# OLIVER AND CECILIE GO ON A DATE
## THE USE OF CINEMATIC SPLIT SCREEN AS AN EXTENSIVE NARRATIVE TOOL IN AN ORIGINAL ROMANTIC COMEDY

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# 1. RESUMÉ

Dette speciale undersøger split-screen formatet i alle dets afskygninger, som det ses i en række film, der strækker sig ud over hele filmhistorien og kombinerer denne viden med en udforskning af den romantiske komediegenre med henblik på at udforme et originalt spillefilmsmanuskript: En romatisk komedie, der benytter sig af split-screen formatet som et omfattende narrativt redskab. Manuskriptet består af et delvist udfærdiget 1. udkast (32 sider) og inkluderer en detaljeret synopsis. Målet er fortsat at udvikle projektet til et stadie, hvor det realistisk set kunne laves som en spillefilm. Der blev udført en mindre kvalitativ analyse med fem respondenter for at evaluere hvordan split screen formatet blev modtaget af brugeren. Konklusionen var, at formatet kræver en aktiv indsats og afvises, hvis det bliver for forvirrende eller intellektuelt krævende eller hvis brugen af formatet ikke kan retfærdiggøres kontra et enkelt skærmbillede. Den romantiske komediegenre har bestået gennem mange årtier og udvikler og tilpasser sig løbende. Den afspejler strømninger i tidsånden og belyser emner i samtiden, der specifikt relaterer til menneskelige relationer i kærlighed og romantik. Romantiske komedier modtager generelt megen kritik for at være klichéfyldte, uvedkommende og trivielle, men består på trods og nye film udkommer hvert år. Genren har opnået end del success med at krydsparre sig med andre genrer; dette tilføjer genren friskt blod og ny inspiration.

# 2. INTRODUCTION

> "When so many images flicker at you, you see differently. You glance. You glimpse. Your eyes keep moving, and you use your peripheral vision, the kind of sight connected to fight or flight (and actually processed in a separate part of the brain than the direct gaze). You don't get the entire picture; you can't, and you learn to take this partial experience as being accurate enough. [...] What starts as necessity becomes a skill, even a pleasure: There's an unnamed satisfaction in stretching this newfound ability to navigate through images. We're actually hungry to use this ability, to feed it with something more substantive than frenzied Web animations and stock tickers. We crave stories. The single-channel film is the visual art form of the gaze; multichannel is the art form of the glimpse."[1]

In January 2007 I was living in Los Angeles and was a member of FIND, the organisation responsible for the Independent Spirit Awards. I spent much time attending screenings of nominated films, so I could vote on the films I thought ought to win in the various categories.

One film I saw, nominated for its screenplay, blew me away. It was "Conversations with Other Women", a film by Hans Canosa, written by Gabrielle Zevin, and starring Helena Bonham Carter and Aaron Eckhart.

I had never seen a film told entirely in split screen - from beginning to end - and I was riveted, literally glued to the screen for the 90 minutes the film lasted. My mind was working furiously at ingesting the split screen, and I loved the challenge. It was a cinematic experience deeper and richer than I had previously known.

The film stayed with me and over the years it suddenly struck me: I, too, would like to experiment with that format; creating an entire film in split screen. It was in 2009 that the idea for "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" emerged. It struck me that dating is an area of life where men and women differ widely in their attitudes and may perceive the same situation in polar opposite ways, without even knowing it.

I thought this would make a great feature film told in split screen, so I came up with a story about a date that goes horribly wrong, yet ends terribly right.

I worked on the idea on and off over the years, but in 2015, I chose to further develop the project as my thesis for my master's degree in film and media studies.

As I started, I knew nothing of the history of split screen or any theories pertaining to it. As far as I knew, "Conversations with Other Women" was one-of-a-kind.

Researching split screen was a revelation. I learned there's a "science" behind it, rules to be obeyed for it to work. For example, characters in the split frames cannot speak at the same time, or the viewer will only hear garbled dialogue. Also, the human eye can only look at one thing at a time, and so, just as with all film, the filmmaker must guide the audience to look at what is important in a frame. A viewer thinks - at least I did -

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[1] Talen, 2002

that whilst watching a split screen they are choosing what to focus on, but the reality is, if important information is revealed in one frame, the other frame(s) cannot do the same. In fact the other frame(s) needs to be unobtrusive.

Brian de Palma, master of split screen, as he has championed the technique in so many of his films, has said:

> "The thing about split screen is: It's a kind of meditative form. You can go very slowly with it, because there's a lot to look at. People are making juxtapositions in their mind. And you can have all this exposition mumbo jumbo on one side."[2]

I realised the technique is very deliberate and offers a myriad of options.What started out as a straightforward two-way split screen for "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date", has since - due to my research - evolved to include an exploration of all manners of split screen usage, widening the stylistic scope that the film aims to explore.

Moreover, in order to refine my narrative idea, I needed to know more about my chosen genre: Romantic comedy. Not a genre I knew much about, so again, my research was revelatory. To me, romantic comedies either work and are magnificent, entertaining pieces of cinema, or they don't work at all, and are cliched, sorry excuses for films that you feel you wasted approximately an hour and a half of your life on.

I learned that romantic comedy as a genre also has its "rules" and conventions and learning about them deepened my understanding of my story and helped me further develop it.

This thesis will lay bare the processes involved in the development of "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" by critically deconstructing both the split screen technique and the romantic comedy genre. First, I will look at split screen, how it has been utilised so far, try to categorise the ways it has been utilised and discuss selected theory. I will then look at romantic comedy as a genre, deconstruct its components, assess its strengths and weaknesses and delve into how it has evolved over time.

All of these insights will then inform my choices for "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". I will include storyboards for select scenes that detail how I plan to use the split screen technique. The first 32 pages of the screenplay as well as a synopsis are included in the appendix. My goal is to create the beginnings of a well-conceived script for a split screen feature film that I can eventually turn into an actual movie after graduation.

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[2] Rapold, 2013, "Sisters".

# 3. SPLIT SCREEN AS A CINEMATIC TOOL

Split screen is the practice of fracturing the cinematic image into two or more screens.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson defines it as such: "…Two or more images, each with its own frame dimensions and shape, appear within the larger frame."[3]

Allan Cameron, in, "Modular Narratives in Contemporary Cinema", defines the concept as a technique that "…divide the screen into two or more frames, juxtaposing concurrent or anterior events within the same visual field"[4].

Sergio Dias Branco admits:

> "This is an intentionally wide-ranging description. According to it, a split screen seems to be any multiple-image layout that sets images alongside each other within the same frame. The broadness is understandable. The authors are cautious enough not to limit what can be understood by the term, exactly because there are no other terms against which to define it."[5]

The term "split-screen" implies a split into two screens, and is often associated thus, and therefore some scholars, including Branco, prefer a different term to denote an image that splits more than two-ways, such as multiple screen[6], multi-screen[7], multiplied image[8] or mosaic screen[9]. I will mostly stick to the term split screen.

Split screen technique is generally under-explored, and thus, an understanding and analysis of the technique equally underdeveloped. Craig B. Knowles (in 2003) contends the use of split screen technique to be limited: "Outside of a few prime examples, narrative film has seen little use of the split- screen effect"[10].

Jim Bizzocchi states that:

> "Despite its long history, the cinematic split-screen has attracted relatively limited attention in the literature of film history or film style. Much of film literature either ignores the form, or relegate it to brief and passing mention. Those few texts that do consider it, generally do not examine the poetics of the form as it has been used by film artists".[11]

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[3] Bordwell & Thompson, p.186

[4] Cameron, 2008, p.15

[5] Branco, 2008, introduction

[6] Tylski, 2008, p.56

[7] Hagener, 2008, "Grand Prix, The Boston Strangler and Television"

[8] Hagener, 2008, introduction

[9] Branco, 2008, introduction

[10] Knowles, 2003, p.39

[11] Bizzocchi, 2009, p.2

Malte Hagener (in 2008) expresses the same view: "In recent years, this divided and multiplied image has gained visibility and dominance […], yet to date, has not garnered much critical attention"[12].

As an example, Bordwell and Thompson use a mere half a page to describe split screen in their book "Film Art; An Introduction"[13]. This presented me with two challenges.

Firstly, in my research I found that I had to devise my own categories and classifications for the split screen I saw in numerous films - and I did this according to what made sense to me and facilitated my work as a screenwriter and filmmaker in developing the script and storyboards for "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". I shall describe these categories later.

Secondly, I have limited theory at my disposal. Dwyer and Mehmet divide the split screen articles featured in Refractory into three themes: Formalism, screen psychology and spectatorship[14]. However, this division pertains to the articles written, not to an actual methodology for analysing and categorising split screen techniques, although the stated themes are good guidelines and did inspire my thinking around the topic.

Bizzocchi advocates an approach where he "examines the phenomenon at three levels: the narrative, the structural and the graphic. The narrative level considers the relationship of the split-screen sequence to critical story parameters such as plot, character and storyworld. The structural level investigates the formal relationships between the frames, including the treatment of cinematic time and space, the identification of any overall master-frame or figure-ground relationship, and the relationship of the split-images to the sound track. The graphic level is a closer look at the design details, considering variables such as frame shapes, number, layout, sequence initiation, and treatment of motion"[15]. He then applies this three-level analysis to the close-reading of two films.

Personally, I would combine the structural and graphic level. To me they both describe form and style. However, the narrative level I agree with, and here I would consider both screen psychology and spectatorship.

Moreover, I intend to look at many more films than two, simply because I am more interested in the variety of ways the split screen technique has been utilised, rather than deconstructing the technique in detail for a particular film. That is reserved for my own project, "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date".

Although Bizzocchi's three-level approach is useful, I decided that theories regarding point of view (POV) would be equally useful when dealing with split screen, as each split image embedded within the larger frame denotes a unique point of view.

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[12] Hagener, 2008, introduction

[13] Bordwell & Thompson, p.186

[14] Dwyer & Mehmet, 2008

[15] Bizzocchi, 2009, p. 2

Edward Branigan, in his book "Point of View in the Cinema, A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film", takes a perceptual-cognitive view of spectatorship and assesses the different ways to analyse and define point of view. He writes:

> "In talking about novels and films, critics often employ such terms as author, narrator, character and reader. When a text is considered as an object for contemplation, there must of necessity be some conception of a subject who presents the text (author), tells the story (narrator), lives in the fictional world (character), and who listens, watches, and desires that the story be told (viewer). But how exactly do we conceive of these subjects and their relation to the text? Furthermore, what does it mean to speak of the 'point of view' of an author, narrator, character or reader? The answers will depend on the critic's underlying assumptions about the nature of aesthetic texts. These assumptions may be based, for example, on theories of information, communication, expression, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, linguistics, cultural study, and many others. In each case a different theory emerges of authorship, narration, character, and of the act of reading or comprehension. Thus a range of issues are implicated in the notion of subjectivity."[16]

The above quote tells me that subjectivity both underpins the construct of point of view and permeates its analysis. He explains that subjectivity is: "the process of knowing a story — telling it and perceiving it"[17].

Branigan identifies five different approaches to anchoring subjectivity. Of these, three perspectives in particular were of interest to me: POV seen as a matter of perception, attitude and identification. Additionally, Branigan also includes POV as language and as logic of reading[18].

Moreover, he contends that POV is made up of six general units of representation: Origin, vision, time, frame, object, and mind[19]. I understand this as who is looking, how are they looking, when and for how long are they looking, in what way are they looking, what are they looking at and with what frame of mind/attitude.

Every POV shot can be thus deconstructed, according to Branigan.

POV is of interest to "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" due to the intention of portraying "his and hers points of view".

Although split screen has been detected as far back as 1901[20], its popularity was perhaps limited by how arduous it was to employ the technique[21]. In the days of physical film, split screen was achieved by way of an optical printer to combine two or

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[16] Branigan, 2012, p.1

[17] Branigan, 2012, p.1

[18] Branigan, 2012, p.5-21

[19] Branigan, 2012, p.103

[20] Bizzocchi, 2009, p.1

[21] Talen, 2002

more images onto the same negative, called a composite. With the advent of the digital era of filmmaking, in particular non-linear editing, it has become immensely easier to employ the technique. Bizzocchi states:

> "...split-screen is supported by ongoing cultural changes in the production, distribution and reception of the moving image. The computer desktop, electronic games, television news, print comics and graphic novels have accustomed us to reading the many-windowed visual screen. The video short forms (commercials, music videos and series opening sequences) have acted as a testbed and incubator for the development of more hyper-mediated visual grammars - including the split-screen. Contemporary domestic media technologies privilege the pleasure of complex moving image narratives and visual constructions. Larger high-definition video screens provide the effective real estate for the display of multiple images, and ever-increasing home playback options support the repeated viewing of more intricately faceted storylines and imagery".[22]

Perhaps that is why so many of the most inventive usages of split screen have been in the last 15 years.

Split screen is usually found during brief, select sequences of a film, and the reasons for employing the technique are as varied as its mode of portrayal.

However, I arrived at two basic units for grouping split screen. It is, at its core, either a division in time (past, present, future or alternate reality) or in place (from separate locations, near or far, to varying angles on the same scene).

Boiling down the concept of split screen to its bare bones is however less useful than opening it up to the myriad of uses the technique has turned up throughout its history.

During my research, I arrived at the following 27 categories from primarily a narrative-centred approach:

1. Convey suspense. The technique is used to build suspense. It might be that
   - the viewer knows there is a bomb under the table so to speak, i.e. understands the connection between the split screens.
   - the viewer is left in the dark and don't know the connection between the screens.
   - the viewer fears the assumed connection, but await confirmation of their fears as the scene plays out.
   Examples of films include: "Kill Bill", "Jackie Brown", "Carrie"[23], "Phantom of the Paradise", "Sisters", "Wicked, Wicked" and "Run Lola Run".

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[22] Bizzocchi, 2009, p.1

[23] David Greven (2008, introduction) explains: "In the famous split-screen prom-destruction sequence, the film makes the daring decision to employ a split screen just at the moment of greatest narrative tension and release, dissociating us from the horror that ensues as its heroine unleashes her apocalyptic wrath". I contend that what he calls "dissociating from horror" is intended to engender sympathy and identification with Carrie and downplay the human death toll. Greven (2008, abstract) further contends: "Brian De Palma's Carrie obsessively thematizes splitting in myriad forms, both formally and thematically." See 14.Convey psychological or social fragmentation.

"Kill Bill" employs the use of split screen to effectively create tension. The Bride, played by Uma Thurman, lies in a coma in a hospital bed. Elle Driver, played by Daryl Hannah, has been sent by Bill to assassinate her before she wakes up. A split screen portrays the simultaneous action of the Bride unconscious in her bed and Elle Driver preparing to carry out her murder disguised as a nurse with a deadly syringe.

The continuous close-up on the Bride, resplendent as an exposed and helpless sleeping beauty, compels the viewer to wonder whether she might or might not wake up at any given moment and prevent her impending doom.

On the other hand, the detailed portrayal of Elle Driver's preparations makes her increasingly ominous - the attention paid to her every move increases her importance which in turn goes hand in hand with of her perceived level of deadliness. The sinister whistling Elle engages in ties the two screens together; it is much like a lullaby performed for the sleeping Bride.

The split screen occurs right after the camera departs from Elle, who disappears into a ladies room to change, and independently continues down the hall, leading us to the room of the bride. Now the subsequent split screen is connected in time and place. As Elle Driver dresses up as a nurse and fills a syringe with what we instantly understand to be a deadly liquid, the other side of the frame shows the limp hand of the bride with tubes attached to it, her veins exposed to the world, establishing a clear connection between the two sides. Next, as the music takes an even more sinister turn, the faces of the two women are juxtaposed next to each other, emphasising that two formidable foes are about to go head to head.

The suspenseful tension is strengthened many times over by the split screen which disappears once the two women are in the same room. But by now the viewer is more than ready to resolve the curiosity and anxiety instilled by the split screen. The following scene now holds far more gravitas and satisfaction to watch.



Another example of split screen used to build tension and suspense is Brian de Palma's "Carrie". When the main character finally unleashes her telekinetic rage, split screen is used to establish a clear link between Carrie (generally in close-up on one side) and the violence that engulfs the room (generally in wider shots on the other side). One look from Carrie and the doors shut by their own accord. Another look from Carrie and the fire hose bursts into action. An electrical fire breaks out. The principal is electrocuted. A teacher is severed in half. Everyone dies.

Above: Another Brian de Palma film, "Phantom of the Paradise", also uses split screen to increase tension. A bomb is placed in a theatre by a masked perpetrator whilst actors perform on stage. Of additional interest, either side of the split screen are long takes with no cuts and at times one sees the same action from different angles in the two split frames. This necessitates a two-camera setup and makes timing of mise-en-scène important. This is similar to "Timecode", discussed later.

Below: Brian de Palma in general is fond of split screen in his films, and in "Sisters" (1973), it is particularly effective during a murder scene, where the left side of the split features the victim crawling to the window to attract attention and the right side (in an impressive zoom out) reveals a witness who eyes the victim from her window in the adjacent building. The split screen resumes as the killer and her accomplice clean up the murder scene on the left, and the witness, a journalist, contacts the police on the right. Questerbert asserts: "The principle upheld by De Palma is that disorder and excess are allocated to the left of the screen, while the desire for order is depicted on the right."[24]



2. Convey a phone call. This is the most common use of the technique. It connects two (or more) sides of a phone conversation, allowing the viewer to see facial reactions and body language that compliments or contradicts the voice. Examples include "Pillow Talk", "When Harry Met Sally", "Suspense"[25,26], "OSS 117: Lost in Rio", "The



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[24] Questerbert, 2010, p.248

[25] David Bordwell has written a blogpost about the films of 1913 and their contributions to film innovation. "Suspense" is specifically discussed at length. Bordwell, 2008.

[26] Critical Commons discuss the impact of "Suspense" on filmmaking, noting its use of split screen, cross-cutting and close-ups. Fortmueller, No Date. "Suspense, Cross-cutting, Close-Ups and Split-Screens".

Above: Humorous phone conversations in "Austin Powers; International Man of Mystery", "Mean Girls" and the S7.E19 "Hollywood A.D." episode of "X-Files". Below: A phone conversation between Meg Ryan and Billy Crystal in "When Harry Met Sally". Notice how the two split frames blend together, matching up the edges of the pillows, making it appear they are in the same bed. Further below: Phone conversations in "OSS 117: Lost in Rio" that ultimately involve twelve people conducting six simultaneous calls. Sound was edited and timed carefully to avoid conversations overlapping one another. Below bottom left: "Suspense" from 1913 is considered one of the first films to utilise split screen to depict a telephone conversation, here seen with a third frame that reveals a intruder cutting the phone line. Several critics have applauded the film for its innovative use of not only split screen, but also close-ups, to create suspense (see footnotes above). Below bottom right: A scene from "Pillow Talk" where Rock Hudson's frame is inset into Doris Day's frame, giving her weight of importance. Moreover the arrangement of the inset creates the visual impression that Rock Hudson is lying on top of Doris Day (See footnote about the Hay's Code under 16. Convey sexually suggestive content).











Thomas Crown Affair", "Mean Girls", "X-files", "Austin Powers; International Man of Mystery" and "Phone Booth".

3. Close - closer. In this instance the technique involves a wide and a close up of the same subject or even a straight duplication. As Julie Talen explains: "…sooner or later everyone simply puts two lenses on the same thing at the same time just for

Above top: In "Stranger than Fiction", director Marc Forster uses split screen in a brief montage to make a point about main character Harold Crick's meticulous toothbrushing ritual. It features different angles of the actor in a mosaic-like frame construction that transition in 90 degree turns. Above bottom: In a dynamic split screen montage from "Ocean's Thirteen", director Steven Soderbergh also repeats images in various mosaic-like frame constructions.

sheer visual pleasure"[27]. I call it the "Prism-effect": Seeing the same thing from different angles or the same angle multiple times. Examples include "Conversations with Other Women", "The Tracey Fragments", "The Thomas Crown Affair", "Ocean's Thirteen" and "Stranger than Fiction".

4. Montage - exposition. A lot of images, and thus information, can be crammed into a
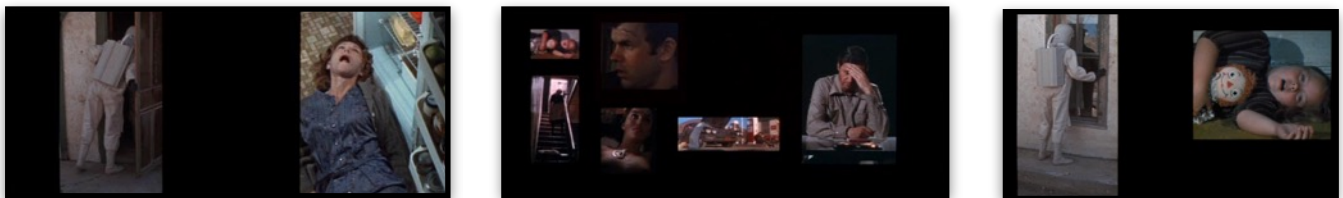


Split screen images in "The Andromeda Strain" where the bodies of the dead are found.

split screen montage in order to convey exposition in a swift, visually dynamic way that may or may not include dialogue. Example: "The Grifters"[28], "Wicked, Wicked" and "The Andromeda Strain".

"24": Due to the show's nature, split screen compresses time and ties characters together. As stated in 24.wikia.com: "In 24, the split screen technique receives thorough use due to the show's real time format and simultaneous multiple plot lines. A split screen showcasing multiple characters and locations is always featured along with the ticking clock on each return from a commercial break (the act-in clock). Additionally, the final few minutes of almost every episode are prefaced by a split screen, often with urgent music, to update viewers on the status of each major character and plotline as the hour ends."[29] Split screen is here a narrative tool that visually ties together storylines, underlining the importance, urgency and simultaneity of time.



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[27] Talen, 2002

[28] Critical Commons writes about how "Grifters" use split screen to reveal exposition about three characters at once, by juxtaposing them next to each other. Critical Commons Manager, No Date. "Split screen for Character Exposition in The Grifters".

[29] Wiki 24, No Date

5.  Montage - compress time. Split screen can create a visually dynamic montage that compresses time, yet conveys information that takes place over a longer period and/or in different locations. Examples include "Alfie" (below) and "24" (above).



In "Alfie" from 2004, split screen is used montage-style to show the evolution of a relationship through good and bad phases.

6.  Montage - lengthen time. The effect can also be employed to the opposite effect, an example being "Run Lola Run".
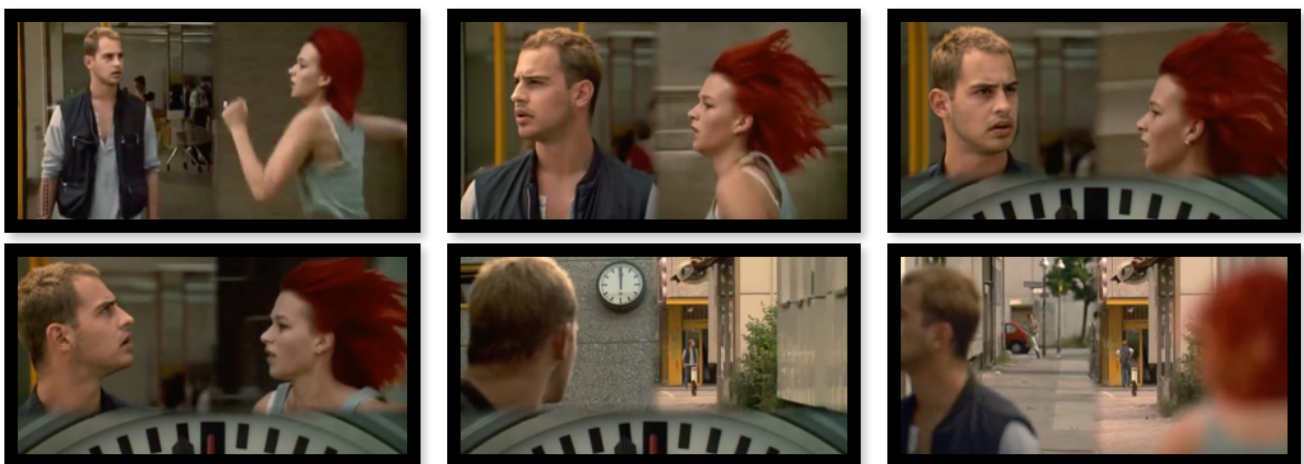


Tom Tykwer's "Run Lola Run" from 1998 employ the use of split screen in a pivotal, climactic scene. Lola is racing against time to prevent her boyfriend from committing robbery at an agreed upon hour and location.

Her running is juxtaposed with the boyfriend readying himself. Every second counts and at the height of the scene, the screen even splits three-ways, at we see the hands of a clock tick into place. Lola arrives the very instant her boyfriend disappears into the shop. The split screen here is interesting, because it enhances and draws out time, increasing the importance of every second. Often times the split screen is employed to compress time.[30]

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[30] Gonder, No Date, "Run Lola Run, Crosscutting, and Split Screen"

7. Convey dynamic momentum, usually in a montage. By this, I mean the split screen conveys an energy that the viewer will experience as being similar to the energy the narrative/characters are experiencing in the film, or put differently: The split screen mirrors the nature of the images. Examples include "Grand Prix"[31], "The Thomas Crown Affair"[32,33] and "Ocean's Thirteen" (see above, 3. Close-closer).



Above: In the 1966 "Grand Prix" by John Frankenheimer, split screen illustrates the velocity and tensions of grand prix racing. It shows multiple points of view as well as simultaneous and synchronised action. Below: A sequence from "The Thomas Crown Affair" depicts an energetic polo match. Bottom: Another sequence, during a heist that opens the film, additionally highlights the synchronicity (via phone) and simultaneity of events coordinated by men who do not meet, making the crime difficult to trace.



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[31] Critical Commons Manager, No Date. "Split Screens and Superimpositions in Grand Prix"

[32] Critical Commons Manager (No Date). "Dazzling Multi-Screen Action Sequence from Norman Jewison's The Thomas Crown Affair"

[33] Critical Commons Manager, No Date. "Montage of Split Screen Sequences from The Thomas Crown Affair; Split Screens for Narrative Tension and Visual Impact"

To the right: In "Life of an American Fireman" from 1903, a fireman is shown daydreaming about his heroic work through the use of split screen, here in the form of an inset circle.
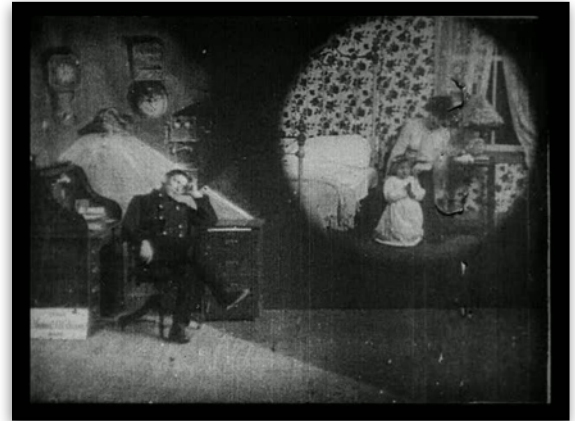


8. Convey a character's dreams/thoughts. Examples include "Life of an American Fireman" (see right) and "Napoleon" (see below, 10. Convey grandeur).

9. Convey a character's wishes/expectations. Examples include "Conversations With Other Women" and "500 Days of Summer" (below).
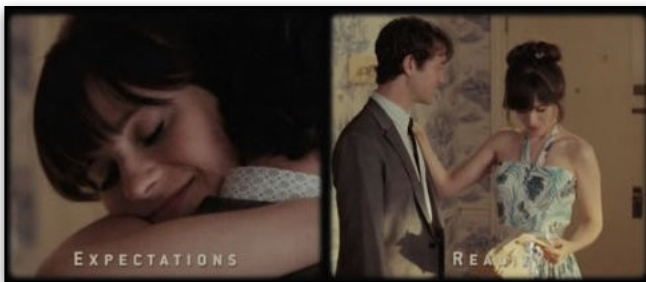


In "500 Days of Summer", split screen is used during a sequence, where expectations do not match reality. The male lead attends a soirée in the hopes of reconciling with his ex-girlfriend, but his hopes are dashed.

10. Convey grandeur. Example: "Napoleon".
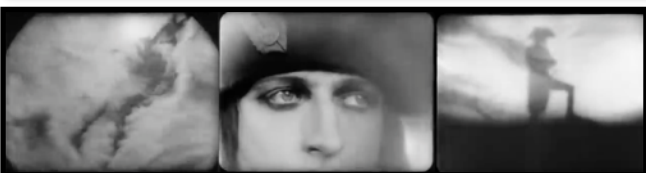


One of the early known uses of split screen was in "Napoleon" by director Abel Gance in 1927. In order to create an epic visual experience, three separate images were projected next to each other, forming a triptych which he called "Polyvision".[34]

Gance deploys the use of his three-way split screen in various ways. Firstly, he might show three visually disconnected images, as seen bottom left where a wideshot of Napoleon, a close-up of his eyes, and a shot of the distant sky (what he is looking at?), imply a connection. It could alternatively be a representation of his thoughts.

In other instances, Gance would use the three projections to create one wide and cohesive image, such as a panoramic landscape (top left) or a close-up of an eagle in flight (middle left). (Cont'd)

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[34] Gance's "Polyvision" is reminiscent of religious triptych paintings of the Renaissance, see RashidaT, 2013

(Cont'd) At times he would create aesthetic symmetry by mirroring or repeating images where the left side and right side of the frame are mirror reflections of one another (top right) or repeated duplicates (bottom right) whilst the middle frame is a separate image.

Lastly, Gance would sometimes simply repeat the same image three times, e.g. in the picture middle right where the colours of the French flag tint each image.

Julie Talen explains: To those whom Polyvision confused, he wrote: "Do me the favor of believing that maybe your eyes do not yet have the visual education necessary for the reception of the first form of the music of light." [...] "It is the future of the cinema which is at stake," Gance continued. "It will become a universal language if you make the effort to try to read the new letters which, little by little, it adds to the alphabet of the eyes."[35]

In the picture below top left from "Grand Prix", an all together different split screen is in use. The mise-en-scène - or production design and framing - creates two additional frames within the frame - the window and the mirror. These are not artificially created frames that were achieved in post-production, and do not as such draw attention to themselves, but nonetheless they divide the frame into several frames. In the picture below top right from "Pillow Talk", Doris Day is bathing prior to receiving a phone call from Rock Hudson (and the frame transitions into split screen). Her bathroom has an implied split in the line fashioned by a wall in the middle of the frame. In fact, there are three lines formed by walls as well as a shower curtain that create a group of lines, producing a visual impression that the screen is divvied into five parts. The bottom four pictures from "Requiem for a Dream" feature a dolly shot through a wall, depicting the frantic cleaning of the mother, high on drugs.



11. Natural split screen (see above). The fragmented frames are achieved through production design and mise-en-scène[36]. Not true split screen, but used in conjunction, it is a valid variation that deserves inclusion. Examples include films that frame through doors and windows, walls and mirrors ("The Great Train Robbery", "Grand Prix", "Requiem for a Dream" and "The Lady from Shanghai").

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[35] Talen, 2002

[36] Hagener, (2008) states: Another major way in which the split screen was used in the late 1960s could be described as intra-diegetic, whereby the rear-view mirror of a car or a window in a room creates a framed image within the overall widescreen frame. This is not a split screen in the strict sense since it does not entail an obvious post-production intervention into the image, but rather, it entails a specific strategy of composition that emphasises the embedding of one image within another.

12. Convey symbolism and metaphor. Split screen can be used to juxtapose images without narrative causality and through their juxtaposition, symbolic meaning is intended to be inferred by the viewer that is not inherent in each individual image in and of itself. Examples include Lars von Trier's "Nymphomaniac"[37] (below right) and Brian de Palma's "Passion"[38] (below left).



13. Convey simultaneity and convergence, such as in "Timecode", the music video for "Closing Time"[39] and "24".



Above: Semisonic's music video "Closing Time" portrays how a couple try to meet up after a day of work. They go to where the other just left, and keep missing each other. Each side of the split screen is one continous shot.

Below: Mike Figgis' "Timecode" employ a quadruple split that follows four characters in the same city that only converge on occasion, but the pictures below depict one such occasion. The man and the women in the bottom frames meet for a tryst in a movie theatre, and the females in the top frames connect through a car window.

"Timecode" is admittedly revolutionary. Nadia Bozak explains: "The film consists of four separate single takes that were shot simultaneously within the offices of "Red Mullet," a fictional film studio located in Los Angeles."[40] Michaël La Chance further writes: "The time code of video signals allow the synchronization of 4 cameras. Mike Figgis was shooting non-stop for 15 days with 15 actors in digital video. Each day produced 4 different films of 93 minutes, the films where shot simultaneously and without interruption."[41]

It seems the intricacies of making "Timecode" is as - if not more - interesting than the actual film, and the stylistic choices clearly overshadow the narrative. The cut - normally integral to narrative cinema -  is eschewed. The editing of note is that of the sound which must cue the viewer on what is important to focus on. However, on the DVD, with the option of choosing which

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[37] Filmslie.com, No Date.

[38] Nye, 2013

[39] "Closing Time" by Semisonic. Available on YouTube by SemisonicVEVO. https://youtu.be/xGytDsqkQY8, accessed 15/11/15

[40] Bozak, 2008, "Elements of Division"

[41] Chance, 2010, p.228

quadrant one wants to hear, sound editing is eschewed as well.[42] All the work is instead transferred to the viewer who must make active "editing" choices throughout the film. The long take records freely, and the split screen forces a relation between images through continuous juxtaposition. Nadia Bozak asks: "The experience of Timecode gives the impression that its maker was either deprived of the means of editing and therefore resorted to the multi screen as an approximation of editing, or else could not decide what to discard from his accumulated images and so chose to display them all. [...] Do the long take and the split screen horde waste and thus over-indulge in visualizing excess?"[43]

On the cinema of excess, Kristin Thompson writes: "...films can be seen as a struggle of opposing forces. Some of these forces strive to unify the work, to hold it together sufficiently that we may perceive and "follow" its structures. Outside of any such structures lie those aspects of the work which are not contained by its unifying forces — the "excess".[44] She concludes, "Once the narrative is recognized as arbitrary rather than logical, the viewer is free to ask why individual events within its structures are as they are. The viewer is no longer constrained by conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as the solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer. Instead, the work becomes a perceptual field of structures which the viewer is free to study at length, going beyond the strictly functional aspects. [...] Such an approach to viewing films can allow us to look further into a film, renewing its ability to intrigue us by its strangeness; it also can help us to be aware of how the whole film — not just its narrative — works upon our perception."[45] She was not writing about "Timecode" or split screen, but she uncannily described what the format can do.

Steve Anderson contends: "As a formal experiment, Time Code reveals the limitations inherent in intrusive structuring devices such as real-time and fragmented screens, but also the potential of innovation with the conventions of cinematic time and space within even the traditional format of a theatrical feature film."[46] Mike Figgis' film is a feature-length experiment in split screen and as such shares similarities with what I wish to achieve with "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". However, my intention is not to value form over content or style over substance. The structural choices must support the narrative and not the other way around. I have great love and respect for the visual language of cinema and its myriad of possibilities, but without a meaningful narrative that justifies its stylistic choices, a film becomes - regardless of its intelligence - a hollow construct.

14. Convey psychological or social fragmentation. It can be:
   • Within a character as seen in "127 Hours" and "The Tracey Fragments".
   • Between characters (or a character and its environment) such as in "Requiem for a Dream" and "The Tracey Fragments". The fragmentation may be:





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[42] Chance, 2010, p.235

[43] Bozak, 2008, "Watching Waste"

[44] Thompson, 1977, p.54

[45] Thompson, 1977, p.63

[46] Anderson, No Date

Above top: A psychological use of split screen can be seen in "127 Hours" where it denotes various psychological states in the same character. It is the true-life story of Aron Ralston who was trapped by a boulder in the desert for 127 hours, before amputating his own arm. Split screen conveys the fragmentation of his psyche as he hallucinates.[47] Below top six images: "The Tracey Fragments" shows how far character fragmentation can go. Main character Tracey is looking for her brother who thinks he is a dog. The film features fragmented images that divide up the screen in constantly changing ways - reflecting both the psychological fragmentation within the main character and the fragmentation she feels in relation to her surroundings.[48]



Above bottom: "Requiem for a Dream" features a pre-credits opening scene in split screen, where the mother (Ellen Burstyn) locks herself in the closet out of fear of her drug-addled son (Jared Leto), who steals her TV to sell it for cash. One side of the split screen shows the mother's POV inside the closet whilst the other side shows the son's POV as he tries to guilt-trip his mother into coming out, whilst stealing her TV at the same time. The split screen creates distance between mother and son and visualises their opposing beliefs. It enhances and sets up the fragmentation not only between, but within the characters.[49]

Below: The film also features a love scene in split screen. The images and dialogue reflect intimacy and tenderness, but the split screen suggests division. Aronofsky said himself: "Here are my two characters in love. They're actually trying to connect but there are still so many walls between them and keeping them apart."[50]

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[47] Srinivasan, 2011

[48] Scott, 2008

[49] Grant, 2010 (Filmanalytical)

[50] Eisenstein, 2007, p.4

- Overt, such as the opening scene in "Requiem for a Dream", where the characters know they are disconnected.
- Covert, such as the love scene in "Requiem for a dream", where the lovers think they are connected, but don't know yet that this is not true.

15. Convey synergy, i.e. a connection or melding between two characters. Example: "Conversations with Other Women" where the two main characters merge together like a Rorschach picture during a sex scene. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

16. Convey sexually suggestive content. This was a way for films to get around the Hays Code[51]. Examples include "Pillow Talk", "Indiscreet" and "Down With Love".



Above: In "Pillow Talk", Doris Day and Rock Hudson are bathing in separate locations, talking to each other on the phone. The suggestive framing on the split screen creates the illusion that their feet are touching.

Below: In "Indiscreet", Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman carry out a phone conversation in bed. Timing and placement of the characters create such suggestive actions as eye-contact, caressing, spooning and hand-holding.



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51 Mondello, 2008

Above: "Down With Love" from 2003, starring Renee Zellweger and Ewan McGregor, spoofs films like "Pillow Talk" and "Indiscreet" by taking the sexual innuendo even further. The viewer is witness to suggestive acts of oral sex, intercourse and the sharing of a post-coital cigarette after hanging up.

17. Convey a homage to source material, as seen in Ang Lee's "The Hulk" (see image below) where it references its comic book roots.[52,53] Some critics contend that the split screen is not very well-integrated into the narrative: It is "redundant"[54] or just plain "odd"[55]. This suggests that the split screen is not sufficiently justified by the narrative, but rather imposed upon it for the sake of style.



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52 Hollyn, 2003. "How much were these effects scripted?"

53 Albinson & Ulloa, 2009. "How did you become involved with the project?"

54 Christaylor2395, 2013

55 Phipps, 2015.

18. Convey pure style. In the music video "Sugar Water" (see above), the split screen plays with reversal of time. As interesting as this effect was, it left me wondering what narrative use it had. I saw similarities to "Timecode", as it portrays a web of urban life signified through the lives two women who do not know one another but cross paths in the middle of the video, when one runs the other over. However, I am still unsure as to the narrative necessity of the time reversal. But it looked cool.[56]

19. Convey convergence across time. Examples include "X-files", "Conversations with Other Women" and the music video for Lauryn Hill's "Doo Wop".
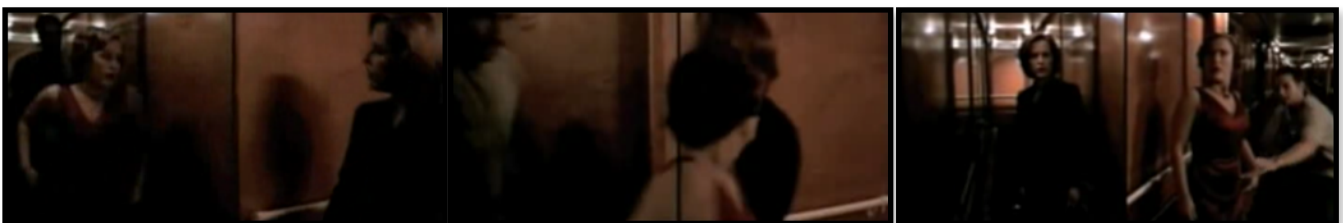


In an episode of the "X-files", entitled "Triangle" (S6.E3), split screen is used to convey simultaneous action across a long lapse of time. Mulder is stuck in the Bermuda Triangle in 1939 aboard a ship that went missing, and meets a Scully alter ego who was present on the ship at the time of its disappearance.

Scully, in present time, boards the ghost ship in search of missing Mulder. At one point Scully crosses paths with her 1939 alter ego when the two of them pass the center line of the split screen, in essence swapping sides. They do not see one another, but do sense each other. The split screen crossover is very sophisticated, as present time Scully and 1939 Scully physically pass each other - with one overlapping the other. The episode also appears to be filmed in real time, consisting of four continuous long takes, and was inspired by Semisonic's music video for "Closing Time"[57] (see 13. Convey simultaneity and convergence).

20. Convey parallel action. This often implies either a mirroring or contrasting effect, and doesn't necessarily include simultaneity or convergence at the end, but often does. Examples include "The Rules of Attraction", music videos for Destiny's Child's "Emotion" (where the characters converge to comfort each other after a string of disappointments) and Semisonic's "Closing Time" and the TV show "24".

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[56] "Sugar Water" by Cibo Matto, available on YouTube by Warner Bros Records. https://youtu.be/EN9auBn6Jys, accessed 15/11/15

[57] Wikipedia, No Date, "Triangle (The X-Files)"

Above:"The Rules of Attraction" opens with a split screen sequence that shows the parallel action of the female and male leads' morning routines (images 1-4). However, the most interesting part of the sequence is the ending where the two frame fragments morph into one via a complex camera movement (images 5-16).

21. Juxtapose the past and the present, or the future and the present. Example: "Conversations with Other Women".
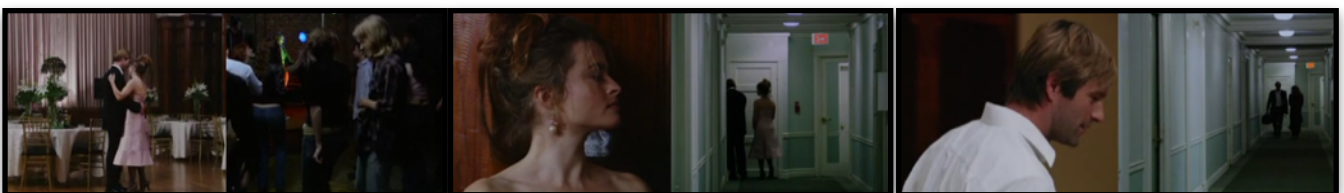


Above: In "Conversations with Other Women" the split screen is often used to juxtapose the past and the present, as seen in the image above left where the couple dances in present time and during their first meeting years ago. On rare occasions, the split screen also juxtaposes the present with the immediate future. When the woman is asked why she is there, her frame is juxtaposed with a frame of her going to her room with the man (above middle). Later, when the man is deciding whether to stay in the hotel room or leave together with the woman, the other side of the split screen depicts them walking out of the room and down the hallway (above right).

22. Convey contrasting or opposing views, values and wants. During a therapy session in Woody Allen's "Annie Hall"[58] (below left), Alvy and Annie divulge contrasting feelings about the same issues, e.g. he says they never have sex, she says they have sex all the time. The scene is cleverly cut sound-wise. The dialogue is timed to naturally ping-pong between the two frames, with pauses arising from thinking

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[58] Benedict, 2014 (podcast)

breaks. In another scene (above right), a family dinner at Alvy's and Annie's respective homes highlight how they come from very different backgrounds. Most interestingly, the two frames start to interact, when Annie's mother asks Alvy's mother what they plan to do for the holidays, on one hand breaking the invisible wall and removing the scene further from the realm of reality, on the other hand expanding the capabilities of the split screen format even further.

23. To convey a pattern or concept greater than its parts. Mosaic screen, as seen in the music video "Hibi No Neiro", "Charade", "The Thomas Crown Affair" and "Grand Prix", usually does not allow the viewer to take in each individual image, but rather



Above top left: The end of "Charade" concludes with a mosaic screen of the various identities Cary Grant took during the film.

Above right: The poster for "The Truman Show" - Jim Carrey's face is constructed from a mosaic of small images, reflecting the constructed and public nature of his life, unbeknownst to him.

Above bottom left: The poster for "The Life of Pi" is also made up of a mosaic of small images that together depict a tiger (a central character in the plot) - reflecting how life is made up of a variety of remembered experiences that we refashion into meaningful stories.

Below: Images from the "Hibi No Neiro" music video by Sour. The people in the mosaic screen interact through the frames, forming patterns, new faces, a shower of rain drops and they even take pictures of each other. This is a music video based upon the adage that the sum is greater than its parts.
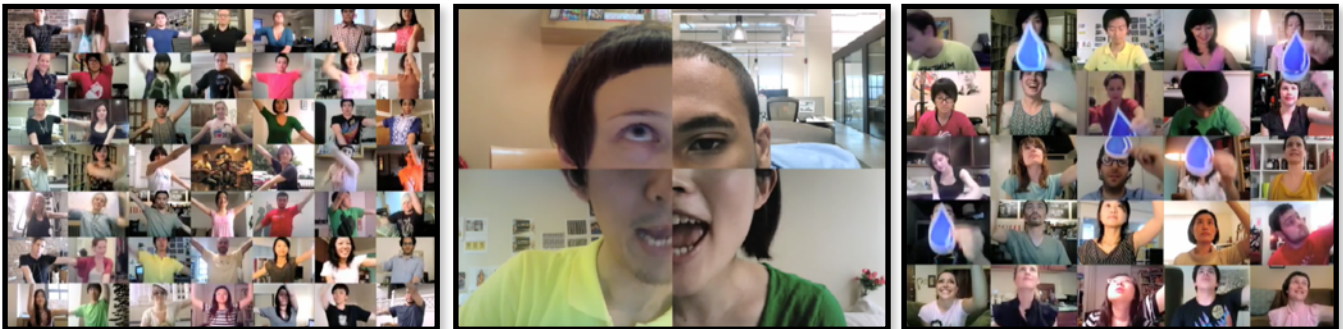


the totality of all the images, often allowing for a new meaning or even a new image to emerge. The latter is usually seen in still images, such as certain film posters, of which examples include "Life of Pi" and "The Truman Show".

24. Convey connection by location, such as Andy Warhol's "Chelsea Girls" and Mike Figgis' "Timecode". These films feature low interaction between the fragmented screens - which is the point. In "Chelsea Girls" (see below), the main characters all live at the Chelsea Hotel. Andy Warhol stated: "I want to make a movie that is a long movie, that is all black on one side and all white on the other." Warhol was referring to both the visual concept of the film and the content of the scenes presented.[59] In "Timecode" the characters inhabit the same urban space; an area around a film studio in Los Angeles (see 13. Convey simultaneity and convergence). When two (or more) images are juxtaposed next to one another, the human brain will automatically search for connection and meaning between the images. Hence it is a fascinating exercise to juxtapose images and storylines that have no or little connection and see what the viewer's brain will come up with.



25. Invisible split, such as when the same actor has to portray two characters in the same frame, for example twins or alter egos. As with natural split screen, it can be argued that this is not a true example of split screen, but since the technique or technical process involved in achieving the effect is similar, I believe it deserves

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[59] Wikipedia, No Date, "Chelsea Girls"

inclusion. Examples: "Adaptation", "The Parent Trap", "The Dark Mirror"[60] and "The Scapegoat".



Top left: Nicholas Cage takes on twin roles in "Adaptation".

Middle left: Lindsay Lohan's breakthrough role was as twins in "The Parent Trap".

Bottom left: Matthew Rhys plays a man who has an identical, but evil, alter ego in "The Scapegoat". They end up swapping identities.

Top and bottom right: Olivia de Havilland plays good and evil twins in "The Dark Mirror".

26. Split diopter and rack focus. A split diopter is not strictly an invisible effect, but nor does it draw attention to itself by showing clear demarcations between screen fragments. A split diopter is a lens that can split the focus in a shot, so that both background and foreground are in focus at the same time[61]. The effect is seen in for example "All the President's Men"[62] (below top image) and "Blow Out" (below middle four images). It creates an unsettled feeling, as we are used to as viewers

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[60] Snelson, 2008, introduction: "The [...] split-screen device employed is atypical in that it is concealed, enabling the twins (both played by Olivia de Havilland) to appear together as though framed within a single shot." I find what is interesting is the use of mirrors to "re-fragmatise" what was made invisible: That the main characters are indeed "split", albeit in a psychological sense.

[61] Nedomansky, 2013

[62] Gonder, No Date, "All the President's Men, Split Diopter and Camera Movement"

not to see both near and distant objects in focus. In addition, I contend that rack focus, by not keeping both near and distant objects in focus at the same time, but by shifting focus between them is another form of split screen, albeit very subtle. This is seen commonly, one example being "Time Machine" (below bottom two images).[63]



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[63] Gaycken, No Date, "Rack Focus in The Time Machine"

27. Split screen by way of sound. There is no pure example of this, as it is a theoretical construct in my mind. If split screen can be achieved by way of imagery - be it via screen-splitting during editing in post-production, via mise-en-scène and production design, or via camera lenses and composition in cinematography - then what of the missing element: Sound?

Ian Garwood hints at its possibilities in his article "Sound and Space in the Split-Screen Movie"[64] where he details a scene from "The Boston Strangler", a 1968 film by Richard Fleischer. He points out how the scene uses "simple stereo effects to suggest something of the specific dimensions of the multiscreen frame." The scene in question separates diegetic sound to the left and right channels in accordance with the left and right screen frames. Two elderly ladies discover their friend murdered. To the left we see a very dim image of a body in a bed, to the right we see the two ladies engaged in their everyday activities. This juxtaposition builds suspense, as we have an inkling as to what will soon transpire. When they open the door to their friend's room, flooding it with light, the two frames reveal the same shot in varying size (see images below), amplifying the horror of their discovery.



Harwood adds: "In The Boston Strangler, there is a contrast between a frame whose sound world is composed of figure (the neighbour's chatter) and ground (the piano playing) and a frame whose soundtrack is – uncannily – all field (the silence of Myra's room). The two worlds are brought together when "figure" – the women's gasps and screams – dominates both frames and each is robbed of its wider sonic context (the "ground" disappears to the right when the piano playing stops; the "field" of silence disappears to the left with the women's cries)."[65]

> **Figure**
> If a sound or group of sounds is positioned as Figure, it is thereby treated as the most important sound, the sound which the listener must identify with, and/or react to and/or act upon.
>
> **Ground**
> If a sound or group of sounds is positioned as Ground, it is thereby treated as still part of the listener's social world, but only in a minor and less involved way. We are to treat it as we treat the familiar faces we see every day and the familiar places we move through every day, in other words, as a context we take for granted and only notice when it is not there any longer.
>
> **Field**
> If a sound or group of sounds is positioned as Field, it is thereby treated as existing, not in the listener's social, but in his or her physical world. We are to treat it as we would treat the people that crowd the streets through which we walk, or the trees that populate the forest past which we drive

Above: An explanation of "figure", "ground" and "field". Taken from: Garwood, 2008. "Conclusion".

Hence, can sound design be another dimension of split screen? Can it create a "split" in in lieu of visual fragmentation? Perhaps it can be combined with rack focus or a split diopter or natural split screen (mise-en-scène and production design), thus maintaining the integrity of a single frame, yet still alluding to a

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[64] Garwood, 2008, "The Boston Strangler: The Screen-Splitting Soundtrack"

[65] Garwood, 2008, "Conclusion"

visual divide, and letting the sound do the splitting by directing what we hear. With all the channels of sound available today (5.1, 7.1, Dolby Atmosphere etc.), it seems like an unexplored opportunity.

The various categories can also be combined, as in the following example: "Wicked Wicked" (see images below) is a film that is predominantly told in split screen and - like Gance's Napoleon - invents a name for it (Duo-Vision)[66]. During one scene, the male lead recounts a childhood experience to a female acquaintance. At we watch both frames unfurl simultaneously - his conversation with the female acquaintance and his childhood experience as a flashback - suspense slowly builds as we come to realise that the childhood experience was a bad one that helped shape the man into a murderous psychopath, and as the flashback reaches its climax, so does the conversation: The man strangles the female acquaintance. The two frames - at first seemingly without causality other than for the purpose of providing exposition - converge upon the realisation of who and what the man is. By recounting his story, his murderous instincts surface. This is a mix between 1. Convey suspense and 4. Montage - exposition. Julie Talen adds: "Deemed a bomb, it never made it to video. But despite its clumsy writing and acting, "Wicked, Wicked" is well worth watching for its exploration of reasons to divide a story's screen: fantasy vs. reality, memory vs. present, truth vs. lies, hope vs. fear and — since it's the story of a peeping Tom — watcher vs. watched, stalker vs. stalked."[67] "Wicked, Wicked" integrates many narrative reasons for its "Duo-Vision", which I applaud and hope to emulate with "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". However, I hope not to emulate its clumsy acting, writing and the fact that it was a bomb.



The above list of categories is by no means exhaustive. I am sure I have not covered every split screen movie under the sun. However, the selection above represent a fair cross-section and provide plenty of material to help me construct all the split screen sequences for "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date".

Taking the above movies and their split screen examples further, I have the option to reassess the material from a formalist-structural-graphical approach. But as I started to do this, I realised this classification was secondary to the narrative function.

The split screen may divide the screen vertically (most common) or horizontally ("Requiem for a Dream") or diagonally ("X-files", "Pillow Talk", "Suspense"). It may have an invisible (as in unlined) centre line ("Conversations with Other Women"), a visible, clearly-marked one ("Down with Love", "Kill Bill") or even try to blend the two frames ("When Harry Met Sally"). It may appear/disappear via a slide transition ("The

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[66] Warner Archive, 2014

[67] Talen, 2002

Grifters", "Kill Bill"), a zoom in or out ("Charade", "OSS 117: Lost in Rio"),  or a direct cut (most common). It may split two-ways, three-ways, four-ways or into a mosaic screen ("Conversations With Other Women", "127 Hours", "Mean Girls" and "Hibi No Neiro"). One frame can be smaller than the other, like an inset ("Pillow Talk", "Phone Booth")  and so forth.

I realised that all the formalist, structural, graphical choices are borne out of the story: What narrative purpose is the split screen serving? Answer that question, and the layout of the split screen "solves" itself. Thus for the purposes of this thesis, and given its page count constraints, it was not useful for me to delve deeper into this type of categorisation, as I am interested in split screen as a narrative tool.

# 4. "CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER WOMEN"

"Conversation with Other Women" is an innovative feature film from 2005 that employed split screen throughout from beginning to end. Directed by Hans Canosa, it stars Helena Bonham Carter and Aaron Eckhart as ex-lovers who meet again for one night when they both attend the same wedding.

The audience is unaware of what history the two may or may not share when the film opens, but as the story progresses, the audience learns that not only do the two know one another, they were once married and still have feelings for each other. However, both have new partners and new lives and it seems that one night of reminiscing and releasing pent-up longing is all the two characters are meant to share.

The film ends with an interesting merging of the split screen which was a never-interrupted constant throughout the film. In the final shot, the two characters seemingly sit in separate taxi cabs and talk about relationships and weddings with their respective drivers. They are both deep in thought, contemplating the subject, when the background seen through the rear window of the vehicle merges into one (after a truck passes), suggesting that they are suddenly both seated in the same cab.



This remarkable detail, easy to miss, but once noticed, changes a viewer's entire perception of the film. One knows that the merging of the split screen is significant, as there was never previously a single merged or non-split image in the film, but what exactly it means is open to discussion.

In my opinion, the meaning is symbolic and surely denotes something important about the characters and/or the story. Upon my first viewing of the film, I was convinced it was a sign that the characters did not or will not separate, but are literally back together in the cab or more symbolically will reconcile in the near future, as they both decide in that moment that they want to be together.



The split screen throughout the film most commonly takes the form of shot-reverse shot as a way to show his and hers points of view. However, it is also used at certain times to juxtapose the past and present, display parallel action, reveal wishful thinking or secret desires,

present fractured emotions (by having an actor speak the same line or play a reaction in different ways), and show time jumps by letting us glimpse the future, and thereby also accelerate the narrative by compressing time.

Most interestingly, the technique is used at one point to denote a merging of the two main characters by mirroring half of an image around the split screen centre line, and thus establishing a Rorschach-like picture of the two lovers melding together as the opening shot to a sex scene. The visuals reflect the nature of the physical act.



By employing split screen throughout the film, the viewer is allowed to follow each character's emotional experience in real time and without interruption, making the viewer an interactive editor, by allowing him or her the choice of focusing on either character alone or watching both simultaneously.

I am impressed with what the split screen technique accomplishes in "Conversations with Other Women" in terms of enriching and deepening the narrative and its characters. I enjoyed the interactive quality of the split screen which demands that I be observant and discerning in order to deduce meaning. I admire how the technique is integral to the understanding of the ending, and thus by extension the understanding of the entire film. Without the split screen, the ending would make little sense. The characters would seemingly drive off in different directions, never to meet again. But the merging of the split screen implies a different story.

However, I cannot be certain that my experience and understanding of "Conversations with Other Women" is the same for someone else, and hence I decided to conduct a small-scale qualitative analysis of how "Conversations with Other Women" is perceived by five other individuals with little or no previous knowledge of the film. I did this in order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of split screen as an extensive narrative tool and to prevent me from making assumptions based merely upon my own experience.

# 5.  INTERVIEWS ON "CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHER WOMEN"

A qualitative interview approach allows me to conduct in depth conversations with my interviewees concerning their views on the film "Conversations with Other Women".

I asked them questions regarding the following:
- Please provide a brief synopsis of the film's plot as you understand it.
- Please present your interpretation of the film's ending when the split screen merges.
- What was it like to watch an entire film in split screen? Did you like it?
- Would the film have worked equally well, better or worse in "single-screen"?
- What was your understanding of place/space in the film?
- In what specific ways did the film utilise split screen?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the split format in your opinion?
- Would you watch another film told entirely in split screen?
- In terms of the cinematography, how aesthetically pleasing do you find the split screen format?

The respondents were all female, and their ages range from early twenties to late sixties. One had seen the film previously, but had to re-watch it to refresh her memory. The rest had never heard of the film, and agreed to watch it in its entirety prior to the interview. I refer to the respondents by their initials. In the appendix (13.1) I have summarised each interview and all statements reflect the opinions of the respondent. Below, I discuss the data and draw conclusions.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER...

My interpretation of the five interviews is that either one really likes the split screen device or one really does not. There are no lukewarm responses. Four of out of five respondents enjoyed the film and the device (although they would not like to see it in every movie). Would this be representative of the general public? I most likely have a circle of friends with a preponderance for intellectual thought who would enjoy such cinematic experiences. Then again, these people may very well be my intended target audience.

Moreover, all of the respondents reported that they felt the split screen afforded them more information, that they were privy to secrets that they would not have been with a "single-screen". I contend that the film could be re-edited into a "single-frame" narrative and include all the shots and frames of the split screen (and thus in essence contain all the same information), and yet the experience would be different for the viewer. Hence this perception of gaining additional information is not based on the actual images one is shown, but in the fact that one is given a choice to choose. By having such options, one feels that one can extract information that is not readily available. One is not being told what to perceive, to watch, to notice as is the case with "single-screen" narratives. With two screens or two POVs, one elects which one to follow. It becomes a subjective experience and by extension unique. And when something is unique, it seems like one knows something no one else does.

S.A. was the only respondent who had a negative reaction to the split screen which she described as editorial, drawing attention to itself, problematic, interruptive, manipulative and distracting. Interestingly, Hagener states:

"The split screen is often regarded as hard to reconcile with the idea of transparency inherent in continuity editing and a narrative style focused on the seemingly unmediated display of story information because it foregrounds the artificial nature of the image. A frame within a frame draws attention to the act of framing itself by visibly displaying the basic principle that forms the condition of possibility for the image: the frame that draws a distinction between inside and outside, between image and non-image."[68]

I believe it is for this very reason that many people will reject watching films that per their definition over-utilise this technique. To them it becomes an art-film that requires too much work to decipher, and not a visual experience they can sit back and enjoy. In my opinion, S.A. rejected the device because it made her aware that she was watching a film, and not real life. By her own admission, she stated that she treats film as if it were real life. My impression of how she processes character is also to pretend that they are real people who has inner life and willpower separate from the writer or filmmaker who created them. She put effort into dismissing the split screen as she watched the film, and admitted that the device was inconsequential to her interpretation of the film.

A split screen can be confusing because it forces the audience to add another layer of interpretation, as they have to work out what function the split screen serves and keep all these functions in mind simultaneously, thus creating more work for them. There is a fine balance and tipping point to the work an audience engages in. Too little and the film is generic. Too much, and it is an unintelligible art-film. Just right, and it becomes an experience that widens horizons and provides emotional catharsis. "Conversations with Other Women" keeps its split screen relatively focused, which I suspect accounts for its wider appeal in comparison to e.g. "Timecode" (still labelled a narrative film) or "Chelsea Girls" (labelled an experimental film) where the split frames veer off in different directions, making the viewer feel "stressed", as A.F. would put it.

However, "Conversations with Other Women" still values its form over its content by insisting that the split screen device be constant, leading to assertions by S.A. that the device is intrusive and extraneous to the story. As she explained it, there are moments where it added to the narrative, but mostly it was just an editorial manoeuvre by the writer and director. Hence, "Conversations with Other Women" was not able to justify its use of split screen in every given scene, although the film justifies it with the ending as well as with an overall thematic and intellectual intent.

In conclusion, I see two areas of weakness with split screen which I must endeavour to resolve. Firstly, split screen must not confuse, forcing viewers to divide their attention beyond what they are capable of maintaining. There may be multiple screens, but there has to be only one story. One motor drives all the wheels. Secondly, the split screen must add value to every scene - if the scene works better as a single frame, then the split screen exists as form over content or style over substance. Most people watch films for their content and substance, not for their form and style. Should the form and style happen to inform the content and substance, then all the better.

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[68] Hagener, 2008, "Pillow Talk and the Telephone"

Thus, is it possible to use the split screen technique in such a way as to not overtax the mind of the viewer, but instead engage it just enough for them to feel interactively challenged and personally involved? Can the technique ensure that the information conveyed surpass or at least equal that of a single screen?

The challenge, if one wants to extend split screen to the masses and not just to a select few of the intellectual elite, is to make split screen a justified narrative tool that adds to the average viewer's enjoyment of the cinematic image and engages their existing knowledge of cinematic "language", a.k.a. their "how-to-watch-a-film" vocabulary.

There is another element to be considered: Genre. Looking at "Conversations with Other Women", I see that, although it has at its core a "simple" story (as all the respondents called it), the thematic content and its dissemination are not simple and in fact belong to the realm of art film, not commercial film. Even without the split screen, "Conversations with Other Women" would fall squarely into the category of independent art film. Art film has throughout history been of interest to only a limited audience. The masses will sooner watch a Hollywood tent-pole action blockbuster that requires little critical thinking. I imagine in order to improve upon "Conversations with Other Women", I must arrive at some sort of balance between mind-bending art and frivolous entertainment.

If I desire to experiment with the split screen device as an extensive narrative tool that spans the length of an entire feature film, I need to marry the art film aspect with its opposite: something commercial and easy to digest. If the form is artsy, then the content must be unpretentious.

Which leads me to the romantic comedy genre.

# 6. ROMANTIC COMEDY

A romantic comedy is a film which has as its central narrative motor a quest for love, and which portrays this quest in a light-hearted manner and almost always to a successful conclusion[69].

This was the best definition I came across of the genre as it allows for a wide variation of narrative styles. Romantic comedies, a.k.a. rom-coms, are often hybridisations, they cross-breed with other genres, and many of the well-regarded romantic comedies are also examples of other genres, be it drama ("Jerry Maguire", "Ghost"), period ("Shakespeare in Love"), horror ("Shaun of the Dead"), action ("Romancing the Stone", "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang"), sci-fi ("Her") and so forth. The comedy need not even be laugh-out funny, but can utilise black humour, dry humour, satire, irony and sarcasm ("Punch Drunk Love", "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", "I Give it a Year"). There are films with relentless laugh-out-loud humour ("There's Something About Mary") and then there are more subtle approaches ("Sliding Doors", "Waitress"). The ending may not be happy in terms of a happily-ever-after, but still the best outcome for the characters and their personal growth ("My Best Friend's Wedding", "Chasing Amy", "Annie Hall"). In the end, genre-categorisation can become a decidedly subjective affair for films that fall between two stools. For example, "Amélie" is widely considered a romantic comedy outside of France, but in France, it is not.[70]

Difficulties with categorisation aside, genre hybridisation has proven a very successful approach, as it allows for eclecticism. It keeps the genre fresh and mirrors real life in the sense that the pursuit of love does not exist in a vacuum. Audiences of today are highly movie-literate and "welcome the hybridisation of film genres, enjoying the familiar but seeking the new".[71]

Deleyto argues that it is important to include films that fall outside comfortable genre categorisation, as "it is often films like these that make the genre evolve in more interesting directions".[72]

In fact, the romantic comedy genre itself is a hybridisation of the romance and comedy genres, "featuring a narrative that centres on the progress of a relationship, and, being a comedy, resulting in a happy ending."[73] The quest for love is a hallmark of the romance film, and happy endings a hallmark of the comedy, dating back to ancient Greek times.[74]

McDonald traces the evolution of romantic comedy into four major subgenres: The screwball comedies, the sex comedies, the radical romantic comedies and the neo-

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[69] McDonald, 2012, p. 9

[70] Rollet, 2009, p.93

[71] Mortimer, 2010, p.2

[72] Deleyto, 2011, p.2

[73] Mortimer, 2010, p.4

[74] Mortimer, 2010, p.69

traditional romantic comedies.[75] Claire Mortimer subscribes to this categorisation as well.[76] It seems even in its purest form, the genre already consists of subgenres.

However, Grindon takes a more sophisticated view and tallies up nine subgenres, by including transition periods too: The transition to sound cluster (1930-3); the screwball cycle (1934-42); the World War II cluster (1942-6); the post-war cluster (1947-53); the comedies of seduction cycle (1953-66); the transition through the counter-culture cluster (1967-76); the nervous romance cycle (1977-87); the reaffirmation of romance cycle (1986-96); the grotesque and ambivalent cycle (1997 to the present).[77]

His categorisation presents a clearer view of how societal influences shape the genre.

Romantic comedy has always relied on dialogue to create both its humour and romance. It seems fitting then that the transition to sound 1930s marked the beginnings of this genre.

Ernst Lubitsch was by far the most influential director of this transition phase. Faced with censorship, he mastered the art of sexual innuendo in both sound and picture. A Lubitsch film was always famously risqué, and appealed to high-brows and low-brows alike[78]. Mae West and Noël Coward were also important influences. Four dominant traits characterise this transition phase: infidelity plots, a bohemian or outlaw protagonist, a distant, frequently elite setting, and finally a skepticism about love. Rather than portray courtship these films depict marriages under threat and abandonment".[79] These elements lead nicely into the screwball era...

1934 marked a turning point. "It Happened One Night" was released, sweeping the Oscars, and gave birth to what is known as the screwball comedy[80]. Screwball initially referred to the heroine of the story, but by the late thirties had become a label to describe the whole genre[81]. Films like "His Girl Friday", "Bringing Up Baby", "The Lady Eve", "My Man Godfrey", "The Awful Truth" and "The Philadelphia Story" are classic examples. Within the screwball genre, there is a subcategory known as the comedy of remarriage[82]. "His Girl Friday", "The Awful Truth" and "The Philadelphia Story" are notable examples. In these films, the central couple are in the process of divorcing or are already divorced, but during the course of the film they get back together again. This was partly due to harsh production codes (The Hays Code) that did not allow for sexual liaisons between unmarried partners. Thus, the concept of remarriage solved

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[75] McDonald, 2012, p.3-4

[76] Mortimer, 2010, p.10-19

[77] Grindon, 2011, p.25-26

[78] Harvey, 1998, p.3-4

[79] Grindon, 2011, p.27-31

[80] Harvey, 1998, p.107
    Mernit, 2000, p.34
    Mortimer, 2010, p.11

[81] Mortimer, 2010, p.11

[82] Grindon,2011, p.33
    McDonald, 2012, p.22

this problem. This trend was not a reflection of real life, as divorce rates were falling in the 1930s. However, separations were on the rise and the comedies of remarriage may have been a reflection of this[83]. Society was in the grips of the Great Depression. Many male-centric jobs were lost, leaving men unable to provide for their families and pushing women into the labour market. Masculinity was thrown into crisis and gender roles in a state of flux.[84] Screwball comedies acknowledge these societal changes, whilst at the same time honouring traditional marriage as its happy ending.

The hallmarks of screwball comedies can be listed as: "lunacy, speed, unpredictability, unconventionality, giddiness, drunkenness, flight and adversarial sport".[85] Characters act in unpredictable and unconventional ways, as if crazy or drunk; their language is pacy, their physical actions no less swift, with chases a common event, as the woman frequently pursues her man and he flees from her. 'Adversarial sport' describes how love is a game each combatant wants to win and they are prepared to cheat in order to do so. Neither side actually wins. The film usually ends in a benevolent draw in which both parties are reconciled. Dialogue often overlaps and is spoken at a neck-breaking pace, characters tend to engage in masquerade, role play and fake or mistaken identities, and reverse class snobbery is often a theme - with a heiress choosing a poor - but honest and funny - man over a rich, usually dull, suitor (known as the Bellamy, as the actor Ralph Bellamy was constantly cast in these hapless roles[86]). To be poor is somehow to be better, to be rich is to be out of touch, and being book-learned means being in need of a real life education.[87] The 21st-century audience is often mystified by the elusive exchanges that characterise conversations in these films, but screwball comedy is censored comedy and its language is ripe with subtle, sexual innuendo.[88] I admit that during my first viewing I myself did not catch the sexual metaphor of David Huxley's missing bone in "Bringing up Baby", as I am used to more overt symbolism.

Another transition phase started when the US entered World War II, and the genre lost its momentum. It became hard to maintain a light, comedic tone in the face of harsh realities[89]. This trend continued into the next transition phase; the post-war years. Here, the themes of death, longing and loss permeate and darker, more sombre genres became popular, such as film noir. Happy endings were no longer guaranteed, as seen in "Roman Holiday" and "The Ghost and Mrs Muir". "Adam's Rib" is one of the more famous examples of this period, and yet differs greatly: Where comedies of remarriage focused its plot on how the couple falls in love again, post-war romantic comedies focus on how marriages deteriorate (and then engineer a quick reconciliation at the end)[90]. All in all, the war and post-war years were not a good time for the rom-com genre.

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[83] Gilmour, 1998, p.30

[84] Gilmour, 1998, p.30-31

[85] McDonald, 2012, p. 23

[86] Mernit, 2000, p.65

[87] McDonald, 2012, p.23-24

[88] Grindon, 2011, p.35

[89] Grindon, 2011, p.38-41

[90] Grindon, 2011, p.42-45

The genre regained popularity in the 1950's and early 1960's with the so called sex comedies, or comedies of seduction, exemplified by notable films such as "Pillow Talk" and "Some Like it Hot", both released in 1959. McDonald defines the subgenre as such:

> The sex comedy pits woman against man in an elemental battle of wits, in which the goal of both is sex. Only the timing and legitimacy of this differs from gender to gender, with women wanting sex after, and men before or without, marriage.[91]

As with the screwball era, a specific year marked the turning point that set the sex comedy era in motion, namely 1953. Marilyn Monroe's stardom exploded with three films released that year ("Niagara", "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes", and "How to Marry a Millionaire") and her persona was one of sensuality and childlike innocence that seemed to promise sex without complications. Otto Preminger released "The Moon is Blue" without approval from the Production Code Administration and the film still became a hit, heralding a more relaxed moral attitude among audiences, and Alfred Kinsey published his ground-breaking book "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female", which revealed that 50% of women surveyed had sex outside marriage. Suddenly the rules of the game changed, and seduction replaced courtship as the driving force in romantic comedies. By the late 1950s, Doris Day rose to fame as a moral counterpoint to Monroe's temptress. She embodied the respectable and virtuous working professional who wants to fall in love, marry and raise a family. In "Pillow Talk", she stands her ground and turns the philandering Rock Hudson into husband material. Masquerade and disguise are still key components of the genre, but now employed in service of seduction, and marriage is still upheld as the desirable outcome for both genders. However, the wholesomeness of Doris Day fell out of favour by the mid 1960s, when the contraceptive pill became widely accepted and moral values in society changed. Marilyn Monroe was already dead and the rest of the 1960s were marked by turmoil; The assassination of Kennedy, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam war and the rise of feminism in the "swinging sixties". Romantic comedy was at a loss in defining the courtship patterns of a new era and once again fell out of favour.[92]

In 1967 "The Graduate" was released and marked a new transitional phase that culminated in the radical and nervous romantic comedies of the 1970s and early 1980s. "The Graduate" depicted an affair between a married, older woman and a younger, single man and ends on an ambiguous note: The man eventually chooses the woman's daughter, whisks her away from her own wedding onto a bus (reminiscent of the ending in "It Happened One Night") that is going to who knows where, and the facial expressions of the characters imply a very uncertain future. Was their elopement just another mistake in a long line of mistakes?[93]

This ambiguity, this inversion of conventions, this uncertainty regarding love, romance, relationships and marriage came to characterise the radical romantic comedy and its subsequent subgenre; the nervous romantic comedy. There is a decided

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[91] McDonald, 2012, p.38

[92] Grindon, 2011, p.45-50
   McDonald, 2012, p. 38-55

[93] Grindon, 2011, p.52-53
   McDonald, 2012, p.62-63

lack of courtship rules and a lack of happy endings. Anything goes. In "Harold and Maude", a man in his early twenties falls in love with a woman in her eighties. The love affair ends with her death. In "Annie Hall" - the definitive nervous romantic comedy - the couple is essentially unable to be happy together, in spite of the fact they do love each other, and thus the film concludes with the end of their relationship. What doomed them were not external hindrances in so much as it were internal, psychological barriers. There is a clear tendency towards self-absorption and self-reflexivity, perhaps in part strengthened by social and political disillusionment and cynical apathy.[94]

This subgenre came into existence during a time when free love reigned, the feminist movement was at its peak, sex (and birth control) was readily available, the institution of marriage was questioned and divorce rates were surging. Masters' and Johnson's work on the human sexual response had been published, and the Production Code was replaced with a ratings system. Courtship rules were that there were no rules, and as McDonald posits: When sex is no longer withheld, what is left? Courtship flies out the window, and with it romance. Aware of the possible obsolescence of its own preoccupations, the genre was determined to examine, self-consciously, these preoccupations and their traditional conventions.[95] The common trope seemed to be "boy meets girl, boy loses girl. The end". [96]

Every action has a reaction. The genre resurfaced with a vengeance in the late 1980's and early 1990's with the neo-traditional rom-com films that we today generally associate with the genre. Fed up with the weary world view of the radical and nervous rom-coms, these films went back to traditional genre roots and espoused happy endings, courtship and sentimental nostalgia, whilst de-emphasising sex. It is as if the wide availability of sex, ushered in with the radical romantic comedies, demystified it, decreased its importance and lead to a realisation that carnal pleasures have little to do with the attainment of love, whilst winning someone's heart does. Sex is no longer hard to come by, but love and lasting commitment still is. Classic examples of this era include "When Harry Met Sally", "Pretty Woman", "Sleepless in Seattle", "You've Got Mail" and the rise of the British rom-com, such as "Four Weddings and a Funeral", "Notting Hill" and "Bridget Jones' Diary".[97] These net-traditional rom-coms would value tears as well as laughter, borrowing heavily from romantic drama.[98]

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[94] McDonald, 2012, p.61&67
  Grindon, 2011, p.55

[95] McDonald, 2012, p.60

[96] McDonald, 2012, p.59-79
  Grindon, 2011, p.54-58

[97] Mortimer, 2010, p.93-111
  Mather, 2006, p.119-176
  Roe, 2009, p.79-91

The British rom-com rose to prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s. Prior to the success of Four Weddings and a Funeral, romantic comedy tended, in the main, to be a generic form associated with Hollywood rather than British cinema. However, driven by financial opportunities presented by Anglo-American co-productions, UK production company, Working Title, formed a partnership with US studios to produce films that featured British culture with an American (co-)star. It struck gold. The formula, lead in great part by writer Richard Curtis, centred around the culture clashes that arose from Anglo-American relations or in the case of "Sliding Doors" or "Bridget Jones' Diary", simply cast Americans as Brits.

[98] Grindon, 2011, p.59
  McDonald, 2012, p.85

McDonald ends her examination of the genre at this juncture in time, whereas Grindon goes on to categorise yet another subgenre that he posits arose in the late 1990s and persists to this day; namely the grotesque and ambivalent cycle. By grotesque he is referring to gross-out humour, evident in films like "There's Something About Mary", "Happy Gilmore" and "The 40-Year-Old Virgin" (in fact it is evident in most Ben Stiller, Adam Sandler and Judd Apatow films), as well as in the bromance subgenre in general. Bromance describes films that focus on the friendships between men (without discounting romantic love with a woman), and is featured in films such as "The Hangover", "I Love You, Man", "Wedding Crashers", "21 Jump Street" and "Ted". It is romantic comedy tailored to a male audience. The ambivalence refers to an extension of the radical rom-coms. Love is still risky business, without a roadmap, and happy endings are uncertain. Films like "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", "Before Sunrise", "Up in the Air", "I Give it a Year", "Greenberg", "Chasing Amy", "Punch-Drunk Love" and "My Best Friend's Wedding" espouse ambiguity and engage in continued self-reflexivity over the nature of love and relationships[99]. It seems that many of these films still believe in the redemptive power of love, but the means to attain it remain elusive. Is the ambiguity Grindon describes driven by the assumptions society makes about love and relationships? What is a good love relationship?

A study by Johnson and Holmes analysed a sample of 40 rom-com films and found that "such films appear to depict romantic relationships as having qualities of both new and long-term relationships; that is, to be both novel and exciting, yet emotionally significant and meaningful. Furthermore, relationships were shown to have both highly idealistic and undesirable qualities but for any problems or transgressions experienced to have no real negative long-term impact on relationship functioning."[100] They named their study "Contradictory Messages". Does the ideal of love we seek set us up for failure in the real world? And does it at the same time make rom-coms cliched and sappy, because they can achieve this ideal in a fictionalised world?

A two-fold study by Hefner and Wilson analysed firstly the embedded romantic ideals contained within "the top 52 highest grossing romantic comedies from the last 10 years. Results demonstrated that romantic ideals and challenges are prevalent in these films. The second study was a large-scale survey of 335 undergraduate students, who were asked to report on their romantic comedy movie viewing and beliefs about romance. Results showed that individuals who watched these films in order to learn reported stronger endorsement of romantic ideal beliefs than those who did not watch to learn."[101]

Hence we return to the age-old adage: Does art imitate life or does life imitate art? And which came first: The chicken or the egg? I believe that in this instance, art generally imitates life and not the other way around. Charlie Kaufman, when talking about "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind", admitted: "'I wanted to write a relationship that I recognized. I didn't want to write a romantic comedy in the conventional sense".[102] I think most writers try to write what they see and experience around them,

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[99] Grindon, 2011, p.61-66

[100] Johnson & Holmes, 2009, "Abstract"

[101] Hefner & Wilson, 2013, "Abstract"

[102] Grindon, 2012, p.197

and not just replicate existing masterpieces. Rom-coms reflect dating and mating trends in society by working them into a genre formula, but society then watches these films and some people accept the genre formula as fact. People assume the happy ending is a happily ever after, even though it only depicts a moment in time, or that the couple in a rom-com are always right for each other, no matter how much they fight, simply because they are the main characters. Real life does not offer this certainty. There are no genre conventions or filmic rules to guide us. If some higher force would tell us that our partner were indeed "the one", it would be a whole lot easier to withstand the trials and tribulations that inevitably come.

Despite its long history, the genre holds a lowly status. Critics often pan rom-coms by default, decrying its high level of cliches and formulaic tropes. Some even pronounce the genre as dead.[103] However, John Alberti claims: "...if the romantic comedy is indeed dying, it is not just being killed by inept filmmaking; it would have to be because traditional genre expectations find themselves in increasing dissonance with larger cultural narratives about romance, love, sexuality, and gender, a dissonance that disrupts enough of our individual experiences of the genre to cause us to question the cultural efficacy and pleasure of the genre as a genre."[104]

I argue that romantic comedies function best when they illuminate new aspects of and rising trends in dating and mating practices in its present-time society, i.e. when they capture the zeitgeist rather than regurgitate age-old cliches. Borrowing and stealing from previous masterpieces must be in service of this. If the genre seems dead, perhaps it is time for a new cycle? Mortimer highlights how critics "bemoan the state of the genre, as each high-profile release is greeted by scathing reviews and feature articles which compare the contemporary romcom to screwball comedies in particular, seeing the latter as a golden age for the genre against which today's films fail to measure up."[105] These critics have in my opinion got the wrong end of the stick. The best of romantic comedies do not emulate. They innovate, illuminate, inspire and inform our dating and mating practices and vice-versa. 2015 has seen the release of a very successful romantic comedy, which for once is receiving plenty of critical acclaim and awards buzz, namely Amy Schumer's "Trainwreck".[106] I believe the success of that film lies in the fact that it deals with a pertinent issue: The acceptability of female promiscuity. Despite women's liberation and the feminist movement, a double standard still exists regarding how male and female promiscuity is perceived. Women are sluts and scorned, whereas men are studs and somehow revered. This issue has not been dealt with at length in a romantic comedy, and Amy Schumer has created a film that celebrates female promiscuity with raucous humour, whilst at the same time depicting men, not as playboys and commitment-phobes, but as emotionally intelligent and equally as capable of desiring a committed, loving relationship as women are. My only problem with the film is that Schumer negates her own stance when at the end of the movie her lead character admits to being "broken". I would have much preferred if

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[103] McDonald, 2012, p.106
    Dargis, 2009

[104] Alberti, 2013, p.1

[105] Mortimer, 2010, p.132

[106] Johnson, 2015
    Child, 2015

she had instead said something along the lines: "That was the life I wanted before, now I want something different."

Hence, my research into romantic comedies has made me realise the genre is one long exploration of dating and mating practices through the ages and it continues to evolve as society does. My research provided me with two major inspirations. Genre hybridisation and illuminating a societal trend or issue. Although the split screen device is not a genre, it is "something other" to marry romantic comedy with that will infuse it with originality and vigor. The purpose of the split screen device in "Oliver and Cecilie" is to portray two points of view - his and hers - in order to illuminate how men and women differ in their approach to romance, how they make different assumptions and have different reactions, and all this in the service of a set of particular challenges facing men and women that have occupied my mind ever since I read four particular articles in "The Atlantic".

Hanna Rosin's "The End of Men"[107] details how the rise of feminism and women's liberation have shifted gender roles in society. Women are now more likely to graduate college and find a job. Men are more likely to hold only a high-school diploma. Most managers are women. Men dominate just two of the 15 job categories projected to grow the most over the next decade. There are more single women who never marry, and more single mother households than ever before. Rosin posits that perhaps modern society is just better suited for women; that inherently female traits and skills are of greater use and value to present society. Women are adapting well to the post-industrial economy, men, it seems, are not. 75% of the 8 million American jobs lost in the Great Recession of the last decade were by men, and many of these jobs - in male-centric industries like construction, manufacturing and high finance - will not return. Rosin explains: "The postindustrial economy is indifferent to men's size and strength. The attributes that are most valuable today—social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus—are, at a minimum, not predominantly male. In fact, the opposite may be true." She then adds: "Dozens of college women I interviewed for this story assumed that they very well might be the ones working while their husbands stayed at home, either looking for work or minding the children. Guys, one senior remarked to me, "are the new ball and chain." It may be happening slowly and unevenly, but it's unmistakably happening: in the long view, the modern economy is becoming a place where women hold the cards."[108] The alpha male is being replaced by the omega male, who ranks even below the beta in the wolf pack. American pop culture keeps producing endless variations on this often-unemployed, romantically challenged loser: "A perpetual adolescent (in Judd Apatow's "Knocked Up" or "The 40-Year-Old Virgin"), or a charmless misanthrope (in Noah Baumbach's "Greenberg"), or a happy couch potato (in a Bud Light commercial)"[109].

Kate Bolick's "All the Single Ladies" continue in the same vein, but focus on the implications it has on romance and marriage. "While the rise of women has been good for everyone, the decline of males has obviously been bad news for men—and bad news for marriage. For all the changes the institution has undergone, American women as a

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[107] Rosin, 2010

[108] Rosin, 2010

[109] Rosin, 2010

whole have never been confronted with such a radically shrinking pool of what are traditionally considered to be "marriageable" men—those who are better educated and earn more than they do. So women are now contending with what we might call the new scarcity. Even as women have seen their range of options broaden in recent years —for instance, expanding the kind of men it's culturally acceptable to be with, and making it okay not to marry at all—the new scarcity [...] narrows the available choices, making a good man harder to find than ever. At the rate things are going, the next generation's pool of good men will be significantly smaller."[110]

When women were denied the financial and educational opportunities of men, it behooved them to "marry up" - how else could they improve their lot? But now that women are moving "up", and men are moving "down", the implications are far-reaching. The Guttentag-Secord theory[111] tells us that women are now in surplus, and men in shortage, and thus her choice is between deadbeats (whose numbers are rising) and playboys (whose power is growing). Courtship practices seems to have devolved into a hook-up culture. The alpha male playboy has the world is at his feet - every woman wants to bag him - and the deadbeat omega male is of so little value to the opposite sex that he might as well be invisible or not exist.

Last time I checked, the world still consisted of roughly 50% men and 50% women. So what happens to all these deadbeats that are deemed unmarriageable? Do they just curl up in their little man caves and die? And what of the beta-male? Did he lose his job and join the ranks of the omega male?

The Greek alphabet aside, there clearly is a gender crisis in existence. Bolick suggests that women, since the numbers suggest that they cannot all marry, learn to embrace and relish singledom; that motherhood and singledom are not mutually exclusive and that the stigma associated with "the spinster" is a remnant of bygone times.

However, Lori Gottlieb's "Marry Him!" tells women to settle for second best and good enough in order to marry and raise a family[112]. Better marry than not at all. She is

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[110] Bolick, 2011

[111] Bolick, 2011: "In their 1983 book, Too Many Women? The Sex Ratio Question, two psychologists developed what has become known as the Guttentag-Secord theory, which holds that members of the gender in shorter supply are less dependent on their partners, because they have a greater number of alternative relationships available to them; that is, they have greater "dyadic power" than members of the sex in oversupply. How this plays out, however, varies drastically between genders.
In societies where men heavily outnumber women—in what's known as a "high-sex-ratio society"—women are valued and treated with deference and respect and use their high dyadic power to create loving, committed bonds with their partners and raise families. Rates of illegitimacy and divorce are low. Women's traditional roles as mothers and homemakers are held in high esteem. In such situations, however, men also use the power of their greater numbers to limit women's economic and political strength, and female literacy and labor-force participation drop.
One might hope that in low-sex-ratio societies—where women outnumber men—women would have the social and sexual advantage. (After all, didn't the mythical all-female nation of Amazons capture men and keep them as their sex slaves?) But that's not what happens: instead, when confronted with a surplus of women, men become promiscuous and unwilling to commit to a monogamous relationship. (Which, I suppose, might explain the Amazons' need to keep men in slave quarters.) In societies with too many women, the theory holds, fewer people marry, and those who do marry do so later in life. Because men take advantage of the variety of potential partners available to them, women's traditional roles are not valued, and because these women can't rely on their partners to stick around, more turn to extrafamilial ambitions like education and career.
In 1988, the sociologists Scott J. South and Katherine Trent set out to test the Guttentag-Secord theory by analyzing data from 117 countries. Most aspects of the theory tested out. In each country, more men meant more married women, less divorce, and fewer women in the workforce. South and Trent also found that the Guttentag-Secord dynamics were more pronounced in developed rather than developing countries. In other words—capitalist men are pigs. [...] the more successful a man is (or thinks he is), the less interested he is in commitment."

[112] Gottlieb, 2008

basically saying: Don't hold out for whatever your notion of Mr Right is, he most likely doesn't exist, and one day you'll wake up too old, and all the good men that you thought weren't good enough, will be taken, and you'll be left with all the losers.

The remaining Atlantic article - Anne-Marie Slaughter's "Why Women Still Can't Have It All" - deals with the high demands women place upon themselves. There is an implicit expectation that any woman worth her salt wants to take over the world as a high-powered career professional and certainly can juggle work and family life as long as she is committed (and organised) enough. However, the truth is it is not possible, and certainly not without sacrifice to her family and damage to her own well-being.[113]

We keep talking about equality, but there is not an equal balance. Women take over and do too much, and men are put in the corner where they do too little. Women expect perfection, they keep raising the bar and bang themselves over the head when they fall short. Men feel emasculated and left in the dust, scrambling to redefine their role in society and eek out a small place where they can fit in and feel like "men" again.

And this leads me to "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date".

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[113] Slaughter, 2012

# 7.   "OLIVER AND CECILIE GO ON A DATE" - GENRE

I have endeavoured to create the beginnings of a romantic comedy that deal with those exact issues explored above. The heroine, Cecilie, is woman who feels the pressure to have it all and is desperate to bag the man she considers is Mr Right, but who proves constantly elusive. The hero, Oliver, is a man adrift, not even the hero of his own life, but at the mercy of the people around him. He has been in love with Cecilie for years. She is his colleague at the advertising firm they both work at, but she shows no interest in him, as she only has eyes for the star account executive, Daniel. Oliver has essentially been friend-zoned, except they are not even that good friends. One day, Oliver is given a golden opportunity to take Cecilie on a date, and now has the chance to change her opinion of him and maybe win her affections. Cecilie, on the other hand, will never be happy until she lets go of her idealised notions of Mr Right. Will these two find common ground in the course of their date?

I have written approximately 30 pages of a 1st draft, which is about 1/4 of the film, and have a detailed synopsis. Both are included in the appendix.

Billy Mernit, in his book "Writing the Romantic Comedy", breaks down the genre into its structural components with the intention of helping screenwriters pen a wellmade romantic comedy. They are as follows:[114]

1. **Character** - and Character Chemistry
    1. the man cannot be in it for sex, at least not at the end.
    2. the woman cannot be in it for money, at least not at the end.
    3. there is a host of supporting characters, such as the bellamy (Mr or Ms Wrong and de facto antagonist) and the buddy (who usually serves as a kind of characterisation mirror).
    4. opposites attract. This means more than fireworks and explosive battle of the sexes conflicts. The two protagonists challenge each other because each has something the other lacks, but needs. Ultimately the two complete one another, and literally does so by entering into a union at the end.
    5. character growth is usually a must before the protagonists are worthy of one another's love. There is often a fundamental flaw that must be dealt with as well as a emotional incompleteness and essential void that the significant other can fill.
    6. Leger Grindon adds that masquerade, disguise, role play and mistaken or fake identities are common tropes in romantic comedies.[115] Through the process of deception and pretense, characters often discover their own true identity.
2. **Plot and Structure:** Comedy with a couple at the core
    1. romantic comedies follow the basic tenet of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy wins girl back or "the meet, the lose and the get" which is better, as it doesn't have to be the boy who does all the meeting, losing and getting - nor does it have to be a girl that he wants to meet-lose-get.

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[114] Mernit, 2001 - the above list is an amalgamation of points contained throughout the entire book.

[115] Grindon, 2001, p.16-18

2. crisis provokes the protagonist into comprehending the value of love and what a protagonist learns by falling in love determines the outcome of a romantic comedy.

3. the three act structure can be translated as such: 1. Conflict: Love challenges the characters. 2. Crisis: The characters must must accept or deny love. 3. Resolution: Love transforms the characters.

4. There are seven basic story beats: 1. The Chemical Equation: Setup. 2. Cute Meet: Catalyst. 3. A Sexy Complication: Turning Point. 4. The hook: Midpoint. 5. Swivel: Second Turning Point. 6. The Dark Moment: Crisis Climax. 7. Joyful Defeat: Resolution.

5. Leger Grindon identifies 10 master plot beats: 1. Unfulfilled Desire (setup) 2. The meeting (catalyst) 3. Fun Together (Fun and Games) 4. Obstacles arise (1st turning point) 5. The journey (towards a point of no return) 6. New Conflicts (midpoint) 7. The choice (2nd turning point) 8. Crisis (End of act 2 climax) 9. Epiphany (theme and character growth) 10. Resolution.[116]

## 3. Point of View

1. romantic comedies more than any other genre follow a dual protagonist point of view - necessarily devoting time to both the man and the woman in story.

## 4. World and Setting

1. many rom-coms choose New York, but it need not be. However, the setting is for whatever reason usually urban. The setting should be credible and convincingly evoked, with its own set of rules that the story adheres to.

2. Leger Grindon adds that romantic comedies often incorporate trips and journeys, usually around the midpoint. Trips and journeys suggest movement and imply that a transformation is underway in the characters.[117]

## 5. Conflict

1. These can be external or internal. But as it is a character-driven genre, internal is most common. But love or the prospect of love is always what challenges the characters and puts them into conflict with themselves, others or the world. Additionally, Leger Grindon three types of conflict: 1. Generational 2. Battle of sexes 3. Internal.[118]

## 6. The Art of Funny

1. The reversal principle: The element of surprise that a reversal supplies is what enlivens a joke.

2. Be serious: It's funny when characters take themselves (too) seriously.

3. Make them hurt: Pain + Truth = Funny

4. Define your tone: Farce? Satire? Parody? Black Comedy? Sophisticated? Comedy Drama?

5. Comedic set pieces: Just as there should be a scene that delivers full-blown romance, there should be one that is laugh-out-loud funny.

6. Threes and toppers: Half the jokes that are longer than one-liners operate on a principle of threes (first time is random, second time sets up a pattern, third time a twist occurs) - and when that is done, top it off with one more (leave no good gag untopped).

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[116] Grindon, 2011, p.9-10

[117] Grindon, 2011, p.19

[118] Grindon, 2011, p.3-8

7.  Leger Grindon adds that laughter is a way to bond in a story, usually entailing the man making the woman laugh, by cracking a joke or by endearing himself through a humorous display of vulnerability or innocence.[119]

7.  **Being Sexy:** Sex is only interesting when it releases passion. There are elements to consider when depicting sex scenes. The good ones do double duty: They reveal more information about the characters and try to find unusual and innovative ways to deliver the scene. Also creating erotic subtext that slowly builds is metaphorical foreplay, making any subsequent release that much more powerful.

8.  **Dialogue:** Drives the plot forward, sets the scene, conveys information/exposition, reveals character and theme, defines tone. Dialogue should do more than one thing at a time.
    1.  At key moments, less may be more and silence can be gold.
    2.  Should be succinct, not on the nose

9.  **Imagery (Mood and Style):** A movie is a visual medium, not a novel with words on paper. Make it visual by bringing imagery alive and making it active. Look for visual metaphors.

10. **Theme:** What is it about? Also what I like to call the "what am I supposed to take away from this story?" question.
    1.  the secret ingredient that makes a rom-com rise above the generic. The issue/trend one is trying to innovate/illuminate/inspire/inform.
    2.  theme is expressed in character growth.
    3.  theme is expressed in story resolution.
    4.  theme is expressed in subplots.

Although I don't use screenwriting formula whilst developing my stories - I find it very restricting as it counters creativity - but I use it afterwards to help me structure, tighten and refine the story. With the above 10 points in mind, I will now justify the choices I have made with "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". Please read the script excerpts and the synopsis in the appendix before continuing.

## 1. Character

Oliver is definitely not in it for the sex. He has been pining away for Cecilie for years. He has an ex-wife who has used (and still does use) sex as a manipulative tool to get her way with him, and it has made him wary of the sexual games people play. He has been celibate for a while, not by conscious choice, but rather because it is a consequence of actively rejecting the power plays of sex.

Cecilie is not in it for the money. She wants to make her own. I have not made her into a full-blown high-powered career woman, as in the end what drives her is a quest for love, and a demanding career would get in the way of that and compromise her femininity. However, I am starting to question whether this is the best choice for her character.

Regardless of how ambitious she is, she is, however, so engulfed in the culture of self-aggrandisement and image-projection, that she is losing a sense of self. She thinks that if she can create the image of perfection, that is as good as or the same as the real

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[119] Grindon, 2011, p.22

thing. The demands she places on herself are enormous: She must be beautiful and fit, she must excel at her work, she must be the perfect partner (just the right mix of good girl and bad girl), she must wear the right clothes, eat the right food, and know the right things. Oliver's love allows her to see herself as she is for the first time, and feel that not only is that good enough, it is actually quite awesome.

Oliver is the classic bellamy, albeit a false bellamy. Daniel is the classic rom-com hero, albeit a false one. This reversal, when it occurs, is a revelation to Cecilie.

Xander and Diana are classic buddies, who also mirror a courtship as they eventually fall for each other. Oliver's sibling, a twin brother, along with his sister-in-law are also classic buddy figures who, as the only non-singles, turn the tide for our main couple.

Oliver must learn to become the hero of his own life before he can win over Cecilie. In practical terms, he must learn to take control and stand his ground. Whatever happens in his life should be the result of his choices and decisions, not other people's.

Cecilie must learn to release her girlish and idealised illusions of Mr Right. Her version of an ideal mate is as impossibly perfect as everything else she tries to construct in her life. But it is all skin-deep and this constant striving for perfection with no end in sight will never bring her happiness. Love is right under her nose, if she would only wake up and smell the roses.

Cecilie and Oliver are opposites in the sense that as ambitious as she is for all things perfect, as unambitious is Oliver who understands the importance of making time and room for the little things in life - that are actually the big things. He is a doting father and feels particularly responsible for his daughter's well-being due to her mentally unstable mother.

Oliver and Cecilie do not engage in much charade or role play other than pretend to go on a date and assuming the identify of his sibling and in-law at the restaurant, but neither one of them are authentic people either. Cecilie hides behind a veneer of perfection, and Oliver cannot seem to cast off his set upon persona.

Oliver can teach Cecilie to relax and love herself, by allowing her to bask in his love and see herself as he does, and Cecilie can teach Oliver to regain a sense of purpose and agency, by giving him a reason to fight for her.

## 2. Plot and Structure

The meet, lose, get takes a different form in "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". Oliver and Cecilie already know each other, so the catalyst of the story is the date. This allows them to meet on different terms and get to know each other in a completely different light.

However, Cecilie loses Daniel, and behaves atrociously towards Oliver who in turn loses interest in her. As kismet would have it, the two are forced to remain in one another's company even though they would prefer to part, and it is during this part of the evening that Cecilie's eyes are opened and suddenly sees all the wonderful qualities that Oliver possesses. She now has to find a way to get him back.

The story beats are as follows:

1. The Chemical Equation: Setup (Unfulfilled desire)
   • Oliver and Cecilie work at the same advertising firm. We learn the she is in love with Daniel, and Oliver is in love with her. A classic love triangle.
2. Cute Meet: Catalyst. (The meeting, a.k.a the date)
   • Oliver asks Cecilie on a date and she accepts which sets things in motion.
3. A Sexy Complication: Turning Point. (Fun together - or maybe not. Obstacles arise)
   • The date gets off to a bad start.
4. The hook: Midpoint. (More obstacles arise)
   • Cecilie realises that Daniel's affections already belong to someone else. There is no chance that he will ever love her, as she has the wrong gender to suit his tastes. Embarrassed and humiliated, she takes her anger out on Oliver whom she blames for meddling in her affairs.
5. Swivel: Second Turning Point.
   • Cecilie tells Oliver that even if he were the last man on earth, she wouldn't fall for him. Oliver is devastated.
6. The Dark Moment: Crisis Climax. (The choice: Oliver decides he no longer likes Cecilie. The journey continues, as the date night cannot be terminated)
   • Oliver realises that Cecilie is poison, and loses all interest in her. However they are still forced to spend more time together. During this time Cecilie starts to see Oliver in a different light and decides she does have feelings for him.
7. Joyful Defeat: Resolution. (The Epiphany: Cecilie does like Oliver. The crisis: Oliver no longer likes her. Resolution: She manages to win him back)
   • Cecilie manages to convince Oliver of the errors of her ways and woo him back. They are finally able to embark upon a relationship together.

## 3. Point of View

The point of view is split evenly between Cecilie and Oliver for the scenes they are both in. These are also the scenes that will always form some sort of split screen. Please see the next chapter.

## 4. World and Setting

"Oliver and Cecilie" is set in an urban world, as romantic comedies often are. Currently this place is Copenhagen, but the story could be rewritten to accommodate any big city, such as London or New York (romantic comedies love NYC), where the pace is neck-breaking, the competition fierce and people plentiful. It is important that the world and setting reinforce the feeling in the characters of being something they are not. Everyone in the story are in the business of projecting an image, whether it is one they are pursuing by choice or it is one that has been forced upon them. They are selling a product, branding themselves. Oliver is an outsider and from somewhere other than where he currently is - in the current script, he is English, and everyone else is Danish, but he could for example just as easily be an American in London, an Englishman in New York or some other combination that in practical terms could engender a co-production). The advertising agency they all work at underlines the aspect of image-projection and branding. The script also deals with stereotypes and cliches in order to dismantle them, and the characters are constantly putting each other into boxes and adding labels.

The date that Oliver and Cecilie go on is a journey that not only takes them through an inner transformation, but they are led from place to place during the night - restaurant, night club and Oliver's house, each place signifying a different stage in the evolution of their relationship.

## 5. Conflict

The conflict in "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" is two-fold. Firstly, it is primarily internal.

This is particularly true for Oliver, who is his own worst enemy. He is only as put-upon as he is, because he allows himself to be "that guy". The second he decides enough is enough, he is more than capable of taking control of his own life again. He releases his fear of alienating people, but finds that once the initial shock passes, people in fact only like him more.

Cecilie's internal conflict consists primarily of the schism that exists between what she has decided her life must be like vs. how it really is. This is particularly well crystallised in her love for Daniel. She has simply decided that he is "the one", although his treatment of her is a constant string of heartbreak, disappointment and mixed messages. This schism between reality and fantasy renders her perennially dissatisfied with herself and her progress in life, and she thus tends to live in the future; in a "one day when I'm beautiful, rich, powerful, and adored enough, I can start living and enjoying myself" way. She feels that she has to be all these things in order for people to like her, only it makes them like her less. People are threatened by her constant striving for perfection - it makes them feel like they have to do the same.

Supporting characters have their own internal conflicts too. Daniel, in particular, is failing to come to terms with his own sexuality, as it does not fit into the plans he has made for his life. Xander is also presenting a public persona at odds with his inner self, although with none of the self-hatred attached. He simply wants to be a private person. Diana is a mirror of Cecilie, but seems far less tormented. She knows the striving for perfection is a game she plays, and she is able to set the game aside, when she gets tired of it, and pick it up again later.

All these acts of self-aggrandisement and image-projection create outer conflict - the characters all want different things from each other, and also want to keep the others from knowing things about one another. Cecilie loves Daniel who loves David. Cecilie's world crumbles upon realising this, and she must rebuild it from scratch - questioning all her beliefs in the process. Oliver, on the other hand, pursues Cecilie which ends in his own humiliation. His ex-wife wants to control him, his intern Xander wants to glorify him, his bosses want to promote him (to a job he does not want) and his brother and sister-in-law want to push him out of his comfort zone. What does he want? He thought he wanted Cecilie.

"Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" is built around conflict that is both internal and interpersonal (battle of the sexes), but not generational - the third type of conflict that Leger Grindon identifies (as mentioned above).

## 6. The Art of Funny

This is my first attempt at writing straight comedy (I usually write drama with comedic elements) and I admit it is a learning process. I try to focus the humour of the story in the tensions that arise from the battle between the sexes. My characters do take themselves very seriously and I definitely make them hurt.

I have not felt I need to choose a tone that can be put into a specific box. I draw on elements of from all walks of humour in varying degrees: Farce, satire, parody, black comedy, sophistication and comedy drama. If anything I would say I lean towards the humour of British rom-coms. I am staying away from gross-out humour that is so popular in American rom-com. Perhaps it is my European sensibilities, but I simply don't know how to write it, although watching it entertains me.

## 7. Being Sexy

There are no sex scenes in "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date". It was not a conscious choice that I made whilst developing the story, but it naturally came to this end. The time frame of the story is only 24 hours. I didn't want my main couple to rush into things, but at the same time it functions well as a culmination of all their efforts and struggles. I am trying to work with an ambiguous ending, where it is open to the viewer to decide whether the couple had sex or merely cuddled/made out. I do feature lots of kissing and - a must for this genre - lots of sexual tension.

## 8. Dialogue

Dialogue is one of my favourite things to write. I am a dialogue-driven writer. I verge on being a novelist. My previous work has all featured heavy dialogue, and I've been told I do it well. Not to say that my dialogue does not require rewriting and lots of polishing.

I write dialogue intuitively and since this is a partial first draft of "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date", I am still uncovering their modes of speech, and I am probably writing more exposition and dialogue than necessary, but as Mernit points out[120], this is part of the aspect of discovery.

## 9. Imagery

I am working on using the split screen device as a visual metaphor in addition to its function of conveying different view points. Whenever possible, I try to have the split screen reveal character. For example, juxtaposing the morning routines of Oliver and Cecilie tells us that in comparison to one another, he is a disciplined and mature adult who takes his responsibilities very seriously and who is a loving and devoted family man who has a passion for cooking in order to feed his loved ones nourishing food. His interests are not self-centred. Cecilie, on the other hand, sleeps in late in her princess-like four-poster bed; she goes to the gym, spends time grooming and does not bother to cook breakfast, opting to purchase it. All this is conveyed with hardly any dialogue.

The mood and style is in keeping with what is standard for the genre. The tone is light, the mood urban and modern and the style colourful and bright like the world of advertising it takes place in. In fact the imagery of branding, marketing and consumerism permeate.

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[120] Mernit, 2001, p.197-198

## 10. Theme

As discussed earlier, I am inspired by the shifting dating and mating practices that are closely tied to the shifting gender roles in society, both socially and economically, that are a result of the Great Recession of the last decade. In fact, I contend that gender roles have generally been in flux ever since the end of the Victorian era, and the 20th century has been a never-ending journey towards a new and elusive equilibrium.

The effects may not be as pronounced in Denmark where my story is set - if anything it seems the genders here have already adapted to these shifting roles relatively well. Men do not seem as marginalised and women not as pressured to achieve. But I still experience the underlying currents.

I want to write about the repercussions these changes have on an individual level. I come from a middle-class background and I am writing about middle class and upper middle class people, because that is what I understand and know.

Oliver is one such marginalised man, who is adrift. He is not unemployed, but he does feel inferior. He yearns for love, and Cecilie in particular, but feels inadequate. He must learn that putting someone on a pedestal, indirectly lets them know that you don't think you are good enough for them. It also makes them an object. Granted, an object of affection, but an object no less.

Cecilie is one such over-achieving woman, who wants it all and has very specific ideas about how to get it. However, the pressures she places upon herself undermines her self-esteem and confidence and makes her miserable. She is looking in all the wrong places for happiness and love.

During their date, when they are finally forced to confront all their feelings and assumptions, they both have epiphanies and as a result grow as human beings. Oliver learns to take back his pride and stand his own ground. He learns he deserves better - from others and himself. Cecilie finally realises her pursuit of Daniel and everything he represents is a hollow, never-ending chase she must release in favour of something that can actually allow her to be happy and fulfilled. Oliver and Cecilie find common ground together and realise the whole is stronger than its parts. Forget about the battle of sexes. Together they can be more, achieve more, experience more.

Subplots and supporting characters reflect aspects of the theme as well. Oliver's brother and sister-in-law are a functioning couple, and represents what the others hope to find. Xander holds traditional and romantic values, but knows how to play the game in order to survive in the urban jungle. Diana dismisses him up until the point she learns this about him. Diana in turn is ambivalent about the whole dating scene. She seems more inclined to be single and her own person. She is ambitious and rebellious and does not tolerate BS. But she is a closet romantic and has a soft spot for an old-fashioned gentleman.

# 8. "OLIVER AND CECILIE GO ON A DATE" - SPLIT SCREEN

"Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" is a film told in split screen. When I started out I was adamant that it be a continuous split screen as seen in "Conversations with Other Women". But as my research progressed, I realised that this may not be in the best interest of the narrative. Ultimately, my intention is to tell a tale about a date gone wrong from his and hers point of view. The point of view is exemplified through the split screen, but need not be a constant to be at its most effective. I am more interested in conveying the sensation of watching "a split screen film", and I might achieve this objective better by employing split screen selectively and in as many variations as the story permits. The objective is to serve the "his and hers POV" idea rather than insist on split screen in every given scene.

I created some rules. I decided that whenever Oliver and Cecilie were in the same scene, I would have to see both their POVs. This meant that the scene would feature split screen. However, in order for this to work, their POVs would have to differ enough for the device to work. Otherwise it was not justified and a single-screen would work better. And this simply was not the case. Not every scene in the script pits Cecilie's and Oliver's perceptions against one another.

So either I rewrite the script to make every scene with Oliver and Cecilie contain differing POVs, or I accept that I cannot feature split screen in every one of those scenes. I chose to rewrite.

The first 30 pages have been adjusted to accommodate variations of split screen throughout. In the scenes where Oliver and Cecilie are not both present, the frame is single-screen, but contains natural split screen, i.e. the mise-en-scène would create natural partitions in the frame. This is in order to play with the concept of splitting in all its forms, and the scenes themselves warrant it as they contain "splitting" between characters.
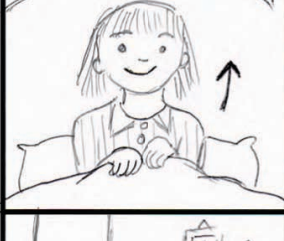
Whether I will be able to continue this concept throughout the script (i.e. always featuring split screen in the scenes that Oliver and Cecilie share) - remains to be seen. I might have to rethink my rules as I continue on.

What follows are a set of storyboard depicting how I imagine split screen sequences will play out in the first thirty pages of the script.

## 8.1. Storyboard 1: Convey parallel action contrasting the main characters

The morning routines of Oliver and Cecilie differ greatly. Oliver is unceremoniously awoken by his daughter, whereas Cecilie gets to sleep, and sleep… and sleep.

STORYBOARD: OLIVER & CECILIE GO ON A DATE                    PAGE 3 oF 5

| DESCRIPTION | LEFT SPLIT SCREEN | RIGHT SPLIT SCREEN | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| … and then she readies herself … | | | |
| … and jumps full force into the air and lands on top of Oliver.<br><br>OLIVER<br>(jerks awake)<br>OUCH!!! | | | Cecilie turns over and continues to sleep. |
| It is exactly 6:00 AM. The clock changes to 6:01. | | | |
| SOFIE<br>(laughs)<br>Hi daddy.<br><br>OLIVER<br>Hi Sofie.<br><br>They smile at each other. | | | |
| OLIVER<br>Did you sleep well?<br><br>Sofie nods.<br><br>SOFIE<br>Daddy, you have to get up. | | | |

© MARIANNE HANSEN                    STORYBOARDS DRAWN BY ELIANNA MORNINGSTAR
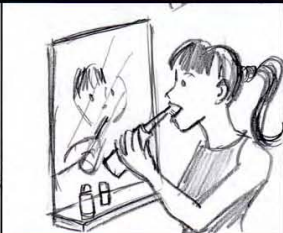
STORYBOARD: OLIVER & CECILIE GO ON A DATE — PAGE 4 OF 5

| DESCRIPTION | LEFT SPLIT SCREEN | RIGHT SPLIT SCREEN | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|---|
| OLIVER<br>Yes, I'm up, I'm up.<br><br>Oliver jumps out of bed. | | | |
| INT. OLIVER'S KITCHEN - MORNING<br><br>Oliver grinds coffee beans … | | | Cecilie still sleeps. |
| … and pours it into an Italian espresso-maker. | | | |
| Oliver and Sofie eat breakfast. Not your usual cornflakes or toast, but a gourmet Paleo version with omelet, spinach, strawberries, yoghurt and coconut smoothie. | | | |
| He prepares lunch with help from Sofie - not the usual rye-bread variety, but yesterday's broccoli frittata, olives, crunchy veggies, homemade hummus and nuts in colourful boxes. | | | The alarm on Cecilie's mobile starts to buzz. It's 7:00 AM. |

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STORYBOARD: OLIVER & CECILIE GO ON A DATE                PAGE 5 OF 5

| DESCRIPTION | LEFT SPLIT SCREEN | RIGHT SPLIT SCREEN | DESCRIPTION |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Oliver rinses off plates and Sofie places them in the dishwasher. | | | She turns it off. She lifts the eye patch and peeks out. |
| INT. OLIVER'S BATHROOM - MORNING<br><br>Oliver and Sofie brush their teeth. | | | INT. CECILIE'S KITCHEN - MORNING<br><br>A blender whirrs, making a smoothie. |
| INT. CHILD'S ROOM - MORNING<br><br>Sofie dresses herself. Oliver coordinates her outfit fashionably. He braids her hair and polishes her shoes. Sofie ties her own shoe laces. | | | Cecilie drinks it. |
| INT. OLIVER'S ROOM - MORNING<br><br>Oliver puts on a suit and tie … | | | INT. CECILIE'S BATHROOM - MORNING<br><br>Cecilie wears workout clothes and brushes her teeth with a sonic toothbrush. |
| … Sofie squirts him twice with a bottle of eau de toilette. | | | EXT. CECILIE'S HOME - MORNING<br><br>Cecilie shuts her door. She carries her workout bag. She runs off. |

© MARIANNE HANSEN                STORYBOARDS DRAWN BY ELIANNA MORNINGSTAR

Oliver's morning time is spent getting his daughter and himself ready for work and kindergarten respectively. He cooks breakfast and spends time playing with her at her kindergarten before going to work. Cecilie, on the other hand, goes to yoga class and spends time grooming.

## 8.2. Storyboard 2: Convey convergence with merge as Oliver & Cecilie meet

They ride to work on their bikes (very Copenhagen) - his old and functional, hers fancy and new.

Upon arrival, they park their bikes and make their way to the main entrance. As the camera dollies with them, they meet in front of the building and both ascend the stairs.

Inspired by the complex camera move in "The Rules of Attraction", where the split screen melts into a single frame by having the two frames meet and perfectly line up, I have employed the same principle here.
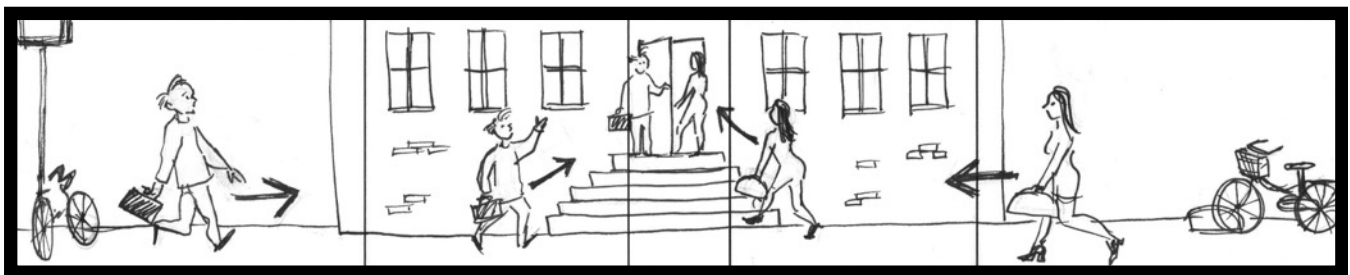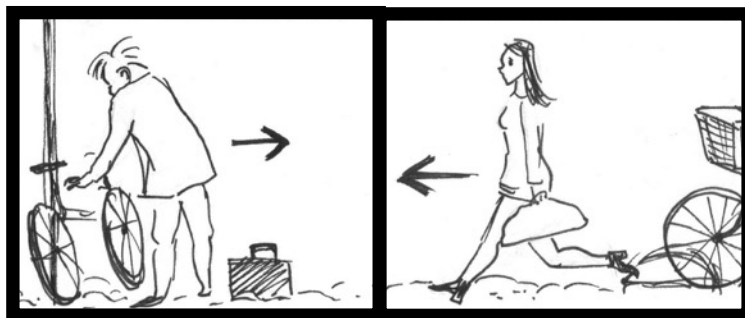
## 8.3. Storyboard 3: Convey convergence as all eyes are on Daniel's arrival

Scene 2 (24 in the script) plays out in an even two-way split screen that serve to convey mostly exposition. We meet the two "buddies", Oliver's young intern Xander and Cecilie's colleague Diana and the setup that will lead to the infamous date is established: It is the last day for Daniel, star account executive at the agency, and the bosses are not happy to see him go. But Daniel has bigger plans: He is starting his own agency with a partner. Cecilie is devastated to see him go, she is clearly hopelessly in love with him. The bosses have arranged a fancy breakfast as a goodbye gesture. Oliver cannot take his eyes off Cecilie, who looks particularly stunning today, and an amused Xander silently joins him in his appraisal.

In the midst of this commotion, the room suddenly falls silent, as all eyes turn to Daniel who has just entered the room. The two cameras on Oliver and Cecilie respectively whip around to divulge what everyone is looking at. The two frames, as before, line up perfectly and reveal Daniel in all his single-frame glory.



The floor plan on the next page details the placement of the characters and the cameras.
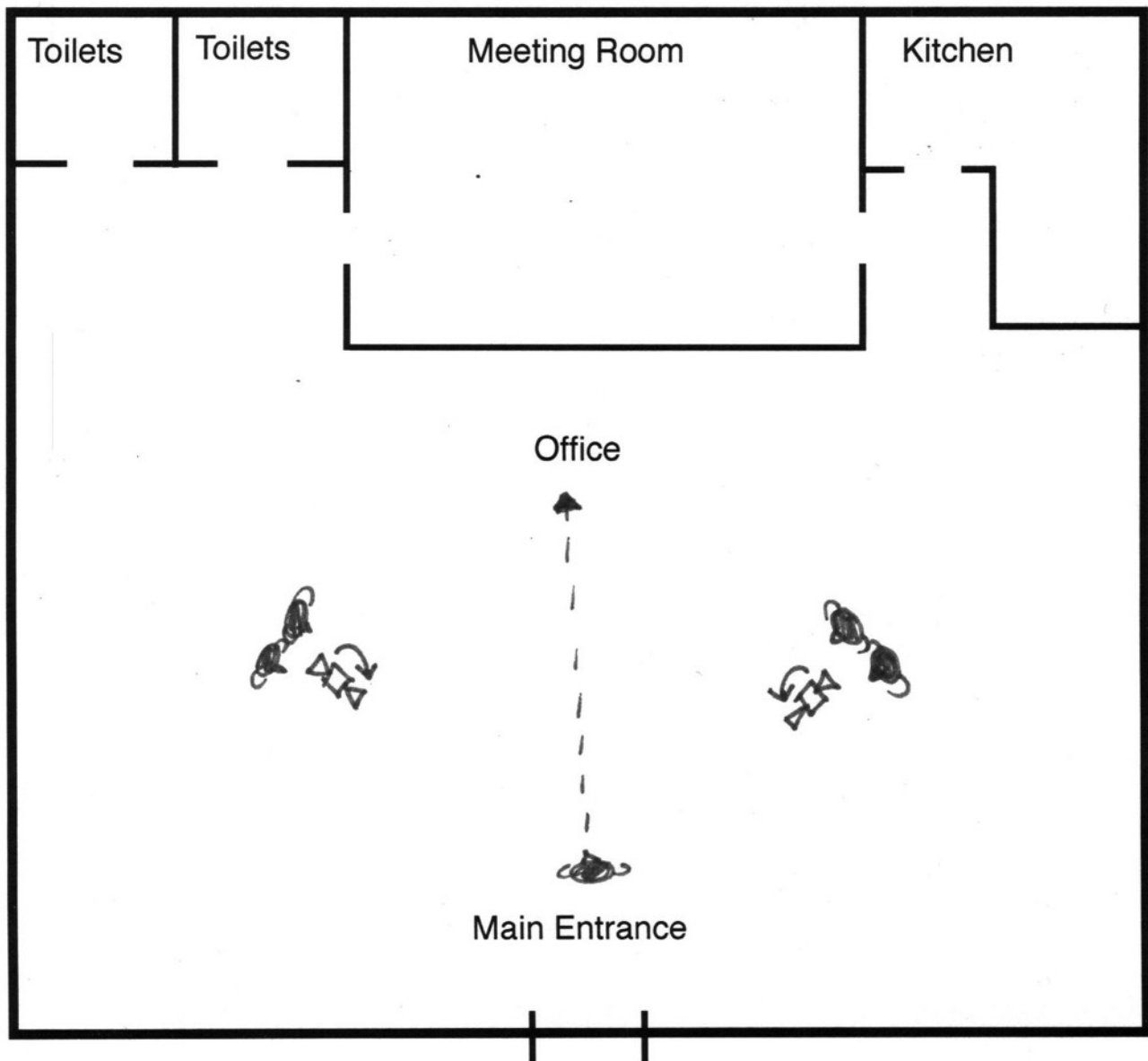
In order for the two frames to line up, there will have to be some special effects work, since both cameras are at an angle. There will have to be an "invisible" dolly move to align the two frames so they match in a single frame.

## 8.4. Storyboard 4: Convey three viewpoints simultaneously

Daniel proceeds into the meeting room where he can be seen through the large windows. The frame splits into 3 even panels: Oliver and Xander to the left, Daniel in the middle and Cecilie and Diana to the right.

When Cecilie and Diana follow Daniel into the meeting room, the right and middle panels merge, as those two frames line up and melt into a single frame.

Shortly after Oliver and Xander also proceed to the meeting room, where their panel lines up with the merged panel of the other two, and the frame becomes a single frame.
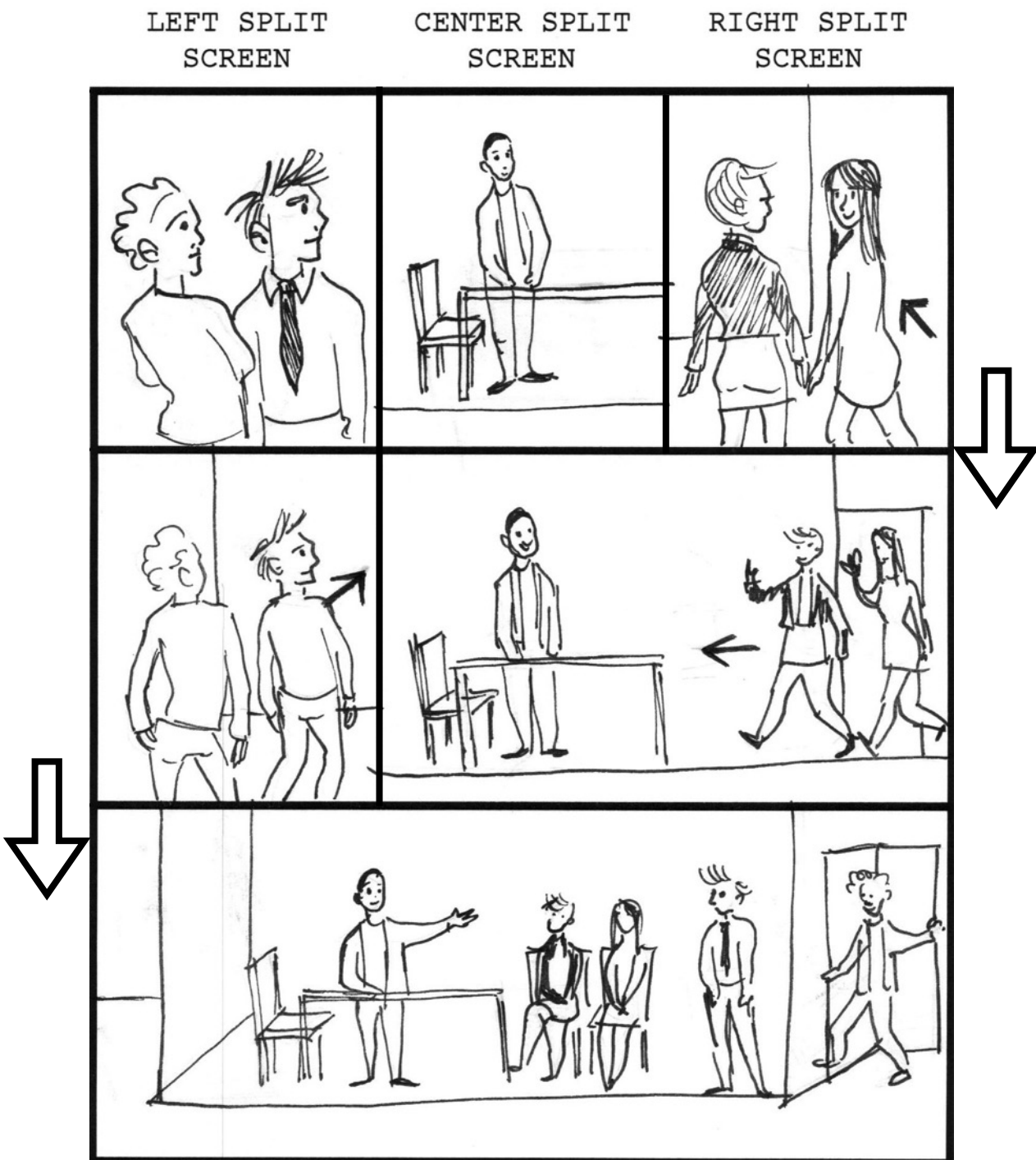
## 8.5. Storyboard 5: Horizontal split to convey multiple viewpoints

In the meeting (#26 in the script) the camera splits horizontally, so that we see Oliver, Xander, Diana and Cecilie in a row at the bottom, and Daniel and the two bosses at the top.



The bottom frame can even split two-ways in order to feature e.g. a close-up of Oliver and a medium shot of the whole group respectively. This would be done if there were particular facial expressions and reactions that needed focus.



I admit that this is the weakest split screen of all the ones storyboarded. I worry that, although I can justify the value in seeing the faces of all characters concurrently, that dialogue heavy scenes that feature close-ups simply are better suited to single-frame scenes. It is just how the human eye likes to watch them. We want linearity as the conversations build and ping-pongs back and forth. A continuous split screen in this scene feels like overkill. Perhaps if it is only used partially throughout?

## 8.6. Storyboard 6: Natural split screen

The two-way split continues into the next scene, and since it is not showing anything, I did not have it storyboarded. However, the scene after (#28 in the script) is a scene that features Daniel and Cecilie alone, with Oliver only entering into it halfway through.

Hence the screen does not feature two frames, but it does feature a natural split screen. The kitchen is constructed in such a way that it forms a natural line in the middle of the frame. Daniel and Cecilie speak to one another from either side of this line, symbolising that they are disconnected - they do not understand each other.



However, Cecilie gathers up the courage to get closer and ask Daniel what she really wants to know. This is the point where Oliver appears. He stands in the doorway and eavesdrops briefly, until his conscience forces him to interrupt their conversation.

Daniel leaves. Now Oliver and Cecilie are alone together in the room and the split screen returns. Except in the wide shots where both can be seen simultaneously.

## 8.7. Storyboard 7: Text message split screen

The next scene (#29 in the script) is with Daniel who exits the office furiously texting on his phone. I imagine I can create an impression of division by having the text messages displayed on the screen, left and right of Daniel. His own messages on one side, and David's messages on the other side, in essence creating three panels with Daniel in the middle.



Daniel leaves, and is followed by a scene that has not been written yet. The scene is not vital to the flow of the script, and so we break directly into act two.

It is nearly 4pm and Oliver and Cecilie are anxiously waiting to leave (#30 in the script). I imagine the clock and Oliver and Cecilie in a three-way split much like the one in "Run Lola Run" which also features a clock. In this instance the clock would fill the top of the frame, and Oliver and Cecilie would fill the bottom left and right. I did not storyboard this, as the pictures from "Run Lola Run" illustrate my point clearly (see 6. Montage - lengthen time) .

A montage then follows in standard two-way split screen, showing parallel action as Cecilie and Oliver get ready for their date. I did not storyboard this as it is similar to scene 1.

## 8.8. Storyboard 8: Natural split screen with see-through walls

In the middle of the montage, a single-frame scene at Oliver's house plays out (#38 in the script). Oliver's ex-wife, Jamila, arrives to stir up trouble. Again, Oliver's home provides a natural split screen, as the place is constructed with open walls (inspired by the cleaning scene in "Requiem for a Dream", see 11. Natural split screen). The camera dollies left to right and back again, depending on which room the characters are in (below top and bottom left). The characters move forwards and backwards in the hallway, sometimes filling the frame (below bottom right) and sometimes only appearing as small figures (below top right).
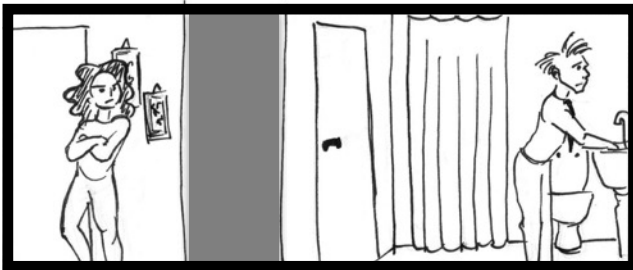
The rest of the script continues in standard two-way, and features the remainder of the montage which segues into a split screen phone conversation.

Then the split screen transitions into two alternate realities. The left side depicts a date that is deteriorating and is Cecilie's POV. The right side depicts a version of the date that is progressing splendidly. This side is Oliver's POV.

The script excerpt ends with them arriving at restaurant Noma.

# 9. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

The script was written over the summer, with the thesis written afterwards. In the interim new ideas have been percolating and there are several changes I already know I would like to make to the script as I develop it further.

- Diana is a "buddy", but towards the end of the script she should serve also as a "bellamy" by posing as a new love interest for Oliver which presents a threat to Cecilie (now that she realises she likes Oliver)

- Oliver originally had a sister but I have instead recently changed this to an identical twin brother to honour the split screen concept. Now the same actor will play two characters. It is also psychologically interesting to see two identical-looking men behave so differently. Oliver's twin brother is everything Oliver is not. The opportunities a twin brother presents, especially in regards to comedy, is something to be explored further.

- Cecilie is more ambitious in her career, and instead of Anders, she is the one who loses the promotion as Daniel's replacement to Oliver. This further increases the tension between them, and makes it much harder for her to believe that he really does not want the job, since she does.

- Be more consistent in assigning split screen sides to Oliver and Cecilie. In the current script Oliver occupies the left frame and Cecilie the right in the beginning. But halfway through the office scenes Cecilie starts occupying the left side and Oliver the right. This is not of major consequence, but I would value a more conscious approach to who gets which side.

- I am re-assessing whether both bosses should be male and middle-aged. Not only are women now more likely to be managers and hold top positions in non male-centric industries, but I also feel as a female writer, I should not so willingly adhere to stereotypes.

- I am fascinated with complex transitions from single-frame to multi-frame and vice versa. I want to develop this aspect and incorporate more interesting ways to do transitions.

- Since I have a list of 27 categories of split screen, I hope to find ways to incorporate as many of them as permissible by the narrative. I already have an idea for a scene that includes a split diopter or rack focus shot with split sound. I also have ideas for mosaic screen, sexually suggestive content, psychic fragmentation and dynamic momentum.

# 10. CONCLUSION

"Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" has developed immensely as a project after research into split screen and romantic comedy was conducted.

It grew from purely emulating "Conversations with Other Women", featuring an even two-way split screen, and insisting on a constant and fixed frame division to incorporating elements such as natural split screen and complex transitions.

Split screen research unearthed a myriad of split screen techniques and usages that continue to inspire. A list of 27 categories was compiled. The device has grown increasingly popular in the digital age of filmmaking, and as a format a "language" is developing around it. It is already a standard trope for phone conversations, and it is gaining popularity as a tool to convey simultaneity. Less commonly used to a great extent in feature films, it has, however, permeated television, advertising and computer interfaces, allowing the public to gain familiarity with the format. This paves the way for it to gain recognition as an alternative narrative tool in feature films.

The split screen device requires active participation by the viewer who must analyse and divert attention to several frames. If the device becomes too complicated and overtaxes the mind, or if it comes across as superfluous and irrelevant contra a single-screen format, the viewer rejects the format. Directors like Abel Gance, Mike Figgis and Brian de Palma have suggested that the format requires adjustment. It is like a second language that one must learn and practice in order to become fluent in it. But once fluent, the format opens up new avenues of both expression for the filmmaker and consumption for the audience. It is a format that challenges - in a good way if employed effectively and in a bad way if overused or used inappropriately. More understanding of how the format can support a narrative is required, so that it does not become a case of style over substance or form over content.

The romantic comedy genre has a long history and is a resilient and malleable format that continuously adjusts itself to changing times. It reflects societal trends by addressing the heart of human relationship: love and romance. Despite the flack it gets by critics and audiences alike - it is accused of being cliched, for women only and trivial - it nonetheless is a mirror of the world we live in, reflecting perhaps the aspects we fail to notice or even brush aside. Some of the more successful romantic comedies are often relegated to other genres, as cross genre rom-coms are so common. The genre has in fact in recent years revived itself through genre hybridisation.

These two aspects - genre hybridisation and reflecting trends and issues in the zeitgeist - have influenced the themes of "Oliver and Cecilie" as well as confirmed the good sense in marrying the split screen device with the romantic comedy genre. A choice originally born out of the axiom: If the form is artsy, then the content must be unpretentious.

Ironically, the more knowledge I acquire, the more I realise that "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date" is only in its nascent stages, having barely scratched the surface of all its potential and the possibilities inherent in the material. When I started I thought the project was pretty well developed. I stand corrected.

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# 13. APPENDIX

Appendix 13.1: Summary of Interviews

Appendix 13.2: DVD-ROM with Interview Audio Recordings

Appendix 13.3: Synopsis - "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date"

Appendix 13.4: Script Excerpts - "Oliver and Cecilie Go on a Date"

# 13.1.SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

## RESPONDENT 1: A.F. (interview conducted in Danish and lasts 34:53 minutes)

A.F. is a 50-year-old Danish woman with an intellectual background. She has lived in France and South America for many years, and does not watch films and television regularly, but when she does, she does not mind watching independent film.

She understood the film's plot, and even suspected that one of the female lead's stepchildren might in fact be the child of the two main characters, as we know she was pregnant in her younger years. She credits the break-up between the couple as what ultimately can be seen as misunderstandings and overreactions associated with the folly of youth.

She caught the merging of the split screen at the end, and although is it very possible that the two get back together, she was more inclined to interpret the ending as a metaphor for the "merging" of their respective feelings, understanding and experiences which until now had been fractured. Now they are on the same wavelength; speaking the same language; seeing things from the same angle. She does not know what the right interpretation is, and does not really need to know, as she feels the open-endedness allows her to imbue the film with her own emotions, depending on her mood on any given day.

At first she was annoyed with the split screen, as she did not know how to interpret it. As the film progressed, she thought it was a fantastic device which allowed her to see many "facets" of the characters. Whenever they crossed into each other's "screens", she interpreted this as them getting closer not just physically but also metaphorically. Although the two screens are not strictly each character's POV, it is interpreted as such by the viewer. She was fond of the two POVs, which she likened to two narrators of the same story, and it allowed for greater identification and self-mirroring in her opinion. In a traditional story you can only have one POV at any given time.

Juxtaposing the past and the present worked well as it layered in each character's subjective memories, attitudes and emotions - something a standard flashback would not have been able to do. She enjoyed "getting under the skin" of each character and called the film an intense experience that she could feel in the pit of her stomach.

Regarding having a sense of place, she considered this a habit. We are used to it, but it is not essential. The film is about the details and inner life of the characters. The images themselves were not aesthetically pleasing, but the beauty of the characters, i.e. the physical beauty of the actors and the beauty of their performances made up for this.

It would not have been the same film without the split screen and the story would not have worked as well. Had the split screen featured different stories that were not as interconnected, she believed she would have felt stressed. Split screen requires a readjustment of expectations and an open mind. She felt that one would have to be careful if one wanted to expand the split screen format to include more characters, locations etc., as this may create the stressful feeling she was cautioning against.

## RESPONDENT 2: E.M. (interview conducted in Danish and lasts 22:42 minutes)

E.M. is a Danish female in her early thirties and has a master's degree in production design. She has viewed "Conversations with Other Women" previously, but re-watched it prior to the interview to refresh her memory. E.M. is an avid consumer of film and TV.

She understood the plot of the film and interpreted the ending in two ways. She noticed the merging of the split screen and felt especially upon her second viewing that she was meant to believe that the two main characters would get back together. However, logically she felt that they would not reconcile. But perhaps the illogical is logical and the happy ending is justified. Her concerns center around emotions vs responsibility. Ultimately she thought the characters had had their time, their chance had passed and it was no longer meant to be. To her the theme was: Once you grow up, you have to do things you don't want to do. Emotionally the two leads may be together, even if they are not in a rational sense.

She liked the split screen device and saw the film as a intimate two-person drama. The split screen allowed the viewer to be privy to two POVs. The way flashbacks were done were interesting. Also when characters repeat words or sentences, it emphasises a particular emotion.

She felt it would be possible to edit the whole film in a standard "single- screen", and it would not be a bad film either, but it would not be the same. The story is simple and can accommodate the split screen, making it easy for the viewer to keep up. There are not two stories to follow. There is only one story.

The split screen is integral to the plot and imbues the film with its own unique character. She did not view the split screen as his and hers POV, at least not continuously, but did view it as such in the flashbacks, where his version and her version of the past differed. She saw the split screen as a device that had multiple functions and possibilities. She was not certain that the split screen device made the film better, as she felt she liked the film first and foremost because it was a good story. If a story is good, it is good no matter how it is told. However, she did concede that "single-screen" would leave nothing to the imagination. It would serve up everything on a silver platter and that is not as interesting. A split screen does not tell her where to look, it gives her a choice.

Asked about weaknesses, she said she lost her sense of place in the elevator scene. She did not have any comments relating specifically to production design, other than one should consider and develop any and all options available to augment the split screen.

In terms of cinematography, the split screen destroys composition, but the device is an active, creative choice and therefore she forgives it. In this film it is not foreground, middle-ground and background that matters, it is the characters. One could of course be more aware of place and space. She got used to the split screen after the first scene and feels that is it not such a outlandish device that it cannot garner a large audience. One has to be careful to not confuse the viewer, of course, and the narrative must be simple in order for it to be able to carry the split screen device. So many films out there are visually stunning, you see those all the time. She liked that this one was gritty and less polished.

## RESPONDENT 3: S.A. (interview conducted in English and lasts 47:44 minutes)

S.A. is a 69-year-old American female who is a writer and psychic. She knows much about literature, but has always loved film as a second passion. She usually watches mainstream film and TV.

She understood the plot, but ignored the merging of the split screen as having any consequence to her interpretation of the ending. It was the director's interpretation and not the characters' feelings. She did not like the split screen device, which she thought drew attention to itself and had a moralising feel to it. To her, it was an editorial manoeuvre by the screenwriter and director and it was getting in the way of the story. It was obvious and unrelenting, and the director was always making a point with this heavy-handed device which was manipulative. She believed the characters split up at the end, as this was what made sense and felt truthful to her understanding of who they were. They were sitting in separate cabs and the female was going back to her husband. She had said as much and it was the right thing to do.

S.A. was concerned with deconstructing the title (who are the other women?) and contemplated why the female character was specifically reading "The House of Mirth" by Edith Wharton in the flashback and what meaning that had to the story. She was not sure why the characters had split up to begin with, she only knew that it was a good relationship that ended in a weird way.

Asked to consider any positive traits of the split screen, she admitted that at times it was used for good commentary by the writer and director. She liked it in the bathroom, when the woman was calling London, and the man was outside eavesdropping. The sex scene worked well too, and she also liked the scene at the end where man tidies up the hotel room, as this is not something she usually sees men do. The juxtaposition of the past and present was also good, and she liked the way the characters were introduced with the man watching the woman sneak a cigarette (strictly speaking this part of the film was not in split screen, as the opening credits occupied half of the frame).

Otherwise, she did not pay much attention to how the split screen was utilised. She had decided it was interruptive and tried to ignore it. She specifically mentioned that the shot-reverse shot uses of the split screen during conversations (the most common use of the device) was unnecessary. Also, she did not understand why she was viewing the throwing of the bouquet with the bridesmaids as a juxtaposition to the conversation the main characters were having. She also disliked the elevator scene. Three is a crowd. And lastly, she did not realise at first that the young couple was the main characters when they were young. She thought they were wedding guests, who served as a contrasting metafor to show a good relationship that is getting off the ground.

She also believed the split screen was inconsistent and arbitrary as it would disappear and reappear throughout the film. When made aware of the fact that the split screen is constantly present until the end, and only seemed to disappear in shots where the backgrounds were similar, she was reluctant to accept this. When it was then suggested that background extras (wedding guests, hotel staff) would disappear into the centre line as a way to be reminded that the split screen was still in existence, she proclaimed she did not like this effect. It was as if they disappeared into some sort of other dimension. It was very distracting.

Faced with the interpretation that the merging of the split screen meant that the characters would end up together, she accepted this as a possibility, but did not agree with it. She admitted that the merging of the split screen probably was some kind of revolutionary insight intended by the director, but she refused to make this concession. She makes a clear distinction between the characters and the split screen. The split screen is just a device that does not mean anything for the characters. It was like a Woody Allen movie; very editorial. So much irony to be commented on. All of us are always trying to connect, but are eternally alone. Contrasts are called into being because of the split screen and it makes the story too obvious.

However, as a device in and of itself she did not think she had a like or dislike for it. She referenced "Ocean's Thirteen" where the split screen sequence worked well for her. She thought that if "Conversations with Other Women" had used the device on-off (i.e. only during certain sequences), it would have worked better. When asked if it was hard to choose which side of the split screen to watch, she said her likes and dislikes did not extend that far. She was using some education of hers to make her comments about the film, she is an analytical person and she treats films as if they were real life. Films matter that much to her. She didn't hate the device, it merely impaired her ability to engage with the characters, because the screenwriter and director were so "loud".

The film had a quality of "Waiting for Godot". It also reminded her of a Whoopi Goldberg movie where she spends the entire film talking on the telephone, only for the viewer to realise at the end that there is no one on the other line. It exemplifies how lonely people are and to what extremes they will go to find solace. To sum up, she concluded with: Split screen, split couple, split up.

The interview picked up for a part two, as I had forgotten to specifically ask her about visual aesthetics and the use of space/place. She did not find the images aesthetic, and likened them to a trash can that collects. Two boxes that kept collecting images. The device was smooth enough, she was able to keep up, but apart from that, she took it for granted. Nor did she feel able to make any comments about the use of space/place or a lack of sense thereof. She felt she had a clear sense that we were in a hotel. There was a ballroom, a hallway, an elevator, a hotel room, a bathroom. If she was looking at a close-up, she was looking at a close-up. If the shot was something else, she accepted that too. She did not question it.

**RESPONDENT 4: S.D. (interview conducted in English and lasts 17:24 minutes)**

S.D. is a young female aged around twenty. She is French and culturally-minded.

She understood the plot of the film and believed that in the end, the couple got back together. She thought it was a romantic ending and interpreted it as such, because the split screen merged. The man was always in love with the woman and wanted her back, and in the end the woman gave in and chose him. She thought they would stay together and live happily ever after.

She was fascinated and very interested in the format of the split screen. She has never seen anything like it, and understood that the device was used in various ways: to see their inner thoughts, what they wanted to say (but could not), their different points of view, feelings, memories, their history. It was all very nice. She did not think the film

could do without the split screen. It makes the film better. It takes place over such a short span of time and without the split screen, it might have been a bit boring.

She did not think the device was confusing. She was a little annoyed at first, because it was new to her, but then she got to know the characters and grew to admire the device. She thought it was great that she could see reactions from both parties, and that she could imagine various outcomes to different situations during their encounter, as sometimes she saw a range of responses to the same situation (repeated words or sentences performed differently). Thus she interpreted this as being privy to alternative realities. She likes that she can choose. Choose what she wants to look at. There are two POVs, and the way he is and the way she is are totally different. She is mysterious, and he is so in love with her. She loved the ending and really enjoyed the film (she asked for a link so she could screen it for her parents too).

Asked to consider any weaknesses, she admitted the elevator scene was confusing. She did not think the split screen images were aesthetically displeasing. She thought the images were beautiful. Yes, the centre line could be annoying at times, but at other times it was really nice. She particularly liked how the sex scene was rendered.

She would be very willing to watch another film like this in split screen. She was surprised at how much she enjoyed it. She liked the story a lot, probably because of the way it was presented in split screen. The split screen provides her with more information. She can see the past, the present, the future. It is much more interesting to have such a choice. She hopes there will be more films like this.

Asked about her sense of space and place, she admitted she wanted to see the ballroom in the beginning. At first it was annoying and surprising, because she was not used to it. She thinks it is part of the film to not have a sense of space, because you're supposed to focus on the characters and their feelings. She liked it, she liked the characters a lot, she liked that she could share this moment with the characters. It was positive.

## RESPONDENT 5: S.P. (interview conducted in Danish and lasts 30:33 minutes)

S.P. is in her early to mid twenties and is a bachelor's student in film and media studies.

She understood the plot and interpreted the ending as the two remaining in each other's memories. They are only together in spirit, because in reality they chose separate taxi cabs.

She felt the split screen device makes the movie somewhat challenging to follow. The story starts in media res and so much information is withheld. She questions what is real, what is in their heads, what is memory. Such a film demand attention and concentration. She may have missed some parts. In particular information about their past and in the instances with jump cuts (I believe she means the cuts when a character repeats a line or sentence in different ways). She worried that she would miss something in one frame, whilst watching another. She assumed that both frames were of equal importance.

As a stylistic choice, the split screen is awesome. She particularly liked the Rorschach images during the sex scene. The juxtapositions of the present and the past worked

well and she also liked how the two main characters would encroach into one another's split frames, and thus seem closer, and yet apart, because there is still two screens dividing them.

The split frame holds one's attention, she adds. The story is simple. One "only" has dialogue to follow, it's not an action-packed movie, but the split screen makes up for this; it adds "action" so to speak. It gives you choice in where to look. The tempo was good. The chemistry between characters also good. Good dynamics. Like watching a tennis match; the ball bouncing back and forth. The split screen adds to the narrative. Without it, the story might have been a bit boring. As it stands, one has to be alert. Something is always happening on one side or the other of the split screen.

Space/place is hard to define. But also trivialised, because it does not matter that it is so. However, this was only the case at first (in the ballroom). She had no problem getting her bearings in the hotel room. She questions whether her confusion was actually caused by the split screen or whether it was the plot holes inherent in the mystery-ladden narrative that confounded her. She felt like she was playing detective.

The man's monologue outside the bathroom confused her. It was too fast for her to follow in places. She did not understand why certain words were repeated. Was it wishful thinking? Was it his hidden feelings? Was it to emphasise important details? She referenced "500 Days of Summer" and the split screen scene that juxtaposes reality with expectations. In "Conversations with Other Women", the device was used to juxtapose the past and the present, and the main characters vs respective and absent partners (Sarah the Dancer and Jeffrey the Cardiologist). The split screen was used to illustrate an associative thought, such as the woman's assumption that Sarah is a stripper, when the man tells her that she is a dancer.

S.P. does not know why the couple split to begin with. It is not divulged what exactly went wrong. They seemed happy, and then suddenly they were not. The female lead seems to have the answers, but is not willing to share them.

Did the split screen denote his and hers POVs? At first she thought so, but was that really the case? The characters switched sides all the time. Would she watch another split screen film? Yes, she would. It was a great experience. It adds layers. The film was simple and complex at the same time. A lot of people don't like to work too hard whilst watching a film, but she does not mind this generally.

The split screen device has "sensational value", she adds. It stands out. It adds depth and weight to a film that otherwise might not amount to more than a short film. However, the other way around, the split screen device also works best in a film that is "small".

In terms of visual aesthetics, the composition of the frame is not very interesting or enticing - apart from the Rorschach images and the split screen merge in the taxi. However, she feels that is the point. The visual aesthetics are not about each individual frame, but rather the sum of its parts. The totality of the frame and the meaning one can derive from it. Had each side of the split screen also somehow been composed beautifully, that might have been too much to visually take in. Perhaps the simplicity in composition is a good thing. However, without the split screen, the visual aesthetics would have been dull in her opinion.

## 13.2.DVD-ROM WITH INTERVIEW AUDIO RECORDINGS

## 13.3.SYNOPSIS - "OLIVER AND CECILIE GO ON A DATE"

Oliver and Cecilie both work at a advertising agency. Cecilie is in her mid to late twenties, Oliver in his thirties. Oliver has been secretly in love with Cecilie for years (or perhaps not so secretly, since everyone knows, including Cecilie), but she has never returned his feelings. She thinks he is a sweet guy whose friendship she enjoys - or rather exploits - at will. Instead, Cecilie is head over heels in love with Daniel - the star account executive of the firm - with whom she has had an on-off relationship for years.

Our story takes place over the course of 24 hours. We start in the morning, with our protagonists waking and getting ready for work. Oliver is the divorced father of a three-year-old girl, Sofie, who serves as his alarm clock: She sneaks into his room, climbs onto his bed and then ruthlessly jumps on him to wake him up. His morning is spent getting the two of them ready for kindergarten and work. Cecilie, on the other hand, is the quintessential single girl. A ten minute snooze, a mud mask, a home-made protein shake for breakfast and 15 new messages in her online dating inbox (as opposed to zero replies in Oliver's online dating inbox). Oliver drops his daughter off at kindergarten. Cecilie goes to a yoga class. She showers, does her make-up, blow-dries her hair. She wears designer clothes. Oliver wears clothes that needs ironing and has food stains on them.

They both arrive at the same destination: A office building in the heart of Copenhagen. There is a lot of commotion. The star account executive, Daniel, is leaving to start his own business, and who will take his place? During the morning meeting, we learn that Cecilie doesn't want Daniel to leave, that Daniel strings Cecilie along with mixed messages, that Oliver couldn't care less about the vacant job position, but that Oliver's loyal assistant, the 20-year-old intern Xander, is pushing him to take it, and after the meeting Oliver finds himself promoted to Daniel's position in spite of himself. Daniel is celebrating that night with dinner at renowned restaurant NOMA with his new business partner, and people are welcome to join - if they can get a reservation.

So Cecilie is desperate to get a reservation at NOMA, and Oliver sees an opportunity to go on a date with her. It's his brother's wedding anniversary and he and his wife have a reservation for two that night, and so Oliver calls up his sister-in-law (she makes all the decisions) and he offers her a luxurious all-inclusive weekend trip to Paris in return for the reservation. Oliver approaches Cecilie with a date-offer, and she accepts. He knows she only said yes because she wants to see Daniel, but he sees it as an opportunity to change her perception of him regardless.

That afternoon Cecilie gets a complete make-over with her colleague and best friend, Diana, in tow - hair, make-up, clothes. Oliver washes and irons and receives a visit from his larger-than-life ex-wife, Jamila, who wants him to watch their daughter. She is extremely gorgeous and one wonders how the two were ever married, given that Oliver has the self-depreciating personality that he has. But the longer we watch Jamila, the more we realise she is manic-depressive, psychotic or just plain bonkers and utterly selfish and manipulative. Oliver tells her he has a date, and the ex-wife, adamant if she doesn't want him, no one else should either, tries to seduce, black-mail, demean and guilt-trip him into not going. She is a whirlwind that Oliver can't resist, can't handle

and can't stand up to. But he manages to get her to leave and take their daughter with her.

Cecilie isn't even home when Oliver comes to pick her up. He's got flowers and chocolates and wears his nicest suit, and sits on her doorstep and waits. She arrives in a taxi, all done up. They leave in his decrepit car, he talks like a waterfall and makes the worst jokes, and Cecilie is already bored out of her mind. At NOMA, Cecilie looks for Daniel to no avail and they are seated at a romantic table for two. Oliver goes all out, but Cecilie is utterly distracted. When Daniel arrives with his business partner, David, she instantly arranges for the four of them to sit together.

The dinner is awkward. The new business partner, David, is standoffish, Daniel is slightly manic trying to keep everyone happy, Cecilie only has eyes for Daniel, and Oliver bends over backwards trying to compete with Daniel and get Cecilie's attention. Things take a drastic turn when Daniel and David leave for a private conversation, and Oliver, heading for the toilet, overhears them and discovers they are in a relationship. Daniel is gay and he doesn't want anyone to know, least of all Cecilie, because he doesn't want to hurt her. David presents him with an ultimatum and returns to the dinner table. Oliver confronts Daniel and demands he come clean, and Cecilie, looking for Daniel, overhears them. She is shocked, but instead of getting angry at Daniel, she gets angry at Oliver for meddling in affairs that has nothing to do with him. The rest of the dinner is worse than a root-canal at the dentist's office. First David leaves and Daniel runs after him, then Cecilie exits, leaving Oliver with a restaurant bill for DKK12000.

Cecilie waits for Oliver by his decrepit car. She has no other means of getting home. The night is still young and Oliver asks if she wants to go somewhere else. Cecilie wants to go to a nightclub. At the club, Cecilie gets drunk and flirts with every guy that isn't Oliver. Oliver stands in the corner and watches her. He calls his assistant Xander who is showing Oliver's brother and sister-in-law around. The three of them show up and Xander tells him to grab the bull by the horns and go dance with Cecilie. He does as he is told, but instead he ends up in a fist fight with all of Cecilie's other drunk suitors. Cecilie is exasperated and wants to go home. Xander and Oliver's brother and sister-in-law are too drunk to drive, so they join him too.

They sit in the car, parked outside Cecilie's home. The others exit to give them some privacy, although Oliver's brother, Alasdair, is out cold in the back seat. Cecilie tells Oliver that she wouldn't date him even if he were the last man on earth. She claims she is being cruel in order to be kind. She then leaves. Oliver sits in his car and cries. The others don't know what to do. Oliver finally realises Cecilie is a bitch and he is completely wasting his time. Then a knock on the passenger window: It is Cecilie. She has lost her keys.

They backtrack and end up at NOMA's parking lot where they find the keys. They also find Oliver's ex-wife, Jamila, who has stalked him all night with their little daughter in tow. She is now waiting in the back of her car, without a car seat and it is 7 hours past her bedtime. Oliver has finally had enough. He explodes. He gives Jamila a piece of his mind and declares she needs professional help. He seizes his daughter and straps her into the car seat in his car, and tells Cecilie he is bringing his little girl home. Sofie takes an instant liking to Cecilie, who returns the sentiment. Cecilie, still without other

means of transport, has no choice but to accompany him and the others. Only now there's 7 of them and they can't all fit in Oliver's car. They have to take Jamila's car too, but Jamila is intoxicated enough that she shouldn't drive and everybody else is too drunk to drive too, so they have to call Diana who arrives to drive the second car. They all end up at Oliver's house and a spontaneous party breaks out. While Oliver puts his daughter to bed, the others go out to buy drinks, and Cecilie and Diana stay behind. They check out Oliver's home and find out all sorts of interesting things about him. Ever since Oliver's outburst in the parking lot, Cecilie is seeing him with new eyes. She finds they have lots in common and is surprised to see how loving and kind he is with his child. She finds it surprising and very strange to be confronted with this whole new side of him. A side she kind of likes.

After his daughter is asleep, Oliver returns to entertain Cecilie and Diana until the others come back. Determined to not be the only sober people in the room, Oliver and Diana get drunk too. And during this drunken party, all sorts of information is divulged. Alasdair and his wife talk everyone's ear off with stories about Oliver. And Oliver, now drunk, starts to develop a liking to Diana. Cecilie, also drunk, starts to develop a liking to Oliver, and is not happy with all the attention her friend is getting. She tells Xander to hit on Diana and take her off of Oliver's hands. But Oliver is not having it. Oliver fights with Xander, Cecilie fights with Diana, but nothing is resolved.

At 4 AM, they all decide to call it a night. Everybody crashes at Oliver's, except for Cecilie who takes a cab home. But not without stealing a kiss from Oliver first. In the taxi home Cecilie finds herself wondering the whole ride home, what just happened those last few hours at Oliver's place?

Outside her door, Cecilie finds Daniel waiting. He wants her back. He doesn't want to be gay, it doesn't fit with his plans for the future. Cecilie wonders what she ever saw in him. Cecilie sends Daniel home: "You're drunk. Go home and sleep."

Cecilie realises that Oliver may not have been what she wanted, but he is exactly what she needs. She decides to go back to his place to confess her feelings. She changes her clothes and freshens up (for the third time that day) and catches a taxi back to Oliver's home.

Oliver opens the door in his pjs. He was not expecting to see her, but is not so dumb as to not get that if a girl returns to your place at 5 AM, it's probably not for platonic reasons. They kiss. A kiss we have been waiting for the entire film. Then he tells her he doesn't sleep with girls on the first date. He always feels used and nothing serious ever comes of it, and that's not what he's looking for. Besides, he doesn't like her anymore. Cecilie is taken aback by his rebuff, but she refuses to give up, making a convincing case for why they should give each other a chance. All Oliver says is that Sofie wakes up in less than an hour.

6 AM. Sofie creeps out of her room, just like she did at the beginning of the film. She sneaks into her father's bedroom, climbs onto his bed and smiles. Instead of one person sleeping in his bed, there's now two: Oliver and Cecilie. Sofie is extra excited and as she jumps, we freeze-frame in mid-air, a nano-second before the human alarm clock lands on the unsuspecting, sleeping couple.

The end.

# 13.4. SCRIPT EXCERPT - "OLIVER AND CECILIE GO ON A DATE"