

THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR'S "PAPER EYES" IN VISUAL STORYTELLING: INFERENCE AND PERFORMANCE

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Highlighting the, as called by Emar Maier, blended perspective shots in cinematic narrative with an unreliable narrator allows us to escape the dilemma of the omniscient cinema-eye (*Kino-Glaz*, 1924) and of the false narrator's paper eyes (*Бумажные глаза Пришвина / Prishvin's Paper Eyes*, 1989). The following commentary on Maier's paper detects the performative nature of the contradictions generated by using blended perspective in cinema narration with an unreliable storyteller. It also demonstrates the heuristicity of the concept of blended perspective to Cartesian philosophical narrative analysis.

Keywords: unreliable narrator, visual storytelling, inference, performance

«БУМАЖНЫЕ ГЛАЗА» НЕНАДЕЖНОГО РАССКАЗЧИКА В ВИЗУАЛЬНОМ ПОВЕСТВОВАНИИ: ВЫВОД И ПЕРФОРМАТИВ

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Идентификация в кинематографическом повествовании с ненадежным рассказчиком кадров, называемых Эмаром Майером кадрами в смешанной перспективе, позволяет выйти из дилеммы всезнающего киноглаза (*Кино-глаз*, 1924) и фейковых «бумажных глаз» подставного рассказчика (*Бумажные глаза Пришвина*, 1989). В предлагаемом комментарии к статье Майера выявляется перформативный характер противоречий, порождаемых смешанной перспективой в кинонарративе с ненадежным рассказчиком, а также демонстрируется эвристичность понятия смешанной перспективы для анализа философского нарратива картезианского типа.

Ключевые слова: ненадежный рассказчик, визуальное повествование, вывод, перформатив

One of the fathers of Soviet cinematography, Dziga Vertov, was dreaming about creating *kinoks* or *cinema-eye men* whose eyes would become movie cameras or kino-eyes (*kino-glaz*). In *cinema – eye* visual narration the events should “narrate themselves” since the cinema eye which “attacks the reality” makes them speak up and reveal their essence. Here-with, the new cinematographic art was not supposed to reflect life, but to be its theory, namely, to be the “dynamic geometry” of things: “Cinema is, as well, *the art of inventing movements* of things in space in response to the demands of science” [Dziga Vertov, 2014, p. 26]. Post-Soviet



cinematography rejects the *kinoks'* scientific, but, in reality, ideological¹ essentialism. The scientific cinema eye is eventually replaced by the fake paper eyes of the unreliable, manipulative narrator. This image appears in the film *Prishvin's Paper Eyes* (*Бумажные глаза Пришвина*, Valeriy Ogorodnikov, Lenfilm, 1989), according to which back in 1949 one of the spectators contacted the television asking to put paper eyes on the announcers' faces. They would then look down while reading their text approved by the censorship, and the paper eyes would allow them to imitate a first-person earnest performance. In *Prishvin's Paper Eyes* the fake paper eyes of the protagonist Pavel Prishvin and other unreliable narrators distract the audience from the absurd "reality" where Stalin conducts a montage of the demonstrators' execution recording from *Battleship Potemkin* (*Броненосец «Потемкин»*, Sergei Eisenstein, Goskino, 1925).



(a)



(b)

(a) Poster for *Kino-Glaz* (Dziga Vertov, Goskino, 1924), designed by Alexander Rodchenko.

(b) Pavel Prishvin (Alexander Romantsov). Still from *Prishvin's Paper Eyes* (*Бумажные глаза Пришвина*, Valeriy Ogorodnikov, Lenfilm, 1989).

Defining a specific type of a film frame which Emar Maier calls blended perspective shot in his paper (see also [Maier, Bimpikou, 2019]) allows us to escape the dilemma of the "view from nowhere" of the omniscient *cinema-eye men* and of the false narrator's fake paper eyes – both topics highlighted by the Russian cinematography of the 20th century. According to Maier, blended perspective shots show everything subjectively experienced by a salient character from an impersonal viewpoint. He creates a useful analogy between blended perspective in visual storytelling and free indirect discourse in verbal narration. I suppose that this analogy lets us, inter alia, clear out several differences in the approaches to contradiction in verbal and visual narrations.

¹ The cinema – eye shows by "inventing" the reverse course of time how, for example, a loaf of bread turns first into dough, and then into ears of rye (*Kino-Glaz*, Dziga Vertov, Goskino, 1924). It thereby reveals the essence of goods produced by human labor and illustrates the proletarian ideology which gives to the workers what is already intrinsically theirs.



In a verbal free indirect discourse, the switch between the narrator's and the protagonist's perspectives is marked with the help of vocabulary and grammar [Abrusán, 2020]. This way we are able to get rid of a seeming contradiction which appears, for example, between the words *now* and *was* in the sentence *Tom sighed. Now he was rich* [Schlenker, 2004] (cf. the usage of two-dimensional logic for modeling the shift of the point of reference in possible world semantics).

Even though the language of cinematography has a set of conventions regarding perspective which help to mark its shift, blended perspective shots might be avoiding these markers. As Maier highlights, shots are a basic unit of filmic storytelling, similarly to what statements are in novels. Shots are, at the same time, the building blocks of cinematographic reality. In this way, the narrative acts of a visual storyteller construct the storyworld through performance. However, the unreliable first – person narrator is not authorized to construct the world he lives in. In blended perspective shots, he looks at the viewer with fake paper eyes and simultaneously creates (usually subconsciously) a pseudo world of his own subjective experience, imagination, desires, fears, etc. The facts in this world contradict the storyworld's reality which is shown from an impersonal viewpoint. As Maier suggests, the anomalies appearing in blended perspective shots encourage the viewer to infer optimal connections between shot contents from a limited set of coherence relations. Restoring the coherence of the visual storyline is usually connected to disavowing the unreliable first – person narrator's performative power and to exposing him as a deliberate (or, more frequently, unwilling) manipulator. The trust in the storyline's coherence which stimulates the viewer to look for anomalies and contradictions is, in its turn, based on the viewer's reliance on the author. As Umberto Eco states, the presence of the author's message makes fiction metaphysically more comfortable than reality. "The problem with the actual world is that, since the dawn of time, humans have been wondering whether there is a message and, if so, whether this message makes sense. With fictional universes, we know without a doubt that they do have a message and that an authorial entity stands behind them as creator, as well as within them as a set of reading instructions" [Eco, 1994, p. 116].

Perhaps the most unreliable first-person narrator in visual storytelling is the Cartesian malicious demon (*Malin genie*). While submerged in hyperbolic doubt, Descartes wrote: "I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all of his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment" [AT 7, p. 22–23]. However, even in the malicious demon' storyworld he continues to think: "Let whoever who can do so deceive me, he will never bring



it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think that I am something” [AT 7, p. 36]. Performance of the act of *cogito* in such a world creates a performative contradiction and reveals an unreliable narrator in the malicious demon [Hintikka, 1962; Hintikka, 2013; Dragalina-Chernaya, 2013]. Nevertheless, “I (ego) who knows its own existence” is not a reliable storyteller either, since *cogito* has an immediate nature and does not allow us to identify the narrator in time. Interestingly, while discussing *Cogito, ergo sum* in Malcolm’s discussion group in Cornell and answering what he considered the most important question “How did Descartes come to do this?”, Ludwig Wittgenstein explains this peculiarity of Cartesian narrative through a cinematographic metaphor: “I always think of it as like the cinema... The present is the picture which is before the light, but the future is still on the roll to pass, and the past is on that roll. It’s gone through already. Now imagine that there is only the present. There is no future roll, and no past roll. And now further imagine what language there could be in such a situation. One could just gape. This!” [Bouwsma, 1986, p. 13]. The identity of the *I-who-am-thinking* in time and, subsequently, the coherence of Cartesian narrative is only guaranteed by the true creator of “this theatre which is the world” [AT X, p. 213]. Only the author of all reality “who cannot be a deceiver on pain of contradiction” [AT 7, p. 62] eradicates the ambiguous blended perspective while ensuring the cumulative logic of Cartesian storytelling.

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