

Article

In Praise of Speed: The Value of Velocity in Contemporary Cinema

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IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA SINCE THE EARLY 1970S the ascendancy and mass popularity of the 'blockbuster' film in Hollywood and around the world has ensured that the critical reception of fast films that use high-speed editing techniques, especially those positioned under the heading of action/spectacle cinema, has been primarily negative. The popularity of action/spectacle cinema, with its emphasis on bigger and brighter visual shocks and 'constant and continual activity', at the expense of narrative causality or in-depth character study, has led to critical derision of any film that moves at high speed.¹ Critics are suspicious of a primarily, but not exclusively Hollywood-influenced popular cinema that seems committed to producing increasing numbers of films that prioritise both spectacle over substance, and high-speed violence without any ethical perspective of the consequences to the human body, in an attempt to make ever increasing amounts of money.² According to this perspective, slow, contemplative cinematic speed has been critically elevated over pure sensation. Rushing excitement and adrenaline is seen as a negative experience which lacks meaning and artistic merit.³

This criticism of fast cinema is compounded by the mainstream dominance of youth-oriented films containing high-speed dance music and action sequences that are cut in time to an incessant beat. This apparent over-use of the 'MTV aesthetic' has been attributed to the ever-decreasing attention-

spans of a youth audience, immersed in the ever-increasing speed of contemporary society. MTV's founding CEO Robert Pittman helped to define this tendency as infantile in 1983 when he claimed he was 'dealing with a culture of TV babies': 'What kids can't do today is follow things too long. They get bored and distracted, their minds wander.'⁴ Since then, the 'MTV aesthetic' has been attacked for its high-speed, music-oriented editing, its superficial lack of in-depth narrative drive and its inability to offer a satisfactory level of spectatorial contemplation.

As the film-strip is broken up and fragmented by digital jump cuts, smash zooms and fast edits that jerk and flash in time to popular music, critics argue that the images on screen have begun to lose their aesthetic and cultural value.⁵ In his book, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*, James Gleick interviews Annette Insdorf, a film historian who lays the blame for contemporary cinema's hyper-visibility at (music) television's feet:

Shot-shot-shot-shot, because television has accustomed us to a faster pace [...] [t]here's a kind of mindlessness. The viewer is invited to absorb images without digesting them. Music videos seem to have seeped into the rhythms of creativity. It's rare these days that films afford the luxury of time.⁶

Peter Bradshaw echoes this frequent (and often valid) criticism of fast cinema in his review of the toy brand-inspired, hyper-fast *Transformers* (Michael Bay, 2007): 'Nobody can hear themselves think. The soundtrack is at Krakatoa levels and the editing is frenzied, almost stroboscopic, so much so that you can't really get a clear look at what the Transformers actually look like.'⁷ While Bradshaw's criticisms of this film are both accurate and appropriate, I would like to suggest that cinematic speed should not be *automatically* aligned with youthful, mindless vacuity. Bradshaw attacks both the film and its teenage audience's cynicism and stupidity: 'innocence, playfulness, imagination and charm—has been chucked overboard in favour of a boorish celebration of the film's dumbest and most reactionary demographic of 15 to 25-year-olds, to whose masturbatory needs Bay caters with passionate urgency.'⁸ Fast films and the audiences who enjoy them are often viewed negatively because these images allow no time for reflection. The screen buzzes and vibrates at hyper-fast speeds, and while critical understanding and narrative logic is often lost, those young spectators with an apparently short attention span instead enjoy a sensory overload of thrilling visual information that can offer a specific kind of sensational cinematic image-value.

Fast speed is not just a negative symptom of a contemporary cinematic problem in which films have become overloaded and exhausted by frantic televisual tropes and empty digital surfaces. Thrilling velocity is present throughout film history in the work of many lauded cinematic giants: in the shunting edits of Gance's high-speed train wheels, in the motion of Vertov's cars and horses, in Eisenstein's suspenseful Odessa steps sequence, in Godard's youthful jump cuts, and in Kurosawa's and Peckinpah's violent and exhilarating fight sequences. It is not speed that is at fault here. Fast motion is not in and of itself the perpetrator of mindlessness. Rather, like any stylistic film trope, it is

the way that the fast edit and the quick cut have been used as empty shortcuts to excitement in modern cinema that must be critiqued.

If the criticisms directed at this style of filmmaking stem from the actual fast stream of images on television, the internet and in advertising, they are also a result of the recent cultural, critical and artistic speculative emphasis placed upon the use of slowness in creative endeavour: namely, its use in moving image work as a philosophical reaction to modernity's high-speed vacuity, as seen, for example, in the video art of Douglas Gordon and Tacita Dean, or in the films of Michael Haneke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul.⁹ This contemporary critical trend towards slowness recalls Walter Benjamin's much earlier revolt against the speed of modernity in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.¹⁰ As Mary Ann Doane recalls:

for Benjamin, there was something obscene about the instantaneous, the contraction of time to a point, the speed and consequent oblivion associated with both urban space and modern technologies—hence his nostalgia for the daguerreotype with its relentless duration, as though the slowness of an etching were required to do justice to the peculiar qualities and texture of light [...] The technique itself of the snapshot, on the other hand, its slavish embrace of speed and the momentary, fits well with a throwaway culture and the reduced life span of its information.¹¹

Doane's connection between the momentary speed of the snapshot and a disposable culture lacking in depth is appropriate here. The contemporary cinematic situation is such that, on the one hand, mainstream cinema has become predominantly fast in a reflection of the consumptive advertising aesthetic of modernity. On the other hand, and as a reaction, avant-garde and art house cinema has become predominantly slow, with the apparent intention of allowing the spectator more time to seriously contemplate the image.

This presumed dichotomy between slow and fast, between art and entertainment, between thought and action, does not, however, take into account films that are positioned on the borders between experimental and mainstream cinema, nor does it factor in emotional, elemental, or instinctual reactions as a constructive response to, or element of, significant creative endeavour. There are certain instances of fast cinema that offer increased levels of excitement and cinematic pleasure by combining temporal assault with emotive character empathy and in-depth narrative causality. In these films the positive influence of Music Television and its reliance on emotive film sequences that are cut to the high-speed musical beat can be seen, heard and felt, while the superficial, derogatory associations of the vacuous 'MTV Aesthetic' have been minimised. It is also interesting to note that, somewhat paradoxically, contemporary cinema seems to depict speed, not through an emphasis on the flow of its cinematic style, but, more emphatically, by creating stuttering photographic bursts of heightened force which reveal cinema's hidden static ontology, its composition as a strip of individual still images. When edited at speed the cinematic image stream is consistently, rapidly interrupted and each shot becomes fleeting, reflecting the photographic sequence via temporal compression. Ultimately, fast motion in contemporary cinema, in combination with a high-speed musical score, can represent a

pleasurable descent towards irrational physical sensation and base emotional fears; a sensation that is visualised on screen as the degradation of cinematic flow and the revelation of the high-speed photographic image. The recent films from around the world discussed below project an intense high-speed style, appeal to the spectator's bodily senses and induce excitement, while simultaneously encouraging the spectator to become instinctively and emotionally absorbed in the images on screen.

Blink and you'll miss it...



Figs. 1 and 2. *Run Lola, Run* (*Lola rennt*, Tom Tykwer, 1998)

Tom Tykwer's 1998 film *Run Lola, Run* (*Lola rennt*) makes a clear connection between an accelerating visual tempo and the intensification of onscreen emotion. As cutting speeds increase and drumbeats get faster, when characters run instead of walk and struggle to breathe on screen, images can seem to rush past at a rate that is almost too fast for the eye to see. In the film, Lola, a rebellious and resourceful red-haired young woman, has twenty minutes in which to find 100,000 Deutsche Marks to give to her boyfriend Manni in order to save his life. Tykwer provides the audience with three slightly different, temporally frantic, potential outcomes of her search for money, all of which play with the concept of split-second timing, the transformative consequences of chance and fate and in particular, as Margit Grieb has argued, with the transposition of the repetitious video game format onto cinema.¹²

As Lola runs through the streets of Berlin, the speed of Tykwer and Mathilde Bonnefoy's editing and their experimental use of frantic, switching camera angles, along with jump cuts and temporal distortion serve both to build tension and to emphasise the point that Lola is literally, breathlessly, running out of time (Figs. 1 and 2). Tykwer highlights this concept of resolute human desperation in the face of the continual, unstoppable flow of time when he explains that he had the image of Lola in his head, long before the film began. "The picture of a woman with flame-red hair running and running and running, desperately, resolutely. This picture is pure cinema: motion and emotion, no other medium can convey these things in quite this way."¹³ Tykwer's emphasis on cinema's ability to combine movement, music and feeling recalls Abel Gance's early use of the fast edit in films like *La roue* (*The Wheel*, 1923). These pure qualities of duration and consequence are expressed and emphasised in

the film, not as flow and development, or contemplation and reverie, but rather as stuttering, high-speed, photographic change, and exciting, frantic, heart-thumping unease. This rapid editing style is emphasised and enhanced by Tykwer, Johnny Klimek and Reinhold Heil's unremitting, pumping, techno-trance score, providing the hyper-fast rhythm for virtually the entire film; a controversial decision that seems to mimic the continuous music of MTV while also linking Lola's anxious, unstoppable drive to keep running and save Manni to the pump and thrust of fast montage. As Tykwer himself has said, 'In a film, music intensifies everything'.¹⁴ The film's beat fills Lola's body with pulsating energy, driving her forward, pushing her on to rescue her boyfriend. Because of the repetitive video-game format her youthful body seems able to run indefinitely. As long as the music keeps going, as long as Manni is in danger, she will not stop. The image of her thrusting arms and pumping legs recalls the shunt and repetition of the machines that fascinated early cinema; in this contemporary film, joy, excitement and panic come not from the motion of the dancing body, as in the musical, but instead from the body-as-machine. Here the ecstatic relationship between the animated body, up-tempo music, and the fast edit is realized. Here cinema once more records the thrilling, pulsating throb of kinetic industrialism, transforming the body into a human engine that echoes the whirring mechanization of the cinematic apparatus itself.

With its combination of unremitting pace and narratively dense photographic sequences, *Run Lola, Run* exemplifies the interwoven, anxious relationships between a series of oppositional, essentially temporal principles within modernity: between cinema's paradoxical transformation of photographic images into filmic motion, between the cerebral contemplation of slowness and the instinctual nature of speed, between the repetitious second chances of video games and the finality of cinematic narrative. In a high-speed blur of sound, image and body, the film speaks of our emotional anxiety and panic of running out of time, of our instinctive fear of dying too soon, and of our need, as Kay Dickinson has indicated, to re-assess the nature of spectatorship in line with the emotional effects of viewing rapid images on the contemporary cinematic screen.¹⁵ As Dickinson has argued, speed is itself a vital mode of youth communication and currency in a world that is driven and obsessed by the elevation of rapid novelties and incessant motion and change.¹⁶ Dickinson identifies a crucial factor in the relationship between the emotional importance of fast and slow images, a debate between the hierarchy of on the one hand a restless, and on the other, a contemplative spectator. In relation to the former, speed appeals to adolescence, while in regard to the latter, slowness appeals to maturity. Each mode of movement is emotionally effective in different ways, as Eisenstein and Bazin have argued with regard to the edit and the shot: with fast images, the eye is denied contemplation, so that the spectator must assume an all-encompassing, unblinking, intense and excited gaze, during which the mind must struggle to keep up, must fight to understand; with slow images the eye is free, the gaze is calm and the mind can relax and take its time to understand more specific, less frenetic emotions.¹⁷ Each mode of looking is also elitist in its own way: speed discourages a spectator who might struggle to keep up, while slowness eliminates a spectator who is easily distracted. As David Bordwell has noted, 'Rapid editing obliges the

viewer to assemble many discrete pieces of information, and it sets a commanding pace: look away, and you might miss a key point [...] Television-friendly, the style tries to rivet the viewer to the screen'.¹⁸

In this way, sequences in some contemporary films, in which bursts of popular dance music are combined with rapid-fire images and emotions, are neither vacuous nor without import when viewed through the eyes of a youthful spectator. These films or film moments privilege spontaneity, intuition and revolt over contemplation and deliberation. They encourage a different sort of image absorption that necessitates a new kind of wide-eyed, unblinking, concentrated gaze. They are at once exciting and escapist, offering the viewer the visualisation of a utopian modern environment that fulfils a youthful need for an ideal fantasy space in which speed and emotion combine. In this way, films that reference Music Television, while privileging emotional intensity, are exciting for their target audiences precisely because the fast images are cut to the rhythm and pace of recognisable music, operating in much the same way as traditional musicals.¹⁹ Besides, for a youth audience in the modern world, surrounded by the educational and parental drive towards the slowness of critical contemplation, sequential, rapid-fire photographic speed in the cinema can become an attractive, exclusive, and fundamentally utopian sensation.

High-Speed Complexity

One of the key criticisms of fast contemporary cinema is that an increase in image velocity has resulted in a decrease in complexity and substance. A sequence of fast cuts and shifting images in *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) negates this assumption by directly communicating the excitement and anticipation of adolescence, the importance of music in constructing tone and mood in cinema, as well as the ability for fast sequences to project a heightened level of cinematic meaning. As Chieko, a Japanese deaf-mute teenager meets up with friends and embarks on a drug-fuelled night in a Tokyo club, Iñárritu communicates her dislocation from reality through a series of fast temporal and aural dislocations.



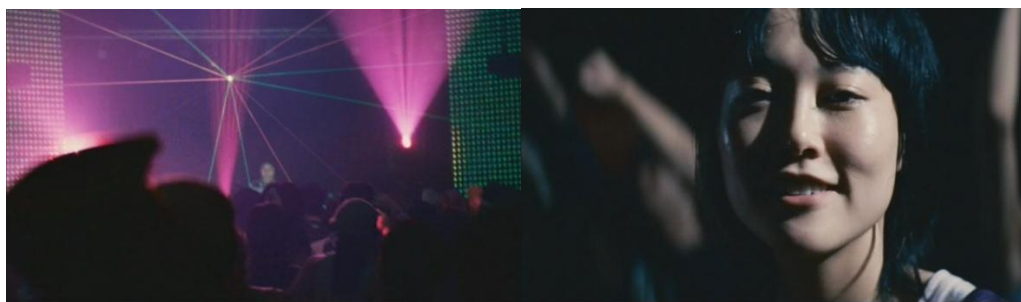
Figs. 3 and 4. *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

After spending the day getting high in an urban park, Chieko and her friends travel on the subway deeper into the city. She gazes in contemplation

out of the window of the carriage, as soothing music plays on the soundtrack in a reflection of her mood. An eye-line cut depicts another train speeding past on the opposite track, and almost imperceptibly, the music changes to a fast electro-pop beat that echoes the increasing frame rate, the speed of the train, Chieko's mounting excitement, and the sea of electric and fluorescent lights that illuminate the city outside the window. Further, faster repetitive cuts ensue, some showing the group moving through the teeming crowd, some of the shots visualising their environment of pedestrian-filled crossings and skyscrapers through aerial shots (Figs. 3 and 4). People push past the camera as the film continues to cut incessantly, moving into the night, passing advertising boards, vast moving image screens and shops and restaurants, echoing the modern world in its need for incessant change and speed.

As the friends enter the club, the music shifts in quality, so that it resembles the tinny, sharp sound of music being fed into the ear through headphones, an indication perhaps that the film is about to externally express Chieko's internal experience more acutely. As Chieko climbs the stairs to a higher level, the music gets louder until suddenly she steps out onto a dance floor and stands in awe at the scene before her. The music shifts again to a rendition of Earth Wind and Fire's 'September', and now we can hear the crowd all around Chieko, cheering and jumping and singing along in time to the music and the beat. Light and colour flashes on and off her excited, sweat-smearred face like flash bulbs going off in the dark. Abruptly the film cuts to show her point-of-view of the dance floor, and simultaneously the sound track cuts to silence. Suddenly we are in Chieko's world of images without sound, and the shift in comprehension of the environment is so abrupt, the change is so dramatic and intense that it is impossible to ignore the degree to which music had framed and shaped the atmosphere of the club.

The rate of cutting slows down at this point, as the film alternates between sound with images of Chieko, and silence with her point-of-view shots, underlining the sense that the spectator is being pulled into and out of Chieko's mind, while all the time, the stroboscopic light effects maintain the fast tempo, breaking the flow of images into beats and rhythms, as well as recalling the shutter and burst of a camera flash (Figs. 5 and 6). I would argue that this moment in the film could not be more profound with regard to the film's narrative drive as a whole, since themes regarding the dangerous nature of high-speed interconnected modernity, youth dysfunction and alienation, and the complexities of visual and verbal language barriers as embodied in this sequence are of paramount importance to the film's overall message, as indicated by its title.



Figs. 5 and 6. *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006)

The fast sequence of Chieko in the club encapsulates the way that she and the other characters in the film face extreme loneliness due to misunderstandings that occur as a result of language barriers, prejudice and stereotypes, all of which are only heightened by a faster, more impatient, ever-changing modern world. Chieko's inability to share the music with everyone else means that the sequence speaks of the isolating contemporary predicament of living in a segregated world of personal computers, hand-held computer games and music for one via MP3 players, while simultaneously these new communication technologies enable virtual access to others on a global scale. Not only does this sequence of the film offer its own unique pleasures, its own valued intricacies, but its speed adds meaning to the frame and in its direct reflection of the complexities of fast modern life in a world of high-speed global communication, it suggests that cinematic velocity might be uniquely placed as a complex, interrogative, self-reflexive tool.

Speed and Fear

At the farthest reaches of the temporal spectrum, when the body is assaulted by extreme speeds of motion and rapid optical bursts, there is the potential danger that the experience of intense movement will become too much for the brain to decode; image processing may become impossible, and, as a result, the subject could become mentally detached from reality and retreat into insanity. In the cinema, the temporal distortion of a character's experience and terrifying descent into madness are often visualised with an increase in temporal velocity. In these instances, a variety of experimental filmmaking techniques, from the fast edit to the use of fast motion, are used to encourage the spectator to experience the suffering of a character on screen, so that their horrifying high-speed loss of control can be both empathised with, and in some way experienced by the spectator attempting to focus on the images speeding past. This experimentation with fast filmic tempo and rhythm, as a reflection of drug-induced psychic disruption, is often most clearly visible in contemporary American independent cinema.²⁰

Darren Aronofsky's second feature film *Requiem for a Dream* (2000) explores the hellish temporal consequences of prolonged drug abuse on four individuals whose lives intersect and eventually spiral out of control. Harry

Goldfarb (Jared Leto) and his friend Tyrone (Marlon Wayans) are addicted to heroin and must continually pawn Harry's mother's television set in order to score the drugs they need. Sara Goldfarb (Ellen Burstyn), Harry's mother, thinks she is going to be on her favourite television game show, so she begins taking diet pills (containing amphetamines, colloquially—and in this context somewhat ironically—known as 'speed') in order to lose weight, until she becomes addicted and goes insane, while Harry's addict girlfriend Marion (Jennifer Connelly) eventually ends up prostituting herself in order to get high. Aronofsky explores the effects of these drugs through an exhausting tirade of high-speed visual imagery and experimentation, dominated by bursts of rapid editing. As Xan Brooks explains:

[The film] runs on a flurry of split-screens, extreme close-ups and rapid edits (the average feature boasts between 600 and 700 cuts, this one has 2000). The result is highly impressive: a swooping, gut-churning assault on the senses, all underpinned by Clint Mansell's mesmerising string score.²¹

Aronofsky's attempt to visualise and replicate the cycle and sensation of drug-taking through recurring, fast-cut images of a needle, a rolled banknote and a dilating pupil in the case of Harry, or a popped pill, a switched-on television and a remote control in the case of Sara, emphasises the way that time can be lost and become condensed in the mind of an addict, regardless of the nature, or level of legality, of the drug.

In a style that embraces rapid-fire edits and sequences cut to the musical beat, Aronofsky seeks to draw the spectator not only into the general world of drug abuse, but also directly into the temporal dysfunction, hallucinatory confusion, and suppressed emotions of the drug addict's mind. This high-speed external visualisation of intense internal sensation is intended to draw the spectator closer to the events onscreen. Aronofsky rejects any association with the superficially thrilling pleasures of MTV. He insists that in the cinematic form must always accentuate and emphasise content:

The biggest insult you can give me is, 'It's like MTV'. That's just a joke. First of all, we cut a lot quicker than MTV: each of those shots is one-third of a second. MTV is style over substance; or style *without* substance, I should say. It's basically just cool shots. With *Requiem* we tried to discipline ourselves as much as possible, to make sure that every single stylistic element that we chose in the film had a narrative reason. If it didn't have a narrative reason, it couldn't be in the movie. Period. So the montages became a narrative element to help tell the story. It had to be like a word that got repeated over and over again; so that every stylistic choice gets repeated.²²

The use of repetition in montage sequences as a tool with which to communicate the characters' growing alienation from reality reaches fever pitch during the last section of the film. In a sequence that begins with the ominous slamming of the third and final season title, 'Winter', Aronofsky begins the grating, nerve-shattering exploration of the final destruction of each of the four characters.

At her wits' end, still waiting for the call to let her know when she will star on her television game show, a delusional Sara leaves her house and walks into the street. She's lost the weight she wanted to, but the side effects of the diet pills mean that now her body is gaunt and frail, her hair is wild and she has lost her mind. In order to communicate her dislocation from reality, Aronofsky has the world swirl about her in fast motion, while people rush past her in an indecipherable blur: she is left disorientated, lost and even more alone than before. Once again music is crucial in evoking the terrifying ordeal that Sara is about to endure, as she is picked up by the police at the television studio and taken to a psychiatric hospital, accompanied by the grinding, screeching, fast-paced electro sounds of panic made aural. Meanwhile, across town, accompanied by the same hysterical score, Harry and Tyrone have left the city to try to buy more drugs. Harry is visibly sick, with pains shooting up his arm from an infected needle wound. Back in their flat, Marion has been left alone to panic: without drugs or money she sells her body to a pimp in order to get high.

As the sequence progresses, the film cuts more rapidly between the three unnerving storylines, while the music becomes even more expressionistic and fast, even more urgent and grating. Harry and Tyrone are arrested when they try to get Harry's gangrenous arm looked at in a hospital. In prison they are separated, and Aronofsky turns to techniques of temporal distortion and CGI in order to communicate their dislocation from reality. Tyrone grasps the bars of his cell as the world around him shakes and oscillates at amazing speed, while Harry lies on a bed sweating in agony, unable to control either his own movements or the pain. As the pair scream for help, the camera vibrates faster and faster, while the music becomes a series of high-speed blips and scratches, so that the rhythm of the edit and the beat seems to be generated by their intensifying anguish. Again, the cuts between the four characters increase in speed as Marion once more returns to the pimp's house to earn drug money through sex.



Figs. 7–10. *Requiem for a Dream* (Darren Aronofsky, 2000)

This time, however, the scene that follows is even more horrific, as she is made to have sex with another woman in front of a room of screaming, cheering men. At the same time, Sara is given electric shock treatment, her face held centre-frame in close-up as the current bursts through her body and she screams. In the prison, Tyrone is put to work, pumping vats full of slime, while Harry is declared unfit and is taken away on a trolley. Again, the cuts and music become faster, as the composer Clint Mansell has noted,

All the cuts in the final section of the film get mathematically faster; they happen in the same space but quicker, in half the time again and then half of that, and so on, and it was all mathematically worked out so I had to be aware of those when I was speeding up the track.²³

The film accelerates incrementally, pushing each character and the spectator to their limit, while actions echo actions and rhythms echo rhythms, so that the pump of Tyrone's incessant work, Marion's thrusting sex act and Sara's thumping ECT therapy beat in time, emphasising the realisation that each individual is sharing a living hell. Finally, the scene comes to an end when Harry is moved into theatre and image and sound reach fever pitch: Tyrone throws up, Sara passes out, Marion fakes an orgasm in order to be free, and Harry's arm is simultaneously, horrifically, amputated, his unconscious face splattered with blood (Figs. 7–10).

The intense, overwhelming and horrendous high-speed experiences of the characters at the end of *Requiem for a Dream* are emblematic of the power of a rhythmic combination of fast movement and sound to elicit visceral, mirrored emotions in the mind of the spectator. The heightened pace of contemporary cinema, as seen in films like this in which images flash upon the screen in photographic instants and music throbs to a hysterical beat, serves to create a potential horror so traumatic that simultaneous conscious concentration of the kind which slow movement in the cinema facilitates becomes impossible. Instead, the spectator is instinctively absorbed by the movement of image and sound and consequently becomes bonded to the characters enduring this high-speed trauma, causing contemplation of the events on screen long after the film has ended. As Danny Leigh indicates with regard to *Requiem*, in a statement that recalls the film's sequential photographic style, 'I still can't shift it, can't stop the memory of it running through my mind like a flicker book'.²⁴ The final sequence of *Requiem* serves as a reminder of the continual emotional power of montage in contemporary cinema, a power that Eisenstein envisaged in the 1920s and 30s when 'he dreamt of an ecstatic cinema, one that carried spectators away, tearing them "out of stasis" and arousing a rapt, electric apprehension of sheerly pictorial and auditory momentum'.²⁵

The films I have discussed, each of which attempts to enter into a dialogue with the increasing speed of the modern world and its exciting, potentially terrifying consequences for the human mind and body, bring Eisenstein's dream to life. In these contemporary, experimental, mainstream films, kinetic energy and incessant motion can be valued as a potent and visceral emotive force. At points of emotional intensity, the eye is not allowed to rest, it must

continually *look*, and as a result, the spectator becomes fused to the image on screen. This incessant drive of unrelenting motion, paradoxically does not however, as Eisenstein has suggested, entirely tear the spectator 'out of stasis'. Instead, it returns them to it, however briefly, since the high-speed cinematic flow degrades to the point of sequential photographic motion, once again recalling the individual images of the film strip. As Mark Kingwell has noted, 'Faster and faster can only mean, in the end, stasis'.²⁶ In this scenario speed reveals cinema's latent photographic ontology: stasis is unveiled as an inherent element of fast filmic motion.

This essay is not an argument for fast cinema itself, or for velocity over delay, but rather a suggestion against knee-jerk critical reactions that automatically denigrate high-speed films as lacking complex meaningful substance. When used intuitively as a reflection of psychological or narrative drive, velocity can become a creative, thrilling and valuable tool of cinematic expression. The decision to understand and reflect character experience through fast motion in the films discussed above ultimately ends up as an exciting stroboscopic presentation of rhythmic individual images, and an accompanying invigorating musical beat that once more remind us of time's ebb and of fast cinema's emotive cinematic potential.

Notes

1. David Bordwell, 'Aesthetics in Action: Kung Fu, Gunplay, and Cinematic Expressivity', in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, ed. by Esther C.M Yau (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 73–93 (p. 76).
2. See José Arroyo, 'Introduction' in *Action/Spectacle Cinema: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), pp. vii–xiv (p.ix). Arroyo is amongst a sparse but growing number of critics who have begun to argue that although action/spectacle cinema's main concern is both spectacular and capitalistic, favouring excitement over contemplation, this intent does not necessarily mean that these films are without emotional merit. Critics like Arroyo have suggested that these fast, thrilling films offer instinctual, visceral pleasures for the audience, that action/spectacle cinema is popular because it offers an awe-inspiring, heart-stopping, adrenalin-fuelled escape from hum-drum reality, and that this aspect of these films makes them both worthy of critical study and of wider socio-historical importance. Critics include Jennifer M Bean, 'Trauma Thrills: Notes on Early Action Cinema', in *Action and Adventure Cinema*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 17–30; Richard Dyer, 'Action!', and Jason Jacobs, 'Gunfire', both in Arroyo, pp. 17–20 and pp. 9–16 respectively.
3. See Nick James's discussion of slow cinema in his editorial 'Passive Aggressive', *Sight & Sound*, 20.4 (April 2010), and Harry Tuttle's continuation of the debate in 'Slow Films, Easy Life' on the blog *Unspoken Cinema*, <<http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2010/05/slow-films-easy-life-sight.html>> [Accessed 19th October 2010].
4. Robert Pittman, *New York Times*, 8th May 1983. Quoted in Kay Dickinson, 'Pop, Speed, Teenagers and the MTV Aesthetic', in *Movie Music, The Film Reader*, ed. by Kay Dickinson (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 143–152 (p. 148). The emergence of the online music industry over the past five years, where sites like *iTunes* offer music tracks and music videos as downloads direct to MP3 players, along with the high-speed sound-bites of *YouTube*, where individuals are asked to 'broadcast' themselves in brief films lasting a few minutes (often accompanied by music) has increased the sense that youth culture, and specifically teenagers can only concentrate for short periods of time.

5. Jean Douchet, quoted in Thomas Elsaesser, 'Louis Lumière: The Cinema's First Virtualist' in *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable? The Screen Arts in the Digital Age*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser and Kay Hoffmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), pp. 45–62 (p. 45).
6. Quoted in James Gleick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (London: Little, Brown, 1999), pp. 174–75.
7. Peter Bradshaw, 'Empty Vessels...', *Guardian*, 27th July 2007, p. 7.
8. Bradshaw, p. 7.
9. See also David Company's discussion of slow and fast moving images in his introductory essay 'When to be Fast? When to be Slow?', in *The Cinematic* (London: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2007), pp. 10–17, and Peter Wollen's essay, 'The Crowd Roars—Suspense and Cinema', in *Speed—Visions of an Accelerated Age*, ed. by Jeremy Millar and Michiel Schwarz (London Photographer's Gallery, 1998), pp. 77–86.
10. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 219–52.
11. Mary Ann Doane, 'Real Time: Instantaneity and the Photographic Imaginary', in *Stillness and Time*, ed. by David Green and Joanna Lowry (London: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2006), pp. 23–38 (pp. 25–26).
12. Margit Grieb, 'Run Lara Run', in *Screenplay: Cinema/Videogames/Interfaces*, ed. by Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2002), pp. 157–70 (p. 158).
13. Tom Tykwer, quoted in Owen Evans, 'Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola, Run*: Postmodern, Posthuman, or Post Theory', *Studies in European Cinema*, 1. 2 (2004), 105–15 (p. 107).
14. Evans, p. 108.
15. Dickinson, p. 150.
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25. Eisenstein cited in Bordwell, 2001, p. 91.
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