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Carl Plantinga and Murray Smith applied to *Dillinger* and *Kalifornia*

Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith's book *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion* invite several film theorists to share their understanding of the relationship between cognition, emotion, and film. In this book, theorists like Susan L. Feagin and Murray Smith explore and define different theoretical elements filmmakers use to affect their audiences. For instance, Feagin's essay, "Time and Timing," discusses how film editing and timing affect a viewer's emotional responses, while Smith's essay, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances" talks about the function of moral perversion in movies. Though multiple films can serve as examples for both essays, *Dillinger* (Milius, 1973) and *Kalifornia* (Sena, 1993) demonstrate elements from the texts, respectively, as Feagin's chapter applies to *Dillinger* and Smith's chapter applies to *Kalifornia*.

To begin, Feagin highlights ten key terms, all of which appear in Milius's 1973 movie. The first terms Feagin discusses are the **duration of the image** and **durational relationships**. The duration of the image is how long an image appears on the screen. At the same time, durational relationships include the relative duration of early images, the time between or in earlier images, and the time between early and present images. Durational relationships are relative to how long other images are on screen. In her essay, Feagin defines an image as "a portion of a film that can be experienced as, or thought of as, a unit;" therefore, images include

scenes, which is how Milius utilizes these elements in *Dillinger* (Feagin qtd. in Smith and Plantinga 168). For example, the opening scene of *Dillinger* occurs during 0:00-1:23. The duration of this image is about a minute, which is significant given its relationship to the film. This scene introduces and characterizes Dillinger (Warren Oates), so audiences immediately understand his personality as charming, infamous, rebellious, egotistical, and devious with how he charms the women in the bank before robbing it. Consequently, the duration of the opening scene, which is a minute, helps establish its durational relationship to the film in that it lasts long enough to establish Dillinger as a character.

Next, Feagin defines **elicitors** and **conditioners**. Elicitors are the parts of the film people respond to. So, in *Dillinger*, viewers react to the scene when Homer Van Meter (Harry Dean Stanton) tries to intimidate the gas station owner (Milius 6:26-8:12). The older man is unbothered that Van Meter is threatening him, eliciting a comedic response from the audience, especially as the other Dillinger gang members begin to laugh. In addition, conditioners are how people respond (their beliefs, ideas, moods, attitudes, etc.), which are psychological states and properties of that person. Therefore, in the previous example, the elicitor is Van Meter and the gas station owner's back-and-forth, while the conditioner is the comedic response from audience members. However, one should note that viewers do not have the same reaction or conditioner because everyone has different experiences.

To continue, Feagin then describes **sensitivities**, which are conditions in which people react differently to different situations. Sensitivities are features of the person's psyche that explain how or why they behave in certain ways. One moment that showcases sensitivities occurs at 13:45 when Melvin Purvis (Ben Johnson) mentions personally delivering his wedding present to a man on the FBI's wanted list who had recently married. Some viewers may react

negatively to Purvis because he also appears egotistical. It implies that Purvis is willing to do anything to reach his goals and narrow the wanted list, even if his actions and intentions are morally questionable. However, on the other hand, some viewers might agree with Purvis's approach because he is chasing and hunting down notorious criminals. The questioning of Purvis's morals and the possible differing opinions that can stem from it is an example of sensitivities and how people react differently.

As for **timing** and **sequencing**, Feagin suggests that timing is a property of a film that regards the relationship between the duration and the durational relationship between the film and viewers. Essentially, timing is the interval of the movie. Moreover, sequencing is the order in which events are presented in a narrative. As timing and sequencing refer to broad cinematic elements like how long a movie lasts or how events are put in order, the interval of *Dillinger* switches between Dillinger and Purvis's perspectives. Thus, the timing and the sequencing allow viewers to see the journey unfold from two perspectives. As this sequencing and timing continue, it appears that the more crimes Dillinger commit, the close Purvis is the capturing him, like at 25:40-27:20 when Purvis catches George 'Machine Gun' Kelly after Dillinger's not-so-successful bank heist. This pattern of back-and-forth between Dillinger and Purvis's perspectives refers to sequencing because that is how they were purposefully ordered for the film's timing interval.

Then, Feagin discusses **cognitive stock**, the pool of beliefs, ideas, and thoughts (sensitivities) an audience may have. If an audience doesn't have the cognitive shock represented in the film, it may need to generate it. An audience member's previous experiences also affect their cognitive stock. During his opening narration, which occurs between 4:00 and 5:39, Purvis

provides the basis of his journey as he reveals the people he is hunting, Dillinger and his gang, and why he is hunting them. As this narration occurs after the opening scene introducing Dillinger, viewers can refer to this cognitive stock to understand who and why Purvis is after this infamous bank robber. The bank robbery sets up information for the audience to store in their minds, and it becomes relevant during Purvis's narration.

The last two terms Feagin defines are **indirect and direct timing**. Indirect timing is when timing creates a cognitive state that contributes to how the viewer feels or responds to the film, like in art films. On the other hand, direct timing is when the timing does not create a cognitive state to spark a response from audiences – the emotions they feel do not require cognitive activity. Essentially, direct timing does not need viewers to think before reacting. For example, the timing might play up an audience's emotions.

First, for indirect timing, viewers may cognitively gain a sense of tension during the scene between 8:18 and 10:35 when Dillinger meets Billie (Michelle Phillips) in the bar. As viewers already get a sense of Dillinger being somewhat of a loose cannon regarding his temper, relying on their cognitive stock from his introduction scene, his body language and his lying to Billie about his name generate a sense of unease regarding what he will do next, especially when Billie teases him. Audiences rely on their cognition to understand the anxiety built during this scene, which is related to indirect timing. Then, directing timing occurs during moments like when Eddie (Johnny Martino) runs over the woman crossing the street at 21:35. This moment is shocking and unexpected, not allowing viewers a chance to respond cognitively; therefore, their responses to the hit-and-run is instinctual and does not require thought.

Moving on, Sena's *Kalifornia* orients itself within Murray Smith's essay, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances," by showcasing several concepts

Smith defines. First, Smith describes the term, exaptation. **Exaptation** is when a particular feature of a species is used to do a new or different function than what was initially intended. It may be helpful to think about exaptation in biological terms as it describes how some animals adapt to survive in the wild. However, exaptation can also occur when adaptations aren't present, so one may think of it as something suddenly changing function. In terms of film, exaptation is like when a particular feature of a genre is used differently in another movie or genre, like how kissing has a sexual undertone in some movies. An example of exaptation occurs when Early (Brad Pitt) gifts Adele (Juliette Lewis) the red heels while they are in the diner (Sena 8:34-8:40). During this scene, Adele mentions how Early giving her the shoes reminds her of the famous fairytale "Cinderella," which was adapted into an animated movie in 1950. In the film *Cinderella* (Geronimi, Jackson, and Luske, 1950), a prince gifts a servant girl with a pair of glass slippers, making her his princess. However, in *Kalifornia*, Early gifts Adele with a less glamorous pair of heels, which he took from one of his victims. This scene is an example of exaptation because it puts a troubling twist on the fairytale, adapting the shoe-giving trope into something more sinister.

Next, Smith discusses **first and second-order perversity**. First-order perversity is when someone genuinely enjoys doing something morally wrong, while second-order perversity is when someone only enjoys doing something because it is morally wrong. They don't necessarily enjoy the act but enjoy the wrongness associated with it. Second-order perversity is like when a viewer roots for the villain. They would not personally do what the villain does, but they enjoy watching morally wrong actions in the film. Movies usually make viewers choose between first and second-order perversity, and Sena's film demonstrates more first-order perversity than second-order perversity.

In *Kalifornia*, Early shows several signs of first-order perversity. For example, he displays that he enjoys violence, like at 17:15-17:28 when he chases his landlord with his car. Early laughs as the man runs away, showing that he enjoys or at least finds amusement from morally wrong actions. Early also listens to Brian (David Duchovny) and Carrie (Michelle Forbes) having sex without their consent as he listens through the wall at 35:30. He also kills a police officer and then takes a picture of the body afterward at 1:28:27. Though these are only a few things to demonstrate Early's morally wrong behavior, he acts upon these things with no real reason. Violence appears to be Early's obsession. He never shows interest in celebrating the wrongness of his actions; he simply acts and does what he wants, which includes being a serial killer and thief. Because of this obsession with violence and the amusement he finds from it, one can argue that Early genuinely enjoys doing morally wrong things, which falls within first-order perversity.

However, there is a potential moment of second-order perversity in the film. Though he never explicitly explains why he became a serial killer, Early shares his theory about the "Black Dahlia Killer" when he mentions about how he thinks the kill enjoys the fact they got away with murder (Sena 47:15-47:22). One may argue that Early considers his own thoughts regarding murder when he records this message. This scene raises the potential that Early kills for the enjoyment of not getting caught, which would favor second-order perversity more as the evasion would be the focal point of Early's amusement rather than any actual morally wrong behavior. However, because Early never clarifies; instead, he kills for the enjoyment of violence or the pleasure of wrongness, his actions primarily appear impulse and for his own amusement.

Next, Smith discusses moral perversity using the terms **alignment and allegiance**. Alignment is when someone can put themselves in the character's shoes and see themselves

doing or feeling similar actions and emotions. However, allegiance is when someone can directly relate to the characters. The audience member sympathizes with or feels apathy towards a character. Sometimes an audience member relates to or is drawn to a character because of their dubious behavior or morally wrong behavior, which is perverse allegiance. Where alignment gives a viewer access to a character's thoughts and emotions, shows who the film follows, and allows one to understand the character, allegiance is when the moral structure of a movie gets a viewer to side with a character. Both appear in *Kalifornia*.

The film gives audiences direct access to Brian's thoughts through narration during and after some scenes, like at 5:53-7:13, where he discusses his motivations and goals, or like 24:18-24:31, where he mentions why he ignores Carrie's concerns about Early and Adele. Because the film gives audiences direct access to these thoughts, its goal is to align viewers with Brian as they understand Brian's decisions. However, the film wants viewers to find allegiance with Carrie. The film sets up a moral structure where viewers find allegiance with Carrie as she is the only suspicious of Early and tries to help Adele. For example, she confronts Brian about Early's suspicious and potentially dangerous history between 1:00:47 and 1:02:18. Though Brian tries to brush off Carrie's warnings, audience members can directly relate to Carrie as they can assume they would remain tense and suspicious of Early because of his strange behavior.

Smith also explores Puritan morality with the key terms **Anti-Puritanical morality and the paradox of amoralism**. Anti-Puritanical morality is a reaction against Puritan morality, which condemns unconventional behavior, sexuality, and the limitations of what they think is right. Anti-Puritanical morality uses the imagination of decadence and aestheticism to emphasize representation and reality, which Puritanism disagrees with. Anti-Puritanical morality appears with Carrie. Decadence and aestheticism were creative movements that celebrated artistic and

sexual experimentation. Thus, Carrie presents Anti-Puritanical morality with her photography. Carrie's photos include naked people and sexual themes, as shown at 10:50, which are in accordance with decadence and aestheticism and contradict Puritan values.

The following term, the paradox of amoralism, is when a moralist assumes an amoralist's values are immoral. In the movie, this concept also arises with Carrie. Carrie presents herself as a moralist when she displays her suspicions and judgment regarding an amoral Early. When she discovers that Early has been to jail before, during 56:00-57:10, she immediately judges him and has further evidence to prove his values are immoral to her. Additionally, when Adele looks at Carrie's photos, she mentions how Early would beat her if she did what Carrie does, and Carrie casts further judgment onto Early as immoral (Sena 51:27-52:15). As the paradox of amoralism describes, in *Kalifornia,* Carrie is one of the few morally considerate characters and Early is the most amoral character; therefore, Carrie's judgment of Early is her viewing his actions as immoral.

Lastly, Smith describes character types and what attracts audiences to them. The first character he talks about is **the good-bad character**. This character is technically good but appears to have a bad quality or feature to them, usually one relating to violence. Usually, the good-bad character has not done anything evil, but they seem corrupt. Brian is a good-bad character as he dreams of being a writer, which is a noble goal; however, he is willing to do anything to write a successful book about serial killers, including ignoring Carrie's warnings and Early's red flags. For example, between 1:09:56 and 1:10:30, Carrie and Brian argue about how Carrie suspects that Early is dangerous and that they should leave the couple behind. However, instead of considering Carrie's worries, Brian implies that he is more worried about Carrie finishing her picture for the book. Brian's narrow mind and friendship with Early blind him to

the truth, creating a flaw within his character even though he has not done anything wrong or criminal. The good-bad character can represent an anti-hero as their moral structure is bad, but they do what they think is right. Brian's moral structure is wrong because he chooses to overlook Early's concerning behavior; however, he does so to focus on his goals, which he thinks is the right thing to do.

The next character Smith mentions is **the attractive-bad character**. The attractive-bad character is a character who is morally wrong but attractive to audience members. Their charisma usually preserves allegiance between them and viewers; sometimes, an actor's performance helps in this attraction. Early is an attractive-bad character because Brad Pitt plays him. Pitt is an attractive and well-known actor, given his standout roles in films like *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991) before his role as Early. However, in *Kalifornia*, Pitt plays a serial killer, a bad character. The film also utilizes Pitt's attractiveness, like at 19:00-21:16 when he's naked, covered in grime, and digging the hole, which will later be the grave of his landlord. When he comes out of the hole, the film shows his naked body and butt, again playing upon the actor's attractiveness for viewers despite his character's actions.

The last character in Smith's essay is the **parasite**, an infection spread through sexual contact that removes a character's humanity and leaves them with carnal sexual desire. Essentially, the parasite strips characters of their humanness. The parasite is not clear in *Kalifornia*; however, there is an argument that one might consider Early a parasite for Adele. He cuts her hair, forces her not to eat breakfast, and threatens her with bodily and mental harm if she does not obey him. Furthermore, their relationship is highly sexual, like when she reveals her breasts to him at 9:59 as a promise when he returns to their trailer. Therefore, one can argue the more Early and Adele sleep together, or the longer they continue their relationship, the more

humanness Adele loses, especially when Early makes her do things she would not have done before meeting him.

Works Cited

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