Implications of Cinematography in Tondoscope

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Abstract:

Circular cinema is referred to as the *Tondoscope* (derived from the *Tondo* movement in the Renaissance) by Gust Van den Berghe (director of *Lucifer*, 2014). Regarding the perception of the viewer, it differs from the traditional rectangular visual formats of cinema and possesses specific traits; namely, visual balance, symmetry, and harmony. This paper tries to understand the implications of cinematography in a circular-shaped image, by analysing the characteristics of circular images from the history of various visual media along with the case studies *Lucifer* (2014) and *I am not Madame Bovary* (2016). Furthermore, it discusses the potentialities of tondoscope as a visual dramaturgical tool.

Keywords:

Tondoscope, Tondo Art, Mimesis, Cinematography.

Introduction

Circular cinema has been called the *Tondoscope* (derived from the *Tondo* movement in the Renaissance) by Gust Van den Berghe (Director of Lu-

cifer, 2014) (McKernan, 2019). During its evolution over a century, the most invariable element of cinema has been the frame and its geometrical properties. Circular-shaped images have been substantially present in the history of visual arts, whereas circular cinema has been sparse.

Circular-shaped images possess unique traits; namely, perceptual force to the centre of the image, symmetry, and balance. This dissertation tries to explore these unique characteristics of circular images by analysing examples from the history of art, cinema, and photography. Subsequently, it discusses the implications of cinematography in the Tondoscope and examines the applications of circular imagery in diegesis. The case studies include *Lucifer* (2014) and *I am not Madame Bovary* (2016), two circular films that exhibit polarising diegetic worlds through diverse applications of the Tondoscope. This research will elucidate the potentiality of circular cinema concerning the various motifs it can express in a film.

What Is a Frame? Seeing Circular Frames

"Everything within a frame tells a story... even the frame itself" (Renée, 2018).

Cinema can be classified into four basic elements: the shot, the shot sequence, the scene, and the dramatic sequence (Hurbis-Cherrier, 2018). The shot, which consists of frames, is considered the smallest element of unbroken film. This defines a frame as the smallest unit of cinematic visual language. To perceive a world seen through a circle, one needs to look more into what a frame is and what a frame does. In "*Cinema 1 The movement-image*", Deleuze (1986) defines framing as "the determination of a closed system, a relatively closed system which includes everything which is present in the image – sets, characters, and props – framing" (p. 13). He claims that the frame forms a set that has elements, and elements then form subsets. He calls these parts object-signs (according to Jakobson) and cinemes (according to Passolini) (1986). Drawing upon these definitions, it is evident that the frame legitimately defines what the audience has been shown of the diegesis. The frame defines one's visual entry to the narrative; consequently, the geometrical and physical qualities of the frame become crucial.

The viewer's perception of the frame depends on several variables, including the shape of the image, which has been unnoticeable due to the central tendency of projecting movies in a rectangle; however, this ascendency of rectangular images has almost made the circle a visual anomaly. This phenomenon can be explained by the nature of human vision. The human eye's general field of vision ranges from 135 to 180 degrees horizontally and 50 to 70 degrees vertically (Spencer, 2017). In other words, humans are accustomed to seeing the world more horizontally than vertically, which explains the abundance of rectangular images in cinema, and one's ease to perceive those images. Human vision can be differentiated as central and peripheral. Central vision fulfils the tasks, which require one's focus, such as writing, reading, identifying colours, driving, etc. Peripheral vision helps to understand the spatial orientation of something that is being seen (Spencer, 2017). A circular image induces the central vision of the human eye more than peripheral vision. The fact that circular cinema is still projected on a rectangular screen with a scope reinforces the highly focused perception of circular images by the viewer.

1. State of the Art; Contextualising the History of Circular Images

1.1 Circle in Art History

Tondo (derived from *rotondo,* the Italian word for 'round') is a Renaissance movement from the early 15th century. Circular paintings, reliefs, plaques, or mural designs are examples of Tondo art (Pallardy, 2009). The predecessors of Tondo include *Kylikes* (wine cups made during Greek Antiquity) and different potteries, which suggest the decorative usage of Tondo art during specific periods. Some of the first Tondi (plural of Tondo) were produced in Tuscany during the late 1430s. During the successive years, notable Florentine artists painted Tondi in their careers; namely, Sandro Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Leonardo da Vinci used circular diagrams throughout his notes and sketches, including his renowned work, *The Vitruvian Man* (1490). He reportedly painted Tondi, which are lost (Olson, 1993). The Tondo *Madonna of the Lake* has been replicated by one of da Vinci's pupils, Marco d'Oggiono (Nolan, 2020).

1.1.1 The Adoration of the Maggi

Figure 1. The Adoration of the Magi (1450) by Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi, (NGA, Washington), and 1(b) the geometrical illustration of Fibonacci sequence on the image.

The painting in figure 1 includes multiple vantage points and a landscape that mimics the circular shape of the canvas. This aids to direct the viewer's eye throughout the canvas only to end up at the heart of the painting; Magi worshipping Christ. Here, the viewer is meant to identify with Magi and worship Christ. This perceptual force is established by the effective use of the Tondo format and carefully designed composition (Romaine, 2018). Romaine (2018) writes, "This tondo image of the magi worshipping the infant Christ was designed to inspire the viewer's spiritual imagination. It unifies iconography, shape, and purpose."

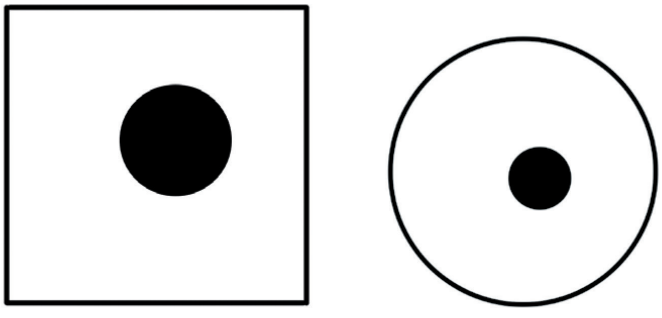

Figure 2. Illustration of the hidden structure of a square experiment (1954) conducted by Arnheim, from Art and Perception, adapted to a circle by the researcher.

To establish what are perceptual forces, this research refers to *the hidden structure of a square experimen*t conducted by Arnheim (1954). In figure 2, one can effortlessly understand the disk lies off centre, without any measuring procedure from the square. Arnheim (1986) describes this capability of the human brain as the ability to see things in relation to their environment and arrive at conclusions about the size, position, or any other variability. From figure 2, it is indisputable that if the experiment is done with a circle, it merely extends the validity of the result. Arnheim (1986) argues that a piece of art urges towards physical and perceptual balance; like every physical body, every finite visual pattern has a centre of gravity or fulcrum to it. However, the circular nature of the landscape is not the only compositional tool used by the artists to achieve this. Additionally, one can associate the compositional modality of figure 1(b) with the geometrical representation of the Fibonacci sequence.

The "Fibonacci sequence" (0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89...) is a sequence of numbers in which each member is the sum of the previous two (Palazzo, 2016). The Fibonacci sequence is observable throughout nature in its spiral sequences and symmetric patterns; found in snails, flowers, leaves, or seeds. The geometrical representation of the Fibonacci sequence has been the basis of *golden ratio* compositions in painting and photography. It is stated that when two elements are in the golden ratio, the harmony between them is highly susceptible to the human eye (Bosco, 2016). Applications of the golden ratio have been done from the presumption of rectangular compositions. In figure 1(b), one can examine the potentiality of this concept in a circle.

1.1.2 Doni Tondi

Figure 3. Doni tondi, by Michelangelo (1504-1506), The Uffizi, Florence.

A circle is the only two-dimensional shape with its centre situated at the same distance from all the points of its circumference ("Wtmaths," n.d). What does this imply in terms of the perceptual forces related to the geometric centre of a circular image? Michelangelo's Doni Tondi (Holy family) is depicted in figure 3. The painting includes Mary, Jesus, and God in the foreground. Trailed by Saint John the Baptist and a set of nude pagan figures who are yet to be baptised (Barolsky, 2003).

Figure 4. The Virgin and Child with St. Anne by Leonardo da Vinci (1510).

The compositional balance of figure 3 is in debt to the distribution of the visual weight of the elements and the visual direction of the image. Arnheim (1986) argues that a piece of art urges towards physical and perceptual balance; like every physical body, every finite visual pattern has a centre of gravity or fulcrum to it. The geometrical centre of a circle is more perceptible to the human eye than that of any other geometrical shape. In figure 3, the centre of the image is that of Mary, the main subject of interest, which instantly gives her more visual weight. The orientation of the three main subjects suggests that the visual direction of the composition is upwards and ricochets around the conjunction point of these main subjects. Additionally, the visual direction of the nudes in the background further affirms this containment of the image towards its centre, resulting in a compressed pictorial space. Pictorial space in art is an illusory space that seems to recede backwards from the picture plane ("Pictorial space", n.d). The artist achieves harmony and containment within the Tondo format through the reduced pictorial space and the golden triangle composition. The golden triangle composition advocates for composing the main subjects of interest in a triangular shape, to achieve visual harmony ("Tamron", 2020). I will compare figure 3 with another painting from the Renaissance that employs a similar bilateral triangle composition, *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (1510) (figure 4) by Leonardo da Vinci. Arguably, one could experience a higher amount of centripetal perceptual force in *Doni Tondo* than in *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, regardless of the similar composition techniques employed in them, as the circular shape of the canvas accentuates the perceptual force in Doni Tondi. Even though this is a singular example, the geometrical properties of a circle advocate for one's effortless noticeability of its centre, which can be embraced or opposed while composing an image in a circle.

1.1.3 Modern Tondi

William Zimmer (1991) writes: "The tondo is the most harmonious, most self-contained of shapes, but it is also the most radically demanding". Circular images with an imbalanced composition oppose the harmony of their shape; for example, Chung Eun-Mo, a Korean artist, has established a merely distinguishable angular composition in her Tondo works (Zimmer, 1991). In figure 5, *Composition C0218* (2002), one of her illustrious works, she employs a minimal composition of shapes and

colours in a circle; the polygonal shapes oppose the visual ease of the image's circumference. According to Chung, the *Porthole effect* of the Tondo medium is highly evocative (as cited in Zimmer, 1991).

Figure 5. Composition C0218 (2002) by Eun-Mo Chung.

The porthole effect is described as light coming through an oculus to a dark and damp place (reminding the porthole on ships) ("Porthole", n.d.).

Figure 6. Inside the circle (1984) by James Wang, Collection of Zimmer.

In figure 6, Taiwanese artist James Wang achieves an off-centred composition by incorporating notable compositional techniques to obstruct the harmony of the circular shape. He employs another off-centred circle in the image, uses shapes and lines which move in opposite directions, and cramps the circular canvas with elements that indicate that the image spins; subsequently, one experiences a sudden descent in the direction of the image's pictorial space (Zimmer, 1991), achieving a great deal of visual entropy that is almost unsettling for the viewer to perceive. Pictorial space in art is an illusory space that seems to recede backwards from the picture plane ("Pictorial space", n.d.). It is eminent that the multidirectional movement

of the composition is achieved by the cluster of different shapes and lines inside the circular frame, and all these elements are battling for one's attention. Contrary to the Florentine artists, the approach of contemporary Tondo artists towards the medium draws upon concepts of abstract and inclines towards compositional experiments to depict a variety of visual movements in their works. From these examples of modern Tondi, it is apparent that the circular shape is tangible in terms of accommodating various visual motifs apart from balance and harmony. Perhaps the visual balance of a circular image is more noticeable when it is opposed?

1.2 Circle in Photography

"Photography is truth, and cinema is truth twenty-four frames per second" (Godard). It is a fact that the image focused through any camera's lens is circular. A lens's sole purpose is to gather all the reflected light into the sensor, and the sensor defines the shape of the image (Peshin, 2019).

1.2.1 Camera Obscura

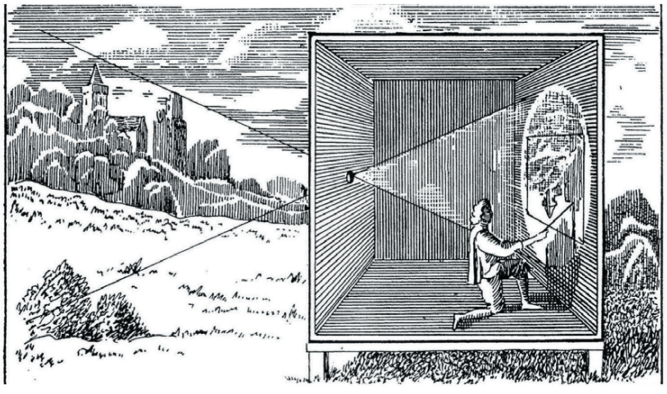

Figure 7. Illustration of camera obscura (Anonymous)

Camera Obscura is an early form of camera consisting of a dark box with a tiny hole or lens in the front and a small screen inside, on which the image appears ("camera obscura", n.d.). The image appears circular. Addressed as the predecessor of photography and cameras, the presence of camera obscura goes back to antiquity.

1.2.2 Kodak Circa 1

Figure 8. Images captured with a Kodak Circa 1
(Collection of National Media Museum/Kodak)

The first-ever "easy-to-use" camera in the world shot images in a circular format (figure 8). The Kodak Circa camera was introduced in 1888 by George Eastman, with a flexible film roll of 100 preloaded exposures that captured circular images of 2.5 inches in diameter. These images are a vital steppingstone in the history of circular images, as they represent the first-ever framings done and compositions achieved in the format.

1.3 Circle in Early Cinema

1.3.1 Magic Lanterns

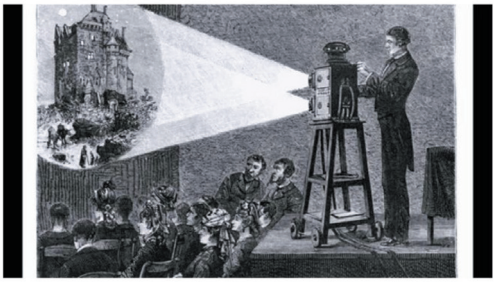

Figure 9. An illustration of a magic lantern show, uploaded by the Oshawa community museum.

Often named as the first projector, the magic lantern is said to have been invented by Christiaan Huygens, a Dutch scientist from the 1650s ("Mag-

ic Lantern", n.d.). There are notable similarities between the magic lantern and cinema. The magic lantern show included a live narrator and a musician who described the story and played a live soundtrack, along with a melodramatic audience that cheered, clapped, and played tambourines (figure 9) ("Magic Lantern", n.d.). The collective experience of a viewer from these shows is similar to that of cinema.

Figure 10. Magic lantern slides (Magiclantern.co.uk)

Evidently, the circular shape of the slides (figure 10) was not merely a coincidence, but a conscious choice by the artists and showmen. The presence of circular imagery in magic lanterns indicates that circular cinema can be an immersive storytelling medium.

1.3.2 Iris Shots

Figure 11. Iris shots from The red man and the child (1908) by D.W. Griffith

Rare in contemporary cinema, with the exception of stylistic choices, iris shots were immensely popular during the silent era. An iris shot masks the image in different shapes, namely, a circle, triangle, or a diamond ("University", n.d.). D.W. Griffith was an early admirer of the device. Among several other instances from his filmography, he effectively used iris shots

to depict the telescopic point of view of a character in his film *The red man and the child* (1908) (figure 11).

The iris shot depicted in figure 11 subjectively directs the viewer's eye, by mimicking the point of view of the character. This is one of the main withstanding applications of iris shots. Even though there have been earlier usages of iris shots in cinema, Griffith was the first person to achieve something in film which was not feasible for theatre: changing the visual perspectives within a scene (Gutmann, 2010). Gutmann (2010) adds that apart from the perspective change, this insert enabled the audience to put themselves in the exact shoes of the character to subjectively identify with them instead of merely being distant observers of the story, which was revolutionary at the time.

Figure 12. Iris shots from La roue (1923) by Abel Gance

La roue (1923) by Abel Gance, from the French impressionist movement (1918-1929), adapts iris shots as a formal device resonating with its title (*the wheel* in English). The circular iris shots are present throughout the film, and figure 12 depicts some of them. (Liang, 2019).

The impressionist filmmakers, such as Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, and Jean Epstein, tend to believe that rather than narrating a story, cinema had to create experiences which lead to emotions in spectators, and they used devices of cinematography and editing to render the internal perspective of their characters (Daniela, n.d.). Gance's works exhibit similarities with the

Tondoscope through their usage of visceral and experiential visual devices to depict ideas. The Tondoscope visualises a diegetic world, which is exceptionally defined and translates the filmmaker's perspective on how to look at that specific story, and Gance's works hint at the same motifs.

2. Case Studies

2.1 *Lucifer* (2014)

Writer and Director: Gust Van den Berghe
Cinematographer: Hans Bruch jr.
Country of origin: Belgium and Mexico

Lucifer, adapted from the 17th-century Dutch classic of the same name by the poet and playwright Joost van den Vondel, is the first feature film to be shot in the Tondoscope.

"I am not a storyteller but a translator. I try to translate a certain time into another, the same way a ferryman carries his passengers from one shore to the other." (Van den Berghe, cited in Bossche, 2014) Van den Berghe believes in the cinematographic translation of concepts and stories, which is evident in his trilogy. *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr* (2010), *Bluebird* (2011) (shot in 32:9 aspect ratio, referred to as an 'uberscope'), and *Lucifer* are shot in the Tondoscope. Lucifer anachronistically adapts the worldview of Vondel's era into the contemporary world views (Fagard, 2018). According to an interview with Van den Berghe during the Black nights' film festival Tallinn (2015), the decision of choosing a circular frame to represent paradise originated from one of his memories of looking up a crater and seeing the sky looped by land (Molder, 2020). Van den Berghe claims, paradise is a place without any corners, self-contained, and there's nothing outside paradise. He aspired to creating an image that encompasses all these beliefs.

Figure 13. The opening shot of *Lucifer* with the reflected camera in the centre

How does the Tondoscope help to achieve a visual representation of paradise? Van den Berghe wanted the image to encompass a 360-degree view, without having much distortion, and people had to be composed on the edge of the frame and the sky in the middle (personal communication Bruch Jr, 2020). They obtained this surreal image with an arrangement made of a conical mirror and a non-reflective glass tube. The camera was pointing towards the mirror, and the glass tube was serving the purpose of a tripod. Due to the shape of the mirror, the reflections became smaller towards the centre of the image. The dot in the centre of figure 13 is the camera's reflection in the mirror, which the filmmakers decided not to erase. Bruch Jr (2020) gives two reasons for this; the first one is his fascination with the untouched and raw imagery from the camera without any visual effects manipulation. Secondly, he correlates the dot in the centre of the image to the eye of the devil (Lucifer) or the eye of the god. These are certainly intriguing perspectives to inquire about.

Fagard (2018) elaborates on the mirror shots of *Lucifer*:

In this panorama, the characters are doomed to a closed perambulation from which there is no escape. The centre of the image, coinciding with the zenith, remains inaccessible and empty. The divine is absent and replaced by the optical eye of the camera.

In figure 13, the mountains encompassing the circumference of the image, and the dot in the middle, conjointly direct the viewer's attention deep into the picture. This dot introduces a compelling centripetal perceptu-

al force, which establishes a deep pictorial space and helps the viewer to understand the spatial orientation of the image. Thus, one's eye tends to ricochet inside the image, and the image illustrates a perfect, complete, and self-sustainable visual representation of paradise.

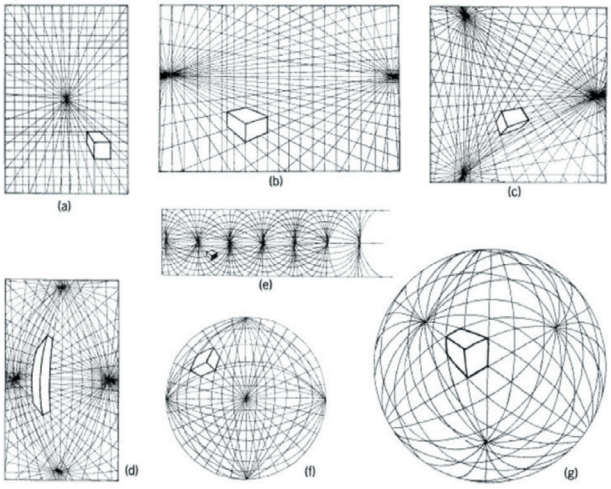

Figure 14(a) One-point perspective grid, (b) two-point perspective grid, (c) three-point perspective grid, (d) Four-point perspective grid, (f) Five-point perspective grid, (g) Six-point perspective grid.
From Dick A Termes study on 6 point perspectives.

This dissertation uses the word *mirror images* to identify these special shots in *Lucifer*. What is the spatial orientation of this image? How do these images achieve the visual parallels to depict a version of paradise, which represents the concepts of completion and self-containment? To elaborate on these mirror images, this research shall use the concept of six-point perspectives developed by the American artist Dick A Termes. Figures 14(a) to 14(g) illustrate different perspectives using grids (Termes, 1991).

In the one-point perspective, figure 14(a), one set of the three parallel lines of the cube is projected onto a vanishing point. One should assume this as the north direction. The remaining two sets of parallel lines of the cube perpetually run parallel ("termesphere", n.d.). In figure 14(b), the two-point perspective projects two sets of parallel lines of the cube toward the North and East direction. The line created by these points is called the eye

line or horizon line. In the three-point perspective, figure 14(c), all three sets of parallel lines are used, and two different directions, Nadir point (below the viewer) and Zenith point (above the viewer), are established ("termesphere", n.d.). When the subject moves away from the vanishing point, the viewer seems to get distortions (Termes, 1991), and when the cube is above eye level and below eye level, the lines vanish to the Zenith and Nadir points, respectively. According to Termes, to understand perspective systems higher than three points, one needs to consider changing the shape of the cube (Termes, 1991). In figure 14(d), if the cube is bigger than the viewer, the lines it propagates above and below curve like a football and come together at the Nadir and Zenith points, a four-point curved line perspective (1991). Another way of looking at this system is considering the Nadir and Zenith points to be parallel when North, East, and West lines are curving to each other, a continuous four-point perspective system, as depicted in figure 14(e). A five-point perspective system, figure 14(f) illustrates 180 degrees of visual space around you.

The six-point perspective system or spherical perspective system introduces the missing direction behind the viewer, South. The six vanishing points are arranged like the corners of an octahedron. Figure 15(a), Black hill, a spherical painting by Termes, and 15(b), its panoramic view, as an example.

Figure 15(a). Black Hills, a spherical painting by Dick A Termes and Panoramic view of Black Hills, 15 (b) (Both the images are from Teremes' online gallery)

Termes claims that a sphere painting with a six-point perspective accurately represents the whole visual space around the viewer, in all directions.

Figure 16. Mirror images from Lucifer

The filmmaker uses these *mirror* shots to establish the particular diegetic world of the film and constructs his visual interpretation of paradise. The exorbitant spatial orientation formulated by these images is not comprehensible with the natural human perception of space, making it different from the viewer's customary world. Spatial orientation refers to one's ability to identify the position or direction of objects or points in space (Benton & Tranel, 1993). In figure 16, people are seen to be walking by the circumference of the frame; hence, their respective Nadir and Zenit points are subjected to change as they move inside the frame. The pictorial perspective of these images inclines more to a spherical rendition than a conventional two-dimensional landscape shot. This visual translation of paradise leans towards the concept of *mimesis* in art, and the filmmakers tend to translate or mimic their idea of paradise on screen.

It is evident that the six-point spherical perspective employed in figure 16, consciously or not, acquires a visual rendition similar to a Termesphere (figure 15) (a spherical painting by Termes) and assembles an idealistic image. This allows Van den Berghe to encapsulate the visual motifs of a closed and contained space that is ostensibly dependent on the circular format of the film. Fahad (2018) argues that by establishing a tunnel-shaped monocular vision between the circular format and the viewer's natural field of vision, the filmmaker draws parallels between the vertical hierarchical movement between heaven and earth from the actual novel by Vondel.

Nonetheless, the presence of these mirror images in the film is sparse. The narrative progression of the film primarily depends on circular images which are realistic, conventionally shot, and circularly cropped in the

post-production phase. These images are drastically distant from figure 16 and suggest a conventional cinematographic perspective. One needs to contrast these two kinds of images to acquire a better understanding of the applications of the Tondoscope in Lucifer.

Figure 17(a) and (c) shots from Lucifer, (b) Homo viator at a crossroads (1510) by Bosch

Figure 17 compares some of these shots with the painting *Homo viator at a crossroads* by Hieronymus Bosch, and brings about several different readings from scholars, due to Bosch's unique reading of the *homo viator* motif. Pinson (2005) argues that the meaning of the wayfarer figure can not only be read in terms of the sins of the flesh but also with transience and decay; thereby transforming into a *memento mori.* He further explains the didactic purpose of the painting by elucidating the Y motif in the composition (as an allegory of choice of two roads in life), and Deguileville's parable of pilgrimage. Deguileville's *Pilgrimage of a man's life* (1130-35) was rooted in the mediaeval thoughts of man being a spiritual traveller of the earth, whereas Bosch upends this parable by portraying the wayfarer in a conflicted instinct between choices (Pinson, 2005).

Drawing upon these arguments, one can correlate some of Van den Berghe's dramaturgical decisions to *paysages moralisés. Lucifer* constantly raises questions about good, evil, heaven, and hell. These moral implications are laid out in the film by multiple devices. Primarily, the contrast between the Tondoscope and the visual setting of the film. The history of Tondo suggests that the format was extensively linked with portraying subjects and themes relating to divinity or creating highly ornamental pieces. However, through his interpretations of *homo viator,* Bosch effectively breaks this

and embarks on a deeper commentary on good, bad, and the metaphor of two roads. Even though the puzzling work of Bosch has had various scholarly interpretations, I think the takeaway here is that he manages to link the technique and formalism to wider realms of politics and morality, which Van den Berghe draws upon without ostentatiousness.

By composing a Mexican village in the circle format as the framework for the film, Van den Berghe elucidates the debate of what is good and evil, and what is heaven and hell, in contemporary society. On the contrary, Eyres (2012) writes about the problematic nature of *paysage moralisés*, as assigning preachings to landscapes and daily life objects will make them lose their particularity; the danger of semiotics and moralising will turn objects merely into carriers of meaning, and fortify social, moral, and religious hierarchies. Although Eyres' argument is valid to a certain degree, Lucifer uses this fruitfully. As Fagad (2018) describes, the iconographic tension in the visual strategy of the film truly lies upon the contrast between its setting and the historical implications of its unique visual format. Van den Berghe manages to achieve this by sculpting his character with particularities. Even though the main characters in the film can be interpreted as carriers of meanings or biblical allegories, Van den Berghe does not come out as hollow because of his choice of actors. By choosing non-actors from the actual village to play a great deal of the characters, apart from the protagonist, he manages to achieve the authenticity and particularity of the characters by finding them in real people.

2.1.1 Visual Composition

Figures 18(a), (b), and (c)

Figures 18(a), (b), and (c) illustrate the centripetal perpetual force of the Tondoscope. One can identify the compositional elements Bruch Jr has employed to fortify this perceptual force. In figure 18(a), the one-point perspective established by the leading lines is created by the muddy road; in 18(b) by the prominent circular shape of the moon in the centre, which subjugates the rest of the compositional elements of the landscape; and in figure 18(c), the textured volcano dictates the direction of the composition towards the centre of the image, where the character is placed. It is also notable that the extremely long lens of 570 mm (personal communication, 2020) used for figure 18(c) heavily compresses the spatial perspective of the shot and introduces an iconographic appearance to the image.

Bruch Jr explains his tendency for creating centre-weighted compositions in the Tondoscope with two reasons. One is the mentioned perceptual force, and he further argues that the Tondoscope forces one to compose singular subjects at a time. He elaborates on this by contrasting the Tondoscope to the widescreen format. With exceptions, in the widescreen format, one always has two stories happening (unless it is an extreme close-up): one in the foreground and another in the background, and the filmmaker makes the viewer focus on either one of these stories. In the Tondoscope, most of the viewer's attention is directed to the centre, and it becomes easier to concentrate on singular elements. This tendency can also be approached by employing symmetrical attributes to the frame, by composing two characters on either side of the centre of the frame. Bruch Jr (2020) expresses his interest in architectural compositions for wider shots. He prefers to frame the setting of the scene in a balanced composition, resulting in visual balance despite the actors' blocking inside the frame. This aids him to present the Tondoscope images with a strong sense of balance and a visual frame of reference for the viewer.

2.1.2 Lensing

A frame defines one's visual entry into the diegesis. The optical and perceptual properties of a frame are highly characterised by the choice of lenses. I am using the term *lensing* to represent the choice of a lens to capture a scene or a shot, and every consequentiality of that choice in terms of optical, visual, and perceptual properties. Lensing in the Tondoscope

differs from that of traditional cinema, in terms of distortion, perceived closeness, and the established tunnel vision due to the shape of the image.

By shooting on Vantage-one lenses, with an aperture of T/1 or f/0.95, Bruch Jr instantly adds a dreamy feel to the image, which is employed by the extremely narrow focal plane of the lens due to its wider aperture. Additionally, *coma* – an internal lens flare created on the circumference of the image due to the exaggerated aperture, an asymmetrical complex aberration that affects light rays from a certain point not to refocus but to flare away – constitutes a subtle spherical feeling to the images in Lucifer (Bruch Jr, personal communication, 2020) (Cicala, 2010). Along with this, Bruch Jr's occasional usage of 16mm format lenses on a 35mm sensor made him capable of achieving a deeper depth of field and an almost circular image to begin with. He claims that in the Tondoscope, the viewer perceives a greater proximity to the image, as an effect of lack of distortions, due to the mask employed to obtain the Tondoscope image. His tendency of creating centre-weighted compositions in the Tondoscope ameliorates this perceived proximity. Prominently, the cinematography of *Lucifer* is observational, yet personal and subjective to the characters when needed.

Other intriguing optical traits of a lens to discuss in relation to the Tondoscope is the depth of field and focus. Bruch Jr (2020) says rack focus and its applications are yet to be fully discovered in the Tondoscope. The tunnel vision of the medium forced him to frame actors closer to the centre of the image, yet lacked several opportunities to rack focus between different planes. However, in his opinion, racking focus in the Tondoscope can affect the perceived tunnel vision positively. Focus is perhaps the most subtle yet effective tool in cinematography. Racking focus in the Tondoscope increases the *z*-axis perceptual force experienced by the viewer due to the shape of the image.

2.1.3 Camera Movements

Figure 19

Bruch Jr tends to not move his camera insatiably. He looks at the diegetic world of *Lucifer* with a static viewpoint; either way, he employs a moving camera to vividly project some of the important story beats. Bruch Jr (2020) says the function of most of the moving shots in the film is to sustain a sensible frame when the subjects are moving. The balance and harmony of the Tondoscope are eminently opposed by the handheld shots, resulting in an intense jarring effect. One becomes arduously conscious of the circular format when the camera is handheld. This can be correlated with the modern Tondi art, although it is arguable that in the case of a film, a shaky camera surpasses the discordance experienced by the viewer over that of a painting. As employed in Lucifer, a handheld camera can enhance the noticeability of desired story beats and represent an important change in the narrative. Lucifer's entry into the village is preceded by an appalling shot of him breaking a mirror, and in turn his own reflection. This instantly gives the scene a visual tension, which is followed by the handheld moving shot that disconcerts the viewer.

Another instance of camera movement in the film (illustrated in figure 19) which necessitates one's attention is at the midpoint of the film. The shot depicts a pondering Maria, after Lucifer's departure from the village. The filmmaker vertically rotates the camera 180 degrees to depict an important change in the narrative and in the character.

Nonetheless, in figure 19, the circular image rotates vertically, asserting a conspicuous change in the viewer's perception. It is debatable that the shot symbolises the irrevocable change in Maria's life, before and after Lucifer. One can argue that one's perceived feeling of a world turning upside down

is elevated by the Tondoscope, and the circular shape of the image refuses any frame of reference to the viewer concerning the surroundings.

2.1.4 Colour and Production Design

Lucifer is muted in colours and authentic in its world-building. A certain colourlessness and monotony are always prevailing over the lens. The earthy tones of costumes and the landscape create a counterpoint against the perfect circular shape which embodies concepts of paradise. The balance between the abstract and the realism conflates to create a magical realist appearance to the film. Van den Berghe certainly tries to contrast his circular images with realistic and minimal scenography. Throughout this paper, I have mentioned the assertiveness of the circular shape of the image on the viewer; thus, circular elements integrated into the production design become crucial. One of the apparent examples is the optical bokeh in certain scenes. One can argue that these circular shapes grant the viewer a certain familiarity with the image.

In figure 20, the decorations on the wall of Lupita's house and church show the particularity of these locations compared to the rest of the village. The abundance of circular properties in both of these shots suggests similarities between Lupita's home and the church, and her departure from both these places implies her diminishing faith in God.

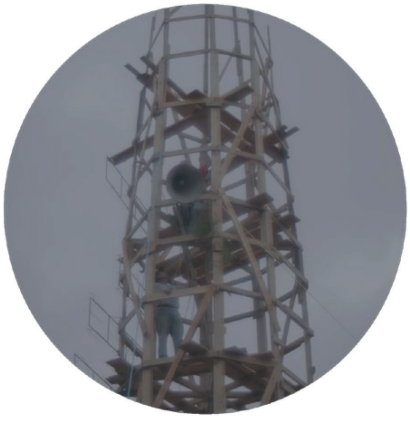

Figure 20

Figure 21

How do straight lines and sharp objects contribute to the circular frame? Bruch Jr (2020) says he found that straight lines visually incise the Tondoscope. Contrary to how curved or round objects create visual ease in a circle, a straight line, or a polygonal object represents tension or conflict within a circle, especially when they are vertically placed (figure 21). Arguably, the viewer will constantly compare the shapes present inside the frame with the circular shape of the image. Thus, every shape framed inside the Tondoscope is constantly contrasted with the shape of the image, allowing filmmakers to explore the further potentiality of the set design as signifiers.

2.2 I Am Not Madame Bovary (2016)

Director: Feng Xiaogang
Writer: Liu Zhenyun (based on his own novel *I did not kill my husband,* published in 2012)
Cinematographer: Luo Pan

I am not Madame Bovary (2016) is partially drawn upon from the 17th-century Chinese morality tale about an adulterous woman named Pan Jinlian, who bears the same connotations to Chinese audiences as those of Madame Bovary to the west (O'Malley, 2016). The story revolves around a woman's indefatigable fight against a bureaucratic system of laws and officials. *I am not Madame Bovary* is not fully shot in the Tondoscope;

it uses circular images to depict its main character (Li Xuelian) and her ideologies, against the careless and impersonal world of a bureaucratic system, which is depicted using a perfectly square image and straight lines. In her review of the film for *The Guardian*, Hans (2017) compares the Kafkaesque visual styles of the film to the literati paintings (1127-1278) from the Song dynasty.

2.2.1 Cinematography and character depiction

I am not Madame Bovary is partially shot in the Tondoscope. It uses three different aspect ratios; namely, tondoscope, 1:1, and 2.39:1. The circular imagery depicts Li (the protagonist), her beliefs, and the bubble of her ideologies, against the square images that illustrate a hierarchical and bureaucratic system (Andrews, 2017). The film enables a divergent exploration into the potentiality of the Tondoscope, as a formal tool to widen the means of diegesis. Other than in *Lucifer*, the circular-shaped image is not merely a statement here; it represents the internal perspective of the protagonist as opposed to a world she disagrees with.

"Cinematography captures and expresses what a character is feeling – their attitude towards the rest of the world, their interior state" (Gabriel, director of *Forgiveness* (2004), cited as personal communication in Nicholson, 2010). One of the main advantages of film as a visual storytelling format is that it allows the filmmaker to define specific perspectives in which he or she wants the viewer to perceive the story. Visual motifs are often used as symbols to depict changes and particularities in the narrative. Amongst the notable examples is *Blue Valentine* (2010), which uses two different mediums to capture its different periods; namely, 16mm film for the delightful romance between the main characters, and digital format to depict the unnaturally detached period of their failing relationship; also, employing extreme long lenses to cover the latter. Another example is Xavier Dolan's *Mommy* (2014), which employs a visually suffocating aspect ratio of 1:1 to depict the protagonist's compressed mental space and alienation from the rest of the world. The film opens into a 1.85:1 picture during the elated and optimistic moments of the character (Renée, 2014). *I am not Madame Bovary* differs from these examples due to its unique use of the Tondoscope to represent its protagonist, and her character graph. I will be comparing both the aspect ratios of the film *I am not Madame Bovary,*

namely, the Tondoscope and 1:1, to understand how they augment the visual dramaturgy of the film.

Part 1: Li Xuelian's world:

Figure 22

The film begins in the Tondoscope, right into the conflict, as Li approaches one of her distant relatives who is a lawyer, to file a lawsuit against her husband. Here, the circular shape of the image prominently associates with nature, female-gendered subjects, community, wholeness, and humanity (Kraicer, n.d.). How do the filmmakers craft these images? How do they try to ideate these concepts visually? And how is the character's internal journey depicted through the Tondoscope? Liu Zhenyun, the cinematographer, often employs a distance between his camera and the character, as he accommodates various movements of nature in his shots, which award an atmospheric quality to the image by establishing its visual setting. All the discussed qualities of the Tondoscope are still applied here, yet the film opens with much more visual ease than *Lucifer*. The nature of Li's conflict, remarrying to disprove a fake divorce in order to divorce

the same person again, is nonsensical, and this serves merely as an empty signifier (Kraicer, n.d.). Arguably, the nonsensical plot devices and the use of the Tondoscope consolidate the unusualness of the protagonist, along with her alienation from the rest of the society, and the self-reliance she exhibits.

The cinematography is observational, yet the narrative constantly keeps one engaged by accentuating the quick succession of the plot and eventually abates the noticeability of the circular frame. The usage of circular elements in the production design and the sparse presence of man-made straight lines in the frame reaffirm this blending. In addition to this, Xiaogang also exchanges the earthy colour palette and natural subsets from Li's world with extremely balanced compositions abundant with vertical lines, as the system interferes with her world. He often frames her with negative space to express her conflict with the authorities.

Thus, in figure 22, one can effortlessly identify how the filmmaker utilises compositional elements to represent Li and her collision with the system. To perceive the duality of these images, one needs to look at their connotations in Chinese culture. In Chinese culture, a circle represents perfection and unity, or precisely something coming in a full circle, completing one's journey; however, a square with sharp edges and corners often signifies rules and regulations (Gao, 2018). "天圆地方" (Round sky and square earth) is a fundamental concept in the tradition of ancient Chinese geography, which appeared at least two thousand years ago and has influenced Chinese geography significantly (Zhongshu, 1992). This is the visual dramaturgy of the film in a nutshell.

Part 2: The Bureaucratic System

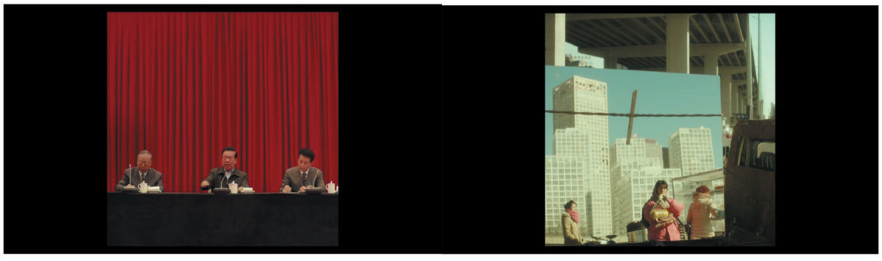

Figure 23. Frames from I am not Madame Bovary, depicting the system.

Differing from the Tondoscope imagery, the visual portrayal of the all-controlling system is characterised by sharp edges, straight lines, and a polished decor.

The compositions depicted in figure 23 lack visual movement. One can achieve compositional movement by creating visual instability (Collins et al., 2015). During the Beijing chapters of the film, the visual style of the film is forcefully balanced, still, and hierarchical. Arguably, the increased headroom given to the shots represents a higher order they are entitled to serving. In the square format, the visual compositions are flat, static, and fragmented. The depiction of the capital city Beijing visually expresses distinctive hypocrisy, which is illustrated in the scene, 40 mins into the film, where Li encounters the gigantic world monuments made for display. It is hard to differentiate between these installations that merely serve as tourist attractions and the actual city. Additionally, in the city, the filmmaker frames people against flat backgrounds, yet the compositions are not as dull or flat. In images, scale (size) of the objects creates dynamic and effective composition; also, a conceptual variation between one or more objects' size is distorted to express an idea (Collins et al., 2015). In figure 23, the saturated colours or gigantic man-made architectures decide the scale of these compositions. People are often framed as small and insignificant figures without individuality, despite their place in the hierarchy that the system supports. The monotony in the costumes and the production design fortify this. Hence, in this world, the particularity of Li represented by the Tondoscope also disappears.

2.2.3 Dramaturgy of Tondoscope

Figure 24. A transition shot from I am not Madame Bovary (2016)

The intriguing aspect about the usage of the Tondoscope here is its fluidity in interacting with the rest of the visual motifs present in the film. The Tondoscope is not merely a metaphor. It is a narrative tool that practises different functions in the diegesis, guided by Li's character graph. In *Lucifer*, the last shot opens up to 16:9, disowning the circular frame; hence, allowing the audience to go back to their accustomed reality and reflect on what they have just experienced. Contrarily, in *I am not Madame Bovary*, the visual motifs used in both these formats often conflate. These two different worlds are not exclusive to one another, and they interact. The transitions between these two formats are purposeful and fluid.

Figure 25. A frame from I am not Madame Bovary

In figure 24, the filmmaker changes the format from the Tondoscope into a square, when Li is travelling to Beijing, determined. Travelling through a tunnel allows a visually pleasing transition and consolidates the story beat.

Figure 25, a transition from the square image to the Tondoscope, visually depicts the temporary downfall of the character. In the narrative, this is the end of Act One. The circular window and its disorganised grilles separate Li from the audience, and represent the imprisoned character, as well as an impenetrable system that defies the character's goal. Pan, the cinematographer, has managed to illustrate the story beat in the visual composition. In his interview with ARRI, Pan (2016) explains the hardships of shooting close-ups and long shots or panning shots in the Tondoscope, as it leads to a telescoping rendition of the image and incorporates a strong sense of peeping, respectively. This forced him to limit the camera movements to horizontal tracking resulting in observational cinematography (Nuke,

2016); however, the progression of the narrative and its effect on the duality consisting of Li and the system is often visually depicted.

Figure 26

Figure 27

In figure 26, contrary to the rest of the square images, the officials are framed within the circular door, resulting in a composition that depicts the impact of Li's legal suits on the system. Throughout the film, there are conjunctions of both visual motifs represented by the square and circle. Similarly, in figure 27, close to the end of the second act of the film, one can identify the visual hurdles created by the window grilles as a compositional element that prohibits Li from achieving her goals. These instances showcase how two of these visual signifiers come into contact with each other and imitate the narrative progression of the story.

Figure 28. Illustrated camera movement from I am not Madame Bovary

The last beat I am discussing here goes eighty-three minutes into the film, an independent camera movement in the Tondoscope, as illustrated in figure 28. According to Blake Snyder's beat sheet structure (2005), this scene is between *break into two* and *midpoint*. The *a* and *b* stories of the film come into contact, and the character meets with a decision he or she has to take for the narrative to progress further. Thus, any dramaturgical decision by the filmmaker becomes crucial.

"What changed is the status of the visual: the visual no longer accompanies the listening of the text, it does not stop at illustrating, explaining or clarifying it, on the contrary, sometimes it complicates it to the point of ambiguity" (Pavis, cited in Rădulescu, 2019).

Notably, the moving shot illustrated in figure 28 has an independent narrative function of its own. The scene takes place ten years after the first act, and Li is unclear about her future, as she starts to question the purpose of her fight against the system. In the scene, Zhao Datou tries to convince her to drop the lawsuit to start a life with him. The characters often exit

and enter the frame, as the camera tracks independently inside the room, only to end up looking out of an opened window. One can argue that the blocking and staging directly mimic the confusion of the protagonist, and her struggles to make the right decision. The officials who guard her house and Zhao Datou's affection leave her woolly and lost. The shot design and the symbol – the Tondoscope – mimic the protagonist's confusion. Nonetheless, Li chooses to escape from the surveillance and pursue her goal, foreshadowed by the final frame that gazes out of the window.

In contrast with *Lucifer*, *I am not Madame Bovary* exploits the Tondoscope as a dramaturgical tool that fulfils variable functions throughout the narrative. Other than *Lucifer*, which uses the Tondoscope as an emphatic visual tool to depict a world different from that of the viewer, *I am not Madame Bovary* uses the circular imagery to represent the particularity of its protagonist and her aversion towards the bureaucratic system. In the last scene of *I am not Madame Bovary*, the film opens up to a widescreen image of 2.39:1, depicting Li adapting to accepted normalcy.

Conclusion

The main objectives of this research were identifying the traits of circular images and analysing their potentiality as a visual format for diegesis. The considerable presence of circular images in the history of art, photography, and cinema has established the format's capability to accommodate a wide variety of concepts. The compositional modality of *Tondo* paintings from the Italian Renaissance exhibit balance, centripetal perceptual force, and symmetry. Modern Tondi artists, through their compositional experiments, achieve a distinct approach towards the format. Their works illustrate visual imbalance and entropy in the format. Camera obscura, daguerreotypes, and the first-ever Kodak Circa 1 are some of the noteworthy circular-shaped images from the history of photography. Magic lanterns utilised the same processes of cinema, in exhibition and narration of the story, and have been one of the most important predecessors of cinema. The conscious choice of circular-shaped slides by the magic lantern showmen reaffirms the capability of the circular format as an immersive medium for storytelling. The iris shot is an assertive visual tool to render

a subjective point of view of a character and direct one's attention onto a specific element in the frame.

Lucifer (2016) visually translates the idea of paradise through the use of the Tondoscope. Being the first film to be shot in the circular format, it offers an intriguing look at the attributes of the Tondoscope. The particularity of its thematics allows *Lucifer* to compose images in complex visual perspectives. The sphere or six-point perspective rendition of space in the *mirror shots* of *Lucifer* is a potential application of the format. The visual compositions of *Lucifer* tend to embrace the balance and harmony of its circular format, yet disregard them at specific points in the narrative, and employ a handheld camera that depicts a great deal of visual imbalance and tension.

In the second case study, *I am not Madame Bovary* (2016), the Tondoscope is employed as a symbol that represents the film's protagonist and her character graph in the film. The film uses the square format in contrast with the Tondoscope to depict a dysfunctional and bureaucratic system. The visual dramaturgy of the film employs the Tondoscope to communicate various motifs throughout the narrative. Apart from portraying the internal perspective of the character through the circular image, Feng Xiaogang uses the duality of the two shooting formats to fortify the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonistic forces. As a dramaturgical tool, the Tondoscope exhibits immense potentiality, which demands more exploration. The cinematographic rendition of images in the Tondoscope implies working with the unique shape of the image and its established traits. It allows one to capture a reality that is different from the customary world of the viewer and re-establishes the basic motifs of cinematography into the circular format. The Tondoscope elevates the scope of visual dramaturgy in a film by introducing a movie-going experience that considerably differs from the rectangular cinema.

From the research, it is evident that the Tondoscope is a potential formal device with various applications for cinematic storytelling. Its ramifications affect the production of films as well as the way they are perceived. The Tondoscope establishes the nature of cinema as an ever-growing art form and tends to recreate *the big picture show* from its inception. It demands further exploration into its potentialities, which are yet to be unveiled.

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CV

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