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**Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades**

**The Cinematic Essence of *Arrival***

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# **UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO USFQ**

**Colegio de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades**

## **HOJA DE CALIFICACIÓN DE TRABAJO DE FIN DE CARRERA**

**The Cinematic Essence of *Arrival***

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## Abstract

This paper uses philosophy of film theories to analyze the film *Arrival* and its effectiveness in expressing complex thoughts and emotions in a way that is original and easy to for viewers to understand thus explaining its success. The movie utilizes cinematic features, namely film editing, to tell two stories simultaneously. The paper begins with a summary of the movie and subsequently a summary of the ontology of film before delving deeper into the places in this movie where relevant philosophy of film theories can be found and explored. While the film itself is the main actor in this paper, it's the theories that allow the understanding of how *Arrival* succeeds in expressing ideas and feelings using cinematic techniques. In a like manner, by exploring the movie's successful use of these techniques, the theories mentioned are being proven to be right to some degree.

Key words: cinema, cinematography, film, philosophy, philosophy of film, movie, film editing

## Resumen

Este artículo utiliza la filosofía de las teorías cinematográficas para analizar la película *Arrival* y su efectividad para expresar pensamientos y emociones complejos de una manera original y fácil de entender para los espectadores, lo que explica su éxito. La película utiliza características cinematográficas, principalmente edición de películas, para contar dos historias simultáneamente. El artículo comienza con un resumen de la película y posteriormente un resumen de la ontología del cine antes de profundizar en los lugares de esta película donde se puede encontrar y explorar la filosofía relevante de las teorías cinematográficas. Si bien la película en sí es el actor principal de este artículo, son las teorías las que permiten comprender cómo *Arrival* logra expresar ideas y sentimientos mediante técnicas cinematográficas. De manera similar, al explorar el uso exitoso de estas técnicas en la película, se está comprobando que las teorías mencionadas son correctas hasta cierto punto.

Palabras clave: cine, cinematografía, filosofía, filosofía del cine, película, edición de película

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## Introduction

The movie *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve and edited by Joe Walker, was published in 2016 and nominated for eight Academy Awards in 2017, including Best Achievement in Cinematography and Best Achievement in Film Editing, and was awarded with Best Achievement in Sound Editing. With a worldwide box office of 203.4 million USD and countless nominations and awards besides the already mentioned Oscar nominations, to say that the movie was successful would be an understatement. ¿What about this science fiction film makes it an artwork worthy of well-deserved attention and positive reception? Exactly a century before the movie *Arrival* came out, Hugo Munsterberg wrote a treatise titled *The Photoplay* (1916) in which “he argued that film – in virtue especially of some of its editing devices – was an objectification of the human mind, and, therefore, not sheerly a mechanical reproduction, but something in principle able to convey thoughts and feelings” (Carroll, 2006, 51). In Munsterberg’s time, film editing was radically different from today’s film editing. The limitations of post-production today far exceed any expectation of film editing that a filmmaker could’ve dreamed of one hundred years ago. However, even in his time there was something about film editing that could be used to explain why film stands as its own artform and convey emotions and ideas, which is ultimately the purpose of art. The philosophy *of* film calls for thinkers to define what is the essence of film and the philosophy *in* film looks at the ways in which film itself can and is limited in doing philosophy.

The purpose of this essay is to explore and answer the question, how does the movie *Arrival* use film editing techniques and other cinematic features to effectively express thoughts and emotions in a way that is original? In order to answer this question, we will explore the ontology of film, specifically the cinematic features of film editing, and define originality to



establish a theoretical framework where we will then analyze how the cinematic elements of *Arrival* are exploited to conceptualize ideas of alien language and non-linear time, as well as explore the nature of human communication. Among the author's and theories, we will be referring to Berys Gaut's (1997) analysis of Gregory Currie's (1995) book, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy and Cognitive Science*, Noël Carroll's (2006) introduction to *What Is Film?*, and Arthur C. Danto's (1979) *Moving Pictures*. Before we delve into the topics mentioned above, we will look at a summary of the film with the intention of making clear which topics and themes within the movie are going to be discussed. We will also discuss the shortcomings of the film, particularly regarding Paisley Livingston's *problem of paraphrase*. In the end, the intent of this paper is to use philosophy of film theories to contend that *Arrival* is successful in expressing thoughts and emotions in a way that is original.

## **Summary of *Arrival***

*Arrival* is based on a short story called *Story of Your Life* written by Ted Chiang. The premise for this science fiction film looks at the life of the linguist Dr. Louise Banks when she is requested by the United States government to decipher the extraterrestrial language of heptapods, aliens that mysteriously arrive in shell-shaped ships to twelve locations around the world. The main character's objective is to communicate with the aliens and ask them what their purpose on planet earth is. In the course of her work, Banks immerses herself in the non-linear language of aliens and begins to experience the world and life in the same way they do. Inside the movie, the characters make a reference to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to explain why learning the language changes her worldview. Paul Kay (1984) cites Whorf (1940) in his explanation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to describe the doctrine of radical linguistic relativity which contains that "the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which have to be organized in our minds... largely, by the linguistic system" (86). That is to say that the structure of a language strongly influences or even determines the worldview a person acquires as they learn the language. In the movie, the theory is explicitly explained during a conversation between Dr. Ian Donnelly (a theoretical physicist working to understand the science of heptapods) and Banks when Donnelly says he's been reading about a theory that says, "if you immerse yourself in a foreign language, then you can actually rewire your brain" and Banks goes to say that "it's the theory that the language that you speak determines how you think" (01:01:58). Slowly her perception of time changes since the heptapods experience time as circular and that is reflected in the way they communicate. Circular time means that they live in the present with knowledge of their future and their past. Circular time is central to the story as the major plot twist depends on the audience's understanding of this concept. The film, as in the story, begins with the

narration of the protagonist telling a story to her daughter, Hannah. In the first scenes, Hannah's life is seen from when she is born until she falls ill in her teens and passes away. This opening montage make the audience think that Banks' life as a mother is in her past, before the arrival of the heptapods. However, throughout the film, they show us various memories with her daughter and in the climax of the story, during a crucial moment of interaction between Banks and the heptapods, it is revealed that they are not really flashbacks but scenes from the future (future memories). This major twist in the story has an emotional impact on the audience because it changes the meaning we give to the story itself and the way we see the decisions the protagonist makes now that we know she chose to conceive her daughter, knowing that she would die young. The protagonist's situation can be experienced by the audience as what Gregory Currie (1995) calls impersonal imaginings that requires a simulation which is "a matter of running mental states, particularly beliefs and desires, 'off-line'." (Gaut, 1997, 331). The role of imaginings in *Arrival* will be explored and discussed in more depth as we move along. In the film, the decision she makes affects her marriage to Donnelly, whom she meets in her work deciphering the purpose of the aliens. The movie reveals, in a rather indirect manner, that in the future he thinks Banks made the wrong decision. This happens in a heartfelt scene of a future memory where Banks and Hannah are together and Hannah tells her mom that dad (Donnelly) doesn't look at her the way she used to, to which Banks replies, "It's my fault, I told him something he wasn't ready to hear... and he said I made the wrong choice" (01:34:14). This idea of choices can be related to Gaut's (1997) analysis of imaginings since running off-line simulations often results in imagined decisions.

Alongside the internal journey of the protagonist, the film tells us the story of the world and repercussions of weak communication by showing us the conflict that unfolds in the world

and society around the arrival of the aliens. The urgency to understand the purpose of the heptapods and why they have come to the planet encourages the collaboration of the twelve countries where the ships have been installed. However, paranoia and fear of the unknown is always present. The uncertainty coupled with the lack of consensus among world leaders on what actions to take leads to violent unrest in the outside world (outside the base where Banks and her team are located) and eventually violent approaches towards the heptapods. The importance of effective communication is magnified when the researchers finally ask the heptapods what their purpose is and they, mistaking the meaning of tool for weapon, respond "offer weapon." The scenes that follow are chaotic, with rogue soldiers inserting a bomb into the ship, China, a world power, declaring an attack to the ship on its territory, and all countries disconnecting from the communication network. It is implied that these impulsive decisions are made because humans react quickly without stopping to consider all the possibilities of what "offer weapon" might mean. Finally, the information that Banks has acquired about the future of her life helps her save the heptapods when she remembers a future interaction with General Shang in China and she gives her his personal cell number and tells her the last words his wife ever said – in war, there are no winners, only widows. This information was used amid chaos to stop the army in China. It is implied that the alien language is the tool they spoke of and that their reason for sharing it with humans is because in 3,000 years they will need help from our species (which they know from their non-linear way of experiencing time).

## Chapter One: Ontology of Film and Film Editing

There is a difference between philosophy *of* film and philosophy *in* film. While the first one is ontological in nature and “interrogates the mode of existence of film – the kind of thing it is essentially” (Carroll, 2006, 51), the latter refers to films that *do* philosophy, something which Paisly Livingston (2006) calls the bold thesis, and is explained and defended by Aaron Smuts (2009) who holds that in order for film to do philosophy, it “must be able to make original contributions to the field” (409). For the purpose of this paper, we will mostly invoke philosophy of film theories, but we will also incorporate some of Smuts (2009) arguments in defense of the bold thesis to understand how *Arrival* makes original contributions to ontology of film itself. In explaining originality, we turn to Smuts (2009) who states that “film could make an original (not unique) contribution to philosophy by using what we might call its cinematic means. Such means include montage, camera angles and movement, and the juxtaposition of word and image” (410). The two criteria any movie must meet to be considered as philosophical are the artistic criterion and the epistemic criterion. The artistic criterion calls for film to utilize “special features of cinematic medium [that] endow works in the art form with unique ability to make philosophical contributions” (Smuts, 2009, 411). This means that the movie is contributing to philosophy in a way that other artforms cannot. Therefore, we are looking at ontology of film, the study that aims to determine what are the special features unique to film.

At first, ontology of film was a difficult subject of study for philosophers because film is an intersection of many art mediums. Despite this, in trying to identify what are the things indispensable to film, it was narrowed to two elements: photography and film editing. At the time there was a ‘one or the other’ approach and those who favored photography were realists whereas those who favored editing were creationists (Carroll, 2006, 51). Theorists made it

impossible to think that a film could exploit both photography and film editing in the same film because “each regarded their own criterion for cinematic accomplishment as exclusively the correct one” (52). Carroll (2006) then explains that what both sides of the debate lacked was an exploration for the functional essence of film which was left unexplained (52). For the purpose of our exploration of the movie *Arrival*, we won’t be delving too deeply into the ontological inquiry of what features of are truly cinematic. Instead, we will approach the analyzes as a mostly theoretically unaligned observer with a bias towards the creationist debates when it comes to discussing the power of CGI (computer-generated imagery). What is impressive about *Arrival*, and part of the reason why we will remain theoretically unaligned, is that its CGI always goes hand in hand with photography, a feature of film that was very well exploited by the filmmakers as well. Nearly thirty minutes into the movie, there is a scene that exploits both photography and editing to make the most of its cinematic essence. When the team is going into the shell using a sort of skylift, there is a moment when gravity is “turned-off” so to speak, the first hint at how different heptapods perception of time and space really is. The high-tension music and worm’s eye view perspective looking into the shell put us in the shoes of the protagonist who is emotionally shocked by what is happening. We see this specially when everyone jumps from the sky lift into the shell’s tunnel and she seems to be shell-shocked, unable to move. When Banks does this jump, or rather the colonel pushes her, the camera moves from a stable frame to a close-up shot of Banks’ panic filled faced, through a dutch-tilt and back to a stable frame showing what used to be looking up is now the protagonist’s horizon line because of the change in gravity. The camarography in this scene hints at the way in which the heptapods’ language and non-linear time will affect Banks, however, this scene wouldn’t have been possible without film editing in post-production. In an interview about *Arrival*, Joe Walker,

the movie's film editor, says that for him, one of the challenges of post in Sci-Fi movies is that it really is a continuation of production. We can further accept this view when we consider that during production Costello and Abbott (the heptapods) are really (in production) two men in green suits holding up tennis balls. Denis Villeneuve, the film's director, said in an interview, "each movie has its own challenge and on this one the biggest one was the editing" (08:13). A big part of why this was the biggest challenge was that editing, like heptapod's way of experiencing life, is a non-linear process. Editors don't necessarily begin with the first scenes and end with the finale. Likewise, filming itself is rarely done chronologically as the scenes are laid out in a script. There is a lot of going back and forth, cutting out scenes, phrases, inserting some, editing colour and sound, etc. There is one scene in particular that was created entirely in the post-production room. The scene mentioned above when Donnelly mentions the Sapir-Wharf hypothesis and then asks Banks if she has been dreaming in the heptapod's language was actually intended to be left out of the movie because the angles in which the conversation was shot created jump cuts that weren't smooth. These kinds of cuts often make the scene unnatural and hard for the audience's eyes to follow. However, because the information in the dialogue was important, the director asked the editor to make it so that Banks was actually dreaming that conversation (and in doing so, she was dreaming in the heptapod's language). To make it work, Walker used CGI to insert the heptapod inside the room with Banks and Donnelly. This scene, while improvised, ended up being of great importance both visually and in dialogue. Up until now, the audience had only seen the aliens, in their shell, behind the glass-like wall and surrounded by something resembling smoke. This is a moment where it becomes clear that the heptapods have fully immersed themselves into Banks mind and life.

## Chapter 2: Heptapod Language and Non-Linear Time

In approaching the non-linear alien language shown in *Arrival*, we also need to address the concept of non-linear time considering that it is essential to the plot of the story. Humans experience time in a linear way, meaning our present is relative to past events. This happens individually, with personal experiences, and collectively, with historical events. This way of consciousness of time, isn't seen in every species, therefore it is possible that this intuitive way of perceiving time is perhaps different from how hypothetical extra-terrestrial beings experience life. In the case of heptapods, they live time in a circular or non-linear way. The idea that time is non-linear suggests that time is just a reflection of the changes we are experiencing. Although the film is not the first to play with the concept of time (we have seen incredible cinematographic works such as *Interstellar* and others of less seriousness that became classics such as *Back to The Future*) the way the film presents the concept of non-linear time is original in that it uses the language of the heptapods to explain it. There is a moment in the film when Donnelly, through narration, explicitly explains how language works; "Unlike all written human languages, their writing is semasiographic. It conveys meaning. It doesn't represent sound... unlike speech, a logogram is free of time. Like their ship or their bodies, their written language has no forward or backward direction. Linguists call this 'nonlinear orthography', which raises the question, 'Is this how they think?'" (00:54:28). Explaining how this language works is a challenge that can be successfully overcome using film editing with intention and purpose, however, we must recognize that in this scene, the movie fails to *do* philosophy as the technique of using dialogue to explicitly help the viewer understand the concept is to merely present it. That is to say, "if the film as philosophy thesis has any significance, it must hold that film can do philosophy in a way



more ‘cinematic’ than merely recording a talk.” (Smuts, 2009, 409). However, we can be forgiving of this use of dialogue since, in many other instances, *Arrival* succeeds in presenting this concept in an original way by using several scene cuts and sequences to portray the life of Banks as she is experiencing it (that is, through circular time). By being able to communicate with the aliens, she begins to think in the same way as the heptapods think. An example of these sequences occurs when Banks is deciphering the language and sees his daughter in the lake with the stick that looks like an alien leg – this visual aid delicately balances exposition of the concept of circular time without revealing too much information which would give away the plot twist about the real timeline in which Hannah comes after the arrival of the heptapods and not before as it is suggested throughout the film. In this scene sequence, Banks experiences the intense grief of the loss of her daughter before she has experienced that loss. We can see this through close-ups and dutch tilts that are often used to show emotional instability. It is at this moment that she begins to experience life in the same way as heptapods, with time being relative to experience and not vice versa like humans. Banks lives her experiences internally before they happen. Not only that, but sometimes, in her mind she visits the person that she is in the future, and she lives those moments in the flesh. We can use as an example the same scene when she is in the lake with her daughter.

As mentioned in the summary, Banks makes the life decision to have a child, a decision that was, in a way, already predetermined. Some may even argue that her experience with non-linear time and the knowledge that she would have a child and would watch her die, was a determinist realization that her future is predestined, and the decision was to embrace it.

However, we will stand by the first hypothesis that states that Banks chooses to conceive Hannah and assume that she had the option to say no, meaning, she had free will. We do so because of

the scene cited before, when it is revealed to the audience that Donnelly tells Banks he thinks she “made the wrong choice” after she tells him about her daughter’s future, hinting at the audience that Banks made a conscious decision of having Hannah. This scene happens right after Banks meets face to face with Costello and Costello explains to her that the weapon they have been mentioning is their own language, which is actually a tool or sort of gift that will help humanity now so that in three thousands year, when heptapods need humanity’s help, they will be able to come to them. These scene clears up any confusion left over from previous scenes to ensure the audience understands that Banks has been seeing the future. Following this scene, we see a juxtaposition of the tranquility Banks has with her daughter in the lake and the chaos unfolding when she is taken into a car by Donnelly as they evacuate the premises where the heptapods arrived. The tranquillity is shown through stabilized shots and frames whereas the chaos is shown through a shaky camera movement that shows Banks running away from the shell and towards Donnelly. Banks tells Donnelly, “I just realized why my husband left me” (01:35:32), speaking in past tense, as if it is something that already happened. This is because at that point in linear time, she has already experienced future events in her life, both personal (with Donnelly and Hannah) and professional (teaching the heptapod language to others as it was intended by the heptapods). The irony of Banks telling this to Donnelly is enhanced by the fact that this is, arguably, the moment in which their romantic relationship begins, seeing that it’s clear that Donnelly cares for Banks and sees her as more than a co-worker.

Now that it’s been established what was the decision the protagonist made, we can go back to discussing Gaut’s (1997) analysis of Currie’s (1995) imaginings and simulation theory. Gaut (1997) explains that as a functional theorist, Currie (1995) believes that mental states have a causal relation to other mental states and to their input and output conditions with the external

world. This means that imaginings are different from beliefs because imagining does not require a call for action in the external world (or an output) so they have differing functional roles (332). Gaut (1997) goes on to cite Currie (1995) and explain that running simulations off-line means being “disconnected from their normal sensory inputs and behavioural outputs” (332). Having said that, “imaginings have internal belief-like connections” (332) which can activate internal sensory responses. The example Gaut (1997) gives us is that of imagining a bear in front of us. Although we won’t physically run away, our mind can go into a fight or flight response without ever being connected to real decision making. In this paper we argue that *Arrival* succeeds in activating belief-like connections inside the viewers minds as they follow Banks’ story.

However, we need to consider that it is entirely possible to non-ividly imagine something, so in order to create an imagining powerful enough to then create an imaginary decision, the imagining itself needs to be incredibly vivid. What that means for our argument, is that we need to provide evidence of how photography and film editing make it easier for the audience to vividly imagine Banks’ situation. This is necessary for “both beliefs and desires are required for motivation, including motivating the sensations [someone] has” (Gaut, 1997, 333). Recognizing that both beliefs and desires are required for motivation is important because in doing so we recognize the limitations of *Arrival*, and any film for that matter, in that everyone has different beliefs and desires in their real lives that may or may not relate to the ones being portrayed in the film. For example, a parent who has lost their kid will more easily imagine having to make the decision of having their kid despite the pain their passing will cause whereas a person who has no desire whatsoever to become a parent will have a harder time simulating the situation presented in the film. Another important point to consider is that the functionalist approach is not always present in the simulation theory or even necessary for imaginings. Gaut (1997) argues

that a “better account of imagination would hold that to imagine some content is to entertain it, without asserting it. That is, the imaginer is not committed to the truth of the representational content concerned” (333). This may relieve us from the pressure of having to provide evidence of how *Arrival* helps the audience vividly imagine situations, both of Banks’ life, and the world’s state involving extra-terrestrial life since there is no need to commit to their existence. However, that would be to merely understand the context in which the story unfolds and recognize the main characters in the story. Movies that don’t use cinematography to push viewers into a deeper way of imagining aren’t the movies that win awards such as *Arrival*.

### Chapter 3: Shortcomings of *Arrival* and The Idea of Communication

As we understand it, there is one problem with film being completely conceivable as a possibility when we are imagining this created reality, and that is the phenomenon of movie stars. The way Carroll (2006) explains Cavell's idea (1971) is as a "personae that exists across films" (55). To understand this, we can compare it to theater actors whose personal lives are significantly less attached to their fame so they can "easily shed from role to role" whereas "the movie star brings her public personality to each role" (55). This could potentially hinder the imaginings and audience has when experiencing film, particularly science fiction, where we are asked to believe the unreal or that which we have no evidence for being truth. However, there are strengths to the phenomenon of movie stars. Considering that successful actors have a known public personality it often "finds itself best expressed in certain situations and certain stories" (55) which means that they often play roles that are somewhat similar to the roles they have interpreted in the past. We see this in *Arrival*'s co-protagonist, Jeremy Renner, who was already a well-known actor for interpreting roles such as Hawkeye in *The Avengers* and Hansel Grimm in *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*. Both blockbuster sci-fi movies where Renner plays the role of an action figure with a complicated past. While *Arrival* is also a sci-fi movie that had great commercial success, it is not what people often classify as a blockbuster film, given its more serious nature as a film. So, we see how Cavell's (1971) phenomenon of movie stars plays out with Renner who has range in interpreting roles (from an impossibly skilled archer as Clinton Barnes to a theoretical physicist working to understand aliens as Ian Donnelly). Perhaps for some viewers it might take some time at the beginning of the film to detach previous roles interpreted by Renner before fully believing that Ian Donnelly exists. Whatever the case, there is one more thing worth noting about the phenomenon of movie stars and that is that "Cavell contends that

the possibilities of film – that is, what will work on film – can only be discovered as filmmakers’ experiment with different project, notably in the form of genres” (Carroll, 2006, 55). This matters because as mentioned earlier, movie stars, their public personalities and the past roles they have played, make them more suitable for certain stories, in other words, “genres become cycles when they are able to function as habitat” (Carroll, 2006, 55). Genres become home for star personalities; thus, genres are born from these personalities.

Another aspect important to consider is that due to the easy access audiences now have to movies, filmmakers have little control over how the audience experiences the movie after its initial release. Danto (1979) argues that “it is not essential to films that they be projected onto screens; early films were viewed in peepboxes” (100). What Danto didn’t know, is that four decades later, a new form of experiencing cinema would take over the world in the form of streaming platforms that allows audiences to watch movies under their own conditions (the comfort of their own homes, with people, on their own, pausing and repeating scenes as they please, etc.). When we analyze the emotions and thoughts that *Arrival* conveys, the way the audience experiences the moving picture is relevant because as viewers we can rewind to hear dialogue we missed or repeat scenes we find confusing. Here we argue that *Arrival* effectively conveys complex thoughts and emotions using photography and film editing, mainly the latter, but perhaps part of why the viewer can understand such complicated concepts like non-linear time and alien language is because of the control viewers have over how they experience film. Not to mention the ability to google an explanation where one is required. Here is where our previous arguments to why *Arrival* effectively conveys philosophical concepts are counter examined. The *problem of paraphrase* states that to argue that a film does philosophy, we need to “demonstrate how a film could present a new idea or argument that is not grossly dependent

on textual sources, non-cinematic devices, or interpretations” and it has to be “accessible through some experiential but ultimately inexpressible means” (Smuts, 2009, 412). However, nowhere does it say that a film fails to do philosophical contributions if the audience requires to re-watch it. While this argument may seem weak at first glance, it can stand on its own taking into account the time and context in which the film was made. Like mentioned above, Danto, nor any of the author’s and theories we’ve considered so far, knew that in their future film and movies would be experienced radically different. While some of the ideas presented in *Arrival* may be hard to understand in a first viewing, the overall plot is there and can be re-watched almost countless of times, something common nowadays. After the second or third viewing of this film, it is clear what are the ideas the film is communicating.

We haven’t yet discussed the less complicated ideas presented in the story about communication itself, particularly regarding the collaboration between nations and world leaders. In another interview, Joe Walker (2016) reveals that all the screens shown in the movie were actually green screens that were edited in post-production to insert images that fit the mood of the scene. For example, our first glance of the shell is in Banks’ house (00:08:50), when the camera is focused on her face and in the background the news is playing footage of the hovering spaceship. This is important because it hints to the audience that while the heptapods will play a central role, the story is really about Banks and ultimately about humans. Likewise, in the first landscape shot of the shell shows its omnipresence and immensity (00:18:49), the camera pans out but at first the top of the shell is cut-off from the audience’s view emphasizing how much the heptapods go beyond our capacity of understanding that which we can barely even see. The motif of understanding is present throughout the whole story as we are shown important people having discussions which could potentially decide the future of our world were the heptapods to

be a real threat. Governments and military are often referring to the aliens as a potential danger, and the urgency to know what they want comes before the desire to understand why they're here. This reflects a dark side of our own nature and our own history as violent peoples who have fought against each other under the false pretense and belief that one race or group is ultimately better than the other. There is a scene when all communications go down, right after the heptapods mistake the meaning of weapon with tool, where there is a communication blackout. Every country disconnects their monitors and refuses to continue collaboration in fear of what information other nations may be withholding. The paranoia and high tensions don't stem from a simple misunderstanding that needs clarification, it stems from a reflection of our own way of being. Shortly after the blackout Banks and Donnelly go to their superiors to try to convince them that they need to get the communication back up but to all their arguments, Agent Halpert changes the perspective to make it seem like the aliens are most likely a threat. In this scene, Donnelly proposes a "non-zero-sum game" where they trade the information they have in exchange of the information other nations have. This expression and this moment is important because Banks has a future memory of telling her daughter the expression a moment after telling Hannah to go ask her dad. In these scenes we understand that present Banks and future Banks are connected through memories. It is here that the plot twist is presented only visually and cinematically without spelling it out for the audience. The expression itself is important because it refers to the importance of collaborating. Banks goes back to the shell on her own because at that point she knows what she will do and that it will be okay. As an audience, we know that things will be okay because we know that Banks will go on to have Hannah in a peaceful world. Following this sequence is the scene when Banks meets Costello face-to-face and the heptapod grants her with full understanding of their way of thinking. This allows her to go back to the base



and call general Shang, preventing a violent attack against the aliens and opening up communication channels once more.

## Conclusion

Despite stumbling with the *problem of paraphrase* and the movie start phenomenon, *Arrival* ultimately achieves to use film editing and photography cinematically to communicate complex ideas and emotions. Particularly ideas regarding non-linear time, communication, and human nature. As well as the emotion of grief and act of acceptance of the way things. It can be debated that the film uses the main character to depict serenity, the ability to embrace the things that can't be change and change the things that can be made better. The reason why this movie is successful is because we can imagine this fictional situation in our world, and it is easy for us to imagine it because the film depicts the situation vividly. In post-production, the CGI work is done to make the film visually aesthetic in every way it possibly can, including the hairs of Amy Adams' character as she enters the shell to meet Costello. Perhaps years from now the editing will be viewed under a harsher lens, considering the great leaps technology in film has taken it is safe to assume it will keep on evolving. However, in this decade, *Arrival* supports the creationist's argument that film editing is integral to the cinematographic essence of the art as well as the realist's belief that film could not be film without photography.

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