

## **Text Messaging in Narrative Film: Intermedial Intertemporalities**

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### **Abstract**

For over a century narrative film has always adopted new technologies, while also fluidly establishing visual conventions for representing new technology's interfaces with embodied experience. Text messaging on mobile devices is a remarkable exception in this history. 31 years after Nokia introduced phone SMS, texting has become a ubiquitous mediation in every aspect of embodied and mediated experience, but narrative film has yet to learn how to represent this activity with the fluidity in which film represents every other human activity. This text/film dissonance stands out starkly in our age in which intermediality has been *normalized* and we so fluidly move between, and through, multimedialities – which are now seamlessly integrated with embodied life. Film's inadequacy in this matter represents a visual challenge, but arises from a *temporal* challenge. Both film and texting are media temporalities operating profoundly differently from embodied temporalities. More significantly, film and texting temporalities differ radically from each other. Hence, in addition to proposing a study in intermediality I am offering a study in *intertemporality*. With this I hope to develop dimensions of *intermedial studies as intertemporal studies*. Texts are generally expected to be read and replied to ASAP, introducing a mediated temporal anxiousness here-to-for nonexistent. Of course, face-to-face encounters also demand temporal immediacy, but this challenge is supported by *bodily presence* congruous with millions of years of evolution. In the blink of an eye, historically speaking, social media has compelled instantaneity in contexts of *non-physical presence*. Texts – so simple to compose, send, receive, and resend – are the most temporally anxious aspect of social media. In this paper I briefly contextualize texts as media relative to somatic life, and then examine how this temporally-most-anxious media is represented in the *first* temporal media form, film. Examining how texting is, and is not, represented in film we find increasingly complicated layers of intertextualities, multimodalities, and inevitably contradictory reader/reception dynamics and interfaces. Now that digital intermediality has been completely integrated into somatic life, what can the misfit of text messaging within narrative film's

representations of embodied life tell us about the limits of our supposedly *normalized* experience within intermediality?

**Keywords**

Film Studies, Text Messaging, Embodiment in Film, Embodiment in Digital media, Temporality

**Bio**

**Ro Lawrence** Professor Emeritus of Video, Animation & Digital Arts, College of the Arts, University of South Florida, PhD Candidate in Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought An interdisciplinary artist and theorist, Lawrence presents films, installations, and embodied actions internationally. His recent films, *Appearing in Bucharest*, and *Codrina's Trace* – emerging from his Fulbright year in Romania – screened at Paris Film Awards, Experimental Film Festival Barcelona, Lisbon International Film Festival, London International Film Festival, and 38 other festivals, receiving 11 awards. In 2024 Lawrence defends his dissertation, *Time/Image/Narrative: Post-Internet*, mentored by Elie During and Catherine Malabou. Adapted chapters from this dissertation were presented in conferences at UC Berkeley, San Francisco State University, University of Greenwich, UK; and in ISIS conferences in Utrecht and Montreal. His essay, *Renegotiating the Body's Social Contract in Public Space and Online*, adapted from his presentation at the inaugural ISIS conference in Cluj, was published as a chapter in *Moving Images, Mobile Bodies*, edited by Horea Avram in 2018. His intermedial image/text/Internet work, *Margin to Margin*, is forthcoming 2024 in Brill Publication's *Experimental Practices in Interdisciplinary Art: Engaging the Margins*, edited by J. Jackson and Antoinette LaFarge.

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