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Stylistic and Temporal Modulations in Richard Linklater's *Before* Trilogy

経済学部 4 年 学籍番号 : 21414568

氏名 : 立川航

(指導教員 : マイケル・エインジ先生)

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1. Introduction

In Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy—*Before Sunrise* (1995), *Before Sunset* (2004), and *Before Midnight* (2013)—the concept of time is a central subject, foregrounded explicitly in dialogues and implicitly in formal structures. Ricoeur, drawing on A. A. Mendilow, described such stories as “tales about time” and differentiated them from what Mendilow called “tales of time”:

All fictional narratives are “tales of time” inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time. However only a few are “tales about time” inasmuch as in them it is the very experience of time that is at stake in these structural transformations.¹

Of course, time has almost always played a central role in Linklater's films. His first feature, *It's Impossible to Learn to Plow by Reading Books* (1988), for instance, approaches the so-called “Slow Cinema” in the way the duration of scenes gets drawn out till the drama almost disappears, while in some of his other features such as *Slacker* (1990), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Suburbia* (1996), and *Everybody Wants Some!!* (2016) the narratives are bounded by limited time frame (e.g. one day, one week). In *Waking Life* (2001), on the other hand, with its oneiric visualization—and then gradually dissolution—of space, the concept of time becomes illusory and almost breaks down; similarly, *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), as Johnson points out, simulates Jamesonian postmodern temporality in which all that exists is “a perpetual present.”² And while *Tape* (2001) takes place in the real time of 80 minutes that passes one night in a tiny motel room,

¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 2*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 101.

² David T. Johnson, *Richard Linklater* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 101.

Boyhood (2014) unfolds over twelve years, capturing growth of its actors over the same time span.

The *Before* trilogy, however, has the unique advantage of so far being the only *series* in Linklater's filmography, with the recurring appearance of Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy not only providing the narrative consistency but the creative consistency, the two working as co-writers with Linklater behind the camera. The return to the same fictional world over a long period of time—each film being separated by nine years—allows the filmmakers to examine the concept of time from different perspectives and reveal its various and sometimes contrasting sides.

Needless to say, past studies on the *Before* trilogy have analysed the series' relation to time, but none has focused on stylistic modulations over the three films or the way these stylistic variations inform and get informed by the theme of time. Two book-length studies on Linklater's oeuvre, by Thomas A. Christie and David Johnson, were published before the release of *Before Midnight* while another book-length study by Rob Stone pays relatively small attention to stylistic dimension of films, favouring thematic/ideological/cultural analyses.³ A master's thesis by Matthew Sanders perhaps devotes more pages than the three books to an analysis of the *Before* trilogy, but his starting point differs from this paper's in that his explicit purpose is to examine "all three "Before" series films as an interconnected whole"⁴ while this paper aims to bring out *different* approaches each film takes to the theme of time. Several short-length articles have also analyzed the trilogy but from critical lenses different from this paper's, be it Peter Lurie's focus on cinephilia and tactility or ideological analyses by Maria San Filippo on Hollywood vs indies, Dan Hassler-Forest on neoliberalism, Lesley Speed on

³ Thomas A. Christie, *The Cinema of Richard Linklater* (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2008); David T. Johnson, *Richard Linklater*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Rob Stone, *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don't Run* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁴ Matthew Sanders, "Richard Linklater's "Before" Series: Time, Duration, and Memory" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2016).

intellectualism, and Rob Stone on nostalgia.⁵ Two exceptions are studies by Robin Wood and Glen Norton; their close readings and greater emphasis on formal aspects closely align with this paper's interest.⁶ Regrettably, these two studies only focus on the first film, and there are no similar studies on the two sequels.

This paper, therefore, aims to extend to the whole trilogy the kind of close readings provided by Wood and Norton. Such an approach will bring out fine stylistic modulations within the series that have often been glossed over, shedding some light on the technical complexities within the films that, for some, might appear only as a record of two people endlessly talking. This paper further aims to interpret such formal observations, asking how they might be seen to be related to the films' depiction of and reflection on the workings of time. The combination of these two kinds of methods will show that the three films, though all focusing on the same two characters and the theme of time, in fact contain multitudes, each taking different approaches to the balance between two aspects of time, the immediate, subjective experience of time and the more abstract, objective flow of time.

This paper's analytic method departs from a more rigorously formalist one, such as Thompson's, in that it seeks to find meanings in the formal elements, believing that such interpretation does not necessarily have to be reductive or forceful as long as it acknowledges the possibilities of other interpretations and did not assert its own supremacy. In regarding film analysis as an act of interpretation and not limited to causal explanation, this paper is also informed by D. N. Rodowick, who sees the value of the humanities—and their difference from

⁵ Peter Lurie, "Digital Déjà Vu: Cinephilia, Loss, and Medial Integrity in Linklater's Before Trilogy," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 68 No. 3 (2015), 60-66; Maria San Filippo, "Growing Old Together: Linklater's Before Trilogy in the Twilight Years of Art House Distribution," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 68 No. 3 (2015), 53-59; Dan Hassler-Forest, "Richard Linklater's Post-Nostalgia and the Temporal Logic of Neoliberalism," in *The Global Auteur*, ed. Jeremi Szaniawski and Seung-hoon Jeong (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 199-216; Lesley Speed, "The Possibilities of Roads Not Taken: Intellect and Utopia in the Films of Richard Linklater," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* Vol. 35 No. 3, (2007), 98-106; Rob Stone, "About Time: Before Boyhood," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 68 No. 3 (2015).

⁶ Glen Norton, "Seductive Slack of Before Sunrise," *Post Script* Vol. 19 No. 2, 1999, 62-72; Robin Wood, "Rethinking Romantic Love: *Before Sunrise*," *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 318-335).

the natural sciences—in one’s *attempt* at interpreting human activities rather than producing immutable facts, “acknowledging the absence of totality in knowing, despite the fascination and terror inspired by the unknowability of others and despite philosophy’s insistent craving for certainty.”⁷ Of course such interpretation will allow room for the interpreter’s subjectivity, but as Rodowick argues, “[o]ne cannot avoid the subject-referring qualities of intentional acts—or else we have renounced the human in the human sciences.”⁸ In addition, to establish what is objectively knowable about a film, and by extension a work of art in general, would involve questions of hermeneutics, a field beyond the scope of this paper. Also, while this paper admits that for some the only question worth asking might be the one that will produce a definitive answer, such a view, when facing art or any other human activities, seems severely limiting. To question and, however tentatively, to interpret seem to belong perfectly within an academic discourse if one remembers the root of “academy” in Ancient Greece, based on Socratic dialogues. Further, such a method seems particularly apt for Linklater’s films in which characters are constantly examining people, culture, and their own experiences.

While thus this paper’s analysis will be subjective in a sense that it does not aim to establish a fact “[e]xisting independent of or external to the mind,” which is the first definition of “objective ” provided by The American Heritage Dictionary, it does aim to be objective in a sense that its observation will be “[b]ased on observable phenomena; empirical,” the second definition provided in the same dictionary.⁹ More specifically, this paper’s interpretation will be based on close readings of the three films, examining modulations in formalistic elements such as *mise en scène*, narrative structure, editing, and sound; such formal

⁷ David Norman Rodowick, *Philosophy Artful Conversation*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 304.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁹ “The American Heritage Dictionary Entry: Objective.” *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Dictionary*, www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=objective (accessed Dec. 6, 2018).

analyses are modelled on methods and insights of a number of scholars including David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Robert Kolker, Gilberto Perez, Adrian Martin, and Louis Giannetti.

Analyses will also utilize the concept of filmic mood, particularly in the section on *Before Sunset*. For its definition, this paper relies on the one provided by Robert Sinnerbrink:

“[moods] are expressive of how a (cinematic) world is revealed, of what aspects of such a world might be emotionally significant...Relevant mood-cues are not simply discrete triggers for generating emotional responses in viewers. Rather, they are themselves encountered as meaningful, as emotionally orienting, precisely because of the expressive manner in which the film-world has been disclosed through its arrangement and composition.”¹⁰

In other words, moods are not only something to be felt—as the word’s common usage might indicate—but also crucial in guiding viewers’ interpretive response to films. While each film in the trilogy can be said to have their own specific moods, an in-depth analysis of mood will be limited to *Before Sunset* because it is only in the second film that the slow transfiguration of the mood plays a central narrative role and brings a resolution to the story.

Each following section focuses on one film at a time and provides close readings. The analyses will reveal subtle stylistic modulations between each film which interact with the use and depiction of time. The section on *Before Sunrise* focus on its mise en scène and structure, examining how in the two elements the subjective time and object time manifest themselves. The analysis of *Before Sunset* looks at how the film matches

¹⁰ Robert Sinnerbrink, “Stimmung: Exploring the aesthetics of mood,” *Screen*, vol. 53, no. 2 (Summer 2012), 154-155.

the real time and reel time, how its closer adherence to the temporal logic of reality charges the subjective time with urgency, and how dissipation of the same urgency is communicated through subtle change in filmic moods. Contrasting with such equal importance of—and at times stronger emphasis on—temporal structure over dramatic elements in the first two films, in *Before Midnight* the use of time is much less foregrounded and does not directly interact with the central drama. Accordingly, the analysis will focus more on the way the drama is structured, and how the use of time stands apart from it. At the same time, the analysis will also note on the way the original score—a new element in the series—is being used and how its presence puts the characters' subjective experience of time simultaneously within the objective flow of time.

2. *Before Sunrise*

The plot of *Before Sunrise* is deceptively simple. Jesse and Celine¹¹, an American traveller and a French university student both in their early twenties, meet on a trans-European train, get attracted to each other, and decide to get off the train together at Vienna in order to spend just one day and night together. They walk around the city and have conversations, till the next morning when they go back to the station and be on their separate ways. There is no secondary character obstructing the main couple's budding relationship and, unlike in the latter two films, no scene of confrontation or crisis; the growing intimacy is allowed to take its course without external complications. While such an aspect seems to promise a film completely set in a mood of romance, it is also marked by a sense of finitude. Such timbre is added because conflict *does* exist in this film: it exists subtly as an undercurrent in the form of two contrasting, if not opposing, temporalities, which this paper will label the subjective time and objective time.

The dichotomy is drawn from the distinction Ricoeur makes between Augustinian and Aristotelian conceptions of time, the former meaning "internal time-consciousness" or "phenomenological time" and the latter meaning "simple succession of physical time."¹² The subjective time, in other words, is the flow of time experienced subjectively by an individual, while the objective time is the time imagined to be passing outside of oneself and manifested in external phenomena, like the movement of the sun or the progression of the clock.¹³ That the objective time is imagined as "objectively" existing separate from oneself also means that its

¹¹ Note the assonance in their names

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 22.

¹³ One could also cite literary manifestations of the objective time, such as the imagined fall of snow at the end of James Joyce's "The Dead" or the second part of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* in which, apropos of the title ("Time Passes"), the narrator depicts time progressing in a house without the presence of the central characters.

existence is seen as preceding—and lasting beyond—an individual’s own existence; thus, it also intimates the finitude of one’s subjective time, one’s mortality. Deleuze’s notion of time-image is similar to this latter, the objective time as well. While Stone notices time-images in Linklater’s films, his emphasis on the political implication of time-images veers away from the concern of this paper. More pertinent here is time-image’s original, philosophical roots. Deleuze focuses on Ozu’s use of shots of inanimate objects (such as the long shot of a vase in *Late Spring*, inserted between close-up shots of the main female character played by Hara Setsuko), and he notes that these shots are “the pure and direct images of time,” their duration representing “that which endures.” And, for Deleuze, “time” here strictly refers to the Aristotelian, objective time: “everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change.” Thus, inserted between shots of characters and their individual activities amid the flow of subjective temporality, static shots of objects like a vase “links the cosmic to the everyday, the durable to the changing.”¹⁴

In the context of *Before Sunrise*, the subjective time is equal to the intimate, romantic time Jesse and Celine spend together, and Jesse says that it feels like being in “some dream world,” while Celine agrees that it is “like our time together is just ours.” They spend it mostly conversing, and it is through their dialogue that the audience experience this flow of time. The meandering nature of Jesse and Celine’s dialogue – occasionally philosophical yet un-Socratic in its lack of conclusive point – marks this temporality as carefree and unhurried, though not completely static¹⁵. On the other hand, the character’s conversation repeatedly touches on the objective time or the time that stretches beyond one’s lifetime. They chance upon, for instance, a cemetery for unidentified bodies, and Celine remarks on how a girl who died when she was thirteen years old will remain to be thirteen forever, while Celine is growing older.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 17-18.

¹⁵ Their conversation is always in flux and movement rather than being repetitious or circular as in, say, Beckett’s plays.

While Jesse and Celine mention mortality in the sequels, what distinguishes *Before Sunrise* is that the entirety of the film is charged by this contrast between the subjective and objective time. On one hand, the subjective time suggests each passing moment's potentialities and possibilities, its number almost infinite as time can be broken down limitlessly into infinitesimal fractions; on the other hand, the objective time checks the former's never-ending elongation.¹⁶ The film without depiction—and even mention—of the objective time would have allowed the audience to get immersed in the subjective time of the characters, the sense of time in which one is caught up in the romance and time almost stands still. But because of the depiction of the objective time, such an illusory feeling is modified; instead, there is always a sense of finitude, an almost subconscious yet palpable sense that the subjective time does not last forever.¹⁷ Thus, the mood of *Before Sunrise* is not only romantic but mixed with a sense of finitude and transitoriness.

Such a mood is maintained, first of all, by Jesse and Celine themselves, who makes several references to what it feels like to be conscious of one's being as temporal. Since it is done very explicitly, mention of a few examples would suffice for the sake of analysis. Jesse, for instance, asks Celine rhetorically: "I mean, we die in the morning, right?" Their one night together here is directly compared to a lifetime, a unit of time that is an ultimate signification of the fact that one has only a limited amount of time. At another moment, Celine imagines being on an airplane about to crash, with a full, terrifying awareness that one would cease to exist within seconds; Jesse also mentions his friend whose only thought while looking at his own new-born baby was

¹⁶ Linklater's *Slacker* might be seen as a film *not* confined by any sense of limitation; its series of episodes can be continued almost infinitely as long as people keep on living in Austin.

¹⁷ One might compare such modification of engagement to Wolfgang Iser's observation of the reading process: he characterizes it as "oscillat[ion] between involvement in and observation of those illusions" that are created by the text. One difference is that in *Before Sunrise* this modification is directly linked to one's experience of time, which is the film's main theme, while Iser's observation focuses on one's experience of narrative and thus can be applied to experiencing of any number of texts. See: Wolfgang Iser, "The reading process: a phenomenological approach," in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed. David Lodge and Nigel Wood, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 295-310.

that “he was lookin’ at something that was gonna die someday.” In fact, Celine *does* notice the similarity between the finitude of life expressed in this anecdote and the time she and Jesse are spending together. The location of this scene (river) as well as the candle on the table underlies the theme, and Jesse’s word choice (i.e. a long-distance relationship always “fizzles out”) fits the image as well (Fig. 2.1).

Such a dichotomy between the subjective time and objective time—the former appearing as if trying to slow down or ignore the progression of the latter—is already suggested in the opening shot. After a listing of production companies and the main two actors over black screen, the film begins with a more than 10-second shot of a railway track, taken from the back of a moving train, over which the title of the film appears (Figs. 2.2–2.3). The image contains both movement and stasis: because the train is running, technically the image of the track is never that of the same part of the track or ground, but instead it is constantly changing at an imperceptibly fast rate; at the same time, the general shape of the image remains the same—a railway track vertically crossing the screen—and, to the eyes, it looks as if the row of crossties is moving up at a much slower speed than the train’s. Though the image does not directly reflect the dichotomy between the subjective and objective time in that it is not from the point of view of any person (subject) visible on the screen, it does already suggest the different ways of feeling time, time as either constant motion or stasis.¹⁸

As was mentioned above, the dichotomy between subjective and objective time is also underscored in other aspects of the film – most notably in its story structure and *mise en scène*. In what follows, the paper first examines the way expansive and carefree tendency of subjective time is reflected in the film’s structure and *mise en scène*; then it considers how the two aspects

¹⁸ Regarding this shot, another notable aspect is that just before the shot ends the track is joined by another one, a delicate intimation of the encounter about to happen (Figs. 2.4–2.5).

are also used to reflect objective time, which circumscribes the subjective time and reminds the characters/audience of finitude.

2.1. Subjective time

2.1.1. Structure (loose connection)

The sequence in Vienna – which constitutes the majority of the film – is made up of 19 vignettes,¹⁹ featuring miscellaneous conversation topics and incidental characters. The succession of these vignettes—which Rosenbaum described as picaresque²⁰—does not have a strong sense of temporal movement because it lacks clear causal chain or temporal cues and also because the number of episodes is large. In this respect *Before sunrise* can be compared to films like *American Graffiti* (George, Lucas, 1973), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (John Hughes, 1986) and Linklater's own *Dazed and Confused* (1993), in which a number of episodes follow one another in an agglutinative manner, and, despite the limited time frame, the clock does not repeatedly intervene into the narrative and rushes the action as in, say, *High Noon* (Fred Zinnermann, 1952). This lack of strong temporal movement instead creates a sense of stasis as well as endlessness, which corresponds to characters' desire to make the moment last longer.²¹

While temporal progression in a classical narrative can be measured by how far the protagonists have worked their way toward a given goal, Jesse and Celine do not have such a clear task to accomplish. Though they do have a desire to know each other better and get closer, such process is not clearly measurable, and the subtle depiction of the couple's growing intimacy

¹⁹ Scenes featuring: bridge, tram, record shop, graveyard, Ferris wheel, amusement park, palm reader, Seurat, church, street poet, bar 1, walk, restaurant, balcony, boat, bar 2, park, harpsichord player, same balcony

²⁰ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Before Sunrise," accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1995/01/before-sunrise-2/>

²¹ In some films, the sense of endlessness can become nightmarish, as in *After Hours* (1985); this negative endlessness can also be found in Kafka's fiction.

means that the change in their relationship cannot be conceived in terms of a linear, teleological progression through clear, different stages of intimacy. Therefore, there is no strong sense of temporal advancement. Also, narratively, most vignettes do not lead to the next one directly. Although sequencing is not random, because one scene does not necessarily build up on the preceding scene, in some cases it would be technically possible to switch the order of the episodes without disrupting the temporal flow. Related to this is the fact that not every episode has a clear temporal cue that places the given vignette in a single spot among the succession of vignettes. Of course, the Ferris wheel scene around the sunset, for instance, would have to come before scenes set during the night, and likewise several scenes in which the couple refers back to an earlier conversation do affirm the linearity of the subjective time. Still, many scenes set during the night do not contain clues that specify what time of the night the scenes are set in, and thus most of them take place within the time frame that is only vaguely describable as “night.” This aspect is more clearly felt if one compares *Before Sunrise* with *Before Midnight*: in that film, the demarcation of scenes more or less matches with gradual advancement of the day (i.e. day, sunset, night) so that there is a stronger sense of temporal progression as one scene ends and another begins. Finally, the sheer number of the vignettes makes the advancement of time less felt, creating an illusion that the succession of episodes can continue much longer. After all, since Jesse and Celine spend more time together than the film’s runtime, it is possible to imagine the film containing more episodes. Thus, the loose sequencing of episodes suggests the subjective time can almost keep on expanding.

Avoiding strong causal chain or a sense of chronology and instead favouring simpler sequencing, the film relies on other formal means to connect scenes and smooth transitions. One is overlapping environmental sounds.²² For instance, at the end of the amusement park scene,

²² *Before Sunset* does the same thing not just to make transitions smooth but to actually elide any temporal or spatial gap, while *Before Midnight* uses non-diegetic score.

just as Jesse gets on a carousel, sound of hoofs can be heard, and this turns out to belong to a horse-drawn carriage in the next shot. While this association of carousel horses and real horses serves a sly, comedic purpose, there is another sound bridge that underlies a thematic point as well. At the end of the scene with a poster for Seurat exhibition, the word ‘transitory’ is repeated three times in succession: Celine mentions that Seurat’s “human figures are always so transitory” and asks if the word ‘transitory’ is the right word, and then Jesse nods and says “transitory.” The scene ends with a static shot of one of Seurat’s sketches on the poster, and then there is a faint sound of a church bell on the soundtrack; the next scene begins with a pan down from a church (Maria am Gestade) revealing Jesse and Celine walking up to it, and on the soundtrack is the same sounds of the church bells but now much louder. The imposing view of the historic church and commanding sounds of the bells that tell the passing of time can be seen as underlining the transitoriness of things just mentioned in the dialogue and slightly undermining the mood of romance. If the sounds can be interpreted this way, then one can also argue they are connected to a line in W. H. Auden’s poem mentioned much later (i.e. “All the clocks in the city began to whirr and chime”). While the church bells are not a conspicuous, thoroughgoing motif of this film, they can also be heard during the earlier transition just before the tram scene. Appearing out of nowhere, bells suddenly indicate the existence of a flow of time that is very different from the way a person or character subjectively experiences time.

Some other transitions, on the other hand, do not have sound bridge. Instead, an end of a scene is indicated by a break in conversation and/or the camera’s move away from the characters, either cutting to a long shot or focusing on elements other than Jesse and Celine. Implications of this visual aspect of transition will be analyzed later.

Even though every transition between scenes in this film is technically an elision since they mask some temporal ellipses, these loose and agglutinative transitions, particularly during the whole sequence set in the night, lessen the sense of temporal movement between scenes and

serve to elongate rather than quicken the pacing of the film, making the sequence of events imitate the meandering nature of Jesse and Celine's dialogue, trajectory and subjective time. At the same time, such casual linking of scenes also allows the filmmakers to intentionally elide certain moments without breaking the stylistic confines of the film. This aspect is less obvious during the night sequence, in which the pure number of episodes gives the audience plenty to enjoy and does not make them feel as if time was significantly elided. However, the use of temporal ellipses becomes more marked when the whole night sequence ends and the morning comes; the sense of elision becomes more palpable and quickening of the time between scenes reflect the characters' (and the audience's) sudden wake up from the world of dream. The final shot set in the night is Jesse and Celine kissing each other in a park. It cuts to a shot of sky and trees in the early morning, with chirping birds replacing insects on the soundtrack; the shot seems to be taken in the same park and thus promises a scene set in the same location, perhaps the two characters just waking up. Instead, beginning with the sound of harpsichord music and one transition shot, the first scene with the couple in the morning starts at a completely different location. Another noticeable elision occurs at the end the next scene on a balcony. In a great contrast to the restfulness of the scene, the busy sounds of a train platform come in on the soundtrack, and in the next shot Jesse and Celine are already on the platform. This forceful transition deprives the audience as well as, in a sense, Jesse and Celine a longer moment of being together.

While thus the pacing quickens in the morning sequence, as discussed above, the entire night sequence—that comprises the majority of the film—is characterized by a loose causal chain. Its pacing is unhurried, the sense of temporal progression weak and less linear, and Jesse and Celine's subjective experience of time is approximated.

2.1.2. Mise en scène

The use of mise en scène in *Before Sunrise* also differs from the sequels in that the film contains a more varied set of stylistic choices; for instance, the camera distance, angle and movement all range more widely within this film than in the others. Though the stylistic choices are subtle and never overtly discursive, they do contribute to create specific moods as in the scene in an amusement park where, because of the use of a lens with the shallow depth of focus, the surrounding environment is made blurry and different colors and light sources blend with each other, producing a romantic mood that is particularly fitting because it comes after their first kiss scene and coincides with the beginning of night.

In terms of subjective time, one particularly relevant difference in mise en scène is the way the camera frequently shifts its focus away from the main couple to look at other incidental characters. Such whimsical, wandering style matches the way Jesse and Celine's curiosity is directed not only towards each other but also outward. Of course, it is perfectly standard for a scene to contain reaction shots of minor characters whenever the main characters are interacting with them, thus momentarily splitting the scene's focus in two. However, compared to the two sequels, there is much more visual emphasis on the presence of others. For instance, during the earlier scene on the lounge car of a train, a break in the scene happens with a cut to a waiter's entrance, for a moment visually excluding the couple from the frame completely. This is a rather unusual emphasis on a very insignificant, or mundane, event. At the same time, Jesse and Celine's presence off screen is felt because their dialogue continues on the soundtrack. The cut subtly emphasizes the presence of the surrounding environment, and this emphasis continues within the shot, the camera not stopping at the couple's table when the waiter reaches it but instead tracking away farther from them. Briefly the opening music comes back on, and the film skips the scene of Jesse and Celine actually eating their meal. At the end of *Before Midnight*, the camera similarly pulls away from the couple while revealing other people around them, but there,

however one interprets it, the camera movement commented on that specific moment in the drama; here, it does not comment directly on this particular moment in the narrative but works more as a part of the larger stylistic strategy used throughout *Before Sunrise*, a strategy of emphasizing the presence of the environment. Another instance is the beginning of a scene in a restaurant which follows Jesse and Celine's intimate conversation on a quiet side street where Celine talks about the importance of human connection. Despite the sensory contrast – the restaurant is crowded and louder – this theme gets diffused here. Successive shots of customers, all but one engaged in a conversation, underlie how natural and fundamental conversation is to people, regardless of culture. At the same time, particularly because of the way Jesse and Celine's conversation is placed at the end, this segment with random people draw attention to the existence of others, each having their own stories like Jesse and Celine that nevertheless do not get revealed. One more example is the scene at an outdoor café when a palm reader notices Jesse and Celine and approaches. The camera's focus is on the palm reader in the background; Jesse and Celine are in the foreground but the use of long lens – while making the palm reader seem closer to the camera – cause their images to become blurry, and their presence is indicated more by their voices on the soundtrack. As the palm reader approaches the couple slowly and circuitously round a cluster of tables between them, the camera also rotates around the couple's table to keep her within the frame while momentarily losing the view of the couple's faces. After she reaches the table, finally all three are within the frame and in focus.

These instances of the camera's wandering gaze, as with the loose succession of scenes, serve to emphasize the extendability of subjective time. If these were the sole characteristics of this film, however, its dominant mood would be that of complete relaxation in which the audience could forget for a while its own temporality. Needless to say, this is not the case. The film is marked by a sense of finitude, and the chief source lies in the very conceit of the film that the

two characters only spend one day together. But the structure and mise en scène of the film also work to remind the audience of objective time, and the following section analyzes this.

2.2. Objective time

2.2.1. Mise en scène

The earlier section has briefly noted that the use of mise en scène differs in *Before Sunrise* from the sequels and analyzed in particular the camera's wandering gaze that reflected expansiveness of subjective temporality. Mise en scène, however, is also used to depict the existence of objective temporality, reminding the finitude of the characters' time together. This is done with several shots throughout the film that dwell on urban space without the presence of the main characters as well as occasional shots that emphasize large space surrounding the characters (Figs. 2.6–2.8). Glen Norton aptly connects such shots to *temps mort* ("dead time") and sees its affective power in its refusal to "denote *anything*."²³ While he is hesitant about interpreting and reducing its seductive ambiguity to one dry, concrete meaning, he does tentatively offer several ways of looking at it; in particular, he tends to see empty space – notably in the shot just before the scene at an indoor restaurant or the montage sequence near the end – to be representing irreconcilable space between two people and "reflect[ing] the impossibility of true communication." Such expressionist interpretation is valid, but this section is going to suggest another way of looking, regarding these shots as visually representing the objective time.

One reason that these shots stand out is because neutral environmental noises and the distance from—or disappearance of—the characters stand in high contrast with most scenes with Jesse and Celine. For the majority of the film, the audience are privy to all the microexpressions shown by the characters, either in their facial expression, bodily movement or the inflection of their

²³ Norton, "The Seductive Slack of *Before Sunrise*," 68.

voices; and observing characters' attempt at vocalizing their thoughts – in a relatively long, uninterrupted time span – is as close as one could get to sharing others' consciousness and temporality (without actually assuming their consciousness as in novels or relying on other cinematic techniques like voice-over narration and expressionist visuals). Moving away from this intimate proximity to others' consciousness and instead approaching non-subjectivity, the shots of things and environments that do not include the characters take on the quality of objective time. Such images are similar to Deleuzian time-images that Rob Stone mentions in that they convey the passage of time by lasting much longer than the audience expect without action; but more specifically, in such images time is imagined as existing outside an individual's consciousness. While it is phenomenologically impossible for an individual to exist in this objective temporality, one can nevertheless imagine its existence and here it is visually approximated.

In this sense, in *temps mort* sequence—a montage sequence near the end which shows again places Jesse and Celine visited as the two are leaving Vienna—the city shown is not an embodiment of “the couple's attempt at an intellectual and spiritual bond”²⁴—which implies close relation between the landscape and characters as in expressionist films—but a separate entity; and the sequence's affective power comes from the audience's realization that in each shot and location Jesse and Celine's (and the audience's) trace is already starting to fade away, and all the signification which various places and things took on was shared by few and remain frail and transitory. While some shots are completely still and visually emptier, others have some moving objects including people; but they only serve to indicate that life goes on without the presence of Jesse and Celine, and one senses the foreignness of the world and people. The fact that these shots show the city in the early morning light further makes most places look already different, underlying the presence of the objective time and its inexorable passage. J. S. Bach's

²⁴ Norton, “Seductive Slack of *Before Sunrise*,” 75.

wistful music (Andante from Sonata for viola da gamba & harpsichord in G Major, BWV 1027) that accompanies the sequence further emphasizes the passage of time by recalling an earlier scene. Just over five minutes ago in the film's runtime, Jesse and Celine came upon a harpsichord player playing Bach's Goldberg Variations, and, after playfully dancing to it, they tried to preserve that specific moment in their memory by staring at each other and imagining to be taking mental photography. Even if the audience do not recognize the composer, the reappearance of the sound of the harpsichord in the montage sequence reminds them that the earlier scene, despite the couple's attempt to somehow hold that moment still, is already in the past. Further, the fact that the music is from completely another age (written more than 300 years ago) marks its presence as something existing outside of the subjective time of the mortals—it belongs to the objective time, the time in which the forever-dead 13-year-old girl rests. After they say their goodbyes and Celine gets on the train, there is no more dialogue and thus much less sense of subjectivity; the aforementioned music by Bach comes on and plays over shots of Jesse and Celine and the following *temps mort* sequence, thereby connecting the two. The sense of the subjective time recedes and instead the characters are no put in the same flow of time depicted in the *temps mort* sequence, the objective time.

The baroque style of the music might also remind the audience of the accompaniment for the opening sequence, an overture from Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. While the somberness of Purcell's music, set decidedly in a minor key, already suggested the nuanced mixture of moods in the film, its story of tragic love, as Robin Wood argues, also served as a point of comparison by referring to "past attitudes to romantic love."²⁵ Wood further notes a similar intertextual function played by *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948), a film evoked by the film's location, Vienna, that also focused on a female character trapped in tragic love. Though Wood's observation centers around different depictions of romantic relationship in these works,

²⁵ Ibid., 326.

this connection between the *temps mort* sequence and the opening sequence in *Before Sunrise* retroactively suggests another kind of thematic link: different consequences of the dichotomy between the subjective and objective time. In both *Dido and Aeneas* and *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, the only subjective time that the titular female characters wish to stay in is the one they (thought they) shared with their male counterparts. And when they get left alone, they try to remain in that specific experience of the subjective time by forcefully ignoring the objective time, an effort that takes the form of self-negation (in the case of Dido, literal self-annihilation). Their desire is contrasted with their male counterparts' different senses of time: in the case of the film, the man is much less interested in sharing his subjective time with any single woman for a long period of time; in the opera, Aeneas, who leaves because he believes the gods wish him to found Rome, can be seen an agent of the objective time or, more specifically, historical time. The heroines, in their strong desire to be left stuck in a moment already lost in the past, are wilfully denying the objective flow of time. And when the time comes for them to die, in their final gestures this melancholic persistence becomes their wish to be remembered. Thus, the woman in the film writes a letter to the man in the hope that he might recall her existence, and Dido sings her final aria, in its climactic moment supplicating to Aeneas and all the living: "Remember me." In contrast, in *Before Sunrise* the couple decide their separation together and thereby mutually ended—or suspended since they did promise to meet again—their shared experience of the subjective time. Thus, they avoid the tragic fates of the characters in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* or *Dido and Aeneas*. At the same time, the *temps mort* sequence, by showing the very transitoriness of the trace of the couple, expresses the same kind of human wish to be remembered. Such a sentiment, however, would lose its affective power if the audience got the feeling that there will be a sequel and the main couple's story will continue: there has to be a sense of closure to the story.²⁶ *Before Sunrise* achieves this through its formally

²⁶ As a counterexample, one can think of *Avengers: Infinity War* (Anthony & John Russo, 2018), whose ending's

balanced, symmetric structure, which, as will be shown in the next section, gives the film a sense of autonomy and completeness.

2.2.2. Structure (symmetry)

Apropos of the fact that *Before Sunrise* is the first film in a trilogy of film and that it existed for a while as the only film about Jesse and Celine (till the release of *Before Sunset* or technically *Waking Life*), this film's story and filmic world exist much more autonomously compared to the sequels. This self-sufficiency also means that, in a way, the existence of the main characters only begins and ends with this single film. Of course, the release of sequels negated this idea by extending the lives of the characters in the filmic world, and Matthew Sanders has analyzed its various implications.²⁷

Still, even after the release of two additional films, *Before Sunrise* retains some sense of autonomy, and this comes from the film's use of symmetrical narrative structure that gives self-sufficient completeness to the film. Wood has already mentioned several examples. The main characters, for instance, are given equal screen time and prominence in the film so that the audience are not encouraged to bias one character over the other.²⁸ This is less true in *Before Sunset* or *Before Midnight*: both of them open with a long sequence with only Jesse and not Celine; the latter film also contains, as noted by Jonathan Rosenbaum, a moment after a fight in a hotel room when the camera stays with Jesse rather than goes out of the room with Celine, thereby aligning the audience closer with Jesse and his feelings of being rejected rather than Celine and her anger.²⁹ Wood also notes on the similarity between a scene on a streetcar and a much later scene in a restaurant. In both, the couple engage in a verbal game, and by becoming

sense of shock is considerably mitigated by the audience's knowledge that there will be sequels.

²⁷ Sanders, "Richard Linklater's "Before" Series: Time, Duration, and Memory."

²⁸ Wood, "Rethinking Romantic Love: *Before Sunrise*," 329.

²⁹ Jonathan Rosenbaum, "A Few (Further) Demurrals About Films That Didn't Make It Onto My (2013) Ten Best List," accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/2018/05/38850/>

playful they in fact manage to communicate more openly, bypassing the shyness and timidity that might inhere in a more normal form of discourse.³⁰ The film's ending echoes the beginning as well, Jesse and Celine going back to the same train station, to a similar platform and train, and the film ending on a train with non-diegetic baroque music on the soundtrack (Figs. 2.9–2.10). In part, this symmetry and the evocation of the beginning of the film serve to emphasize all the changes that happened within just the span of a day, conveying the sentiment similar to the famous song “What a Diff’rence a Day Makes.” And mirroring this difference, there is crucial modulation as well: in the earlier scene, as the couple get off the train, the camera pans right to see them go down the platform amid other passengers, but, in the later scene, after the couple say goodbye to each other, Celine gets on the train while Jesse remains outside so that the camera's identical pan right now only shows Jesse, walking down the platform that is much less populated, tracing for a while the wall of the train car Celine is on (Figs. 2.11–2.12).

At the same time, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, the symmetrical structure, the way the filmic world is framed by similar beginning and ending, gives the film—as well as the main characters—a sense of autonomous existence or completion despite the way the plot leaves an unanswered question. Such structural completion suggests a sense of finitude precisely because it is already complete. This magnifies what the characters themselves meditate in their dialogue. Celine, for instance, remarks on posters for a Seurat exhibition that “it's like the environments... are stronger than the people.” This remark applies not only to the immediate, physical environment of Vienna surrounding Jesse and Celine, which the audience also see as filmic images, but also to the extra-diegetic time that brackets the limited filmic time depicted in *Before Sunrise*; the time before and after the storyline is almost as strong as the story time, just as the time before and after one's life span can be felt to be equal to or even stronger than one's lifetime. And like Jesse and Celine compared their limited time together to the finitude of

³⁰ Wood, “Rethinking Romantic Love: *Before Sunrise*,” 331.

human life, the limited duration of their filmic existence itself evokes mortality; there is a subtle sense that the structure of the film—starting on a train and going back to a train—figuratively parallels the way life emerges out of nothingness, have a singular, beautiful experience, and then goes back to the same nothingness, reflecting, in the words of Prospero, the way “our little life is rounded with a sleep”:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (4.1.161-71)

2.3. Figures from *Before Sunrise*

2.1



2.2



2.3



2.4



2.5



2.6



2.7



2.8



2.9



2.10



2.11



2.12



3. *Before Sunset*

Released nine years after *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset* depicts Jesse and Celine's reunion in Paris that also takes place nine years later in the fictive world. While the film continues to focus on the couple's dialogue and intimacy, it eschews the dichotomy between the objective and subjective time, centering instead on Jesse and Celine's subjective time alone. But this film brings out a different side of it. While the sequel's very existence in effect negates the sense of finitude that marked the last film by extending the characters' filmic existence, the continuation of their story also modifies the last film's sense of subjective time by more strongly bringing in the temporal logic of real life, be it through its match of real time and reel time or the foregrounding of the aging of the characters. While *Before Sunrise* depicted the subjective time as extensive and full of potentials, *Before Sunset* focuses on its linearity, the way it is continually slipping away, turning potentialities into actualities every second, irreversibly and unstoppably. This gives the film a sense of urgency, creating a wish on the part of both the characters and audience to reach a state somewhat more stable. While this desire is similar to the one experienced with the viewing of more plot-driven films, here an arrival at such an equilibrium is indicated not by an explicit action or dialogue but by the return of the previous film's sense of subjective time. This, however, is such an elusive goal. And the path towards it is ambiguous too, requiring the characters to undergo gradual, intuitive shifts in their emotive states despite the sense of urgency; and this change in the characters is conveyed to the audience, again, less through discursiveness and more through shifting moods, from the one of neutral, uncertain indeterminacy to romantic, conscious indeterminacy. Thus, if the first film created tension through the dichotomy between subjective and objective time, in this film the tension lies in the way the conscious awareness of changed, more pressing sense of subjective time is frustrated

by and cannot hurry the slower shifts in the characters emotive states and filmic moods.³¹ The following sections analyze this process in detail.

3.1. Real time and reel time

Before Sunrise conveyed the subjective time experienced by Jesse and Celine—including its mundane or static moments—by keeping digressive dialogues intact or utilizing occasional long takes. *Before Sunset* extends that attempt at wholesome preservation of lived time by a technique not used in the last film, the matching of real time and reel time: here, the amount of time the audience spend watching the story more or less equals to the amount of time that passes in the fictive world. A quick look at other films using the same device highlights the unique way *Before Sunset* gets affected by it.

According to David Bordwell, the use of this technique in the cinema can be traced back to the forties—though theater predated it—and most notably to *The Set-Up* (Robert Wise, 1949).³² Since then, many films have utilized the technique, usually to enhance the sense of mounting suspense as in *High Noon*, *Fail Safe* (Sidney Lumet, 1964) or *Locke* (Steven Knight, 2014), while *Russian Ark* (Alexander Sokurov, 2002) ingeniously used it to visualize and suggest the coexistence as well as continuity of the past and present. A much more related precursor would be *Cléo from 5 to 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962)³³ in which, as in *Before Sunset*, the device allows the audience to share more closely the subjectivity and experience of the titular character. Further,

³¹ Rob Stone makes a similar point, seeing the theme of *Before Sunset* as “the challenge...to dismiss the ticking clock and return to that lost, Bergsonian, intuitive sense of time.” His analysis, however, mainly focuses on the ideological and in general propositional content rather than formal elements which is this paper’s concern. See: Stone, *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don’t Run*, 131.

³² David Bordwell, *Reinventing Hollywood: How 1940s Filmmakers Changed Movie Storytelling*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 159. Bordwell notes that Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*, which was released a year earlier, shows characters’ reaction in “real time,” “but the background shift from afternoon to evening compresses several hours” (Ibid., 172).

³³ The film is mentioned by Johnson though more in relation to *Before Sunrise*. See: Johnson, *Richard Linklater*, 35.

while in both films the characters recognize time as finite and thus each passing moment gets imbued with a slight sense of tension, the suspense differs from films like *Fail Safe* in that it has less to do with the plot or achieving a clearly defined goal but more with existential anxiety that applies equally to the characters and the audience. In other words, the passage of time in films like *Fail Safe* places logistical pressure first and foremost on the characters, and the audience watching the characters vicariously experiences the similar kind of tension; in films like *Cléo from 5 to 7* or *Before Sunset*, existential implication of passage of time is foregrounded and experienced equally by the characters and the audience.

At the same time, while the affinity between the two films in terms of the use of time is notable, one significant difference is that *Cléo from 5 to 7* emphasizes the urban environment in which Cléo wanders around, both visually and sonically, while *Before Sunset* downplays it and instead keeps very close to the main characters. This is also the difference between *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*. The earlier analysis of *Before Sunrise* noted Jesse and Celine's curiosity towards and interaction with Vienna and its people which were also reflected in the camera's shifting focus; here, their interest is directed almost solely towards each other, and similarly the camera is almost always close to the characters, either using a medium two-shot while they are walking or an exchange of close ups for static scenes in the café, the Promenade Plantée or on the boat. Thus, for instance, while the presence of an accordion player near the book store is noticeable because of the momentary emphasis on the sound of the accordion, his place remains in the background, to be passed over, unlike, say, the belly dancer in *Before Sunrise*. Likewise, the waitress in the café does not get her own entrance shot like the previous film's waiter in the lounge car or musicians on the boat. The camera in *Before Sunset* stays close to Jesse and Celine in such scenes. One implication of this stronger emphasis on the main characters is that there are fewer expressive or unmotivated camera movements in *Before Sunset*; instead, editing becomes more important. While some notable uses will be mentioned later, one example should be noted

here briefly. Early in the film, after leaving the bookstore, Jesse and Celine start to tentatively catch up on each other's lives but do not immediately disclose what happened six months after their night together—whether they went back to the station or not. Their walk is stopped first when Celine decides to directly ask Jesse if he was there or not, and for the following conversation an exchange of medium close ups is used for emphasis. After Celine admits defensively that she could not go and Jesse awkwardly follows suit, they start to walk again and the two-shot returns. While such a way of emphasis on dialogue is completely standardized, soon after it gets a subtle variation. Within less than a second of walking, Celine becomes suspicious and stops their walk again. It is in the following conversation that Jesse admits he did go back and in which all of the details finally become available to both the characters and the audience. This calls for a greater emphasis. Thus, when Celine asks angrily, “Wait. Why weren't you there?” not only the similar shift to an exchange of close ups occurs but also the camera crosses the 180 line, thereby putting more emphasis on the moment by slight visual disorientation (Figs. 3.1–3.4). Such an editing technique—and avoidance of more conspicuous techniques—puts a dramatic emphasis subtly without disrupting the audience's immersion in the couple's subjective time.

Thus, while there have been many films that utilized the match between real time and reel time, *Before Sunset* uses it to preserve and emphasize Jesse and Celine's subjective experience of time together and, in addition, to allow the audience to share such duration.

3.2. Subjective time

This foregrounding of Jesse and Celine to the exclusion of other elements—be it incidental characters or unmotivated camera movements—results in part from the film's premise; it makes sense that, meeting for the first time in nine years but having not much time, Jesse and Celine

wish to spend their time only talking to each other (especially since Celine is not a tourist but a resident of the city). It would in fact feel forced and implausible—both narratively and psychologically—if the couple decided to spend their very limited amount of time together by striking up conversations with random Parisians. Accordingly, the relative lack of their interaction with others does not necessitate many diegetic camera movements. At the same time, this foregrounding of the main couple also serves to put the audience closer to the characters both spatially and temporally. While some films mentioned earlier like *High Noon* and *Fail Safe* also synchronize the real time and reel time, in these two films what is happening more specifically is the matching between real time and plot or event time. Since the two films occasionally shifts the perspective from one character to another or one location to another, what is emphasized is the amount of time required for a plot or event to take place; plot rather than a character or location controls the time. Therefore, while the audience do get to experience the main character's subjective, minute-by-minute experience of time more fully in these films than elsewhere, this gets interrupted as well; these interruptions give the audience the bird's eye point of view, and the audience's experience during the duration of the film does not align completely to any single character's experience of the story. In *Before Sunset*, on the other hand, the audience do get to fully share the main characters' experience of time, or their subjective time, as long as the film lasts. At the same time, while the subjective time, along with the objective time, played a central role in *Before Sunrise*, here it is no longer experienced as something extensive or semi-infinite as in *Slacker*. Instead, because of the premise that gives the characters a very limited amount of time to spend together, and because of the match between real time and reel time analyzed earlier, the subjective time is marked as linear and continuously passing by, giving the film, as noted by many, a sense of urgency. Put differently, while *Before Sunrise* also had time constraints, its mood of finitude and transitoriness was created through the dichotomy between the subjective and objective time and, in particular, through the way the objective time seemed

to limit and bracket the extendability of the subjective time; the subjective time itself—which was relaxed and playful—was not marked by any strong sense of transitoriness. Here, however, the subjective time itself, each passing moment between Jesse and Celine, gets imbued with the sense of impermanence. At the same time, the lack of the previous film's dichotomy means the subjective time is not felt to be bounded by something else, and in this regard there is no clear sense of finitude here. The fact that this film starts as a continuation of a pre-existing story (*Before Sunrise*) and the fact that it ends in the middle of a scene with a gradual fadeout—suggesting continuation of the diegetic world beyond the runtime of the film—both also negate the sense of finitude that marked *Before Sunrise*.

As in the previous film's treatment of both the subjective and objective time, this different aspect of the subjective time is reflected in and reinforced by other elements. The most obvious would be the way the film is built around the characters' almost continuous movement from one location (the bookstore) to another (Celine's apartment). In *Before Sunrise*, the couple frequently stopped to talk to strangers or rested at various locations (e.g. restaurants or cafés, a record shop, and church); further, the editing often elided moments in which Jesse and Celine would have been moving from one location to another, and thus there was no clear sense of geographical direction. Here, in contrast, though technically there are some location jumps,³⁴ dialogue overlap is used to create a sense of both temporal and geographical linearity; and even when Jesse and Celine get on a chauffeur-driven car and the sequence's beginning and ending show the exterior of the moving car rather than the couple, their dialogue continues non-stop on the soundtrack and the temporal unity and continuity are maintained. While the first film used overlapping diegetic, environmental noises to smooth some transitions, the connections are stronger here.

³⁴ "Filming Locations for Before Sunset (2004)," accessed December 6, 2018, <http://www.movie-locations.com/movies/b/Before-Sunset.php>.

Such continual movement of the characters, coupled with the use of a walk-and-talk shot, enhances the sense of passage of time and urgency the audience feel.³⁵

Even during the brief flashback in the bookstore, which Johnson notes as “work[ing] against this sense of time’s inevitable forward movement,”³⁶ the steady flow of diegetic time is maintained by the uninterrupted monologue of Jesse on the soundtrack. Thus, even though Jesse suggests in this scene that a mind can almost retrieve the past even after the disappearance of its physical referent, the past does not belong to the present temporality (but Jesse – and the audience – is granted the wish for this retrieval of the past when Celine *does* appear).

That Jesse and Celine get to meet again but are now nine years older adds to the sense of urgency as well. Though one could say that characters in a stand-alone film—or a series of films released closely to each other—get preserved in a story half mythically and exist as they are forever without aging, just as a girl who died at the age of thirteen mentioned by Celine in *Before Sunrise* remains to be thirteen forever, *Before Sunset* in a way robs Jesse and Celine of this fictive privilege by continuing their story nine years later. The idea of one’s mortality, which was already mentioned in the previous film but remained imagined and figurative, becomes more real and felt in the signs of aging visually apparent on the characters (though of course it is still not their immediate concern). And here even Notre Dame is seen to be transitory, Celine mentioning “you have to think that Notre Dame will be gone one day.” Such a pressing sense of the subjective time is further reinforced by the fact that the missed reunion irrevocably determined the following courses of their lives—or at least the way they regard the courses of their lives—so that they can no longer see every new moment as offering the same sense of renewed possibilities; instead, past actions color the way the present moment gets perceived, and thus each passing moment becomes more precious, making Jesse and Celine more cautious.

³⁵ This becomes apparent if one compares *Before Sunset* with a similarly dialogue-heavy but more static film like *My Dinner with Andre* (1981).

³⁶ Johnson, *Richard Linklater*, 84.

In this way, the time constraint of the premise is just one of many sources that brings out the urgent sense of the subject time.

In films with a more classical narrative structure, similar sense of urgency and suspense is created by clear obstacles lying before explicit goals; accordingly, such urgency usually gets resolved or diffused when the characters decisively reach or fail to reach the goals. In *Before Sunset*, however, as analyzed above the sources of the urgency are more nebulous and thus the goal or paths towards it as well. Of course, both the audience (consciously) and the couple (latently) wish for Jesse and Celine to get back together. But the process is complicated because they do in a sense get back together at the beginning of the film when they reunite and spend the rest of the film's runtime together; further, till the very end there is no typical, explicit indication of mutually rekindled love ("I love you," a kiss, etc.). At the same time, there *is* a sense of relaxation at the end of the film. The rest of this section is going to look at how this is achieved through a gradual shift in the mood of the film, in which neutral, uncertain indeterminacy gives way to romantic, almost willed indeterminacy, the indeterminacy of *Before Sunrise* described by Norton as "seductive slack."

3.3. Mood

In *Before Sunset*, aside from the sense of urgency, the prevalent mood is that of indeterminacy. It can be felt most clearly in the way Jesse and Celine defer explicit admission of their feelings towards each other. But the opening credit already starts to set the mood, though indirectly. In contrast to the previous film's use of Purcell, here the music is a contemporary pop song sung by Julie Delpy. The fact that the singer is one of the main actors of the film adds self-referentiality and makes one wonder if it is meant to reflect Celine's emotions or meant as filmmaker's non-diegetic commentary. The lyrics also

complicate the issue: the first verse mentions the singer has to leave and catch a plane but, as will be revealed soon in the film, that is what Jesse has to do and not Celine. Further, the promise mentioned in the chorus (“you promised to stay in touch”) is precisely what Jesse and Celine refused to do in the first film. At the same time, the general theme of the transitoriness of romance, as well as the more specific situation of one of the couple having to leave after a brief encounter, does fit *Before Sunset*. Thus, the song ambiguously links Jesse and Celine’s relationship to transience but avoids stating clearly if transience will win and whether the two will “soon... be apart.” The opening credit is also visually ambiguous. The static shots of different places in Paris recall the montage sequence near the end of *Before Sunrise*; but in that film the sequence was charged with a sense of melancholy since each place reminded one of the absence of Jesse and Celine. In *Before Sunset*, while the shots also do not contain the couple, their absence does not register emotionally because relations between the places and the characters are not established. However, the film does show gradually that there are relations between the two—that each shot in the opening credit was showing places Jesse and Celine would visit in reverse order. Here, one might say that, in contrast to *Before Sunrise* that showed absence left behind by the characters, *Before Sunset* shows absence that would be filled by the characters and already maps out the path towards Celine’s apartment. The sequence, in other words, come to retroactively signify the inevitability of the trajectory—both literal and figural—of Jesse and Celine. However, during the first moment of watching the opening credit, the sense one gets is that of ambiguity, uncertain if it shows random places of Paris to loosely establish the locale or if each shot is in fact closely connected to the story.

The first scene proper, Jesse’s Q&A session in a bookstore, introduces other ambiguities. For one thing, a ring can be seen on Jesse’s left-hand ring finger during the interview, but the topic of Jesse’s marriage never comes up until well after the halfway point of the film, and even then it is Celine who brings it up. The scene also sets up the premise that Jesse has a plane to catch,

but it does not establish a specific time limit. While if one is attentive enough a poster outside the bookstore shows that Jesse's public reading starts at 17:30, and while Jesse is also told that he should leave at "7:30 [in the evening] at the very latest," the film does not provide what specific time of the day it is at that moment. As a result, the audience are kept in uncertainty as to how much time is left for Jesse and Celine at any given moment.

Another source of indeterminate mood is the self-reflexive turn the film takes. While the opening song by Julie Delpy already has an element of self-reflexivity, this is further reinforced when Jesse gets reintroduced as an author who has basically written a book version of *Before Sunrise*. And soon after during a Q&A session, one journalist asks Jesse a question that could have well been about the ending of *Before Sunrise*, a question that is also on the mind of the audience. The ensuing scenes also find Jesse and Celine frequently remembering the night they spent together nine years ago as well as comparing themselves to their past selves. While Jesse and Celine already saw themselves self-consciously in the first film, often adapting different persona so that they could somehow observe themselves as others would, *Before Sunset*, by having Jesse write a book based on events in *Before Sunrise*, makes both Jesse and Celine's relation to their time in Vienna close to the one the audience have to the previous film. Such self-reflexivity enhances the characters' authenticity to the point where their ontological independence—unusually close to the audience's—creates slight ambiguity about how the audience should relate to the characters.³⁷

While these ambiguities all vary in nature and perhaps too subtle to be clearly registered in the mind during the watching of the film—as opposed to, say, plot points or salient thematic elements which can be recognized and retained—it is precisely this weakness of the cues that

³⁷ This film's self-reflexivity remains modest and for the sake of authenticity compared to ones in which it is used to point out their own fictionality, whether for thematic purposes (e.g. films by Godard, Fellini, Altman) or comedic purposes (e.g. *Airplane!* [Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, & Jerry Zucker, 1980], *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* [Terry Gilliam & Terry Jones, 1975]).

allow them to constitute an indeterminate mood. But how does this indeterminacy get dispelled or at least modified to something more enticing? Though the way Jesse repeatedly delays his departure to catch his plane suggests his unexpressed desire to stay, for a change to happen, Jesse and Celine have to go through more open acknowledgment of their emotions. While the most emotionally dramatic moment occurs during the scene in a car, the couple's frustration is already noticeable in the scene on a boat, such as when Jesse asks Celine, "So, you in love with that guy?" to which Celine answers "What guy?" and "Yes, of course," but a little too pointedly. And Jesse of course reveals his exasperation ("Oh, God. Why weren't you there in Vienna?") and complains about his marriage, a checked but still honest gush of feelings which Celine is not yet ready to answer, nervously evading it or trying to deflate it with a joke ("What monastery do the monk have sex ten times?"). Nevertheless, it is when they get in a chauffeur driven car that they openly express their current frustration and regrets that arise from the missed reunion. The sequence alternates between two-shots and close ups (Figs. 3.5–3.7). Though the sequence could very well have been filmed in a single take with only a two-shot (as in the tram scene in *Before Sunrise* or the car ride scene in *Before Midnight*), the use of close-ups serves to visually isolate each character while also underlying the wholeness of the two-shot. The choice further plays up the agitation of the scene by necessitating more frequent cuts; in contrast, two-shots work to diffuse tension by loosening the visual confinement of close-ups. While the couple still avoid touching on their immediate future and remain indeterminate about what they want to do, the exchange of raw, honest emotions and its subsequent cooling off in the car slightly increase their intimacy.

The moment of the car's arrival at its destination further visually cues the growing intimacy. The car leaves a busy street and, going through an archway, takes Jesse and Celine to a secluded courtyard leading up to her apartment. After getting off the car, Celine shows the most intimate gesture so far by hugging Jesse for a moment, while also trying to avoid complete emotional

seriousness by wittily connecting it to their earlier conversation (“I want to see if you stay together or if you dissolve into molecules”). As they walk towards her apartment, the privacy of the courtyard stands in a stark contrast to the previous scene which was marked by both visual and emotional tenseness. Further, the courtyard is shut off from the earlier sequences’ ephemeral, golden hues of sunset, instead colored green by trees, shrubs and vines that are richly furnishing the area; the surrounding buildings complement it too with their matching color scheme on the doors, foundation and coverings of windows (Figs. 3.8–3.10). Even as Jesse and Celine do not dispel the fact that he has to catch a plane (e.g. “I’m gonna walk her to her door,” “Il prend l’avion,” “You’re gonna miss your flight” – “I won’t, I won’t”), the surrounding environment gets increasingly intimate, from the aforementioned courtyard to neighbors’ inviting Jesse to a private barbecue—and then the two silently walking up the stairs, guessing each other’s feeling just as the audience are guessing theirs, to finally reaching Celine’s apartment, the only place throughout the trilogy that belongs to a character, a home.

The sequence in her apartment again abandons two-shots and alternates between long to medium shots of Jesse and Celine; but here this serves to intensify the mood and, and in fact it is in this scene that the indeterminate mood becomes more knowingly ambiguous and, with the rushed sense of subjective time giving way, the previous film’s sense of subjective time returns. First of all, the relative distance between the camera and the characters does not emphasize empty space as in *Before Sunrise* but is in fact filled by knick-knacks of Celine’s apartment, the very miscellany emphasizing the comfort one associates with home, and long to medium shots underscore the characters’ situatedness in the apartment; the ample space here is positive. One might also argue that the room’s dominant color, red, harkens back to the color scheme of *Before Sunrise* which accentuated red and green. (Though the color green was more dominant in the film, red and green both appear notably on the interior and exterior of the trans-Europe train while either of the two also appears markedly on Jesse’s sweater, the bridge where they

meet amateur actors, the interior of the tram, the poster in the listening booth, cemetery of the nameless, etc.) In this sense, the verdure of the courtyard earlier already anticipated this return of the mood of *Before Sunrise*. On a related note, it is perhaps significant that Celine mentions the song she ends up playing as “a little waltz,” the form being closely associated with Vienna (in fact, the scene of the restaurant on a moored boat did feature musicians playing a waltz).³⁸ After Celine’s song, the sustenance of ambiguity becomes more conscious and even flirtatious: when Jesse asks for another song, Celine replies, “No, no, no. You’re gonna have your tea and then...” allowing the end of her sentence to trail off; further, when Jesse tries to confirm if the song was addressed to him—which would also make Celine’s feelings for him more definite—she decides to be ambiguous but teasingly and playfully rather than evasively.

Such a mood of alluring indeterminacy is heightened by the avoidance of two-shots. Here, it seems helpful to draw on Deleuze’s analysis of close-up shots. For him, “the close-up does *not* tear away its object from a set of which it would form part...but on the contrary *it abstracts it from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates*” and “raises it to the state of Entity.” In other words, it extracts and emphasizes the affective power of an object. He further contrasts Eisenstein and Griffith’s use of close-ups: Eisenstein prefers “intensive faces” and an “intensive series” of divergent emotions or faces that dialectically produces “a new quality”; Griffith, on the other hand, prefers “reflective faces” which reflect on an object and reveal their “fixed” and “eternal thoughts,” expressing “a pure Quality... a “something” common to several objects of different kinds.”³⁹ In the final scene of *Before Sunset*, it is through such Griffith-like union between affects of subject and object—though here it is a union of emotions between two subjects—that the mood finally turns into something consciously and seductively indeterminate. Because most of the times each character is framed separately, what gets emphasized is less the fact that they

³⁸ As will be analyzed later, Celine’s waltz in turn gets evoked in *Before Midnight*.

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 100-102, 106.

share the same space but more the way each looks at the other and gets attracted by the other—their mutual gaze and intentionality (Figs. 3.11–3.12). At the same time, because these shots are mostly medium to long shots rather than close-ups, Celine’s room does not lose its “spatio-temporal co-ordinates” or become “any space whatever”; if there is any receding sense of space and time, it is Paris and the world outside Celine’s room that lose their presence—if anything, the affective qualities of her room become even more palpable (Figs. 3.13–3.15).

The mood further gets charged with intimacy and attraction when Jesse puts on Nina Simone’s rendition of “Just in Time,” her voice in turn heartfelt and playful, intense but warm, the lyrics already suggesting Jesse’s stay. Simone soon takes a solo on the piano, allowing more space for Celine’s monologue, her own version of solo performance that entices him into staying. And while medium shots are used for both Celine and Jesse’s final lines (“Baby, you are gonna miss that plane” — “I know”),⁴⁰ the very last shot returns to a long shot, with rich view of her room (Fig. 3.16). They do not need any clearer confirmation. For the first time in a very long time, the mood is kept indeterminate but alluringly. With her face almost completely away from the camera and Jesse, Celine just keeps on dancing, making the others guess her feelings. But her—or Jesse’s—rekindled love for each other is almost clear and definite. And with the intimate atmosphere of Celine’s room and Nina Simone’s enchanting performance, the mood becomes romantic, calling back to *Before Sunrise*’s sense of subjective time. The film lets this mood and sense of time last by slowly fading out but keeping the song playing on the soundtrack. As the credits begin to appear, Simone finishes her solo and comes back to singing. Her voice now more openly mixes in sadness to the song, mirroring the way Jesse and Celine’s final joy was reached after pain and regret of the time lost, and reflecting the lyrics’ acknowledgement of “lonely life” that preceded the “lovely day.” She prolongs more notes and gives each of them almost a pained tremor. As the song nears its climax and her naturally deep voice reaches for

⁴⁰ As in the last film’s imaginary phone conversation scene, playacting allows Celine to be indirectly direct.

higher notes, in contrast to the playful way she entered her piano solo, she reveals, for a brief moment, such a strong sense of longing and yearning—vulnerability. Thus, while Jesse and Celine at the end were being teasingly indeterminate, what remained unsaid finds its expression in Nina Simone's highly expressive performance, with the mood still lingering after the last images of Jesse and Celine.

Before Sunset took on a different structure by abandoning the first film's dichotomy and, instead, foregrounded the passing of each moment through matching of real time and reel time. This brought out a different aspect of subjective time, a sense of urgency. This differed from the mood of finitude of the first film in that it was seen as one inherent aspect of the subjective time itself rather than a product of a dialectic between the subjective and objective time. The film, however, in the end restored the first film's sense of subjective time, one of relaxation and extensiveness, through gradual changes in the mood. If there is any lingering sense of urgency in the audience's part, it is only because, almost at the moment the mood of *Before Sunrise* returns, the audience have to leave it behind.

3.4. Figures from *Before Sunset*

3.1



3.2



3.3



3.4



3.5



3.6



3.7



3.8



3.9



3.10



3.11



3.12



3.13



3.14



3.15



3.16



4. *Before Midnight*

Before Midnight differs from both *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset* in several important ways. In the previous two films, Jesse and Celine's relation to each other was similar to the one the audience had to the characters in that *Before Sunrise* showed the couple meeting each other for the first time just as the audience were meeting them for the first time and, in a similar manner, *Before Sunset* showed the couple reuniting for the first time in nine years like the audience reencountered them for the first time in nine years. At the beginning of *Before Midnight*, however, the couple has already spent a significant amount of time together after the last film. Moreover, the event of *Before Midnight* is for them less singular. In other words, the way they relate to the event of the film is much less aligned with the audience. The fact that they had had years of time together also means that each passing moment for them is no longer as precious as in the last two films. Thus, in *Before Midnight* Jesse and Celine's subjective time becomes languorous.

In addition, contrasting with *Before Sunrise* in which Jesse and Celine were mostly situated within their subjective time, here, through the use of original soundtrack (another new element for the series) the couple occasionally seem to get placed within the flow of the objective time. Likewise, the static shots of environment or objects in this film, though similar to the ones in *Before Sunrise*, appear as (semi)subjective shots of the characters so that it looks as if the couple themselves are observing the way they are situated within the objective time. In this regard, the distinction between the subjective time and objective time becomes less clear, and the languor of the former and inexorable movement of the latter blend with each other, giving the sense that the subjective time and experiences of Jesse and Celine are spread out over the flow of the objective time.

While thus there is much less temporal tension in this film, in contrast the previous films, tension lies in the drama. And if the temporal duration of the last two films served to increase the couple's attraction for each other while teasing the audience's expectations in *Before Sunset*, here the use of real time (in the car, dinner, walking and hotel scenes) serves to subtly introduce the couple's dissatisfaction with each other and to raise the audience's apprehension in a very prolonged fashion. Therefore, unlike *Before Sunrise* which was structured by temporal dichotomy or *Before Sunset* in which tighter temporal tension more urgently and continuously inflected the narrative and dialogues, here the main tension is dramatic, with the couple's dialogue gradually filling in information gaps and laying out for the audience some specific logistic problems as well as emotional friction between the two that lead to the emotional clash of the hotel scene. In this sense, the temporal flow or the pacing of the film is more rigorously modulated—but for the dramatic purpose. Each scene brings out some emotional tension to the surface while the original score serves to diffuse or alleviate it and signal the end of the scene. (In this sense, the function of the score is twofold: it situates the characters in the objective time while also alleviating dramatic dissonance.) At the end, such ebb and flow of tension is resolved through an explicit discourse apropos of the nature of the conflict, but the resolution also fittingly remains tentative. The ending's relative irrelevance to the passage of time compared to the last two films also means that both the characters' and audience's awareness of the objective time that intimates one's mortality or the eventual limitedness of the subjective time emphasized in dialogues (e.g. "We appear and we disappear") does not get any dramatic transformation or mitigation, even an illusory one. The following analysis examines such relegation of temporal flow to dramatic pacing and its implication.

4.1. Subjective time

The subjective time in *Before Midnight* is marked by a sense of languor, and this comes first from fact that the premise of the story does not produce any clear dramatic question at the beginning. The question that was inherent in the premise of *Before Sunrise* was how much the central couple would get closer and what would happen in the morning, while the question in *Before Sunset* was whether the characters would find some ways to stay together. Here, it is much less clear to the audience where the story is headed or if there will be any conflict (at least till a certain point). Such lack of teleological thread contributes to a mood of languor. The film also does not contain the predecessors' time constraint, the characters' continual movement on foot, or the second film's matching between the real time and reel time. Such aspects make the flow of time—in a neutral sense—languorous.

This sense of time, as well as mood, is established early on in the film by its second sequence, a very long take of the characters' car drive from the airport to their host's house. This more than 13-minute take is broken only once by a momentary insert shot, and the fixity of the shot composition, the mundaneness of the couple's conversation, and the sheer length of the scene continue to create the languor. At the same time, as will be later shown, this element has equally to do with dramatic pacing, a careful control of the flow of information for the sake of drama. Though there are no shots that last as long as this one, other scenes add similar sense of languor because each of them lasts much longer than most of vignettes in *Before Sunrise*.

4.2. Objective time

As for objective time, in *Before Midnight* there is no depiction of it in the manner of *Before Sunrise*, meaning no static shots of the environment or objects that are perceived only by the

audience. At the same time, while such device in the first film enforced a sense that the subjective and objective time are separable, in *Before Midnight*, the two often appear simultaneously, giving one the sense that Jesse and Celine's subjective experience of time is concurrently placed within the objective flow of time. This results mainly from the film's use of non-diegetic music. Here, this paper's definition of such music follows Michel Chion's description that the non-diegetic is "situated in another time and another place than the events directly represented."⁴¹ It should be noted, briefly, that some scholars call for finer distinctions than such traditional dichotomy between diegetic and non-diegetic music. Ben Winters, for instance, notes that some non-diegetic music does not really follow Chion's definition in that the music can be indispensable to the construction of a diegetic world and can almost become a part of it.⁴² As an example, he cites John Williams' score for *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) and observes that taking away the score from the opening action sequence would make it "unnerving." His observation is right, particularly regarding such a film in which the music closely mirrors the action and emotions of each ongoing moment and thus sounds as if it is being created simultaneously as the action unfolds. In the case of *Before Midnight*, however, what is notable is precisely the spatio-temporal gap between the music and the events that Chion mentions, for this gap introduces a subtle sense of temporal distance between the audience and the immediate event on the screen.

The score for this film is not situated in this film's diegetic world in a sense that the musical style is not particularly Greek, either in instrumentation or harmonic progression. Its pop-inflected simplicity on both fronts—made up mainly of the piano, acoustic guitar, upright bass and vibraphone and relying on few diatonic triads

⁴¹ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York and Chichester, 1994), 217.

⁴² Ben Winters, "The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space," *Music & Letters*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (May 2010), 230.

regularly changing on the downbeat—is characteristic of music for American independent films in the 21st century. If the story of Jesse and Celine so far has been marked by a certain feel of timelessness as Linklater mentions in an interview,⁴³ the score's very contemporaneity situates the music in a time slightly different from the diegetic world. The sense that the score is not directly located in the diegetic world also comes from audience expectations: because the first two films did not feature original instrumental score that recurred throughout, the music for this film is registered as extrinsic. Another factor is that the same theme, though its tempo and accompaniment go through minor variations, appears in more or less the same shape throughout the film (seven times), therefore not serving to directly reflect emotions of a given moment but working as a framing device. In this regard, the music not only provides regularity, which adds to the languorous mood, but also a sense of temporal distance between the audience and the characters/event on the screen, as if the tense shifted from the present to present perfect or past. The music pulls the audience away from sharing the subjective time of the couple, and, because the audience is now looking at the couple from a different temporal vantage point, makes the couple look as if they are situated in the objective flow of time.

This can be observed, for instance, in the theme's second appearance. It starts playing after the family arrives at a small supermarket and continues to play over subsequent scenes (the family's arrival to their hosts' house, Jesse playing soccer with others, Celine picking vegetables with their daughters), denoting them as a montage

⁴³ He notes the first film's European setting and lack of pop culture reference as helping that effect. One could also add the use of baroque music in *Before Sunrise* or Nina Simone's song in *Before Sunset*. Some of his other films—like *Dazed and Confused*, *The Newton Boys* (1998), *Boyhood*, *Everybody Wants Some!!*—are opposite in this regard. See: Jessica Kiang, "Berlin Interview: Richard Linklater Talks Making 'Before Midnight' & The 14-Minute-Long Shot," <https://www.indiewire.com/2013/02/berlin-interview-richard-linklater-talks-making-before-midnight-the-14-minute-long-shot-101377/>.

sequence and combining durations of different shots into a single one. The sequence departs from the subjectivity of the main couple and instead gives the audience a more privileged viewpoint, moving from one set of location and time to another slightly different one, and in this sense it resembles the montage sequence at the end of *Before Sunrise*. However, one crucial difference here is that the audience is seeing shots in which Jesse and/or Celine are present rather than absent; as such, the sense one gets from the sequence is that, however briefly, Jesse and Celine are being situated within the flow of the objective time.

At the same time, it should be noted that the score's first appearance *does* mirror and even shape the dramatic pacing of a scene. The music comes on for the first time after Jesse says goodbye to his son, Hank. It is initially melancholic (in Em, relative minor of the key of the main theme), matching Jesse's saddened expression at sending Hank off, and this prelude lasts till Hank goes out of sight. But as Jesse walks away and nears the exit, the melody lines the notes of D7, the dominant chord; and when he steps outside, the main theme enters, switching to a major key (G major), and the simple, regular accompaniment gives the music a sense of steadiness, which is soon answered by comforting entrance of Celine within the same shot. But the quick alteration between G and Em also retains a sense of melancholy. About this theme, one might argue that it is reminiscent of and calls back to Celine's song at the end of *Before Sunset*: her song was also a waltz that alternated between G and Em chords, and both songs' melodies begin with an upward leap from B to D.

Nevertheless, this use remains an exception, and other scenes are marked by the way music puts slight temporal distance between the audience and the characters. This is true of, for instance, a scene in which Jesse and Celine look at the sun going down over a small mountain by the sea (Figs. 4.1–4.4). The score plays over Celine's voice that reflectively observes, "Still there... Still there... Still there... Gone." The movement of the sun—with its disappearance over the

mountain specifically demarcating successive moments of “before” and “after”—is a classic, Aristotelian manifestation of the flow of the objective time, time seen to be passing according to some law existing outside of one’s self. The music, playing over both shots of the sun and the couple, moderately distances the characters from the audience while instead drawing them closer to the objective time visualized in the sun’s movement. As a result, the characters appear as if they are placed within the objective time, even as they are aware of it.

The progression of the objective time—its slow but steady march—inflects Jesse and Celine’s subjective time in another way, through the film’s sense of temporal progression that is stronger than *Before Sunrise*. Purely in terms of the amount of story time that passes within the story between the first and last scenes, this film (about 12 hours) is closer to *Before Sunrise* (about 18 hours) than *Before Sunset* (about 80 minutes). And the way story time is compressed into less than 2 hours of a film’s runtime is similar to the first film as well. However, there is a difference in the method of the condensation. As was analyzed earlier, *Before Sunrise* put together its scenes in such a way that there was not always a strong sense of temporal or narrative succession from one scene to the next, while at the same time it included a flow of time *not* experienced by the characters, the objective time. In *Before Midnight*, each scene *does* lead to the next one either because of the logistical flow (e.g. driving leads to the host’s house, walking leads to the hotel) or more distinct temporal markers of each scene (e.g. darkening of the day visible on the screen). As a result, there is a stronger sense of the objective time’s passage and its inexorability, which *Before Sunrise*, however fleetingly, suspended by countering it with the extensiveness of the subjective time and the couple’s attempt to prolong each moment through infusing it with significance. In *Before Midnight*, however, the languor of the couple’s subjective time does not really contradict with the objective time, and thus the former gets situated in the flow of the latter without

creating a sense of conflict. This synthesis is further enhanced because of the way the music regularly comes in for each transition between scenes, creating the impression that the scenes of the subjective time are spread out over the flow of the objective time which, in a sense, underlies the film as a pedal point. This also means that, when it comes to its attitude towards the passage of the objective time—and its ultimate implication, one's mortality—*Before Midnight* is more resigned than existentially tragic (as in *Before Sunrise*). And although, almost in a reverse fashion to *Before Sunrise*, the conflict appears this time as a dramatic one, as the following section will show, its resolution centers around the way characters relate to each other and not the way they perceive time; therefore, the inexorability of the objective time remains unmodified till the end. In the very last shot of the film, after an indication of reconciliation, the camera slowly starts to pull away from the couple. And as the main theme comes on for one last time on the soundtrack while the couple's conversation is still audible, the subtle insertion of both visual and auditory distance between the characters and the audience creates a sense that, again, the couple's subjective experience of time is put back into the larger flow of the objective time.

4.3. Dramatic pacing

In *Before Midnight*, as in *Before Sunset*, suppressed emotions gradually come to the surface over the course of the film, but the dominant underlying emotions are, instead of attraction, resentment and dissatisfaction. Thus, the very uncertainty of the story's direction at the beginning mentioned earlier, which is protracted by the long car scene, increases the alarm the audience feel when the tension between the couple surfaces for the first time. The audience is made increasingly apprehensive as the tension keeps on resurfacing, leading them to fear the

worst, a break-up. Needless to say, the audience's expectations for romance in the vein of the first two films slowly gets negated. With such underlying tension, the film's less charged moments cannot exist as separate but also obtains a dramatic function, one of dramatic respite. This is demonstrated well in the first two sequences, in the airport and the car.

The film begins in a minor key, with Jesse sending his son away at an airport, and already suggests his life is not perfect. In fact, this separation indirectly casts a shadow over the entire film since Jesse's dissatisfaction at living away from his son turns out to be one of the most important plot points. Furthermore, the ironic juxtaposition between the boy's nonchalance at leaving his father and Jesse's desire to prolong the moment shows how the way two people wish to and choose to spend their time together do not always match like it did in the previous two films, and such bifurcation in two people's subjective experience of time is later shared by Jesse and Celine, an aspect markedly different from the previous films. The following car ride scene, while filling the audience in on the life circumstances of the characters, gradually stresses Jesse's discontent. He is relatively silent at the beginning, reflecting the heaviness of the split a moment ago. And when he says "I have the perfect son. He lives a million miles away," the couple's conversation does not dwell on it yet, Celine answering Jesse's remark with a rejoinder not related to Hank. Jesse complains about it once more ("Saying goodbye to Hank sucked"), but the conversation again shifts immediately to Hank's crush on a girl. It is after a call from Hank that both Jesse and Celine directly start to talk about Jesse's dissatisfaction, which further leads to Celine pre-emptively declaring, "This is where it ends." While the car journey features a lot of complaining from both Celine (about her job) and Jesse (about his son), it is when Celine prophetically mentions the potential end of their relationship that the mood of the film clearly becomes anxious, her remark working as a Chekhov's gun, making the audience feel disquiet. Fortuitously, one of their daughters wakes up and interrupts the conversation, and the idea does not resurface till much later; but the anxiety remains not only for the irresolution but also because

the turn of the events challenges the audience's expectations while its placement at the end of a very long take provides extra emphasis.

The two scenes leading up to the fight in a hotel room work in a similar manner. During the dinner scene, the audience see for the first time the couple interacting with others for an extended period of time, and the presence of both younger and older couples visibly underlines the fact that Jesse and Celine are not fixed in time but age like any other. Here, the kind of romantic love Jesse and Celine shared or hoped to share in the previous films gets questioned, while at the same time their dissatisfaction with each other again occasionally bubbles up, as when Celine mentions Jesse's previous marriage. In particular, near the end of the dinner, most people except for Jesse and Celine express skepticism towards romantic love (e.g. Anna saying "Her big advice was to not to be too consumed with romantic love," or Patrick answering to a question, "Was she soul mate?" with "Well, sounds appealing, but actually your grandmother was more rational than that"). Further, Ariadni notes "I couldn't agree more. I mean, that's the thing that fucks us up, right? This idea of a soul mate, of someone who will come to complete us and save us from having to take care of ourselves?" During the beginning of Ariadni's speech, the backs of Jesse and Celine in the foreground frame Ariadni in the middle ground, and then there is a reaction shot of the couple appearing uncomfortable and not looking at Ariadni in the eyes (Figs. 4.5–4.6). Such choice of the camera position and editing subtly emphasize the way others' doubt about romantic love applies to Jesse and Celine's idea of love as well as the couple's awareness of it. Natalia's monologue that finishes the sequence is similarly filmed from behind Jesse and Celine, the two's silhouette out of focus at the sides of the frame and framing Natalia at the center; she notes how even her memory of someone she deeply loved is ephemeral and fading away, and further connects that ephemerality to sunrise, sunset, and life. The speech of course relates to Jesse and Celine's relationship as well, particularly because of her emphatic use of the words "sunrise" and "sunset," a fact not lost on the couple themselves. Rather than dispelling

the dramatic anxiety created in the car drive scene, her speech suggests that the main theme of this film is going to be the testing of durability of Jesse and Celine's relationship.

It is also worth noting that it was Ariadni and her husband, Stefanos, who had offered to take care of Jesse and Celine's daughters and provided the couple with a hotel room and a night to spend together, alone. Thus, they indirectly encouraged the couple to face each other, to acknowledge the fact that they are at a crucial, transitional moment, and to go through their frustrations and problems so that, in Jesse's words, the couple could eventually come out at "the other side of the woods" or get out of the liminal phase *together*. Here, one might think of the fact that the two characters' names are associated with the myth of a labyrinth. Of course, in the Greek mythology, Ariadne helps Theseus get out of a labyrinth with her thread. As for Stefanos, in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, novels that very likely have influenced the trilogy,⁴⁴ one significant character—and the protagonist in the former—is named Stephen Dedalus; and in the myth the labyrinth was created by Daedalus. Therefore, the characters of Ariadni and Stefanos can be seen as a provider of a maze while simultaneously suggesting the possibility of getting out of it.

Among several sequences in this film, the next scene of the couple's walk to their hotel is closest to the earlier films in style, with the two walking and having a conversation as the camera operator retreats backwards, a similarity recognized by the characters themselves ("how long's it been since we just wandered around bullshitting?"). Again, however, unlike in the previous films, because of earlier foreshadowing of possible conflict between Jesse and Celine, even more digressive parts of the couple's dialogue are charged with anticipatory anxiety. In fact, the anxiety is increased when aggression briefly reappears with a new kind of information, possible infidelity between the two. Though the topic quickly disappears and does not get taken up again

⁴⁴ Many have noted the fact that Jesse and Celine meet for the first time on Bloomsday, the day the story of *Ulysses* takes place. See: Johnson, *Richard Linklater*, 6-7.

till much later (as with the topic about Hank), like Celine's earlier declaration about possible end of their relationship, the impact does not go away. Of course, the anxiety does not get alleviated by the couple's frequent references to mortality, either directly (e.g. death of Jesse's grandmother, Celine's anecdote about her now deceased friend) or indirectly (e.g. reference to *Voyage to Italy*, observing the sunset). While the most duration of *Before Sunset* might also be characterized as anticipatory in the way that the felt sense of urgency called for its alleviation, such process depended more on subtle changes in the way the couple related to each other at each passing present moment than on a future event. Further, the story did not foreshadow any singular event as *Before Midnight* does and instead focused the audience's attention on the present (rather than the future) through its matching of real time and reel time. In this film, in contrast, as the story nears the couple's fight in a hotel room, the dramatic anxiety created by foreshadowing makes the audience's relation to the film increasingly anticipatory.

At the same time, such tension and orientation towards the future get occasionally softened by the score, used to signal an end of a scene. Its extrinsic character, which was analyzed earlier, moderates the temporal immediacy of a preceding scene, suspending—and then very slowly mitigating—the tension and anxiety. But unlike in *Before Sunset*, in which the passage of time slowly brought back the couple's love and thus led the story to its resolution, the passage of time here only serves to revive the couple's discontent, however the score might try to ameliorate it. And the dramatic tension finally explodes when the couple arrive at a hotel. The long, open fight is presented in its full duration so that the audience can observe its entire trajectory just as the audience could observe the couple's restoration of intimacy in full in *Before Sunset*. Accordingly, whereas the shot-reverse shot at the end of *Before Sunset* emphasized the intimacy of the apartment and the emotions of the couple that were playfully kept indeterminate, here, the static and distant camera—also in contrast with earlier scenes like the dinner scene which were

filmed either with a hand-held camera or Steadicam—emphasizes the presence of walls between rooms (particularly when the two are in different rooms), objects like glasses and table lamps, and dour monotony of the wallpaper. Such emphasis on the distance—between Jesse and Celine and between the characters and the audience—was prepared, both in terms of style and plot, by the shots at the beginning of Hank leaving Jesse (Figs. 4.7–4.9).

After the fight, again, in contrast to the previous film's indeterminacy, the broken relationship is mended by Jesse's explicit discourse. In other words, if the previous two films were about both romantic relationship and the way people (both the audience and characters) experience the passage of time, this film focuses only on the former. While it is true that it was the passage of time that brought the couple to this state of emergency, that long process had already happened before this film began and is not experienced by the audience. Thus, even though the theme of aging is foregrounded by dialogues and actors' matured appearance, it does not interact with the final resolution of the drama in a way that is perceptible to the audience. In addition, while the successive shots of objects at the very end of the couple's fight (Figs. 4.10–4.12) might appear as a variation on the montage sequence at the end of *Before Sunrise*, rather than being from the perspective of non-person and almost visualizing the flow of the objective time, here they are semi-POV shots from Jesse's point of view, each shot of object preceded by Jesse's look. Thus, if such sequence evokes Ozu's use of similar shots and, as discussed earlier, their representation of "the cosmic" according to Deleuze or the existence of the objective time, one salient difference is that such observation is not only registered by the audience but by the character as well, as if Jesse is contemplating on the way he is situated in the objective time.

However, as noted, the essence of the dramatic resolution in *Before Midnight* centers on the way one relates to another rather than the way one perceives time. In this way, the couple's conscious recognition of their problems and acceptance of each other put

Before Midnight in the company of what Stanley Cavell termed as “the comedy of remarriage.”⁴⁵ By this, he meant a comedy in which “the drive of its plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*.”⁴⁶ The significance of making such distinction for Cavell is that the couple’s divorce—be it legal or emotional—“raises the question of the legitimacy of marriage” and the films become “parables of a phase of the development of consciousness at which the struggle is for the reciprocity or equality of consciousness between a woman and a man.”⁴⁷ In this sense, the couple’s eventual reunion is not only the dramatic equilibrium Tzvetan Todorov mentioned but “a genuine forgiveness” that leads to “the acknowledgement of the otherness,” which has, importantly, ethical and social implications in that it posits the ideal way one can relate to another.⁴⁸ And for the characters to not merely arrive at this conclusion but actually earn it, the path cannot be through “complications unknown to the characters that a conclusion can sort out,” just as what the characters have to learn “cannot come as news from others.”⁴⁹ Rather, dramatic irony is avoided so that the knowledge the characters and the audience have about the problems is equal. And the characters attain a dramatic resolution not by changing external circumstances for the better but changing internally—by modifying how they perceive their own experiences, relationships, and the world. And the avoidance of dramatic irony here means that the audience is encouraged to vicariously experience such internal change together with the characters.

⁴⁵ He puts seven films under the genre: *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940), *The Lady Eve* (Leo McCarey, 1941), *Adam’s Rib* (George Cukor, 1949).

⁴⁶ Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19, 102.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 240.

The ending of *Before Midnight* is such a kind of ending. Unlike in *Before Sunset*, in which one action (deciding to stay together) seemed to dispel all other problems, the main source of the couple's friction, the fact that Jesse lives far away from his son, is established in such a way that there is logistically no simple solution that will make every party involved happy. And further because the couple had been together for a long time, deciding to stay together is not a new circumstance externally brought to the characters but rather a conscious recommitment made by the characters themselves. This emphasis on the way a relationship is made and sustained by the characters' own perception—rather than external factors—is strengthened by the fact that Jesse and Celine are not legally married, a fact revealed earlier in the scene in the Byzantine chapel. Thus, the couple has to mend the fracture between them not on the level of plot, action, mood or the way they perceive the subjective and objective time, but of the way they relate to each other. More specifically, in a slightly paradoxical manner similar to *The Awful Truth* analyzed by Cavell, Jesse and Celine have to change—or at least examine—the way they relate to each other and, then, recognize and reassert that, despite all the changes in their life situations, the part of them that made them fall for each other has *not* changed.

This involves self-examination of their own past, and indeed both Jesse and Celine recount stories about *Before Sunrise* and *Before Sunset*. They are aware of how special those incidents were just as well as the audience, but they also feel they have changed and are not the exact same persons (“If we were meeting for the first time today on a train, would you find me attractive?”). This estrangement from one's past self is directly related to a question of self and how much of it remains constant over time, a theme brought up by several characters, Patrick even mentioning the famous Greek aphorism “know thyself”. While such theme was also present in *Before Sunset*,

particularly in a dialogue about continuity and discontinuity of identity over time,⁵⁰ in that film, Jesse and Celine did not have to explicitly assert their sameness because the nine-year gap in a sense preserved the way they felt towards each other intact; it was only a question of time for that underlying emotions to resurface. That is not the case in *Before Midnight*. The fact that the couple have experienced the passage of time more or less together means their relationship itself has gone through a long process of changes, which would have been so subtle that the couple might not be perfectly aware of it themselves. One very obvious example is the contrast in Celine's entrance between *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*. The former emphasized the element of surprise—both for the audience and Jesse—by relying on editing to introduce her. Before her entrance, Jesse has been occupying the screen time alone for a while, and her absence teased the audience's expectation to see the both of the main characters from the first film. But when Jesse starts to talk about an idea for his next book, its intriguing content grabs the audience's attention momentarily away from wondering about the current status of Jesse and Celine's relationship; at the same time, several shots of Celine from *Before Sunrise* start to get intercut again (this was done a bit earlier as well), and this intrusion suggests that Jesse is actually talking about how he remembers Celine. While the audience's attention is thus led away from the present moment and directed in trying to figure out the relationship between Jesse's idea and flashback scenes, and while the editing goes back and forth between shot of Jesse in the bookstore (the present moment) and shots from the first film (the past), one cut, unexpectedly, shows Celine in the same book store. It is both startling and satisfactory (Figs. 4.13–4.17). Because this shot is preceded by several shots of her from *Before Sunrise*, there is some pause in the audience's mind before they recognize that the shot does show Celine in the same bookshop, in the same space and time as Jesse. And the suddenness that is inherent in the

⁵⁰ Celine notes how reading her old diaries made her aware of the continuity of the self: "the core and the way I was feeling things is exactly the same. It made me realize I haven't changed much at all."

technique of a cut matches Jesse's surprise. In *Before Midnight*, on the other hand, as was mentioned earlier, she gets introduced within a relatively long single shot that starts from inside the airport: the camera first shows Jesse's wistful expression at separation with his son in medium close-up, follows him as he turns away and heads for the exit, goes out of the airport with him, slowly turns right following Jesse, and, preceded only a few seconds by Celine's voice on the telephone on the soundtrack, finally reveals her, leaning against a car and waiting for Jesse (Figs. 4.18–4.22). Though her appearance is a satisfying moment for the audience, the seamless way she gets reintroduced underplays the moment. What was singular at the time of *Before Sunset* both for Jesse and the audience has become ordinary for Jesse by the time of *Before Midnight*.

Thus, in order for Jesse and Celine to reclaim or reassert their love for each other, they have to self-consciously examine themselves and recognize what has or has not changed. Such self-examination requires self-reflexivity from the characters. As discussed in the section for *Before Sunset*, this was already present in the first film and got more foregrounded in the second one; *Before Midnight* extends it with a similar premise that Jesse has now written a book based on *Before Sunset* as well. As the earlier discussion mentioned, the existence of books based on the events in *Before Sunrise*—and now *Before Sunset* as well—is more ontologically independent than pure memory, and thus Jesse and Celine's relation to those events become closer to the way the audience relates to *Before Sunrise*. While memory is directly connected to individuals and never fixed, going through unnoticeable changes, a book, as long as it is being published, can exist in its original form without any connection to the author. It is also open to the public (like Jesse's writer friends and a hotel clerk in *Before Midnight*), not exclusive to the author, and can reflect and contain desires of both the author and the reader that might be either realistic or unrealistic. And the way Jesse and Celine relate to their own memories of the events of those two films, which should probably be with fondness, get

conflated with the way they relate to the books, which is with some objectivity and suspicion because of the aforementioned separateness and potential wishful elements. Celine's relation to Jesse's books is particularly more critical and contentious in *Before Midnight*: at one point during the fight, she even declares, "you may never, ever use me or anything I say or do in one of your fucking books again." Though it is true that memories from distant past can sometimes seem estranged and become an object of wonder—did it really happen?—the presence of books for the couple makes this aspect of memories even stronger. Thus, the fact that their memories, though in a modified way, exist as entities separate from themselves makes the self-examination of their past easier as well as severer for them.

In relation, it is also notable that Jesse's books are regarded as semi-fictional rather than non-fictional because this allows the characters to emphasize their own relative authenticity—to assert that the books are not real but, in contrast, *they* are. Indeed, the main cause for Celine's dissatisfaction with these books is that others assume Celine and the love interest in the books are basically the same, and she tries to correct a hotel clerk that makes such an assumption: "people assume it's me, but it's not me at all. He's [Jessie's] got a big imagination." At the same time, such emphasis on realness encourages the characters (and the filmmakers) to question what this "real" actually means—to ask which parts of the characters and the story are true in the real world outside of the film. The answer for them is twofold. One is the characters' existence as a temporal—and thus mortal—one, a fact suggested in *Before Sunrise*, extended in *Before Sunset*, and then reinforced by *Before Midnight*. This is a painful notion, both to the audience and the characters (Jesse asks, "Is this really my life? Like, is it happening right now?"). It disallows the illusory yet consoling sense of extra-temporality so many artworks provide and refutes the sense of timelessness that was, however momentarily, suggested by the subjective time of *Before Sunrise* or the final scene of *Before Sunset*. As noted earlier, the drama of *Before Midnight* does not modify this fact. Just as the sun went down while Jesse and Celine watched, and just as the

day turned to the evening and eventually night, time slowly but steadily passes on in this film.

The second thing that is suggested as genuine and real is Jesse and Celine's love. The idea is stated most explicitly by Jesse: "if you want true love, then this is it. This is real life. It's not perfect, but it's real." Unlike in the previous films, this love does not spontaneously renew or sustain itself. Rather, as described earlier in relation to Cavell's analysis of "the comedy of remarriage," it has to be consciously maintained. On the other hand, this also means that their love *can* survive as long as both Jesse and Celine recommit to it—as long as they recognize its significance, imperfection and fragility and affirm it. And this is what they achieve at the end.

Such recommitment is also what Cavell calls "the acceptance of repetition."⁵¹ He observes that:

"As redemption by suffering does not depend on something that has already happened, so redemption by happiness does not depend on something that has yet to happen; both depend on a faith in something that is always happening, day by day."⁵²

Similarly, if *Before Sunset* was built around something that was yet to happen, the return to *Before Sunrise*, Jesse and Celine's final assent to each other in *Before Midnight* is a hard-earned recognition and affirmation of what they already have—and what they always had. This is signaled when Celine, after a long pause following Jesse's monologue, chooses to reply not with a comparable serious remark but with a reprise of the earlier "author-fan" routine. Her playacting suggests not only her awareness but acceptance of Jesse's worse tendency, while the fact that this is a reprise indicates Celine's return to what the couple always had. Thus, the drama of *Before Midnight* reaches at "redemption" of Jesse and Celine's relationship and suggests that it can—and will—continue.⁵³

⁵¹ Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: the Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, 241.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ While it is true that none of the couple's logistical problems—like Jesse's son's absence—is solved, that

At the same time, it should be noted again that such an ending does not redeem the characters from the passage of time. *Voyage to Italy* (1954), a film Celine mentions, provides a good contrast. Like in *Before Midnight*, a middle aged-couple go through a crisis in their relationship while traveling, get reminded of their own mortality, and in the end come back to each other. But the nature of the ending is different in that, as James Naremore noted, it “ends with a Joycean epiphany” rather than conscious, discursive working out of the problems they have.⁵⁴ And, after repeated images of death, the suddenness of the final reunion implies transcendence—almost miracle—that human connection can provide. But such conception of human connection is closer to *Before Sunrise* in which the main couple’s love and subjective time were pitted against the inescapable flow of the objective time. In *Before Midnight*, as noted earlier, the subjective time and objective time seem to interweave with each other and do not produce a sense of conflict, and further the nature of dramatic resolution is unconnected to the objective time. This is one notable difference from Cavell’s observations. He notes how the end of *The Awful Truth* and the couple’s acceptance of repetition are reminiscent of “Nietzsche’s vision of becoming a child and overcoming revenge [which] is tied up with the achievement of a new vision of time, or a new stance toward it, an acceptance of Eternal Recurrence.” By extension, the couple in “the comedy of remarriage” learn “to inhabit time anew” when they accept repetition, and each present moment becomes a source of not only romantic but temporal redemption—each moment becomes eternal. However, such Transcendentalist view of the present moment, often expressed by characters in Linklater’s other films,⁵⁵ is not available here.

Celine’s way of acceptance is ambiguous and never explicit, and that the narrative remains open-ended, it also seems the case that there is no better argument for the continuance of relationship than the one Jesse provides. And because Celine seems to (or must be able to) recognize this—that what Jesse provided was an ultimatum—it appears plausible to regard Celine’s acceptance, even such an indirect one, as also definite and (semi)final rather than provisional.

⁵⁴ James Naremore, “The Return of *The Dead*,” In *An Invention Without a Future: Essays on Cinema*. (California: University of California Press, 2013), 232-233.

⁵⁵ Examples include: “It’s constant... the moment. It’s just... It’s like it’s always right now” (*Boyhood*); “There’s only one instant, and it’s right now. And it’s eternity” (*Waking Life*).

Having decided to foreground the fact that characters/actors/human beings age and to be objective about the effects the passage of time have on characters, it becomes increasingly difficult for filmmakers to render a notion that, subjectively or phenomenologically speaking, time does not really exist or that time is eternal. Accordingly, the ending of *Before Midnight* only redeems the couple's romance—but not the fact that they are temporal.

4.4. Figures from *Before Midnight*

4.1



4.2



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4.4



4.5



4.6



4.7



4.8



Before Midnight

4.9



4.10



4.11



4.12



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5. Conclusion

This paper examined the way the passage of time is used and depicted in Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy. To do so, it relied on both formal analysis—or close reading—and interpretation. While these three films are not overtly stylish and, perhaps because of this, have not received much scholarly attention in terms of cinematic techniques, this paper applied close readings and demonstrated how there are in fact many intriguing stylistic modulations within and between these three films. At the same time, this paper did not limit itself to describing and categorizing the films' stylistic choices in purely formal terms but also attempted to interpret them, to seek what such differences could mean, to explicate their relation to themes, and to analyze how they shaped the passage of time. While this paper acknowledged the fact that interpretation could not produce absolute truth, it also argued, following Rodowick, that such an aspect only becomes a fault if one requires the humanities to function as the sciences do.

Analyses of three films showed how the use and depiction of time shifted throughout the series. In *Before Sunrise*, there was a contrast between the subjective and objective time, expressed through different layers including structure and mise en scène. The subjective experience of time was seen to be expansive and almost never-ending, but the film implied such a sense to be illusory or momentary by also depicting the objective flow of time, and the contrast resulted in a sense of finitude. This was augmented by the fact that *Before Sunrise* was initially a stand-alone film and thus the film's runtime could be said to be the only duration within which Jesse and Celine existed. *Before Sunset*, however, mitigated such a notion by continuing Jesse and Celine's story and thus extending their fictive existence. The film also elaborated on the first film's interest in the experience of subjective time by matching the real time and reel time, the time it took for the audience to see the film and the time that passed within the story. This

technique was complemented by the premise that the two characters did not have much time to spend together to the extent that, unlike in *Before Sunrise*, the time frame was indicated to be as short as the film's runtime. The experience of the subjective time, accordingly, was charged with a sense of urgency. The change in the mood of the film, however, gradually and subtly restored the previous film's sense of subjective time—and the film ended just when the mood of *Before Sunrise* seemed to have fully returned. By the time of *Before Midnight*, such singularity of the events of the previous two films—as well as their time together in general—has worn off for the couple. Mirroring this change in the characters' perception of their time together, in *Before Midnight*, while each scene was comparatively long it was marked by the mood of languor, and there was at the same time a stronger sense of temporal progression—or sometimes lapse—from one scene to the next. And even as couple were experiencing their time subjectively, the film simultaneously placed them in the flow of the objective time through the use of the original score, thereby emphasizing the way the inexorable movement of the objective time contains and even inflects the subjective time. On the other hand, the audience's experience of the passage of time—which was a distinct element in the previous films—is used more in the service of a drama, an examination of the durability of romantic relationship. Accordingly, the final resolution redeems Jesse and Celine's relationship towards each other, but another running thread of the series, their (and the audience's) relation to time does not get affected, either positively or negatively. In other words, love's redemptive power in the film does not extend to the characters' existence as a temporal being.

Taken together, three films reveal a delicate, artistic balancing between exaltation of personal experience, or one's subjective time, and acknowledgement of one's temporality, or the presence of the objective flow of time. If the idea of the objective time remained rhetorical or at least abstract in *Before Sunrise*, and if the idea in *Before Sunset* became more acutely felt after nine-year gap but was nevertheless dispelled at the end with the return of the mood from the past,

then, *Before Midnight* qualifies such notions. The objective time is no longer abstract, and its effect can be felt in the faces of the characters or their drastically changed life circumstances; and, unlike *Before Sunset* which ended with the couple completely lost in their subjective time together, *Before Midnight* ends with the couple's subjective time simultaneously placed within the objective flow of time, the flow of time that did not interact with the central drama but nevertheless served as a backdrop throughout the film. Thus, the series' focus on the subjective experience can be seen as underlaid by an increasingly felt presence of objective time. In this respect, while Roland Barthes remarked that the cinema was "in no way melancholic" because it was "protensive" and "sustained by the presumption that, as Husserl [said], 'the experience [would] constantly continue to flow by in the same constitutive style,'"56 the *Before* series—and the ending of *Before Midnight* in particular—finds melancholy in the very same protensity by giving the lie to such a notion. Though the open ending of *Before Midnight* might suggest pure protensity if it was a stand-alone film, this is modified by one's knowledge of the first two films and recognition that the characters are placed in the objective flow of time—that they are temporal—like everything that exists. The sense of protensity, therefore, is mixed with an awareness that it *will* have an end.

Finally, combination of formal analysis and interpretation provides one a chance to become more attentive to the intricacies of films, to examine how meanings are—or can be—made, and to engage with artwork in a more creative and interactive way. If there is any value in such a study as this, it is to suggest different ways of looking at a film, art work, or any other thing one cares to look at and examine.

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, Hill and Wang, 2010), 89-90.

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