ASPECTS
OF ELLIPTICAL EDITING

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Abstract

Temporal omissions can be found in the most diverse manifestations of various genres and film cultures. However, the ellipsis as a narrative tool has seldom been addressed in film theory, and when it has, it has tended to be treated in a manner of purely instrumental qualities of skipping the unimportant parts of a plot, to cover vast stretches of story time or as a pure mean of scene transitions.

By contrast, I argue that temporal omissions have the potential to be a key creative tool in a filmmaker's arsenal. I will investigate on how temporal ellipses are used in films and through this analysis I will discuss about how it can serve as a dramaturgical feature in narrative film.

Questions I want to occupy myself within this dissertations are: What characterizes temporal omission in film? Is there different types identified and how can they be distinguished? Is there a phrase catalog, a standardized vocabulary? How is elliptical editing influential in a story's structure and hence can it contribute to a high dramaturgical quality of a narrative?

This paper is an attempt to depict the terminology, identify and differentiate scopes of elliptical editing but moreover it is an investigation on the temporal ellipsis and it's means of aesthetic construction to create a receptive stimulus for the narration in fiction film.

„Hide the ideas, but so that peo-ple find them. The most important will be the most hidden." [1]

It's gone. Skipped. Cut away. Deleted in the script. Trimmed away. Elided. Bypassed. Con-cealed. Embezzled.
Omitted.

Introduction

Elliptical editing is clearly a common practice in filmmaking. It allows film-makers to manage scene transitions, to move from one scene to the next without having to experience the unim-portant events, to economically cover vast stretches of story time, to omit redundant information. Hence it is of-ten described simply as "shortening of duration plot achieved by omitting some story duration."[2]

Such a statement is suitable to only a limited extent and even suppresses its deeper meaning of the ellipsis' charac-teristic trait. Filmmakers elide actions and events for more resourceful rea-sons than only as a method of manag-ing plot duration.

„In Bertolucci's 1900, for exam-ple, ellipsis serves as one of the principal instruments of historical

analysis and interpretation, link-ing separate moments of the his-torical past in such a way that a discursive relationship emerges. [...] Often in [Robert] Bresson, the principal events of the plot will be completely elided: the event will be represented only in its ab-sence. In the films of Godard, el-lipsis is used in a directly authori-al manner, dividing and disjoining the discourse of the film from the story-world in such a way that crucial events are elided." [3]

Hence, the concept of temporal ellip-sis does have a great significance as a creative tool in narration and can even serve „as a complex storytelling device with many possible rhetorical uses."[4] Due to that fact, my own approach in this paper is to move beyond matters of temporal condensation and towards a focus on other expressive possibilities: the ellipsis and it's means of aesthetic construction to create a receptive stim-ulus for the film narration.

Furthermore, I will deal with the questions of how temporal omissions can be char-acterized and how they can be divided into different types. The aim hereby is to create a better understanding of the topic according to the various manifestations, effectiveness and functionality. From the

point of view of an editor, it is a valuable task to study the ellipsis in an analytical manner to systemize the means and ef-fects of temporal omissions.

Alongside the attempt of depicting the terminology and identifying different scopes of elliptical editing, this paper is in the main an investigation on the temporal ellipsis as a narrative tool in fiction film. I will attempt to clarify the questions of how temporal ellipses do serve as a narrative feature in a story's structure, how a tactical and deliberate-ly placed ellipsis can contribute to a high dramaturgical quality of the narrative or how eliding a particular story event can engage the audience's imaginational activity. For this purpose, I will analyze relevant film examples to clarify the question of how filmmakers use tempo-ral ellipses to enhance the cinematic ex-perience through the aesthetic principle of elliptical editing.

In film theory, elliptical editing is often described as a mean of skipping unim-portant and redundant information or is being treated in an instrumental man-ner of managing scene transitions. It almost blatantly lacks of differentiated vocabulary to describe temporal omis-sions as a specific aspect of film narra-tion and specially in terms of literature about film editing the ellipsis seems to

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1   Bresson, 1997, p. 44.

2   Bordwell, Thompson, 2008, p. 478.

3   Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, p. 122.

4   MacDowell, 2010, p. 89.

be a neglected black frame. An attempt to change this is worthwhile; there are several reasons. Mine feeds on an unconditional passion for film editing.

Remark
ellipsis vs. compression

Film is always in time. And rarely this time is uninterrupted. Without condensing, without omission, each film would be a real-time film.

> „To read „John got up, dressed, and took a taxi to the airport' takes only a fraction of a second; to watch it could theoretically take as long as to do it. But of course, almost all films are elliptically edited."[5]

Only very few films represent the entirety of every single action. Commonly known, it is a general practice in film to elide uninteresting intervals and omit minor pieces of action to shape and control the actual screen duration. David Bordwell explains in this context that „at the level of the whole, the fabula duration is expected to be greater than the syuzhet duration, and syuzhet duration is assumed to be greater than projection time."[6]

In other words, a scene may be comprehended to consume five minutes in the story, but by cutaways or other editing devices the depicted event might be presented in three minutes on the screen.

> „All such procedures are commonly called „ellipses', but […] there are two quite different ways of reducing story duration. One way, which we can call ellipsis proper, […] eliminates an interval of story action. […] The spectator is to take this as a brief summary of longer string events and portions of fabula time are skipped over. Fabula time can also be reduced without any ellipsis. Both fabula and syuzhet duration can be greater than screen time, but screen time presents a series of actions in such a way that no missing time can be detected. Since time is here not elided but condensed, I shall call this procedure compression."[7]

Taking Bordwell into account and also in order to understand the use of the term *elliptical editing* in this present paper , it is a necessity to declare the distinction between the two entities of ellipsis and compression.

Both concepts use elision for shortening screen duration. However, they should be carefully distinguished. The importance hereby is the different perceptual connotation. Through compression, unimportant details or dead time is omitted so as not to bore the spectator but still ensuring the feeling of an continuous ongoing action. Ellipsis, on the other hand, refers to the omission of story events and in doing so marking a noticeable discontinuity in the ongoing action. It is a narrative gap, which becomes significant through it's context within the film narration.[8]

An example for ellipsis: One character has a meeting with another character and therefore has to travel to another town. Such travel time is usually skipped by an ellipsis. The character gets into the car and drives away; after a cut, or a dissolve, we see the character arriving at his friends house. A noticeable jump in time and space has just happened and is also perceived as such by the viewer.

An example for compression: One character intends to smoke a cigarette, he is looking for a lighter but cannot find any. He then sees one on the other side of the

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5   Chatman, 1993, p. 84.

6   David Bordwell refers in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) to the Russian formalists and differentiates between three variables. Fabula: the time that the viewer presumes of the story that is represented. Syuzhet: depicted stretches of time which the film dramatizes. Screen duration: the projection time of the film itself (*Bordwell, 1985, p. 49 and p. 82*).

7   Bordwell, 1985, p. 82.

8   de Wied, Tan, Frijda, 1992, p. 329.

room and starts walking towards there. We cut and see the character grabbing the lighter immediately. Screen time got reduced by cutting out the interval during which the character was crossing the room. Howver, the physical inaccuracy will not be noticed by the viewer.

Using temporal ellipses as a mean of compression does surely belong to the repertoire of cinematic tools, yet is not part of narrative discourse. And therefore, a discussion about temporal omissions in this present paper fully excludes the concept of compression and solely refers to the use of ellipsis for creating the narrative structure in a fiction film.

Definition
Temporal ellipsis and it's classifications

In order to make the notion of elliptical editing feasible for a discussion in terms of film theory, is is a necessity to elucidate the concept of ellipsis in it's origins of theoretical linguistics.

> **Ellipsis** (from the Greek: ἔλλειψις, élleipsis, "omission") signifies leaving out one or more words from a rhetoric construction. It is the the omission of normally required elements that are none-theless understood in the context of the remaining elements.[9]

Although many linguistic narratologists have discussed the subject of temporal ellipses, the most widely accepted survey of this topic is provided by the French literature theorist Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method.* (1980)[10]

Genette considers the ellipsis, from a formal point of view, as one possibility of time-relation between story-time and discourse-time; which means the time it takes to read out the narrative and the time the events in the story themselves lasted. In the case of the ellipsis, the discourse-time halts, though time continues to pass in the story. Genette divides the temporal ellipsis into diffrent types, whether the elided time span is indicated or not. He defines *explicit ellipses* as temporal omissions in a narration with a specification of the elapsed time to a greater or lesser extent.

As sub-categories of the *explicit ellipsis*, he differentiates into definite ellipsis (clear specified time, e.g. 3 weeks later) and indefinite ellipsis (roughly specified time, e.g. several years later). Besides the *explicit ellipses*, which have an immediate indication that time was omitted, he also categorizes the *implicit ellipsis*, which is not announced in the text and can only be concluded by narrative discontinuity. Whereupon this form of the ellipsis is in the actual sense always indefinite. Furthermore, he determines the third and most implicit type of ellipsis as the *hypothetical ellipsis*, which is impossible to recognize as such and is only revealed in the further course of the narrative by using an analepsis.[11]

However, reading time of a narration varies according to particular circumstances and should be seen as an individual variable of every reader. Unlike what happens in movies, a book offers time and space to fill a narrative gap created through a temporal omission. The constant flow of images in a film though, does not give the viewer an individual timeframe of perception. It is the filmmaker who controls how long the narration takes to be told and hence influences the comprehension-time of the viewer. Being aware of that fact is of major importance for any filmmaker when it comes to constructing the narrative structure of a film.[12]

And also, Genette systemizes the concept of temporal ellipsis in an exceedingly nested hierarchy of terms and definitions that are not very practicable for

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9   Salkie, 1995, p. 56.

10   Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis, 1992, p. 118.

11   *Genette*, 1980, p. 106 ff.

12   ibid., p. 34 f.

a constructive communication when it comes to film structure and film editing. Hence, the analysis of ellipsis based on literature theory is not fully applicable in neither film theory nor film practice and should therefore be treated in a different manner for a better understanding of the various manifestations, the effectiveness and also functionality of temporal ellipses.

My further research on the structuralist scopes of elliptical editing is mainly motivated by the instructive work of the German film editor David J. Rauschning who elaborates a more cinematic approach of using temporal omissions in fiction film. In his book *Die Kunst der Auslassung* (transl.: The Art of Omission, 2014) he explores in a precise frame-by-frame manner the mechanisms of temporal omissions from the point of view of an editor and creates awareness of the diverse types and functions ellipses do serve in narrative films. Partially taking the prior work of Gérard Genette into account, he attempts to propose terminologies and create a phrase catalogue which verbalizes the various manifestations of temporal omissions in fiction film. He elaborates a complex and detailed classification of temporal ellipses in film, whereupon I intend to exemplify in the following the basic framework containing main categories of temporal ellipses in film language.

Trans- & intra-sequential ellipsis

As a basic principle, Rauschning separates the concept of temporal ellipsis in film into two different kinds: the *trans-sequential* and the *inter-sequential ellipsis*.

A *trans-sequential ellipsis* only happens between scenes or sequences and marks their separation point; it is a moment of transition between two different storyline elements. We see a character in his bed during night-time; after a cut we still see the character in the same bed, but now the sun shines through the window, the room is light-flooded; we do understand that with the cut a new scene of the film has begun.

The counterpart of *trans-sequential ellipsis* is the *intra-sequential ellipsis*, thus occurring within a scene or sequence. Usually single scenes and sequences are distinctly separated from one another and in spite of occurring ellipses in-between them a coherent meaning can still be formed by the viewer. When it comes to *intra-sequential ellipses* it is different. Within a scene, we normally don't expect a temporal discontinuity or disruption, whereas time jumps between scenes are often announced prior. In most cases, the end of a scene can be encoded in a way, that a change of space and time is expected. And exactly that is not the case with *intra-sequential*

ellipses. A temporal omission within a scene is mostly not expected by the viewer and causes disruption. In terms of editing, this can be a restriction, but yet can also be used as a creative element for structuring the narrative.[13]

Soft - hard - opaque ellipsis

Furthermore, Rauschning developed a sub-classification of temporal omissions into ellipses which do not attract further attention and feel seamlessly placed in a film's narration, ellipses which are indicated and trigger discontinuity and ellipses which do not create irritation but yet create a strong effect on a viewer's perception.

He specifies the category of temporal omissions that are seemingly unnoticed as *soft ellipsis*. Such ellipses do not cause any extraordinary activation of the viewer and are mostly created by using conventional cinematic tools such as fade-out/fade-in or night-day-changes. When a scene ends with the character going to bed and the next scene begins with the same character waking up, we have an inbuilt time jump marked by a *trans-sequential ellipsis*. These temporal omissions are created during script writing, shot by the director, acted by the cast and then timed to perfection by the editor. There are a great many examples in film language of such ellipses: two people meet on

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13   Rauschning, 2014, p. 38 f.

a street and we cut to a waiter serving some drinks to these people; we hear the ring of a doorbell, a person reacts and we cut straight to the opening of a door. Such ellipses are fairly obvious and occur usually as trans-sequential scene transitions where a change of time and space is generally expected by the viewer.

Compared to the *soft ellipsis*, what Rauschning calls a *hard ellipsis*, is a temporal omission that appears sudden, without any prior announcement, and creates an irritating moment, a perceived conflict in the narration. *Hard ellipses* create a time gap that has to be filled in and therefore engages the viewer by activating his ability of visualizing or rather imagining the absent. The third category, the one of the *opaque ellipsis*, can be seen as a blending of *soft* and *hard ellipsis*. This type of temporal omission is clearly perceptible as a time jump, but yet does not evoke an immoderate irritation. Rauschning considers *opaque ellipses* as the most veritable tool of elliptical editing since it combines the advantages of *soft ellipses* (little disruption in perception, a fluid narration rhythm) and also the advantages of *hard ellipses* (engaging the viewer, own contribution of the viewer by filling in the gap). It is a narrative gap, but yet of high quality. The *opaque ellipsis* can serve as

a dramaturgical feature of constructing time in film; it is a method to create moderate time jumps and therefore still engage or rather encourage the viewer to imagine the elided parts of the story.[14]

Defined & undefined ellipsis

Referring to Gérard Genette's division into *explicit* and *implicit ellipsis*, also Rauschning differentiates wether the omission is indicated or not indicated and moreover if the elided time span is specified or not. Rauschning's equivalent to Genette's *explicit ellipsis* is the *defined ellipsis* which clearly indicates the temporal omission and also defines how much time has passed by. A well-established and often used tool to mark *defined ellipses* are graphical captions with time and place indications. But, as Rauschning states, a *defined ellipsis* does not necessarily be specified in such a precise manner. In order to have a temporal omission classified as a *defined ellipsis*, it is sufficient to mark the omission in such a way that the viewer can presume an approximate time span; a change from night to day, from winter to spring, from the first kiss to the moment after the sex act. The viewer can imagine roughly how much time has passed by.[15]

In addition, to evaluate the intensity of an ellipsis, Rauschning developed a coordinate system. Whether a temporal omission is soft, hard or opaque and if the ellipsis is defined or undefined results as a point in a particular spectrum. The farther away this point is situated from the zero point, the more intense becomes the ellipsis's effect.[16]
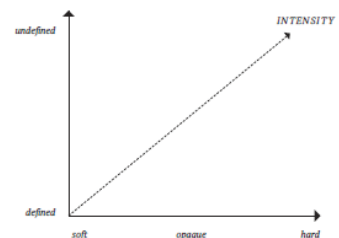
Rauschning, 2014, p. 49

Certainly, Rauschning is aware that such a division into clearly separated categories is hardly possible. Specially since every temporal omission, every narrative gap, is perceived individually and comprehended to a different extent by each viewer.

However, having the ability of dividing whatever he personally feels as soft, hard or opaque, gives him the possibility to put his own sense or cognition into words. And even more, such a differentiation enables him to measure the intensity of temporal omissions and

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14   Rauschning, 2014, p. 40 ff.

15   Rauschning, 2014, p. 48f.

16   ibid., p. 49.

thus offers a set of vocabulary that can enhance the communication with the director and make the working process in the editing room more pleasant and productive.

Narrative Ellipsis
A dramaturgical device

> *„The narrative is a […] doubly temporal sequence […]: There is the time of the thing told and the time of the telling. […] This duality not only renders possible all the temporal distortions that are commonplace in narratives (three years of the hero's life summed up in two sentences of a novel or in a few shots of a »frequentative« montage in film, etc.) More basically, it invites us to invent one time scheme in terms of another time scheme."*[17]

This duality emphasized here by Christian Metz is not only a typical characteristic of linguistic narrative but also of cinematic narrative expression. Hence, in a dissertation about elliptical editing, it is essential to determine one certain reference point in time: the connection between the duration of the events or story and the duration of their telling.

Leafing through theoretical textbooks about film and literature, I quickly found a relative complexity of ideas and concepts.

David Bordwell refers to the Russian formalists who distinguished between *fabula* and *syuzhet*, and differentiates between *plot* and *story*.[18] In addition he elaborates the third element of *screen duration*. Seymour Chatman on the other hand, established the terms *story* and *discourse*.[19]

For the present paper, I will use the more descriptive distinction *erzählte Zeit* (*narrated time*) and *Erzählzeit* (*narrative time*). According to David J. Rauschning's explanations in *Die Kunst der Auslassung*, these terms describe in the most feasible way the relation between this duality of time.[20]

As the terms already imply, *Erzählzeit / narrative time* depicts the screen time, the actual length of the film, whereas *erzählte Zeit / narrated time* refers to the entire time frame of the story, including events that have been omitted in the plot but are still part of the whole story being told. Most films contain discrepancy between these two temporal aspects, unless it is a „real-time-movie", where both of these temporal axes are identical.[21]

In this paper, an investigation on the relation *narrated time > narration time* is of particular importance since the result of a temporal omission is that the *narrated time* continues though the *narrative time* disappears practically at the moment of the cut.[22]22

Hence, narrationally seen, ellipses in film are a maximum acceleration of the narrative.

In this sense, any temporal omission is also a narrative omission. Structuring a narrative also means structuring time. It's like when David Bordwell asks „Is there anything in a narrative that is not narrational?"[23] And on that account, I argue that elliptical editing does serve narrative means in a film's story.

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17 Metz, 1991, p. 18.

18 Bordwell, 1985, p. 49 ff.

19 Chatman, 1978, p. 62.

20 David J. Rauschning uses these terms referring to the German literature theoretician Günther Müller:„Erzählzeit und erzählte Zeit" in *Morphologische Poetik. (Tübingen: Max Niemayer, 1968).*

21 *Rauschning, 2014, p. 24.*

22 Kirsten, 2012, p. 107.

23 Bordwell, 1985, p. 53.

It only depends what is hidden in this particular moment of a cut; what story content is elided and if the omission of this certain information is de facto important to the comprehension of the story or the characters behaviors.

Also David J. Rauschning states that temporal ellipses, besides serving an economical function of timing or a discretely abbreviation of movements or space and time, are self-sustaining dramaturgical elements of every cinematic narration. He characterizes temporal omissions that elide significant and relevant parts of the story as *Narrative Ellipses*. Hereby is not only the amount of time that is elided of importance, but especially the dramaturgical contribution of the ellipsis. He describes such narrative ellipses as time-gaps, which contain a *how-did-itcome-to-this*-item and cause a corresponding void that needs to be closed subsequently.[24]

If creating *narrative ellipses* implies to eliminate story relevant parts, so is the underlying notion to classify major and minor events of the story. According to Seymour Chatman, who terms major events as *kernels* and minor events as *satellites*, narrative events follow „not only a logic of connection, but a logic of hierarchy."[25] On the basis of this

hierarchy, *satellites* are more important than *kernels* because they are nodes in a story's structure that constrain a progression into one or more possible directions and hence advance the plot: „Achilles can give up his girl or refuse; Huck Finn can remain at home or set off down the river..."[26] A *kernel* has a less determining function in this sense. It's task is to fill in, to elaborate the *satellite* and thus can be deleted without breaking the logic of the plot.

In this matter, David J. Rauschning points out, that omitting minor events - *kernels* - tends to create *soft* or *opaque ellipsis* whereas eliding major events - *satellites* - leads to *hard, narrative ellipses*.[27]

The film *SHAME* (Steve McQueen, GB, 2011) contains a temporal omission which is generated by elision of such a major event and therefore can be seen as a *narrative ellipsis*:

The film tells the story of Brandon, who, to say the least, has sustainable problems with his emotional balance. After various sexual escapades, he meets with his coworker Marianne; things seem to fit and they come along well together. At a later point, Brandon talks Marianne into having Sex with him in a

hotel room. However, Brandon fails miserably due to his emotional impotence and the sexual act ends abruptly.

> Marianne: Should I go?
> Brandon: Sure. (Silence.)
> Brandon: I can walk you down.
> Marianne: It's ok.

Marianne leaves the hotel room. Brandon stays; sitting on the rim of a bathtub. The next cut hits hard and quasi slices a crack into the flow of the narrative: Brandon is now having Sex with another lady, a prostitute, in the same position which he as been observing at an earlier point in the film. And once more, the sexual act becomes for him just a mere filling of a profound obsession.

Even though the temporal omission here does not have any time indication, it does have a strong narrative relevance since the ellipsis skips the storyline of Brandon making the decision

of having compensatory sex with a prostitute completely; only the before and the after of his decision is shown.

Narrative ellipses of this kind, as Rauschning states, do have the ability to draw a line between two moments in time but concurrent also link them all the more

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24   Rauschning, 2014, p. 68.

25   Chatman, 1978, p. 53.

26   Chatman, 1978, p. 53.

27   Rauschning, 2014, p. 68.

stronger into a correlation to each other because the viewer is increasingly challenged to actively participate in merging the narrative gap that is caused by the ellipsis.[28] In the case of this depicted scene in *SHAME*, the events that got elided through the elliptical cut certainly cannot be precisely reconstructed, but they have definitely an emotional certainty since the film's narration so far makes Brandons behavior coherent.

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As mentioned before, most definitions of elliptical editing in film neglect the dramaturgical utility of the ellipsis as an integral feature of narrative storytelling. Hence another powerful potential often gets disregarded: creating surprise/suspense through elliptical editing.

An ellipsis is foremost an element of a film's narration that withholds story information, resulting that the narrated world of the characters contains more than the narrative time actually shows. Because of this withholding of depicted story content that the characters have experienced, every ellipsis creates a superior knowledge of the protagonists compared to the viewer's knowledge. This does necessarily have an effect on the overall epistemic relationship with the film; it is not the viewer anymore who watches the film from a superior and observing position, but rather the film uses it's narrative competence to make the viewer attentive and also alert.[29]

[…]

SHAME, min. 66

28 Rauschning, 2014, p. 69.

29 Rauschnig, 2014, p. 117.

In this sense, elliptical editing affects, besides a film's temporal axis, also a film's cognitive axis. It is to say that *narrative ellipses* in editing create a sense of knowing versus not-knowing particular characters at particular times in a way that „the spectator's and the character's times diverge."[30]

An exceptional and yet fiery narrative ellipsis and it's dramaturgical use can be experienced in the film *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN* (Ethan & Joel Coen, USA, 2007). We see the contract killer Anton Chigurh standing on an abandoned road next to his car with an open engine hood, apparently waiting for help. A farmer comes along, stops and offers him support. It comes to a short conversation between the two.

Anton Chigurh: Can you get those chicken crates out of the bed.
Farmer: What are you talking about?

An aggressive sound of a splashing water hose marks the ellipsis. Suddenly the killer is standing at a gas station, removing chicken feathers from the empty bed of the farmers truck. We neither see how Chigurh got into the possession of the truck nor what happened to the farmer, but is is clear to us that Chigurh did kill the farmer and seized the vehicle.

This ellipsis has the nature of repetitive narration; it is only comprehendible because the viewer does already know enough informations about the characters, their world and their course of behavior. A similar action occurred earlier in the film, when the killer Chigurh, pretending to be a policeman, pulls over a random car driver only to kill him and take over his car.

Narratively speaking, the act of killing the farmer is an important event since it gives us important information about the behavior of Chigurh, but yet, the abruptness of the ellipsis, the sudden cut to the next scene, do evoke the effect of an aggravating or even unpleasant surprise. A clean but ruthless cut catapults us directly to the aftermath of the killing; the ellipsis feels as violent as the act of killing itself. In this sense, a

tactical and deliberately placed ellipsis can contribute to a high dramaturgical quality of the narrative without spending a film's running time.[31]

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Films in which speculation about the unseen plays an essential narrative and thematic role provide fertile ground for temporal ellipsis since it can be key in creating suspense. The viewer is denied exactly the information that could resolve the suspense. A special case of this kind of narrative is the *Whodunit Plot*, which starts with an ellipsis and delivers the information about who has committed a certain crime by *delayed exposition* only at the end of the story.[32]
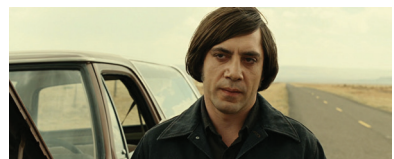
30 MacDowell, 2010, p. 81.

31 Rauschning, 2014, p. 118.

32 *Kirsten, 2012, p. 108.*

[...]

NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN, min. 93

„*It is during these moments of darkness that many of the story's most crucial events take place and go unseen by almost all its characters.*"[33]

This is clearly an essential dramaturgical feature in most of Hitchcock's work, and specially central in the case of *REAR WINDOW* (USA, 1954). In this particular film, it is more a *Did He Do It* than a *Whodunit Plot* but nevertheless the concept of omission is used to hide the most essential portions of the story in order to create suspense.

This triller tells the story of photo reporter L. B. Jefferies, who is, due to a broken leg, wheelchair-bound and cannot leave the house. For lack of something better to do, Jeff starts watching his neighbors on the other side of the courtyard. The observed incidents lead Jeff to suspect his neighbor of murdering the wife.

The first relevant temporal omission that happens in the film, a fade-out at minute 32, fulfills one purpose: emphasizing the importance of the scream. By cutting to Jeff's worried face right after we hear the scream and then fading into black while he is still wondering what happened, the ellipsis gets linked to an act of violence, what we will find out later in the film.[34]

After a fade-in we see Jeff sleeping and then being woken up by the growl of a thunderstorm outside. These two sequential shots of Jeff sitting in his wheelchair and the fade to black in-between them, show us that an undefined time span has passed by. What is hidden to us, concealed in this very fade-to-black, is something that will change the whole mood of the film's world. As it will be revealed later in the film, „the events that occur during this ellipsis, are far from »unimportant«; in fact, they are the central catalyst for change in the story, and will reverberate until the end of the film."[35]

A few minutes later happens another ellipsis that has greater significance for the film. Jeff is observing one of his neighbors, namely Thorwald, leaving the flat. As per his attentive gaze out the window and his look to his wristwatch, we can clearly see how intrigued Jeff is by the question of where this man is going. Then, we see a fade-out on a close-up of the watch showing the time as 1:55, followed by a fade-in on the exact same shot with the watch showing now 2:35. Jeff is still looking outside the window. Thorwald is now arriving back home.

This fade-out/fade-in is a defined ellipsis, conveying us several storytelling functions: It shows us that forty minutes have passed by but more importantly, points out that Jeff has been timing them. Which results in an awareness of Jeff's growing interest in the happenings outside and also results in the beginning of our own speculations. Plus the ellipsis is the first initiator to associate the unseen, but imagined murder, specifically with Thorwald.

Yet, once again, the epistemic suspense here is not solely caused by a durational gap but rather narrational one.

[...]

REAR WINDOW, min. 32
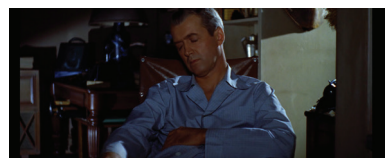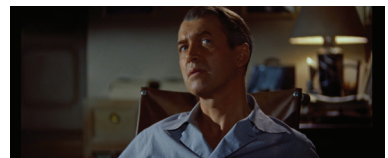
33   MacDowell, 2010, p. 78.

34   *Orpen, 2003, p. 42.*

35   MacDowell, 2010, p. 84.

REAR WINDOW uses ellipses to conceal quintessential parts of the story and also intensify elementary moods of the film.[36] Virtually all violent or sinister events are obscured through temporal omissions or occlusions in other forms. And more obviously, the most important plot event, the presumed murdering of the neighbors wife, happens during a *narrative ellipsis*.

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Of course, in every film, there is always an out-of-sight just as there is always an off-screen. But out of sight does not necessarily mean *out of mind*: „we may not know what lies beyond the horizon but we do know that there is a beyond."[37] Films are presented as an assembly of bits and pieces from which the viewer composes the world around it. So to say, an elliptical cut can omit in order to fill in; narrating less in order to create more narrative. „What we don't see in a film plays a very important role in our sense of what we think it means."[38] Our imagination of a film's world is strikingly independent of the instruments of representation.

„*We do not have to see how the action occurs to understand it has taking place in its world, and thereby to know something of its character. […] Selective representation creates the stylistically relevant freedoms for the artist.*"[39]

Like in the earlier mentioned scene from *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*, the film is constructed on information that is not laid out for us, but is still accessible from our knowledge of this particular world. And yet the challenge for a filmmaker is actually to still create enough continuity throughout the film's storyline so that the viewer still has the feeling of watching a continuous story and not only an assembly of disconnected fragments.

„The best tool in overcoming the problems of discontinuity is to imitate human perception and to let the imagination of the spectator become a co-narrator."[40] If an elliptical cut is made in time-continuity, the viewer will always try to imagine what happened during the elided time span.

[…]

REAR WINDOW, min. 35

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36   MacDowell, 2010, p. 99.

37   Perkins, 2005, p. 22.

38   MacDowell, 2010, p. 98.

39   Perkins, 2005, p. 29.

40   Wiedemann, 1998, p.28.

The film *LOLITA* (Stanley Kubrick, UK, 1962) for example, contains a scene which only took place in the minds of the audience and never actually in the film. Here, Stanley Kubrick withholds the complete sex scene of the under-aged Lolita and her step-father Humbert Humbert.

One morning Humbert Humbert gets woken up by Lolita who behaves very teasingly and coquet. She whispers into his ear and tells him about a game she has been playing with a boy during summer camp. Lolita giggles, Humbert Humbert frowns and stutters: „I don't know what game you're playing." She whispers more details towards him and asks: „You mean you never played that game when you were a kid?". Humbert is stunned and answers solely: „I don't know", whereupon Lolita sits next to him on the bed, looks seductive and says: „Alright then!". This is the moment when Kubrick uses a fade to black. Several black frames remain until he fades in and we see Lolita and Humbert driving along on a Highway. This is a very good example how the audience has to and willingly does imagine the non-visible. What happened here within the ellipsis is a very crucial event for the film's story and theme, and yet it got omitted; it was hidden between the images.

The example of *LOLITA* makes it clear how through film editing the decisive can be so concisely hidden in an ellipsis, that even argus-eyed censorship administrators at that time overlooked it, while it was willingly retrieved and eagerly imagined by the viewers.[41]

Robert Bresson wrote in his *Notes on the Cinematographer* (1997) that „the thing that matters is not what they show me but what they hide from me."[42] And that's the point of elliptical editing as a narrative device: it's not about cutting out a time span for a purely accelerated narrative time, but rather gaining space for imaginativeness through withholding of particular elements. For that matter, a temporal ellipsis can be considered a filmmaker's conscious aesthetic decision to trigger an active participation of the viewer.

> „And consequently the best narrative is the one that is created in the spectator's own mind. [...] The task of the filmmaker is to create gaps as wide as possible in every aspect of his storytelling and thus making the audience the other half of the narrator."[43]

Thus a determining factor of elliptical editing is not only how noticeable the temporal omission is, but also the indication of the ellipsis; cues that time has elapsed and specially how much time has passed by.

According to David J. Rauschning, an elliptical cut is specifically striking when it is clearly noticeable that a time span has been elided but not immediately revealed how much time has passed by. Then, the viewer of sorts remains in a temporal void, trying to fill in the gap that has been created by the elliptical cut. He states that therefore, for constructing elliptical cuts and using temporal omissions as a narrative device, it is of particular importance to pose the question how long the effect of a time

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41 Hanich, 2012, p. 14 f.

42 Bresson, 1997, p. 15.

43 Wiedemann, 1998, p. 29.

jump should be lasting in the ongoing narration of a film. When to provide particular cues for the audience. How much tension should be created.[44]

The film *SHAME* has in it's editing a greatly use of temporal omissions and *narrative ellipses*. Notedly a sequence in about the last quarter of the film, when a *narrative ellipsis* becomes the starting point of an impressively edited sequence that shows the ellipsis' dramaturgical potential in an exceptional way. This particular ellipsis withholds segments of narration and raises questions.

After an intense dispute with his sister, Brandon leaves the house. A hard elliptical cut suddenly shows him sitting in the subway with a burst open wound on his forehead; it looks quite bad. The injury gives us a clear cue of the *narrative ellipsis*; we immediately feel the temporal omission that happened here but we do not know how much time has passed between he left his sister and getting the wound in his face.

An artful edited sequence of flashbacks, combined with shots in the subway, shows us only gradually what happened to Brandon. All hidden in this initial ellipsis, the flashbacks show us that Brandon went to a bar and provoked the beefy boyfriend of a young lady until it came to a fight. Afterwards he tried to get into a club but got rejected by the doorman. After a short visit to a gay club, he then landed in the flat of a female acquaintance so as to have sex with her and another young lady. It takes about twelve minutes until the indication of the elided timeframe is finally presented to us. Only at the end of the sequence we find out that the subway ride, which was until then completely undefined according to time, turns out to be the return trip the next morning.

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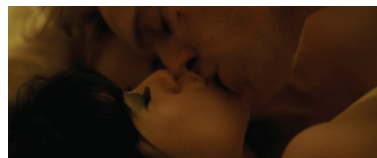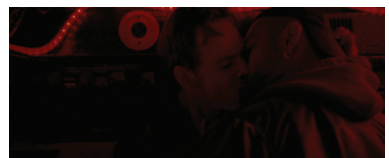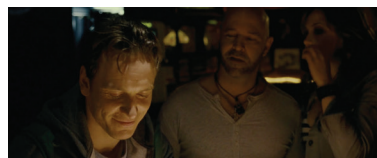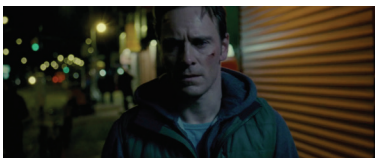
44   Rauschning, 2014, p. 163.

The cue hereby is that when Brandon finally gets out of the train and leaves the subway station, he finds himself in New York's morning traffic. Due to the multitude of nested flashbacks, the initial ellipsis in the beginning of the scene turns out to be not an ellipsis anymore since the film does fill in the created gap through the continuing narration. The ellipsis itself is only an ellipsis as long as a narrative gap remains. Directly after the ellipsis, when we see Brandon in the subway, it is only him who is aware of the happened events. What follows then is a simple inversion of this relation of knowledge. During the course of the analeptic manner of the narration, the viewer gradually gets aware of the events and eventually can even foresee what's going to happen. The film deliberately plays with this different levels of cognition and through the nested sequence of flashbacks even consistently delays the results of Brandon's provocations in the bar.

Even though this outstanding sequence is in fact considered an exception due to it's use of flashbacks, it still does show the dramaturgical potential of temporal omissions and particularly through the *hard, narrative ellipsis* and it's delayed time indication it's possibility to enhance the viewer's cognitive and cinematic experience.[45]

Closing Words

It is certainly rarely possible to determine whether a specific cut, a particular temporal omission, was conceived already in the script, while shooting or during the editing phase in the cutting room. And since the concrete process of editing cannot be seen identical with the concept of film editing in general, film editors are not the only ones who contribute to the editing of a film. The screenwriter, the cinematographer and of course the director are as much involved in determining the editing of a film as the editor himself. Hence all creative decisions that are made in each phase of the process have an explicit influence on the later work in the cutting room. Thus elliptical editing can mostly unfold it's true virility and the editor can effectively create time omissions if it is integrated a priori; planned already in script level and implied during the shooting. Nonetheless, since the final rhythm of a film can only be foreseen in a very rudimentary way in script level, the constructive and thereby proactive contribution of the editor is to shape temporal omissions regarding timing of indications of the ellipses and eventually form the definitive rhythm of the film.

Nevertheless, a centric part of an editors work in this aspect is examining the quality of the film's temporal structure according to it's narrative quality. That is why, from the point of view of an editor, dividing temporal ellipses into different types, proposing terminologies and identifying various usages of time omissions will not only help me shaping the cuts in my future work as an editor but moreover will give me the feasibility of enhancing the communication in the editing room. In my opinion, the clearer and differentiated the dialogue with the director, the more pleasant and productive is the whole process in the editing room.

Elliptical editing is not referring to flawy missing elements but rather emerges as a characteristic trait of film language itself.

Withholding segments of narration. Raising questions and delaying answers. Generating curiosity.

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45   Rauschning, 2014, p. 1.65

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