

# Techniques of the invisible: Cinematic images of being addicted

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## ABSTRACT

**AIMS** — This study analyses how contemporary American films on “new”, behavioural addictions (sex, gambling and shopping) visualise the inner experience of being addicted. **DESIGN** – A close-reading of cinematic techniques (such as cinematography, editing, sound and colour) at the beginning of six films explores how the spectator is invited into an affective engagement with the film, and how being addicted can be visualised through these techniques. **RESULTS** – Despite genre differences and various types of addiction problems, the analysed films all employ expressive techniques that resonate with each other. Being addicted is imagined through confessional monologues which provide access into the anomalous inner experience, through a sensualising of the objects of addiction as both enticing and repelling, and through an aesthetics of disconnections and distance. While similar modes recur, the cinematic image of being addicted can also be subversive. **CONCLUSION** – The affective modes of the films emphasise intimacy and exploration of the self, central to the modern strategies of managing addiction problems. However, the cinematic images also enable subversive affective registers of images of addiction as an inner experience. **KEYWORDS** – behavioural addictions, films, representations

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## Introduction

The appearance of non-substance-based repetitive problem behaviours, such as gambling, sex and shopping in recent American films co-occurs with the rise in addiction themes in both medical discussions and wider media culture (Sedgwick, 1992; Keane, 2003; Hellman, 2010). Sex addictions have featured in such mainstream films as *Diary of a Sex Addict* (Brutsman, 2001) and *Choke* (Clark, 2008), while *Going for Broke* (Campbell, 2003), *Owning Mahowny* (Kwietniowski, 2003) and *Even*

*Money* (Rydell, 2006) have portrayed gambling, and shopping is the headlined addiction in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (Hogan, 2009).<sup>1</sup> These films employ the mainstream conventions of drama films in dealing with identity problems, where an individual explores his or her identity and relations to others in problematic networks of affection. Diaries, confessions, shame and secrets are central themes in the recent cinematic accounts on behavioural addictions, resonating with the in-

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dividual's exploration of the inner self and management of intense emotions through self-disclosure, often related to late modern techniques of the self (Sedgwick, 1992; Keane, 2003; see also Valverde, 1998).

It is commonly held that addiction as a film subject pertains to the story, characters and the symbolic content of the images. In other words, addiction is usually understood as a matter of narrative and direct representation. While such accounts offer important views on images of addiction (Denzin, 2001; Room, 2003; Hersey, 2005), it is important to notice that the capacity of cinema to examine subjective experiences is not necessarily a concern of stories, symbols and narratives. My intention is to show how non-representative cinematic techniques, such as cinematography, rhythm and sound impact on determining the film's emotional charge, while the spectator remains mostly unaware of them. Through focusing on the cinematic expression itself, it is possible to grasp what can be affective and "felt", but not directly represented.

This article focuses on films on "new" addictions, all of them major films on the subject and released in the US since the year 2000.<sup>2</sup> The films represent different genres, media discourses and styles (drama, black comedy, TV drama, chick-flick). However, similar techniques of constructing the impression of being addicted recur. The cultural importance of the addiction theme as a catch to evoke curiosity in the viewer becomes evident in how all these films posit the addiction problem to the very beginning of the film. This is where the nature of the problem is to be mediated effectively to the spectators in order to engage them with the film. How, then,

can the "essence" of being addicted be constructed in short flashes in the setup sequences?

### **How to visualise "being addicted"?**

Such expressions as "the disease of the will" (Valverde, 1998), "the soul-destroying disease" (Peele, 1987) and "the secret leprosy of modern days" (Hickman, 2007) exemplify how contemporary investigations into how societies define and manage addiction problems have articulated addiction with the inner experience of the individual (see also Levine, 1978), indicated with terms such as will, soul and secret. Inner struggle, loss of control and failure in pleasure regulation also characterise the concept of addiction applied in, for example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual on Mental Disorders DSM (Keane & al., 2011), the genealogy of which can be tracked to the US temperance movement and to the concern about the individual's capacity of self-control (Levine, 1978; Reinerman, 1995). While the use of the concept of addiction increases and the non-substance-based behaviours enter into medical classifications, it has proved increasingly problematic to locate and define addiction in theory, research and practice alike (Levine, 1978; Keane, 2003). What is more, it is the experience of being addicted that has puzzled scholars and treatment-oriented practitioners who have observed difficulties of describing and verbalising it, such as hyposymbolization (Wurmser, 1974), anhedonia (Denzin, 2001), fading of cognitive beliefs (Elster, 1999) and regulative images that structure the behaviour as meaningful from both an addict's and others' perspectives (Sulkunen, 1997; Rantala & Sulkunen, 2012).

Cinematic dimensions of duration, movement, sound and montage offer unique possibilities to explore the inner experiences and affective charges associated with being addicted. The narrative fiction film has developed towards engaging the viewer through an intimate emotional connection that merges the subjective and objective. As one of the central modern technologies of “externalization of the psyche”, cinema is itself closely connected to the inner experience, mental faculties, emotion and thinking, and is essential in how previously private mental processes have increasingly become a part of the public sphere (Manovich, 1995).

Being addicted is a visually challenging subject, to the point that it is often thought that it cannot be visualised at all. Addiction is essentially an abstract concept referring to a subjective, inner state, which lacks signs or symptoms that could be told from the surfaces or interiors of the body (Hickman, 2002). The experience of being addicted is not necessarily manifested in images of dark circles underneath the eyes, AA meetings, drug use, heavy drinking or repetitive smoking. Here, it becomes evident that as far as being addicted concerns inner experience, the attempts to show “what addiction is” are always about how such a theme can be imagined.

The theme of invisibility, inherent in addictions, may be even more relevant in terms of the behavioural addictions, which do not entail chemical interactions with an alien substance. It could be presupposed that visualising these addictions does not involve abject bodies and alterity attached to visible, external surfaces of socially marked bodies, imagined as polluted by substances, and framed with dirt

and involuntary bodily reactions such as vomiting or withdrawal, familiar from the abject rhetoric of substance-based addictions (Harold, 2000). Rather, these films may employ the cinematography of delusion as a marker of mental disintegration that is often associated with images of madness (Cherry, 2009; Pisters, 2008). This calls for exploration of how the impression of being addicted is created, hypothetically less by a visual construction of difference through recognizable surfaces of bodies and other objects, but as the “externalization of the psyche” through relations in time and space, actualised by means of cinematic expression.

The cinematic presentations of the “new” addictions are not yet widely discussed<sup>3</sup> but they can be seen as continuous to imaging intoxicant use and forms of deviance, such as self-destructive behaviours and psychiatric disorders, which cannot be wholly grasped with the logics of rational and motivated behaviour, and which have recently captured the interest of several researchers on cinema and affect, such as Powell (2007) and Pisters (2008). Most of the in-depth analyses on cinematic presentations related to addiction problems deal with representations of alcohol and drugs instead of being addicted as such, and the study thus traverses the middle ground between studies of “altered states” – drug use and madness – in cinema, by critically employing the addiction concept.

Some previous analyses have investigated the theme of addiction as a general concept and have compared images of many different behaviours, such as recovery from substance-based addictions (Hersey, 2005) and addiction as crisis of agency,

already pointing towards the theme of invisibility by examining the importance of the secret in the context of addiction (Sulkunen, 2007). These studies focus on the narrated events. At the other end of the scale, other studies discuss how cinematicity itself may approach the desire for drugs presented through it, for example by inviting the spectator to experience a drug-user's perspective to drugs and their effects (Boothroyd, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2010). My study is located in between these modes, as it looks for the repetitive modes among images representing different types of behaviour and analyses how these images may engage the spectator affectively in ways that relate to the addiction in question.

### **The approach: “Our emotions are not our own”**

Cinema is a technology of affect. It looks for impact, although the actual impact or spectator reactions are not in the scope of this study. As the French film theorist Christian Metz wrote, “to some extent, all cinema is a special effect” (Metz, 1977, p. 670). Following him, Cubitt (2005) states:

the effects cinema produces are images and sounds, dimensions, durations, sensations, understandings, and thoughts. Certainly you could measure physiological dilations and palpitations to ascertain the reality of a film's emotional clout. But there is something fictive, something uncanny, or something that, however marginally, fails the reality test.  
(Cubitt, 2005, p. 1)

Here, as in much of the recent media the-

ory, mediation is understood as material transmission where the pre-conscious, multisensorial and kinaesthetic realms of sensation outside representation are regarded at least as important as the semantic and conscious.<sup>4</sup> Cubitt, too, proposes that cinema resonates in the spectator's body and thinking.<sup>5</sup> His notion on the “fictive” dimension reminds one of Brennan's (2004) description of transmission of affect that takes place in-between bodies and can be felt, for example, as an atmosphere when entering into a room. This kind of accounts are in contrast to the traditional way of understanding emotion as contained in the individual, solely one's own. However, one's impression of an anxious atmosphere (Brennan's example) may be quite different from someone else's who experiences the situation differently. How, then, to discuss the affective, or the atmosphere, in a way that would not be all but contingent? The techniques of cinematic expression are designed to direct the spectator towards certain kinds of experiences, or atmospheres. The means to invite, persuade and affect can be analysed, to a certain extent, on a general level. Cinematic techniques, such as editing (including rhythm and the montage effect, time-space continuums and contrasts); scale (image sizes, such as the close-up) and other cinematographic techniques (for example, framing, camera angle and camera movement) and sound (music, sound effects), are often, although not always, to remain invisible and thus practically non-conscious in an ordinary viewing. A tracking shot, for example, can be a strong, immersive technique that draws the spectator into the cinematic space; the close-up can diminish the dis-

tance between the spectator and the image and create an intimate proximity to what is shown; and montage, sometimes labelled as the art of the invisible, directs the perception through producing time and space relations and virtually unrecognizable shifts in them (Deleuze, 2005; Cubitt, 2005; Herzog, 2008). When the researcher looks for the affective charge or the “fictive” in cinema through a close-reading of the cinematic techniques best attained through repetitive viewings, the approach employs both interpretation and description of the objective structures of the films.

Films may evoke affective reactions such as desire, fear, pleasure, disgust, fascination and shame, often attached to the visibilities of the body (see, for example, Kyrölä, 2010 on fatness), but these visibilities may play a minor role on non-substance-based addictions, which do not alter or pollute the body through excessive intake. Furthermore, as Herd (1986) has noted about the history of films on alcoholism, there is a shift of presenting the causes of alcoholism as external towards presenting them as internal. This may be related not only, nor primarily, to the changes in how addiction problems are viewed, but to the shifts in the conventions of cinematic expression. Pisters (2008) states that cinema – once known as the “machine of the visible”, a media technology that is based on an act of showing – is moving towards being a “machine of the invisible”, or an image technology enabling new connections, associations, ways of thinking and affectivity. Cinema not only represents the existing problems and our views on them, but also actively produces possibilities for new experi-

ences. When mapping cinematic expression as the machine of the invisible, the focus is not so much on “what” is shown, but on “how”; in the relations that form through techniques that are not directly visible as such. This implies an embedded spectator who, instead of being in front of a spectacle, is “immersed in an audiovisual environment in which filmmaker/camera, characters and spectators, world and screens are all chasing and questioning each other” (Pisters, 2008, p. 114).

The setup sequence of a film presents the milieu, the main characters and the main conflict that create the film’s dramatic tension. This is where it is important to motivate the viewers to be engrossed in the film (see Thompson, 1999). The beginning of the film is essential in building up the focalisation of addiction, that is, establishing whose inner experience is shown. The affective visual and sound techniques are crucial in drawing the spectator into the atmosphere when the narrative has yet to be developed. As stated, I will focus on short moments or “flashes” where something crucial to the addiction theme takes place, rather than on the structure of the setup sequence as a whole, or the development of narrative (Cubitt, 2005, p. 38). Still, it has to be noted that the narrative and the affective dimension essentially work together: the events both take the story forward and provide viewers with titillating images (Laine, 2012).

This study is based on a close-reading of the construction of being addicted through cinematic expression in six films on sex, gambling and shopping. In order to analyse the setup scenes, I have viewed them several times. I have approached them with the questions: what makes the se-

quence interesting in terms of image and sound – what is their affective “grab” – and how is it crucial to the impression of being addicted?

## The affective modes

### *Intimacy: confession and the facial close-up*

To begin the film with a confessional monologue, be it voice-over narration of the experience of the protagonist or a therapy session or an interview, is a recurring technique and a catch which draws the spectator into the protagonists’ inner world and proposes an intimate relationship with them. For example, the opening scene of *Diary of a Sex Addict* lets the viewer embarrassingly close through extreme facial close-ups and suggestive cinematography, materialising some tensions of sexual desire.

The film opens with a voice-over of a man’s confessional, intimate tone. A weak, almost whispering female voice replies, setting the intimate tone of the sequence. A close-up shows the face of an attractive young woman speaking softly. She is the therapist who asks him to tell her the truth about his problem. Her face is filmed in a sensual half-light, and brought close to the viewer through a close-up. Then, a middle-aged man is shown, sitting in an armchair, in a medium shot and thus more distanced from the spectator. A counter-shot shows the woman again. The camera slides swiftly downwards from her face to her figure and breasts, as if in a secret look, finally moving to what is more appropriate: her hand holding a notebook. A close-up of his hand with a wedding ring follows.

The visual style of the scene approaches soft-core pornography, creating tensions between the man and the woman through

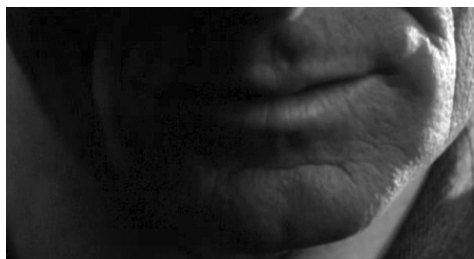
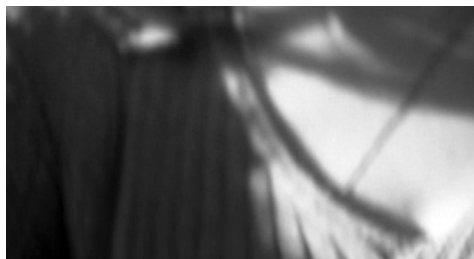
distancing his figure and showing the female therapist in a way that could be his subjective perspective, explicitly eroticising her face and body through close-ups and camera movement. This is followed by an extreme close-up of his mouth before the camera moves swiftly downwards again, as if it were a gaze that turns away in embarrassment.

The facial close-up itself has often been seen as the affective technique that in its unnatural proximity collapses the boundary between the external and the internal, and between the spectator and the image (Herzog, 2008, p. 63). The tension in the scene stems from the use of a tight close-up of his mouth, which is an unusual, sexually evocative image that feels in some way out of place. This impression of being “out of place” and the affect of embarrassment are accentuated by the swift, almost unrecognizable camera movement downwards, inviting the spectator to feel the charged atmosphere.

The grab of the scene works through push and pull between curiosity and too much proximity. This is associated with the uncontrolled desire and a sense of shame, produced by the fast camera movements. The very conventions of audiovisual erotica invite the viewer into the addict’s experience of the desire that appears to be in danger of erupting onto the surface and out of control.

The image of the mouth is followed with a more “sober” medium-shot of the man looking away and saying “the problem is that I love my wife”. He turns his head, facing the camera, “but I cannot stop fucking other women”. The inner conflict is exposed through rather blunt speech and the dramatic, direct look, after which the





Sexually suggestive cinematography in *The Diary of a Sex Addict*.

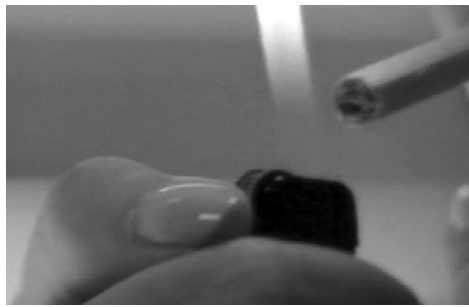
scene immediately ends. A contrast is set between seeking for help and simultaneously being driven by the problematic desire itself. The impression of conflict is accentuated through a sharp montage, as the next image shows a middle-class exterior with a child's voice calling for "dad" and an interior shot of a family spending time together in a brightly lit, beige-toned home.

An introspective monologue by the addict creates a strong sense of intimacy in the setup sequence of *Going for Broke* as well. Here, too, is a monologue scene that employs extreme close-ups of the mouth and eyes of the addict, a middle-aged woman, but the impression of intimacy is now something different, even poetic. The

scene has the protagonist speaking about her gambling problem in front of a supposed audience that is not shown, but her monologue suggests an AA type meeting in a bleak office room.

Part of the scene is edited into a sequence of extreme close-ups capturing her mouth as she speaks and smokes a cigarette, and her eyes; and middle-shots of the woman standing alone against a bleak background and speaking about the emotions she experienced when she was gambling. The poetic impression stems from the duration given to her lighting up a cigarette, which stops the monologue for a while, and the time taken to examine the details of her face.

The affective here has to do with the



Taking time to think while lighting up a cigarette in *Going for Broke*.

impression of her thinking about her situation. The close-ups are given as if in an attempt to reveal something about her, but no answers are forthcoming about her destructive behaviour. This creates a space that runs counter to the ethos of self-disclosure of the addict. She is surrounded by silence and empty space, in contrast to the *Diary of a Sex Addict's* intensive proximity of the extreme close-ups. The bleak colours of the scene stress detachment and being alone among the audience. The atmosphere of the bleak office interior is in a stark contrast with the warm tones of the home, presented elsewhere in the film in a way which resembles the *Diary of a Sex Addict's* beige-toned, middle-class family interior.

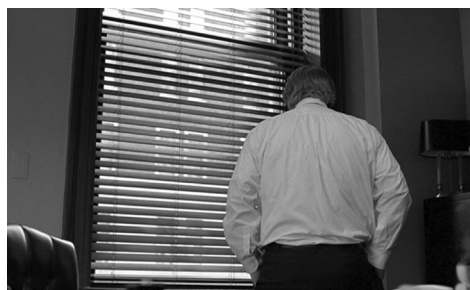
The cold tones, extreme close-ups and the impression of a bleak, empty space are also central in *Owning Mahowny*, which similarly starts with a voice-over monologue by the protagonist, a pathological

gambler. The voice-over appears to be an interview question to him. The next image shows him sitting on a sofa and answering the question about his life, setting the "present" from which his past is viewed. The film then moves on to tell about the past and the development of the gambling problem.

At the end of the setup sequence, the spectator knows that the protagonist is in serious debt. A slow and silent, but emotionally very intense scene follows, depicting a dark and bleak green-toned image sitting almost motionless by a desk, looking down at the desktop in front of him, in silence. The camera approaches him, moving slowly in the space. The camera movement emphasizes the impression of a claustrophobic, empty and bleak office space, folding it with the subjective experience of distress.

Next, his face is shown in an extreme close-up that fills the whole screen. He





Overwhelming anxiety: extreme close-up of an anxious face and the back turned towards camera in *Owning Mahowny*.

writes a mock cheque to finance his gambling. The cheque is shown before the eyes of the spectator, who is invited into his subjective perspective. The scene is accentuated with a sound of uneven, slow breathing, which signals anxiety mixed with passionate desire. The technique takes the spectator painfully close to the troubled man, creating an impression of a strong inner conflict. In the last shot, the man is shown standing his back towards the camera. This is another technique of invisibility, employing a gesture of turning away and thus hiding the face. Filming the protagonist standing with his back to the camera without giving any external reason is a strong visualisation of an inner experience that results in turning away from the world.

The man's motionless body, the camera movement, silence and the slow rhythm direct the affective charge towards pressing anxiety which feeds on the pressure created in the narrative. He is shown to continue with gambling and risking his reputation that has been carefully constructed in the earlier scenes. However, there is also a moment of his being self-confident enough to take the risk. This presence of possibilities for simultaneous intensities produces a grab, involving not

only the unbearable depressivity but also the dramatic potentiality to develop towards what is not yet known.

The nearly claustrophobic office environment figures in several of these films, and it is also crucial in the setup sequence of *Choke*. Here, too, self-examination and voice-over monologues are employed: a close-up shows a young man – the protagonist – with an ironic smile on his face, and then an office room where an AA type meeting is to start. The voice-over narrates what the young man thinks about the situation, the others and himself. He describes the bizarre sexual acts the participants of the meeting have performed due to their addiction. Simultaneously, the camera moves in the office space, filming the faces of the members of the group. The grab of the scene stems from curiosity and shock of the intimate secrets, in stark contrast to how the addicts look like: completely normal everyman types, mostly middle-class adults, chatting with each other in the office. The movement of the camera, tracking past the persons whose intimate stories of deviance are revealed, enforces the impression of emotional detachment, of indifferent passing by and also alienation from oneself and others that characterize the protagonist's experi-



Montage produces an impression of abandonment and shame in *Confessions of a Shopaholic*.

ence focalised here. The scene is a good example of how the “mental machinery” of cinema (Metz, 1982) works through camera movement and montage to enable new relations between what is said and shown. There is certain asynchrony: the impression of intimacy with the addicts invites curiosity, while it is dealt with detachment in respect of situating the spectator.

*Confessions of a Shopaholic*, too, begins with a voice-over monologue. A young woman speaks about her childhood shopping experience of getting only ugly practical things. A childhood trauma in the world of luxury objects is evoked: first, the camera tracks over an abundance of beautiful girls’ shoes in bright colours, which is juxtaposed with a bleak image

of the clumsy shoes of the protagonist. After that, a group of girls in trendy clothes laugh at her. A counter-shot shows her serious face and a shabby beanie in her hair. Through the montage from the other girls in the world of abundance, contrasted to her serious face, the image of her face invites the spectator to resonate with abandonment and shame.

In this film, the affective stems from the way the consumer goods are presented as shiny and bright, through lighting and saturated colours. Addiction is about fascination with things, the visual style of the film foregrounding material abundance that resonates with the fashion magazines and advertisements. Here, the inviting and seductive consumer products become central to the film’s affective charge. Such a

mode is to be found in other types of films, too. I shall discuss this theme in the following section.

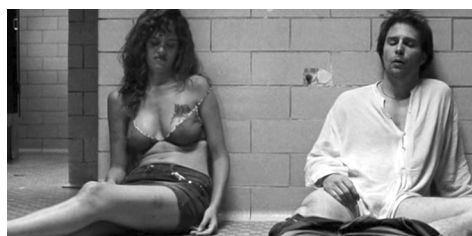
*Disconnections: the objects of addiction*

The intoxicating world of luxury objects of consumption creates a sense of vertigo, a disorientation that repeats in other films' scenes of blinking, inviting neon lights of gambling venues and eroticised bodies in sensuous lighting. For example, the *Diary of a Sex Addict* presents an atmospheric, music video-style scene with close-ups of facial features and eroticised body parts of females in dim coloured lights: mouth, neck and legs. A reminiscent dream mode is employed in the opening scene of *Going for Broke*: there is a long shot of a garage examined by the police, camera flash, superimposed with blinking neon lights of a casino, a lingering, soft music combined with the inviting sounds of gambling machines. The scene ends with an image of a woman's hand turning a car key and her leaning backwards in the car, in darkness, suggesting a suicide (or suicide attempt) by car fumes. These scenes (in *Going for*

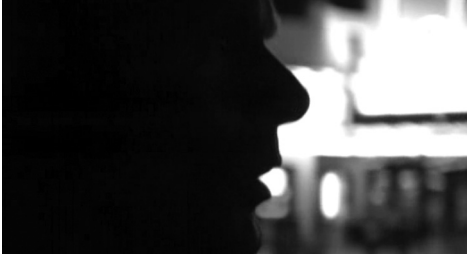
*Broke* and *Even Money* also featuring the opening credits) employ superimposition, tracking shots and low-key music. These evoke a sense of open, endless space where the haunting and sensual, lingering impressions resonate with the "altered states" of the addiction in question – the spinning and blinking of game paraphernalia, sensualised female bodies and shiny consumer goods.

Showing the object of addiction as both desirable and associated with disconnections in social relationships is a central device in creating the impression of problematic desire. In *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, the desire for things is coupled with a theme of disconnection: the protagonist passes by a young man who casts an intrigued gaze at her. She appears to meet his gaze, but is then shown to look at the window display of a department store.

The theme is more explicit in a scene of *Choke* where the male protagonist has sex with a female fellow member of the meeting in a public toilet while the others are sitting in the meeting. The bleak deadpan perspective, cold greens and hard lighting



Aesthetics of disconnection in a scene of a couple having sex in a public toilet in *Choke*.



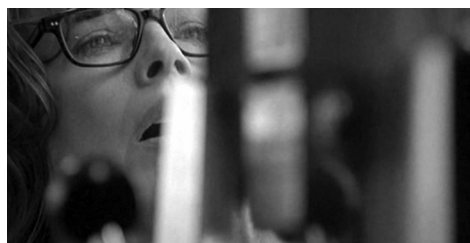
The montage in the *Diary of a Sex Addict* scene creates a sense of objectivation of the female and lack of reciprocity.

that creates unflattering shadows over the woman's body, are in a stark contrast to the lights, angles and colour toning used to present something as desirable. The body movements are tugging, mechanical and jerky, and the man does other things (such as writes a note) during the sex act, all implying a complete lack of deeper emotions. The scene ends in his orgasm which he describes as "sweet nothingness". The grab in the scene has to do with titillation about an obscene scene, which the main subject's voice-over narrates as strangely pleasurable, while what is visualised is brought to the fore in an unpleasant way. There is complexity as the addicts are presented simultaneously as making decisions and as victims of their desire.

The image of a female body in a harsh, cold, blue-greenish light recurs in the *Diary of a Sex Addict* showing a woman in a tight dress standing alone by a neon-lit street corner, appearing as a prostitute. The profile of the man, unrecognisable, is

shown in the darkness of the car, while the woman is observed as if from the cars passing by, at an objectifying distance. Constantly changing camera locations show the woman from different distances, edited in a machinic rhythm that adds to the scene's emotional coldness. Here, too, the technique produces a sense of emotional distance as lack of reciprocity. The montage posits the man in the dark as the one who watches and desires, but in a way that is rather mechanical, worn out and cold.

These scenes employ varied techniques of organising the images of "objects" of addiction in time: first, as seductive, and soon thereafter as unattainable, cold or repellent. This structure is amply visible in *Even Money*. Among the first images of the film a dreamy mode of presenting the casino is employed: slow piano music combines with the electric casino sounds, the camera soon tracking above a roulette table, following its spinning, vertiginous rhythms and the rhythmic movements of handling cards around the card table. The



The desperate yearning for the unattainable in *Even Money*.

scene is soon followed by images of elderly, bodily deformed or disabled people by the slot machine. The camera passes them by, moving along in the casino space until it stops behind the back of a woman playing a slot machine, lit by pale blue-green neon lighting.

The next image shows the woman's face from a close distance, as she prays for the machine to let her win. There is weirdness in the grave gestures and tone of the praying voice. The experience of being addicted is charged with strange, desperate interaction with the machine, implying something beyond what can be seen directly.

### Discussion: The inner experience of addiction itself?

Recurrent conventions of cinematic construction of an anomalous mental state through techniques that are not directly recognizable but still normative, points towards cultural ways of imagining what addiction is about. These can be related to what Keane (2003) discusses as the concern of individual autonomy in modernity, of self-interrogation and surveillance, which also underlines the American tradition of the AA and the self-help discourse. This is especially clear as the monologues are constantly spoken from the point of view of a recovery context. This, as noted

by Sedgwick (1992, p. 582) marks a profound shift in the addicts' subjectivity, from being the *subject* of their "own perceptual manipulations" into being the *object* of institutional definitions that "presume to know them better than they can know themselves". However, the analysis also shows how cinema may produce what Herzog (2008, p. 65) calls affective expressions which are not always strictly coded and which have a potential of thinking beyond the normative, often quite rigid descriptions of what it means to be addicted (Malins, 2004).

To analyse how cinema as an audiovisual medium constructs an anomalous experience, one may start from looking at what the images represent directly. The films show a moderately affluent and educated middle-class white American lifestyle. The actors are dressed and acting as everyman types from young adults to middle-aged men and women with families, situated in the urban environment of homes, meeting rooms and streets. The bodies are marked in the normalcy of the white, middle-class "self". It is not necessarily the directly visible symbols that create the affective grasp and emotional tensions, but the ways of showing them.

Pisters (2008) proposes that cinematic accounts of anomalous mental states (in her work, schizophrenia) themselves reso-



nate with the experiences associated with those mental states. As far as the embodied spectator becomes engaged into the cinematic time-space relations, rhythms and intensities, being addicted is not represented but felt. In this sense, what is at work is what Metz has referred to as “mental machinery” and what Manovich has termed as the “externalization of the psyche”.

On the one hand, the shift of presenting addictive behaviour as motivated by internal rather than external forces, proposed by Herd (1986), seems crucial in these setup sequences. The “techniques of the invisible” are at work in the confessional monologues where the anomalous inner experiences are presented through cinematography that brings the subject unusually close to the viewer, in the facial close-ups but also in extreme close-ups showing relatively intimate parts of the body (the mouth, the hands and the eyes) as well as through sounds of breathing and the intimate tones of voice. The techniques that foreground the spectator’s proximity with the addict subject are central to the affective charge and the intense grab from the viewer. Here, too, it is important to notice that these are not abject bodies. Despite the attempt to explicate through voice and the microphysiognomy of the face, the bodies also hide and cover in their everydayness or anybody-who-ever-ness.

On the other hand, the idea of internalising the reasons of addictive behaviour could also be challenged. The techniques of the visible can be seen to be at work in the images of the external objects of enjoyment. What matters here is how the films about addictive behaviours resonate with the affective registers of commercial en-

tertainment associated with those behaviours, such as striptease and pornographic films, utilised in the sexually suggestive cinematography and eroticised bodies in the films on sex addiction; the blinking, spinning and beeping game arcades and casino entertainment that invite the spectator to feel their enticement in the films on gambling; and the shopping mall and advertisements in context of excessive shopping. The films employ modes of such mediated consumer practices to engage the spectator with the objects of addiction and the experience of addictive desire, which appears as mediated itself, and as such, a part of consumer practices.

These modes, however, include registers quite opposite to the logic of enjoyment. The movements of spinning wheels and the blink of the casino light are followed with impressions of desperation instead of success; sex lacks emotional connection; and excessive shopping becomes nearly nauseating. The world of objects turns emotionally cold through such techniques as the objectifying and bleak deadpan shots, silences, the machinic camera movements as well as the gestures, positions and movements between bodies. The affective charge of the techniques of disconnection approaches the uncanniness of becoming a non-subject. This underlines the concern for autonomy as central to the addiction discourses in late modern affluent societies (Keane, 2003; Sulkunen, 2007). At times, the theme of disconnection and asynchrony approaches the problematics of fear, which nevertheless remains rather inexplicit or undefined, in contrast to the more explicit and abject imagery that signals danger in the images of substance-based addictions.



Thus, the cinematic techniques of the films are rather subtle in comparison to those applied to the imaging of madness or drug use (Cherry, 2009; Pisters, 2008; Powell, 2007). By shifting the emotional clout of the images through such techniques as montage, movement, duration and angle, the films enable virtual relations beyond the visible. There is something that cannot be directly seen but is sensed as a resonance, or atmosphere. However, it is important to note that the cinematic techniques that create a sense of detachment also shift towards an open space that could be called a “space of indetermination”, to modify Deleuze’s (2005) phrasings. The key here is movement, implied both through the material movements (camera movement, distances) and movement of thought, such as in the scene of *Owning Mahowny*, where the gambler sits motionless in deep thought, while the camera tracks towards him in the space; or in the scene where the gambler confesses in front of an audience, and extreme close-ups of details of her face are shown when she stands still, opening up a space of thinking.

The films are capable of moving and shifting the affective register very swiftly from one impression to another. There are potentially many affective modes that could be focussed in such films. One important affective register central to the affective logic in these films but left out of this study, would be laughter. Two of the films discussed here come close to the genre of comedy (*Choke* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic*), but elements of laughter are present in almost all the films: in the first scene of the *Diary of a Sex Addict*, as the protagonist is named Horn(y); the black

humour of *Choke*, where the sex addicts, attending a meeting, narrate their horrific deeds; race-and-betting rednecks sitting in the slick office in *Owning Mahowny*; and *Choke* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* celebrating irony towards the AA. Comedy is mainly constructed through dialogue and props, but it could be an interesting topic for a further study.

## Conclusion

I have analysed the opening scenes of recent American fiction films on “new”, behavioural addictions to sex, gambling and shopping, which have increasingly become themes in mainstream cinema as their visibility has risen in other professional and lay discourses. The recurring tropes of cinematic expression in the opening scenes of these films may be called affective modes which aim to grab the spectator into the world of being addicted.

Through the technique of monologue (for example, inner monologue such as voice-over, interview, AA meeting or therapeutic meeting), the films emphasise intimacy and exploration of the self, central to the late modern strategies of managing addiction problems. The films also grab the viewer to resonate with the addictive experience by employing audiovisual modes of consumer cultures which are associated with these behaviours, such as an aesthetic of pornography and advertisements, which is a powerful way of engaging the spectator affectively.

However, in presenting the objects of addiction as sensuous and desirable, but also as problematic, decayed and wearing off of the pleasure, the affective modes produce impressions of both desiring the objects but also being worn out by them. These

techniques also shift the experience of being addicted towards more subversive, non-normative affective modes of indeterminacy, such as in the scenes that present the addicts thinking.

**Declaration of Interest** None.

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## NOTES

- 1 In addition to these films, a great many films not situated in the field of mainstream fiction film have been released on the subject of sex addiction, such as *I am a Sex Addict* (Zahedi, 2005); *Sex, lies, obsession* (Barr, 2001); and *Too much sex* (Ainsworth, 2000). Contemporary American cinema appears as one of the most eager to deal with the theme of sex addiction. Sex addiction has also been featured in other countries such as Canada (*Borderline* by Charlebois, 2008) and Spain (*Diary of a nymphomaniac* by Molina, 2008). The recent UK film *Shame* (McQueen, 2011) has also been associated with sex addiction. Films on gambling have been recently released as well, such as *Confessions of a gambler* (Lane, 2007) and *The Collector* (Olsen, 2004).
- 2 *Love sick: Secrets of a sex addict* (Harvey, 2008) would also belong to this group but it was not available for the study.
- 3 However, for a more treatment-oriented perspective on gambling, see Dement (1999) and Griffiths (2004).
- 4 For a concise discussion on how the affective can be related to the representational, see Paasonen (2012).
- 5 On the concept of resonance in the context of affective media culture, see Paasonen (2012). In the models of the spectator's embodied mind, the spectator becomes emotionally and intellectually affected by the film. See, for example, Sobchack (2004) and Powell (2007). Furthermore, the ways we think and feel – even most intimately – always include social interaction. On the theme of the secret and addiction in films, see Sulkunen (2007).

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