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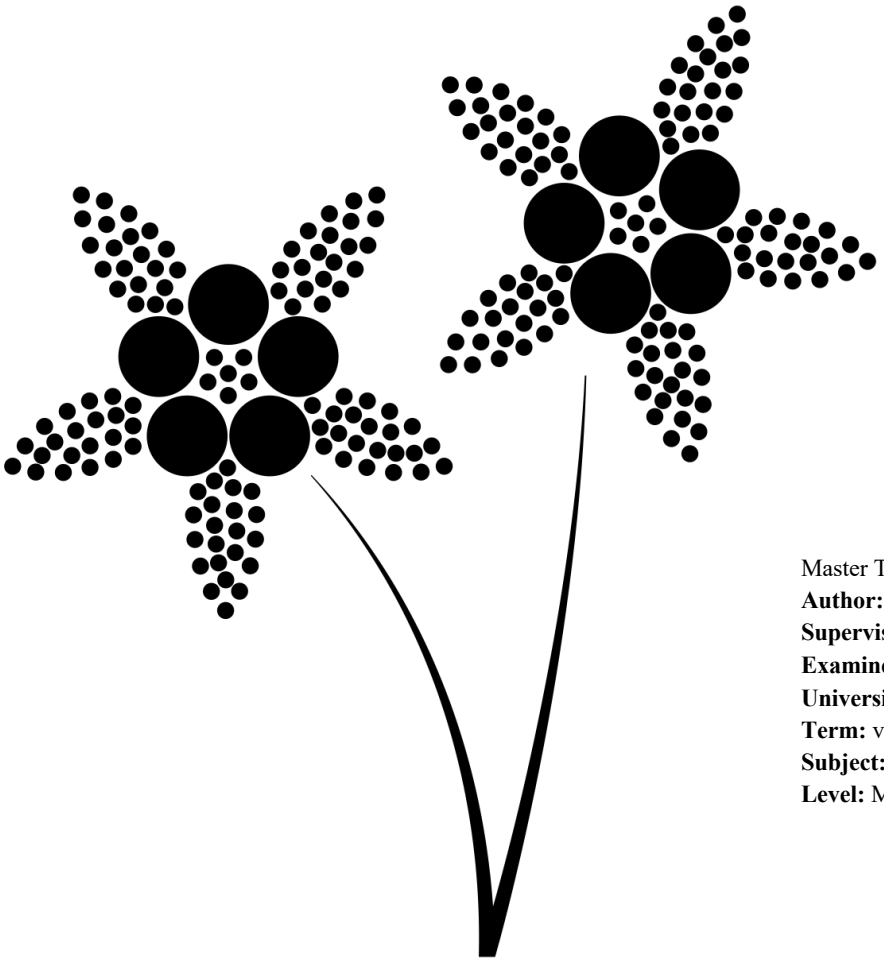
Beyond Representation

An intermedial approach to disability in film



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Abstract

This thesis explores the topic of disability and film through an intermedial lens. Influenced by disability theories like Kafer's and Siebers', it embraces the need for new frameworks which can account for the variability of disabled lives. To do this, it tackles the issue of disability representation, which so far has been examined through content or representational types of film analysis. In contrast, it proposes a media-based approach, which can account for the variability of disabled experiences in a sensory, mental and social level. Two case studies were chosen as illustrations of this approach, one being the feature film *Blue* (1993) by Derek Jarman, and the other being a mixed abilities practical filming workshop. Their complementary value sheds light into how the variability of being disabled corresponds to all the medial affordances of film like sound, image, time or camera work.

Keywords

Disability, Crip Theory, Film Theory, Intermediality, Multimodality, Filmmaking, Mediation, Film

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1 Introduction

1.1 Disability Representations in Film

Disability is ubiquitous throughout film history. Although its depictions have changed significantly over time, disability has often appeared within recurring contexts such as pain, villainhood, deformity, or narratives of overcoming personal limitations. Especially in older films, disability and physical difference were frequently associated with moral corruption or danger, while more contemporary films often frame disability through inspirational narratives centered on perseverance and recovery. There is important literature examining how these plots sustain one-dimensional and frequently negative representations of disability, even in the context of positive stereotyping. Despite this, there is a gap regarding films which communicate disability through all the channels a film can provide. Even in the rare case that a film employs more formal elements, like camera movement or sound, to mediate the experience of disability the analyses which follow, have a tendency towards the attributional and the symbolic.

Nikolaidis, for example, illustrates how *Rust and Bone* explores issues of gender and sexuality (760), usually unspoken with regards to disabled people, while the portrayal of the main characters satisfies staple narrative arcs associated with disability, such as overcoming adversity, thus becoming an aspirational figure (762). Landmark's analysis of the *Peanutbutter Falcon* also focuses on the protagonist framed as a "supercrip", relating films to the legitimation of politics of power in the topic of disability and visual culture (131). Both these analyses are textual and focused on symbolisms through plotline and character actions.

Analyses where disability is related to a film's formal elements (e.g. camera positioning), also incur symbolic attributions in current literature. *Que Nadie Duerma*, a documentary film about Danza Mobile's preparations for a theatrical show, employs filming techniques traditional to observational documentary-making. Frazer, who analysed this film in his book *Down Syndrome Culture*, states that the distant camera position (often associated with observational documentaries) and the framing of a staged play, is a way of showing how disability is framed through multiple perspectives (90), thus attributing to the camera placement, a symbolic function.

1.2 Research Problem

These analyses provide us with valuable social and aesthetic insight, encompassing fiction and documentary film, gender issues and cross-cultural observations. What is notable, however, is the focus on communication through plot and character representations. Frazer himself, further into the same book, discusses how disability in visual culture functions as a simulacrum (92). He uses this concept to illustrate how disability has been shaped so much by continuous representations that it has become far removed from the reality which it originated from. Turning our attention to the reality Frazer refers to, requires us to acknowledge the variability of a disabled person's lived experience. How is it to live life without sight, with limited hearing, without seeing colour, from another height or while holding assisting equipment like crutches? How can film communicate the sensorial plasticity involved in navigating a city through hearing or "seeing" a smile with one's hands? To what extent are represented actions enough to communicate the life of an intellectually disabled person?

To be more concise, a visually impaired person has a very different experience of the world. Depending on the type and degree of visual impairment, they might rely on sounds or recognise others from their gait instead of facial features. Since our senses and

perception are plastic, meaning that they can change and adapt to each other and the environment, the world of a visually impaired person, might be lacking one modality but others step in. To communicate disability through film then, is not only to tell stories about or including disabled characters, but to employ all the elements of a film like sound, image, editing together with script and acting. Representation is, indeed, an issue relating to the visibility of disabled characters and filmmakers. At the same time however, representations constitute the predominant narrative mechanism through which disability is communicated in film. This leaves a gap related to the limited analysis of films that explore disability through many film elements, as well as the overall lack of films which communicate disability in multiple ways.

1.3 Disability Theory and Visual Culture

Disability has been through many waves of analysis and corresponding social movements. Early conceptualizations focused first on the medical model, which put weight on the physical condition of a disabled person, and the social model which framed disability as the series of exclusions posed, by society, on people with varying constitutions. Through many years of social and scholarly discourse, we are left with the useful distinction of impairment and disability. The former, refers to the pure physical condition (e.g. a missing limb, reduced eyesight or lack of hearing), while disability takes into consideration the social inequality which restricts someone with an impairment from participating in social life (e.g. the existence of ramps). The current scholarly view of disability, adopted by many disabled individuals as well, is the “complex model”, which encompasses both medical and social aspects.

Views like this gave way to literature like Sieber's *Disability Aesthetics*, which contextualize the existence of disability in visual culture through many vantage points. In

his book, Siebers illustrates the existence of disability as a thematic through centuries of visual art and situates it within the broader aesthetics of disqualification (28). For Siebers, disability has existed long within the art canon as a collective representation of depravity, pain and imperfection, contributing, in effect, to social cohesion and abidance to moral values (105). By examining disability both as a theme within the art canon and through the perspectives of disabled visual artists, he set the ground for a more systematic discussion on disability and visual arts.

Other scholars like Kafer, Garland-Thompson and McRuer, utilized frameworks from queer and feminist studies which led to the development of crip theory (Karlsson and Rydström 397). This line of thinking imbued the discourse on disability and the visual arts with concepts like normativity, identity and self-representation (398). These theories acknowledge the multiplicity of human existence, beyond notions of "exception" and "alternative", which imply a rightful standard. So, the sensorial, mobility or cognitive condition of a disabled person is framed as variability. Importantly, the same goes for the interaction with technical and technological tools that disabled people often rely upon (hearing aids, canes etc.). It follows, that the discussion on disability and film ought to take into consideration these issues of normativity, not only with regards to plots or character representations, but on every level of a film. To achieve this, film theory and filmmaking would need to embrace the multiplicity that disability introduces.

Siebers writes in his essay *Disability in Theory*: "disability changes the process of representation itself "(738), building on the concept of a heterotopia to re-introduce disability as a way towards new aesthetic theories and practices. Originating from Foucault's work, a heterotopia initially referred to places like prisons, asylums or even gardens, which are contradictory to traditional social structures. These spaces serve as the

"other space", where inconsistencies embedded in society, as well as alternatives to it, are highlighted (Foucault and Miskowiec 24). Siebers uses this term, not only to critically describe visual culture, but to claim that disability can have a transformative effect on the art world. Changing the processes of representation itself then, implies a change of questions.

1.4 Research Questions and Case Studies

Wondering how we can include disabled people into our society, our ways, our filmmaking practises is quite different than embracing a new way influenced by the perspective of disability. To tackle this, this thesis will employ media theory to answer the following questions. How can we analyse the multiple ways through which disability can be communicated in a film (e.g. sound, image, editing)? Can an intermedial approach provide the tools for studying and enacting this new path? By joining disability and intermedial theory, this thesis explores the novel ways which our established tools can be used. On the one hand, disability and crip theory have consistently highlighted aesthetic and formal challenges within visual culture. On the other hand, intermedial perspectives offer us concrete analytical tools and theorizations of media qualities, which are ideal for studying how disability can be mediated inside films, beyond the use of representations.

To address the questions above, this thesis analyses two case studies with complementary value. The first, is the feature film *Blue (1993)* by Derek Jarman, and the second is a mixed abilities film workshop. *Blue*, is a 96-minute feature film, which solely features a monochrome IKB (International Klein Blue) screen and multilayered soundscape, while the workshop was an artistic, non-therapeutic class, designed for people of varying abilities. While *Blue* explores the experience of living with HIV and the deterioration of

Jarman's vision, the workshop explores the practical relationship between individual movement and filming with camera.

The choice of two examples, relating to film analysis and filmmaking respectively, is tied to the fact that the culture of film analysis is interrelated with filmmaking processes. For example, Carolyn Lazard's films mediate disability through multiple modes at once, enabling conversations on disability in film beyond the scope of representations or plot. For example, in *A recipe for disaster (2018)* she employs the practise of audio description, highlighting the issue of accessibility through the media involved in film. *Blue*, provides equal possibilities for discussion around how Jarman mediates his disability, while the workshop illustrates how these processes of mediation can look.

The two case studies combined, highlight another aspect of how disability is mediated within films, namely the issue of the filmmakers being disabled. Instances like this are few and often relate to known filmmakers who became disabled at some point in their career, like Jarman. This notoriously straining and narrow field has no space for practices developed by disabled people, raising questions about the current filmmaking pipeline and film culture overall. Hence, the aesthetic and practical impact on filmmaking requires informed analytical methodologies, which can address the non-normative.

1.5 Structure and Aim

The thesis follows a description of *Blue* and the mixed abilities workshop, which also situates them within broader cultural and methodological environments. Afterwards, through analysis infused with intermedial tools, the research questions will be addressed. The analysis is focused on how camera movement, sound design or time mediate disability, and how they enrich or subvert dominant film techniques. An important outcome of this type of analysis is the merging of film, disability studies and intermedial

studies. There is established background between film and disability, intermedial studies and film, as well as links between disability and intermediality, so joining them under one framework is fitting and can lead to new research and practise possibilities.

2 Theoretical and Methodological Background

2.1 Film Analysis Through Representations

Before embarking in the search for new insights, it is essential to pin down why representations are hierarchically set above other ways of communicating meaning in contemporary films. On the analytical level, this is part of an issue which pertains to western types of analysis in whole, as well as the pervasiveness of visuality within our cultures (Pedersen and Engberg 60). We can trace representation in the enduring application of semiotics through many waves of film theory. Indeed, many of these analyses, influenced by linguistics, treat film as a language system that can be ordered and deciphered accordingly. Despite the emergence of subsequent theories, which focus on affective or cognitive aspects of filmmaking, Allen points out the cultural influence of semiotic analyses on film (142), which is highly relevant to the topic of disability mediation as it influences not only scholarly but public views and film criticism.

It is important to note that the existence of representations and symbols within films is neither bad nor inherently limited. The point being made refers to the predominance of using representations in contrast to other elements of a film, as well as how representations are situated within broader film culture. For example, Allen criticises the arbitrary manner by which semiotics was coupled with psychoanalytic concepts while psychoanalytic film theory was formed. Semiotic structures like sign, signified and

signifier were paired with psychoanalytical linguistic analysis, which, in comparison, was more unclear (Allen 127).

We can see traces of this when speaking about the hidden symbolism behind a character's actions. Kim, for example explores the influence of heteronormative culture on the topic of disability in Lars von Triers *Breaking the Waves* (1996), by analysing character actions and plot (133). Interestingly, it is not only Kim's analysis which is structured through symbolic attributions of the film's characters. The film also mediates sexuality, spirituality and disability strictly through plot and symbolic actions/events, in the context of religious and psychoanalytic tropes (137).
The character's actions therefore works as a symbol related to hidden, even unconscious motives, society's larger influence etc.

Erhat attributes some of these analytical tendencies to the fragmented adoption of semiotic theory. A sign is not directly related to a representation within the film's plot but can be transmitted in many ways. Without the full understanding of how signs can exist inside films, cinema is understood as having a "sign nature" and is susceptible to analyses of endless interpretations (Erhat 113). This is related not only to how films are analysed but also in the way in which film theories themselves are understood. For example, although male gaze theory is considered to be dealing with representations of the female, it describes the camera's role as something more of an emulation. Camera placement does not only have a situational and narrative role. Instead, it is described as pervasive and sensorial type of communication, aligned with how patriarchy has moulded our ways of viewing women in any context.

Camera placement and movement have long been topics of discussion for both film scholars and filmmakers. These discussions, however, are often shaped by the same attributional tendencies. As Morgan argues, the ethics of film are usually discussed primarily on the basis of representation (136–137). Mainstream films not only turn to representations to construct meaning but also tend to make the formal elements of film invisible, in order to immerse the audience within the represented world. When formal elements become visible, this is often interpreted as an ethical or symbolic position. As a result, many analyses appear to have assumed a normative model of filmmaking that corresponds to a fraction of possible sensory and bodily experiences. The camera can certainly support plot and accent representations within a film, but it can also be analysed and utilized outside of a strictly representational framework.

The same applies to sound within films. Since filmmakers were able to synchronise sound and image, cinema became an art of time (Ma 220). Indeed, the capacity of sound enveloping image, gave filmmakers the ability to represent fragments of life and progress narrative through plot in newfound ways. The dominant conception of sound in film is influenced by this relationship, giving sound the role of bringing a film into real time and thus into cinematic realism (Ma 6). The techniques associated with cinematic realism however, lead to often unrealistic representations of life, in the sense that they cover only part of daily experience (Chion qtd. Ma 6). The use of sound then, is another film convention, based on the premise of immediacy and illusion, disregarding the antagonism or plasticity between sound and image in everyday life.

Following this reasoning, camera movement, framing, sound or duration do not simply serve to elaborate on a plot. They can also mediate perception and sensory experience directly. As Erhat writes (114):

> In fact, the concerns of film theory should not be limited artificially to whatever one is convinced is the specificity of cinema. In fact, the scope of film theory suffers from such impositions. (…) It would be a profound misunderstanding to include in this list, as a further analogon, cinema 'as' Sign. Like everything else, cinema is, of course, Sign, but this is not interesting. How it is Sign, however, is interesting, because this involves a dynamic process of mediation, rather than film as some static object.

This point is particular for analysing disability through an intermedial perspective, where the film itself has the potential to communicate embodied experience through multiple modalities at once. In the spirit of Siebers' work, disability in this thesis is treated not only as a theme, but as a novel influence on film analysis and practise.

2.2 Intermedial Theory and Film

Intermedial frameworks do not seek to replace film theory, but rather to provide tools capable of describing complex filmic phenomena and concepts that often remain abstract within traditional film discourse. Specifically, Bruhn and Gjelsvik argue that intermedial studies can concretely describe unclear concepts that exist within film theory (136). This is highly relevant to the tradition of textual film analysis. Film theory, as well as social analysis through film examples, can benefit from focusing on intermedial relationships.

Hearing, seeing, touching or moving correspond to sound, image, performance, set design or camera movements in filmmaking. It is essential, therefore, to see them as transmedial ways of producing a narrative, not as mere tools which serve a plot. A cornerstone of intermedial analysis is the assumption that meaning can travel through any medium. An important implication of this, is the fact that we can study how meaning is constructed in everyday life through the interaction with media. Another is that we can study common features between media, using intermedial concepts like modes and modality.

As Elleström has formulated, modalities are the dimensions which establish how a medium facilitates the construction of meaning (674). In this way, film can be understood

as multimodal and a heteromedial phenomenon, giving rise to an abundance of ways through which the disabled experience can exist within it. Multimodal, since a film holds multiple ways of constructing meaning and heteromedial due to the possibility of multiple media to exist within a film. These tools will be useful for analyzing both case studies. For example, *Blue*'s intricate soundscape is comprised by recorded sounds, composed music, prose and recordings, while the workshop focused on how corporeality can be mediated through the existence of the camera. By delineating the modes and media involved in the case studies, the analysis illustrates the multiple paths through which a film can mediate aspects of disability.

Overarching modalities such as temporality (rhythm, duration, pacing), can characterize every medium, extending beyond sound or editing to include the image itself (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 13). In this sense, rhythm is not limited to musical compositions, but can emerge through camera movement, editing, gesturing, or the pacing of bodies within the frame. Such an understanding challenges medium-specific approaches that isolate a film's elements from one another, instead proposing that meaning is generated through the interaction of multiple formal systems, which exist simultaneously within a film. The intermedial perspective therefore becomes especially useful for studying film, because it acknowledges film as a composite, where image, sound, movement and design influence one another. These insights also allow us to concretely analyze, not only how media exist, but also, what happens when they are absent. This will be useful for the analysis of *Blue*, which has a radical approach towards the visual modality.

An intermedial perspective then, strengthens the position that disability can itself be mediated in various ways throughout a film, just as it is mediated across different media artefacts such as literature, painting, or photography. This provides us with a

methodological framework through which the heteromedial nature of film can be examined beyond film essentialism (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 5). Basically, beyond the assumption that film has the unique ability to represent life. Meaning emerges through the simultaneous interaction of image, camera positioning, sound design, composed music, acting, editing, and even modes of projection. This is particularly relevant to disability, because it is a multifaceted experience, characterized by internal and external variability. It is also tied to how society, architecture and policy make for a different experience of everyday life. Disability in a film may then be shaped not only through representations of disabled characters, but also through the sensory and aesthetic subversions emerging between film elements. As a result, disability can be approached not only representationally, but as an embodied and mediated experience.

Although subtle, the distinction between representation and mediation is essential for the rest of this analysis. Mediation refers to how something becomes perceptible (Elleström 668). It is a dynamic process that depends both on the medium through which something is communicated, and on the perceiver engaging with it. Representation, on the other hand, refers to anything that stands as a sign in the place of something else, whether that is an object, a meaning, or a person. In the context of this thesis, a disability such as visual impairment can be mediated through a film's formal elements, for example through the soundscape of *Blue*, or it can be represented through the symbolic mechanisms and narrative conventions discussed in the introduction.

While all representations are therefore the outcome of some form of mediation, not all acts of mediation are representational in nature. *Blue*, for example, subverts the visual by depriving the spectator of conventional visual representations and instead relies on processes of mediation. The same principle applies to the workshop, where the goal of filming shifted from capturing external movement to mediating the movement and

corporeality of the participants who were filming. Film, having a multimodal and heteromedial nature, has the capacity to accommodate both mediation and representation, and the topic of disability simply brings this dual capacity into focus.

The goal of the analysis that follows is to elaborate on this point. Media, film included, are not only vehicles for representing life, but are themselves part of a continuous process of shaping and experiencing the world, representations included. From this perspective, disability functions as a heterotopia for film. It introduces the issues of variability and mediation not only in relation to disabled people, but also in relation to everyone and to the conventions that make up (and often limit) film culture.

Therefore, disability as exclusively mediated from plot is quite limited. The variability of disabled experience is aligned with intermedial approaches, since both challenge rigid distinctions between media forms, modes of communication, and systems of perception. To explore this, the thesis derives tools from transmedial narratology. Elleström's work is particularly useful because it operationalizes and clarifies many debates surrounding narrative and media. This is achieved by outlining sets of integral media qualities, shared by different media to varying degrees (49).

Elleström points to the importance of semiotic principles but encompasses the full spectrum of relations and modalities through symbolism can occur (50). This is relative to Erhat's issue within predominant film theories, because it helps us clarify arbitrary associations between what a sign is and how it affects the artist as well as the viewer. Within disability representation, for example, certain images or gestures are often immediately interpreted symbolically without sufficient attention to the temporal, sensory, or embodied qualities of the film, or conversely the film often overlooks these possibilities.

A significant contribution for this thesis is his distinction between story and narrative in a transmedial setting (Elleström 90). These two terms are often used interchangeably by critics, filmmakers, and some scholars because narrative cinema is frequently associated with plot-driven storytelling. Elleström, however, argues that story and narrative are not identical. Story refers to the sequence of events that take place, while narrative takes into account the manner through which these events are communicated (93). Clarifying this distinction opens new paths for film texts around disability (and perhaps in general), because it shifts attention from what is being told to how meanings can be mediated.

Analysing how disability is communicated within film, as well as broader inferences on aesthetics and politics behind it, can also benefit from the concreteness of intermedial analyses. Marie-Laure Ryan for example, approaches film culture through transmedial storyworlds. Ryan analyses how the same fictional world exists through many iterations across media, in cases such as the *Harry Potter* franchise, which extends across novels, films, and video games. Each medium communicates the world differently according to its own affordances, including cultural and financial aspects. Through conceptual clarifications, Ryan expands her discussion, by approaching the phenomenon from the perspectives of fan culture, creators, and the film industry. This allows her analysis to move beyond abstract theory and address the practical realities of contemporary media production and consumption.

Another example relative to both the case studies is the work on self-adaptation by Mousavi. In her analysis of self-adaptation in the film *Persepolis*, Mousavi examines how meaning first exists inside the preceding graphic novel before tracing how it is transformed through film. By analyzing the transformation of meaning across media, Mousavi demonstrates how adaptation involves more than narrative transfer; it also reshapes identity (125) and acts against processes of assimilation (78) through the

strength of multiple and different media forms. This methodological approach is particularly relevant to the present thesis because it illustrates how intermedial analysis can reveal the transformation of embodied experiences across media. These processes of self-adaptation are relative to both case studies. *Blue* existed both as a book and as a multimedia performance before becoming a feature film. In addition, Jarman had openly discussed his intention to not create a film not about AIDS but from someone with AIDS (Vallorani 85). With regards to the workshop, the processes of self-adaptation become related to embodiment through the performance and camerawork respectively.

In the context of disability, transmedial concepts become crucial because the same story may be communicated through very different narrative forms depending on sensory experience, embodiment, or modes of perception associated with different disabilities. This perspective illustrates particularly well how intermedial studies and disability studies can expand discussions around film theory and film practise.

For example, questions surrounding experimental and non-experimental cinema gain new significance. Films often categorized as experimental because they do not abide to traditional narrative through plot structures may instead be understood as stories communicated through differing narratives, much like the differing everyday experiences between people with disability (and without). This point is critical in understanding the context of the thesis' film case study. It is very interesting that *Blue*, despite its approach towards the visual, is not framed exclusively as experimental in scholarly texts since the "experimental" aspect is often attributed to the filmmaker's impairment. In addition, *Blue* has been featured on TV, museums, radio and film theatres. It is, therefore, a work that already breaks the limits of where experimental works can be showcased.

2.3 Accessible Filmmaking Practice

So far, disability and artistic practices have been mostly connected to community programs centered around therapy through art and social integration. While these initiatives are essential, they enable disabled participation primarily as rehabilitation, inclusion, or care rather than artistic process. In effect, this prohibits the restructuring of creative practice itself as Siebers, and other disability theorists suggest. Emerging research on the topic highlights the inadequacy of established artistic practises and the problematic dynamic of inclusion strategies (Jones et al. 1298). Jones et al. performed meta research on the effect of assistive technologies and crip concepts on artistic practise. They employed an openly "transdisciplinary" strategy, linking Kafer's "crip time" to a practise called "musiking", thus merging the modality of time with the medium of music in the context of disability (1306). By allowing disabled artists to dictate their practise, the subversive effect on the works is profound and not an external target.

Such approaches consider individual differences as well as the technical and technological tools each disable person uses in everyday life. Rather than treating these tools as compensatory devices, they are seen as a part of the artistic process itself and open new creative possibilities for all participants, despite having a disability or not. This is a way of enacting Tobin Siebers's disability as heterotopia as well as Kafer's discussions of "crip time" and "crip futures", both of which imagine society and creative practise organized around bodily variation and access.

The collaborative aspect of the workshop case serves as another practical way outside of, at least, the stereotypical dimension of representation. By enabling collaborative work, the methods and aesthetic decisions that emerge become a natural way of moving away from merely representing a group and toward mediating that group's lived experience

(Bramley 120). In this context, an intermedial perspective becomes particularly useful. Since the workshop group consisted of both disabled and non-disabled dancers, intermedial frameworks can account for the overlap and interaction between film elements, embodiment, and disability.

2.4 Structure of Analysis

Considering the practical tools and core assumptions outlined above, the rest of this thesis structures its analysis around how *Blue* and the workshop handle disability through formal elements of film. The analytical approach is designed to examine the multiple ways in which disability can be communicated within a film beyond conventional representational analysis. Rather than limiting disability inside narrative or characterization, the thesis approaches it as something mediated simultaneously through sound, image, camera and time in relation to disability.

Each of them focuses on the relations between different cinematic elements and the ways that they were challenged in the making of *Blue* and the mixed-abilities workshop. The thesis will explore how perception and sensory emphasis are re organized and subjected to plasticity. At the same it will address the relationship between bodies, movement, framing and technical aspects of camera work, focusing on how film techniques can shape engagement with disability. Finally, time will be addressed, in order to explore how rhythm and duration, reflect varying temporal states associated with certain disabilities in the two case studies. The analysis for both case studies starts from sound and image to camera and then time, because time is a profound element of film, related to the interplay of all the factors that will be analysed before.

By applying the same analytical framework to both a feature film and a practical workshop designed to for mixed abilities, the thesis aims to bridge theoretical analysis

with embodied creative practice. This structure allows intermediality to function not only as a theoretical lens, but also as a methodological approach capable of informing creative processes themselves. As mentioned earlier in the text, the two case studies provide complementary forms of knowledge. The film analysis offers insight into how we can incorporate intermedial and disability theory concepts for analysing an existing cinematic work, while the mixed-abilities workshop allows these concepts to be explored more practically. Together, they create a dialogue between theory and creative practise. This combination is essential to the thesis because it recognizes not only the gap in analysis, but also the gap in how filmmaking can be re-structured by disabled people themselves.

3 Analysis

3.1 *Blue*

3.1.1 Historical and Cultural Context

Blue was selected as a case study for two central reasons. First, the film presents a radical approach to visual impairment as mediated through cinema itself. By reducing the visual stimulus to a blue screen, the film challenges normative assumptions regarding vision and cinematic representation. Rather than depicting visual impairment through representations and plot, the film challenges film's visual hierarchy and the way in which the other media within the film relate to the image. Second, although the film has been the subject of many writings, the analyses have predominantly approached it through the perspective of AIDS activism, queer cinema, homosexuality, not through disability or crip perspectives. In addition, many analyses remain tied to content analysis or debates surrounding the spectacle and the political aspect of film. In contrast, the formal ways in which visual impairment is mediated through the film itself remain underreported.

One example of this can be found in the work of Ratekin, whose analysis offers important observations on *Blue*'s relationship to mortality in the context of final acts. However, the text attributes Jarman's separation from representational mechanisms to death itself, which Ratekin frames as a kind of breaking with the status quo and its restrictions (110). Despite some poignant observations, such attributions raise methodological questions regarding what exactly warrants them beyond the representational analytic frameworks employed. This is also relative to the attributions revolving disability which were discussed earlier. If the analyses primarily focus on symbolic meaning, narrative themes, or representation, they risk overlooking how the media involved in the film produce meaning. An intermedial approach becomes particularly useful here because it shifts attention from representation to the relationship between modalities like sound, image, and editing.

Although there are no approaches explicitly named as intermedial, when analysing Jarman's work, one interesting example, which moves in this direction, is Quaranta's discussion of iconoclastic film works. Quaranta focuses on the function of each modality within the film. This could be since her object of analysis consists of visually subversive works themselves, including examples by Isidore Isou and Marguerite Duras. Quaranta does not focus solely on the physical destruction of the film, as in the case of Isou, but also on the separation of cinema from its symbolic and representational function (20). Analyses such as these demonstrate the potential value of intermedial approaches because they examine how film components interact and how meaning emerges through many types of media beyond content. This is especially significant in the context of disability studies, where embodiment and the senses are only partly mediated through representation alone.

Before continuing with the analysis of the film itself, it is important to situate *Blue* within its broader historical context as well as within Jarman's wider practise. Jarman was very outspoken about his HIV diagnosis as well as his political opposition to Thatcherism and the conservativism which characterised it (Hallas 220). At the same time, AIDS had entered public consciousness during the late 1980s and early 1990s, creating public debate around activism, art and spectacle. This was also the time in which films like *Philadelphia* (1993) were released, the famous Benetton AIDS campaign was projected internationally, and actions like the *AIDS Memorial Quilt* and amfAR gala became big symbols of AIDS activism. That cultural and political landscape shaped the public, AIDS patients and artists alike, and Jarman as a public figure was overtly against the visual exploitation of the topic (221).

As Lawrence notes in his 1997 article, there existed a significant gap between Jarman's own position and broader public or activist opinion surrounding AIDS representation. Jarman was interested in making a film as someone living with AIDS rather than contributing yet another film about AIDS (see Vallorani). This distinction is crucial because it reflects a resistance to the reduction of AIDS into either palatable, or purposefully shocking material. This echoes Mousavi's discussion of transmedial self-adaptation mentioned earlier. Through the presence of narrative in many media forms, an artist can support their narrative against forces which would simplify or adapt their works to reduced representations, thus making them palatable. Jarman's work similarly resists the stabilization of illness into recognizable spectacle or narrative closure.

Indeed, Jarman explored these concerns through many types of media, for example through paintings like *Arse Injected Death Syndrome* (1993), or performances like *Bliss (1991),* which included a first iteration of *Blue* within the segment *Symphonie*

Monochrome. The final version of *Blue* also was a product of many iterations, and the merge of other artistic projects of Jarman. Starting off as notes on an exhibition about Yves Klein, which later became a blueprint for a film, Jarman tried to make a film which reflected the works and not biographical information per se. This led to the project being postponed due to lack of funding, while Jarman took over the biographical film about philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's writings on colour and the limits of language affected Jarman's writings as we can see in the book *Chroma*, the main source of text used in the film. Even after being made, the film was showcased in television, film theatres, as a radio play, a DVD and as a museum exhibit (Hallas 224).

Reactions to these different technical media of display varied a lot. Interestingly, the radio broadcast received many negative telephone calls, in contrast to the positive reception of the cinema screenings (Wymer 174). This difference may be linked to the technical medium of display itself, which shapes expectations, as well as sensory affordances. Radio listeners may have expected a typical narrative structure associated with radio drama, while the film screening provided a controlled environment, due to the sound system, dark room etc. Such differences illustrate how meaning is mediated not only through content, but through the relationship between film, context, technology, also highlighting the usefulness of employing intermedial tools for our analysis. So, the multimodal nature of Jarman's narrative cannot be overseen.

Another fact that cannot be overlooked, is the shared suspicious attitude both Jarman and Klein had towards representations themselves (Remes 116). For both artists, colour was not symbolic; it was tied to the affective and bodily reactions it produced. Some scholars associate the use of pure colour with Jarman's rebellion against the emptiness of visual activism of the time, as well as its abuse of representation as a strategy. Nevertheless,

Jarman was fascinated by the opportunities of pure colour, a similarity he shared with Klein.

Klein himself experimented with techniques that moved beyond representation in painting and sculpture. Through works such as the *Cosmogonies* or the *Peintures du Feu*, he employed texture, embodiment or the elements as ways of mediation. In some cases, he even obstructed visual perception, like when painting sculptures like the *Venus de Milo* entirely in International Klein Blue (*Venus Bleue*, 1962). These practices draw a parallel with *Blue* because they emphasize the experiential and sensory dimension of narrative, besides textual representations.

3.1.2 Description of Media Involved

Visually, the film consists of seventy-nine minutes of International Klein Blue (IKB). The colour was initially shot as painted colour and later reproduced in a laboratory as a wavelength shot onto 35mm film. Because the image remains totally unchanged throughout the film, the spectator's attention shifts toward sound, duration, and various types of internal and external sensing. Instead of using changing images to communicate its meaning, the film creates meaning through the relationship between the monochromatic screen and the soundscape.

Concerning the sound in *Blue*, the soundtrack plays a particularly important role in the film. As Ma notes (xxiii), the soundtrack's role is subverted by the openness of no visual representation and should be considered a soundscape consisting of multiple aural elements. Passages from *Chroma* are performed by close collaborators of Jarman, including Tilda Swinton, Nigel Terry and John Quentin. The passage on medical treatments for his impairment is performed by Jarman himself. Alongside the spoken text, the soundscape includes many different types of sounds. Some are abstract or difficult to

identify, such as screeches or chiming, while others are more recognizable, including alarm clocks, river sounds, and church bells. Ambience samples from a hospital or a beach are also incorporated. Music also comes from many different sources and styles. The soundtrack combines known pieces such as *Gnossiennes no. 1* by Erik Satie with composed music by Simon Fisher Turner, ambient music from Brian Eno, and industrial music by Coil. Together, these elements create a multilayered environment where sound becomes central to the experience of the film rather than an image supporting element.

The content of the film follows a similar fragmentation and variability. As Parsons explains, the narration includes reflections on the colour blue, passages about a boy named Blue and autobiographical elements connected to illness and memory (201). Different stories, memories, and artistic references are interspersed throughout the film without following a conventional narrative structure. This also resembles the structure of *Chroma*, where Jarman incorporates texts and ideas from philosophers, writers, and artists into his own reflections on colour. Through this combination of static image (or rather colour), sound, memory, and text, *Blue* constructs meaning across multiple media forms and sensory experiences rather than through representations and plot.

With regards to display, the thesis examines *Blue* in its form as a film projected in a film theatre. Lawrence in his 1997 article emphasizes, “Jarman's move is powerful precisely because it is staged in a cinema rather than an art gallery” and further down “and it is because Jarman increasingly doubted the value of visual representation that he chose to intervene in the medium that is most dependent on image” (252). The examination of the individual media involved in film has multiple scholarly interests. In this case examining how Jarman communicated his experience with AIDS and his visual impairment have

significant political implications, extended to the context of self-representation for disabled people.

3.1.3 Sound and Visual Imagery

Sound in cinema has historically existed in constant relation to the image, both in film analysis as well as filmmaking practice. However, as Chion explains, sound and image in film share a long and complicated history. His writings point out that contemporary filmmaking and analysis have forgotten, for example, the descriptive orchestration of 1930s cinema, where music substituted for environmental noise or natural sound effects (140). At the time, this was not perceived as unusual but rather constituted a dominant cinematic convention. With the development of sound technologies, however, such orchestration gradually shifted from necessity to stylistic choice. What has remained stable however, is that the relationship between sound and image has remained hierarchically structured in favour of the image.

Film has consistently privileged the image as the primary carrier of meaning, while sound was often positioned as supplementary or supportive. Technological developments further reinforce this tendency. The introduction of multichannel sound recording made it possible to create sensations of spatial direction, depth, and distance. Yet, the predominant use of these technologies was tied to representing reality. Even within stylized genres, film sound largely remained tied to the image. *Blue*, however, employs these technical possibilities very differently. Rather than using sound technologies to reproduce life realistically, the film uses them to evoke life. This distinction is crucial because the soundscape does not accompany any visible action. Instead, it guides to audience to construct imaginative spaces and sensations in the absence of representational imagery.

This becomes possible precisely because of the near-total absence of visual stimuli besides the monochromatic field of International Klein Blue (IKB). Instead of functioning as a limitation, the monochrome image becomes a starting point for the viewer's imagination. As Lars Elleström notes, different media possess different narrative affordances according to their modalities (55). For example, a static image and a moving image differ temporally, allowing them to communicate narrative in different ways. Following this logic, the static monochrome image of IKB creates conditions for the spectator to actively participate in constructing the image themselves. Vision is no longer simply provided by the film but becomes something generated mentally through the interaction of sound, individual memory, imagination, and bodily sensations.

The choice of monochromatic IKB is deeply connected to Derek Jarman's political and artistic position regarding the representation of AIDS and illness. Jarman strongly opposed the visual exploitation of the AIDS-afflicted body. First, the refusal to provide conventional visual pleasure constituted a direct critique of the ways the AIDS crisis was appropriated within media spectacle, often distracting attention from the absence of meaningful political intervention and healthcare policy. As Quaranta writes, "the ill body disappears (into the monochromatic Blueness), and only subjectivity remains (in the sonorous articulation). Rather than an aesthetic of displeasure, however, Blue's colour and sounds allow for the pleasure of the imagination" (143). The film itself contains multiple critical remarks directed toward the spectacle surrounding AIDS representation, including references to projects such as the AIDS quilt. A quote from the film states "In the pandemonium of image I present you with the universal Blue (…) an infinite possibility becoming tangible." Here, the monochrome image functions not as deprivation, but as resistance against overexposure and visual consumption.

At the same time, Jarman's use of colour was profoundly influenced by philosophy, literature, and modern art. As Parsons notes, these influences permeate both *Chroma* and *Blue* itself (196). In the months leading up to the production of *Blue*, Jarman had been working on *Wittgenstein* (1993), and the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein on language and colour deeply affected his thinking. This line from *Blue* reads: "Blue transcends the solemn geography of human limits," resounding Wittgenstein's proposition that colour exposes the instability of shared understanding (200). The monochrome IKB can therefore be understood as an invitation to imagine how the world might be experienced by someone else. Rather than representing visual impairment directly, the film is an invitation to imagine how the world could be for someone else.

Although colour is semantically associated with many concepts or emotions, the way these associations exist differs from that of representational imagery. As Parsons explains, colour operates through connotations rather than representation (198). These connotations are fluid, fragmented and unstable, allowing for meanings to emerge associatively. Both Jarman and Yves Klein viewed the colour blue as transcendental, connected, not only through symbolism, but through affective and sensory experience. Consequently, IKB does not function as a signifier within the film, but as an instigator for creating images.

This brings us back to the question of sound. Film sound has been extensively researched, but *Blue* challenges many of the concepts traditionally used to describe it. As Hallas points out, the film destabilizes familiar categories such as the voice-over (226). Indeed, how should one describe the vocal performances of Tilda Swinton or Nigel Terry within the film? Their speech fluctuates between narration, prose, memory and internal thought

without “voice-overing” something on screen. Their voices function relationally within the soundscape of *Blue*.

Through prose, music, ambiences and loose sounds the audience is probed into producing images internally and to experience sound without the context of deciphering an image. Chion distinguishes between iconogenic and non-iconogenic speech, referring to whether speech directly generates mental images or not (156). Much of the speech within the film is strongly iconogenic, yet even fragmented discourse or seemingly non-iconogenic speech has a constructive function within the context of the monochromatic screen. The iconogenic qualities of the speech often provoke bodily reactions while simultaneously blurring distinctions between narrator and viewer. As Hallas writes, “Language in *Blue* not only facilitates the means by which to bear witness, to construct a testimonial address to an other, it also serves as the form through which the witnessing body may be imagined” (225). Language therefore becomes not only descriptive, but corporeal.

This occurs through several specific linguistic strategies. First, the film repeatedly directs the spectator’s attention toward their own body and position as viewer. A line such as “How are we to be perceived, if we are to be perceived at all?” destabilizes the distinction between AIDS patients, spectators and “we” as in everyone. This effect is intensified by the fact that viewers are themselves staring at a visual field similar to the one experienced by Jarman due to his visual impairment. Second, the film makes a complex use of the pronoun “you”. It often remains unclear whether the narrator is speaking directly to the viewer, to another person, or rhetorically to himself. For example, the narrator says, “My heart turns to you” followed by a brief pause, followed by the names “David…Howard”. In that pause, the “you” feels directed towards the audience rather than part of a prose.

Third, the use of direct speech repeatedly places the spectator within embodied situations. This is done by either questions like “Would you faint if someone stuck a needle in your arm?” or by the repeated sentence “Look up, look down, left, right.” This instruction clearly originates from Jarman’s medical exam, but it is not always followed by a narration in the doctor’s office.

More broadly, the film’s stories consistently involve bodily sensations and actions. Experiences are not simply recounted but communicated through an action or a kind of sensation. Introductions of people are done by looking through a window and thinking about an event is done in the context of reading the paper.

Texts on *Blue* frequently describe its soundtrack as haptic or corporeally engaging (Quaranta 147). This characterization is accurate, yet there is another important overlap between visual impairment and poetic language that deserves attention. The imagery produced by the soundtrack is vivid, which is done through similarity and metaphor. While this is common in literature and poetry, it is also a communicative strategy frequently used by visually impaired people and those around them in everyday life. There is research suggesting that visually impaired people maintain a very good cultural grasp of colours (Dini et al. 522), so descriptions in this case reflect another aspect of everyday life.

3.1.4 Camera and Sound Through Visual Impairment

In *Blue* there is no camera work in the traditional sense. Instead, the film consists of a static, monochromatic image of International Klein Blue (IKB). The shade of blue itself was produced in a laboratory by exposing the film stock to the corresponding wavelength, in a process that parallels the way the human eye physically registers light and colour wavelengths. In a sense, even if the result feels like a static, coloured image, the process

behind involves movement, just in a level that humans cannot perceive. Beyond this physical similarity however, *Blue* exists somewhere between showing and experiencing. This relationship becomes clearer when considering Derek Jarman's own visual condition during the making of the film. Due to complications caused by a cytomegalovirus infection, a common complication among AIDS patients, Jarman was progressively losing his sight and experiencing expanding blind spots and flashes of blue light. There is an important overlap between what Jarman himself was physically seeing, what he presents to the audience, and the way this is ultimately experienced within the space of the film theatre. The monochromatic image, therefore, does not simply symbolize visual impairment, it rather emulates one aspect of the experience associated with it. In this sense, the camera of *Blue* does not record external reality but, instead, mediates an aspect of Jarman's embodied experience.

This emulation is supported by the film's soundscape. The amplified role of sound within the film parallels the heightened importance that hearing and other sensory forms can have in the life of many visually impaired people. Through the aural strategies discussed above, like the iconogenic speech, the use of ambient sounds or the play between cases of "you", the corporeal sense is elicited. At the same time, image and sound invite the viewer to construct mental imagery, subject to their own experiences, memories and perceptions. This also resonates with experiences described by some visually impaired people. This does not mean, that *Blue* functions as a direct simulation of blindness or visual impairment. The film does not reproduce a universal experience of blindness, instead it illustrates how disability can be mediated differently through the formal elements of film itself.

3.1.5 Time and the Monochromatic Image

Time in *Blue* functions primarily through sound. As Ma notes, when sound is subverted, time itself is subverted (221). He expands this idea by describing time not as a neutral or biological flow, but as a constructed experience shaped by social values and expectations. In other words, time within capitalist societies as organized through productivity, efficiency, schedules or architecture. This strongly echoes Alison Kafer's concept of "crip time," which she describes as time emerging through the ableist barriers created within capitalist systems (26). According to Kafer, movement through space, labor and production, enjoyment, and everyday routines are all factors that shape how time is socially understood and experienced. Such a perspective complicates a biological understanding of time by showing that it is relational and subject to different bodily and social conditions.

Within *Blue*, time unfolds in fragmented and fluid ways. Jarman moves between historical eras and locations, personal memories, reflections, and conversations connected to hospital visits and his treatment. Weekly doctor's appointments, medical examinations, and the uncertainty of prognosis reshape how time is experienced. However, *Blue* does not attempt to show this through a plot about a visually impaired man with AIDS. Instead, it grants the viewer intimate access to an internal mental space. The film therefore communicates time less through events and more through memory, imagination, and internal awareness.

Kafer discusses the enforced identities on disabled people that emerge through time concepts. Terms such as "congenital," "transient," or "acquired" do not remain purely medical descriptions but become ways of reducing disabled people to the status of their disability (25). Temporal language like this participates in constructing social identity. In

Blue, the almost total absence of visual stimulation, leaves the viewer confronting time in a much more internalized form. Without narrative progression or decipherable representations, time is experienced as an internalized concept full of self-evaluation, expectation and reflections. By granting the viewer a glimpse into the internal, Jarman allows for identity to unfold in all its complexity; a function of society, disability and personality together.

Time in *Blue*, as expressed through sound, also creates a strong ambiguity of place. The audience moves through Jarman's thoughts, memories, observations, and recollections without stable spatial markers. Even if everything appears to unfold within Jarman's own consciousness, there are no indicators of location and therefore no indicators of time. Certain repetitions occur, such as the hospital or the cafe, similarly, to recurring sounds like the Tibetan bells. Despite this, spatial orientation remains insignificant.

This absence of fixed space and time creates room for the viewer to extend the experience beyond Jarman himself. The spectator may connect the film's temporal sensations to their own body, to another person, or even to an abstract state. This happens in a more visceral and embodied way than conventional representation often allows. This is not an argument against a well-constructed plot or an evocative action. Rather, it is an argument in favor of recognizing the multiple ways disability can be mediated and the different sensory and emotional effects these forms can produce.

3.2 Mixed Abilities Filming Workshop

3.2.1 Context and Description of the Group

The mixed abilities film workshop was designed and conducted by me and a collaborator as part of a broader documentary project. Our main interest was to create a collaborative

setting for our film, coupled by a deep interest in the relationship between varying embodiment and the camera. To construct the workshop, we were inspired by the intersectional aspect of our group which consisted of people with very different types of disabilities as well as non-disabled people (hence the term mixed abilities) and the intersection between dance and filmmaking.

It is clear, that an intermedial perspective will be very useful in this analysis exactly because of the merge between filming, dance and disability. As facilitators, we created tools based on their dance methodology and relied on them being familiar with necessities or restrictions associated with every type of disability in the group. If the case was that the participants did not know each other, the workshop would have looked quite different.

In more detail, the group that participated in the workshop is a mixed-abilities dance collective called “Artogether”, that primarily uses improvisational techniques to construct its pieces. The dancers work through practices like instant composition and structured improvisation or contact improvisation. Instant composition and structured improvisation refer to the real-time creation of choreographic scores during a performance or rehearsal without concrete choreography and steps. In that setting, dancers continuously co-create movement, in relation to the space, prompt, sound and each other. Contact improvisation similarly entails real-time processes but does so through the give and take of weight, touch, balance, and momentum between bodies. Both practices rely heavily on bodily awareness, responsiveness, and visual or auditory imagination.

These tools were integral parts of the workshop because they already encouraged the group to treat the camera as an embodied, collaborative process. In addition, these

dancers were very familiar with the distinction between representing and mediating meaning through their body, as this is a key part of dance training and dance history knowledge. Although the group had extensive experience with the arts in general, that they had never previously used image-capturing tools in their creative practice, collectively or individually. We could, therefore, could introduce the camera through the movement techniques already used during the group's rehearsals. Filming anyway involves rhythm, balance, body awareness, and responsiveness to movement. The operation of a handheld camera, for example, requires continuous bodily adjustment, something to which improvisational techniques are useful. In overall, the workshop treated the camera itself almost as a choreographic and embodied activity.

Since we were familiar with every dancer, as well as their individual movement variations and access needs, the technical equipment was adapted in relatively simple but interesting ways. Existing filming equipment such as Cinesaddles and monopods were modified according to each participant's type of movement and filming goal.
To clarify, a Cinesaddle is a soft beanbag, strapped around an operator to provide stabilization support. It is a piece of equipment commonly used in cinematography, with additional uses like allowing cameras to rest on the operator's body or on uneven surfaces. A monopod, on the other, is a single-legged camera support that provides stability while remaining allowing more mobility than a tripod. It is used in cinematography as well as photography in settings which require momentary stability, e.g. when taking photos with low shutter-speed.

In order to make filming equipment accessible to our disabled dancers required minor adjustments of existing filming equipment. In one instance, a dancer who normally used crutches replaced one of them with a camera mounted on a monopod, transforming an

existing movement aid into a cinematographic extension of the body (Fig. 1.). There is already a link between the use of tools in everyday life as well as filmmaking, a point that will be analysed later in the thesis. To conclude, standard filming tripods equipped with sensitive and fluid heads were also incorporated into the workshop and adjusted according to each participant's grip strength and range of motion. Rather than enforcing the typical use of every filming tool we introduced in the workshop, we encouraged for the camera setups themselves to emerge through the relationship between tools and individual corporeality.

Fig. 1. A participant using a monopod-mounted camera.

3.2.2 Structure of the Workshop

The workshop began with a warm-up exercise sourced from the visual imagination often used in dance practise. The group initially closed their eyes and focused inward on the body itself, progressing from the feet to the top of the head and the eyes before gradually turning their attention outward towards everyone else and the space. This was coupled with changing the wight distribution from one foot or support, to the other while simultaneously activating these areas with small movements. When reaching the eyes, the group was called to opened them and were given time for their gaze to wander freely. The

exercise then expanded into movement through space while observing how it changed every time their visual perspective. Through this transition, vision itself became understood not observation, but as linked to posture, balance, motion, and movement affordances.

The first practical engagement with the cameras occurred in pairs or, when necessary, groups of three. Participants filmed one another while dancing and improvising movement within the space. Importantly, the workshop encouraged the co-usage of cameras, particularly through principles derived from contact improvisation. For participants who required assistance handling the equipment, the camera often became a shared object negotiated collaboratively between two bodies. As a result, the operation of the camera ceased to be an individual technical action and instead became a relational process involving balance, touch, support, and responsiveness. In this context, filming functioned less as a mechanism for extracting images and more as a shared sensory practice.

The remainder of the workshop was structured to progressively lead to a collective handling of the cameras. First, in pairs of two, instead of focusing on capturing a specific or aesthetically correct shot, participants were encouraged simply to look through the camera. The emphasis moved away from representation towards the ways they could mediate their sensory experience through the camera. Even when one of them was not physically operating the camera, they remained engaged by imagining visually what the other operator might be seeing, an integral skill for camera operators.

Each video emerged as a combination of individual movement of the dancer shot, the particular camera setup used by each participant as well as their own disability as

expressed through their corporeality. The interaction between body, movement aid, stabilization system, framing, and rhythm produced unique audiovisual relations tied directly to embodied experience. In this sense, this process relates to Richard Grusin's understanding of mediation, where a medium is not a communicative tool to transfer meaning, but rather an agent capable to actively shape how we experience reality at that time. The camera indeed participated in and reshaped the way each participant approached it or behaved when they knew they were filmed by their couple.

Although this thesis does not focus on the social and psychological effect of art therapy, one instance where the existence of camera influenced a dancer is testament to this view on mediation. It involves a dancer possibly on the autism spectrum, reflecting on their couple who was filming them. During the couple exercise, this dancer had difficulty staying in touch with his pair, who was filming him. Once his pair was framed as looking at him through a tangible object, he was able to "latch" on the camera, as a way to stay in touch and continue dancing for his pair. The camera no longer functioned as an intermediate tool to capture an image but became part of the relationship between the two. Such instances illustrate how the workshop gradually transformed the camera from a representational device into an alternative way of mediating the dancers' experience. Finally, the cameras were left aside as tools for their customary jam (improvisation), which takes place at the end of every rehearsal.

During the jam, the innovative approaches to overcoming filming difficulties observed, were directly related to everyone's type of ability, as well as their familiarity with other bodies. For example, one participant using a wheelchair cooperated with another in the following way. While one was lying on the other, the split the task of directing where the pair would go and what the final frame constituted of. This is reflected, although in a

more rigid and often hierarchical way, to how a camera operator and the grip will cooperate. While the grip could be taking care of a dolly moving properly on the track or holding the operator in difficult terrain or backwards steps, the operator is responsible for the actual framing of what is being shot.

3.2.3 Corporeality Mediated Through the Camera

As Hallas explains, there is an important distinction between optic and haptic visuality (225). Optic visuality functions through distance and relates to the processes of identification commonly discussed in film theory, whereas haptic visuality creates engagement through proximity and bodily sensation. Earlier, the haptic and corporeal aspect of *Blue* was discussed, as emerging from both the soundscape and the openness of the monochromatic. Together they function as an invitation for the viewer to engage in mental imagery themselves and activate other senses beyond sight.

The haptic aspect of the image can be discussed with regards to the workshop process as well. In the workshop, we are similarly dealing with a haptic effect, but one that stems from the transference of individual corporeality onto the image itself. This was one of the central objectives of the workshop: to discover new ways of filming informed by individual bodily differences and needs. This process was, to a large extent, enabled by the flexibility of modern digital cameras. The lightweight nature of the cameras allowed the dancers to experiment with many different types of movement and framing, while shooting digitally simplified the filmmaking process overall. For example, by selecting the appropriate recording formats to keep the file sizes small, we were able to keep the cameras continuously running and to avoid technical interruptions. Effects like this are not restricted to special accommodations like ours, but to filmmaking in general.

As Morgan notes, digital cameras significantly transformed both the filmmaking pipeline

and the aesthetic possibilities available to filmmakers (221). During the 1990s and early 2000s, for example, “impossible shots” became increasingly common because of smaller cameras, compatibility with editing software, and ease in post-production. The tools already exist; the question, then, becomes how to reimagine their use. The workshop highlights this opportunity, following the theoretical work of Siebers, Jones et al. and Kafer. Disability can function as a point of view on technical and aesthetic issues, contributing to existing debates and practises of filmmaking.

Digital and technical tools are becoming progressively bigger parts of everyday life, highlighting the role of the body and everyday performativity within these interactions (He and Bruhn S2). Such developments warrant a new perspective on how humans interact with digital media and how these media can themselves be used differently. Many disabled people are already accustomed to working with tools within everyday contexts, and this became particularly visible during the workshop. Many participants incorporated the cameras naturally, often discovering novel ways of handling them according to their individual corporeality. For example, one dancer who uses crutches both in performance and in everyday life, replaced one crutch with a monopod carrying a lightweight camera.

The images produced during the workshop can be described as a product of the specific interaction between each participant’s corporeality and the camera setup they used. In this sense, the camera as a medium affected the participant creatively. This position strongly echoes Richard Grusin’s argument that media are not simply communication channels transferring concepts derived from reality (125). Instead, interaction with media actively shapes the reality surrounding someone, including the participants of the workshop.

Consequently, the existence of the camera itself, its size, weight, and accompanying equipment affected how each one filmed.

This stance, also, challenges representationalism because it destabilizes the ontological distinction between "real" experience and experience mediated through art (Grusin 128). It also questions the role cameras traditionally assume within the "medium invisibility" context of narrative cinema, bringing us back to the issue recognized earlier by Morgan within film theory and filmmaking practice. In the workshop, the cameras were not primarily used to frame a pre-existing story created by the participants. Neither was the goal to conceal the camera's presence in order to immerse prospective spectators into a fictional plot. Instead, the camera and the body jointly created the image, producing a balance between medium visibility and invisibility similar to what Grusin describes through immediacy and hypermediacy (131).

Indeed, the images produced at the workshop made the presence of the camera known at multiple occasions, through interrupted movement, or unusual framing. This constitutes a situation of hypermediacy, where the medium makes itself known as an integral element of the work. This becomes an especially important point in relation to filmmaking and disability. On one hand, the possibility of making conventional narrative cinema should always remain available. On the other, it is essential to understand what happens when the only creative and practical filmmaking options are designed around non-disabled bodies and norms.

As Jones et al. suggest, creative processes are enriched when they are influenced by disability rather than merely accommodating disabled people. In the context of the workshop, this would mean using stabilization technologies such as gimbals, which have

become standard tools for producing smooth and seamless camera movement. Applying a gimbal to the interrupted, uneven, or jagged movement produced by some disabled participants would be very practical. Nevertheless, doing so would maintain established aesthetics and dominant filming conventions. The aim of the workshop, instead, was for each participant to discover new ways of filming through their own corporeality. Once this principle is established, tools such as gimbals can still be used conventionally, but they can also be reimagined beyond their standard function of producing seamlessness and immersion.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Summary

This thesis set out to answer the following question: how can we analyse and make films that mediate disability beyond representation and plot? In other words, films which employ multiple formal elements to mediate disability. To address this, it employed an intermedial perspective in both theoretical and practical settings. These correspond to the two case studies explored throughout the thesis; the feature film *Blue* and the mixed abilities filming workshop respectively. By focusing on the relationships between media forms within film, the analysis shifted the discussion around disability in film away from purely representational analysis and toward other ways through which film can mediate experience.

The analyses revolved largely around how the traditional role of film elements like sound, image, the camera or time were subverted. In *Blue* the visual element was reduced almost entirely to a monochromatic field of International Klein Blue. Through the interplay between this static image and the film's layered soundscape, the blue field became more than a symbolic statement or a simulation of visual impairment. This was achieved partly

through the connotational affordance of colour, rather than through direct symbolism. It was also achieved through the organisation of the soundscape itself. The soundscape continuously engaged the audience, encouraging spectators to construct images internally through their own memories, sensations, and imagination. In effect, aspects of visual impairment became part of an experience unfolding within the viewer. At the same time, the mostly first-person narration provided an intimate view to the reality of a disabled person through the form of personal testimony.

Rather than reproducing generalized and reductive representations of "the disabled person," the film invited audiences to imagine how the world is for another. In this way, Jarman was able to attack the spectacle of AIDS activism, which was itself heavily tied to representationalism within visual culture. This effect can be expanded to the context of his impairment by, not only refusing conventional representation but by, also, engaging the imagination of the viewer through multiple media within *Blue*.

At the same time, the workshop addressed the practical gaps concerning how films by disabled filmmakers could be made. The group attending the workshop consisted of mixed abilities participants who were also dancers, creating a particularly interesting interplay between differing corporealities, in a context where these differences could be harnessed. The consistency of the group and its non-rehabilitative nature were especially important to the aim of this thesis. The workshop brought together participants with mental, sensory, and physical disabilities alongside participants without disabilities within a professional, artistic setting. On its own, this already challenges many aesthetic and practical norms surrounding filmmaking.

Keeping this in mind, the workshop focused on shifting the role of the camera away from framing representations and toward mediating each participant's corporeality and intention. In this way, the camera co-created images that were distinct and directly derived from each individual participant. This parallels how Jarman allowed for a nuanced reading of a person rather than a reduced representation of "the disabled" within *Blue.*

Both approaches, which rely heavily on relationships between media, challenge established norms. They question both aesthetic and practical conventions within film in ways that are beneficial, not only for how disability exists within film, but also for revisiting many overlooked narrative affordances of the film itself. Such observations therefore have implications for film analysis in general, in a way that reminds us of the heterotopia of disability that Siebers discussed. First, they contribute to discussions surrounding how disability can be communicated through film beyond representations. Second, they draw attention to the blind spots of film culture and to the limitations of dominant representational analyses. Third, they expand the areas that intermedial theory can address, similarly to the way intermedial ecocriticism has developed into a distinct discipline.

Finally, the thesis has practical implications, as illustrated through the techniques developed in the workshop. These implications extend not only to filming practices on set, but also to broader questions around funding, distribution, and labour within the film industry. Film sets are notoriously straining and hierarchical environments, and there is growing concern on the many inequalities they sustain. These include the segregation between "above" and "below the line" crew members, the lack of women in technical positions like camera and sound, disparities between entry-level and senior crew,

divisions between creatives and technicians, and the physical and mental strain caused by work conditions.

Broadly speaking, most countries lack fundamental policies for the employment of disabled people in any domain. Within such environments, accommodating disabled creatives feels redundant. Doing so, would mean either for disabled people to assimilate into systems that are already hostile to most workers irrespective of ability, or resulting in the tokenism that often characterizes institutional diversity schemes (McRuer ch.1). Instead, incorporating technologies and practices developed by disabled people and mixed groups could benefit everyone working on a film, while instigating a much-needed aesthetic subversion.

Ultimately, this thesis has illustrated that the heteromedial nature of film is particularly well suited to mediating the variability and complexity of disability. This relationship works vice versa, because creating films with or as a disabled person "awakens" many of the medial possibilities that film has.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations, as well as opportunities for further research, relevant to this thesis. First, although the topic is inherently multidisciplinary, some aspects require further exploration. The role of technical and technological devices related to disability on the one hand, and filmmaking on the other, needs more focused research. Additionally, the relationship between representational film analysis and the mediation of disability is not necessarily causal. This thesis approached them as strongly interconnected, however, the broader factors influencing both representational practices and the mediation of disability, such as financial structures, aesthetic conventions, and social conditions, require investigation.

Another important limitation relates to the workshop. The group consisted of disabled people with a high degree of body awareness and familiarity with creative practices, particularly dance and improvisation. It is important to stress that a workshop involving a mixed group without this background and skillset would likely need to work differently, in order to ease participants into the process of filming. In effect, the specific outcomes of this workshop cannot be used, exactly as they are, for every filming setting.

Finally, although disability was discussed throughout this thesis as a broad concept, more nuanced research is needed regarding different types of disabilities and their distinct implications. Different disabilities involve very different experiences, histories, and treatment from society. Perhaps the most prominent example concerns mental disabilities. The treatment of mentally disabled people has a very heavy history and continues to raise ethical, aesthetic and political questions. The presence of mentally disabled crew, even if warranted, like in the case of Schlingensief's *Freakstars 3000*, generated debate on whether mentally disabled people understand the implications of being in front of the camera. These debates include valid concerns but most often harbour moralistic and quasi-scientific assumptions.

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