

# Department of media and communications film studies essay



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dyslexic? noEssay or Assignment TitleType in box belowHans Belting writes

that ‘ the image is not present the same way its medium is present. It needs

the act of animation by which our imagination draws it from its medium’ (An

Anthropology of Images, p. 20)How does Belting understand the

interrelations between media, images, and bodies?

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Assessment Handbook 15f. The image is not present the same way its medium is present. It needs the act of animation by which our imagination draws it from its medium. Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images* One may ask, is the screen enthral its spectators or is the image? How do both screen and image affect us? Or rather, how we fit into them? In Sigmund Freud's [1] letter to his family from Rome, he mentioned the screen in Piazza Colonna projects lantern slides of advertisements. Spellbound, Freud commented. Belting on the other hand, in his *An Anthropology of Images*, provided an insight which ready to solve the riddle of the questions in which he draws the connection within medium, images, bodies and mind. Belting with his anthropological approach to dissect the interrelation of medium, images, bodies and mind, he proposes that the "image" is not defined by its mere visibility but by its being invested, by the beholder, with a symbolic meaning and a kind of mental "frame". He also suggests that image has dual meaning, internal (endogenous) and external (exogenous), which the <https://assignbuster.com/department-of-media-and-communications-film-studies-essay/>

former is refer to the mental images and the latter is refer to physical images. Until now, the understanding of image and its importance is in relation to the world we perceived from its medium is besides of what can be called spellbound. In addition, memories, dreams, imaginations, are generated in one's body thus the body is the living medium which produce the images through self-experience. In this case, we can derive that our mind behaves like an internal screen which projects the archive of our memory for remembrance, our brains is making the images of the world when we are dreaming while we are asleep, and hallucinations of day dreaming as well as when we have our eyelids closed. Thus, medium can be a lifeless object, for example the rectangular white screen in cinema theatre, as well as a living body, which carry the images. Meanwhile, the body does not just serve as medium which carry the images, more specifically mental images, but the body can be the picture, according to Belting. Still, is it screen that enthrals its spectators or is it the image? How screen and image affect us? More interestingly when the body as picture, how about our position within screen and image? We are still in the mist of the riddle, although we are on the track to understand image and medium. Belting points out that " every medium has its capacity either to capture our attention for its own sake or to conceal its presence within the picture". Similarly, the more we pay attention to the medium the less we will be focusing on the image it carries, on the contrary, the more we pay attention to the image the less we notice the medium's presence. At this point, it seems that Belting's point of view is solving us the question of either screen or the image that beguiled the spectators' attention. However, it opens a room for further deliberation when capitalism comes into the question.

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Jonathan Crary[2] suggests that: " the changing configurations of capitalism continually push attention and distraction to new limits and thresholds, with an endless sequence of new products, sources of stimulation and streams of information, and then respond with new methods of managing and regulating perception." In order to resolve the questions, let us venture through Belting's insight by looking at the example of the film " Inception" directed by Christopher Nolan in year 2010 which narrates about subconscious with fascinating spectacle to deal with the technology development ostensibly effect the media today that has push the visual experience to a new limit and threshold. As well as, taking the example of Sichuan Bian Lian (川剧变脸, Sichuan face mask changing Chinese Opera performance) to explore of what Belting suggests, the body as picture." Inception", it is a film narrates the ability to steal information through one's subconscious, an art of extraction to gain secrets during the dream state. Dom Cobb, the main character of the film, who has this ability, was aimed by Saito, who wishes to break up the energy conglomerate of his competitor Maurice Fischer. As Maurice Fischer was on his dead bed, Saito offered Cobb a chance to redeem what has cost Cobb lost all that he ever loved, to use his ability instead of stealing or extracting information from a person's subconscious but to plant an idea. The idea is that for Robert Fisher, son and heir of Maurice Fisher to disintegrate his father's company. In fact, the idea is to alter one's mind during the dream state, as in this film, dream within a dream, and the levels of dream go deep down to three layers of dreams in order to successfully plant the idea. Through this film, we are going to explore two parts; first is to explore the events within the film, the narration of the film based on physical images and mental images that Belting was

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suggesting. Secondly is to look into spectacle of the film to explain how different type of screens as the physical carrier medium for the film that create different viewing experience in accord to the technology development where new products had happened to be pushing cinema theater to the risk to become obsolete. Figure 1 Blueprint of Inception explaining the level of dreams of the entire narration for the film. dreamBelting offered us the triad medium-image-body which is from his anthropological perspective. Drawing this triad medium-image-body interrelationship in comparison to the film "Inception" content narration, the medium instead of only referring to a physical object, it is referring to the brain, which carry the images of dreams, and the body is where the action is taken which in the end of the film, Robert Fisher decided to liquidate the company therefore splitting up the conglomerate, in other words, he has accepted the planted idea and also complied to his father's will for his son to be his " own man". Hence the power of the dreams images occurring in one's mind in the context of this film, shapes the disposition of the body and mind which relates to the visible and sayable of Jacques Ranciere's in The Future of The Image[3]. In "Inception", the scene of the kidnapping of Robert Fisher in the first level of the dream, while Cobb and Arthur interrogate Robert Fisher. For what is visible is what is in the mind, in this case is the memory, where Robert Fisher has to remember the combination for his father's personal safe. The audible part was when Robert tells the first six numbers that first come to his head after Cobb pointing the gun to his face. Besides, take another scene as an example to clarify the physical image of what Belting means and how he put the relationship between mental images and physical images so intimately relating to each other that is difficult for them to be apart. When Robert

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Fisher and Peter Browning are in front of Maurice Fisher's death bed, Robert picks up the photo frame which Maurice flung it away. The photo frame framed a photograph of a boy, which is Robert himself when he was young. While looking at the photograph, the broken glass of the photo frame, metaphorically indicating the relationship between Maurice and Robert, father and son. When Peter Browning says to Robert, who is holding the photograph: " Must be a cherished memory of his [Maurice]." However, Robert continues: " I put it by his bed. He hasn't even noticed." From this instance, the memory is for Robert, though Browning assumes is Maurice's. Moreover, this instance is to show that the physical image which is the printed photograph brings along the mental image which is the memory in Robert's mind. Belting: " As perceived pictures they turn into remembered images that henceforth become part of the archive of our memory." The medium which is the photograph provide personal meanings of the subject related to the photograph, it can represent an individual experience, and when the physical image re-embodied as our own images, the mental images in our mind and hence the body substitutes the physical media to become the living medium, according to Belting. Figure 2 Robert Fisher holding the broken glass photograph on his hand when Browning says: " Must be a cherished memory of his." Back to Belting's medium-image-body and speaking of dreams where the entire film is dealing with dreams, J. Allan Hobson[4], Professor of Psychiatry, Emeritus, Harvard Medical School says: " The brain is a filmmaker! The brain he shoots roles, directs, script writes, edits, does everything all at once, automatically, every single night."

Inasmuch as Annette Michelson[5]talks about Michael Snow in " About Snow"

where in her text, she relates Michael Snow's description similarly to

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Belting's idea: " Snow's own description of " trying to make a definitive statement of pure film space and time, a balancing of ' illusion' and ' fact', all about seeing. The space starts at camera's (spectator's eye), is in the air, then is within the screen (the mind)."" The film " Inception" as the director Christopher Nolan[6]himself said: "... try to incorporate any of the really familiar touchdowns of what it is to dream. Any of the things a universal could allow the audience to relate their own experience of dreaming to this rather fantastical set of events." He refer to the " kick" in the film, a common thing for people to be able to relate the idea that we can't die in a dream and when we die in the dream in fact we wake up, like the feeling of falling and snapping a person to be awake, that spectator would recognize. Hence, the film affect the audience through the structure how the dreams event in the film that is so much relate to our real life, that our brain will generate the images of self-experiences in relation to the film that is appear on the screen. The affective of the film to the spectators in fact, is not only the structure of the content narration; it is visible and presentable because of what makes them visible – the screen. With the advent of the technology development and the out coming of capitalism, screen in the cinema theater is not the only possible way for the film screening. Computer monitor, iPad, even mobile phone, allow films to be played. Despite different conventions of the screen, as Belting's profound insight, " it also requires a spectator who is able to animate the media as though images were living things. Image perception, a form of animation, is a symbolic act that is guided by cultural patterns and pictorial technologies." Furthermore, as refer to D. N.

Rodowick[7]that no two prints of the same film will ever be identical as each has its own " unique traces of destruction with a specific projection history."  
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Similarly there is no identical viewing experience of the same film. It is more apparent with different physical medium. Especially for film like " Inception" the visual and sound effects composed which brings an impactful cinema experience. The details of the visual effects for example the train appears on the road, the reflective folding of the streets and buildings in Paris, the rotating hotel corridor, seeing them on a big screen compare to a screen of mobile devices, the affect is different towards how spectators could animate from the perception of images through different physical medium. Figure 3. The train appears on the road which is one of the projections of Robert Fisher. Figure 4. When Cobb try to explain to Ariadne about subconscious. Figure 5. Arthur running in the hotel corridor in the second level of dream, it is rotating according to Yusuf driving in the first level of dream. As we have explore what Belting is telling us about mental image and physical image, of how it depends on the act of animation by which one spectator's imagination draws from its medium thus explain how screen and image affect us. Then, how about the position of our body stands within screen and image? When Belting talks about the body as picture, he focuses on mask. The body decoration functions as mask in which the body becomes the carrier medium, so as the body transform to be a picture. Sichuan face mask changing (Bian Lian 变脸) is a rather fascinating example to be related to Belting's idea of the body as picture. Bian Lian[8]originates from Chinese Sichuan opera where performers wear the colorful mask and costume followed by rapid movement according to the dramatic rhythm of music. The unique of this performance is that the performers change the mask (face) to another almost instantaneously with the swipe of a fan or a movement of the head. Different faces depicting different moods of the character

development throughout the performance. In addition to its unique, the skills of face mask changing only pass down from generations within a family and the techniques can be categorized in four most general techniques that are used for performance, some kind of a trickery work, conjured along with narration. First[9], is " wipe face" (□□), the paints are painted on certain parts of the body, during the performance, using the hand to wipe the face instantly to change to another face mask. Secondly, " pull face" (□□), the masks are painted on silk material, all the masks will be stitched together by a fine thread and then attach them on the face, the masks will also be stitched upon the costume hence with a rapid and instantaneous movement the mask will be pulled and change according to performer posing and presentation. Next is " blowing onto face" (□□), there are powder such as gold powder, toner powder and silver powder ready on the stage inside a box, when the performer is prostrated on the stage, the trick is when the performer blow the powder onto his face therefore the face changes. Lastly, " qigong face changing" (□□□□), is technically a breathing exercise (qigong □□) that allows the energy in the body change the face color from for instance, red to white and from white to green. Figure 6. A series of screenshot of a Bian Lian performance, the face mask changing is accompanied by the paper fan. Noticeably, all the techniques of the face mask changing performance can be seen as the embodiment of the mask with the body of the performer. The whole figure of the performer becomes a picture, in fact a moving picture presented to the audience with narration. Alongside with the gesture to the performance, there is a story to convey to the audiences. As

Agemben[10]talks about gesture is the display of mediation, it can be

applied to this example where Bian Lian require the coordination of the body  
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movement to perform the trick so as to communicate to the audience through the character the performer performed based on stories. The characters of the stories are based on famous characters from opera for example " The Legend of White Snake" (白蛇传), " Feiyun Sword" (风云剑) and " KongChenji" (空城计). The mask, the costume, accessories, and the body and its movement henceforth become the impersonation of the person who himself the narrator and actor of the opera. The medium which is the physical body and the image relationship thus become almost seamlessly. Take the film " The King of The Mask" directed by Wu-Tiangming in 1996 as an example, the film narrates about Bian Lian, providing a brief background of the face mask changing and the technique in which the main character used has been analyzed to be " pull face" (扯脸). Figure 7. The main character calls " Bian Lian Wang" the king of Bian Lian, he is painting the mask on a silk cut out. Figure 8. (clockwise), Bian Lian Wang begins with narrating a story, the scene is cut to another character, then to him again as he started to perform Bian Lian, the shot has apply a trick of a small fire explosion to indicate him to change the mask unnoticeable, and in rapid movement. Lastly, the mask disappears and his face reappears in the shot. bianlian6Hence, we can argue that Bian Lian is a resemblance to cinematic experience; it is more than proving of what Belting calls the body as picture. The stage is the screen, the Bian Lian performer is the actor, he a result of transformation into a picture and he is lively moving, he perform with a storyline, there is a beginning and end narration, the face mask changing tricks thus resemble special effects of a film, Bian Lian has its mise-en-scene, movement and posing depicting the cinematography of a film, the performance has its audience gathered, it then refer to a socio-cultural event. Indeed, Belting suggests: "... [The] body

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assumes a dual existence as both medium and image." Somehow, for Bian Lian it serves to propose it may be more than that. Insofar the film "Inception" and Bian Lian are being ascertained in regards to Belting's insight of how he relates the interrelations between medium, images, body and mind. The dual meaning of mental images and physical images are to be inseparable. Neither the screen nor the images that capture one's attention are require our body mind act of animation to derive the image from its medium. Besides the images from the two discussed examples, all images can be replaced by new and different images according to Belting's anthropological approach. The constant replacement of images of the past to new images is along the stream of socio-cultural and technology development also by the influence of capitalism among them. In Belting point's of view, images will always be improvised, innovated and will be invented as they devoted themselves in new medium or enroll to a new set of perception in accord to time and generations following the satisfaction and the needs of the human development. Even so, the interrelation of medium, images, body and mind will hardly be annulled.