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The Kinesthetic of *DUST* – The End of Drama

by Andrija Dimitrijevic

End of drama
dust of dream--
a black cat

Ban`ya Natsuishi

I have known Manchevski for 25 years now! As an artist, he has never been attracted by the actual appearance of things and phenomena. He has never been interested in presenting life as it really is, in the already defined Descartes' coordinate system x, y, z, which we could consider a banal one. Instead, he has always been interested in an alchemical cinematographic laboratory in which he organically integrates different kinds of reality, time, narrative forms, editing structures – producing an aesthetic experience that surpasses the one caused by the actual appearance of things and phenomena themselves! Manchevski supports the idea of a motion picture as an autonomous art form. The basic principles of his movie, *Dust* (2001), as a work of art, are based on two insufficiently explored forces: the force of arousing of an organized kinesthetic reaction, and the force of overcoming the literary meaning of a frame, i.e. creation of poetic images. The kinesthetic values of a motion picture as a point of departure, that other arts almost do not have, are found in the artistic articulation of visual-dynamic characteristics of poetic moving pictures which are emphasized in relation to the narrative structure! The art of motion pictures is neither in their narrative aspect, nor is it in the symbolistic, iconographic construction of logically opposed symbols (S. M. Eisenstein), that essentially supports the idea of "reading" motion pictures. Instead, the art of film is in the visual nature of the motion picture medium itself. A motion in a movie is built on the principle of the phi-phenomenon. This is, in fact, the general name of the illusion of movement when, actually, there is no physical motion in a shot. Here, as an example, we can take the famous experiment in the Gestalt psychology: if two light sources, distant from each other, are alternately turned on and off, the viewer will have an impression that both light sources jump from one side to another. Besides, when two different forms alternately appear on the very same spot, we have the illusion of one form being transformed into another, and vice versa. Both of these examples illustrate the claim of the members of this psychological school that partial perceptions unite in our mind, creating a completely new visual impression... Starting from the principle of the psychologist, Kurt Koffka, and applying them onto movies, we can conclude that the "gestalt" stands for a spontaneous configuration, or a spontaneous fusion, of partial visual elements into a new kinesthetic whole, and that the very "perceptual fusion" acts not only upon our mind, but also upon our nervous and motor system...

Accordingly, before we start talking about the movie itself, let us look at the two enclosed photographs, out of many of them that are found in the volume called *STREET*, published by Manchevski in 1999.



Milcho Manchevski, STREET (1999)

Someone would say that these two photographs are documentary ones. This would be especially the case with the first one dominated by the posters in Cyrillic in the background, with the hyperbolically smiling representative of the party looking forward to seize the power as soon as possible. The party's candidate is pointing his finger at us, as though he is holding something recognizable in his hand. The other person in the photograph is an older man, drinking his coffee and a glass of water, in accordance with the ancient Balkan custom, and wearing old-fashioned spectacles. He is there to create an illusory distance from the present moment and his surroundings, alluding to some better times of the past, with his back indifferently turned to the posters behind him and to everything that they stand for... This is a prototype of the Milchevski's way of thinking – a discovery of the sarcastic reality, almost Bunuel-like in its surrealism, within the surroundings that becomes truly poetic under his eye... If we carefully analyze the ideological context, we come face to face with two different, dynamically juxtaposed ideological times: the present one and the other belonging to the past. Actually, within the very same frame, there are two levels of action with the two representatives of said times. The two times coexist in two different, parallel worlds that permeate each other. And we very well know that the existence of a certain time can be objectified only by means of movement that is, on the other hand, possible only within a certain space. However, both movement and the state of rest are equally important to any film director. The pointed finger and the indifferently turned back! The very state of rest of the man in the forefront, completely ignoring the candidate's pointed finger, i.e. the movement in behind of him, reveals the bipolar spatial coordination of the frame, characteristic only of the visual nature of movies. There is movement even in the state of rest! Sobriety against the exaggerated smile ...



Milcho Manchevski, STREET (1999)

The other photograph also tells a story about life of the two parallel worlds. The only difference from the first one is that the life it represents is more optimistic, even though the photograph is black and white! In addition, there is the state of rest even in movement.

There is movement, a strong dynamics, and an active force in both of the photographs, while an intensive feeling of a poetic, dynamic image, and not of a symbolic one, is being provoked in both of the mentioned frames.

How does the visual-dynamic articulation of *DUST* function?

Most of the existing motion pictures do not represent either a prototype or an exclusive specimen of a creative use of film inventions and technology, but only the use of film instruments for the registration of the process itself. *DUST* can be mentioned as an example of a creative use of film inventions, while some of its fragments and inserts/parts of it can be compared with the best achievements in other arts, the arts that have been developing for thousands of years now. One can ask several questions in this connection: do we have in mind here a line of short frames, or the abstract forms that move in harmony with the music, or the change of frames in accordance with the musical beat, or its symbolic character and fantasy, or the camera tricks and the Hollywood-like editing. *DUST* replies to all these questions: Yes, all this and much, much more than this! The film, and especially the television medium, is used as an extension for various uses of recording printed words, events, people, and it can also be compared with a fluoroscope, with fingerprinting, with different schemes and drawings from the field of etymology, botany, architecture... It is quite rare that an art value lies in a specific film structure in which its subject has been articulated, organized or structured. Many people are of the opinion that the beauty of the art of film as a medium lies in the fact that there have been so many effective film recordings, sometimes quite emotional, and sometimes highly exciting, not taking into account the fact that an effect itself does not originate from the medium itself. This happens when we place into the forefront its external factors, i.e. mechanical effects, instead of its creative effect! Then we get a so-called *photoplay*, i.e. the British term for film. The word itself was coined at the very beginning of film, when it was considered something that has resulted out of theatre (for theatrical shows are called *plays*). To this very day, some motion pictures do not have the least intention to be anything of the sort. *DUST* is a good example of such a movie. That is why the meaning of a *play* so much differs from the meaning of the phrase *motion picture*!

After a long introductory frame, the so-called *dolly-shot* that, climbing upwards, manages to take four stories, and that reveals to us, in a privileged feeling of flying upwards, the juxtaposed contents: a family having supper, a couple having a sexual intercourse and finally Edge, one of the characters in the movie. Edge is a petty thief from the neighborhood - downtown Manhattan – who is closing the curtains because he is in the middle of a robbery. What follows is a dialogical scene characteristic of all the dialogical scenes in this movie, revealing the formal

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approach of the whole movie to us: the close-ups of the actors in action, the expressive *mise-en-scene*, movements of subjects in the locale (the room), the movements of the camera, pans, Edge and Angela's (another character in the movie) contrasting reactions, the changes from a close shot to a long shot, the regular, spatial organization achieved by means of using the adequate camera angles, a larger number of jump cuts in a single scene... In spite of the seemingly simple recordings reeling off one after another, all this helps overcome the photographic literalness, raising the movie to a higher, essential level where the shots become – *imaginative pictures*! Not pictures, in the sense of pictorial compositions, paintings or drawings, but in the sense somewhat close to the use of the word in poetics. There, it is quite easy to understand this word in the right way. However, as the art of film is a visual art, this particular word can easily cause confusion. (In the English language, there is a certain subtle difference between the word *picture*, and the word *image*; in the vocabulary that I use, the word *imaginative picture* covers the meanings of both of these words). As we still do not have specific, more adequate words for the notion that I have in mind, we must satisfy with the phrase *imaginative picture*.

In this connection, let us recall three different scenes in this movie. First, the one, in which is Edge is searching through an apartment in order to find something valuable, i.e. attempting a robbery. The editing structure in all the three scenes is elliptical, and the spectators do not have a feeling of condensation of the action/time. The ellipsis in film condenses the action, creating an impression of a surprise and of a partial shock. Some of the frames are connected by means of jump cuts, as in the frame in which the old trunk with old photographs is being opened, where the dynamic structure creates a kinesthetic feeling. Later on, when Angela, the owner of said apartment, catches Edge in the act, the false “adequate” angles of shooting violate the mechanical conventions of the film language. Edge's moves, the movements of the camera following the characters moves in the locale, as well as Edge and Angela's glances, violate the rules of orientation of the spectator within the locale. The second scene, in which Edge is still searching through the apartment for the second time, is characterized by the same editing style, and condensation of time. The last scene, in which Edge is searching the whole apartment, contains frames that are slightly longer and slower, as far as movement within them is in question. This is the way to announce the moment of the accidental discovery of golden ducats. The visual-dynamic structure in these scenes is articulated in three different ways. By means of connecting the static frames, by means of connecting the frames shot with a static camera accompanied with movements within the frame, and by connecting the frames shot with a moving camera accompanied with movement within the frames. The editing principles of said, simple scenes are dynamically connected with the scenes of a richer organization of the dynamic-visual structure. Creation of such *imaginative pictures* by means of editing, which are at the same time kinesthetic and kinesthetically organized, helps overcome the mechanical lethargy of individual frames. In the nonverbal moments, within the psychomotor sphere of our mind, the dominating gentle, slow, silenced, movement, i.e. kinesthesia, results in a friendship of the two characters, Edge and Angela. Movement? Why does this word express life itself? There is not a single particle of matter in the whole universe, which is at rest even for the shortest while. The stars, the planets, the tides, the wind, our mind and its thoughts, our dreams - all this is constantly moving, vibrating and going on. Since the dawn of human mind, or the humanity itself, there has been the attempt to express one's own emotions and desires by means of movement: in dance, by means of visible moves of the body; in music, by means of inexpressible and sensual movements of sounds; in writing, by means of symbolic movements of our mind; in painting and sculpture, by means of crystallized, but motivated movements of our visions. Artists have also been trying to find the way to objectify their dreams, that have always been changing and on the move.

The film audience gladly reacts kinesthetically - even though not aware of that – to certain, most frequent sequences in the contemporary movies: chases, fights, battles, explosions, fires, storms, that abound in this movie. Sometimes, in said sequences, one can feel hidden, newly arisen imaginative pictures - pictures of some forceful discharges, triumphal breakthroughs, and semiconscious plays with death. The audience is right in preferring action movies, to static, verbal, i.e. non-accomplished ones. After such, often rough but vital moments, almost every motion picture abruptly plunges into the dead world of dialogical recordings, ruled by the unsurpassed demon-twins, **Tech** and **Mech** (technology and mechanics). This is not the case with DUST! The frame, in which Angela breaks off a ducat from the chain that she is wearing around her neck, and throws it into the direction of Edge, is joined with the frame in which we see the ducat violently flying up into the air. In the next frame, the ducat is being shot at by Luke, a new character, so that the action of the movie is being transported into the past by means of the visual-dynamic intensive action and a false continuity. Manchevski intelligently treats the formal film elements - paraphrasing the

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Russian film cineastes: Dovzhenko, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and even Kuleshov, if you want it, in construction of movie space and time. In this way, he manages to rise above banal photographic effects, emphasizing the film visual-dynamic values by means of the editing structure itself.

The close up, articulated by Manchevski, simultaneously obtains two chief functions: the visual-dynamic, and the associative one. Now, comes the scene in which Luke is watching the silent movie. His decision to go to Macedonia results out of the strong appeal of said movie, and not so much out of the information that he has just acknowledged. Luke becomes a member of the *ballistae* (the Albanian fighters organized on the tribal principle on the territory of Southern Serbia and Western Macedonia, wearing white hats, so called *ketche*), i.e. a headhunter. They attack the surrounded *komite* (the Macedonian rebels, fighting for freedom against the Ottoman Empire), headed by a character called Teacher. The scene of the attack, is dominated by close ups characterized by more than an intense movement. Being a cinematographic alchemist, Manchevski gets an interesting idea. It seems as though he is watching a theater spectator using a binocular, trying to see a face of a protagonist from a close up! In other words, he refers to the stereotypical use of a binocular by means of a characteristic mask consisting of two circles. In this way, he emphasizes the "telescopic" characteristic of film itself. There is no doubt, that this particular device increases the visual dynamic nature of the movie itself, and somewhat compensates for the absence of a live character in this particular frame. In the sequence with a sudden attack, the visual-dynamic progression is emphasized by numerous close ups characterized by a dominant movement. Here, a close up means a magnified image of a relatively small object, and we, naturally, have a bodily reaction - we react kinesthetically, as to an every single visual change. Accordingly, the bigger the change, the stronger the reaction. For example, a sudden change from a long shot of a distant object to its close up always causes an optical kinesthetic shock, a sudden jump forwards. This is exemplified in the frame where Luke is lying in the dust, and the frame in which we see an airplane flying above him, that were joined together. Another example is the dynamic connection of frames in which we see Luke with his double-barreled gun, shooting down two *komite* hidden in a sheepfold. If an object is moving, it's close up emphasizes its movement because of the background that, simultaneously, becomes more smeared. As a rule, the larger the surface of the screen encompassing the movement, the greater is its intensity. At some points in the movie, the close ups are used to create an impression of a condensed, and in the others of an extended time. The scene with the sudden attack of the Greece gang (*andarti*), being helped by Elijah, who happens to wound his own brother Luke, is characterized by an emphasized time extension. One even has the impression that the movement within the frames has been slowed down. This particular scene is also characterized by a strong, dynamic change on the level of changing of the frames themselves. The one where Luke and Elijah exchange glances has a visible time extension. An artistic use of a visual medium understands a good and a proportional coordination of the visual parts. The problem of duration, harmony, contrast, proportion, and rhythm, are articulated in a visual-dynamic organization, i.e. in the course of editing. This is completely contrary to the literary-dramatic conventions regarding the editing process of connecting of scenes, wide shots with medium or close shots, similar to the theatrical, and the film ones.

According to the fact that, a close up of an object somehow separates it from its own context, it also independently acquires the properties of adhesion and cohesion, i.e. attraction and rejection, in relation to the surrounding contents/frames. Thus, when their own meanings of values are in question, frames acquire a more complex sensibility thanks to the meanings surrounding them. This process, within which a close up acquires new characteristics, thanks to the associative corpus of others, gives birth to the already mentioned *imaginative picture*.

The visual nature of *DUST* rests on its dynamic values. This means more than effective photography, unusual positions of camera, or brilliantly shot frames with a help of a crane or a traveling shot. The subjective frame of the wounded, semi-conscious Luke, to whom Lilith appears in a hallucination, transforming into a Turkish soldier, is a kinesthetic whole in itself. Milcho upsets our notions of the lower and the upper edge of a frame by means of turning his camera around its horizontal axis, which stands vertically in relation to the axis of its lens. At the end of a long, slow motion, we see Luke regaining consciousness, and the frame, practically thanks to the motion itself, changes from the subjective to the objective one. Cinema, actually, understands the integration of parameters with the visual-dynamic associations that are combined into new, live wholes by means of a creative editing. Accordingly, cinema understands construction of a visual-dynamic language independent from the literary/theatrical conventions that are mostly verbal and rationally exhaustible. The circular motion of the camera in the scene in

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which, by means of a combined pan and a traveling shot - a complex movement of the camera – we see Elijah's face, the revolver, the eyes of Luke who is aiming the revolver at Elijah, is a typical example of an induced movement. Fast movement of the background creates a feeling of kinesthesia. The same scene includes the epilogue, consisting of a series of rhythmic frames - close ups of the Turkish soldiers. At first, they watch that insolent act with surprise and disbelief, and then raise their arms with a movement that is partially repeated from one frame to another. Luke is aiming the revolver at the face of his brother Elijah. Hundreds of soldiers are aiming their weapons at Luke. The editing structure, in which we see the arms being raised, is created by means of overlapping, so that the result is the extended time effect. The timing of the scene in which the soldiers are laughing, was extended as much as the spectators can bear. The connection between the frames was realized by means of a dynamic-visual change of the joined static pans. Irritated by the distorted laughter of a soldier, Luke shoots and kills him. Manchevski is not interested in quiet and flat *imaginative pictures*. He seems to be constantly turning around, placing the camera on the wheels, and driving us through different surroundings. He approaches a character or follows him in his movements, giving us a new and, until that moment, completely unknown appearance of things. He seems to raise us from our seats, taking us into the drama itself, a drama with film characteristics. I can almost hear sarcastic objections being raised: you, Milcho, support the idea that the audience has to be stunned. Yes, Milcho replies, I like it that way. I prefer to deal with the things that stun us, than to be satisfied with what is making us yawn. Movements will help you make a movie out of your imaginative pictures. Movements will enable you to bring emotions into the pictures and excite the audience.

In the final sequence of the clash - the most kinesthetic scene in the movie, by the way, we see the sweetest Macedonian watermelon cut into halves, together with the ducat and a swarm of wasps enjoying the watermelon. Taken out of the context, it would have a positive connotation. In the context of the other frames, in which the Turks like maddened wasps attack and shoot, Manchevski metaphorically equalizes it with the position Luke is in. Luke who shoots at the wasp's nest, atoning for his own madness and greed that is equal to the one manifesting itself on the watermelon. That is something exhaustible, visible, and it was realized by means autochthonous film devices, or to be more precise – editing!

Film editing is a highly flexible means of expression using sound/visual effects. It includes all the possibilities of camera, movements, and rhythm and cutting, in order to express feelings and thoughts as told by a FILM story. For example, we see wounded Luke falling from his horse in three different frames. The spectator is placed in the position of the subjective point of view of Luke himself, with the help of the camera turning around the axis of its lens to the left. The dreamlike black-and-white frames showing Look's desire and the slowed-down jump of the woman he loves out of the water (Lilith) are, by the way, one of the leitmotifs of the movie. These inspired frames are constantly strongly opposed the moments of reality. Here, the juxtaposition results out of the connection of different speeds of movement within the adjacent frames. On one hand, a close up in the real time lasts 24 fps while, on the other; a slowed-down frame probably lasts up to 60 fps. This means that the normal movement here is connected to the slowed-down one.

Manchevski presents himself as a supporter of the classical theory of movement as an essential means of expression in film. It seems as though he is pointing out that film was, in fact, invented to record movement of a horse, an airplane or shooting from revolvers and rifles. The very word "movie" (movement) is the one innocently hiding and referring to the nature of his way of understanding of the art of film. He openly supports the position of a creative structuring of frames by means of a creative use of camera and editing. The harmonious organization of movement causes a spontaneous mental reaction in the viewer, while different movements can incite different reactions. There are many examples of this: The upward movement from the beginning of the movie; the frame with the coin flying into the air; the slowed-down frames with a Turkish soldier falling from the bridge; the distorted lights in the editing triads of the light reflection of the night Manhattan; the airplane flying over the two brothers in the scene of their final separation; the sequence in which we seen the carpets being washed and the children bathing at Mariovo; the scene in which we see Edge going down the streets of the down-town Manhattan; the scene where Edge shows a strong kinesthetic reaction because of his fear of flying; the cynical repetition of the shots (5 of them) of the Turkish pasha with teacher's head in his hand; the effectively edited falls of both Luke and Elijah onto the ground with dust showering the camera lens; the disappearance of the sarcastic Turkish soldiers effected by a means of a trick in gradation and an extended time interval... In the imaginative sphere of our mind, images of certain

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things, people and movements, carry their associative fields that attract each other and join in countless configurations, as per their “physiognomy”, contents, and contrasts. At happy, creative moments, some of them shine with a wondrous life of their own. The imaginative-pictures, metaphors and symbols are being born in this way. Moreover, I am not talking here about the metaphors, metonymies, and symbols that are verbally and intellectually exhaustible (“this thing represents this”), as the ones already mentioned before, but about transcendental pictures in which numerous other pictures are echoing, and which are out of reach of our intellect.

The principle of the DUST kinesthesia continues the tradition of those film structures that are stressing the visual-dynamic effect and that, as a means of expression, amplify the other film components - its context, contents, totality. The kinesthesia is a specifically sensual sensation of the unique phenomenon of movement in film, representing a feeling of movement within us caused by the sensations from the screen. This is a psychological-motor reaction of our bodies caused by the movements on the screen. It is reflected in the neuromuscular reaction of body movements, as well as on the visceral one, i.e. the changes in the operation of our internal organs such as the accelerated pulse, convulsion of the stomach muscles, sweating, heart arrhythmia, the feeling of nausea, vomiting... By means of the editing orchestrations of various movements, the visual-dynamic sensations intensify the sensory-motor reactions. Manchevski brings back the aesthetic essence of film to the sensual, kinesthetic organization of movement by means of editing.

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