Mental space on screen: through the examples of *Last Year in Marienbad*, *Stalker* and *Lost Highway*.

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Abstract

This paper explores how the different elements of a film work together to depict the mental space of the characters, that is, give the impression that the events shown on screen reflect their subjective experience, and the space shown on screen is a projection of their mental state. Through the examples of Alain Resnais' Last year in Marienbad (1960), Andrei Tarkovsky's Stalker (1979) and David Lynch's Lost Highway (1996), I show how similar techniques recur in films made in completely different cultural contexts, but that have in common to picture the subjective world of the characters. These techniques are: narrating events as the characters think about them, remember them or imagine them rather than how they actually happen; a labyrinthine set design where the inside and the outside contaminate each other; lighting and colours that reflect the mental state of the characters; rhythm that traps the viewer inside the characters' subjectivity and, finally, sound that creates a mood of its own rather than illustrating or simply enhancing the images, with sparse dialogues becoming an integral part of the sound design.

Keywords: space, subjectivity, cinema, cinematography, sound
Introduction

In Cinema 2, Deleuze (1985) introduces the concept of 'time-image', a type of cinema that depicts 'purely audio and optical situations', where objective and subjective are no longer distinct, real and imaginary become indiscernible, true and false can no longer be decided upon. Characters, no longer able to decide on a course of action, wander aimlessly in 'empty and disconnected spaces'. Such spaces are, as Vidler says of the uncanny, 'a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity' (1992, p.10). I call 'mental space' such a space that is a projection of the character's mental state. Through the examples of Alain Resnais' Last year in Marienbad (1960), Andrei Tarkovsky's Stalker (1979) and David Lynch's Lost Highway (1996), I will explore how the different elements of a film, that is, narrative, set design, colour and light, the rhythm created by camera movements and editing, and sound design, can be used together to depict the characters' 'mental space' on screen.

Narrative

In Lost Highway (1996), Fred Madison (played by Bill Pullman) is condemned for the murder of his wife Renee (played by Patricia Arquette) which he does not remember. One night he inexplicably vanishes from his cell, replaced by a younger man, Pete Drayton (played by Balthazar Getty). Released, Pete soon meets Alice (also played by Patricia Arquette).

The film may follow Fred's hallucination as he experiences a 'psychogenic fugue' (Lynch quoted in Hartmann, 2007), a condition where someone creates a completely new identity in their mind to escape a trauma (in Fred's case, his imminent execution) and forget their past identity. The time structure follows Fred's subjective viewpoint rather than the linear order of the actual events: the film starts with Fred inside his house hearing 'Dick Laurent is dead' on the intercom, and ends with Fred outside his house saying 'Dick Laurent is dead' in his own intercom. Gifford (quoted in Hartmann, 2007) explains that 'the story folds back underneath itself and continues', forming a 'Moebius strip'.

![Fig. 1 Moebius strip.](image-url)
In *Stalker* (1979), the title character guides two clients, Writer and Professor, through a no man's land called “the Zone” where a room is supposed the make the visitor's innermost wish come true.

Space changing in reaction to the characters' mental state is literally conceptualised in the story. Stalker explains the Zone to his clients: 'Our moods, our thoughts, our emotions, our feelings can bring about change here. [...] At any moment it is exactly as we devise it, in our consciousness. [...] Everything that happens here depends on us, not on the Zone' (Strugatsky, A. & Strugatsky, B., 1978, p.395). Several times, Writer and Professor disobey Stalker's directives but are never harmed. This may be because they do not share Stalker's belief in the Zone, therefore the Zone interacts differently with them, to mirror their own philosophical disposition (Gerstenkorn & Strudel, 1986, p.86).

In *Last year in Marienbad* (1960), a man, X (played by Giorgio Albertazzi) tries to persuade a woman, A (played by Delphine Seyrig) that they met the year before and planned to meet again this year to leave together, whereas A denies it.

Resnais explains that the film attempts to 'approach the complexity of thought and its mechanism'. The visuals show events that 'correspond to the present thoughts in the mind of the character'. Therefore, the images have various 'degrees of reality': some images are 'altogether invented, or interior'. The 'degree of reality' of a particular image is more or less easy to determinate: some images are 'ambiguous' while others are clearly false, or even images of 'lying whose falsity is [...] evident'. It is also often ambiguous 'whether the scenes are occurring in the man's mind or the woman's. There is a perpetual oscillation between the two' (Resnais, 1967, pp.159-160, Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967, p.166). Robbe-Grillet adds that the opacity of the film mirrors the complexity of the 'inconsistencies, doubts and phantasms' the characters are feeling in the midst of their 'passionate love affair' (Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967, p.167).

These 'doubts' and 'inconsistencies' influence the way X describes the décor of the hotel in the voice-over monologues written by Robbe-Grillet, emphasizing feelings of confusion and falsity: 'endless corridors succeed silent – deserted corridors [...] transverse corridors that open in turn on empty salons' (1962, p.17), 'false door, false columns, painted perspective' (1962, p.29), 'trompe l'oeil architecture' (1962, p.146).

**Set Design**

Leutrat (2000, p.19) writes 'that architecture can be the image of a psychic state is nothing new in cinema'. According to Vidler (2000, p.240), Nietzsche was the first to describe the modern experience as 'labyrinthine', an idea later reused by Benjamin. Sartre, explaining how the fantastic shows contemporary men a reflection of their own image (1947, p.127), describes a 'labyrinth of corridors, doors and staircases that lead nowhere', of 'signposts that indicate nothing, those innumerable signs that line the roads and signify nothing' (1947, p.130). The image of the labyrinth strikingly describes the set design of the three films.
Lynch (interviewed by Rodley, 2005, p.225) explains that the 'uncertain geography' of Fred and Rene's house reflects the edgy uncertainty of their relationship. Astic (2004) explains how this illusion of 'uncertain geography' is achieved. The Madison house is always framed so as to never be shown in its entirety. The framing and the flattening of the depth of field make the corridor leading to the living room alternatively visible and invisible. The night before Renee's murder, Fred looks at himself in a mirror that is not the only mirror we have seen so far (in the bedroom). The screenplay locates this mirror is in the living room: it can only be in this part of the living room that is always occulted by the framing (Astic, 2004, p.102). The cinemascope format 'flattens the verticals', 'enlarge black surfaces' and 'widens the lateral convergence lines': it distorts the perspective in a way that sends the characters into a purely 'mental space' (Astic, 2004, p.128). Interestingly, these effects of 'uncertain geography' centre on the corridor between the living room and the bedroom, and on the living room mirror, the two central elements in the scene before Renee's murder where Fred seems to utterly disappear from the house (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.32), the scene where Fred's illusion breaks down.
The décor also transforms to suggest a character is having a hallucination: after Andy's murder, Pete sees the corridor in Andy's house become 'hazy', 'different' and 'longer', with numbered doors like in a hotel. He passes door 25 and enters room 26 where he has a hallucination of Alice, before the hallway turns back to normal (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.125). Later, the hallway of the 'Lost Highway Hotel' is 'strangely similar' to Pete's vision. Fred sleeps in room 25, and kidnaps Laurent from room 26 where he had spent the night with Renee (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.134).
In *Stalker*, the Zone, including the room itself, looks like an unremarkable no man's land, with derelict buildings and recurrent images of random debris lying in shallow water.
The Zone has a labyrinthine geography. 'Within the various settings, the spatial cues are often contradictory and misleading' and the 'physical positioning of the characters, in relationship to each other, their surroundings, and even within the film frame, changes, apparently arbitrarily, from one shot to the next' (Vida & Petrie, 1994, p.152). When Professor walks back to retrieve his bag while Stalker and Writer continue forward, they inexplicably meet again at a place where they were before (Strugatsky, A. & Strugatsky, B., 1978, p.400). Stalker's dialogue even suggest a non euclidean geography: 'a straight road is not the shortest' (Strugatsky, A. & Strugatsky, B., 1978, p.393).

Similarities between the 'telephone room' and Stalker's flat have been noted, among them the floorboards, the defective lighting and the presence of sleeping pills (Vida & Petrie, 1994, p.151). This antechamber to the room marks the end of the journey since the characters choose not to go inside the room. These similarities may suggest the possibility that everything was only Stalker's inner journey.
For Bory (quoted in Leutrat, 2000, p.32), the contrast between the 'baroque sensuality of the interior architecture' of the Marienbad hotel and the 'exterior Cartesianism of the formal gardens' reflects the opposition between the 'Cartesianism of conscious life' and the 'baroque nature of our memory and our affective life'. This echoes Robbe-Grillet's comment that the complexity of the film mirrors the complexity of emotions in a 'passionate love affair' (Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967, p.167). Deleuze (1985, p.102) compares the whole façade of the Marienbad hotel to the crystal of his 'crystal-image', whose facets reflect the real and the imaginary, making them indiscernible.

![Fig. 10 Marienbad: A and X in the formal gardens of the hotel.](image)

In the hotel garden, the luminosity is such that the trees and statues have no shadows, yet the characters' shadows are painted on the ground. This effect may give the impression that the characters are 'turned into stones' (Leutrat, 2000, p.50), becoming part of the décor. Pictures of the garden decorate the walls inside the hotel, reinforcing this impression that the inside and the outside contaminate each other (Leutrat, 2000, p.36).
Robbe-Grillet (Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967, p.166) explains that the décor reflects the level of reality of the image we see: 'When the room has an extraordinary complicated baroque décor […] we are probably watching a rather unreliable image'. In the screenplay, Robbe-Grillet (1962) repeatedly gives scenic indications of an ornamented décor, suggesting a 'lying image'.

Set Designer Jacques Saulnier (quoted in Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006, p.90) explains how A's bedroom gradually transforms to mirror her acceptance of the events X tells her. First, the room is incomplete, bare of any detail because she rejects the very notion that their encounter in her bedroom happened at all. Then, as she accepts it, the bedroom gets gradually more precise until it reaches the appearance it had in reality. But afterwards, A, in anguish, starts feverishly elaborating in her mind an hypothetical future, and the design of the bedroom becomes totally delirious. A's changing bedroom is described in detail by Robbe-Grillet (1962) including indications about the mirror moving from the chimney to the chest, the painting appearing on the chimney, and the single bed turning into a double bed, which we see in the film. The truth image is indicated when 'it is apparent that everything is now in its right place' (1962, p.122) before A's anxiety starts producing 'a proliferation of ornaments' (1962, p.135), which later disappear as she resigns herself to her fate (1962, p.139).
Fig. 12 *Marienbad*: A's bare bedroom.

Fig. 13 *Marienbad*: The décor of A's bedroom slowly changes.
Fig. 14 *Marienbad*: A recoils in fear. The bed has darkened.

Fig. 15 *Marienbad*: A's anguish causes a fur rug to appear in her room.

**Colour and light**

In both *Lost Highway* and *Stalker*, subdued or bright colours are used in different sections of the film.
McGowan (2007, pp.157-158) points out the difference in colours and lighting between the two parts of *Lost Highway*. Fred's house is photographed with 'subdued lighting', 'minimal depth of field' and 'drab colours (black, gray, taupe, dark orange)', whereas Pete's house has 'bright lighting', 'colorful furniture and décor', and 'depth of field', which McGowan links to the 'traditional conventions of Hollywood realism'. The visual style in Fred's part is more reminiscent of film noir conventions. Lynch and his cinematographer, Peter Deming, used a chocolate brown filter, which causes a dominant colour of 'red yellow brownish' to permeate every images (Krohn, 1997).

![Fig. 16 Lost Highway: Noir atmosphere in the Madison house.](image1)

![Fig. 17 Lost Highway: Pete's “American Dream” world.](image2)

Zizek (2000) interprets the stylistic difference between the world of Fred and Pete as the separation between, on one side, the drabness of 'pure, aseptic reality' and, on the other side, 'fantasy'. For Zizek, those two aspects constantly merge in the way we usually perceive our environment: fantasy constantly 'sustains our “sense of reality”', protecting us, somehow, from its drabness and making the world liveable. We are simply not used to seeing 'reality deprived of fantasy', and seeing it through Fred's eyes causes a shock for the viewer. Zizek calls this forced separation of the reality and fantasy elements of our usual perception the 'extraneation' effect.
Deming and Lynch repeatedly chose to use underexposure and no backlight, so as to have characters 'coming in and out of black, or standing there and becoming part of the background'. This gives the audience 'the feeling that anything could come out of the background' and that 'the film is working under the surface while you’re watching it' (Deming quoted in Hughes, 2001, p.208 and Biodrowski, 1997). The most famous of these sequences is when Fred, walking down a dark corridor, seems to materialise from the shadows (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.32). This visual effect brings to mind Minkowski's concept of "black" or "dark" space, that space which, despite all loss of vision – in the dark or blindfolded – a subject might still palpably feel: the space of bodily and sensorial if not intellectual existence' (quoted in Vidler, 2000, p.148).

![Lost Highway: Fred in the dark corridor.](image)

Tarkovsky (2008, pp.138-139) considers that 'though the world is coloured, the black and white image comes closer to the psychological, naturalistic truth of art' and suggests that 'perhaps the effect of colour should be neutralised by alternating colour and monochrome sequences, so that the impression made by the complete spectrum is spaced out, toned down.' In *Stalker*, he experiments with this effect.

The world outside of the Zone is shot in sepia whereas the inside of the Zone is shot in colour. Interestingly, sepia results from the degradation of a colour film (Gerstenkorn & Strudel, 1986, p.95). Critics (Gerstenkorn & Strudel, 1986, Vida & Petrie, 1994) agree that sepia symbolizes the sordid reality of everyday life, while the Zone offers the hope of an escape from it. This is similar to the interpretation of the stylistic difference in *Lost Highway* as sordid reality opposed to fantasy. The divergence is that Gerstenkorn & Strudel (1986) give this pessimistic assessment of everyday life a religious connotation, whereas Vida & Petrie favour a philosophical interpretation, pointing out that Tarkovsky denied believing in God (1994, p.146).

Vida & Petrie highlight further colour symbolism: the colour green is omnipresent when the trio enters the Zone, suggesting their hope that 'here things are really going to be different'. When they reach the Room, 'subtle shades of gold and red rising and falling in intensity' suggest feelings of 'magic' and 'wonder' (1994, p.153). The final colour sequence where Stalker walks with his family in the normal world suggests 'some seepage of the powers of the Zone into the real world' (1994, p.190).
Fig. 19 *Stalker*: drab reality (Stalker's flat).

Fig. 20 *Stalker*: drab reality (the trio preparing to break into the Zone).
Fig. 21 Stalker: The Zone in colour.

Marienbad is a black and white film, with most images on the lighter side, very legible, with bright lighting that does not leave ambiguously obscured corners. According to Floc'h (quoted in Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006, p.40), Resnais alternates between visually light and visually dark films, the light films taking place in the upper-class and the dark ones in the lower middle-class. Thus the choice of lighting reflects both the rich décor and the class background of the characters which influence the subjective way they perceive the world around them.

Fig. 22 Stalker: The normal world is no longer sepia.
Discontinuities and rhythm

Deleuze says that in 'time-image' cinema, the consecutive shots no longer follow each other logically, as opposed to 'movement-image' cinema where consecutive shots used to form a logical series. Therefore, the cut that separates two consecutive shots becomes an 'irrational cut'. Each shot is framed differently compared to the previous shot, without there being a logical reason for it (1985, p.278). In 'movement-image' cinema, differences in framing between consecutive shots used to follow the logic of 'association', 'contiguity', 'resemblance', 'contrast' or 'opposition' (1985, p.361). Deleuze describes here discontinuity editing, a recurring feature in *Lost Highway*, *Marienbad* and *Stalker*.

In *Lost Highway*, discontinuity editing gives clues that the character may be hallucinating. There are several examples of this. When Fred has a nightmare of his murdering Renée, the bedsheets are black. In the videos, they are white (Astic, 2004, p.79). The apparently premonitory nightmare may really be a repressed memory, and so may be the videos. A triptych of paintings hangs in the Madison living room. After Pete receives a phone call from Mr Eddy and the Mystery Man, his worried parents have disappeared when he raises his gaze from the phone: instead, he sees three landscape paintings, *absurdly* highlighted by the focus of the camera (Astic, 2004, p.80).

Fig. 23 *Lost Highway*: Paintings in the Madison living room.
Characters inexplicably disappearing from the frame are used three times to hint that Fred or Pete may be hallucinating. First on the night after Pete sees Alice for the first time (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.86), then in the same scene as Pete sees the paintings (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.118), Pete and his parents look at each other from the two ends of the corridor, and are suddenly unable to see each other. On the night before Renee's murder (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.32), Fred stares at himself in a mirror in the living room. A cut shows Renee in the bedroom calling out for him, then a cut back to the dark living room which is now empty. Then a cut shows Renee's point of view looking down the hallway, empty as well. Fred is thus neither in the living room, nor the hallway, yet he suddenly materialises out of the shadows in the hallway.

In Marienbad, discontinuities are also used to give clues to the audience that the level of reality they are looking at just changed: 'all the changes of costume' that sometimes inexplicably happen between two otherwise identical shots 'correspond to different “layers” of time' (Resnais, 1967, p.162).

In the screenplay, Robbe-Grillet (1962) repeatedly gives elaborate indications regarding non-continuity: he specifies consecutive shots where, for example, either the characters keep the same clothes, posture and position in the frame but the décor has changed, or the décor is the same but characters have inexplicably moved. He also indicates to reuse elements of décor or secondary characters previously seen in different circumstances. There are also indications of discrepancies between verbal descriptions of settings or events told by X in the voice over and the image actually shown on screen. This happens when the characters disagree on an event, and one of them (usually X) tries to convince the other (usually A) of their version.

If the images picture the present thoughts of the characters at the same moment that they cross their mind (Resnais, 1967) and these thoughts become more confused when the characters experience intense emotions in their 'love affair' (Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967), then it would make sense that, the more the characters are in emotional upheaval, the more startling and hectic the visual discontinuities become.

An example of this is the storyline regarding the possibility that X may, or may not, have raped A, which is so powerful that is causes, as Brown (2009) puts it, recurring 'images of violence' to increasingly perturb the narrative (the crumbling balustrade, Ms shooting A). The rape storyline consists of several episodes taking place in A's bedroom, interrupting scenes in other settings. The first of these episodes is 'a quick series of startling, soundless flash shots showing A in a white gown standing in a white bedroom' (Brown, 2009) that interrupts a scene of A and X standing at the hotel bar after X tells A “One night, I went up to your room”. Then, A drops a cocktail glass that breaks and her terrified reaction is out of proportion to this mundane event (Brown, 2009). Flashes of the bedroom recur several times, with the design of the bedroom changing, as explained previously, and A's clothes changing too.

The storyline culminates in the possible rape scene where X approaches A as she recoils in fear on her bed. We then see a long over-exposed backward tracking shot out of the room through the hotel's corridors, with a repetition of the last part of the tracking shot. The sequence ends in an 'overexposed white on white shot of A in her
room, followed by nine varied repetitions of the end of the track-in shot in ten seconds' (Brown, 2009). In each version of the quick ending, A is alternatively sitting on either side of her bed. The overexposure may suggest A's illumination when she remembers and is confronted to her memory, and the nine alternative end shots may picture her confused attempts at deciding which version to believe amongst several possibilities with various degrees of truthfulness, repression and wishful thinking. The long tracking shot concluding with a repetition of the last part, and the quick succession of nine different endings were invented by Resnais, they were not described in Robbe-Grillet's script (Resnais & Robbe-Grillet, 1967, p.172). Indeed, the version of the scene in the screenplay is more straightforward and graphic (Robbe-Grillet, 1962, p.139).

Discontinuity editing is also used in *Stalker*, especially extensively in the rest sequence in the swamp, the one Tarkovsky refers to as the dream sequence. The 'physical positioning of the characters, in relationship to each other, their surroundings, and even within the film frame, changes, apparently arbitrarily, from one shot to the next' (Vida & Petrie, 1994, p.152).

The particularity of *Stalker*, however, is the extensive use of unusually long shots, which allow for camera movements so slow they are almost imperceptible. The film has 'an average shot length of almost one minute' with '142 shots in 161 minutes' including 'many 4 minutes or longer', which gives the film a 'slow, inexorable pacing'. Often the camera is 'virtually motionless or tracking forward so imperceptibly that it is only toward the end of the shot that we realize how much our spatial perspective has changed' (Vida & Petrie, 1994, pp.152-153).

For Vida & Petrie, 'the extensive use of the long take' 'traps us within the protagonists' subjectivity', forcing the viewer to 'live inside' the world of the film and 'accept its laws'. Because the long, slow, smooth shots gently lulls the viewer, inviting them into the world of the film, the viewer no longer has the instinct to logically rebel against the inexplicable discontinuities between shots. The illusion of 'seeming inevitability' created by the slow, smooth rhythm 'counteracts the spatial and temporal discontinuities of the individual segments' (1994, p.153).

Therefore, in *Stalker*, the viewer is expected to unconditionally accept the discontinuities as a natural part of the film's reality, whereas in *Lost Highway* and *Marienbad*, they were used as clues to help the viewer navigate the different levels of reality.
Fig. 25 *Stalker*: Discontinuities in the dream scene.

Fig. 26 *Stalker*: Discontinuities in the dream scene.
Deleuze (1985, p.63) considers that in 'time-image' cinema, sound ceases to be 'a component of the visual image' becoming instead 'an image in its own right'. The 'interstice' between the two 'frames' (audio and visual) provides a feeling of ambiguity and unknown. This conception is shared strongly by Lynch and Tarkovsky. Lynch (2002, p.128) considers that 'sound is half of what makes a film work. You have the image on one side, the sound on another, and if you know how to combine them properly, then the whole is stronger than the sum of the parts.' For him, sound is 'a concrete and powerful entity which physically inhabits the film.' Tarkovsky (2008, p.159) considers that sound in film should not be 'a flat illustration of what [is] happening on the screen'.

The most striking feature of the Lost Highway sound design is the constant background drone, a 'sound that creeps into [the] silence' to give a 'mood' of 'uneasiness' (Lynch, interviewed by Rodley, 2005, pp.226-227). Chion (2009, p.205) calls it the 'fundamental noise' and Herzogenrath (1999), quoting Lacan, compares it to the 'continuous murmur' perceived by psychotics during their hallucinations. The screenplay (Lynch & Gifford, 1997) specifies the scenes in which the presence of this 'droning sound' is most crucial. The drone is present on the soundtracks of the video tapes that Fred receives, and which will eventually remind him of his crime. Because the Mystery Man produces a video camera at the end, we can assume he sends the tapes, and several clues point to the Mystery Man being a product of Fred's psyche.
The night after Pete sees Alice for the first time, he hears 'a succession of highly amplified sounds' underlined by 'a kind of unearthly, steady drone' (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, p.85). When his girlfriend Sheila accuses him of being 'someone else', 'the droning sound returns' and Pete hears 'every word and every sound' as 'loud and distorted' (Lynch & Gifford, 1997, pp.112-114). Thus the droning sound is stronger whenever the hallucination of the character breaks apart. The other way sound is used to hint at psychotic hallucinations is when Fred meets the Mystery Man at Andy's party: 'the background noise of the party dims to become almost inaudible, as if, in the midst of this crowded party, the Mystery Man and Fred are having a private – intrapsychic – conversation' (McGowan, 2007, p.162).

While he mostly used music in his previous films, Tarkovsky has a different approach in *Stalker* where he uses ambient sound extensively. Sounds such as fogs horns, train whistles are omnipresent in the film, without them corresponding to any visible source in the image. Tarkovsky considers (2008, p.159) that in a film 'that is realised with complete theoretical consistency, there will be no place for music' which would be 'replaced by sounds in which cinema constantly discovers new levels of meaning'. Music is still present in *Stalker*, but heavily distorted and noisy, virtually indiscernible from the background noise. Sounds themselves are not naturalistic, either distorted or synthesized from scratch. Tarkovsky (2008, p.162) considers that 'accurately recorded sound adds nothing to the image system of cinema, for it still has no aesthetic content' but if the image is accompanied by 'extraneous sounds that don't exist literally' or 'real sounds [that] are distorted so that they no longer correspond with the image', 'then the film acquires a resonance'. This creates sound 'working in counterpoint with the images rather than simply reflecting or intensifying them' (Vida & Petrie, 1994, p.201).

If Robbe-Grillet (quoted in Leutrat, 2000, p.25) had had his way, the sound in *Marienbad* would have been similar to the one in *Lost Highway* and *Stalker*. He wanted 'music to set one's teeth on edge', 'a composition based on the essentially real noises one hears in a hotel', processed so as to sound 'more or less strident or distant', including 'lift doors', 'those metal doors on hinged rods that make a very beautiful sound if properly recorded', 'the ringing of different bells', 'footsteps, isolated notes, shouts'. His screenplay (Robbe-Grillet, 1962) contains numerous such indications.

Instead, from conversations with Resnais, the composer Francis Seyrig (quoted in Leutrat, 2000, p.27) gradually 'realised that he wanted Wagnerian touches for the love-story side of the film, but also a 1925 feel, plus modern bits, all mixed together'. This music was designed to 'blend with the décor' (Leutrat, 2000, p.27). Francis Seyrig (quoted in Liandrat-Guigues & Leutrat, 2006, p.91) explains that the music contains several 'themes' corresponding to various settings such as 'garden' or 'hall' and changes as the characters move in the hotel. The music thus 'mimicks the editing'.

However, the music does not simply illustrate the set design: it follows it only to better detach itself from it, creating for the viewer an uneasy feeling of spatial confusion. Chion (2009, p.37) defines 'temporal vectorization' as the way a sound gives spatial cues from how it varies. When a sound 'does not vary over time' or 'varies in a chaotic and unpredictable way', it gives no coherent spatial cues which creates 'a feeling of fixity, stagnation, or destructuration'. Because the organ music
that accompanies the long corridor tracking shots 'has no discernible direction', it creates the feeling that the tracking shots are neither 'going in any particular direction' nor 'leading to a predetermined destination'. The descriptive voice-over that accompanies other tracking shots, and that Brown (2009) calls 'a verbal tracking shot', uses the same trick: the voice shifts closer and further from the camera, lacking a distinct origin (Leutrat, 2000, p.37). Thus the sound enhances the labyrinthine feeling of the film.

Lastly, the three films share a sparsity of dialogue, and some of it is mundane or repetitive. In Stalker, the characters spend a lot of time walking without speaking. In Marienbad, a 94 minute film, there is about 'forty minutes of speech', 'with very beautiful and very simple words, which are endlessly repeated' and 'could almost be sung', like an 'an opera libretto'. (Resnais, quoted in Leutrat, 2000, p.27) This musical comparison hints that the dialogue merges with the general sound design and is no more meaningful than the music. Present during the Lost Highway shooting, Rodley (1997) reports that David Lynch had a 'very precise delivery in mind' for the 'sparse and enigmatic dialogue', yet did not 'give line readings' but rather 'indications of mental states' to help his actors. The way Fred and Renee speak enhance the claustrophobic atmosphere of the first half of the film: they speak with 'lengthy and awkward pauses' (McGowan, 2007, p.168) and there is 'no resonance to their voices' which gives them a dry, lifeless quality (Herzogenrath, 1999).

**Conclusion**

In this paper, I have explored how the different elements of a film work together to depict the mental space of the characters, that is, give the impression that the events shown on screen reflect their subjective experience, and the space shown on screen is a 'projection' of their 'mental state' (Vidler, 1992, p.10). The main ways to achieve this are: narrating events as the characters think about them, remember them or imagine them rather than how they actually happen; a labyrinthine set design where the inside and the outside contaminate each other (Leutrat, 2000, p.33); lighting and colours that reflect the mental state of the characters; rhythm that traps the viewer inside the characters' subjectivity and, finally, sound that creates a mood of its own rather than illustrating or simply enhancing the images, with sparse dialogues becoming an integral part of the sound design. When all these elements are combined, we get what Deleuze (1985, p.35) calls a 'conscience-camera', that is a camera that 'subordinates the description of a space to the functions of thought' and 'enters' inside 'mental relationships'.

Further research on this topic could explore how the concept of mental space is manifested in other films and works of video art, whether the same techniques are used or new ones introduced. For example, Stanley Kubrick's The Shining (1980), Ingmar Bergman's The Silence (1963), and Markus Schinwald's Dictio Pii (2001), all taking place in a hotel, and Roman Polanski's Repulsion (1965) and Eija-Liisa Ahtil's Talo (The House) (2002), both taking place in a house.
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World Wide Web


Film

Last year in Marienbad (L'Année dernière à Marienbad) (1960) Directed by Alain Resnais. France: Cocinor. [Video: DVD]


Repulsion (1965) Directed by Roman Polanski. UK: Compton films. [Video: DVD]

Stalker (1979) Directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. USSR: Mosfilm Studio. [Video: DVD]


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Resnais, A. *Last Year in Marienbad, still from the film*. [online image]. Available at: <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_EWY1PJsPzBA/TIr8yVgpoCI/AAAAAAAAACx8/2X_ar8SIJv0/s1600/lanneedernieremarienbad1.jpg> [Accessed 1 December 2010]

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Fig. 3 *Marienbad*: A labyrinth of endless corridors.

Resnais, A. *Last Year in Marienbad, still from the film*. [online image]. Available at: <http://27.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_l7d6pzVoXE1qzzf25o1_500.png> [Accessed 1 December 2010]

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Resnais, A. *Last Year in Marienbad, still from the film*. [online image]. Available at: <http://laregledujeu.org/files/2010/05/last_year_at_marienbad.jpg> [Accessed 1 December 2010]

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Resnais, A. *Last Year in Marienbad, still from the film*. [online image]. Available at: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_CEFZ5TdRIao/TKxXP696zNI/AAAAAAAADtI/d4wME7AXDJ8/s1600/marienbad00005.jpg> [Accessed 1 December 2010]

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