

Ida & Deleuze's Time-Image

In *Cinema I* and *Cinema II*, Gilles Deleuze not only expanded the way cinema is analyzed but the way the concept of time is analyzed as a whole. He argues that in a disjointed post-World War II world, time does not adhere to a linear chronological form but rather exists as an open durational whole. In other words, the past and the future coexist in the present; time is no longer seen as a line but rather as a plane. What this meant for cinema is that filmmakers began to use images to represent time as opposed to movement representing time, whether it be through prolonged shots or disconnected sights and sounds. Time was no longer subordinated to movement; instead movement was subordinated to time. This then becomes particularly significant in the post-World War II cinema as it relates to trauma because of the paradoxical nature of memory. In the film *Ida*, director Paweł Pawlikowski is heavily influenced by Deleuze's understanding of time, formally shaping the film so as to constantly highlight how the past, present, and future can all exist in unison. Through repeated use of long, lingering shots on mostly empty frames, Pawlikowski represents how the trauma of the holocaust haunts the memories of those who survived it and affects even those who have no memory of it. In this essay, I will analyze the sociopolitical environment of post-WWII through the lens of trauma theory in order to better understand how Deleuze's concept of the time-image came to be and use key scenes from the film *Ida* to show formal elements that represent the time-image as transcending our understanding of linear time.

Displaced People of the Post-War

To understand the film *Ida* and the characters within it, one must understand the position of Poland and its people in the postwar world. Poland had not only been invaded by one country but two during the second World War, with Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia massacring and exiling millions of Polish people over the span of a few years, many of them Jewish. Over this short period of time, the Polish people were forced to conform to Nazism at first and then communism later on. In the last half of the film, as Anna and Wanda dig up the burial site of the Lebenstein's, Anna turns to Feliks and asks why she is not in there, to which he replies that she was tiny and would not be recognized as Jewish. Wanda's son was not as fortunate as he was "dark and circumcised" and Wanda herself only survived because she aligned herself with Communism, earning the nickname "Red Wanda" by sentencing people with anti-communist ideals to their death. In that particular moment, Anna and Ida are one, past and present, Jewish and Catholic; As Megan Ratner says in her article, *Displaced Persons: Ida's Window on Vanished Lives*, "The erased Ida Lebenstein stands in for the Jewish wartime victims as well as the psychologically displaced persons of Communist Poland, hectored by the state into conformity." Pawlikowski excels in creating these two characters who represent the polarity of Poland at the time, with Anna standing in for the Roman Catholic church and Wanda standing in for Communism, both powerful forces in the country after the war. They learn to care for each other despite their ideological differences but clearly cannot live with one another. Wanda's suicide can be seen as the eventual death of communism in the country, while Anna's confident devotion to the Catholic faith serves to show the continued influence of the church in Poland.

This significantly relates to Deleuze's argument of time as an open durational whole in that these two characters manage to encapsulate the past, present, and future of the country within themselves.

Pawlikowski, who left Poland as a teenager to escape the communist regime, represents a generation of filmmakers suffering from the transgenerational trauma from WWII, people who had not experienced the

event but were still affected by it. This unique positioning, Deleuze would argue, allows Pawlikowski to understand time in non-linear non-chronological way, which is then reflected in his films.

Memory & Trauma

Film theorist and historian Thomas Elsaesser wrote extensively on New German Cinema and the effect of the transgenerational trauma of WWII on the German auteurs coming out of the movement. In his book, *Terror und Trauma*, Elsaesser dives into this concept of trauma theory and the ways in which memory, specifically that of the German people after the war, can be paradoxical and often contradictory, especially after a traumatic event. For Elsaesser, psychic temporality and linear temporality came to coexist in the films of the postwar period. As he says in his book, “The traumatic event intimately links several temporalities, making them coexist within the same perceptual or somatic field, so much so that the very distinction between psychic time and chronological time seems suspended.” The overwhelming emotions associated to a traumatic event like WWII could not be accurately represented through traditional cinematic form, which led the directors of the New German Cinema movement to experiment with new ways to represent memory and time.

Deleuze would agree with Elsaesser’s ideas on trauma, understanding that memory and recollection do not adhere to the constraints of linear time. Memories and recollections can affect a person at any given moment in the present, causing time to be altered (slowed down, sped up) as the person experiences a past moment in their present moment. Dreams also occupy this position outside of linear/chronological time as the human mind perceives time differently when experiencing a dream. In classical films, a character’s dreams are typically presented as a fantasy sequence and a memory is shown as a flashback. For example, in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, Scottie sees Carlotta’s necklace and has a flashback to having seen it in the painting in the museum. The audience is clearly aware of the distinctions between past and

present because of how the scene is put together formally. But Deleuze is more interested in how memory and dreams are experienced in everyday life. For Deleuze, formal representations of memory in film might look like prolonged shots that linger on an empty frame or non-continuous editing that does not clearly indicate differences in time. The actual (real life) and the virtual (memory/dream) are indiscernible. What is out of frame becomes just as important as what is in frame. This break of the sensory-motor link is crucial to the understanding of the time-image since situations in the postwar period no longer extended into action or reaction in accordance with the requirements of the movement image (Deleuze).

Ida: Qualities of the Time-Image

The film *Ida* expertly represents trauma and memory through direct time-images that constantly remind the audience of the past's presence in the present. The use of a monochromatic palette is instantly noticeable but is not used to try to recreate a certain time period or its look; instead it is used to underline the primacy of memory over history (Ratner). Anna's convent seems to not belong to any time period, keeping the audience from being able to identify historical markers until 15-20 minutes into the film. Pawlikowski uses extreme wide shots throughout the entire film and allows the characters to enter and exit the frame without needing to follow them, lingering on empty space. All these formal elements show time as an open durational whole, representing the past and present in a way that does not make a distinction between them.

The narrative in the film also reinforces the time-image by centering the story around a person who had no connection to their past and is suddenly thrust into a world of people and places they have no previous memory of. Anna spent her entire life in the convent, sheltered from the outside world and the war going on, so when she is told to visit her last remaining relative, her world is suddenly expanded and

she gains a past. Her aunt Wanda, on the other hand, is someone who is completely haunted by her past. She spends her time drinking excessively and sleeping around to try to forget the traumatic experience of the war and her brutal part in the communist regime. As they embark on their quest, the past is constantly amongst them, like an invisible passenger. Wanda sees her sister in Anna and Anna sees her mother in Wanda, Roza being the uniting force guiding them throughout the film. In the scene where Anna finds the stained glass in the barn of her childhood home, the glass acts as a physical piece of her mother, literally allowing Roza and her memory to exist both in the past and in the present. Ultimately, the culmination of the consequences of the past and present are what lead to Wanda's suicide; Already intensely traumatized by the war, the weight of the definitive knowledge of her sister and sons fate becomes too heavy for Wanda, her future already determined as she leaps from the window.

Key Scenes from *Ida*

One of the first scenes that stands out in terms of how it encapsulated the Time-Image and Deleuze's idea of time as an open durational whole is that of the unearthing of the Liebenstein's remains. The scene begins with an extreme wide shot of Anna, Wanda, and Feliks crossing an expansive empty field to go into a dark, forested area. This imagery of empty or disconnected "any-space" is key to the cinema of the postwar period, says Deleuze, since it visually shows the disengagement between action and reaction, a lack of traditional temporal continuity. The camera then cuts to a shot of trees and holds on the trees as the characters walk into the frame, Feliks walking in front alone and Anna and Wanda walking farther behind holding hands. They seem detached from time and space, merely visitors in a forest that has lived longer than them and will outlive them all. The next shot shows a mound of dirt, Feliks not immediately visible until he comes up from digging. Once again, Pawlikowski is emphasizing how disconnected Feliks is from this land that he holds claim to but does not truly own. Anna and Wanda sit on the ground,

only occupying the lower left of the next frame, staring off into the distance as dirt from the earth flies by them. This is the culmination of their journey and it is clear in their faces that this is something neither of them are emotionally prepared for. Anna then stands as Wanda crouches down towards the hole, taking a small, fragile skull, that of her only son, from Feliks and wrapping it gently in her headscarf. The weight of Felik's shame taken over him as he sits in the hole with his knees to his chest and head bowed, having dug his own metaphorical grave by admitting to his murder. He can no longer attempt to forget his sins as they surround him, past and present iterations of his wrongdoing. The camera cuts back to Anna and Wanda as Wanda stands, her head out of frame, and walks away from the hole. Her mind is no longer connected to the present moment but instead is stuck in the trauma of the past. Anna then asks Feliks why she is not in the hole, to which he responds that she was tiny and no one would recognize she was Jewish. In that moment, her past identity as Jewish Ida and her present identity as Catholic Anna converge into one, reminding her and the audience that, even though she has no memory of her past, it still lives on in her present and will live on in her future.

The scene of Wanda's death is also particularly important for understanding time-image in a multilayered way. In formal terms, the scene begins with movement-image in the form of a montage, showing Wanda's increasing despair through a series of continuous shots of her everyday life. She looks through photos of her family, goes on a date, sleeps with a man, eats toast, smokes a cigarette in the bathtub. All of these mundane moments of her life are marked by the increasing hopelessness in her face; the charming, effervescent Wanda of the past is replaced by a shell of a person, someone who has lost all will to experience the future. The camera then focuses on Wanda opening the window, allowing it to remain in the center of the frame as Wanda moves in and out of the frame. As Deleuze would say, the actions happening out of frame are just as important as what is within the frame; it is outside this frame that Wanda comes to the decision to end her life. She grabs her coat, puts out her cigarette, and exits the frame through the window. The camera does not follow her plummeting down or immediately cut to a scene of her funeral, to indicate a rational cut to related action. Instead, the camera lingers for an extended

period of time on the open window, silent and still, as though to allow the audience to grieve for this character. The film then cuts to Anna standing in the same place as Wanda in front of the now closed window. Just as the character of Roza does throughout the film, Wanda then lives on in Anna and her future, as shown by where Anna is positioned in the frame. In that moment, Anna becomes the only surviving member of her family, the only link to her family's past. The following scenes show her wearing her aunts dresses and smoking her cigarettes, desperately trying to reconnect with the only other person who had a shared past with her. In imitating her aunt, she resurrects her in the present moment. The past, present, and future coexist in one visual moment.

Another significant scene representing Time-Image is that of Anna leaving Lis and walking back to the convent. After Lis tells Anna his plans for their future, the camera cuts to a closer shot of Anna in the foreground, Lis's sleeping face behind hers as she stares off, deep in thought. The shot is reminiscent of earlier shots of her aunt, once again resurrecting Wanda in Anna's present. The shot stays on Anna for a while, Pawlikowski giving the audience a moment to ruminate on Lis's plans for a "normal life" as Anna does the same. This prolonged shot encourages the audience to search for meaning in the frame. This becomes Anna's pivotal moment, where she can drop everything she's ever known to pursue a life she never had or return to her devotion to God. It is a life-altering decision for her, which is why the length of the shot emphasizes the importance of the moment. The camera does not move with her as she gets up from the bed and exits the frame, leaving Lis alone. It continues to linger on his blurred sleeping face as Anna's actions offscreen signify her decision to remain committed to her faith. She gets dressed and puts on her habit, looking at herself in the mirror while continually looking back at Lis, her past and future coexisting within the moment. She puts on her coat, just like her aunt before her suicide, and walks out the door. The camera follows her from a distance as she walks through the city and then cuts to her looking the camera head on as she walks down a rural road. For the first time in the film, the camera follows her as she moves, walking confidently in the center of the frame as she stares directly at the

audience. Her traumatic past caused her to have doubts about her future as a nun in her present but after experiencing the pleasures of the secular world, she is assured of her life path.

Both these scenes in the film are representative of Deleuze's Time-Image in that they defy the traditional understanding of linear time. These moments transcend time by connecting temporalities, allowing the past, present and future to exist amongst one another instead of one leading to the other. The story of postwar survival and trauma in *Ida* becomes a perfect example of how to combine Time-Image and Movement-Image to accurately portray more complicated temporalities since, according to Deleuze, only an event as traumatic as World War II could lead to such a shift in our temporal understanding.

Conclusion

Gilles Deleuze argued that World War II and its horrific, widespread reverberations led cinema into the time-image as filmmakers attempted to visually represent the shared disconnect from rationality. How does one represent what is unrepresentable? Theorists like Thomas Elsaesser build on this idea of trauma, noting that memory transcends one's traditional understanding of linear/chronological time by removing itself from time and space while simultaneously existing within time and space. The film *Ida* then works, in our modern day, to visually represent Deleuze's Time-Image through its formal elements, allowing for the characters and the audience to disengage from linear chronological temporality and instead experience psychic temporality, that which exists within the mind.

Works Cited

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