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THE ROLE OF OBJECTS AND SITUATION MODELS IN FILM TRANSPARENCY
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF FILM

Abstract: This paper deals with the problem of how viewers interpret feature films. It explains the role of mental models called situation models in interpreting diegetic worlds of fiction. By using P. F. Strawson's interpretation that persons and material objects occupy a central position among logical subjects when we think about our world, and associating the knowledge of diegetic worlds of fiction with the knowledge of reality, we propose that these two can be compared and thus offer a better understanding of the role of extended networks of objects in viewing film narratives. Recognizing sight gags as particularly complex narrative figures, the paper describes the doubling of situation models by viewers interpreting specific sight gags. A result of this doubling is the incongruity registered by the viewer, who thus gains an analytical opening into the structure and functioning of individual situation models.

Keywords: cinema, viewer, diegesis, situation model, transparency, object, interpretation, reality

1. FICTION AND KNOWLEDGE

In this work we aspire to explain the cognitive processes that the viewer undergoes during the watching of a feature film by reference to the *situation model* that the viewer constructs. Developed in other fields, the *situation model* notion is adapted in this article to the field of film studies and philosophy. Our main premise is that contexts influence viewing, and we have taken the position that the context can be found within, as well as outside the narrative field of a specific film. Our impetus was to explain what transpires in the moments when the narrative introduces contradictory explanations for the existence and conduct of the "same" set of objects in a particular narrative situation. In

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these conditions, incongruity arises between two different explanations. Each individual explanation is based on the existence and behavior of objects that make that particular explanation. This means that rather than being solely focused on the outcome of the epistemological clash of the two opposed matrices, viewers have the opportunity to reinvestigate their relation to the significant number of objects that they have already formulated as semi-independently existing entities in their mind.

In his short films Buster Keaton repeatedly played with the depth of space in constructing a range of what we call sight-gags. In *The Paleface* (Buster Keaton and Eddie Cline, 1921), for example, the horse and the horseman suddenly and unexpectedly separate into two. First, Buster mounts the horse, which is partly hidden by a bush. The *mise en scène* is supposed to unavoidably bring together two separate objects, the human body and the horse, and it leads the viewer towards the familiar "destination," a mounted, stationary, or moving horse. The viewer's mode of understanding has already been strongly conditioned by westerns, which were popular at the time. The ending of such a shot could be twofold, the mounted horse could remain stationary, or the rider and the horse could ride out of the shot. But the simultaneous presence of both solutions is logically impossible, as well as it is impossible for the rider to be separated from the horse, which the viewer had already seen him mount. Second, as Buster lands on the horse's back, the animal begins to move, but as it leaves the shot it becomes apparent that there are two horses, and that Buster has actually jumped onto a different animal than we had assumed, and in the wrong direction too, facing the backside of the horse. It is a twofold mistake, but not the same one. Both the viewer and Buster have mistaken one horse for the other, but their points of view must have been different because of the obviously different conditions of perception. An apparently simple trick, but the separation of the entity horseman-horse into two shows an extent to which the diegetic space is conditioned by the objects it contains. In this case the functional and visual unity of an object in a close-up flattens the space, while the consequent doubling of the horse provides the uncanny effect of the doubling of the concept, which has been firmly connected to its spatial and temporal coordinates within the diegetic space.[2] At the same time, we discover how thin is the line that separates a character's from the viewer's point of view, and that the borders of the self may become very flexible and porous during the

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2   A similar effect is frequently used in cinema for various ghosts, spirits, supranatural objects, which spring out of an already established object, mostly a human body. However, there an absence of the complete spatial rearrangement generates a different response. This emphasizes the extent to which interpretation of each particular shot is a result of its being incorporated into the interpretative field of the viewer's consciousness, in very small segments, at least in its basic spatial orientation.

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watching of a feature film.

When one approaches the phenomenon of fiction, some of the first and basic questions concern the nature, or the parameters of existence of the diegetic world. We ask: what kind of world is it? And consequently, how can we describe its relation to reality, consciousness, and the self? At the beginning, we need to consider if it is possible to at least give an approximate answer to this question. We need to ask ourselves whether we can be positive that such a widespread and omnipresent phenomenon can be found to have common features coherent enough to make it a topic of examination. In order to approach the issue, it may be advisable to find a connection between the fictive world and the mind, which is closest to some other basic functions of human consciousness. Although there are some fundamental differences, we have chosen to discuss fiction as a particular kind of knowledge.

At first sight, there is a significant obstacle to this: how are we to ascertain the truth-value of statements pertaining to our supposed fictional "knowledge?" To begin with, the series of conclusions regarding the diegetic world is not presented to us in the form of statements, but this need not be a problem. As Ayer points out, our taking that something is the case, does not necessarily involve the making of a conscious judgment.[3] Still, if one of the constitutive elements in the definition of knowledge since Plato is that it is true, while its truth-value can be confirmed by independently established procedures, which often includes corroboration by other witnesses, we certainly run into problems when we need to select a reliable group of these. Instead, we need to rely on discourse about fiction, and the fictional world related to it. This inability to positively determine meaning is what makes it intriguing, though it shouldn't drive us to conclude that no approximate consequential answer is possible. One of the reasons why we care about the meaning of fictional works is because they have many characteristics of knowledge, as they generate a more or less coherent set of conclusions of various degrees of certainty, related to the worlds of fiction. The complexity of this network of stratified facts is probably the most important similarity between our respective understanding and participation in fiction and in the lifeworld. Austin notes, "It is, I think, the problems of sureness and certainty, which philosophers tend (if I am not mistaken) to neglect, that have considerably exercised scientists, while the problem of 'reality', which philosophers have cultivated, does not exercise them."[4] We can add that the problems of sureness and certainty have certainly exercised film viewers, in and outside of the theater, and seem to be crucial for

3   A. J. Ayer, *The Problems of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, London 1956, p. 12.

4   J. L. Austin, "Other Minds", *Philosophical Papers*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1970, p. 94.

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understanding how film fiction functions, while, when it appears, the problem of "reality" tends to be closely related to the problems of sureness and certainty. However, unlike in science, the goal of fiction is not to eliminate uncertainty, while increasing the precision of language as much as possible. Or, it is not its only, and probably not even its primary goal.

The aspirations of science and fiction may be remote, but one cannot fail to notice that in regard to knowledge, both find the area between knowledge and various degrees of belief the most attractive for their operation. The border between what we are quite sure about, which for Austin represents the cognitive degree of knowledge, and what we believe, or only suspect, is one of the lines along which consciousness divides various objects which represent the diegetic world. It doesn't only group them; it positions itself among them for the process of sorting out the remaining portion of the diegesis. This "positioning" is not influenced only by the cognitive aspirations of the viewer, but also by emotions and values, by what could be called a perceived existential importance of objects in the presented conflict, and something as obscure and difficult to define as aesthetic criteria. In this complex development, the basic task may vary, but it is generally influenced by the need for some kind of completion, by the passage through the diegetic world that assures a form of meaningful existence, as well as by the pleasure principle. The various parameters can be seen as tools that help the mind extract and evaluate the objects of the world. The habitual parameters develop into a more or less autonomous projective explanatory power of consciousness, thus having each object pass through the network of identifying and evaluating procedures. These procedures are far from being transparent for the viewer. We may say that there are two things which influence their level of transparency: a) the distance between the values and parameters informing these procedures and those more or less self-consciously adopted and championed by viewers for themselves (we could explain this as a distance between actual and projected motivation, and b) the ability to follow the interaction between the procedural tools, the world, and the objects it contains.

As noted by Austin and others, there can be different ways of knowing things, such as knowing facts vs. disposition to behave in certain ways, and we can be sure that fictional knowledge involves various types of knowing. It is always a mixture of different ways of knowing, inasmuch as knowing facts itself involves knowledge of how to do things, which is in some form necessary in order to apprehend the facts. Simultaneously, film viewing presents us with the case of a suspended or otherwise channeled tendency to behave. All this does not necessarily make it different from the knowledge of the everyday

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world, where we know something if we can do it, not if we actually do it. Still, fictional knowledge is much more inactive, at least while the performance lasts, and if any action is taken, it is in regard to some other and not fictional objects of knowledge.[5] Thus, we can closely connect this knowledge to the suspended or otherwise transformed will to behave, since knowledge of the fictional world cannot be reduced solely to the acquaintance with distant facts.

For a long time perception was, next to the mathematical and logical truths, one of the main sources of knowledge. One of the main disputes among philosophers was whether infallibility is a necessary condition for knowledge, in which case knowledge involving the senses would merit the status of mere belief. The terminological discussion about the meaning of "knowing," or the border between knowledge proper and belief is not as important for us as the debate about sureness and certainty of perceptual knowledge. As Austin demonstrates, unless we want to introduce a meaning of knowing, which significantly differs from the everyday use of the term, we must accept that we are liable to be mistaken even when we say that we know.

Still, despite admitting that we can say for someone they know something while allowing the possibility of their mistake, some philosophers consider the logical necessity of knowledge to be imposing enough to warrant the introduction of the additional, "strong" sense of knowing, which does not allow the possibility of mistake. For example Norman Malcolm's strong sense of knowing involves mathematical as well as empirical truths.[6] Since he centers his enquiry on the use of "knowing" in everyday communication, his insistence on the specific weight of some empirical truths points out the special place of certain empirical statements, and their cognitive equivalents, in the functioning of individual consciousness. He essentially divides empirical statements into those representing knowledge in the weak and strong senses. As a surprising example of knowledge in the weak sense he cites his conviction that he has a heart, while his conviction about the existence of an ink bottle, which he sees in front of him on his desk, would represent knowledge in the strong sense. He would, as he claims, under no circumstances accept the proof that this ink bottle did not now exist, while he could somehow allow the possibility that his body functioned without a heart.

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5   Here we could distinguish between fiction that evokes a certain tendency to behave in order to stymie, or preempt it enacted in reality, and the one supposed to encourage the viewer to act consequently. The inability to "correctly" position oneself in this case can result in all kinds of misunderstandings and misguided action.

6   Norman Malcolm, "Knowledge and Belief", in: *Knowledge and Belief*, A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), Oxford University Press, London, 1967, pp. 69-82.

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Regardless of whether his opinion is justified or not, Malcolm's view is significant because it expresses a deep conviction in a strong link between the awareness of sensual evidence and infallible knowledge. It implies a peculiarity of at least some sense-statements, which consequently ensure the directness of knowledge. This view is far from undisputed; Austin for example negates it, disallowing even the existence of the class of sense-statements.[7] Instead, he focuses on the problem of recognition, which is in his opinion pushed aside when the directness of what would amount to sense-statements is discussed: "recognizing, at least in this sort of case, consists in seeing, or otherwise sensing, a feature or features which we are sure are

similar to something noted (and usually named) before, on some earlier occasion in our experience."[8]

Two factors that for Austin crucially influence recognition are experience and acumen. They both have their present and past aspects: I need to have learned to recognize a particular object (fact) in order to recognize this one. In film there are obviously two different sources of my past experience: film and reality. I don't need to have previously seen the object on film (or photography, or painting), in order to recognize it now: it is often sufficient to have seen it in reality. At the same time, my previous cinematic experience has two distinct sources, the film that I have been watching until this moment, and earlier film viewing.

2. OBJECTS AND TRANSPARENCY IN FILM

The need to recognize an object, in order to establish, continue, or modify the existence of a concept in a longer cinematic form is one of the basic activities performed by the viewer during the watching of a feature film. The place of various objects in human thinking and linguistic communication has been the topic of interest of many philosophers of knowledge. For example, P. F. Strawson believes that material bodies and persons, who are in philosophical terminology called particulars, occupy a central position among logical subjects when we think about our world.[9] For Strawson there seems to be no history in this development, and in his essay he strives to describe how things are, and seem to have always, or at least for a very long time, been with human knowledge. Strawson sees material bodies and persons, as sources of primary concepts in

7   J. L. Austin, "Other Minds", p. 94.

8   Ibid., p. 94

9   P. F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen & Co Ltd, London 1965, p. 11.

our thinking, while other elements of our conceptual scheme must be seen as secondary to them. He presupposes that humans operate within a unified spatio-temporal structure, which is our condition of knowing the particulars. In such a structure identifying and reidentifying various particulars is one of the basic procedures. This means that we are able to communicate because we can talk about the same or similar objects at different points in time. Although Strawson describes how primary particulars function in our linguistic communication, he clearly leaves a way to using his deliberations in cinema open, as he states that he must go beyond pure description of language to explain how language communication occurs. So, his philosophy of knowledge could be seen as describing in part pre-linguistic understanding of our world, applicable to other modes of expression and communication.

The notion of transparency in cinema describes the viewer's acceptance of the diegetic world as reality; it includes the suspension of disbelief, and the attendant immersion of the viewer into this world. According to David Bordwell, narration guides the viewer through the process of apprehending events on the screen.[10] There is a range of narrating practices, known to the viewer, by which narration of a Hollywood feature movie guides the viewer's attention towards creating an idea of a diegetic world. George M. Wilson assumes that the viewer accepts information about this world as "objective," and this is the way it has been treated here.[11] This viewer, unlike some of the alleged viewers of early cinema, knows that the diegetic world is really not objective, but still establishes a "transparent" relation to it. That is to say, the viewer during the process of watching a film sees the diegetic world as having a specific kind of objectivity. If this is so, then the question why at all use the term "objective" becomes prominent. Wilson's answer is similar to the one given by so many film theoreticians before him, which is that the impression of reality the movie has on the viewer is so strong, so varied, and akin to the impression that reality itself has on the viewer, that it deserves to be so called.

In general, we can say that there are two different claims about transparency of the cinematic image, one stronger, which tends to regard the film image as an imprint of reality, or a corresponding analogy, and the other one that insists on correlation between the cinematic image and impression of reality. Bazin was a strong and influential proponent of the former, and it has become almost obligatory for French film theorists to deal with this problem long after he died, whether they agreed with him, or not. Even

10   David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 1985.

11   George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light. Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1988.

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Christian Metz, one of the most influential theoreticians who introduced semiology in the field of film theory, had paid homage to his teacher André Bazin.[12] In his early works he claimed that "semiologist can begin with his work on the other side of analogy" while he asked if it were possible that the idea of analogy enables us to say "that there is nothing else that can be said about an image except that it resembles the original."[13]

Bazin wrote in "The Myth of Total Cinema" about "photographic realism" and, according to Wilson, even if it is not entirely possible to fulfill these goals, these factors contribute to spectators' assuming the position of make-believe as if they were watching the unfolding events from within the space of the story.[14] In addition, the practices of analytical editing of action have gradually been developed. Also, the projected screen image contains a vast wealth of diversified visual information that is apparently "unworked" and relatively untextured. Finally, the invisibility of classical editing reinforces an audience's impression of looking into a solid and autonomous world.

From this follows that consciousness operates with conditional predisposition to regard the fictional world as existing autonomously from the viewer. Assembled along the lines of the already mentioned situation model, this world includes agents, who shape events, and sufferers, but also a range of other objects, which are sometimes, called setting; it has its spatial and temporal parameters, and it operates in a context that is specific for each potential viewer.

Thus, illusion of reality is one of the basic assumptions with which consciousness approaches the construction of the diegetic world. A weaker claim on illusion of reality does not imply that there is anything "real" about the cinematic image, describing the relationship between reality and cinema as being co-relational. On the other hand, the use of the situation model may imply that "readers understand narratives by creating a situation-model, which represents the narrative world described by the text rather than the text itself."[15] This entails that situation models are removed from diegetic "reality" as much as they are removed from textuality through which viewers reach a particular situation model.

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12   Bazin's belief in the same ontological origin of reality and cinema, which is different from epistemological presupposition of analytical philosophers, does not need stop us from comparing their similar attitudes towards objects in cinema.

13   Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinema*, vol. 2, Klincksieck, Paris 1972, pp. 161-162.

14   George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light. Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, p. 56.

15   Daniel Morrow, "Situation Models and Point of View in Narrative Understanding", in: Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (eds.) *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2001, pp. 225-241.

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3. SITUATION MODELS AND SIGHT GAGS

In order to explain better what takes place here, we have defined broadly the notion of *situation model* as a mental representation of the situation described by the text, while categories that make this model are agents, actions, space, time, events, and causal relations.[16] In this course of thinking, the term *situation model* is of primary interest to us, since it explains the relation between the viewer and the diegetic world, as well as the interrelation of other theoretical terms that we use to explain the process of viewing and analyzing film's textuality. The term has been introduced from cognitive research into the processing of discourse, but it is also closely connected to the way in which humans interpret reality. Adopting the term from the psychological work of Johnson-Laird, van Dijk, and Kintsch, van Oostendorp describes a situation model as a "mental representation of the situation described by the text."[17] Johnson-Laird makes it clear that his discourse model makes explicit the structure not of sentences but of situations as we perceive and imagine them. Similar assumptions may with increased certainty be applied to film: the discourse model is not applied only to the visible situation but to the situation that has been translated from the visual field to the cognitive symbolic structure. Just as there is a need in written or spoken discourse to go beyond linguistic representation, there is a need to go beyond the visual surface when we discuss narrative films.

Here, we will attempt to apply the term situation model to a range of narrative situations, and develop it further to match the needs of cinematic narration. Situation models, developed by the viewer, have got to be longer lasting than a particular scene, which is being interpreted with their help, unless this scene is a complete digression in the text. Very often in film narration the viewer uses opposing, incompatible situation models for interpretation of a particular segment of the text, which leads to the conclusion that interpretation of a narrative text is potentially a complex mental activity which engages a much more intricate action on the part of the viewer than it would appear when a film segment is observed in isolation from the rest of the narrative. It is also evident that for the great majority of narrative texts one of the opposing situation models could be called

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16   Herre van Oostendorp, "Holding onto Established Viewpoints during Processing News Reports,"
      in Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (eds.) *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, State
      University of New York Press, Albany 2001, pp. 173-179.

17   Herre van Oostendorp, "Holding onto Established Viewpoints during Processing News Reports", in:
      Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (eds.) *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, p. 173. P.
      Johnson-Laird, *Mental Models* Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 1983 Teun A. van Dijk,
      Walter Kintsch, *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*, Academic Press, New York 1983.

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objective, at least at the end of the conflict. If we suppose that two opposed situation models may be used by the viewer for the interpretation of a particular segment of the text, then after the conflict is resolved one must assume the position of objectivity. Since one of the important functions of characters in fiction is to act as cognitive channels for understanding of diegetic worlds, the second situation model is usually ascribed to a subject, often a character within the story, and in that case we can call it *subjective*. Viewers do not only understand the world through situation models, they project situation models to various characters as a condition of understanding the way of how these characters perceive the objective world out there. Of course, the objective situation model can be equally associated with a subject, but it is its objectivity that assures its specific position. In the hierarchy of situation models that viewers advance, the objective situation model has epistemological, if not necessarily dramatic primacy. Some generic conventions strongly make the objective situation model dependent on the development of the subjective one through the agent of an investigator. For example, Sherlock Holmes builds and develops his situation models as a path to illuminating the objective state of affairs, which cannot be understood without his input. But even in this case, the objective situation model that explains the world of fiction is wider than the subjective one, since it incorporates the idiosyncratic character of Holmes, again made closer to the reader mostly through another subjective situation model developed by Dr. Watson.

In stories about Sherlock Holmes the reader is rarely in doubt that the subjective model represented as belonging to Holmes is at the same time the objective one. It is always crystal-clear that Holmes will be able to construct a comprehensive objective model, regardless of the paucity of clues. On the other hand, in *film noir* the inability of a detective to see correctly and act appropriately in a convoluted world that surrounds him intertwines opposing situation models in a very different manner. There, the subjective one that belongs to the main character generally remains subjective throughout the narrative, and, if it moves towards becoming objective, it is usually late behind the events so that the person "holding" this prominent situation model at the end remains a loser, sometimes telling a bitter story from the end of the narrative, as in *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950). At the same time, even Sherlock Holmes may hold false beliefs, but he is able to change them in time and solve the mystery.

One of the main properties of an objective situation model is its explanatory coherence. This has often been described as one of the basic characteristics of film narration in general, which has a role in helping to establish its global reliability. For example, Wilson says, "there is a promise (of the classical narrative) to depict a set of events, acts, and

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situations which will turn out to have an internal explanatory coherence."[18] And further: "classical narration, cinematic and other, offers the warrant that:

(1) The chief dramatically significant questions do have answers that the text will supply and;

(2) The narrational material that gives these answers will be suitably, if perhaps not overtly, identified."[19]

Since situation models are among the main tools used by the viewer to interpret the narrative, explanatory coherence as a general stipulation applies to the way a situation model is perceived. Further, it seems reasonable to say that epistemological coherence on the level of the situation model has specific ways of functioning, which are different from the ways it functions in other segments of narrative process. Given that we are discussing mental phenomena, it is difficult to describe situation models very precisely. It is only possible to search for their approximate characteristics. At the beginning, they could be seen as fluid flexible mental systems that in some way correspond to the situation they interpret. They also have a particular way of existing in time, and are certainly more prominent when their pertinent elements are in narrative focus than when they may be left aside "dormant" for a while. As long as we pay attention to simpler cases, which would amount to following the development of a situation model corresponding to an event in the plot, it may seem that there is nothing more to the situation model than its close reliance on immediate visual narration. This would include recognition and sorting of objects and development of a situation model by viewers' consciousness through mobilizing their relevant cognitive abilities and beliefs concerning the external world and functioning of the medium. But as soon as we begin to observe the functioning of a situation model in a longer narrative, the process gets more complicated. How exactly does a situation model relate to the already internalized knowledge about a diegetic world? How does this relationship influence the way it relates to the textual field at the moment of reading? What are the consequences of increased demands for parallel processing of complex alternative situation models?

Situation models may, as a context, incorporate viewers' previous experiences, including the experience of previous texts, regarding the same or similar narrative situations. Simultaneously, the model also may incorporate instances of more general knowledge from memory about such situations. The functioning of the situation model can be ascribed to all narrative films, but not only to them. For example, scientific and

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18   George M. Wilson, *Narration in Light. Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, p. 40.

19   Ibid., p. 40.

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educational films propose mental models to their viewers, which directly consider reality and its perceived contradictions.

Thus, the situation models are a subset, or a variation of mental models that humans use to understand the world. Viewers use their cognitive abilities, spurred by film narration, to interpret various situations that are proposed during the processing of a feature film. This activity takes place in a context that can never be fully explained, since the individual variations are too numerous to account for all of them, but we can still examine the core features of the situation model's activity.

One of the conclusions of Johnson-Laird's work confirms that premises that lead only to single models are reliably easier than those that offer a choice of models. We are decidedly interested in the films that first propose two or more situation models in order to choose the one pertinent to the surrounding context. Here we don't have enough space to present sufficient number of examples that juxtapose two different situation models, involving the viewer in the process of re-defining the existing situation model into a different one. We will only describe the situation involving sight gags. Noël Carroll defines the sight gag as a "form of visual humor in which amusement is generated by the play of alternative interpretations projected by the image or image series."[20] Our analysis of sight gags shows exactly this: viewers are "forced" to see contradictory examples of situation models, and to decide which one they will promote as corresponding to the context in which the decision was made. The whole process is facilitated by the fact that viewers themselves tend to actively search for counterexamples in order to establish the validity of the initial mental model they have constructed. How is it then that they are surprised when confronted with contradictory explanations offered by sight gags? Firstly, they are in part lulled by the preceding narrative in which the objects behave according to viewers' expectations formed on the basis of their ability to manage the objects in reality. Secondly, film narration actively promotes transparency by the way diegetic objects behave outside the reflexive moments of the clash between two contradictory propositions, which are counterexamples of the highest order.

We found the sight gag especially interesting as it involves the doubling of situation models on "one" set of objects. One of the most important features of classical narrative is to produce explanatorily coherent narrative, but sight gags represent a significant obstacle to the smooth implementation of the desired coherence. Of course, most sight gags in silent comedy are short, so that explanatory coherence may be quickly restored. During

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20   Noël Carroll, "Notes on the Sight Gag", in: Andrew Horton (ed.) *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, University
     of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1991, p. 26.

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the time they last, however, they may demand from the viewer full concentration as they go through the process of realigning diegetic objects, or reestablishing the (temporary) novel hierarchy of those same objects. Silent comedy employed specific forms of sight gags from its early days, but we have focused on the films in which a semi-developed form of sight gags found its place. The leading thread in our analysis is provided by the early films of Buster Keaton, when he first joined forces with Fatty Arbuckle. In many ways Keaton's features manage to preserve a narrative structure that allows him to include a number of sight gags, which might have been considered an obstacle in the eyes of a big studio, fully in control of his films. As already mentioned, the sight gag offers two incongruous explanations, thus "using" viewers' ingrained predilection to search for the counterexamples in deductive reasoning. It actually forces viewers to employ their deductive capacities in order to remove the obstacles in their search for the truthful explanation of the fallacies they encounter. Thus, we could claim that they incite the viewer to an additional effort during the viewing of a narrative film.

Recognition of an object presupposes activity more complex than we generally assume to be related to perception in the narrow sense of the word. One of its basic features that instantly connect the viewer and the object is the attitude assumed by consciousness towards the objects and the diegetic world, which comprises them. At the very root of sight gags more than anything else lay an attempt to explore the links that form between consciousness and the diegetic world, which it "incorporates." Since we have already given logical primacy in understanding the world we live in to material bodies and persons, we shall see how the dependence of the situation model is played with in some of the most interesting silent comedies made in Hollywood in the late 1910s. In the following pages we will explore this basic process by focusing primarily on the short films produced by Comique Film Corporation between 1917 and 1920. The corporation was set up for famous silent film comedian Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle by Joseph M. Schenck. He lured an increasingly independent Arbuckle by offering him creative control over the movies he made, and a good financial arrangement. Consequently, following Chaplin's example, Arbuckle starred and directed a series of shorts during this period. Practically all of these films use some forms of sight gags as their major attraction, producing comic effect by challenging viewers' perceptive abilities.

In early cinema, films of the Brighton school display a keen interest in the process of recognition, and even re-recognition, from *Grandma's Reading Glass* (G. A. Smith, 1900) and *As Seen Through a Telescope* (G. A. Smith, 1900) to *Mary Jane's Mishap* (G. A. Smith, 1903). Later, sight gags in silent comedy developed into a form within a form,

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dedicated to an inventive play between the concept and its textual base. In general, the work of Chaplin and Keaton is considered their richest source. As is the case with many other elements of silent comedy, the role of Chaplin should not be overlooked when we search for decisive influences in the development of sight gags, but there are many other examples, which point out a deep-seated inclination of silent short comedies towards this topic.

The shorts made by Arbuckle serve as witness to the role recognition played in the structuring of the diegetic world in regard to varying degrees of certainty. Schenck produced these films with three well-known comedians: Fatty Arbuckle, Al St. John, and Buster Keaton. Arbuckle was already an established movie star, while Keaton was at the beginning of his career in film. Even though his later independent shorts and features display a variety of sight gags, it doesn't seem that Buster was a driving force behind the extensive use of what we could call a sight gag during this period. If we recall Carroll's definition of the sight gag, then the persistent cross-dressing in these shorts is certainly its variety. Most prominently, Fatty Arbuckle develops a variation on a theme from *Butcher Boy* (Roscoe Arbuckle, 1917), to *Coney Island* (Roscoe Arbuckle, 1917), and *Good Night, Nurse!* (Roscoe Arbuckle, 1918). From rowdy and sloppy man he changes into a fat woman in a bathing costume, a (sizeable) college girl, and a clean and seemingly proper hospital nurse. Whether an errant husband, or a boy in love, he plays essentially the same type of guy: infantile, voracious, and outrageous. Dressed as a woman, he displays a carefully built-up variety of roles, which play against his well-established cinematic personality. These shorts display not only an extensive play of alternative interpretations throughout extended parts; the tricky situations centered on Fatty's cross-dressing represent the pivotal elements of the complication, and denouement.

In *Coney Island* Fatty, on the run from his upstanding wife, puts on a big woman's bathing suit in order to accompany a girl he befriended on the beach. Conveniently, he also acquires a wig, and a ridiculously small parasol, accoutrements that he first obtains, later discards according to the occasion, and sometimes even re-appropriates. Thus, viewers can see the various stages of the change between Fatty the man, and Fatty the woman, in regard to the form and level of his cross-dressing. At the same time, they can witness the dependence of the concept of an object on the smaller units, i.e. concepts of smaller objects, which stand in a very close logical relation with the concept that subsumes them, and which we could define as microsigns.[21] The viewer is instructed, and led through

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21 D. Stojanović defines the microsign as "the smallest recognizable visible or audible representation (*predstava*) from afilimic perceptual experience that we recognize on the screen." Dušan Stojanović,

this process by other characters. Thus Fatty's wife patiently shows twice what it is all about: first she shows the medallion with Fatty's photo to the police, then, on the beach, she looks at Fatty courted by Al, and, alternately looking at the couple on the bench and Fatty's photograph asks, almost straight to the camera: "That fat woman?" At the same time, Al is another character that falls as victim to erroneous perception. He pays little attention to Fatty's looks, but he is confused by the roughness of his unshaved cheeks. His eyes tell him one thing, while his sense of touch says another.[22]

Even before Fatty gets to the beach, he spends a few moments in a hot dressing room for the ladies. Unnoticed, crushed by the heat, he takes off his wig. A woman making up in front of the mirror shifts her eyes and glimpses Fatty without a wig. Slowly realizing that a man has sneaked into the ladies' dressing room, she yells and turns around. In the meantime, Fatty has put the wig back, and the woman faces a properly dressed, friendly, corpulent lady. Strangely, she calms down, confused, as if the fact that she had seen Fatty without a wig in the mirror, and not directly, changes anything in the way he looked a moment ago. Apparently, an object seen in the mirror does not carry the same cognitive "weight" as the one seen with one's own eyes (or on the cinematic screen). Even Fatty himself, before the series of misrecognitions begins, enacts for the viewer what the character's process of recognition will look like: ushered out by the lifeguard after he enters the male dressing room, he realizes why and explains it to the viewer. "Aha, they think I am a woman because I am dressed like one, isn't that funny."

Thus forwarded, the process of recognition acquires a prominent place in structuring the diegetic world, and in forming the situation model achieved by viewers. The overarching situation model comprises a few different situation models, which can be ascribed to the various diegetic characters. The sudden shift between different situation models is a cause of a great surprise for the characters involved: the woman yells, while the wife erupts in anger, and Al engages in a fistfight. Here we can see a seemingly disadvantaged position of characters in fiction in relation to viewers. They serve as viewers' proxies in

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Film kao prevazilaženje jezika, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd [Belgrade] 1984, p. 118.

22 Although visual, sight gags in silent cinema involved all human senses in the process of forming the viewer's attitude towards the events depicted. Here it is sense of touch, while at the beginning of *Back Stage* (Roscoe Arbuckle, 1919) in a series of sight gags Arbuckle creates one based on sense of taste. While putting up a poster, Fatty takes care of an annoying kid, who obstructs him in his work, by gluing him onto the wall. During the altercation, they both begin to eat the white glue Fatty uses to do the work. The gag not only insists on their enjoying the glue, but it also opens the space to think about the glue as edible cream of a kind.

making visible that which is hidden under the surface of material bodies. Strawson has described a specific position of persons in relation to our understanding of the world that we inhabit:…for each person there is one body which occupies a certain *causal* position in relation to that person's perceptual experience, a causal position which in various ways is unique in relation to each of the various kinds of perceptual experience he has.[23]

In general, in *Coney Island* viewers are in a privileged position; they have been saved from the series of blinding emotional shocks. They maintain an omniscient relation vis-à-vis diegetic characters, which enables them to follow the nuances of the changing dynamics between the characters and their setting. Actually, the epistemic position of the viewer is very close to Fatty's. The viewer knows almost everything he knows, except the way he will react to the situation. No character in fiction is ever entirely predictable, the viewer is always to a certain extent late in "catching up" with the character's (re) action. But here Fatty becomes the channeling force for the viewer on two accounts. Their epistemic position is very close, which is supplemented by Fatty's intimate relation with the camera and the viewer. As usual, he winks, gesticulates, talks to the camera, invites the viewer to follow him along, and at one moment in the dressing room even demands reframing of the shot above his waist in order to protect his privacy. Most of these are reflexive techniques characteristic of much of silent comedy, but Arbuckle was one of their most adroit and persistent champions.

4. SIGHT GAGS AND REFLEXIVITY

It seems obvious that the various overt attempts to guide the viewer's recognition agree in their reflexive potential with other techniques briefly mentioned. The main question remains: why are these moments reflexive? The diegetic environment is conveniently reflexive, but there is something in the very brief moment of incorporation of these objects into the situation model that causes a rupture, which is often more than a mere blink. The surprise is biggest at the beginning, at the moment we see Fatty in women's clothes for the first time, but later there is a variation on a theme, which involves use of other characters, and deeper identification with their process of recognition. Obviously, we are talking about transgression of the basic laws of logic, i.e. that no two objects can occupy the same temporal-spatial position. At the same time destabilization of the perceptive pattern of reidentification takes place. As we have said by using an object, or rather a set of objects seems to be the way in which consciousness organizes reality.

23   P. F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, p. 92.

This seems simple and obvious enough, but by describing the relationship between an object and consciousness we can grasp the full importance of this fact. Of course, it is the body of Fatty Arbuckle that physically occupies the space, and the viewer is well aware that there is no change in physical disposition within a scene. However, the reevaluation of the very "same" object brings about an entirely changed attitude by the viewer and diegetic characters. Evidently, the awareness of the object cannot be separated from the general attitude of consciousness towards it. This attitude can be very varied, because diegetic objects may be perceived to have widely different importance for consciousness, and their meaning cannot be separated from this aspect. In a way, we are talking about symbiosis between consciousness and the world, about the form of existence in fiction, which is not (or may not be) far from the form of co-existence in reality.

By beginning his career in movies in *Butcher Boy*, Buster Keaton was from the very start acquainted with the propensity of silent comedy towards quick changes of pertinent situation models. He might have learnt some of the useful techniques in vaudeville, but Comique films, which were undoubtedly made under the great influence of Arbuckle, display in abundance the predilection for reflexive play with the viewer's situation model and point of view. As mentioned, Keaton joined Arbuckle in the company set up for him by Joseph M. Schenck. Arbuckle enjoyed creative control over the movies made; he wrote and directed most of them. Keaton apparently very quickly gained his confidence, and exerted a significant influence. While acting and working as writing staff for Arbuckle, he must have come up with various gags we can see today in Comique films.

Good Night, Nurse! appeared in 1918, a year after *The Cure* (Charlie Chaplin, 1917), and it was manifestly strongly influenced by it. Gags from other Chaplin Mutuals are also used, for example the stethoscope gag from *The Pawnshop* (Charlie Chaplin, 1916).[24] If one wanted to ponder Keaton's share in the movie's creation, the beginning of the film strikingly resembles the storm scenes from *Steamboat Bill Jr.* (Chas. F. Reisner, 1928), while the ending race, in which Fatty unexpectedly wins the money prize, resembles many of Keaton's exhausting sprints. *Good Night, Nurse!* also features a simple but effective film trick in which Buster, while at the spa, throws his crutches at a patient, who has his back turned to him. Despite being in a cast from head to foot, and not being able to see the crutches flying at him, the patient grabs them effortlessly and continues to walk with crutches under his armpits. Obviously, the filmmakers have employed reversed motion in this shot, which produced a simple sight gag: the first part of the shot is interpreted as

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24   Noël Carroll cites *The Pawnshop* as an important source of many imaginative sight gags. Noël Carroll, "Notes on the Sight Gag", Andrew Horton (ed.) *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* p. 31, 34-36.

the continuation of the previous one; i.e. the crutches are seen as flying from right to left towards the patient. However, the second part of the shot reverses the interpretation of the first part. Once viewers realize that something is wrong with the original explanation, they produce the new one, and apply it to the "same" textual field.[25]

On this occasion, as was the case with alternative interpretations involving the characters, we encounter the play of alternative interpretations applied to the same, contiguous spatio-temporal segment. In *Back Stage* the same formula has been broadened, the gags are more complex, while some also involve written material. In this late Comique film one can recognize the complexity of sight gags later achieved by Keaton in his more independent productions. The question whether Keaton or Arbuckle was the driving force behind this development cannot be positively answered, nor is it very important. More significant is to recognize the deep-seated tradition of silent comedy towards reflexivity, or as we have formulated it, towards creating simultaneous contradictory situation models, thereby proposing a reflexive point of view to the viewer. What has changed over time was the form of reflexivity. Instead, or together with the winks, inviting laughter, and other forms of open address to the audience, the sight gag proposed a more refined form of reflexivity. The sophistication consisted in the way in which the reflexive play of situation models was proposed to the viewer. The reflexive authoritative intervention from outside to inside of the diegetic world, or a sudden interruption as in the case of trick films and slapstick, was replaced by a reflexive act more invisible and difficult to explain. It involved viewers and their participation in the diegetic world more substantially than the earlier forms did. It could catch them unawares, and surprise them in more novel and unusual ways.

The pivotal point was the viewer's attitude towards an object, a network of objects,

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25   Max Linder was the first to use this kind of trick in film comedy, but even the Lumière projectionists of *The Demolition of a Wall* (Lumière brothers, 1895) used it in order to amuse the audience. In *The Hayseed* (Roscoe Arbuckle, 1919) we find the same trick being used repeatedly on different occasions. Tati employs the same technical possibility of reversing the flow of movement in one of the shortest and most intriguing sight gags of his career. In *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (Jacques Tati, 1953) he inserts a shot of a dog "lying down" in front of Hulot's car as the latter speeds towards the summer resort. There is no change in speed of the projection, which would help the viewer uncover the inconsistency, and the moment does not function as the high point of an elaborate joke. The shot is very brief, and it has a strong narrative motivation. The only clue by which the viewer could discover that something is strange are the movements of the dog, but who is to notice the difference between the way in which the dog lies down and gets up? Here of course one can dispute the intentionality of the director, and the point of view assumed by the viewer will depend on plausibility of the accepted interpretation.

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or towards an event. The reflexive position pointed out the incoherence in the situation model developed by the viewer. In order to be more effective in what was one of the main features of reflexivity, in invoking a surprise, it had to be more realistic, and detected with more difficulty. Since surprise is one of the ways in which an individual maintains the affective link and insures its position in relation to reality, nothing can be as surprising as reality. Sight gags exploit the transparent potential of the cinema by playing with the conditions of perception, and the viewer's relation to the diegetic world. The difference between human beings and non-human objects is significant in this regard. First of all, non-human objects almost always appear less ambiguous to the viewer than humans do, and thus seem less predisposed to any future revision. And when humans are in question, their bodies are much more easily pinned down than their minds. The fact that we do relate to the body and the mind of the human object of knowledge as much separately as we take them in union, does not mean that we here advocate the fundamental difference between body and mind. But when we approach the world and the objects in it, we certainly expect more predictable behavior from somebody's ears than from their hands.

Strawson has maintained that the primitiveness of the concept of person ensures that when we talk about this second kind of individuals we must ascribe to them "*both* states of consciousness *and* corporeal characteristics." In order to explain the specific position of a person he divides the properties that can be ascribed to them to M-predicates and P-predicates. M-predicates are those that can be applied to other particulars that have material bodies, to which we could not apply the states of consciousness. For example they include statements concerning weight, position in space, and so on. P-predicates include predicates that can be applied to objects that possess consciousness, "like 'is smiling', 'is going for a walk', as well as things like 'is in pain', 'is thinking hard', 'believes in God' and so on."[26] It is this P-group of predicates that differentiates between material bodies with and without consciousness, or roughly between human and animal objects from those objects, to which the P group of predicates cannot be applied.

Once recognized, non-human objects are a safe haven for the viewer, they can serve as the known territory on which to base further exploration of the diegetic world. Humans are much less predictable as the instigators of dramatic action. There are of course numerous movies in which nature becomes the driving force of change, films about natural catastrophes, aliens, as well as those about cyborgs or extraordinary mechanical objects. For example a good number of Spielberg's films, from *Duel* (Steven Spielberg, 1971), in

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26   P. F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, p. 104.

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which the maniacal truck was the focus of the story, to *Jaws* (1975), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1975), *E.T.* (1982), and the *Jurassic Park* movies (1993, 1997), center on the unknown, non-human objects which demand from the viewer an assumption of a specific, distant point of view, whose variability becomes the primary organizing principle of the entire narrative. More often, however, the unfamiliarity of objects is conditioned by their close connection with the activity of humans. The objects become the focus of interest, and once the mind becomes sufficiently informed about them, they recede to the function of familiar setting. In that case they present an epistemological base from which the viewer establishes a point of view onto the unfolding events. Thus, even though they may be on the very edge of the viewer's attention, they play an important part in the cognitive equivalent of diegetic events maintained by the viewer. The certainty about the form of their existence, and in particular about the range of their possible future role is often much stronger than the one about humans, and above all other consciousnesses. Thus, the mind of the viewer seems to differentiate between objects of the diegetic world according to the perceived propensity of their change in the diegetic world. Once these expectations, which are often negative, i.e. that relate to what is not possible as much as to what is possible are betrayed, viewers must accordingly adjust their situation models and their points of view.

This logic is at the root of sight gags and the feeling of surprise, which follows. The beginning of *Back Stage* combines two sight gags with the complexity characteristic of Keaton's later work. The title advertising that Fatty is "chief stage decorator and advertising manager" is followed by parallel editing of two separate actions, eventually united by Fatty. Both of them turn out to be sight gags of a completely different kind, substantiating Carroll's claim about the very important role played by the sight gag, which has by the 1920s become "the leading type of film comedy."[27] Both gags use the same technique, but, so to say, in reverse. The first gag uses written material: Fatty puts up a poster for the new show outside the theater on which is written:

<div align="center">

You must not Miss

Gertrude Mc Skinny

Famous Star who will

play

The Little Laundress

First Time Here

Tomorrow at 2 PM

</div>

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27   N. Carroll, "Notes on the Sight Gag", Andrew Horton (ed.) *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, p. 40.

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At the same time, somewhere inside the theater Buster walks in and out the door on the floor that seems to be leading downstairs. He descends, and comes back to fetch a few planks more for the work he is evidently doing. Fatty, who has finished painting the poster, closes a huge stage entrance door half way, which changes the initial message into:

<div align="center">

Miss
Skinny
will

undress
Here
at 2 PM[28]

</div>

Subsequently Fatty walks into the theater and picks up a banister, which the viewer must have considered screwed into the floor, and moves it away. The amazing sight is revealed, this time Fatty exposes the hidden portion of the screen space instead of hiding it, and allows viewers to see what they had not expected. This changes their conclusions about the previously visible part of the diegetic world altogether. Buster does not walk down the stairs but gradually crouches in order to reach the corner of the room on the same floor and hit a few nails into it. The movements of his body have been wrongly interpreted, especially the immobility of the upper part of his body, which denoted someone walking down the stairs.

These two gags motivated by narrative open the film, while Arbuckle presents himself in the role of a diegetic character, as well as that of the consummate film director aware of his role, as reflexively as Godard does at the beginning of *Numéro deux* (Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, 1975). Moreover, Arbuckle merges the two, which will again become a common practice in some other reflexive genres such as backstage musicals, or movies about movies. The two gags described seem to differ in their impact. While they are both successful, the second gag invokes the viewer's mistake, whereas the first one only postulates the possibility of a mistake. But that is not all. The second gag is somehow more firmly integrated into the diegetic world, and the consequences of

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28   The language is of course crucial for this kind of the gag, and by extension, for any diegetic world in which the linguistic component plays an important role. The French translation of this gag read: "L'Etoile Miss Skinny dans La Vérité Toute Nue. Rideau à 2 heures." Once the door is closed we see only "Miss Skinny Toute Nue à 2 heures."

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change of the situation model invoke confusion, which does not appear in the first gag. This confusion stems not only from the changed, unforeseen position of the viewer in relation to the position of objects in space; the type of change contributes to the strength of the confusion as well.

Once we take a closer look at this example we can clarify the relation between perception, objects, and situation model. The shots that lead to the gag last for only a few seconds. Because they are situated at the beginning of the movie, the viewer has not been building up the mental equivalent of the spatial coordinates of that part of diegetic space for long. Nevertheless, the impact of the change is significant, which leads to the conclusion that viewers establish spatial parameters of the scene fairly quickly, and that they assume a very high level of certainty. Also, the set-up is understood as a network of objects with specific coordinates. Generally some are stationary, while some move in specified directions. This is emphasized in the Keaton gag by the repetition of the same action, Buster goes "up and down the stairs" a couple of times, letting the viewer confirm the previous conclusions. The space depicted by the shot extends beyond its frame; it has two floors, the stairs, while a human body, which is obviously a focus of attention, connects these main stationary elements.

We may conclude that the mental equivalent of an object is a concept, whereas the equivalent of a network of objects is a situation model. This complicates the role of image in film. Ayer in his *Problem of Knowledge* strongly disputes the understanding of knowledge and memory as mental images. The role of image in cinema is paramount, and its relation to the diegetic world constructed by the viewer is of primary importance, but in no way can we equate the complexity of the diegetic world with a mental (visual) image. The concepts of objects that comprise the situation model stand in the relation of inter-dependency, none of them is independent from what takes place with other objects. Additionally each concept relates to the past experience, and to a specific extent activates the memory, while it also raises expectations about future developments. Making conclusions about the relationship between objects and our sense-experiences, Ayer writes: "in referring as we do to physical objects we are elaborating a theory with respect to the evidence of our senses."[29]

This theory can change with new sense-experiences, just as our previous interpretations of sense-experiences can change with our new conclusions. Thus, when Fatty removes the wooden panel, and reveals a new state of affairs, our up-to-date conclusions, based on, among other things, our recently, and more than recently obtained past sense-experiences,

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29   A. J. Ayer, *The Problems of Knowledge*, p. 132.

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must be made coherent with our new sense-experiences. Suddenly, the whole spatial disposal must be rearranged: we now must shrink our diegetic space from two floors to one, and we need to rethink our ideas about Keaton's body and its relation to the setting. Keaton plays the pivotal role in the whole placement. His movements are the bases for our understanding of the space, which is comprised of inter-related objects. The viewer maintains the relation with objects that comprise the space, in which equivalent concepts making up the situation model have a variable logical likelihood of change. The human body in the building is for example more likely to change than the walls or the furniture, but even the prospect of such change has constrictions placed on it. Some modifications are more likely than others, and this involves a complex question of plausibility.

The stairs that the viewer inscribes into a diegetic space are not seen, there are no sense-data to support it, but still their existence is taken for granted as firmly as it is the existence of other objects veritably seen. Even further, the concepts of many objects seen in this gag, such as the wooden board which plays the role of the balustrade, seem to undergo wholesale change in their relation with consciousness when they change their function. A sudden abolishment of one point of view, and establishment of the new one, which reflects the changed circumstances, follows the change of the situation model. The objects seemingly insignificant for the action, regardless of their size, suddenly acquire importance, which points out their relevance as the cognitive and existential base for the new orientation of mind in diegetic space. In addition to their links to other objects, and the self, relevant objects relate to the past of the viewer and to the projected future. They may not invoke positive predictions relevant to the viewer, but they certainly carry the weight of negative implications, of what they cannot be, which is equally important for the consciousness in trying to maintain its balance in any further developments. It is one of the main features of floors that they do not disappear once their existence is established, and that is what is so puzzling about this gag. On the other hand, Keaton as a character might change behavior, initiate a host of new actions, but viewers are not at all meant to change their opinion about physical activity such as walking down the stairs, so casually performed in front of their eyes.

Of course, Keaton is the *spiritus movens* of the whole gag, and his physical dexterity enables him to trick the viewer. He commands the diegetic space that surrounds him as well as the viewer's perceptive and cognitive powers. Keaton often liked to put himself in the position where he was able to show his physical skills, at the same time remaining somewhat emotionally aloof from the viewer. We can see the difference between him and Chaplin if we compare the famous gag from the beginning of *The Immigrant* (Charlie

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Chaplin, 1917). The film opens with Chaplin's back turned to the camera, while he leans over the railing of the boat, seemingly sick during the trans-Atlantic voyage to America. His movements relay agony, but when he turns around, we realize that the Tramp has just caught the fish, and that the movements that we wrongly interpreted as vomiting twitches was actually his struggling with the good catch. As in Keaton's gag, the change of the situation model is destabilizing, but while Keaton uses the psychological power of the moment to underline his physical dexterity, as he calmly repeats for us the whole procedure of "going down the stairs" once again without a single change in his demeanor, Chaplin uses the commotion created in the viewer to evoke a strong feeling of empathy for the clever old Tramp, thus somehow using the viewer's slightly uncomfortable point of view to his own advantage in a different way. This agrees with Chaplin's tendency to increasingly introduce pathos in his films, and makes it a necessary condition for understanding of the situation models he creates.

5. CONCLUSION

Our goal here was to outline the form of the basic conceptual network involved in the interpretation of sight gags, a peculiar form of film comedy. We found that sight gags involve reinterpretation of what we have named basic particulars: material bodies and persons, as well as the spatio-temporal grid in which these particulars exist. When we asked the question why the interruption in identification of objects and places would cause the wholesale interruption of narrative, the answer was evident: the idea of continuous space and time, filled with particulars of a specific kind, is essential for the processing of film narration, as well as it is essential for conduct in our everyday life.

The ability to reidentify things, according to Strawson, cannot be complete without our ability to reidentify places, and vice versa. Their mutual dependence insures that we can call a set of things the same, and claim that each member of the set "is in the same place as it was before." [30] The objects that have a certain position in space can change them, and then we say that some of the objects have changed their position, and some have stayed in the same position. Crucially, our decision of which things we shall say the former or the latter, depends on which set of things we have chosen for a dominant framework of the set as a whole. This dominant set is a group of objects that supports the rest of objects

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30   P. F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, p. 37.

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within a given segment of space, or on which the "set can be thought as centered."[31] This idea of assuming a central position in the specific segment of space, within a specific set of objects, is practically identical to Wilson's idea about how the narration insures that the viewer assumes a centered point of view in relation to film narrative.

Now we can see that disruption which is pertinent to sight gags is a particular kind of disruption, since it reveals an alternative order of things to the one that is being replaced. It can also be seen as an exercise in renaming the objects; if the position of an object in the set of objects has changed to the point that we do not see and talk about the object as being the "same," this amounts to giving to our object in focus a different name. It is important that the names in parole have a stable relationship with our perception, and that this relationship does not change unexpectedly. Therefore, even though the names are arbitrary, they are not fully independent of human perception, and the logical order of things with which consciousness approaches reality.

The name of objects in parole stands in specific correlation with the materiality of objects. By discovering alternative situation models we often see that material borders, shape, consistency, and other attributes of objects as perceived are also to an extent arbitrary, or at least our choice of the same is, and that they depend on the spatio-temporal grid with which we approach a particular set of objects, as well as on our presuppositions about the conduct of objects in specific circumstances.

This system, in connection with practice, has as its main goal the explanation, prediction and control of events by the individual and society. We should not underestimate its complexity and summarily proclaim its stability throughout the ages. At least from our examples, it seems that this kind of perception, which relates either to fiction or to reality, is, or can be, an intricate system, allowing for a complex input from the mind. One of the factors that increase this complexity is its use not only to explain, predict, or control events, but also to create them.

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31   Ibid., p. 37.

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Saša Milić, The Role of Objects and
Situation Models in Film Transparency...

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ULOGA OBJEKATA I SITUACIONIH MODELA U FILMSKOJ TRANSPARENTNOSTI
PRILOG EPISTEMOLOGIJI FILMA

Sažetak: Ovaj rad se bavi načinom na koji gledaoci interpretiraju igrane filmove. On objašnjava ulogu mentalnih modela, koji se zovu situacioni modeli, u interpretaciji dijegetičkog sveta fikcije. Koristeći P. F. Strosonovo tumačenje da ličnosti i materijalni objekti imaju centralno mesto među logičkim subjektima kada razmišljamo o našem svetu, i povezujući znanje o dijegetičkim svetovima sa znanjem stvarnosti, mi izvodimo zaključak da se ovo dvoje može uspešno uporediti i tako ponuditi bolje razumevanje uloge produženih mreža raznih objekata kod posmatranja filmskih narativa. Shvatajući vizuelne gegove kao posebno kompleksne narativne figure, rad opisuje dupliranje situacionih modela kod gledalaca koji interpretiraju određene vizuelne gegove. Rezultat ovog dupliranja je nehomogenost koju registruje gledalac i koji tako otvara analitički put u strukturu i funkcionisanje individualnih situacionih modela.

Ključne reči: film, gledalac, dijegeza, situacioni model, transparentnost, objekt, interpretacija, stvarnost