

The triangulation of another earth, moon and sunshine

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Abstract

Science fiction space travel films typically concern themselves with deep space travel. Through their indicative titles, *Moon* (Duncan Jones, 2009), *Sunshine* (Danny Boyle, 2007) and *Another Earth* (Mike Cahill, 2011) seem to conform to such a convention. The evocation of non-Earth celestial bodies suggests that the emphasis of the films lies in narrational and cinematographic elements that expound the grandeurs of space. However, while the evocation of non-Earth celestial entities corresponds to the notion of space travel, these heavenly bodies simultaneously limit the boundaries of space travel. Additionally, the use of “Moon,” “Sun” and “Earth” qualifies as a specific concept which I term the ‘terrestrial celestials.’ The ‘terrestrial celestials’ functions as a near-Earth zone setting that reconfigures the idea of space travel through contraction, rather than expansion into deep space. By appropriating what J.P. Telotte calls “escape velocity” (*A Distant Technology* 19), one might argue that despite expansionary travel, these films cannot escape the pull of Earth and will consequently always return to Earth in their respective (visual and narrative) closures. Thus, in contrast with what Barry Keith Grant calls the “expansive thrust of science fiction” (18), these films *reconfigure* the meaning of space travel by *triangulating* their settings and narrative progressions in/around space *close* to Earth. Unlike other space travel films predisposed toward the allure, grandeur and spectacle of deep space travel, *Moon*, *Sunshine*

and *Another Earth* display resistant qualities towards the expansion of space. What can we make of these peculiarities? In what ways does the films' cinematography inform us of this contractionary impulse as opposed to the expansionary conquest of space? If science fiction films are about spectacular spectacles and visual effects, how does this reconfiguring of space inform our reading (or seeing) of the cinematic visuals?

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Science fiction space travel films have always been about the conquest and expansion of space. Among others, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979) has helped popularized “Space: the final frontier” as a convention that exhibits what Barry Keith Grant calls the “expansive thrust of science fiction” (18) in his essay “‘Sensuous Elaboration’: Reason and the Visible in the Science-Fiction Film.” At an elementary level, the expansive nature of space travel is indicated by distant planets such as “Romulus” and “Vulcan.” As J.P. Telotte says, such films often feature narratives about the conquest of space and faraway planets amidst “fantastic images and events” (“Film, 1895-1950” 43). The idea of “fantastic images” characterizes science fiction as a filmic genre that is heavily invested in visuals and special effects. Moreover, as Scott Bukatman says in “The Artificial Infinite: On Special Effects and the Sublime,” “[such alien] panoramas of exotic ports [and indeed settings evoke] an immersion in faraway places” (252). As a rule of thumb, the more visually spectacular a film is, the further the distance evoked and vice versa. Visuality thus becomes associated with the idea of distance. Space and its vast nature consequently take on the role of *terra incognita*. Instead of sailors on boats and adventurers afoot, space becomes an un-territorialized “openness described as a ‘sense of wonder’” (Grant 17) that, in turn spurs astronauts and spacemen on an ever-expansory journey into deep space. As Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska write in *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* “A

key ingredient of science fiction cinema is travel through space or time” (22), space travel it seems, cannot help but continue on its interminable journey outwards.

However, films like *Sunshine* (Danny Boyle, 2007), *Moon* (Duncan Jones, 2009) and *Another Earth* (Mike Cahill, 2011) challenge what a conventional space travel film might mean. While film genres are notoriously difficult to define and limited in discursive scope, they will provide a starting point for this essay. As Bukatman suggests that certain science fiction films are “characterized by a spatiotemporal grandeur revealed by their titles alone” (256), these films potentially display expansionary space travel characteristics through the evocation of specifically non-terrestrial (Earth) bodies. Nonetheless, as opposed to “[space travel which] provided the metaphor for a broad evocation of a spatiotemporal continuity wedded to a utopian dedication to ‘progress’” (Bukatman 251), the triangulation of these films in and around space *close* to Earth, suggests a move away from the “expansive thrust of science fiction” that perhaps no longer hold a “[utopic] sense of wonder” (Grant 17, 18).

Hence, this essay argues that *Moon*, *Sunshine* and *Another Earth* display counter expansionary thrusts in varying degrees, despite their putative space travel genre. While Bukatman’s brief statement on films such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) informs us that such films’ are “characterized by a spatiotemporal grandeur revealed by the titles alone” (Bukatman 256), these films instead contradict their titular inclinations of space travel. Instead of mere voyages into deep space, the narrative and filmic elements of these films display extraordinary relations that hearken back to Earth itself. By triangulating the films’ setting in/around the ‘terrestrial celestials,’ a self-imposed boundary is also evinced. Bearing in mind the films’ contraction of spatiotemporal grandeur and also “common criticisms of contemporary science fiction cinema... that relies too heavily on special effects” (King and Krzywinska 63), this essay also explicates the use and implication of special effects/visuals within this films and its impact on spectatorship.

One of the earliest space travel film is George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). As Telotte writes, it is "seen as the father of the [space travel] cinematic genre" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43). With the film's "cinematic apparatus's [sic] ability to create a new sense of time and space, Méliès created amazing appearances and disappearances, animated practically anything, and sent his characters on fantastic journeys and exploration" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43). The emphasis on "fantastic journeys" and "a new sense of time and space" reiterates the "expansive thrust of science fiction" (Grant 18) that is conventionally synonymous with space travel films. However, Telotte also emphasizes the importance of science fiction films as "an evolving relationship between the [then] new genre and the cinema's own technology" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43). As Telotte traces science fiction films to what Tom Gunning calls the "cinema of attraction" (qtd. in "Film, 1895-1950" 43), there is an emphasis on the visuality and the importance of the visual spectacle in science fiction films that captivates the spectators' attention. Coupled with "fantastic images and events: exploding moon men, a flying train, undersea monsters, interplanetary travel," space travel films seem subservient to "a growing arsenal of special effects" that "create his [new] worlds of wonder" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43). Here, Telotte seems to suggest that expansionary space travel films work in conjunction with "science fiction [visual] extravaganzas" (King and Krzywinska 58) to sweep spectators away into the mindless abyss of deep space visuality.

While I do not disagree with space travel's understandable emphasis on exploring new lands and enterprises, Telotte's statement that Méliès chooses "not to develop more *complex* narratives, but to fashion [merely] new and more fantastic *visions*" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43) proves hard to accept in its entirety. Perhaps too caught up in the "fantasy powers of [Méliès'] trick films" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43), Telotte himself is distracted by the allure of the cinematic visuals that he continually expounds through the ever expanding "shifts in time and place" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43). As mentioned, *Sunshine*, *Moon* and *Another Earth*

resemble *A Trip to the Moon* in that they end precisely with its travellers returning to Earth. It is not unthinkable to suggest that space travel films have harboured a desire to return to Earth from the very beginning.

By focusing on the contractionary aspects of space travel films as opposed to its expansionary aspects, the importance of my project is revealed in light of Baudrillard's statement. In "The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway," Baudrillard writes that "The conquest of space constitutes... an irreversible threshold in the direction of the loss of the earthly referential" (qtd. in Csicsery-Ronay 391). Hence by casting my attention upon the contraction of space travel films, I argue that this essay is important because it will *recover* the reversible as opposed to irreversible "loss of the earthly referential" (qtd. in Csicsery-Ronay 391). Unlike Grant's fixation on the "the expansive thrust of science fiction" (Grant 18), the space travel films figured in this essay will demonstrate the "earthly referential" in both their narrative and cinematography. By doing so, one can thus also arrive at a new understanding of space travel films that does not merely exhibit a one-tracked pursuit of expansion. Consequently, in what ways do films like *Sunshine*, *Moon* and *Another Earth* re-triangulate their narratives and cinematography around Earth instead of falling into Telotte's emphasis on merely expansionary "interplanetary travel" ("Film, 1895-1950" 43)? In what ways do these film's cinematic elements inform us also of this contractionary counter movement inwards that challenges the over-simplistic definition of space travel as always expansionary?

As Tina-Louise Reid's writes in her review *Lunar Flair*, "Moon begins with Sam Bell (Sam Rockwell) soon to *return* [emphasis mine] to Earth after a three-year stint on the moon as a technician aiding in the harvest and transportation of Helium-3 for the Lunar Corporation" (Reid 53). If Neil Armstrong's declarative statement "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind" reveals the pride and elation of stepping onto the Moon,

“Sam’s solitary job on the Sarang moon base has left him world-weary [sic] and ready to rejoin his wife and daughter on Earth” (Reid 53). The emphasis on his Earthly return as opposed to his departure suggests that *Moon* is potentially different from its space travel sounding title right from the beginning. Echoed within Reid’s statement, one can detect Sam’s “cynicism towards space travel [or by extension any space endeavours]” (Hunter 360) that has degenerated into “a yawn over the adventures of new heroes” (Susan Faludi qtd. in Hunter 362). Various scenes that elevate his boredom can be found throughout the film. As Sam laments that “three years is a long haul” for someone to spend alone on the lunar surface, he meticulously ticks away at an improvised countdown chart (like Robinson Crusoe). He fusses over his mini greenhouse and scaled model of an Earthly city as he exclaims to Gerty (the artificial intelligence computer module) that he has been ‘talking [to himself] on a regular basis. Instead of what Damon Knight calls the “widening of the mind’s horizons” (qtd. in Grant 18), Sam’s residence on the Moon positions him at the “horizons of ennui” (Hunter 360). As opposed to the event horizon (the furthest line of sight one sees in space) of space travel which typically presents itself as a form of technological, utopic or spatio-temporal breakthrough, space dwelling in *Moon* is the cause of Sam’s humdrumness. The prospects of a rosier return journey (as compared to his tenure in space) from the beginning of the film suggests that “individual heroics on the space frontier” (King 69) is really nothing to fawn about.

As the film begins with what seems like a Lunar Industries (the company that owns and operates the Lunar Base Sarang) corporate video presentation, spectators are didactically informed of Sam’s industrial endeavours on the Moon. Unlike “a brand of spectacle that is hyperkinetic, flashy and bright” (75) as Geoff King writes in *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the age of the Blockbuster* with regards to *Star Wars*, the visuals in *Moon*’s opening sequence feature a montage of tiresome terrestrial scenes ranging from commercial

to industrial activities. We are educated, informed and cognitively apprehending the film's back story instead of "constructed... as childlike, in thrall to the illusion" (Grant 25) of films such as "George Lucas' *Star Wars* trilogy" (Grant 25). Even if we look towards the skies or the stars as Grant suggests, the innocent wonderment of space travel is lost. While the computer-generated imagery (of the corporate video presentation) is considered special/visual effects, it does not merely serve the purpose of enthralling a child into illusory abandonment. Unlike a "hyperkinetic" (King 75) sense of spectacle, Sarang's "utilitarian and sturdy, not high tech and shiny" (Reid 53) mise-en-scene also challenges the idea of space travel spectacles that is almost always serving the interest of expansionary space travel typified by "hyperkinetic" (King 75) visuals. In *Moon*, visuality does not merely reiterate the grandeurs of space. In its non-hyperkinetic mode, Sam's very earthly and mundane endeavours on the Moon are explicated in favour of swashbuckling extravaganzas.

In "The Far Side of Moon Zero Two," I.Q Hunter notes that the setting of the Moon in *Moon Zero Two* (John Burke, 1969) "resembles [that of] a Western frontier town" (355). As mentioned previously, Reid also notes that "the world on the moon base is utilitarian and sturdy, not high tech and shiny" (Reid 54) as would the typical space travel mise-en-scene look like. Both statements point towards an "earthly referential" (Baudrillard qtd. in Csicsery-Ronay 391) via its visual resemblances to an Earthly setting. However, resemblance extends beyond the visual realm. In *Moon Zero Two*, the setting of the film is a mining colony. The Moon thus functions as a cog in the machinery of Earth's industrial activities. Likewise in *Moon*, the Moon we are told, functions explicitly as an extension of an off-Earth industrial asset for Lunar Industries which will supply "all the energy [Earth] ever needed" just "right above our (Earth's) head." The Moon in this sense of resemblance, functions more than just visual similarities to Earthly origins. It resembles Earth in terms of industrial, economic and commercial activities. The Moon's close proximity to Earth also suggests a 'terrestrial

celestial' near-Earth setting instead of a deep space locality. In both the literal and conceptual closeness of the Moon to the Earth, typified in terms of their close distance and identical economic activities, the film sets out from the beginning to apply an "earthly referential" (Baudrillard qtd. in Csicsery-Ronay 391) to the moon itself.

Thus, as Hunter rightly states that "the frontier of space is closed and the imperial adventure has given way to machinations of big business" (Hunter 359), exploring space (Moon, and all other celestial bodies as well) becomes not a matter of adventure, but rather matters of terrestrial concerns, such as Lunar Industries exploitative "big business" (Hunter 359). If "classical science fiction... [is] characterized by the constant elaboration of the theme of expansion- of human production and exploration... [and] of adventure" (Csicsery-Ronay 391), the effacement of any sort of exploration in *Moon* is telling. After the didactic Lunar Industries presentation, we cut immediately to a close up of Sam's feet while he jogs on a treadmill inside Lunar Base Sarang. From the beginning, Sam is already accustomed to the setting of the Moon. That he is working on a treadmill suggests that he might as well be working out on Earth in any nondescript gym setting. In that brief sequence, as he runs on the treadmill, he literally is going nowhere despite running or 'travelling.' The treadmill thus becomes the emblem of his stasis that also characterizes the film's mundaneness, and also Sam's lack of exploration as he remains rooted within the confines of the base.¹

Instead of portraying Sam in exploration mode just as a typical space travel film would, Sam is already part of the Moon's dynamics just as the Moon is already assimilated into terrestrial activities. By removing the exploration process from *Moon*, the Moon does not represent the conventional alien planet that needs exploration as well as subjugation. From the beginning, the Moon is already co-opted into the Earthly system of economic and

¹ Sam occasionally travels beyond the confines of the moon base. However, the area of his travel is limited, as well as is perpetually tracked by Gerty (the moon base's computer system). It is interesting to note that he is never allowed to 'explore' as Gerty always sounds of a cautionary note whenever he veers off course.

industrial machinery. While the Moon certainly exists as an independent celestial entity, its subservient functions to Earth in *Moon* illustrate both an Earthly literal as well as conceptual hold on the Moon. In *Moon*, the Moon does not merely resemble a certain aspect of Earth; it *is* a part of the Earth's economy.

Consequently, by disregarding the “image of a wide-eyed child” (Grant 25) staring at the cinematic visual with merely a “sense of wonder” (Grant 17), the non “hyperkinetic” (King 75) visuals generated by Computer-generated imagery (CGI) sequence explicitly informs spectators that this supposed space film triangulates itself around the ‘terrestrial celestial’ instead. In this sequence, the Sun, Moon and Earth are literally presented as a triangular framework of economic, energy, and industrial interdependence. We are by means of an accompanying voiceover as well as CGI shown the interdependence and correlation of these three entities in a continually pedantic manner. To illustrate the case in point, the voiceover relates “How do we make the world so much better? Make deserts bloom? Right now we are the largest producer of fusion energy in the world. The energy of the sun trapped in rock, harvested by machine from the far side of the moon. Today we deliver enough clean-burning helium-3 to supply the energy needs of nearly 70% of the planet.” Contrary to a “sense of wonder” (Grant 17) as exemplified by a “wide-eyed child” (Grant 25) in the face of overwhelming science fiction spectacle, *Moon* forces us to remain contemplative and grounded through its opening sequence. Its scientific jargon, formal rhetoric, pedantic style and corporate presentational format (through both the audio and the visual) cannot be further from special effects that serve to hyper sensationalise the wonders of space travels. The triangulation of the film's settings within the confines of near Earth space also highlights the film's own inhibitions in conducting further forays into space.

The excitement of outward bound space flight is thus doubly effaced in *Moon*. How so? As explained, we are informed through a pedantic visual sequence at the beginning of the

film that does not exhibit an uninhibited embrace of space travel. It does not come close to the flashy extravagance of conventional space travel films experienced through an intuitive “sense of wonder” (Grant 17). Secondly, immediately after the montage sequence, we are introduced to Sam Bell on Sarang base. In this sense, the film begins in *media res*. As informed by Reid’s synoptic description of the film’s narrative, the film really only begins with Sam’s drudgery and desire to return to Earth. The implications of this immediate cutting away (that also figuratively cuts away the outward bound narration) from the montage into events on the Moon are highly significant. Any visual or narrative elements in no way depict and convey to us Sam’s flight *outwards* from Earth and *towards* deep space. That the film entirely omits the journey outward from Earth suggests a shifting emphasis of the film which has nonetheless already situated itself in space, or already in space *media res*. In quoting Susan Faludi, “Space [turns] out to be a place not much worth conquering” (qtd. in Hunter 360) as it is marked by drudgery and stasis in *Moon*. Furthermore, if as Brook Landon says, “The function of special effects... is to serve narrative purposes, to make possible the images called for by the narrative” (qtd. in King and Krzywinska 65), the absence of any space travel visuals away from Earth suggests that this film is less concerned with the “expansive thrust of science fiction” (Grant 18) than “the horizons of ennui” (Hunter 360) that space brings.

While *A Trip to the Moon* visually depicts the journey towards the Moon, in Duncan Jone’s film, we are decidedly only shown the return journey. In *Moon*, the final sequence shows a static establishing wide-shot of the Earth which fills up most of the cinematic frame. Like the film’s montage of terrestrial activities at the beginning, the Earth-dominated images sandwich the film at its beginning and its end. While the camera remains static, Sam Bell’s returning spacecraft closes in back on Earth. The gravity of the Earth’s literal and conceptual pull forces the film’s protagonist as well as the camera’s focus to return to an imagistic affirmation of the film’s central concerns, the Earth itself. This return to Earth reflects what

Telotte calls the “escape velocity” (*A Distant Technology* 19) that neither Sam nor the film can escape from. While images of the Earth that dominate the frame reiterate the film’s concerns with terrestrial origins, Sam’s return to Earth literalizes the conceptual pull of the Earth. This return leg to Earth provides then a perfect segue into *Sunshine*.

If *Moon* qualifies as a space travel film despite its lack of expansionary space travel and distinct stasis in terms of setting and narrative progression, *Sunshine* is the quintessential space travel film at a cursory glance. As Icarus II travels “55 million miles” away from Earth, it is the deepest space travelling film among *Sunshine*, *Moon* and *Another Earth*. If so, how does *Sunshine* exhibit a refiguring of its narrational and cinematographic elements in order to portray the counter-expansionary characteristics that this essay argues for? How does a film which fits the bill of a typical space travel film at surface challenge the concept of distance?

Teresa Forde brilliantly notes that “As [Icarus II and its crew members] near the sun [,] they seem to be going to their death whilst simultaneously going back to the origin of life” (73), or Earth itself. While the spaceship Icarus II and its crew does not literally return to Earth at the end of its tragic sojourn, Forde clearly emphasizes the quasi-philosophical return of *Sunshine*’s narrative throughout the essay “The Sunshine soundtrack as aural attraction.” This idea of a “cyclical order of the universe” or the importance of a “cyclical encounter” (76, 80) characterizes *Sunshine* in its reconfiguration of spatial expansion into contraction. Any outward spatial expansion is inevitably subjected to a subsequent contraction through Forde’s idea of cyclicity. Additionally, even from its title, one can see that Forde’s “paper explores the ways in which soundtrack fulfils the role of ‘aural attraction’ as an alternative way of understanding the function of sound within science fiction film” (71). By placing emphasis on the aural instead of visual, Forde situates the reading of her film against the Telotte’s occupation with expansionary cinematic visuals. Consequently, if Telotte’s vision of distance is always accompanied by expansionary distance, Forde’s reading of the aural

aspects of *Sunshine* serves to undercut the convention of space travel films' visual effects that always accompanies spatio-temporal distance expansion.

Taking the idea of cyclicity expounded in Forde's essay, we shall begin by looking at *Sunshine*'s ending sequence. The end, in this sense of cyclicity, resounds with *A Trip to the Moon* as well *Moon*'s narrational and cinematic closures that always return to Earth. After Robert Capa (Cillian Murphy) successfully detonates the nuclear warhead in his final attempt to reignite the Sun, a brief white out occupies the entire frame before dissolving into an extreme close-up shot of the Earth. The predominant image of the Earth within this shot mirrors exactly the same mise-en-scene and cinematography in *Moon*'s final sequence. The Earth is (once again) the final destination and object of return in the film's narrative as well as visual closure. As the camera begins to track in towards Earth in a cinematography resembling Sam's return to Earth in *Moon*, both tracking-in movements literalize the conceptual pull of Earth as an origin in both *Moon* and *Sunshine*. The image of Earth beckons as a siren call for the camera to return to "the origin of life" (Forde 73). Hence, the visual prominence of Earth in both *Sunshine* and *Moon* scenes reiterates the importance of Earth despite its space travel genre. As King and Krzywinska say "science fiction implicitly raises concerns close to home, however or distant the setting" (King and Krzywinska 22), Icarus II's first and foremost mission is to save mankind from facing extinction. Amidst the film's outward space travel, an impulse to save and ideally return to Earth provides the paradoxical and "[simultaneous]" (Forde 80) return to Earth.

Subsequently, after a brief cut, the camera returns to a high angle establishing wide shot of ice-covered tundra. The conceptual as well as physical closeness of the Sun and the Earth are further enacted in the dying seconds of the film through its cinematography. As the Sun appears in the horizon with its rays encroaching upon the tundra, the Sun literally 'superimposes' its image upon the Earth's surface as its rays cover the tundra. The Sun and

the Earth are literally one in light of this ‘superimposition.’ While corresponding to his assertions of the “expansive thrust of science fiction” (Grant 18) , Barry argues that the final lines from *The Thing* (John Carpenter, 1982) as well *Brainstorm* (Douglas Trumbull, 1983) both counsel the need to “Keep watching the skies!” as well as to “Look at the stars!” (Grant 18). According to him, their desire to look at the skies and stars stems only from a one directional motivation to look into space and beyond. Nonetheless, as Bukatman notes in opposition to Barry, these stars do not merely envisage a certain “sense of wonder” (18). “The star-filled skies [actually] presage the appearance of the mothership [Icarus II]” (Bukatman 267).

Thus, as spectators look at the sun/star-filled sky in *Sunshine*, the sky does not merely function as a conduit for the look of wonderment. Rather, it serves as a conscious reminder of a distant demised object, Icarus II. Despite travelling towards the Sun throughout the film, the Sun’s brilliance in the final scene carries the materials and explosive light of Icarus II after its self-sacrificial detonation. As Capa’s (Cillian Murphy) voiceover narrates “So if you wake up one morning and it’s a particularly beautiful day, you’ll know we made it,” the accompanying voiceover and the ‘superimposition’ sequence all signify the cyclical return of the camera, Icarus II ,and all its crew back “to the origin of life” (Forde 73).

A ‘return’ in all its nuances can also be applied to establish a ‘terrestrial celestial’ zone. Harvey (Troy Garity) states that “For the moment we can still send packaged messages back. Our frequency spur will rise above interference and the moon stations will be able to pick them up. But it's possible that within 24 hours we won't be able to communicate at all.” The dire need to maintain communications with Earth arises from mission technicalities as well as human relational communications. However the evocation of the Moon amidst a communication loop between the Sun and the Earth also supports the theory of a space travel film that seeks to reformulate itself within an Earth-Sun-Moon frame. Explicit references to

both the Moon and the Sun in both *Moon* and *Sunshine* may seem a convenient narrational element that perhaps warrants no second thought. But in an essay that argues for the triangulation of space travel films in and around the ‘celestial terrestrial’ locale, these albeit brief mentions reveal an unconscious impulse to contract space travel films. The explicit mention of the Moon’s importance to *homebound* communication in *Sunshine*, as well as the visual CGI presentation sequence in *Moon* proffers up the undeniable ‘terrestrial celestial’ setting evident in both films thus far.

If contraction or expansion in any direction implies a change in status quo, sense and rationality is also subject to change and warp in space. Mace (Chris Evans) is unable to deliver his final video package home due to Capa’s excessive use of the communications room. Consequently, Mace and Capa engage in a brawl that results from “an excess of manliness.” As Forde calls this loss of rationality that results in their brawl “a form of space madness” (76), there is every implication in her statement that reflects the negative attributes of space. Reiteratively, space according to Mace, causes one to “lose track” of one’s self. As Forde explains that the “movement towards the sun... [is that] which affects the crew profoundly” (75), the importance of staying connected to Earth functions as a grounding for the crew’s sanity. In reading Forde’s statement, “space madness” (76) is thus the result of distance travelled *away* from Earth. Space travel does not occupy a glorified role nor does it widen the “mind’s horizons” (Knight qtd. in Grant 18). Space destabilizes and distance accentuates madness.

Correspondingly, “space madness” (Forde 76) also afflicts Sam who “begins to experience excruciating headaches and unsettling hallucinations that eventually culminate in his wrecking of one of the lunar rovers” (Reid 53). In both *Moon* and *Sunshine*, the instability of their mind can be attributed to the “form of space madness” (76) that Forde explicates. As

opposed to a positive wonders of space, space itself becomes the very medium of madness. Its vacuum reeks of the abyss of insanity.

However, unlike Sam who is unable to receive any form of ‘treatment’ from “space madness” (Forde 76), Mace is sent to Searle (Cliff Curtis), the resident psychologist for counselling. Following Searle’s “prescriptions,” Mace is subsequently sent to the Earth Room for treatment. According to Forde, Mace’s desire for the waves which “make [him] feel peaceful” stems from the “fascination of returning to our origins, to the sonic tones of the mother’s womb” (81). By analyzing Forde’s statement, the Earth Room can thus be read as deep space Earth analogue that resembles a return to an Earthly origin that functions to restore the crew’s sanity.

However Forde’s analysis concerns itself with more than just the idea of a terrestrial analogue that the Earth Room functions as. She states that “The term “cinema of attractions” (Gunning qtd. in “Film, 1895-1950” 43) has been used to explain the visual draw of early cinema where audiences could be astounded by the images of screen invoking awe and wonder in the audience. Like Telotte, Forde cites “the animated moon in George Méliès’ *Le voyage dans la lune*” (71) as an example of a “cinema of attraction” (Gunning qtd. in “Film, 1895-1950” 43). Science fiction films no doubt offer such “images of screen” that invokes both “awe and wonder in the audience” (Forde 71). However, “Rather than subsuming the role of the soundtrack [and all other aural elements] into a cinema of visual attraction, the recognition of the function of soundtrack demands an alternative definition: aural recognition” (72) as mentioned previously. In using Forde’s essay, *Sunshine* can thus be read as a meta-filmic space travel film which criticizes the allure and grandeur of space travel, enhanced if not made possible by the advent of special effects. However, instead of merely focusing on the aural aspects of the film, I argue that the visuals and special effects in *Sunshine* also carry underlying meaning that subverts a visuality that merely explicates

“fantastic images and events [of] interplanetary travel” (“Film, 1895-1950” 43). The images in *Sunshine* are thus construed to reveal the cinematic apparatus and consequently challenge the expansionary characteristics of space travel films that work in conjunction with visuality. How then does Danny Boyle reveal the constructs of special effects in order to undermine the grandeurs of space travels?

As Searle administers psychological treatment to Mace, he recommends that Mace spends “two hours” in the Earth Room. Immediately, we cut to a shot in which a wavefront crashes down onto three nondescript people standing on a boardwalk. In its absolute dominance of the frame, spectators are lured into wondering if this scene is indicative of a narrative transition that shifts back to a setting situated on Earth. The camera then tracks out and we see Mace standing in front of the three-shot revelling at the prospect of waves crashing upon them (and him?). The presence of Mace immediately raises alarms bells. The improbability of his situatedness on Earth marks a disjunction between the visuals and the narrative aspects of the film. Because they are a whopping “55 million miles away” from Earth, how is it possible that Mace is seen in this Earth-like setting? Could Mace back on Earth somehow? Is this some sort of memory? Is this the Earth Room?

Alas, the cinematic apparatus (and hence the visual simulation) is revealed as the whole scene freezes. In a combination of track and pan, the camera then arcs a hundred and eighty degrees as we now perceive a low angle medium shot of Mace reaching out his hand in “awe and wonder” (Forde 71) at the screen’s contents that remind him of Earth. Initial questions of a shift in setting as depicted by the Earth Room’s simulation are revealed only as a ‘visual reality;’ an improbability generated by the Earth Room’s visual apparatus. Like Mace’s outreaching hands of desire, spectators who are implicated by means of their spectatorial positioning through his point of view, are also likewise subjected to the disappointments Mace feels. Visuality proves to be a deceptive component in *Sunshine*.

However, visuality goes even further than deception. It is destructive. In analysing the characters of Searle and Pinbacker (Mark Strong), the Sun exudes a negative affectivity that indicates a destructive element. Searle's worsening sunburns and Pinbacker's disfigured body are results of the Sun and its affective rays. That both Searle and Pinkbacker repeatedly describes the Sun as "beautiful" suggest that the Sun, like vision and special effects, is alluring yet detrimental. The dangers of the Sun (and hence visuals) in the film is thus synthesized via "the story of Icarus [hence Icarus II] flying too close to the sun" (Forde 75). While Forde extrapolates the cyclicity of the Sun and the Earth, and the importance of the "aural attraction" (71) of the film, she never does draw a link between the Sun's affect-ion and Icarus II's return to its origin. Yet, through Bukatman's idea of special effects as a "halt[ing]" function, the Sun can be seen as a barrier that prevents and halts Icarus II from going beyond the aforementioned triangulated space between Earth, Moon and the Sun. While the Sun displays a simultaneous pull factor given that it is Icarus II's final destination, it also exudes a push factor through its affectivity which conceptually forces the "expansive thrust of science fiction" (Grant 18) inwards towards near-Earth spatial coordinate. The Sun is indeed a "cinema of attraction" just as its image attracts Searle, Pinbacker and Icarus, and yet is also the limiting factor in their travels as its affection forces them to remain within the 'terrestrial-celestial' setting lest they suffer Icarus' fate.

In conjunction with the image of the Sun and the possibility of images only via the existence of the Sun, the cinematic apparatus is exposed and deconstructed by the Earth Room sequence. Vision is exposed as the very essence of space travel that attracts (as Icarus is fatally attracted by the lure of the Sun), just as Earthly images lure Mace into a desirable respite in the images of Earth. As the "genre of science fiction often exhibits its spectatorial excess in the form of the *special effect*, which is especially effective at bringing the narrative to a spectacular halt" (Bukatman 254), the Earth Room scene is a telling critique that both

establishes and delineate the limits of what special effects do. Mace's temporary relief or recommended 'prescription' for his dislocation from Earth results in a temporary respite found in the form of the Earth Room's simulated visuals. In his moment of respite, the camera establishes his disappointments just as the Earth Room's simulation runs into a "spectacular halt" (Bukatman 254). Mace's disappointment and spectators' reactions that vary from surprise to awe and disappointment proves that cinematic visuals have to ability to affect. Visuals are both mediums of comfort and positivity as well as the harbinger of doom.

While "One of the most common criticisms of contemporary science fiction cinema is that it relies too heavily on special effects" (King and Krzywinska 63), both rightly point out that "there is [also] an essential tension in the way we consume special effects" (King and Krzywinska 64). While on one hand, "the function of special effects...is to serve narrative purposes" (King and Krzywinska 65), in *Sunshine*, the film also deconstructs and lays bare the illusion of visual simulation. Its concurrent use of the aural also suggests an alternative understanding of the film and thus calls for the reassessments of the science fiction space travel genre as a whole. Hence while Searle and Pinbacker take part in the "pleasure of enjoying an awareness of the *process* of the illusion in which [they] partake" (King and Krzywinska 66) via their obsession with the image of the Sun itself, their awareness is simultaneously (as mentioned most importantly through the visual deconstruction in the Earth Room) depicted for the spectator to perceive.

As Searle succinctly puts it, 'They had an epiphany. They saw the light... If we weren't behind the *screen* (emphasis mine) of Icarus II, we'd have joined them.' Despite Searle's seeming obsession with the Sun and its visual awe, Searle can also be read as the embodiment of the space travel film spectator who is "not the victim of machination to the point of being unaware that it exists, but he is not sufficiently conscious for it to lose its impact" (Steve Neale 15). While he is simultaneously captured by the Sun's image which

delineates the goal of their mission as well as the limits of their space travel, the film's "violently self-conscious" (Neale 11) special effects forces Searle (who is also self-conscious) and spectators to consider their implications of space travel films epitomised in grandeur and distances. Searle is the informed spectator that is "subject to division" (Neale 14) and that who understands the allure of vision and its illusory nature. He is on one hand captivated by the image of the Sun and partaking in its visual grandeur, but also simultaneously aware of its dangers. Correspondingly, with such a "violently self-conscious" (Neale 11) character who literally discusses the cinematic apparatus on various occasions, this alternative aural as opposed to the visual aspects of the film forces spectators to contemplate on the *Sunshine's* embedded critique on visuality.

Beyond just the Earth Room and its implications on visuality and special effects, various aspects of life onboard Icarus II convey the idea that Earth exists more than merely a fascination "with the origin of life" (73) as Forde suggests. Rather than "returning to the origin of life in a cyclical encounter" (Forde 80), I argue that Icarus II itself takes on the role of Earth as it really is a "[projection] of the Earth" (Csicsery-Ronay 391). The presence of a psychologist on board, a kitchen complemented by planned kitchen duties, a discussion of whether they are a "democracy" and most importantly the existence of a greenhouse and the character of Corazon (Michelle Yeoh) all contribute towards my reading of Icarus II as Earth. Given that Icarus II is really a site that functions as a like-for-like replication of Earth, the presence of terrestrial-analogues to carry out Earthly functions onboard is not surprisingly abundant within the film.

Specifically, the greenhouse's lush forestry provides a place of refuge from the constraints of the spaceship amidst its sterile and monotonously silver-coloured mise-en-scene. While the "sonic tones" (Forde 81) emitted by the Earth Room calms Mace, the lush and green mise-en-scene also offers Corazon a respite. More importantly, Corazon's

attachment to the greenhouse takes on significance when we analyse her relationship with the greenhouse. If Forde's article emphasizes the "origin of life" and the "mother's womb" (80, 81), Corazon's obsessive care for the greenhouse points towards a maternal care she unconscious/consciously exhibits. By interpreting the greenhouse as an oxygen producing mechanism and hence Nature (with its ability to provide oxygen), we can subsequently read Corazon as Mother Nature.

As "There just isn't enough oxygen to get all of us there (the Sun)," Corazon takes on the role of Mother Nature who seeks to restore balance to Icarus II's ecosphere and oxygen levels. As if she were Mother Nature going through planetary adjustments (for example the Ice Age which resulted in a change within Earth's atmospheric gaseous components), Corazon contemplates "When Searle and Harvey died we lost two breathers. If Trey [Benedict Wong] dies we'll have the oxygen to make it to the delivery point." If Mother Nature is nurturing and provides oxygen for all at the beginning of the film, she can also be ruthless in executing a 'survival of the fittest' Darwinian Theory. In order for the oxygen level to attain sustainable levels, Corazon suggests that Trey, the weakest link onboard be killed. Corazon carries out both the nurturing as well as destructive functions as the Mother Earth analogue on Icarus II.

As King and Krzywinska say "science fiction implicitly raises concerns close to home, however or distant the setting" (King and Krzywinska 22), I argue that Corazon and the greenhouse provide Earthly solutions (organic or not) to concerns onboard Icarus II despite their distant setting. Likewise, despite their forms of "space madness" (Forde 76), it is telling that the Earth Room is recommended as the solution for Mace's lost of rationality. In always returning to Earth as solutions for their problems, the cyclicity of the film is reiterated. The same arguments can also be made for the film's critique on visibility. If the Sun is the ultimate metaphor of vision in its provision of light rays that enables sight, the

Sun's affect on Searle and Pinbacker illustrates its negative effects that as well. There is both a simultaneous push and pull factor that the Sun exhibits. In flying too close the Sun, Icarus II meets its demise. But its "stardusts" and brilliant explosion also travel back to Earth in cosmic radiance depicted at the end of the film.

Having discussed *Sunshine*'s mise-en-scene and cinematography positively in various parts of my essay, there seems to be an inherent contradiction having argued against special effects and the viscosity of space travel films in other parts. However, the spectator that is informed, intelligent and "subject to division" (Neale 14) cannot and will not suspend their total disbelief in abandonment to merely a "look of wonder" (Grant 18). Just as Searle is obsessed with the "beautiful" image of the Sun, he is clearly aware of the effects of vision and the Sun itself. In comprehending *Sunshine* in pleasure as well as cognitive processes, the underlying refiguration of the film in terms of spatio-temporal coordinates can be discerned when spectators view and analyze the film's underlying messages beyond its surface contents. While *Sunshine* is indeed heavy on its visual effects, Forde's analysis of the aural aspects that provides an alternative reading, as well as my analysis of certain subversive visual elements suggests that the film is really about contractionary space travel as opposed to expansionary travel. The destruction of Icarus II, which on repeated viewing resembles an iris, also calls for the destruction of old ways of 'looking' and 'viewing' a space travel film.

Like Searle and Pinbacker, Rhoda (Brit Marling) is "hypnotized" by the image of Jupiter which is "beautiful... but nothing special until shown in rapid succession." As opposed to a single static photographic shot, *Another Earth* clearly alludes to the filmic and the cinematic apparatuses which comprise of photographic stills shown in "rapid succession." Like the visual allure of the Sun and its cyclical return to the Earthly "origin of life" (Forde 73), *Another Earth* foregrounds the idea of viscosity and the contraction of distance in space

travel films. Bearing in mind the ‘another’ in *Another Earth*, the film’s title suggests that no matter the distance travelled, a cyclical return to an Earth-like planet is evinced.

Another Earth frames its narrative upon the appearance of an enigmatic Earth 2 in the sky that mirrors Earth’s exact appearance. The distracting and destructive nature of vision is a direct implication of Earth 2’s hypnotic effects on Rhoda. Just as Searle and Pinbacker are subjected to affect by the Sun, Earth 2 causes Rhonda to lose focus on the road. The consequences are devastating. As she stares hypnotically at Earth 2, Rhoda veers into John Burroughs’ (William Mapother) car and kills his entire family, leaving him alive to face the consequences. Like the Sun in *Sunshine*, Earth 2 is presented as a goal (Rhoda desires to escape to Earth 2 in hope of living her life anew), an end point in which the characters desire to traverse in distance towards. They however lend themselves to the narrative progress in a destructive, negative and adverse sense. As opposed to worlds that are utopic and conforming to conventions of a distant hinterland, the Sun in *Sunshine* and Earth 2 in *Another Earth* are destructive in nature. Throughout the film, Rhoda is subsequently haunted by her guilt as she seeks to atone for her mistakes. While Earth 2 is posited as a possible escape from her guilt throughout the film, it is also the very object of her visual desire that creates her unfortunate predicament.

However, guilt is not the only thing which haunts the film. The film is literally haunted by Earth 2 as it hangs in the sky throughout the film. It is as Csicsery-Ronay says, “The substantialization of SF’s object has created a new form of haunted consciousness, haunted by the uncanny spectral actuality of its properly imaginary objects” (392). While Earth 2 is not an imaginary object per se in the film, it is imaginary in the sense that much speculation about its very “nature” occurs throughout the film. At times, it is deemed in “synchronicity” with Earth and at other times it is referred to as a “mirror” to Earth. By analysing the descriptions of Earth 2 as a “mirror,” the idea of distance is evoked via the

‘real’ object as well as the reflected object in the mirror itself. There must always be a spatio-temporal distance evoked in the looking of one’s reflection. A mirror can only reflect if one stands a distance away from the ‘real’ object. Moreover, as one looks at the mirror, the light and reflection we see is always light-speed temporality slower than actuality. Thus, as characters are often shown to look up at Earth 2 in deliberation, this deliberation which is and always light-speed away, exhibits “a mode of awareness, [that it] characterized by two linked forms of hesitation, a pair of gaps” (Csicsery-Ronay 387). The use of “hesitation” suggests that the distance between the “pair of gaps” (Csicsery-Ronay 387), Earth and Earth 2, is not to be traversed as freely as it is in typical space travel films.

In appropriating Csicsery-Ronay’s definition of science fiction (in extension one can also extend this definition to space travel films) and an entailing look of “hesitation” (Csicsery-Ronay 387), Rhoda does not exhibit a look of awe and wonderment as she looks at Earth 2. Her gaze at the distant object is marked by a “hesitation” (Csicsery-Ronay 387) that ultimately collapses upon her own “introspective and meditative sense of reflection” (Forde 80) as she reflects on the devastation she has wrought on both her life and John’s. The distance evoked in her act of looking off at distant Earth 2 only conflates upon her own life here on Earth. Her act of looking at a distance thus provides a “[simultaneous] going back to the origin of life” (Forde 73) instead of an expansionary and utopic imaginations of what “Earth 2” really is like. Thus while “Earth 2” functions as a distant mirror, it serves only for Rhoda to perform an “introspective and meditative sense of reflection” (Forde 80). While Earth 2 literally reflects Earth’s image due to its like-for-like blue and green hues, it is when transposed upon Rhoda’s gaze, an “introspective and meditative sense of reflection” (Forde 80). Her “dream of distance” (*A Distant Technology* 23) in the form of escape from Earth only mirrors her futility and her rootedness on Earth. This reflects Forde’s idea of “a cyclical

order of the universe” (76) in which even Rhoda’s mere expansionary gaze (not to mention actual travel) is subjected to an inevitable return onto Earth itself.

As Telotte states, “narratives typically turn on technological devices-rockets, submarines, radio-telescopes, tunnels, aircraft... for bridging...gaps, or, in some cases, for coping with threatening distance” (*A Distant Technology* 21). In this film, a telescope thus bridges the distance between Earth and Earth 2 as Rhoda and John looks at it through a telescope. The telescope functions as a spaceship without thrusters, a spaceship that bridges no literal spatio-temporality. While literal spatio-temporal gaps are not bridged literally, I suggest that by looking at Earth 2 through the telescope, Rhoda and John bridge the distance only through visuality. Yet as John comments “You’re up there and I’m up there” while Rhoda replies “I wonder if I’m cleaning your house?” Their dialogue indicates two important points. By situating Earth 2 and their probable doppelgangers “up there,” and they in opposition down here on Earth, there is firstly an acknowledgement of distance that is not bridged spatio-temporally. Despite the telescope that functions as a pseudo-spaceship, Rhoda never traverses an inch off terrestrial ground. Secondly, Rhoda’s reply “I wonder if I’m cleaning your house” exemplifies the fact that Earth 2 can be translated into “projections of the Earth” (Csicsery-Ronay 391). Despite the distance between Earth and Earth 2, the impulse to wonder if she is doing the exact same thing there suggests that Earth 2 can be read as a projection of Earth in which she imprints her psyche onto. In *Sunshine*, “the fascination of returning to [an Earthly] origins” (Forde 80-81) is the key issue for Forde. However in *Another Earth*, the lack of a spaceship (which is substituted by a telescope) and the diction that Rhoda and John employs suggests a much more insurmountable distance.

Despite Earth 2’s insurmountable distance, Rhoda nonetheless wishes for a new life on Earth 2. This however reflects Csicsery-Ronay’s idea that “The distance [is] greatest in utopia” (Ronay 390). The distance between her life on Earth and a potential life on Earth 2 is

so great that the distance can never be travelled. That the telescope stands in as a replacement of a spaceship reiterates such an unconquerable distance. Being on Earth itself is really what - *Another Earth* is ironically about. Because it is in Csicsery-Ronay's sense truly utopic, Earth 2 is really never an object to be travelled to as it is a mirror for introspective reflection. In *Sunshine* and *Moon*, I have explicated the varying degrees of importance given to visual sequences that depict return journeys to Earth. But in *Another Earth*, no sequence of space travel, outgoing or even returning is filmed. Given that its title promises further space travel than *Sunshine* and *Moon*, the film interestingly never does leave the confines of Earth. Instead, what we get is only the magnificent allure of Earth 2 in the sky that ends up as a broken visual promise of hope. As Rhoda and John ponder about Earth 2, a telling scene suggests a new way of looking at and defining spatio-temporality in space travel films.

More than just a "sense of wonder" (Grant 17), Rhoda's looking always envisions a return to one's own psyche as opposed to mindless expansion. Such an implicit reference to the film's undercurrent of refiguring the conventional tradition of space travel can be clearly glimpsed in a sequence that takes place in Rhoda's room after her release from jail. In this scene, Rhoda plasters an Orion Belt poster on the inverted- v shaped ceiling of room. As she lies on her mattress that is at a non-perpendicular angle to the poster (that is to say that she is not directly under the poster), she gazes at the poster at an oblique and angled manner. The indirect manner of her gazing is contributed firstly by the angle of her sight and secondly the v-shaped (and hence not-parallel-to-the-floor) ceiling. This skewed way of looking is further accentuated by the camera as it tracks into a close-up of the poster in a canted manner. By looking at the poster (just as Rhoda does) with such a significant amount of obliqueness, the film's indicates that we should look at space travel films differently, just as we do a poster of the stars differently.

While the visual analysis in the preceding paragraphs suggest a poignant need for a new understanding of space travel that plays out partly through Rhoda's contemplative and philosophical thoughts on the existence of Earth 2, the film's aural aspects further cement the current strain of thought which this essay follows. The following voiceover (from an unknown scientist character) from the film is telling as it narrates:

Within our lifetimes, we have marvelled as biologists have managed to look at ever smaller and smaller things. And *astronomers have looked further and further* into the dark night sky, back in time and *out in space*. But maybe the most mysterious of all is neither the small nor the large. It's us, up close. Could we even recognize ourselves? And if we did, would we know ourselves? What would we say to ourselves? What would we learn from ourselves? What would we really like to see if we could *stand outside ourselves and look at us* (emphasis mine)?

Unlike, *Moon* and *Sunshine*, there is no corresponding visual shot of the Earth from space in *Another Earth*. However if spectators were to envision the statement "if we could stand outside ourselves and look at us," it most certainly would mirror the final scenes in *Moon* and *Sunshine* where the camera tracks into the familiar bluish-green planet in space. In such a manner, *Another Earth* performs Forde's idea of "the role of 'aural attraction' as an alternative way of understanding the function of sound within science fiction film" (71) through this telling voiceover commentary. Despite the lack of returning visuals, one can certainly conjure up this return image in the film's closure by virtue of the spectator's imagination and the voiceover.

Thus like *Sunshine* and *Moon*, a return to Earth is always featured in the films' respective endings. However, what can one expect from *Another Earth* when Rhoda never leaves Earth? How can there be a 'return' without a going?

Instead of leaving Earth for Earth 2, Rhoda passes her space travel ticket over (which she wins in a competition) to John who leaves for Earth 2. Through a news report on the television screen, we witness John's flight outwards. The fact that this expansionary space travel scene is shown only through television suggests that it is relegated in importance to where and with whom the film's primary cameras actually follow. Its expansionary impulse is also only shown through a television and hence it is only a mere deferral. Thus, instead of travelling to Earth 2 with John, the final sequence of the film follows Rhoda as she unexpectedly meets her Earth 2 doppelganger that has travelled to Earth.

In consolidating the film's analysis, Csicery-Ronay's argument that "SF is suspended because all the relevant information about the future has not been created yet, and never can be" (387) is especially apt. Rhoda does not leave Earth for Earth because Earth 2 simply cannot exist in the void of information about it. Earth 2's inability to exist and hence the camera's inability to follow John is accentuated by its insurmountable spatio-temporality as "The distance [is indeed the] greatest in utopia" (Ronay 390). Furthermore, as "Science Fiction [has] narrowed the distance considerably, bringing the imaginary closer to the real world of production... there is no need to differentiate the imaginary from the real" (390), Csicery-Ronay explicitly points out that Earth 2 does not and need not exist as it is really but a "[projection] of the Earth" (391). Thus the distant hinterlands of space, be it Earth 2, the Moon, or any other sort of destination to be traversed to in space travel films are merely "[utopias] which [are no] longer a possibility, a utopia we can do no more than dream about, like a lost object" (Csicery-Ronay 390). Like all lost objects, they no longer figure because they do not exist. In *Another Earth*, distance is no longer travelled as there is nowhere to travel towards. This "implosive [concept]" (Csicery-Ronay 390) suggests that *Another Earth* reconfigures the expansionary space travel characteristics via a spatial implosion that forces distances to collapse upon its origins, or Earth itself. If the "dream of distance" (*A Distant*

Technology 23) cannot be attained, Rhoda must face her devils squarely on Earth, “the origin of life” (Forde 73) itself with all her accompanying problems. In this sense, *Another Earth* reconfigures the idea of space travel to its extreme. The film manages to portray the idea of a return without a going. In this sense, one cannot be too far off from the truth in saying that space travel films are really Earth travel films.

While this essay focuses on three films, it is primarily about *Another Earth*. Both *Moon* and *Sunshine* depict films that situate themselves within the spatio-temporal zone of the ‘terrestrial celestials.’ Matters concerning plot progression as well as functional analysis of cinematic elements signal an incessant throwback to Earth in both *Sunshine* and *Moon*. In this sense, *Another Earth* offers up cinematographic and narrational elements that entirely displace space travel from the film. That the space travel film paradoxically is premised only within the constraints of Earth (as opposed to Moon and a Sun-bound journey) suggests an even more radical manifestation of the reconfiguration of the space travel film within the boundaries of the ‘terrestrial celestial’ zone itself.

By situating the film via a more-or-less sequential analysis of *Moon*, *Sunshine* and *Another Earth*, this essay also literally carries out the concept of ‘terrestrial celestials’ which I have expounded. While this essay is about space travel science fiction films just as the mentioned films are, the triangulation of the new spatio-temporality of near Earth setting is reflected by the essay’s constant elicitation of the ‘terrestrial-celestials’ zone reflected in the use of *Moon*, *Sunshine* and *Another Earth*. The essay also shows a progression of distance travelled from Earth in the sense that it analyses the films in accordance to its increasing distance from the Moon in *Moon*, to the Sun in *Sunshine* and finally *back* to *Another Earth*, which is really Earth itself. The essay thus reflects the idea of cyclicity that Forde extrapolates in her essay via the inevitable return of its analysis to a film situated solely on Earth itself. This essay is also unabashedly and “violently self-conscious” (Neale 11) like

Searle with regards to the very self-awareness of one's textuality (or visuality). As the essay progresses via an increasing spatio-temporal scale in terms of its films, it ultimately returns to an analysis of (another) Earth.

This essay discusses the preconceived notions of what space travel films are. By analysing the films' narrative and cinematography, *Moon*, *Sunshine* and *Another Earth*, have shown that space travel films can be viewed in a different manner. Instead of mere expansionary space travel, these films have shown that space travel films exhibit a certain contractionary impulse that harkens back to Earth in terms of its literal distance, concepts and cinematographies. By looking at space travel films this way, one can offer up a defence for science fiction space travel films. As Grant states, "Because film is primarily a visual medium, it tends to concentrate on the depiction of visual surfaces at the expense of contemplative depth" (Grant 23), he does not give science fiction films nearly enough credit for ingenuity and depth. If the surface of space travel film is about distance from Earth, its underlying readings provide a challenge to such assumptions. Thus, we might take this essay as defence for science fiction space travel films given the genre's even more pronounced (than other genres) emphasis on visuality. In rethinking space travel films and its expansionary thrust, we might perhaps begin to rethink science fiction space travel as a genre which is worth much more than only its spectacle.

(9988 words)

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