



Moving Images and How to Deal with Them

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When I was a young academic hopeful in literary studies in the early 1980s, Jürgen Link and his structuralist analysis of key terms for literary analysis (1974) was the hype of the moment, at least in Vienna. Within his toolbox, opposing pairs (aka binaries, aka, in its most fancy version, dichotomies) seemed very attractive as a starting point for any analysis. You first find a pair, such as night and day, then consider which part of the pair is the more dominant one, according to whatever contingent parameter you find important, and off you go with starting a line of argument. Thinking about binaries was attractive and rewarding but got boring after a while, especially when whatever happens along the scale, whatever goes on between night on the one side and day on the other, needed to be neglected. Whatever was not part of the game, namely the in-between, was, unsurprisingly, slowly becoming more attractive within my academic practice. On the night and day scale there are processes such as dawn and dusk, and there is the twilight zone; all are areas of paradoxical collision between lightness and darkness, areas which lure you into murkier and more muddy waters with poor visibility, but ever so appealing, stimulating and thought-provoking. This newly found challenge kindled my interest in paradoxical form and led me away from any either-and-or discussions. My curiosity was increasingly aroused by concepts incorporating two seemingly contradictory sides, like Raymond Williams' notion of structure of feeling, which combines, in abstract terms, something solid and static, a structure, with something almost unfathomable, namely feeling. My interest in film and all things visual attracted me to a less obvious paradoxical entity, namely the cinematic close-up.

In this paper I will embark on a formal and creative exercise in conjecture and speculation, as I will focus on structural and logical similarities between the concept Raymond Williams labelled structure of feeling of a particular period in time,¹ and more narrowly the experience of emerging structures of feeling (1977: 121-27), and aspects of the workings of the filmic convention known as the close-up. Both the close-up and structure of feeling are notoriously difficult to define.² I will try to show that the

¹ Williams uses sometimes the plural form, "structures of feeling", as for example in *Marxism and Literature* (Williams 1977: 128-35) or the singular, "structure of feeling" (Williams 2001: 64). I will stick to the singular form, in the sense of the structure of feeling of one time period.

² See Sharma and Tygstrup 2015 as an example for a recent study trying and testing various definitions of structure of feeling and Doane 2021 as a new and extensive study on the close-up.



paradoxical concept of structure of feeling can, as an epistemological lens, help better understand the workings of the close-up, and I will also show that looking closely at the mechanisms of the filmic close-up may shed some light on the complex notion of structure of feeling, which Williams himself often, not to say excessively, returned to and kept revising.³

I will start out with a brief chronology of Raymond Williams' various involvements with film, simply to show that Williams' interest in audio-visual products started early in his career as teacher and academic and stayed with him throughout his life. This section is mainly based on "Raymond Williams on Film", an article published in 2013 by Dana Polan. Polan's survey is based on research using the *Raymond Williams Papers* kept at Swansea University. Williams and film is important for my line of argument because Williams' interest in film and TV was grounded, as I see it, in his interest in emerging structures of feeling and in his general interest in possible responses to changes in structures of feeling. At this point, the topic of crisis also comes in, as any changes in structures of feeling are responsible for a variety of aspects of crisis, such as crisis of representation or crisis of the constitution of subjects. Features of crisis will be covered whenever they support my main argument.

Raymond Williams' interactions with film and cinema began during his university education at Trinity College, Cambridge, and more specifically at the local Socialist Club, which according to Dai Smith's biography *Raymond Williams: A Warrior's Tale* "framed his interests and directed his social activities" (2008: 85). The Socialist Club, according to Williams in an interview in *Politics and Letters*, "[...] had a club room, it served lunches, it had film shows, it was a way of finding friends [...] I immediately fell into this world of lunches and film shows. The films were particularly important" (1981: 39). Williams and film is closely connected with Michael Orrom (1920-1997),⁴ a film enthusiast and a close friend of Williams during the Cambridge years. Orrom, together with Patricia Elliott, established a Cambridge University Film Society, managed to fund a projector, and film education on Soviet classics and German expressionist cinema started at the Socialist Club (cf. Smith 2008: 95ff.). For a British context, modernist German and Soviet films represented new and emerging forms of cinematic experience, such as the dialectics of montage in the cinema of Eisenstein or Pudovkin, or the stark visual contrasts, exaggerated perspectives and tilted angles exploited in expressionist film. These new conventions left their marks on Williams and his fellow students. One could even argue that the novelties of filmic experience modernist European cinema offered at the time may have inspired Williams' theorising and may have motivated his interest in the experience of emerging forms.

³ Often cited references to definitions by Williams are 1977: 128-35 and 1981: 156-74.

⁴ Michael Orrom is known as documentary filmmaker and also worked for the BBC on social documentaries. There is little research on his work, apart from articles by McGahan 2010 and Boon 2013.



After the war, during the late 1940s, Williams and Orrom rekindled their joint interest in film and embarked on some collaborative effort. They founded a private company, *Film Drama Ltd.*, in 1953 and started to work on the theoretical and practical side of film and filmmaking. The *Raymond Williams Papers* at Swansea University keep a treatment by Williams, entitled *Effect of Machine on the Countryman's Work, Life and Community*, meant as a first draft of a shooting script for a film about the history of British agriculture to be shot by Orrom. Williams' text provides a sociological and economic analysis of the changes brought about to rural communities through capitalist exploitation. The treatment does not suggest anything about planned filmic renderings, but some passages of the text were later incorporated in *The Country and the City* (1973). The documentary itself never materialised (cf. Polan 2013: 4-5; Smith 2008: 253-56). Orrom and Williams never managed a joint filmic project, but they published *Preface to Film* (1954), a short treatise which was meant as a manifesto for any future filmic endeavours.

The part written by Williams was "Film and the Dramatic Tradition" (1954: 1-54), a part often reprinted, which holds the first, fledgling ideas about structure of feeling. Orrom's part is called "Film and Its Dramatic Techniques" (1954: 57-117) and is only available in the 1954 edition; it has never been reprinted. *Preface to Film* also has a "Postscript" (1954: 119-22), also never reprinted, in which the two authors deplore that they do not manage to get any funding for their projects. They see distribution constraints responsible for this failure, as there was the need to have a contract with a film distribution company first before any application for public funding was possible (cf. 1954: 119). In *Preface to Film* Williams raves about "total performance" (1954: 11) and Orrom about "total expression" (1954: 113), by which they mean that "speech, movement, design" (1954: 31) need to come together and that "each element is then equally relevant to the whole" (1954: 31). *Preface to Film* is extremely enthusiastic, and one gets the feeling that Dana Polan is right when he says, "perhaps that was for the best" (2013: 5), about the fact that no actual filmic production followed *Preface to Film*.

Before I turn to Williams' definition of structure of feeling in *Preface to Film*, let me add a couple more milestones in Williams' involvement in film, following, and selecting, from Polan's chronology. After finishing his studies at Cambridge after the war, Williams was employed by the Oxford University extramural education branch as a staff tutor. From this time (1953) dates a summary of a film course for the *Workers Education Association* titled "Film as a Tutorial Subject" (McIlroy 1993: 185-92). As Polan rightly observes (cf. 2013: 8-9), Williams' tutorial clearly shows Leavisite influences, particularly when Williams promotes attentive viewing skills as a detached, quasi scientific, form of close analysis, and when he speaks of film as an art form to justify any scholarly criticism of the medium.



In the early 1960s, Williams returned to Cambridge, first as fellow at Jesus College (1961), then as reader (1967) and eventually as Professor of Drama in 1974. In his early years as a teacher in Cambridge, he realised that film was the preferred arts form his students consumed and enjoyed and therefore started to include film into his teaching. In an interview about “Film and the University” quoted by Polan, he states that “an English faculty which didn’t deal with that experience [film] would be deluding itself” (2013: 11). In Fred Inglis’ biography, *Raymond Williams*, and in Polan’s article we find some references to his lecture notes kept in the Swansea archive. These notes are sparse, but we learn about a 1968-69 “lecture course on dramatic forms and tragedy” including “Eisenstein, Bergman, Pudovkin, Lang, D.W. Griffith” (Inglis 1995: 218), and there is also reference to courses on the US-American Western (cf. Polan 2013: 12). These sources also suggest that his teaching always had a formalist component, such as close analysis of filmic conventions and, as a second step, a contextualising component, where the filmic example was examined within its wider cultural field.

Williams often returns to moving images and their expressive potential in his work: in the 1968 extended edition of *Drama in Performance* (first published 1954), he includes a new chapter on Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* (1957). His interest in the moving image also takes centre stage in 1974, when he was made Professor of Drama at Cambridge University: his inaugural lecture is called “Drama in a Dramatized Society” and is devoted to television. His book-length study *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) was stimulated by his television experience in the US, when he spent a year at Stanford in the Department of Communications. As a final example, I would like to mention the preface to the anthology *British Cinema History* (Curran 1983), “Film History”, which is reprinted in *What I Came to Say* (Williams 1989: 132-46), in which Williams provides an outline of the way he could envisage a film history. Such history, according to Williams, should start with “(a) the actual technology and its uses; (b) film and popular culture, then turn to (c) film and established culture; and finally (d) film and modernist culture” (1989: 135). This outline sounds promising but never led to any book-length publication.

Having briefly sketched some features of Williams’ work on the moving image, I will now summarize a number of key characteristics of structure of feeling. Sean Matthews, in his article “Change and Theory in Raymond Williams’s Structure of Feeling” (Matthews 2001), mentions Williams’ “[...] dogged fidelity to a defining metaphor for over fully twenty years [...]” (2001: 183),⁵ a long time span during which Williams kept revising the concept. One of structure of feeling’s main functions as an analytic tool, which is relevant for our purposes,⁶ is to facilitate considerations of new and emergent

⁵ Matthews 2001 provides a very good summary of Williams’ theorizing on structure of feeling, which also inspired my summary here.

⁶ Critics keep coming back to “structure of feeling” in various academic contexts. There is a recent article by the historian Stuart Middleton (2020), who discusses the concept within its historical situatedness in



elements in the social formation in popular culture or, more specifically, in the arts or in literature. According to Williams, evidence of change is generated by comparing the experience of new feelings or ideas with received conventions and forms of expression. These new feelings are apparent in the experience of “an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency” (1977: 130). In the context of Williams and film, one could argue, this unease can be related to Williams’ observations and ensuing practice that teaching drama without film and television at the time he was lecturing at university no longer made any sense, as film and television were pushing towards a prime position in popular culture, which made him change his teaching content.

In the above-mentioned *Preface to Film*, Williams gives an early, if not the first, definition of structure of feeling. The passage begins as follows:

All products of a community in a given period are [...] essentially related, although in practice [...] this is not always easy to see. In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct [...] the material life, the general social organisation, and [...] the dominant ideas. [...] We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the lived experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. [...] it is from such a totality that the artist draws [...] (1954: 21)

This quote first and foremost refers to Williams’ negation of the text/context or foreground/background dichotomy, which tends to cut the links between culture, society and its material conditions. In this context, Williams contrasts the nature of historical analysis with an analysis of a phenomenon grounded in the day and age the critic lives in. According to Williams, when we study the past, we access each element of interest to us via a “precipitate”. This word derives from chemistry, where a solid substance derived after a chemical process is called the precipitate as this substance used to be liquified in a solution before the process started. These precipitates, the ‘solid’ remnants from the past we examine, have gone through selection processes and are therefore easier to access than anything in an analysis of the present moment when everything is fluid and in flux, or “in solution” (1954: 21). The quote opens up a dichotomy between elements that are regarded as inseparable (“in solution”) and elements regarded as separable (“precipitate”). The separable ones, such as “the material life”, “the general social organisation” or “the dominant ideas” of a period are, in *The Long Revolution*, referred to as “documentary culture” (Williams 2001: 65). The inseparable elements, “the complex whole” or “the totality” make up the structure of feeling of a time period, which is the very stuff a creative person draws from. The two authors of *Preface to Film* seem to have cherished the hope that their desired product,

mid-century democratic politics. British feminist critics working within an affect studies paradigm often refer back to the concept when they work on affect-laden discourses like the one generated by the hashtag #metoo (McDuffie and Ames 2021) or on the pulling power of digital media (Coleman 2018). The articles collected in Sharma and Tygstrup 2015 are also inspired by affect studies and focus on collective affective states, which, for example, are at the centre of memory studies.



the films they were planning to make, would provide “total performance” and “total expression” while creatively drawing on “the complex whole” of their day and age.

Following these first considerations, Williams then wants to come to terms with “the totality”. Structure of feeling is meant to be a concept that both tackles the general mood of a period and, at the same time, its organising rules, regulations and conventions. For the development of my argument, it is important to emphasise that structure of feeling tries to describe simultaneously both sides of a coin: the experience side and the convention side. This feature will help to illustrate another phenomenon; namely the close-up as an entity that, at its core, is also characterised by two paradoxical sides: a side of “feeling”, in the sense of affect withdrawing itself from immediate accountability, and a side of “structure”, a grounding in conventions.

Let me continue with another quote from *Preface to Film*, which looks at structure of feeling from the side of analysis:

To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may [...] be useful; but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work of art against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named the structure of feeling of a period, and it is only realizable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole. (1954: 21-22)

This definition again distinguishes between separable elements, “any part of that observed totality”, such as conventions of the period a scholar is interested in, and inseparable experience, here described as something which “remains”, as something from the realm of affect, in the sense of an element that for a moment resists signification, that can be called a potentiality, an intensity, an unease or a form of crisis.

Preface to Film stresses the importance of art as the site where structure of feeling finds expression. This focus on art in the context of Williams’ first definitions of the concept emphasises that, at the beginning, structure of feeling has to be understood very much in the context of Williams and Orrom as potential artists who wanted to find ways of expressing the lived experience of a time and struggled to define a concept that names and explains this experience. Here is another quote:

The structure of feeling lies deeply embedded in our lives; it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art [...] that it can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience. [...] the artist has not only to feel; he must, to the extent that he is an artist, find ways of realizing and communicating, wholly and definitely, the moving experience. Only when he has found such ways can the personal vision be confirmed in public view. (1954: 54-55)

In this section, we can again observe an analysis of the individual elements of structure of feeling. “Finding ways of realising and communicating” refers, in my view, to the



semanticizing effort and the work on conventions artists need to undertake in order to integrate their work into something new the public can relate to. However, prior to this effort, there is a “moving experience”, the “feeling”, the personal vision, the affect, the unease, which trigger cultural production in the first place.

In *Marxism and Literature*, in the section on “Cultural Theory” a whole subchapter is devoted to structure of feeling (Williams 1977: 128-41). Here, the concept is not discussed in the context of artistic effort, but against the backdrop of social experience.

There is frequent tension between the received interpretation and practical experience. Where this tension can be made direct and explicit, [...] we are still within a dimension of relatively fixed forms. But the tension is as often an unease, a stress, a displacement, a latency: the moment of conscious comparison not yet come [...] (1977: 130).

Williams here looks at structure of feeling from the side of the experiences one goes through when there are changes in the structure, when one lives through shifts or forms of crisis in society that do not fit any familiar categories. At these stages, the side of affect becomes more dominant because the experience of change, of something new and something emerging, may lead to tensions. This pressure and strain is often experienced as unease, causing stress and feelings of displacement.

For my purposes and summing up, the two sides of structure of feeling delineated above are of key importance: there is, first, the ‘feeling’ part, which may manifest itself as tension, as unease, and which can be defined as a latency and a potentiality, or, as Williams has put it in a passage from *The Long Revolution* (1961) devoted to a definition of “way of life”, as something “least tangible” (Williams 2001: 64). Second, there is the ‘structure’ part, focussing on the side of convention, a side which can be easily made explicit and can also be separated into relatively fixed parts or forms. “The term I would like to suggest to describe it [way of life] is *structure of feeling*: it is as firm and definite as ‘structure’ suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity” (2001: 64). The two-sidedness of structure of feeling, in the sense of an entity that is structurally and logically inseparable like the two sides of a piece of paper, and Williams’ various definitions of the specific nature of each of the two sides are both relevant for my exploration of the filmic close-up.

In “The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema” (Doane 2003), the film scholar Mary Ann Doane provides a lucid and precise working definition of the close-up:

The close-up transforms whatever it films into a quasi-tangible thing, producing an intense phenomenological experience of presence, and yet, simultaneously, that deeply experienced entity becomes a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read. This is, inside and outside of the cinema, the inevitable operation of the face as well. (2003: 94)



This definition has, similar to Williams' definitions of structure of feeling, two sides which work together simultaneously and which show logical similarities to Williams' concept: according to Doane, the close-up has an element we can relate to 'feeling' (of 'structure of feeling'), namely "the intense [...] experience of presence" (2001: 94) and another element we can relate to 'structure', namely "a sign, a surface that demands to be read" (2003: 94). So, similar to Williams' concept, the close-up relies on an element "least tangible" (Williams 2001: 64), on an intensity, and at the same time on another element, which is very tangible and which follows the generic and well-known conventions of the respective filmic narration. I see the logical similarities to Williams' concept in this paradoxical nature of the close-up.

In the following examples, the close-up of the face will be the focus, but I will employ a wide notion of face/close-up proposed by Gilles Deleuze in the cinema books, where he equates face and close-up and, furthermore, stresses the potentiality of the close-up/face as a de-territorialised image detached from spatial and temporal relations (cf. Deleuze 2013). Equally important for my explorations is the territorialising side of the close-up, when the close-up of a character's face forms part of the diegetic space this character inhabits within the narrative.

I will now discuss the general distinctive features of the close-up and the paradoxes and cognitive dissonances that are associated with the close-up in general and, in particular, with the close-up of a face.



Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960)

© Universal Pictures



To illustrate my point, I will first turn to a well-known filmic example, namely the end of the deadly shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960): this scene finishes with an extreme close-up of the shower's gully dissolving into Marion Crane's (Janet Leigh's) eye. Next, the camera zooms out, stops and then lingers on one side of Marion's tightly framed face. Janet Leigh does not blink in this shot, which led to rumours that the shot was a still, which was not the case according to an interview with the actress (cf. Gross 2018). You can see drops of water in Marion's eye, drops on her nose and around her mouth. These drops can be interpreted as tears, maybe tears about herself she will never cry, but they can also be seen as simple drops of water as the setting is a shower after all. We could therefore argue that the audience is encouraged to respond to this lingering close-up shot both by an affective and an analytic response, as the drops of water and the unblinking expression seem puzzling. The close-up of Marion's, presumably dead, face disturbs and evokes unease, but a viewer most likely also makes an effort to integrate the shot into the structure of the narrative, possibly with a paradoxical result: do the drops just signify water or rather tears, or simply both?

Analysing the close-up in the context of dichotomies and paradoxes can be followed up on a number of levels, and I will start with keeping to Doane (2003: 92-94) and look at the words, in the sense of the signifiers, different languages use to refer to the close-up. The English language uses 'close-up', and German has 'Nahaufnahme', which are both words that emphasise the place of the spectator. Both words foreground aspects of proximity as they focus on the relationship between the viewer and the object being viewed. The Italian word, 'primo piano' is similar, with its emphasis on foreground and on something which needs your attention. The French language, however, has 'gros plan', an expression providing a different focus: 'gros plan' foregrounds aspects of size, in the sense of whether something is depicted as large or small. The French expression, therefore, focuses on the quality of the image itself, and not so much on the relationship between image and spectator. These minor differences, one might speculate, could be the reason why critics from these different language communities tend to focus either more on the quality of the image or on the relationship between image and spectator.⁷

Again with the help of Doane's article, I will now consider more paradoxes, dissonances and ambivalences in the context of the close-up. At one point Doane calls the close-up "a potential semantic threat to the unity and coherency of the filmic discourse" (2003: 91). On the one hand, there is "threat", a form of "unease", to use the terminology that we know from Williams' definitions of structure of feeling. On the other hand, there is "unity and coherency", which could be both related to something "firm and definite" to use Williams' modifying adjectives when he speaks of the features of

⁷ See Doane 2003: 93 ff. for more details. The Russian language uses a term similar to the French one, and it seems remarkable that Sergei Eisenstein in his essays on film theory or Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1* both theorize the close-up rather like an image and not as a proximity pattern. This might be a stimulating but also complex topic to follow up, which would go beyond the scope of this paper.



structure in 'structure of feeling'. Doane points out more ambivalences: first, the close-up can be seen as detail of a whole, as a microcosm, where the focus is on depicting one little piece of a larger entity, with the whole entity firmly in mind. So, for example, when a face is shown, the idea that this face belongs to a body is equally considered. The close-up is then regarded as part of a homogenous diegetic space, which also territorialises the close-up within the depth of perspectival realism. Second, still following Doane, the close-up can be regarded as a complete whole, as a macrocosm, and as a separate totality in its own right, as an entity that is deterritorialised and detached from any temporal and spatial coordinates. Within this second logic, a face on screen is not automatically seen as part of a body and the face's embeddedness into a homogenous diegetic space is of lesser importance. When the close-up is seen as separate entity, the focus is then on sheer screen surface, whereby any sense of perspectival realism is momentarily lost. These two ways of seeing make it obvious that the close-up is an ambivalent entity which can belong to the order of spectacle of scale and also to narrative integration.

Doane's definition at the beginning of this section stresses both aspects of the close-up; namely "the intense phenomenological experience of presence" and the need to "become a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read" (2003: 94). In early film theory, and early film practice particularly, the pressure towards reading the 'surface' was very strong and was negotiated extensively. Doane mentions as one example Béla Balász who, under the influence of Henri Bergson, writes in *Der sichtbare Mensch* (1924) about the close-up of a face: "[...] we can see that there is something there which we cannot see [...]"⁸ (2003: 96). Balász here refers to the affect-laden and intense quality of a face in close-up (the "there"), which, at the same time in the sense of a universal language, gives direct access to the inner feelings of the person depicted (the "not there"). This isolation of the intensity of the single shot promoted by Balász was heavily criticised by the proponents of dialectical montage, who always embedded their close-ups within a dialectical sequence. Sergei Eisenstein, one of Balász's main contemporary critics, tellingly calls his response to *Der Sichtbare Mensch*, "Béla Forgets the Scissors" (cf. Eisenstein 1988: 77-82).

These discussions about the close-up of the face are summarised by Doane in the form of two key questions: "Does the close-up extract its object from all spatio-temporal coordinates? Does [the close-up] constitute a momentous pause in temporal unfolding of the narrative?" (2003: 97-98). She comes to the following conclusions: if these questions are answered in the negative, the close-up will lack autonomy and has to be defined as detail of a whole. If these questions are answered in the affirmative, the close-up will retain its autonomy and may function as affect-laden intensity beyond signification and can be regarded as a de-territorialised whole in its own right. Doane's line of argument

⁸ Doane here uses a quote from Balász (1924) in translation.



leans towards the answer no, but throughout her article one senses the author's puzzlement about the wide-spread fascination with the power of the close-up as "intense [...] presence" (2003: 94).

In the following I would like to look more closely at two examples mentioned by Doane, which she both reads within the conventions of continuity editing and in support of narrative linearity with a focus on the power of "spatio-temporal coordinates" (2003: 98) versus 'intense presence'. The first example comes from the 1936 film *Sabotage*, which is Alfred Hitchcock's take on Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). In a [scene](#) towards the end of the film, Mrs Verloc (Sylvia Sidney) has just discovered that her husband Mr Verloc (Oscar Homolka) is responsible for the death of her brother. The scene is set in the couple's dining room and starts with Mrs. Verloc carving the roast to serve her husband. In a sequence of short close-ups showing the carving knife, as well as Mrs Verloc's and Mr Verloc's faces, the scene establishes Mrs Verloc's realisation that she could use the carving knife as a murder weapon. The scene also shows her hesitation, Mr Verloc's rising suspicion of impending danger and eventually the deed itself. The scene ends with an extreme close-up of Mrs Verloc's hand letting go of the knife's handle, while the knife itself is firmly lodged inside Mr Verloc's body.

In Doane's analysis, this scene serves the purpose of reading all the close-ups as instances that follow the conventions of continuity. According to this interpretation, the close-ups, and in particular the close-ups of the carving knife, support narrative linearity and thus need to be read as details lacking autonomy. The close-ups of faces and knives emphasised by eyeline matches want to tell you: look closely, this is a scene about a knife that will be of importance later on in the narrative. It needs to be added here that we all know zillions of banal versions of such a scene, because any murder mystery on TV has a similar 'significant' close-up shot in it. As we are conditioned to this convention and also know that no shot is wasted within the crime drama genre, we read such a shot as support of the narrative. Any close-up of a knife, a gun or whatever, tells us in a split second that the item seen will be of interest later and will be relevant within the diegesis. This is one side of the story, but, as I see it, there is more to the scene from *The Secret Agent* described above: shortly before the killing, when the tension between Mr and Mrs Verloc has built up considerably, we get a two shot of the couple followed by a close-up of their hands reaching towards the carving knife. Nobody really manages to get hold of the knife, which drops noisily back to the plate. The close-up and the high-pitched clink-clank of the falling knife, more or less the only sound this scene has, create a surprising and startling effect and for a moment shock the viewer. In this moment the close-up conjures its autonomous power and works very effectively as a whole that is not attached to the narrative. For a moment, affect and feeling take centre stage. So, concluding, I would like to argue that the close-up of the falling knife plus its accompanying sound "constitute" via affect "a momentous pause in the narrative" (Doane 2003: 97-98). This disturbance or unease is, however, shortly followed by an



integration of the shot into the linearity of the story. What happens here, according to my reading, is a paradoxical intervention, which emphasises that a close-up comprises two aspects at the same time: unease and intensity plus conventional support of the narrative.



Rouben Mamoulian: *Queen Christina* (1933)

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The second example used by Doane is a scene from Rouben Mamoulian's 1933 feature *Queen Christina* with Greta Garbo in the lead role. In this film, the Queen resigns from her throne in order to spend her life with her Spanish lover; the lover, however, unfortunately dies in a duel and the closing scene shows Christina walking towards the front of the ship sailing to Spain. There she stands in a medium shot gazing into the distance with the wind blowing through her hair while the camera very slowly moves into a tight close-up of her face. Prior to shooting this final scene, Mamoulian allegedly suggested to Garbo that while shooting the take she best think about nothing and best avoid blinking her eyes, so that her face could be a "blank sheet of paper" (Erkilla 1985: 613).⁹ The 'blank sheet' specifies the close-up of the face as an empty surface that allows multiple readings. Mamoulian seems to have wanted to achieve the effect that any member of the audience could imagine the ending of the film for themselves, thereby giving the audience agency and detaching the close-up from 'the whole' of the diegesis. Mamoulian's stage direction, therefore, points towards a yes to Doane's two questions as this zooming in on Garbo's face again rather supports the autonomy of the close-up. The

⁹ Here is the full quote as given in Erkilla 1985, who took it from an interview with Mamoulian from a standard 1970s Garbo biography: "I want your face to be a blank sheet of paper. I want the writing to be done by every member of the audience. I'd like it if you could avoid blinking your eyes, so that you're nothing but a beautiful mask" (1985: 613).



close-up here works as ‘a whole’ in its own right and seems to resist narrative linearity and to enter a temporality of individual contemplation.

This final scene of *Queen Christina* was famously described by Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (1957):

Garbo still belongs to that moment in cinema when capturing the human face still plunged audiences into the deepest ecstasy, when one literally lost oneself in a human image as one would in a philtre, when the face represented a kind of absolute state of the flesh, which could be neither reached nor renounced. A few years earlier the face of Valentino was causing suicides; that of Garbo still partakes of the same rule of Courtly Love, where the flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition. [...] It is indeed an admirable face-object. (Barthes 1972: 56)

The manner in which Barthes here describes the close-up could be read using Williams’ terminology as a “residual” (Williams 1977: 121-27) aspect of the close-up. For our purposes it is significant that Barthes’ reading of the close-up supports its autonomy as a deterritorialised object promoting a momentous pause in the narrative. Doane argues that “Although Garbo’s face here seems to constitute a veritable zero degree of expression, its blankness nevertheless is forced into legibility by the pressure of the narrative culminating in that moment” (Doane 2003: 101). Conversely, I would like to argue that the pressure of the autonomous face-object, the pressure of the close-up as an independent whole, in short its intensity, triggers the audience’s will to semanticise, thus supporting my claim of the paradoxical nature of the close-up. This means that the close-up may function autonomously and may at the same time trigger a will to semanticise. The close-up may function as a whole in its own right and at the same time develop into a detail within the narrative.¹⁰

I will now come to my final part and show how a focus on the paradoxical nature of the close-up is supported by Williams’ continuous work on structure of feeling. Similarly, the working mechanism of the close-up strengthens, on a logical and formal level, the paradoxical nature of Williams’ concept. Structure of feeling can explain the impact of something prior to semantization, which is the focus when Williams talks about pre-emerging forms. The paradox at the core of the close-up works as follows: seeing a close-up triggers an impact, a feeling of unease created via the spectacular extraction of what the close-up shows from spatio-temporal coordinates, while narrative integration happens simultaneously. This effect is succinctly explained in a version of Williams’ definition of structure of feeling from the extensive *New Left Review* interviews in *Politics and Letters* (1979). In this definition he particularly stresses how change, how the emerging and how the new is experienced:

¹⁰ Roland Barthes’ distinction between “punctum” and “stadium” developed in *Camera Lucida* (1981) relate to a similar tension. As my anonymous reviewer wrote: “It also draws attention to the fact that the somatic (rather than the semantic) effect of the close up is related not only to size and perspective, but to the (photographic-indexical) technology of film.” Thank you for this comment.



[...] I have found that areas which I would call structures of feeling as often as not initially form a certain kind of disturbance or unease, a particular type of tension, for which when you stand back or recall them you can sometimes find a referent. To put it another way, the peculiar location of a structure of feeling is the endless comparison that must occur in the process of consciousness between the articulated and the lived. The lived is only another word, if you like, for experience: but we have to find a word for that level. For all that is not fully articulated, all that comes through as disturbance, tension, blockage, emotional trouble seems to me precisely a source of major changes in the relation between signifier and the signified, whether in literary language or conventions. (1979: 167-68)¹¹

This quote once again foregrounds the paradoxical nature of structure of feeling. Williams' definition of the concept is here again characterised by a struggle between cognitive uneasiness and, at the same time, the will to semanticise. I would like to argue that this aspect is formally and structurally very similar to what Doane says about the close-up as having the status of a semantic threat. Following this conceptual analogy, the 'feeling' side (of structure of 'feeling') of the close-up could be called the side of the close-up as a whole, which puts emphasis on spatio-temporal isolation and which may cause disturbance and tension. To continue, the close-up as a whole may be seen in analogy to what Williams above calls "the lived", "disturbance", "blockage", "emotional trouble". The 'structure' side, however, would be the close-up as detail which affords narrative integration and which, in analogy to the quote above, would be "the articulated". Thus, following the fundamental logic of structure of feeling sheds light on the paradoxical nature of the close-up and provides a strong argument in favour of a collapse of dichotomies: a close-up can be both, namely the producer of the monumental, the gigantic and the spectacular and at the same time the bearer of the small, the minute. Consistent with this logic, the close-up is both totality and detail, both whole and part. And the question where does the close-up reside can be also answered: Williams' definitions of structure of feeling show us two ways of access to the close-up: first, the access via feeling, via affect, tension, disturbance and unease, the way dominantly supported by Barthes in *Mythologies*, and the access via structure, via the narrative, the access preferred by Doane. The conceptual similarities, particularly the aspect of paradox, between structure of feeling and the close-up buttress the idea that the close-up simultaneously resides in the space of the audience when it has the effect of disturbance or unease and in the space of the narrative when it forms part of the linearity of the diegesis. Williams' theorizing about structure of feeling can accentuate our awareness that there are always two ways of access, one via "structure" (the narrative) and one via "feeling".

Conversely, the analogy to the workings of the close-up also strengthens the paradoxical nature of structure of feeling and opens up new avenues for further analysis.

¹¹ This quote could be fruitfully exploited for a structural analysis of 'crisis', which would go beyond the scope of this paper.



One could stick to the extensive oeuvre of Raymond Williams and consider whether his interest in film and the moving image may have fed into his fiction. *Border Country* (1960), for example, has scenes which zoom in on microelements to support and strengthen the bigger narrative context.¹² On a more general level, the tension between micro- and macroanalysis could be worthwhile exploring, such as the topics developed in Siegfried Kracauer's last book, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (1969), in which he sees historiography in the context of microanalysis and refers to the filmic close-up in this context.

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¹² I owe this reference to Daniel G. Williams (Swansea University).



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