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Director's reflection on the concepts, ideas, and theory underpinning the short experimental film *As You Know, You Can't Imagine* (2024).

Analysis: *As You Know, You Can't Imagine*

The cardinal concept behind the short concerns the human's faculties of imagination and knowledge: to what extent is it correct to say that the ingestion of knowledge – i.e., the process of collecting information and data – prompts a limitation of our imaginative potential – as in openness to possibilities? This argument is deeply rooted in the conversation attached to Schrödinger's cat. Putting aside the mere quantic conclusion (although the scientific community's paramount interest), the experiment can be seen as a mathematical explanation of how knowledge and imagination affect one another. Following the scientist's reasoning (Schrödinger translated in Trimmer, 1980), before the box is open, our ignorance of the conditions inside the box allows us to 'Imagine' multiple situations: the cat might be dead; it might be alive; it might even be both alive and dead at the same time. However, once we see the box open, and therefore we collect knowledge through our sensorial perceptions, all possibilities will reduce to one; in other words, at the end of the experiment, we will 'Know' if the cat is dead or alive. Although Schrödinger's theory already structurally relies on visual capacities, as it talks about resolution by "direct observation" (ibid), a more tailored insight into cinema can be found in MacDougall's *Transcultural Cinema*. Drawing from Bertrand Russel (1911), he distinguishes between knowledge by acquaintance, which he recognises as the way we absorb information from an image, and knowledge by description, related to written and spoken language; put in simpler terms: 'showing and telling' (1998). While the first allows us to have a somewhat physical interaction with the subject matter, the latter communicates with us at a distance, manifesting a cloud of abstraction because of the inborn unreliability of language (ibid).

Informed by these theories, we proceeded to structure the film using the techniques of fragmentation and repetition. Firstly, even though the final shot was the first one we filmed during production, we decided to deliver the scene in pieces, collected in sequences of five details – the wallpaper (working as a statement of the theme, showing that regardless of its absurdity, the vision of it automatically nullifies everything else 'it could have been'), the party cups, the pool game, the cash, and the silhouette. Later, moving into post-production,

we edited the film alternating between blocks of visuals and a dark screen with voiceover, respectively recalling McDougall's ways of 'showing' and 'telling'. As we get closer to the end, the images get longer and the darks shorter: the more time we get to analyse the visuals and collect information, the less we need the indeterminacy of the narrated descriptions.

From a more formal point of view, the film mimics the approach of Jørgen Leth's 1986 *Det Perfekte Menneske* [*The Perfect Human*]. Like the French-Mexican director utilises fictional scenes and scripted lines to make his statement and critically question the claim of human perfection (Det Perfekte Menneske, 1986); so we present our reflection using similar features of fiction cinema. This directorial choice guaranteed us total control over the film's narrative structure. In the final sequence, all elements are brought together to build a unique eye-opening experience. As the viewer watches the film, the reality he is observing slowly unfolds in front of him. Starting from extreme closeups, aiming to achieve the modernist-specific notion of defamiliarisation (Nichols, 2001), with any successive cycle the eye of the camera gets increasingly wider, revealing more and more details of the set (see Figure 1). Ultimately, a pan – intentionally the only camera movement included in the film to highlight its conclusive function – shows all the previously framed elements as part of a unique united scene, where a purposefully designed lighting setup creates spotlights on the main detail. In addition to these visual elements, the film features a soundscape composed of sound effects and voiceovers (as previously mentioned). Once again, both elements are edited according to the short's main idea: the former aims to anticipate the final pan by slowly mixing the objects-specific acoustics; the latter, works as a determining device, addressing the content of each shot with an increasing degree of specificity, while simultaneously creating an over-diegetic link between the visuals and the blacks.





(a & b) Figure 1: Starting from nearly unintelligible ECUs (1a), by the end of the film we are looking at LSs giving full contextualisation (1b). (*As You Know, You Can't Imagine*, 2024)

Recognising the heavy structure of the film (which was necessary to make our thesis as explicit as possible), the main issue became engaging the viewer in our material. The solution came by removing some voiceovers, previously over-imposed to both visuals and pauses. By doing so, the film now forces the audience to actively participate, required to create their own original connection between visuals and narration which becomes an integral part of the film message.

Works Cited

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