unveils (Loht, 2017). In the 'cinema of worlds' the onto-cinematic experience becomes a paradox: a showing that inherently conceals. Each shot frames a world beyond its borders, while edits and transitions perpetually mask one image with another. Characters are enigmatic, revealing fragments of themselves that resist complete comprehension or defying type. Possibly, Bresson requires his actors to 'do less' just like the untrained donkey in *Au hasard Balthazar*. A possible mediation on anti-acting from an animal. This can bring us back to our worlds where rather than relying on generic understanding or an unthinking opinion of 'the They,' we see the fundamental absence (the nothing) that belies all phenomena and our comprehension of them. Film, as a visual language, can become poetic, drawing us into this paradox that my Being known through beings (film) is not a thing, giving the space to bring about new possibilities and interpretations. We can only recognise a world by first knowing what it is like to be part of one ourselves. It is this aspect that is neither explicitly artistic nor techno-environmental. Knowing what it is like to be part of a world, in the Heideggerian sense, also comes with the possibility that *we can lose our worlds*. This is where the 'cinema of worlds' is located. It is here that the subject-object can be transformed in and through art, as it frees the possibilities for new meanings. As part of the 'cinema of worlds' it is neither absorbing or immersive nor distancing or distracting. When cinema becomes art it reveals the contingency of existence, which for Heidegger is experienced through fundamental moods such as anxiety or profound boredom. It is this that gives the possibility for authenticity. Critchley (2009) utilises a 'marine' metaphor where the inauthentic life is a kind of "groundless floating" where "everyday life in the world is like being immersed in the sea and drowned by the world's suffocating banality". Prior to the experience of angst, this banality is transparent to us. It is this 'banality' we wish to be saved from through the 'worlds of cinema.' However, in the 'cinema of worlds' banality and angst present themselves through momentary depthlessness where we understand we are as fictional as the fantasy in front of us. Here we become distinct from our worlds and stand alone. Echoing other 'ontologies of cinema' such as Elsaesser's (2005) where cinema as ontology instantiates "the groundless ground of our being – and

reconciling us to it (renewing our 'belief in the world')" (Paalman, 2021: 29), I call this *onto-cinematics*.

At any point, one can be seized by the feeling of meaninglessness, by the radical distinction between themselves and the world in which they find themselves. It is the understanding that our 'self' has been lost to 'the They,' where one has been temporarily captured by the 'worlds of cinema,' sedated by entertainment. This presents the possibility of winning or claiming one's self back. This is a kind of 'conversion' point of the self – but for Heidegger, this is not a re-orientation towards God, but towards 'death' (the nothing). Here, the 'cinema of worlds' reveals ontological difference, possibly the artifice of the film reminds me of the artifice of my own life, the characters I play and that we all inhabit, the contingency of my choices and how they do not constitute my totality, nor anyone else's? How the actuality of my world is only known via its possibilities to which the film has now drawn my attention. Neither immersed, absorbed, distracted, or distanced, the viewer is unsettled. The breaking down of the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' the movie, between spectator and actor, between fiction and reality here is not an ontic one of metaleptic transgression, but an onto-cinematic one, which I call the 'cinema of worlds' and which reveals its source in the world of Dasein.

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