

Seeing is *not* believing

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Introduction

Imagine your favorite movie. If you are anything like me, you enjoy it because of the interesting characters, the colorful world they inhabit, and the hardships they overcome together. Movies make us laugh, move us to tears, and have us hiding our faces in terror. It should come as no surprise that philosophers are interested in understanding how stories that are not real make us do that. On first blush, these behaviors elicited at the movies look a lot like what we might refer to as a regular set of emotional responses, or what Peter Kivy calls ‘the garden-variety’ (1989, p. 135ff). If we find something funny, we laugh and are overjoyed; when we are sad at something, we cry; and when we are scared, we hide from what scared us. But the location of the emotion is a tricky thing to pin down. Jesse Prinz (2004) calls the issue ‘the problem of parts’, which is illustrated in figure 1. Say your pet dies and you become sad. Was the emotion of “sadness” the aversive judgment that some perceived scenario represents loss, or was it the physiological response, which is to say the judgment *caused* the emotion of sadness, or sadness motivated your judgment? Are emotions in the mind or in the body? I say, along with Katherine Tullman (2012), that emotions are best thought of as metacognitive judgments alongside of physiological types.

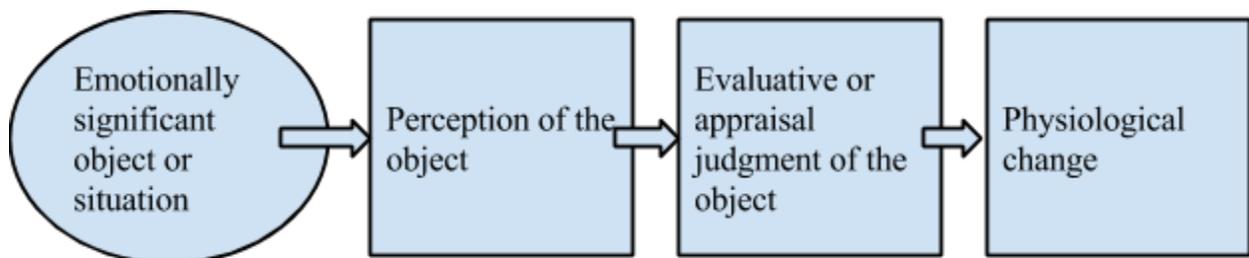


Fig. 1: What part of the arrangement is the emotion?

This essay proceeds in three sections. The first section addresses the paradox of fiction, which locates the problem of discussing the affect elicited from film fiction as emotions. Roughly speaking, if the affect at the horror film is genuine fear, there is a need to explain how we can be afraid of something that we know, or perhaps should know, is not putting ourselves, or any *actual* people, in any real danger. Kendall Walton resolves the problem by taking it at its terms; he does not call the affect at the movies emotions at all, reserving emotions for those instances where our agent responds to what she

believes to be actual circumstances impacting her well being. The second section entertains two contrasting suggestions that aim to move the affect prompted by film fiction into the category of emotions. One is that because emotions are a somatic (i.e. noncognitive) response, and therefore do not require any robust mental furnishings to experience them, movie theater emotions cannot be about the movies that caused them, even if they are what started them.

On the other end, some suggest that emotions are products of subject belief states (cognitions), because they are thoughts containing what philosophers refer to as *intentional content*. This means that emotions are thoughts *about* something. For describing what emotions are and subsequently how film fiction might issue them, we must jump back and forth between emotions being the stuff that moves us to the picket lines and also, potentially, a reaction that can have us eating another handful of popcorn while we whimper in fright. Referring back to section one, the positions that pin emotions at the movies as irrational viewer responses will be deemed insufficient in how to appropriately assess the phenomenology of emotional experience. Lastly, the third section considers how a hybrid theory of emotions explains how the emotions experienced at the movies are homogenous to emotions experienced towards the actual world while at the same time distinct in their behavioral outcomes. The hybrid theory allows for emotions at the movies to share the same physiological status as emotions aimed at the actual world, even if our beliefs about movies are not shared with our beliefs about the actual world.

Section 1: The Paradox of Fiction

To be brief, fictional narratives are about something that could possibly be true, and evaluating the trueness of a set of propositions towards a movie's fictional world and not the actual world comes at a price.¹ Representing a battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader in *Star Wars* (1977) on the silver screen is not the same as claiming that in the actual world there was once a battle between Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. We can say that things are true of the representation insofar as the fictional world of *Star Wars* is concerned, but those statements do not then apply to the actual world.

¹ Genres like abstract films will not service under the category of fiction, as they are, by definition, non-representational imagery that may elicit moods or, perhaps, emotional states, but do not register coherent intended beliefs about made-up characters and events.

We might even say all propositions about Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader are prefaced with “In the fictional world of Star Wars” before we can evaluate their trueness.²

The problem this essay is looking to solve is as follows. Movies that are about fictional entities seem to really move us. We watch with bated breath as Dr. Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) battles French adversaries and escapes from ancient Mayan boobytraps. Meanwhile, you as a viewer in the cinema have no problem in acknowledging that there was not a history professor in the 1940s plundering Biblical artefacts from the Nazis. If anyone were to stop you on the street and suggest that there was such a figure, you might very well feel less awe and more pity as you tell the storyteller to try another audience. In that case, the previous statement in relation to the last should strike us as odd. We have no problem hoping Indiana will make it to Egypt while he is on screen, but when we talk about someone telling us an untrue story, we are apathetic because it lacks credibility. The problem can be summed up in these conflicting propositions:

- “1) We are genuinely moved by fictions
- 2) We know that that which is portrayed in fictions is not actual
- 3) We are only genuinely moved by what we believe is actual.”

(Carroll 2012)

Premises 1-2 and 3 are in contradiction. We have to kick one of these three premises out, or at least adjust their language, for the propositions to be true together. This will tell us whether or not fictions genuinely move us, thus allowing us to call our feelings at the movies emotions. A couple strategies come out of this.

Historically, many film theorists have tended to remove the second proposition, which is an epistemic relationship between the viewer and the fictional movie. For these theorists, watching movies puts us in a state of mind that is unable to detect the illusoriness of the filmic image. Psychoanalytic theorists have suggested that we enter an unconsciously motivated fetal state within the darkened room of the cinema, allowing for us to become dependent on the screen image to tell us about the world

² See Thomasson, A.L. (1999) for an explication of metaphysical problems for objects within fictional worlds.

without our better-knowing conscious appeals.³ Trembling at the movies, under this account, stems from some part of your mental structure misunderstanding the images on screen as being real. I will leave these theories at this rather reductive level, but their key assertion, that emotions are engaged only when people are in situations where the emotions are called for ego-centric action, will be on the chopping block later in the essay.

Kendall Walton (see section 1.2) eliminates the first proposition from the triad. Film fiction does not genuinely move us, he says, we merely play up to them. Just as when you are in a dress rehearsal for *Henry the IV*, you act *as if* you are a bloated English nobleman named Falstaff, thereby behaving *as if* you have the emotions that the character is written to possess. Acting can be convincing depending on who is performing. It looks like the person sitting next to you is terrified out of their wits, but really, they are great actors.

Noel Carroll, Aaron Meskin, and Catherine Tullman eliminate the third premise. Their suggestion is that emotions, being cognitions supplied with a given set of criteria, can work outside of beliefs about the actual world, within our capacity to imagine. In my essay, I too will dissolve the paradox by negating the third premise, yet pulling us away from the stance that says emotions must begin with belief-states as the primer in an emotional sequence, featured in the aforementioned writers' work. We are genuinely moved by film fiction, not in the same way we are genuinely moved by what we believe is actual, even if elements from actual world situations feature into our filmic response. While watching *Raiders*, audience anger towards villainous Frenchman René Belloq as he jeopardizes the safety of the world for a paycheck from fascist Germany in the fictional film *is the same type of anger* you experience when your beloved independent cinema turns into a corporate megaplex, despite their relationships to the their respective worlds being different.

1.1 It's Only Your Imagination

Human beings are susceptible to occasional episodes when something apprehended by our perceptual apparatus does not match with actual circumstances. Walking down the street at night, you

³ See especially Metz, Christian (1982) for Lacanian psychoanalytic theory accounting for affect and film fiction

might mistake a shadow cast on the street for a man-eating wolf. A life-preserving response would be one of fear, the desire to remove yourself from a dangerous situation, but it would be an inappropriate context in which to feel this way. In the following section, I will address whether or not this is an appropriate analogy to draw for our response to film fiction, that is, movies are fantastically realized and sometimes misapprehended scary shadows.

Let us start with setting up the thing we are investigating and what our theory needs to take account of. Meskin (2003) has four explanada that any account of film fiction and the affect they evince must reconcile in order to give a full explanation. Here they are in brief:

- i) “Phenomenological and physiological robustness” - that is the affect at the movies jump starts our hearts and has us gripping our seat in terror.
- ii) “Fiction-directed affective intentionality” - when we grip the seats, we’re not doing so because we’re worried about the Dentist appointment the next day, but rather the outcome of some sequence of events portrayed in the film. What’s more, we recognize that the things threatening the characters do not threaten us.
- iii) “Behavioral circumspection” - we might be clutching to our armrests at the movies, but cases of spectators running out of the cinema flailing their hands above their heads in terror are few and far between. We must be able to explain why the fear at the movies is not enough to impact decisions towards our spot in the movie theater.
- iv) “Intimate yet ambiguous relationship to non-fictive affect and emotion” - Though it is the position of this essay, calling the affect experienced towards the horror movie ‘fear’ as a tokening of the emotion *fear*, what we might experience towards a barking dog, is a controversial position that I am obliged to defend.

These explanada will be revisited throughout the essay. As alluded to with the shadow of a wolf case, our emotions, if grounded in situationally appropriate responses, can either be caused in accordance with justified or unjustified apprehension. Thus, and crucially, our account of the possibility for emotions at the movies can fit into one of two bills:

- i) *Irrational Emotional Response* - A viewer’s affective response, generated by some apprehended scenario, is from *incorrectly* perceiving the received information as pertaining to either the

actual world or the viewer's immediate circumstance, thus mistaking the events on screen for events happening in the actual world, thereby producing the affect.

ii) *Rational Emotional Response* - A viewer's affective response, generated by some apprehended scenario, is from *correctly* perceiving the received information as *not* pertaining to either the actual world or the viewer's immediate circumstance, thus identifying the events on screen for events happening in the fictional world, thereby producing the affect.

Depending on which theoretical stance we adopt to account for the affect experienced at the movies, we will, deliberately or not, end up in either of the two frameworks. My position has it that only a rational emotional response gets at a viewer response to film fiction correctly, despite some seemingly unassailable obstacles along the way. As will be explored in section 3.2, Neo-Jamesian emotional theories commit themselves to an irrationalist framework. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with arguing that we irrationally respond to film fiction when we are afraid of its onscreen events, throughout the essay I will be pointing to behavioral circumspection (item 3 of Meskin's explanada) and other counter-evidence for why this is an untenable position.

Let us briefly sketch some things that we might do with our beliefs so that we can understand better what I mean when I talk about them. 'Suspending disbelief' could mean we stop believing the film is fictitious so we can endogenously generate an emotional response. According to this common phrase explanation, we halt disbelieving that the film is fictitious, thus allowing for something of a self-imposed irrational emotional response. This position implicitly endorses the suggestion that emotions are possible only in the case of our believing something is actual. Were our beliefs bendable to our will in this manner, we might get into some amusing circumstances. After a domestic robbery, can you voluntarily disbelieve that your computer was stolen? While we may doubt our beliefs, or question why we have them, many of them do not answer to this stripe of decision making. Same goes for movies. I might try desperately to convince myself that Jedis are really out there, but at the end of the day, I will be clutching my stuffed Wookie in vain.

Someone might suggest that we alternate between belief responses, or occupy two or more simultaneously at various intervals during the film. This consideration is especially attractive for those who look on in incredulity at viewers bawling in their seats at the end of the romance movie when the couple reunite at the end. Surely, even if it is only temporary, people lose track of reality in these

moments, allowing for genuine tears of joy to stream down an audience member's face. This solution is rather *ad hoc*. To suggest we alternate between belief and disbelief in this manner seems like a fast and loose way to discuss belief states. If there is on-screen a depiction of someone being tortured, such as in the movie *Saw* (2004), what kind of alternation would make it possible for people to be disgusted at inhumane acts and yet grin from ear to ear when they walk out of the movie? It is more likely the case that they are, in a sense, disgusted by what they see and delighted at how the film was engineered and able to generate the response of disgust in them. The suggestion that we both believe and disbelieve the events on screen are in the actual world is equally absurd. Either it is the case that the limb was mutilated on screen *really happened* or it was staged. Someone lost a leg, or someone did not. Incredulity might work as compromise between believing and not-believing, but in those instances, we generally err on the side of caution. An F5 tornado sweeping through the countryside as in the film *Twister* (1996), were we even only somewhat dubious to its existence in the actual world, would still compel us to exit the theater in a quick and disorderly fashion.

1.2 Playing Make Believe

Kendall Walton's theory of quasi-emotions (1978) was an important step in the discussion of affect and film fiction. Moreover, it is not only an influential paper, but achieves, where other accounts failed, the necessary justifications to show how the irrationalists have an uphill climb to demonstrate their solution to the paradox of fiction.

Walton argues that viewers have no trouble distinguishing between what is real in the fictional world of the movie. In light of that awareness, how do we explain then explain the affect? While my contention is that we can call it genuine emotion, Walton, after describing our beliefs to the fictional world of the movie, says the affect is forced into another category of phenomena, or what he calls 'quasi-emotions'. Why is that? Walton says that those beliefs allowing us to evaluate situations and their corresponding emotional valence apply strictly to ourselves and our involvement in the actual world. It is summarized best in his assertion "[t]hat fear must be accompanied by, or must involve, a belief that one is in danger. Charles does not believe that he is in danger; so he is not afraid" (Walton 1978, p. 6, my emphasis).

Fear, if construed solely in terms of how a subject evaluates situations relative to themselves, fits this definition. But is this the only appropriate way to use the emotion fear? I may fear that you are going to miss a baseball pitch. This puts me in a situation in which the consequence of some state of affairs bears on the actions of someone else, not myself. Someone may come back at this and suggest that I am afraid you will miss the pitch because I fear feeling disappointed, the second clause being the real source of tension, as it is about the subject. But this would hardly skirt the issue. If I am afraid of how I might feel after something happens, I still require a relationship to what might happen that *must be about that possibility*, not the possibility of my being unhappy. Maybe I don't check the score of the game until after work so that I don't ruminate on a loss during the day. I'm still going to feel bad about the game because someone, not myself, missed a baseball pitch. Therefore, it is not the case that some emotion, *x*, can only be about the viewer's relationship to some event in the film fiction and not a given fictional character's relationship to some event in the film fiction. We fear, are happy, are sad, and other feelings *for* some character *p*.⁴ Our response involves an intentional relationship with the fictional world (Meskin explanandum 2).

Just how the imagination works with phenomena like dreams is connected to understanding film fiction's access our imagination, too. Walton says that "[i]magining is not always a deliberate self-conscious act. We sometimes find ourselves imagining things more or less spontaneously, without having decided to do so. Thoughts pop into our head unbidden. Dreams can be understood as simply very spontaneous imaginings." (1978, p. 4). There appears to be an oversimplification here. I can agree with Walton that imagining is not always a deliberate self-conscious act. Maybe I start imagining what it would be like to have wings by watching a bird in flight, not by posing the internal proposition 'What would it be like to have wings?' and then running my imagination. But the issue with dreams is trickier. Daydreams look a lot like the flying example. When boredom is the state of our mind, it can often go places, seemingly, without our conscious deliberation. But we never lose track of the fact that we are running "daydreams." Dreams while sleeping, more often than not for those of us unable to have consistent lucid ones, look nothing like this. Those imaginings we can believe, sometimes horribly, that they are real. Their phenomenology is a complete departure from a daydream. The dream in which a

⁴ The list of movies that attempt to break the third wall and have the on-screen threat make a gesture towards the audience are few and far between. Nevertheless, Walton's theory of quasi-emotions should take care of encounters with those films.

loved one perishes is *real* in the dream, and our emotions from it are as a result of that; we genuinely believe someone we love has died. Moreover, if I fear green slime in a dream is about to envelop me, it is because it can and (in the dream) may cause harm. We are glad when the bad ones are over and our beliefs in relation to the experience adjust, realizing it was all in our imagination. Philosophical obsessions with nightmares are a result of their being a classic example of adjusting our beliefs about an experience to conform with the actual world; we don't know we're delusional until after the fact.

No matter what the content of the imagining is, daydream or nightmare, our perspective to it is the relevant detail in discussing our emotional relationship to it. Our perspectival relationship to daydreams and musings looks a lot more like our relationship to film fiction than to nightmares. I belabor the point because dreams are sometimes drawn on as the analogous experience to best understand the affect experienced during film fiction. The above section argues that this is a bad parallel, and Walton makes the same mistake. Still, it would be quick to characterize Walton's position as unhelpful. He successfully makes the case that the affect we experience at the movies is not about some event's immediate relationship to us or the actual world. We are not afraid of green slime harming us, but we also are not crying during *My Girl* (1991) because we lost someone we personally knew, nor are we cheering during *Friday Night Lights* (2004) because the high school football team was our own. Point being, emotions are not simply about ourselves; they're about others. In which world those other people or beings exist, however, is another question.

Section 3: Left Feeling Incomplete

Theories of emotions oftentimes are directed exclusively towards situations in the actual world, and rightly so. We spend far more of our emotional lives dealing with problems that impact our actual circumstances than an imagined one⁵. And if we have an irrational emotional response to dreams, it becomes ever more appealing to suggest that emotions ignite when we think something is true of the actual world, not a fictional one. In this section, I will suggest the advantages and the shortcomings of Neo-Jamesian theories of emotions that rely on bodily states as indicators of emotional intentions because they rely on a theory of emotions geared strictly towards the actual world. Afterwards, I will

⁵ Unless you are playing *World of Warcraft* (2004) for most of your day.

address the opposing court's suggestion that emotions can be understood as cognitive states that provoke physiological responses.

2.1 Neo-Jamesian Theories of Emotion

Jesse Prinz and Jenefer Robinson continue a tradition of examining human emotions within a framework popularized by William James, hence they refer to themselves as Neo-Jamesians. James thought that emotions were all in the body. Tears streaming down your face means that you are sad, and the smile across your face means that you are happy. Even in the event that some set of beliefs reliably cause you to cry, these beliefs are not in themselves "sadness," but rather the outpouring of bodily manifestations are.

Remember the problem of parts. Prinz attempts to defend the position that emotions occur without evaluative or appraisals of situations, and instead are the perception of a physiological change. Among his reasons is an example drawn from neuroscience that says fight or flight responses triggered by the amygdala can originate in thalamic signals that process visual stimuli without object recognition.⁶ It leads Prinz to conclude, "[I]f fear can occur without mediation of the neocortex, then perhaps fear can occur without cognition" (2004 p. 34). There is quite a bit we have to take here at Prinz's word, most importantly his appeal to suggest the emotion fear occurs without cognition is based on his usage of "fear" and "cognition." If a Neo-Jamesian already thinks that emotions are bodily responses, then anytime a bodily response occurs will be good enough to call an emotion. So why should we bite? For starters, sometimes our startle response is generated by more than a bright flash or loud noise. Theorists who suggest that subject responses are limited to either brute startle responses or intentional beliefs miss the nuances of these other registers involving non-conceptual information. Also, emotions can oftentimes determine the appraisal, rather than the other way around. After a long week during which you received little sleep, a roommate may walk through the front door, in not perceptively different manner to every other occasion, only to receive you lashing out at him, shouting, "You always walk through that door like you own the place!" Your anger was already there before the event, your

⁶ Study to be found in LeDoux (1996)

roommate merely became a convenient outlet for it. These, among other strategies, suggest that emotions do not require appraisals to begin at all.

After doing away with evaluative and appraisal theories of emotions, however, what does Prinz have left in his theory's arsenal to explain our affect towards film fiction? Without needing to judge a fictional situation as sad in order to have sadness, how does Prinz explain the tears of someone watching *Sleepless Seattle* (1993)? In the interest of staying with our insight from Walton, let me suggest that Prinz would rather *not* have his theory of emotions commit him to an irrational emotional response to film fiction. The question is whether or not the Neo-Jamesian theory of emotions can offer some solutions to the challenge that stay within a rational response. If not, something from it must be abandoned or added to accommodate this emotional experience.

The back and forth between emotional bodily states and the beliefs is important because they commingle with each other, thereby becoming an inseparable whole. Once you believe you are angry because you are tired, and not because your roommate has made an irritable entrance into your living room, you may, if evaluated appropriately, become less so. Maybe things go south, and instead of agreeing with the roommate that you are inappropriately upset with them, you plunge further into your invective spree and blame them for always turning things on you. In any case, emotions can be bodily states that influence beliefs and they can also be the beliefs that influence bodily reactions. They are too linked to make a clean split.

While speculating, Prinz helps us consider this amalgam of thoughts and feelings. "Perhaps anxiety-inducing drugs actually causes us to judge that danger looms. This, of course, is sheer speculation." (p. 40) Is it? I have an ample sample size of friends and colleagues (plus personal experience) who confess that being too stoned can cause one to think paranoid thoughts, like the cops are here to arrest you, or that the floor is moving (and that it is a bad thing), and so on. I think these confessions are suggestive enough to say, beyond speculation, that these beliefs would not have arrived with the emotional resonance they carry without the ingestion of drugs. In that case, the somatic state, induced by the ingestion of an anxiety-inducing drug, was enough to bring about paranoid beliefs.

The suggestion is not that a Neo-Jamesian theory is not up for plenty of different tasks, but it is an incomplete theory for our purposes. The proposal on the table is that the feeling, and not the thought that prompted it, is the emotion. I do not see this as a particularly fruitful appeal to simplicity for a

couple of reasons. Firstly, if the affect during film fiction is the same emotion-x as some instance of emotion-x directed towards the actual world, it appears Neo-Jamesians would have to remove the fictionality of film fiction for the emotional response to register, because emotions cannot be appraisals of beliefs about fictional worlds. But, if we are indeed not delusional nor putting on our affect at the movies, we must start to be angry at Belloq in *Raiders* because our anger was activated by our entertaining such a character in some fictional world w . In spite of that, how can Prinz say that these emotions are the same? Physiologically, the body experiences the same dilation of blood vessels and aggressive disposition in anger toward the actual world and anger toward fictional world w . But to suggest this adequately describes and explains the anger's direction is short a piece of the puzzle, namely, what got us in that state to begin with. If the states that started the emotion are different, how is it that their outcomes can be the same? This disjunctivism, without a cognitive piece, leaves anger looking like the exhaust on a biological engine instead of the fuel.

Secondly, if Neo-Jamesians wanted to suggest that the cold sweat was something the viewer puts-on (as in the section on Walton) then how would they explain the state prior to the quasi-emotional response within a framework that shirks cognitive influences as components of emotional or quasi-emotional experiences? That is, in a Waltonian make-believe account, we need beliefs to influence the way our body is responding, like pretending there is a spider around puts us in a cold sweat. The problem for the Neo-Jamesian is that then the cold-sweat comes only after we have started to pretend, i.e. once the appropriate system of beliefs and behaviors is in place. Was the make-believe a necessary part of the quasi-emotion, and if not, then what was?

This should remind us of Walton's mistake. The Neo-Jamesian reductionist program of discussing emotions exclusively in terms of their use for a subject interpreting dangerous situations towards their own well being cannot handle the demands of processing danger for on screen characters. Why not? Without the understanding that i) intervention with events on screen is impossible and ii) even if it were, via some sort of involved play acting, it would be inappropriate to think *actual* danger were in play, whereas a conceptualization theory of emotions can accommodate *imaginary* danger that will have ramifications for *imaginary* people.

Additionally, I think Prinz is crying wolf when he says these appraisal cognitions are in danger of becoming "disembodied." (2004, p. 51) As with other hot button issues within cognitive science, the

ontology of cognition is an ever debated topic. Prinz argues out of what he and others call disembodied cognitions, or thoughts that seem to float on top of mental states that do not imply an action oriented outcome.⁷ Certainly, ghostly mental states may not be the right appeal for philosophers of mind who carry a naturalist card, but he's wrong to think that's what we mean when we say some emotions take cognitions. Firstly, if emotions are generated in beings who flee from danger, fight against threatening agents, and socialize with cooperative parties, *thoughts* that guide these behaviors may not be discussable solely in their behavioral outcomes. If emotions are given open reign, such that they do not come at the close of a repeatable and reliable survival operating sequence with conceptual foundations, it is hard to imagine how we would be successful at any of these activities. I say leave the problem of how *embodied*, physical, or whatever ontological status these thoughts have for another conversation, and maintain that adrenal glands are not always prompted from bypassing our mental fixtures and starting instinctually, but sometimes take a more elevated initiating thought pattern to activate, without which the relevant bodily states would not arrive.

The piece we can at least agree with Prinz on in his theory of emotions is that some really do not appear to initially require cognitions. Unmediated perceptual appraisals of snake-like objects can start the adrenaline despite there being no conceptual attachment to the perceived object. Seeing snakes, initially, in *Raiders* will have you feeling afraid because you fear snake-like objects, not from any gross evaluations about the level of danger you are in with the snakes on the movie screen. Mind you, there is a fork at which the feeling initiated from the image of the snake-like object must be subsequently understood. These contribute to or compromise an actual or imaginary fear. (See figure 2 on the next page)

⁷ Grounding conceptual content and criticising embodied cognitivists attempts are explored in Caramazza & Mahon (2008)

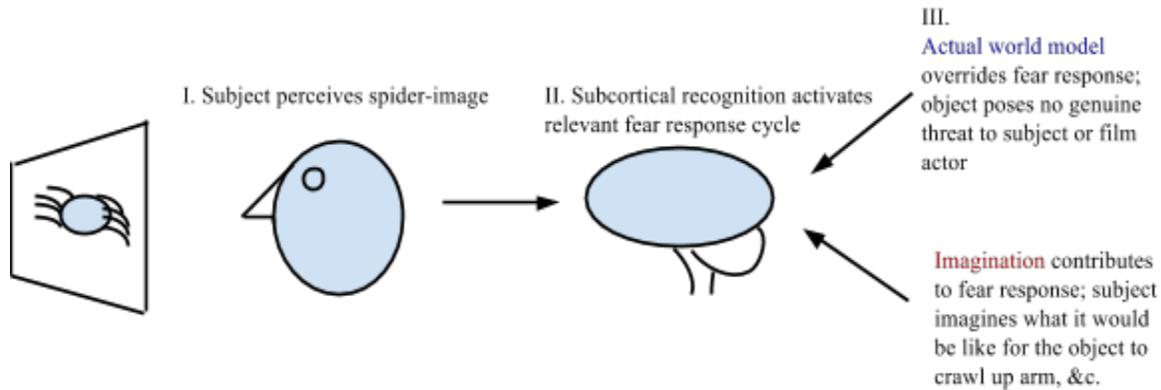


Fig. 2 Interaction between coarse visual registration and object recognition from the two models

2.2 Cognitive Theories of Emotion

In case you too were feeling unsatisfied with the somatic interpretation of emotions, the pendulum swings the other way for cognitive theories of emotions and their relationship to perceptual appraisals. There are many and diverse accounts that fall under the category of cognitive theories, but we will be dealing with Noel Carroll's, as it trades specifically with affect and film fiction.

Carroll argues that some emotions have intentional content. This content is supplied by some piece of relevant cognition, i.e. jealousy is spurred from perceiving a lewd character flirting with your romantic partner. Without bearing witness, or being told about, this kind of interaction, another individual flirting with your lover, then judging it as undesirable, the emotion of jealousy could not exist. Carroll takes it a step further when he claims that "perceived danger is a criterion for the state of fear; perceived wrong is a criterion for anger..." (2011, p. 64). This flies directly in the face of somatic theories. According to this account, I am not angry unless I think someone, or some relevant party, has wronged me or my kin. Our common language effectively cashes out this understanding of emotions. Hearing of a tragic accident, our response may be "That is so sad." If we break down the meaning of that sentence, it looks like:

1. There was an occurrence of an event understood as "sad."
2. The event, after placed within the category of "sad," is thought of aversively without a solution.
3. An inescapable aversive situation causes the subject to become downtrodden.

Other phrases like, “I fear death because” or “It was a happy time when” put these emotions as evaluations of situations and/or their actors. Fictional stories wheel and deal in these evaluations. I can think *Saw* is scary, but I will not run and tell the police about the terror I have seen. But what are we to do with the subcognitively instigated affects discussed in the previous section? We agreed that snake-like objects in the movies gets us primed for fear, but this is before, not after, a cognition that can judge whether or not the object is real. Carroll suggests that “[b]y having these affects [the ones unmediated by thought] off from the category of the emotions, I don't mean that we can neglect the cognitively impenetrable affects.” (Carroll, p. 218) I intend to bring these “cognitively impenetrable affects” to the fore and suggest that some of them are, contrary to Carroll’s usage, part of emotions *proper* and not merely moods, and that movies, among other visual stimuli, are tremendously effective at accessing them.

I will disagree with an intuition Carroll uses to make a case for cognitive theories. Carroll appeals to a thought experiment in which we are equipped with a dizzying pharmacological arsenal of drugs and are able to make a brew that would put someone in an identical bodily state as they were in when they were jealous of another person’s relationship to your romantic partner. Problem is you are no longer in a relationship with this person, thus, concludes Carroll, no longer jealous despite your physiology being the same. This leads Carroll to extend his conclusion to other emotions, claiming “[y]ou can’t be angry, unless there is someone or something that serves as the object of your anger...” (p. 219). But here is where the disagreement lies. Anger looks like the kind of emotional state that *does not* require beliefs; the beliefs can be rather a consequence of the opening of an emotional state. If someone puts me in the selfsame bodily ferment as a previous occasion during which I was seething with rage, I may lack the object of my previous condition, but I can supply one readily, like an unassuming roommate’s entrance. An object to point my anger towards or not is irrelevant to the fact that I feel aggravated, with a perceived injustice coming after the fact.

His inclusion of beliefs and attitudes like “patriotic” under the category of emotions is out of place. Obviously, putting me in a similar bodily arrangement at a time when I was excited for my country’s football team after I’ve been exiled from said country hardly means I’m patriotic again, but so what if the patriotic belief didn’t come with it, because the emotion of joy did. It is not my business to enumerate all the terms we should use to describe emotions that qualify as being capable of acting as

feelings and beliefs, but commonly used items (among the ‘garden-variety’) like sadness, happiness, fear and anger suffice for the purposes of this essay. Jealousy, patriotism, and pride are more complex and require appropriate beliefs, thus building on top of the previous emotional architecture, i.e. jealousy makes us angry and feel a sense of longing. In other words, patriotism is never a bodily state, whereas fearfulness is.

Plantinga (1999) observes that certain facial expressions trigger a similar response in a subject attending to those features. A smiling person may make you smile. You do not need to ask yourself why is the person happy before the you find yourself smiling along with them. Film images, with their inducement of emotions from facial recognition, work with subcognitive mechanisms to begin our feelings, while our appraisals of on screen situations sustain them.

Prinz has the edge on Carroll in terms of how we personally evaluate many dangerous situations, without some kind of internal evaluator judging whether or not it is appropriate to be afraid of the runaway dog, but Carroll is driving at an important point for emotions at the movies. I want Luke Skywalker to escape the Death Star garbage compactor in *Star Wars* because I am afraid he will be crushed. This requires that I believe i) there is someone in some possible world named Luke Skywalker, ii) I desire his prosperity, iii) Garbage compactors could crush a human, and iv) Luke Skywalker is in danger of being compacted by a garbage compactor. I may sweat bullets watching Luke, Han and Leia try to escape, but in order to do so I need to be aware of why I should be afraid. Unless emotions are to be restricted to facial expressions, awareness of what there is to be worried about is why fictional stories can move us. Appraisals and judgments about thoughts that are about people and circumstances are metacognitive, and keys that unlock emotional triggers.

In light of the fact that humans cannot form metacognitive judgments until their third or fourth year,⁸ there is reason to believe that our two modules for models of some possible world and the actual world are not fully developed until that time. Infants can experience a brand of fear, but they don’t know *why they are afraid*, or what it might be appropriate to be afraid of. There’s research left to be done here, but I hypothesize that children up until that developmental period have a hard time grasping fictionality, too. Monsters really might be documented in the film, if you are three years old, because their imagination and actual world model are not fully apart yet, and, for the rest of us, may never fully

⁸ Wimmer & Perner (1983)

have a clean split. After all, there are reports of viewers fearing swimming pools after watching *Jaws* (1975). How much do we have to get wrong in knowing which module for film's fictional content to be processed within in order for beliefs about the fictional world to start influencing beliefs about the actual world? Films like *Jaws* have a leg up in blending into the actual world model by being located in real places, e.g. southern California, and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), by using a handheld camcorder and a title card claiming the film was 'found footage,' is cashing-in on attempts to push audience members imagination into beliefs about the actual world for a stronger terror.

My last piece of evidence steers us away from film fiction and towards a socially constructed space that I think best demonstrates why we need a cognitive piece to our theory of emotions. Some people when they watch the World Series, and their favorite team is up to bat with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning, with the bases loaded, a full count to the batter, the offense down by three runs, will have a lump in their throat the size of a grapefruit and a pulse beating like a mouse's. How did all of these physiological states become brought about? To Prinz, it came from a non-cognitive apprehension of the game's events, but then what from the baseball game is prompting this emotional response without possessing a learned understanding of the game? Maybe it is the response from the crowd sending the whole stadium in a frenzy. Say, however, you are watching the game at home on TV with the sound off. A fan will still feel fear a loss even if the news of the baseball game is coming from a ticker tape. Solomon corrects the conversation when he writes: "Even the most hard-headed neurological or behavioral theory must take account of the fact that no matter what the neurology or the behavior, if a person is demonstrably ignorant of a certain state of affairs or facts, he or she cannot have certain emotions." (2004, p. 245).

If the emotional package did not include the cognitively seated concepts of "winning" and the agent's appraisal of its value, the feeling of fear felt by this individual would be incompletely described. That is, unless we are willing to combine thoughts and feelings with our theory of emotions and explain that the baseball spectator is willing to suffer through the unpleasantness of feeling anxious for the possible outcome of the baseball game, we are missing a key ingredient in what separates that kind of fear from others. Attempts to separate emotive thoughts from their respective physiologies are looking for simplicity where things are not so simple. Once we acknowledge that feelings of fear are directed towards specific cognitions, like losing important baseball games and the dangers of complex, albeit

fictional, boobytraps, we are willing to act upon them in ways we would not do if this connection were not in place. Suggesting that fear is only a feeling is unhelpful in understanding the complexities of what we are afraid of, why we are afraid of it, and how this emotional belief regulates, and is not merely an outward appearance, of our behavior.

Section 3: On a Hybrid Theory of Emotions

This section will investigate the proposal of a hybrid theory of emotions to account for the affect experienced from film fiction. The two components in the hybrid are somatic types and their corresponding mental states. If we eliminate one in the pair, we do not have a cohesive account for emotional responses across experiences in the actual world and directed towards a film’s fictional world. Eliminating the cognitive component might bring about erratic behaviors in the viewer, leaving them unable to identify or label the feelings they have at the moments they do while at the movies. If the pumping adrenaline did not come with its associative *fear for fictional character x* label, then the viewer would be left thinking they were afraid of something else, perhaps more immediate, or that they had been drugged.

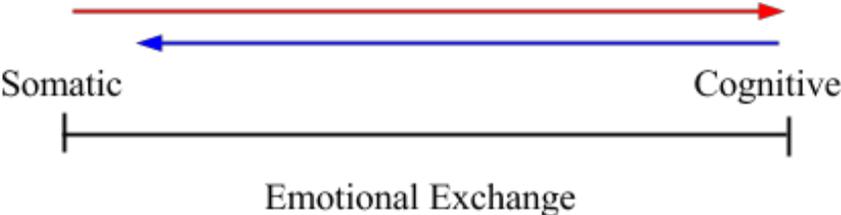


Fig. 3 The bilateral relationship between metacognitive judgments and their physiological counterparts is, according to the Hybrid theory, the emotion.

3.1 The Real World Model

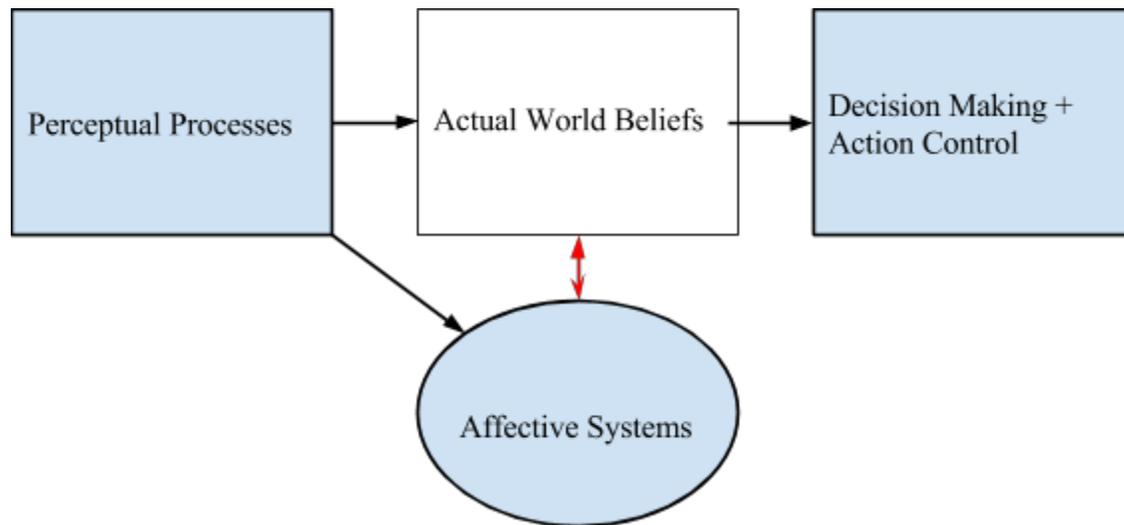


Fig. 4 Flow of Information for Situational Apprehension towards Actual World (Note the bi-directionality of information from the affective system and beliefs about the actual world)

You are walking down the street, and a mountain lion leaps out from behind the minivan parked next to you. The shock from the spontaneously appearing object prepares you for immediate action, you visually identify the surprising object to be a ravenous feline, and you take begin to take action. This all happens faster than your words can keep up with, and indeed the visual information splits between your object recognition and your more crude reflexive perceptual responses, with the latter leading the charge of fear. These perceptual processes, and the emotion of fear instigated from both your recognition of a dangerous animal and the primitive survival skills stemming from fears over suddenly appear animals, push your behaviors to remove yourself from these circumstances. .

Our model of the actual world develops and cultivates bodily relationships to these concepts of “dangerous animal” for future, situationally appropriate, access. It comes with a command, like “be afraid of a giant rattle snake,” and its relevant reasons such as “because it can kill you.” This complex web of beliefs surrounding rattlesnakes the the judgment to be afraid of them is part of the emotional package. The judgment to ‘be afraid of’ is a metacognitive, or thought about a thought, that is the command circuit for our affective systems, to start adrenaline and tense our muscles. Our affective response directs the formation and consequent behavioral application of our cognitions, while our

cognitions direct the affections and subsequent behavioral use of our bodily state. Emotions make up a neural highway between thoughts and feelings.

There are well-founded worries over cognitions and how our awareness relates to them. Warily, I disband with with Tullman who employs a Higher Order Thoughts (HOT) theory of emotions to ground thoughts actual world model with emotions. HOT theories, though also building upon usages of metacognitions, also bring along issues over conscious awareness towards thoughts and beliefs (Rosenthal 2005). Matters become far too contentious when we suggest that conscious thought is something important for emotional experience. Am I *consciously aware* that I am interested in the wellbeing of my loved ones, or, furthermore, Indiana Jones, or are these unconscious thoughts I am having running concurrently with the present circumstances? It is not obvious to me how this item in metacognition's other agendas play into our emotions in towards actual or imaginative worlds. To reemphasize the point about beliefs, I do not need to be aware of my beliefs in order to have them. Daydreams do not need to be consciously observed while we are still able to discern their unreality. Thereto, I can have metacognitive emotional judgments without being consciously aware that I make them.

3.2 “In A World...” - Imagination as Possible Worlds Simulator

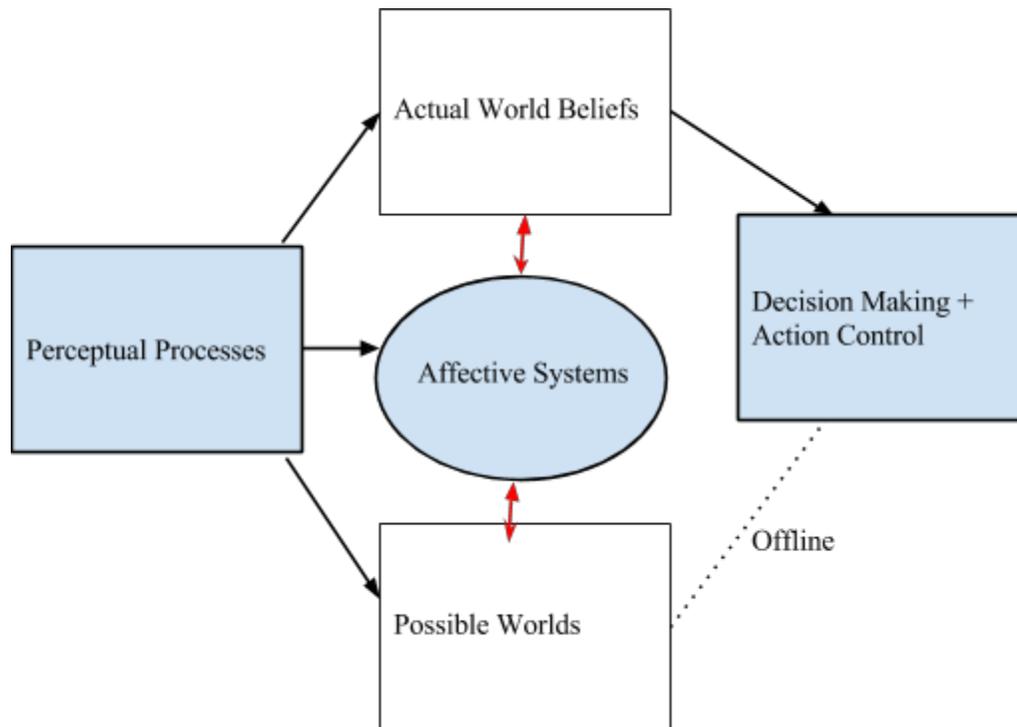


Fig. 5 Adopted cognitive architecture revised and simplified from Meskin and Weinberg (2003)

Gregory Currie claims that fictions are ‘primarily devices for directing the imagination.’ (1995, p.151). I take the human imagination to behave as a possible world simulator that contains its own relevant sets of beliefs about some possible world p , and some of those beliefs have no impact on our actual world model’s beliefs. I can ask you to imagine being on fire. There is little chance you will then believe you are actually on fire. An impoverished simulation would take the proposition “I’m on fire” and draw inferences like “It hurts,” whereas a richly composed imagination would attempt to simulate the modalities, like the smell of burning flesh, the sound of skin searing, or recollecting the memory of touching a hot stove, magnified to every inch of your body.

Thus, entertaining counterfactual statements sometimes provokes us to respond viscerally. If it were not for the gut reactions we got from contemplating some of them, we might not make life-preserving decisions. This leads me to believe that there are remarkable evolutionary benefits for possessing such an evocative simulation module. For starters, imagine an early hominid thinking about

bringing down a mastodon. He could plan an attack and execute it, or he could plan an attack and run a simulation of *what it would be like* if the hunt were to fail. Say he imagines one of the pointed mastodonian tusks puncturing his rib cage, and the animal swings him around like a rag doll before hurling him onto a pile of rocks. His stomach churns as the image in his head unfolds. Not a desirable outcome. With this new appreciation of a misstep in his execution, he is more careful and more aware of the mastodon as he approaches it. The memories of his imagined bungled mastodon encounter will serve as a helpful reminder of how to appropriately treat any encounter with a beast of that size. His fear of the mastodon is the package of belief about its danger and the flight or fight response for action.

Dangerous fictional creatures activate these inferences in separate cognitive modules. The rancor held inside Jabba's dungeon is scary for us watching hero Luke Skywalker combat it because we judge dangerous fictional animals to be harmful and Luke is someone we care about. The loose end in this story beginning with hominids and mastodons is that somewhere along the evolutionary road this simulation module could handle information that does not even need to have actual world behavioral outcomes. What would you do to fight a mastodon with wings?

Salient features of the rancor from *Return of the Jedi* (1983) will fall correctly under reasons to be afraid for Luke. The rancor's sharp teeth, blood thirsty growl, and storage of fresh corpses in his cave all act as indicators that this is a creature who stands to eat and harm our hero. We know we are supposed to be afraid of the Rancor because our background of beliefs has concepts like "sharp toothed animal" and their correlates of "can tear through flesh, kill me or my friends."

Because I claim the somatic and cognitive components are causally linked, we need an agent who can have physical responses appropriate to the right cognitive instigation. That is, a security alarm cannot be afraid given that it lacks the situational awareness to avoid harm to itself. Nussbaum (2001) insists there could be an agent with emotions that have no bodily impact, but according to my arguments from before this seems like a rather unhelpful suggestion. Given emotions need cognitions for an agent to distinguish possible world situations from their real world counterparts, we still need the right bodily composition for the agent to recognize their shared feelings.

Robinson (2005) expresses worry over cognitions that do not reliably start their proposed appropriate physiological fallout. What if the death of the hero doesn't make me feel anything but glad that the movie is almost over? Moreover, what if I think the hero's death is unfortunate, but that fact

does not move me in the slightest? These two issues need to be teased out. Firstly, a viewer's beliefs misaligned with the intentions of the film to sympathize with a hero, thus not thinking something intended to be sad is sad and therefore not feeling sad is consistent with the hybrid theory of emotions. Secondly, evaluating a situation as unfortunate and not feeling anything afterwards is a similar worry to seeing a smiling face and feeling nothing but hostility towards them. Reliable activation, of a concept or something noncognitive, faces similar challenges. All kinds of conflicting beliefs, attitudes, and conditions can get in the way of a movie or any situation from causing the emotion an agent or film has intended to elicit. These issues make for interesting discussion, but I will leave the topic for another occasion. The point being, no theory can escape these countervailing considerations.

There is ample reason to believe that the emotions we experience at the movies feature into how we formulate expectations and desires in the real world. Goldie criticizes movies for distorting our expectations, commenting that “[l]ife does not come with all the ends neatly tied together, and to seek a narrative which achieves this has the potential of being dangerously blocking to the possibility of emotional closure, or of being dangerously self-deceptive, and deceptive of others.” (Goldie 2011, p. 16). Might there be some things without closure, thinks Goldie, and this is a “permanent feature of our humanity” (p. 20) that movies tend to ignore? Given that this has been a paper about emotions, I will not say too much on the serious case of the chicken or the egg that is within this analysis of narrative psychology. Do humans seek narrative arcs because it is something we are geared towards, or is this something we have been instilled with to expect?⁹ In either case, the fact that even our fictional films produce tears of joy when the father is reunited with his daughter should be indication enough that narratives, irrespective of their factuality in the actual world, can start the water works because our attitudes about reunions of that nature are the same for both.

On the other hand, Carroll is willing to suggest that film fiction can serve as kinds of “Thought experiments,” such that “the narrative...has been structured in such a way as to propone or to call forth the relevant reasoning in alert audience members.” (Carroll 2011, p. 58). So, with our two-pronged approach towards emotional instigation, the cognitive component in the emotional package is what services the viewer to feel particular ways about particular events. These are most likely learned

⁹ Given the ample amount of anthropological evidence of human societies who see value in storytelling, it would be a better case to attack specific tropes, e.g. the hero always getting the girl, rather than stories with beginnings, middles, and endings.

responses, but not necessarily. Loss, or grief in particular, is a good candidate for an emotion that keeps a species together and cooperating, and how a movie portraying the loss of a family member can be transculturally understood as sad. Worries that the body might not experience any perturbations whatsoever given some emotional evaluation is fortune to empirical inquiry.

4 Conclusion

The affect we experience towards film fiction are *genuine emotions*, and they come from beliefs about circumstances within the fictional world as well as sub-cognitive reactions to visual stimuli. We can be afraid of snakes while not thinking we are in the presence of *actual* snakes, just as we are *really are* afraid for Indiana as he attempts to escape the Egyptian catacomb even if he does not actually exist. The former kick starts our emotions with, while the latter heightens them with its sustained concern over character well being until his situation concludes. Snakes scare us no matter where we see them, and Indiana should be careful even if his life and death exist in a fictional world. Let me end with two concluding remarks.

4.1 In the Mood

Jump cuts, crane shots, and close-ups are a handful of ways filmmakers utilize items in their toolkits to set the tone for a scene in a film. Frenetic editing generates anxiety in viewers, with its uncertain sequence of imagery and rapid progression of subliminal footage. These uniquely cinematic tools do not figure into what we understand as film fiction, but they are responsible for causing reliable responses from audience members in how filmmakers cue the audience responses to certain events in the movie.

A classic example from film history is Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) staircase sequence. With each shot lasting mere seconds, the pace of the sequence is rapid, unpredictable, and riddled with images of violence and terror. We are not asked to meditate on any scene for too long, rather we take in the sequence as a collective representation of the massacre of civilians. Its effectiveness as an elicitor of powerful feelings stems from the organization of its images. Uniquely

cinematic deliveries of information play into how we receive the message, even when fiction is not involved, the language of movies still meddles with an emotion's magnitude.

4.2 Why Do We Watch Upsetting Movies?

Though this essay has tried to argue *how* it is possible to experience emotions like fear at the movies, there is still the problem of *why* we would want to experience these negative feelings in the first place. Furthermore, an explanation for why zombie movies can generate terror and glee within its audience members in the same sitting appears to counteract one of the initial points of this essay, which was trying to establish the incoherence of possessing genuine fear and being in good spirits simultaneously, a requirement, it would seem, for discussing audience members who sit through slasher films.

One possible motivation, *ex hypothesi*, is that despite generating legitimate emotional states, we do so within the safety of a fictional world. Stories about people losing loved ones primes us for the world in such a way that the unknown ahead, which may very well hold such tragedies, becomes less abstract and mysterious after having gone to the movies. No need to be part of the cognoscenti to enjoy difficult or otherwise emotionally challenging films.

Perhaps most interestingly is the *maudlin justification*. Crying just feels good sometimes. Built up tension from the working week can find a relief in the melodramatic. Stress about the day-to-day gets vitiated when the hero blows up the enemy's base. In the actual world, where many of our plans go awry, films can give us reliable movement and flow through events that has internal coherence the actual world lacks, hence justifying our emotional responses in ways the actual world does not give us time to do.

Aristotle's *Ars Poetica* claims that we can vacate these feelings while watching tragic stories, and I think there's something to that. These experiences may be akin to going to the gym to release pent up, working week tension. The description of the physiology of these experiences requires work, but with the appropriate understand of emotions in place, we might be able to discover how lingering emotional fixations in our beliefs about the actual world find relief when emotions are expunged from

fictional films. This explanation is made possible when affective responses at the movies are emotions that pertain to our feelings about the actual world.

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