Trains and Cinema: Life and Movement in Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011)[*]

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It may seem somewhat puzzling to discover Martin Scorsese directing a Christmas fantasy comedy-drama – a tradition inaugurated with *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946) – since he is better known for gangster movies such as *Mean Streets* (1973) and *Goodfellas* (1990). Yet *Hugo* could be read as an expression of Scorsese's homage to old masterpieces, or as a wish to transmit his fascination for the cinematic art.[1] Brimming with allusions to films from 1895 to the 1930s, the time of the action, and scattered with references to later films, *Hugo* is in many ways a journey through the history of cinema.

Based on Brian Selznick's 2007 novel, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret,*[2] the drawings of which seem inspired by silent movies, Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* relates the story of the young orphan of the title (Asa Butterfield), who leads a solitary life within the walls of one of the busiest railway stations of Paris, the Gare Montparnasse. Hugo spends his days maintaining and winding up the station clock, observing its countless passengers, a café owner, florist, newspaper vendor, inspector and a curiously familiar, yet bitter, toy-booth owner, while striving to repair a mysterious, broken automaton – a mechanical man intimately associated with his dead father, Archibald Cabret (Jude Law), killed in a museum fire. Despite his skill at fixing gadgets, wind-up toys, clocks and watches, the parentless boy cannot repair the mechanical man without a key. The quest for this key provides the starting point for the enthralling adventure during which Hugo is helped by Isabelle (Chloë Grace Moretz), an eccentric, bookish young girl, who grew up with Papa Georges (Ben Kingsley), a sour-tempered toy-shop owner. He is in fact Georges Méliès (1861-1938), the great illusionist and one of the first French film directors. The adventure leads the two children and the audience to the origins of cinema and its magical beginnings, a dimension which has never vanished from Scorsese's movies.

By having a train station as the main setting for *Hugo*, Scorsese reinforces the correlation between trains and cinema. Even if no trains are shown leaving the station (except for one during a short, deliberately burlesque sequence), the notion of movement inherent to both trains and cinema remains of central importance, and it is therefore interesting to question the different values and meanings that trains are endowed with in *Hugo*.

The impression of movement for the movie audience is bolstered by the innumerable

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[1] As shown through his involvement in The Cinema Foundation he founded in 2007, Scorsese is also a true cinephile and a remarkable film scholar, as evidenced in his documentary with Michael Henry Wilson, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (New York/London: BFI, 1995).

[2] Brian Selznick, *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (New York: Scholastic Press, 2007). The book is originally an illustrated black-and-white children's story, providing an interesting combination of novel, picture book, flip book and graphic novel, whose drawings frequently suggest camera movements.

images of machine parts (automata, clocks, wind-up toys, etc.), whose motion seems synonymous with life, an attribute applied here to both people and automata. Moreover, movement is associated with the idea of a journey – as if cinema could be conceived as a mental form of travelling, not merely in space, but also in time. *Hugo* takes viewers to Paris in the early 1930s, and to even earlier periods: the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries when Georges Méliès was working on some of his first feature films, such as *Le Manoir du diable* (*Manor of the Devil*, 1896), *Cendrillon* (*Cinderella*, 1899) and *Le Mélodrame* (*The Melomaniac*,1903). This journey into the past seems to imply that both trains and the art of illusion called "cinema" are instrumental in defining the notion of time. Trains and cinema are thus presented as two inventions symbolizing modernity, marked by a degree of mistrust, as posing a threat, even when they remain associated with the fascinating notion of movement, and the idea of assembling people as a temporary community within the bounds of a movie theatre.

A train journey into the history of cinema

Except for a few scenes set in Geroges Méliès's apartment in Paris and in the "Film Academy Library" – a large, fictitious hall full of books on the cinema – *Hugo* is mainly set in a vast train station. It is no coincidence that a film dealing with the origins of cinema should unfold in such a location, since associations between trains and cinema have existed since the invention of this technological and artistic medium. The train was not only one of the first iconic objects and images that appeared on early cinema screens, it has accompanied the evolution of cinematography ever since. Trains also took part in the popularisation of the new artistic medium in the early twentieth century, enabling the transportation of movie-goers and facilitating the distribution of films.[3]

Trains and cinema are not merely historically associated; both are motion-related inventions, as indicated by the terms "cinema" and "locomotive". The etymology of the word "cinematograph" comes from the Ancient Greek word "*kinêma*": literally "movement", whereas the Greek word "*graphein*" refers to "describing". "Locomotive" derives from the Latin words "*loco motivum*", indicating the "capability to move". Cinema achieved the old fantasy of setting images into motion, whereas trains facilitated the movement of entire crowds, an exploit no previous means of land transport had achieved. From the late eighteenth century, with the invention of the steam engine by James Watt (1781), workers and families were able to move more easily and more frequently. Trains soon revolutionised daily life all over Europe, actively contributing to the development of leisure activities. As noted by Colin Matthew, "the train was a catalyst for the development of telegraph, the postal service, printing, travel, leisure, all of which had fundamental implications for the character of public life."[4] During the same period in the United States, trains were of paramount importance in the context of westward expansion. The role of the railway during the different phases of the industrial revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been the object of scholarly analysis, demonstrating how trains not only shaped

[3] Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 53.
[4] Colin Matthew, *The Nineteenth Century: the British Isles, 1815-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 85.

narrative perspectives, but had an impact on society as a whole.[5]

Although the very first film directed by the Lumière brothers was *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895), it is more common to recall *The Arrival of a Train in a Station* (*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, 1895) and the mythology around its first public screening. Since then, images of trains have journeyed through the history of cinema and, even today remain essential features of westerns, confirmed by *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik, 2007), the remake of *3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold, 2008), and *Appaloosa* (Ed Harris, 2008). They also play a prominent role in a variety of recent films, such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *The Polar Express* (Robert Zemeckis, 2004), or *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011). Paradoxically, while train travel may seem to be a thing of the past, it is still very present in. film narrative. Since its invention and development during the nineteenth century, the railway has influenced different art forms, as well as the spectator-passengers' own relation to art. As Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman observe, "the railway structured plots and shaped narrative perspective" and "a whole species of writing, non-fictional as well as fictional, became popularly known as 'railway reading', tied as it was to the captive reading time that railway travel generated."[6]

A particular sequence in *Hugo* illustrates the historical link between trains and films, when Martin Scorsese offers his audience an entertaining "lesson" on the history of film. Hugo and Isabelle have gone to the Film Academy Library to find out more about cinema. They borrow a book by a fictitious film historian, René Tabard[7] (Michael Stuhlbarg) – a reference to Jean Vigo's *Zero for Conduct* (*Zéro de conduite*), released in 1933, two years after *Hugo*'s timeframe – and start reading the history of cinema from its invention in 1895. Somewhat similarly to Hugo and Isabelle, Vigo's characters are carefree young teenagers trying to escape the authority of their harsh schoolmaster. *Zero for Conduct* influenced later films such as *The 400 Blows* (*Les 400 coups*, François Truffaut, 1959) and *If...* (Lindsay Anderson, 1968), both of which deal with adolescent desire for freedom. Hugo emerges as a legitimate heir to Vigo's protagonists.

Obviously, the true receivers of this browsing through the early pages of cinema history are the spectators of Scorsese's film. They not only witness a film history "lesson", but also watch it being illustrated via cuts that mix fixed shots of the book and its photographs with extracts from old movies such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920) or *The Kid* (Charles Chaplin, 1921). The last shot of the sequence corresponds to a close-up on a photograph from the iconic science fiction short film *The Voyage to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la lune*, Georges Méliès, 1902), which foreshadows the crucial role of this film for the plot and character development of *Hugo*.

The first page examined by Hugo recounts the adventure initiated by the Lumière brothers in 1895, and the first photograph from Tabard's book is a still from the seminal *The Arrival of a Train*. Scorsese sets this chapter in motion by using archival footage from "the

[5] See for example Mark Casson, *The Railway Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1998).
[6] Matthew Beaumont and Michael J. Freeman eds., *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space, and the Machine Ensemble* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 9.
[7] The name is borrowed from *Zero for Conduct*, in which René Tabard is the provocative young student who starts the revolt.

very first film ever shown," according to the fictional cinema historian René Tabard. Scorsese not only provides images of the film, he describes the great technological innovation cinema represented in 1895, evoking the mythology around the first screening of the film at Le Grand Café in Paris. Isabelle reads the legend aloud while a parallel cut illustrates her words, indicating that she is addressing both Hugo and the spectators of Scorsese's movie: "When the train came speeding towards the screen, the audience screamed because they thought they were in danger of being run over." Contemporary spectators first discover the footage from *The Arrival of a Train* and, as the locomotive reaches the edge of the frame in the Lumière brothers' film, Scorsese's camera zooms back in time to reveal the panic-stricken audience in a fictionalised reproduction of the famous event.

During this sequence, Scorsese makes witty use of 3D technology to emphasize the impression – in the eyes and minds of a twenty-first century audience – that the locomotive is about to rush out of the frame. The *mise en abime* effect of the scene provides a greater sense of reality regarding the reaction of the Parisian audience, the first one ever to have faced a train on a big screen. Newspapers covering the event insisted on the innovative technique of the moving picture and the real-like effects it triggered. For *La Nature*, "these films are alive, they walk and run, they are lively portrayals", and for *La Poste*, "cinema represents life itself."[8] The sequence In *Hugo* proves that the cinema's ability to surprise spectators has not disappeared, and that its magical power still exists.

Indeed, the key dates evoked in *Hugo* echo some of the major stages in the evolution of the cinema. The film contains images that recount the birth of film, while the plot unfolds during the period of the first "talkies". At one stage, Mama Jeanne (Helen McCrory) evokes colored films, since Méliès was one of the first film directors to achieve this technical prowess on screen, through meticulous hand-tinting, frame by frame. In comparison, the spectators who discovered *Hugo* in 2011 were introduced to the consequential technological improvements of three-dimensional movies.

The Lumière brothers' *The Arrival of a Train* is not the sole reference to trains. Isabelle and Hugo's reading is next illustrated by a chronological succession of archive footage, showing several extracts from other Lumière brothers' films, as well as *Intolerance* (D. W. Griffith, 1916) and J. Gordon Edward's biographical film *Cleopatra*.[9] Interestingly, in the two-minute sequence, there are no fewer than seven images of trains or references to westerns, highlighting the rich train iconography of this genre (for example, *The Great Train Robbery*, Edwin S. Porter, 1903, and *Hell's Hinges*, Charles Swickard, William S. Hart, Clifford Smith, 1916).

As Helen Powell writes, "when the Lumières' included trains in their opening films [...] not only did they capture a subject very dear to the fascination of the public, but also tapped into the idea of cinema as 'the metaphor of a journey or excursion made literal.'"[10] The screening of a film can, indeed, be considered as a "journey", capable of "transporting" its audience to different spaces and to different epochs, as illustrated in this sequence, which allows *Hugo*'s audience to "time-travel" to Ancient Egypt, the nineteenth-century American Far West, and even the Moon. Like train passengers who board the same train, cinema

[8] Jérôme Bimbenet, *Film et histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), 62.
[9] Perhaps a reference to the first film to portray Cleopatra, directed by Méliès in 1899.
[10] Helen Powell, *Stop the Clocks!: Time and Narrative in Cinema* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 39.

audiences become members of a unique community, sharing a particular experience which lasts for the duration of the film. If the cinema can be compared to a means of transportation, trains may, conversely, be perceived in terms of cinematic experience, as demonstrated by the opening images of *Hugo*.

Indeed, the opening imagery of interlocking wheels is transformed in a dissolve to a computer-generated Paris and then replaced by the Arc de Triomphe roundabout and the endless gyrations of cars around the famous Place de l'Etoile. Through a high-angle shot, the camera moves rapidly over the Paris skyline towards Gare Montparnasse into the station concourse, winding wildly through a crowd of passengers, before coming to a halt in front of the clock tower that overlooks the station. The arresting close-up on Hugo Cabret's eye introduces the boy viewing the hustle and bustle of the station. It is soon discovered that he leads a secret life behind the station clock. During this long take, the camera enters the station as a train would, and the viewer has the immediate impression of being caught in the movement, about to undertake a journey like the travellers who are seen boarding a train. As suggested above, the audience will be taking a journey – to the origins of cinema. The train becomes a metaphor for the cinema and, as Patrick Keiller states, "films even physically resemble railway tracks – long, parallel sided strips divided laterally by frame lines and perforations, as is the railway by sleepers."[11]

Cinema and the manipulation of time

The Lumière brothers' invention resulted from an old dream. Initial efforts to animate images were as old as Descartes's observations on optics during the seventeenth century. But the combination of light and images to animate them dates back to prehistoric times. Cave paintings sprung to life when a portable means of illumination was (ceremoniously) carried alongside the walls.[12] Before it became a popular form of art, cinema was, above all, an object of scientific research. Interested mainly in the mechanical dimension of this research, a number of inventors and scientists did research on image movement (Michael Faraday, Thomas Edison, Etienne Marey, to name just a few). The inventor-filmmaker at the heart of *Hugo*, Georges Méliès was not only a skilful mechanic with a passionate interest in clockwork figures and robotics, but also one of the first film directors whose movies point to a keen awareness of the endless artistic possibilities offered by the relatively new medium.

Méliès would undoubtedly have agreed with King Vidor's statement, "cinema is the greatest means of expression ever invented," but it is also "an illusion, more powerful than any others and it should therefore be in the hands of the magicians and the wizards who can bring it to life."[13] Méliès was an illusionist in the sense suggested by Helen Powell and his films are characterised by "the development of a sense of narrative and this acts as one of the primary factors that distinguishes his work from others around him."[14] Narrative cinema was rendered possible only after the discovery of montage techniques, such as those used by Méliès, which allowed the filmmaker to manipulate images and rearrange them according

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[11] Patrick Keiller, "Phantom Rides: The Railway and Early Film", in Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity,* 70.
[12] See Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010).
[13] Scorsese and Wilson, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese*.
[14] Powell, *Stop the Clocks!*, 40.

to his artistic views. Scorsese underlines in his documentary, how D. W. Griffith extended the immense possibilities provided by montage. Predictably, Griffith's films are also mentioned during the fictitious exploration of film history in *Hugo,* whose cinematographic references generally allude to early films that contributed to the evolution of cinema as an art form. This highlights the work of the great "illusionists" who manipulated both images and time through montage and editing devices that create distortions in temporal reality. Méliès was one of the first film directors to do so, just as Griffith perfected cross-cutting editing techniques in order to increase dramatic tension and suspense.

The manipulation of time in Méliès's films did not only result from montage techniques, but also from the fact that "he embraced subject matter which required the projection of the protagonists through space and time."[15] In *Hugo*, manipulation of time is highlighted by the numerous close-ups on clocks, gears and cogs, as illustrated by the close-up on wheels in the opening sequence shot, followed by an insert on the main clock of Montparnasse Station. The film's complex timeframe is a further indicator of Scorsese's deliberate attempt to carry the spectator back to by-gone periods. This is underlined by the film's montage and sequences that depict the city of Paris in the early twentieth century, together with the multiple allusions to films made after the 1930s, like *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958). Several flashbacks accentuate the film's different temporalities, illustrating the way a film director may distort time by connecting different time periods.

The main plot revolves around the young orphan Hugo, who is struggling to fix the automaton left by his dead father, but there is a parallel, perhaps more interesting, plot. Flashbacks return to Hugo's cheerful past, when he was still assisting his clocksmith father, but also to Méliès's past as a popular film director working in his first professional film studio in Montreuil, in the outskirts of Paris, creating the fantasies which he is still famous for today. The connections between the different *topoï* and time periods, fictitious and factual, are reinforced by the use of dissolves that introduce flashbacks linking different temporalities.

Moreover, *Hugo*'s treatment of time is of interest for the way it relies on different types of foreshadowing. This is exemplified, for instance, by Hugo's ability to unlock closed doors when he walks in and out of a movie theatre with Isabelle during a sequence that highlights his need to escape a dreary reality by transcending certain boundaries. This sequence, which shows the two children sneaking into a cinema without paying, is another illustration of Scorsese's use of metafilmic references, namely Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups*. In a similar vein, he repeats the iconic scene from Fred C. Newmeyer's silent-era comedy *Safety Last!* (1923) where the hero (Harold Lloyd) is seen hanging from the hands of a gigantic clock. This occurs towards the end of *Hugo*, when the young orphan is trying to escape the station inspector, recalling to what extent the computer-generated *Hugo* required far fewer physical risks during shooting.

Hugo's montage techniques and its numerous cinematographic references to previous films are explicit indicators of the cinema's renewed ability to embrace reality from an artistic point of view. Powell notes how Gilles Deleuze saw film as a new medium offering up "the potential to see the world in both creative and challenging ways."[16] Indeed,

[15] Ibid., 33.
[16] Ibid., 6.

Scorsese's conception of time could be compared here to Bergson's notion of duration perceived as a "dynamic continuum of past, present and future" and, in a sense, "in contrast to the ticks of the clocks."[17] In *Hugo*, Scorsese seems to consider cinema as a possible "time machine" due to the constant manipulation inherent to this art, and here may lie one of the major differences between cinema and train, even if Matthew Beaumont and Michael J. Freeman do not hesitate to compare the train to a "time-space machine," arguing that "passengers stepped into a train in one place and stepped out of it at another without much consciousness of having overcome distance."[18]

In *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Lynne Kirby claims that "the railroad provided the paradigm of a radically new time consciousness" and that "the effect of the shrinkage of space was to convert space into time, to turn the distance between two cities into a matter of days or hours."[19] The "shrinkage of space" may not only be due to the redefinition of time by train travelling in *Hugo,* it is also illustrated by the train as the sole setting. In *Hugo*'s fictionalised railway station, Scorsese stages a micro-society with its different "inhabitants" (a florist, a toy-shop owner, book sellers, etc.), and the place itself is "presented as both a key force of order but also a new focus for violence, crime and immorality."[20] In the film, the character of the station inspector (Sacha Baron Cohen) who strives to maintain public order, epitomises authority, while the "Montparnasse orphans" who visit the station to steal food to survive represent "crime and immorality." However, it is possible to argue that in this film, punctuated by repeated clock shots – presenting time as a temporal authority –, time itself becomes a symbol of order, with passengers having to respect the imposed train schedules. As Kirby notes, "it is the railroad that gave rise to, indeed mandated, standard time the world over,"[21] a remark that echoes the following viewpoint expressed by Michael O'Malley: "the regulation of time by the railroad was not simply a mechanism to ensure efficiency, it was a way of expressing power."[22]

The "shrinkage of space and time" inherent to trains and cinema seems to have had yet another consequence: the speeding up of everyday life. Although filmed within the confined space of a train station, *Hugo* unfolds at a rapid pace punctuated by a series of frantic scenes that show Hugo being chased by the mean station inspector and his beastly Doberman. The film's fast-paced rhythm and rapid succession of events undoubtedly echo the amplification and exponential development of railway travel in the nineteenth century. The frantic races captured by the camera evoke the "speed of the ride," the acceleration of "the entire pattern of life" in the wake of the train system, as "rapid transit meant 'rapid everything else'; and shopping, eating, shaving and shoe-shining were all done in quick time."[23] This speeding up of daily life is rendered perceptible in Scorsese's film not only through numerous shots on gears, wheels, cogs, clocks, etc., but as a series of disturbances, or a more general upheaval after the advent of "modern times." For, while trains and

[17] Ibid., 31.
[18] Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, 23.
[19] Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, 50.
[20] Jeffrey Richards and John MacDonald MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 10.
[21] Kirby, *Parallel Tracks*, 50.
[22] Ibid., 52.
[23] Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, 16.

moving pictures certainly participated in the redefinition of time, they remained intimately associated with the very notion of modernity; hence the image of a train often presented as a celebratory emblem of modern times.

Human robots and mechanical human beings

The role played by the locomotive in *Hugo* could be said to correspond to the complex train imagery found on screen throughout cinema history. Although the invention of the train was praised as a symbol of progress, it was viewed at the same time as a figure of excess and danger. This ambivalence of the train as a symbol of "creativeness and destructiveness," as Charles Dickens put it,[24] could be considered a palimpsest for *Hugo*. Moreover, the main character, Hugo, recalls many a young Dickenensian protagonist. Oliver Twist, for example, and Hugo are both orphans struggling to survive in a hostile, modern world, and like Dickens, Scorsese adopts the child's point of view, reinforced by subjective camera angles. Orphan stories were common in nineteenth century British literature, and in *Hugo* the viewpoint proves explicitly Dickensian through its wish to show the world, not through the eyes of adult characters, but from Hugo and Isabelle's viewpoints.

The perception of the derailing train at Montparnasse Station corresponds to another fictionalized historical fact. On October 22, 1895, due to excessive speed and dysfunctional brakes, the Granville-Paris Express train crashed through its buffer stop, and plummeted down to Place de Rennes through the wall of Montparnasse Station. Strikingly, Scorsese's meticulous reconstruction of this famous railway accident involves an explicit reference to Jean Renoir's *The Human Beast* (*La Bête humaine*, 1938), since the begoggled locomotive driver's face blackened with soot is reminiscent of the engine driver, Jacques Lantier's (Jean Gabin) mask-like face in the former film, in which the locomotive turns into a "black monster" or a symbol of death, distorting – literally blackening Lantier's cursed body. The threat represented by the locomotive is highlighted by close-ups on several parts of the train, stressing the vehicle's tremendous power and violence, while conveying an intensified sense of speed owing to the travelling movement of the camera. As Scorsese's camera focuses on the locomotive engineer's black face, the sequence suddenly stops, showing Hugo waking up in the middle of a frightening nightmare of a train roaring into Montparnasse Station. In his nightmare, the train almost runs him over and this almost happens, later on, when Hugo is rescued shortly before the film's happy ending. Hugo gets up, and acts somewhat mechanically, like the automaton he is trying to fix, before disappearing behind the cogs, as if devoured by gearwheels.

The sequence fictionalizes the common nineteenth century distrust for modern appliances and modernity in general, warning against the risks of mechanization, which might transform people into machines – a theme that is also central to Charles Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936). In *Hugo*, however, the boundaries between human beings and automata remain somewhat unclear, raising the question of man's alienation because of machines, but also suggesting a fascination for different types of engineering, including clocks, trains and the cinema.

Within a film marked by both modernist and anti-modernist views, "Papa Georges"

[24] Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1848).

and the station inspector are highlighted as two characters epitomizing the limits between human beings and machines. At the beginning of the film, the station inspector, Gustave Dasté, is presented as cruel and heartless, spending his days trying to capture orphans who struggle to survive on their own in the station. Dasté's lack of humanity, as he mechanically applies orders, is reinforced by his partly mechanized body, which seems to confirm the uncertain boundaries between man and machine. Wounded during World War I, he has to wear an elaborate, yet uncomfortable, metal equipment on his leg, which has turned him into an injured, broken automaton of sorts, a characteristic he shares with Méliès's automaton – the "penniless merchant and a broken wind-up toy!" as Ben Kingsley's Méliès is heard to utter at one point.

The inspector is certainly the one of the two who undergoes the biggest changes. After his relentless chase of the "Montparnasse orphans" during the first half of the film, Dasté ultimately saves Hugo from a train crash, before the young boy in turn, repairs the inspector's mechanical leg with a mechanical system of sorts to illustrate the film's hesitant and somewhat Chaplinesque relationship with modern times. While the train remains a monstrous, intimidating force threatening Hugo's life, the station inspector regains his humanity, somewhat paradoxically, thanks to the mechanical equipment attached to his body, helping him accept his condition as an "automaton."[25] At the end, Hugo's obstinate quest helps the filmic Méliès accept his past as a film director and a great creator of magic through the mending of the "mechanical man" at the heart of the film and both of these "repaired protagonists" express their gratitude to the young boy.

The boundary between humanity and robotry nevertheless remains hazy in *Hugo,* since human beings are not always what they seem. The absence of clear boundaries also applies to trains which, according to "a common late nineteenth-century metaphor […] became the capillaries and veins of a ferment of *circulation* that had trunk lines as its arteries and city termini as its pulsing heart."[26] As in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, man is often little more than a mere cog within a larger mechanism. This may explain why Hugo considers the world "one big machine," when he says: "If you lose your purpose, it's like you're broken. To this Isabelle adds: "Like Papa Georges."

In *Hugo*, the consequences of the Great War are still visible, affecting the lives of the characters. Isabelle has lost her parents, Méliès's cinema has become obsolete and unpopular, the florist has lost her brother, and the train inspector – a war veteran – suffers from a war injury. As underlined by Beaumont and Freeman, "wartime powerfully evoked the association of the railway with sadness, with loss, with destruction, and with death."[27]

Despite the omnipresence of war and potentially murderous mechanisms, Hugo Cabret has a theory according to which every machine has a purpose and a role to play: "clocks tell the time, trains take you to places." And it does seem that the film's mysterious "mechanical man" and other mechanical devices have something crucial to do with the revelation of man's humanness. *Hugo* repeatedly summons the two main machines of the film – trains and clocks – both of which bring to the fore the importance of movement symbolized by wheels: that of the locomotive, seen several times in close-ups, and that of a

[25] See Nicolas Azalbert, Review of *Hugo, Les Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 674, Janvier, 2012, 33.
[26] Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, 14.
[27] Ibid., 35.

film projector, whose clattering sound is heard from time to time. The film's happy ending underlines the possibility of finding a purpose to life and the possibility of mending and healing, so as to overcome the condition of "broken automata" – in other words, to become a "fully functioning man," as the humanized inspector of Montparnasse Station says during the closing sequence.

In order to function again, the mechanism of the automaton requires a special heart-shaped key – seen in an insert during Hugo's dream sequence to underline its diegetic importance for the plot and recall what some of the characters seem to be lacking. The face of the mechanical man (reminiscent of the automaton in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, 1927[28]) looks surprisingly human, and when Isabelle finds it among Hugo's clocks, gears and wheels, she thinks "he looks sad" and that "he is just waiting?" Indeed "his," rather than "its," ability to trigger reactions and feelings from those around him is arresting. Just as the mechanical man gradually reveals the hidden humanity in those who approach him, so does he have the power to resist hostility and alienation. His main achievement lies in forging links between the different characters of the disparate community which evolves within the microcosm of Montparnasse Station. While the nasty inspector and the florist end up forming a happy couple, Méliès – the creator of the automaton – is seen enjoying himself with his family and friends at the end. The final sequence brings together the main characters, after the revival of the mechanical man's mediating force has, quite magically, taken over the powers of disconnection.

Conclusion

Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* presents an ambiguous relationship with trains, which are celebrated, while simultaneously being viewed as a potential menace. This is especially noticeable in the blurring of boundaries between human beings and automata, mechanical men and wind-up toys. Nonetheless, the final emphasis of *Hugo* remains on the collective character of both train and "movie travel." Like train travel, cinematic journeys tend to temporarily unite those assembled before the same screen during a projection within a movie theatre, allowing for shared sensations and emotions. This is what Scorsese seems to imply when revisiting the early years of cinema history through the recreation of the first, now mythic end-of-the-century film projection of the Lumière brothers' *The Arrival of a Train* at Le Grand Café where a privileged Parisian audience formed the first group of spectators of this unique and unprecedented experience.

Scorsese repeatedly underlines the magical, profoundly interactive nature of cinema – including Hugo and Isabelle's sneaking into a movie theatre to watch *Safety Last!*. Relying on specific cinema techniques, Scorsese emphasizes a variety of emotional states a film is able to arouse. He alternates extracts from *Safety Last!* with close-ups on the faces of Hugo and Isabelle who are seen, in turn, smiling, laughing, or holding their breath, while viewing the movie among other spectators with whom they share the visual experience. This indicates how cinematic movement may trigger a variety of emotions as does the mechanical man.

[28] Lang's film was made at a time when entire populations were about to be reduced to "automata" by totalitarian regimes.

Train historians have noted how trains allowed people to travel more quickly, more easily and more frequently than before.[29] In *Hugo*, the train station constitutes a meeting point, and in many ways also a "mixing point" for a group of disparate, often solitary people who evolve towards a unique community where differences mingle, thus calling to mind Matthew Beaumont's observation of how "the railway became a very obvious point of potential social mixing."[30]

As only one train is shown leaving the station – most of the train scenes in *Hugo* focus on the arrival of locomotives – the emphasis remains on the gathering, federating force of the motorized, in its own way kinetic mode of transportation, and not on its power to separate or divide. As highlighted by the opening scene where the camera, mounted on a moving train, captures the frantic arrival of the steam engine into Montparnasse Station, Scorsese's camera remains inseparable from the preliminary movement of the train. Revisiting the iconic moment of the Lumière brothers' early train film while adopting another vantage point, *Hugo* resonates with a number of other early attempts to try and convey the impression of a three-dimensional space through moving pictures.

In addition to these structural and aesthetic aspects, it becomes apparent that the travellers boarding the same train at the beginning of *Hugo* are akin to cinema audiences in that they constitute an analogous community. They share a similarly moving visual experience – not in front of a train window, but facing a film screen, since every journey and each film constitute a unique, yet at the same time a collective, shared experience. Scorsese is of course not the only contemporary filmmaker aware of this joint venture. In *The Darjeeling Limited* (2007), for instance, Wes Anderson underlines the sense of community and cohesion inherent to train journeys, namely by panning the train from one end to the other, and portraying the different kinds of people that comprise this moving community on rails. In *Snowpiercer* (2013), Joon-ho Bong goes further by having his train encapsulate an entire social organism, with each coach corresponding to a specific social class.

In the final scene of *Hugo*, all the characters are now assembled at Méliès's apartment in Paris. They are presented in a tracking and panning shot which ends with a final close-up on the mechanical man, standing in front of a blank piece of paper, holding a pen – ready to start another story. *Hugo*'s story-time, studded with apparently endless quotations from pre-existing films, thus appears less linear than circular; a movement recalled by the ubiquitous clock at the top of the station, which challenges the idea of endless linear progress represented by trains, including those rushing towards Montparnasse Station.

Georges Méliès stopped making films and then fell into nearly total oblivion, in a sense even self-oblivion. In *Hugo*, the now elderly Méliès finally accepts to be acclaimed for his creations, and (with Scorsese's help), gains the place he deserves in cinema history. Meaningfully enough, at the end Méliès adopts the young orphan and becomes Hugo's new father figure, hence underlining Scorsese's heir-like relation with Méliès, a major influence on the American filmmaker. Through *Hugo*, Scorsese not only pays a memorable homage to the first train film of the Lumière brothers, but more generally to the cinematic magicians of early French and European cinema: to Fred C. Newmeyer, Harold Lloyd, but even more remarkably to Georges Méliès, one of the greatest innovators and illusionists behind the

[29] Beaumont and Freeman, *The Railway and Modernity*, 86.
[30] Ibid., 27.

"cinema of attractions."