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The Cognitive and Hermeneutic Dynamics of Complex Film Narratives

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1.

The heart of narrative complexity lies not in intricate narrative structures by themselves, but in the felt experience and cognitive effects that such compositional disruptions create. Therefore, an adequate conceptualisation of narrative complexity needs to include an understanding of the processes by which viewers engage with such stories.

2.

Contemporary complex films offer cognitive playgrounds that challenge viewers' comprehension and meaning making routines, demanding increased cognitive or interpretive effort to organise the narration's cues, events, and patterns into a causal, chronological, coherent or meaningful chain of events.

3.

As cognitive playgrounds, complex narratives expose spectators to experiences of complexity in an 'offline' mode (i.e., without a direct link to real-world action), to provide fictional experiences in which coping with ambiguities and contradictions can be experienced as stimulating or attractive, rather than just frustrating.

4.

Complex narratives have a distinct potential for reflective hermeneutic play, inviting spectators to apply and weigh different cultural and cognitive frames, and test the flexibility of their interpretive competences and stances.

5.

The experience of complexity in fiction may be appreciated for its mimetically expressive capacity, for spectators may feel that a story's evocation of complexity, multi-stability of interpretations, or lack of a singular logic, captures or reflects facets of the world or our lived experience of it.

6.

Many contemporary complex narratives work by skilfully balancing viewers' frustration and fascination, presenting 'impossible puzzles' that feature strong incongruities or impossibilities amidst familiar classical narrative patterns and conventions.

7.

'Art-cinema' is not merely some theoretical, typological, institutional or evaluative category, but constitutes a functional cognitive frame of narrative meaning-making that distributes viewing routines, attitudes, and strategies for dealing with complex narrative experiences in films.

8.

A challenge for future research lies in integrating the cognitive-interpretive and embodied-affective perspectives on viewers' engagement with complex narratives, to seek more unified conceptualisations of the relations between narrative cues, cognitive dispositions, perceptual affordances, bodily sensations, emotional arousal, and interpretive acts.

9.

The owls are not what they seem.