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Gaining Perspectives on Our Lives: Moods and Aesthetic Experience

Susanne Schmetkamp [1,2,3]

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Abstract This article examines the role of moods in aesthetic experience by focussing on film. It considers specifically the function of moods in relation to narrative and aesthetic perspectives which a film provides and which recipients are invited to adopt. I distinguish superficial transitory moods from profound enduring ones. This differentiation is important with regard to the question why moods in film matter and why they are different from emotions. I will focus on Lars von Trier's film "Melancholia" and claim that the moods of the leading characters can at one and the same time count as moods and perspectives on the world. Their moods are strongly connected to how they perceive their world, evaluate it, and "are" in the world. By being put into a mood that assails human beings holistically, viewers get acquainted with a perspective of a fictional character in an encompassing manner that includes mind and body. However, it will be discussed whether the viewers feel profound or superficial moods when engaging in the moods of the film and the characters and whether they are infatuated or can remain aesthetic distance.

Keywords Moods · Emotions · Aesthetic experience · Film · Perspectivity · Empathy · Melancholia · Lars von Trier

1 Introduction: The Role of Moods in Aesthetics

As David E. Wellbery has shown in his influential article about the German term *Stimmung* (English attunement, mood, or atmosphere) as an aesthetic concept, its

✉ Susanne Schmetkamp
susanne.schmetkamp@unibas.ch

[1] Department of Philosophy and Media Studies, University of Basel, Steinengraben 5, 4051 Basel, Switzerland

[2] Present address: University of Siegen, Adolf-Reichwein-Str. 2, 57068 Siegen, Germany

[3] Hardstrasse 325 8005, Zürich, Switzerland

history goes back to the eighteenth century (Wellbery 2003). Notwithstanding its rather short history, the term has undergone considerable conceptual change. Whereas it metaphorically always refers to musical attunement, its use and meaning in aesthetics has turned from a mere formal condition of aesthetic experience as such – the "proportionate accord of the faculties", capable of being universally communicated, as Kant described it (Kant 1914, § 19) – into a more subjective concept referring to a particular affective personal state, or more precisely to the affective impact of an aesthetic object, its producers, or its recipients.[1] This paper focuses on the meaning of *Stimmung* as a subjective affective state within an aesthetic experience, rather than the broader one of aesthetic unity.[2]

"Stimmungen" or moods in aesthetics, have been ascribed to human beings as well as non-human entities, above all to landscapes. Compared to acute complex emotions like anger or fear, which can be broadly defined as having a particular object and a more or less limited course, moods such as melancholy or happiness are more diffuse, global, and enduring. Moreover, they seem to be not about any discrete intentional object or at least not about an acutely perceived one. *Stimmungen* are about life or the world in general. Whereas there is a lively discussion about the nexus of interactions between emotions and art, especially with regard to film or literature (i.e. Smith 1997; Grodal 1997; Sobchack 2004; Plantinga 2009), very little has been written about moods and their role in aesthetic experience, especially in cognitivistic film theory. However, even here there seems to be a "mood-turn" (cf. Plantinga 2012; Carroll 2003; Smith 2003; Sinnerbrink 2012). Notwithstanding the paucity of discussion on this topic, the nature and function of moods in the aesthetic realm is of substantial interest. Empirically it is widely recognised that our environment is able to influence our mood. We can feel safe and secure in a particular landscape or in a building, not from a practical point of view concerning safety precautions, but from an affective perspective. The same counts for artefacts and artistic objects such as paintings, music, poems, or film. They have the capacity to engender a particular mood in the viewer, listener or reader. Especially film is predestined for investigation in its relation to moods, with regard to the expressivity of images and other aesthetic devices such as music, sound, lighting which create a specific atmosphere and evoke particular moods (Sinnerbrink 2012. 149).

This article examines the role of moods in aesthetic experience by focussing on film. It considers specifically the function of moods in relation to narrative and aesthetic perspectives which a film provides and which recipients are invited to adopt. Though one could problably claim that almost every artwork more or less expresses or evokes a particular mood, film[3] is obviously more laden with moods and it is more likely that it intends to provoke moods than for example a work of conceptual art. In its spatiality, film is comparable with music and architecture, in its kinetical dimension with dance, and in its temporality again with music. In its narrativity it is of course very close to

[1] If we say that an aesthetic object has an emotion or a mood it is meant metaphorically: The object does not *have* the affect itself but represents and expresses it.

[2] These two implications are, however, not seperate. When an artwork succeeds in inducing a mood in a viewer that is crucial for aesthetic appreciation, it might also lead to an "aesthetic resonance" with the work as a whole.

[3] I use the concepts "film", "movie" and "moving image" interchangeably. The differences are not relevant to the present investigation, which focuses on fictional narrative films.

literature or theatre. Maybe it is exact this plurality why moods in film are of such interest since they can be evoked in so many ways.

Film is an intense and immersive medium, which is able to catch viewers' attention and arouse a particular mood in them by using different techniques, above all editing, music, sound, light, and colour. When we watch a melodrama or a film noir whith all its properties (such as long takes, dramatic music, or dark colours) we enter a very different, for instance *noirish* mood than when we view a comedy with its funny soundtrack or short takes. To mention another example, a black-and-white film expresses quite a different mood than a coloured one. The German film "The White Ribbon" by Michael Haneke, for instance, does not just tell us a story set a year before the commencement of World War I. It actually *expresses* the particular moody impact of these past events by using black-and-white images, a voice over, and very calm and precise geometric images. It thereby conveys, on the one hand, the impression of historical distance and evokes, on the other hand, a mood of oppression. "*Stimmung*", as Robert Sinnerbrink writes, "encompasses both the expressiveness of [a] film and the affective responsiveness of [a] viewer: it designates an expressive presentation of a world of singular individuals, places and things imbued with aesthetic significance." (Sinnerbrink 2012, 149).

Regarding the relations between moods and art, or film more specifically, at least two questions arise. One is: What is the difference between moods which human beings feel in their everyday life and moods expressed or induced by artworks? Plantinga (2012) distinguishes between art moods and human moods: art moods are moods which we metaphorically ascribe to art and which are elicited by art. Using the example of Lars von Trier's drama MELANCHOLIA, I will show how a particular film uses the impact of "moods" narratively and aesthetically. I will thereby discuss in which way art moods can contribute to our understanding of the value of moods in general. My main thesis here is that moods are the *expressive* equivalent of perspectives, that is, of how we perceive and are in the world, and that "art moods" help to acquaint the audience with particular probably *new* perspectives towards the world in a very intense way: Moods in film are *condensed* since the filmmaker has made a prefocusing choice which moods she wants to create. She uses particular "cues" that sustain affective and emotional responses (Smith 2003). By cueing moods film enables the viewer to focus on and to comprehend how someone sees, feels, and is in the world. Moreover, by being put into a mood that assails human beings holistically, they also comprehend a perspective in an encompassing manner. At this point, it is already important to mention though, that I do not claim that viewers are moved "away" from or abandon their own perspective in the filmic experience. Generally viewers are able to differentiate between their own perspective or their own mood and the perspective or mood that is evoked by the film. We can speak of a double perspectivity by which viewers become aware of how someone could be and feel without thereby misinterpreting the expressed moods as their own and therefore without being moved totally away and being lost in the mood of the film.

A second and follow-up question is: What do we actually learn from an investigation of moods and art that we do not already know from the parallel research about *emotions* and art? My conjecture is that, insofar as moods differ from emotions in some crucial aspects, they of course also have a different significant import than emotions do. They have, for instance, a basic function since they prime us from the very beginning of a

film for the particular aesthetic and affective experience, the understanding of the genre and the narrative, and prepare us for specific complex emotions (cf. Smith 2003, 38).[4] Beneath that art moods enable us to become familiar with a more holistic affective state and its effect on our perspectives.

The structure of my paper is as follows: in a first introductory section I define the concept of mood in general to provide a conceptual base for the rest of the argument. I distinguish, on the one hand, moods from emotions and, on the other hand, propose additional differentiations within the category of moods. Furthermore I distinguish superficial transitory moods from profound enduring ones. The second section gives an impression of Lars von Trier's film MELANCHOLIA, in which the significance of moods is particularly evident. I will claim that the moods of the leading characters can at the same time count as their perspectives on the world. Their moods are strongly connected to how they perceive their world, evaluate it, and "are" in the world. In the third section I therefore examine the notion of perspective and its relation to moods. In a fourth section I argue for the importance of moods. Finally, I sum up the main aspects of the investigation.

2 Moods in Comparison to Emotions

Moods are usually distinguished from other affective states, such as complex emotions or emotional dispositions (cf. Voss 2004; Goldie 2002; Ben-Ze'ev 2000; Hufendiek 2015). Complex emotions – like fear, shame, or envy – usually have a particular object (intentionality), show more or less temporal progress (development and duration), motivate to act in a particular way (behaviour), feel in a certain way (feeling), and they imply an evaluation of the situation (judgement). When a person is jealous, for example, she is jealous *of* someone, and this jealousy reveals something about the object, herself, and how she evaluates her world in a clear-cut given situation with regard to the object of her emotion. She might feel upset, her body might tense up and she may be motivated to act according to the jealousy triggered by an object or an event.[5]

Moods, in comparison, are rather diffuse. They can exist without triggering any specific actions, and they have only a vague intentionality, which means that they do not refer to a specific object but rather to the world at large or life in total. This does not mean that moods do not have any causal trigger or reason. A mood can be initiated by an event or can be the lingering echo of an emotion. However, moods are prereflecitive and more passive, which means that we might not become aware of the trigger or even the mood when it actually occurs but rather find ourselves in a mood without even knowing exactly how we got there.

Whereas emotions can be considered eruptive peaks of our general affective state, moods can be characterised as more steady and consistent, pervading our affective state. Acute jealousy generally does not last long, it rather has a narrative dramaturgy,

[4] However, Smith subordinates moods too strongly to emotions proper instead of recognizing them as autonomous affective states which have a central aesthetic role for their own. Cf. Smith 2003, 38 and 41 pp.

[5] Of course there is more to be said about emotions, for instance about their narrativity (cf. Voss 2004; Goldie 2002). However, for my argumentation here it might be sufficient just to mention the main components of emotions.

as Christiane Voss (2004, 217) has shown: it has a beginning, a climax and a decay, and it fades away after that. However, emotions like jealousy might convert into long-lasting moods, such as permanent tenseness or nervousness. In case of moods it is often not clear where they come from and how they evolve. For instance, when we are in a glum or depressed mood, everything is tinged by sadness, darkness, and exhaustion and there seems to be no end in sight. Thus, moods are global, whereas emotions are focal. While an acute emotion such as fear has an intentional object that means danger and that affords me to flee, the mood of anxiety is a fundamental affective state that permeates our lives, albeit only in the background. Moods are more encompassing and can, as mentioned, concern the world as a whole. They have a world-disclosing capacity, as especially Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have argued. A mood is a modus by which a way of being is disclosed and a particular kind of knowledge is imparted. This is not propositional knowlegde, but rather an implicit, intuitive, and non-propositional kind of knowledge (Wellbery 2003, 725; cf. also Gabriel 2012).[6] Regarding the impact of moods in film, Plantinga reminds us of the famous "heresy of paraphrase" whereby verbal descriptions are not sufficient to describe what we feel, think, or understand when watching a film, reading a book or looking at a painting. The same counts for moods in general: descriptions cannot substitute the real thing (Plantinga 2012, 463; cf. also Brooks 1956).

Moods can, however, also bias our perception in an arational and unrealistic way, for instance our perception of time and space. In a boring mood everything seems to last for ever, whereas in a happy mood, time seems to go by too quickly. Even more, depending on the mood, different aspects of objects and persons come into focus. If someone is in a grumpy mood, other people seem to be hostile, or, if not, their good mood is even more annoying. Instead of observing green lights, the awareness centres exclusively on the red ones, and so on. It is part of the phenomenolgy of moods that they do not only disclose one's personal way of seeing and being but transform one's entire experience of the world.

Concerning the plurality and variety of moods, I propose to differentiate further between *profound moods* or, as Angelika Krebs (in this issue) calls them, *enduring moods* on the one hand and *superficial* or *transitory moods* on the other hand. Without rating one over the other for now, I claim that the first category includes deep, long-lasting and existentially relevant moods, whereas the second category involves something akin to what the German concept "Laune" refers to, or what in English is meant by the saying "being or not being in the mood". According to this distinction, profound moods are consequential and serious affective states which tinge our whole perspective and affect every step in our life, sometimes for a very long time. They thereby influence our character, our decisions, our form of life. Krebs dinstinguishes here even further between existential and personal moods: existential enduring moods concern our being-in-the-world as humans as such, for example being mortal and feeling existential anxiety regarding this. Personal enduring moods

[6] This epistemic impact can also be attributed to emotions. However, it is important that knowledge has to be understood here in a broader sense than as justified true believe: A broader concept of a so called non-propositional knowledge also implies something like practical knowledge (how to do something), empathic knowledge (how other's feel), and phenomenal experiential knowledge (cf. Jacobson 1996; Gabriel 2012; Rowe 2009).

concern the circumstances of the individual life: a person with a very ill loved-one might not only feel emotions like fear or anger with regard to the other's health, but is presumably in a particular mood of worry and anxiety.

Other examples of enduring personal as well as existential moods are depressive moods, deep sorrow and mourning, as well as melancholy, but also profound happiness or the feeling of harmony and unity. In contrast to profound moods, superficial, transitory moods are short-lived affective states and less influential with regard to our overall perspective on the world. Expressions like "being grumpy in the morning" or "to get out on the wrong side of bed" reflect this short-term impact of moods. Such superficial moods moods might not even be triggered by any event or need not have to have any reason or specific cause. They are just there and go away as they came. In contrast, profound moods like sadness have a cause or reason, for example the death of a beloved. Just like emotions, enduring sadness that pervades everything also did once have an intentional object, for instance the death of the beloved person, but the intentionality might lie far behind. The emotion of sorrow caused by the death has faded into the mood of sadness. Conversely a mood can predispose a person toward a certain emotional state, as Greg Smith has pointed out with regard to the role of moods in film. According to his "mood-cue approach," moods in film therefor have an orienting function. By engendering a mood, for instance through specific technical "cues" like music, editing, costume design etc., film predisposes the viewer to experience a particular emotion. Thus, mood and emotion sustain each other (Smith 2003, 42). I would add that some moods are more compatible with particular emotions than others. In the case of a person who is in a sad mood, the emotion of sorrow might arise sooner than in the case of a happy person. This is important, because it transfers the manipulative power of the film to the particular affective situation of the respective viewer. Furthermore I would agree with Sinnerbrink's critique that Smith's approach still "subordinates mood to the discrete emotional states generated in response to character action, narrative situation or generic convention." (Sinnerbrink 2012, 153).

There is one last crucial difference between profound and superficial moods. Whereas the latter are mostly easy to change – for example when the "morning grouch" enters a funny group full of laughing people who, through contagion, turn his bad mood into a good one – the former endures ostensibly or subtlely. In other words, superficial moods are ephemeral and fluctuate, whereas existential moods are deeply rooted and can come to constitute the foundation of our individual personality (Wellbery 2003, 712). All these distinctions are important for our following investigation of the role of moods in aesthetic engagement. Hence, one might ask: What kind of moods does film elicit? Superficial or profound moods?

With regard to aesthetics, moods gain a particular significance. Art is a realm of affective condensation and affective mediation. When we watch a film, we encounter a specific framework in which a particular affective character is already established and condensed (Wellbery 2003, 726 pp.). As Carroll (2011) has pointed out, the affective field of a film is prefocused by narrative as well as aesthetic strategies and technologies. Dramatic music brings the reception into a quite other line than funny music. By so doing, it influences

the viewer to feel particular emotions or moods. It is worth mentioning, that this is certainly true for conventional genres, whereas arthouse films might pursue a more complex strategy as the discussion below of the subversive approach of the film MELANCHOLIA shows.

Film is predestined to engender moods and atmospheres.[7] We often speak of a "sad" or a "happy" film. By doing so, we do not mean that a film literally has this mood but that it expresses it. Thus, we use those descriptions metaphorically (cf. Scruton 1997). This is why Plantinga distinguishes art moods from human moods. Human moods are moods which humans literally have. Art moods are those we ascribe metaphorically to art or to fictional characters. Art moods, however, can elicit real human moods in the viewer.

Film is a highly multisensual medium. Not only does it offer viewers a narrative plot, it also adresses them through a plurality of formal and stylistic means. It does not only represent something by telling the story of different characters but also *expresses* particular affective states by means of the images, music, sounds, camera perspectives, light, props, and colour. That said, film challenges recipients not only cognitively, insofar as they have to follow the story and its emotional cues, as cognitivistic, neoformalistic film theories stress (Bordwell 1985, Grodal 1997, Smith 1997). As phenomenological film theories emphasise (Sobchack 2004; Voss 2013), film also has the capacity, or one could say the power, to *touch* its viewers somatically. When we watch a *moving image* we are literally moved: we feel something in our body. A romantic comedy can make us feel eased whereas a melodrama might oppress us, so that we literally sink into our armchair and feel weighed down. The manipulative character of film related to this power is a commonplace. Especially genres which work with suspense, such as crime or horror films, employ those means which amplify the moods of anxiety or tension in order to intensify the cinematic experience and corporal immersion. By using those means, such films employ the contagious character that, for instance, music and montage can have. Naturally other, more self-referential films – such as arthouse movies – play with the media options to evoke specific moods. This provokes the question whether films, being enormously expressive on different levels, are always manipulative and dissolve aesthetic distance, or, on the contrary, how distance can be preserved. This of course depends on the extent to which a film also implements meta-reflexivity. An example of a very mood-laden and at the same time "cine-reflective" film is MELANCHOLIA, written and directed by the Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier.[8]

[7] The German word "Stimmung" refers not only to moods of a human being or an artwork but can also refer to the *atmosphere* of an environment, landscape, building etc. "Atmosphere" is a crucial concept, especially in German phenomenology, for example in relation to affective states or to aesthetic experience. The German philosopher Hermann Schmitz defines emotions as atmospheres which pervade space and time and are transformed by subjects into private emotions. (Schmitz 1998).

[8] Lars von Trier can be mentioned in a row with two other contemporary arthouse filmmakers, namely Michael Haneke and David Lynch. All three show a fascination with cinematic moods. At the same time they cultivate a cinema of "confusion" by using paradoxical strategies. They combine diegetic absorption and confusing confrontation and by so doing reveal both the aesthetic significance and the manipulative power of film. Cf. Loren and Metelmann 2013; Sinnerbrink 2012, 151).

3 How an Expressive Movie Expresses Moods: Melancholia

The film Melancholia (Von Trier 2011) is in many regards remarkable and helpful for our investigation. It is at one and the same time extremely expressive and artificial, immersive and distancing. Lars von Trier opens his film with some aesthetically ambitious and impressive shots and demanding techniques. Following Sinnerbrink, an opening scene is not only an introduction into the story. Moreover the thereby expressed and created mood has a "disclosive" function. It reveals the cinematic world as such: it is a grounding mood that will pervade the whole movie and attune us "to the various tonal qualities of the narrative, its characters, its generic aspects and so on." (Sinnerbrink 2012, 156). By using super-slow-motion, freeze-images, music by Richard Wagner, and pictorial quotations of classical paintings like *Hunters in the Snow* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder and *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais, Lars von Trier draws on images and sounds which could be considered metaphors and symbols both for the human condition with all its diseases and for the looming apocalypse within the diegesis. The opening sequence is thereby not only an example for the disclosive function of cinematic moods but also a typical silistic means often used by Lars von Trier, in order to invite the viewer to make a more "lyrical-associative experience" (Grodal 2004, 134 pp.). The scene evokes "saturated feelings" which are at first glance independent from any narrative or any actions (Grodal 2004, 134). They rather enable a pure aesthetic and affective immersion though at the same time preparing the viewer for particular affective experiences. We can speak here furthermore of an aesthetically autonomous atmosphere that has an aesthetic function of its own. However, in contrast to mere mainstream-movies – such as action movies – the sequence provides "an extraordinarily strong cognitive challenge", and, as I would add, also an expressive challenge by the very using of cinematic quotations from other classical movies, genres, or art works, and exceptional images and montage.

The film is about a depressive, melancholic woman named Justine, her rational sister Claire and the ominous planet "Melancholia", which is approaching Earth.[9] In the first of two main acts, Justine (played by Kirsten Dunst) is presented as someone who is obviously overwhelmed by the world. The world with its day-to-day challenges seems too much for her, insofar as she is a tremendously sensitive character. She reacts with irony, hate, refusal, or cold indifference towards her environment. Every film sequence in which she appears is tainted by oppressiveness. Close-ups on her pale face and her tired eyes engender an atmosphere of gravity and crammedness. Sinnerbrink classifies the moody impacts of particular scenes as "episodic" by which the atmosphere is repeated "in order to replenish or sustain" the moody effect (Sinnerbrink 2012, 157).

However, during the film her character and attitude seem to change substantially. The closer the planet approaches, the more balanced and relaxed Justine becomes. In the end, the planet seems to represent Justine and vice versa. As if she has been seduced, she lies devoted and other-worldly in the light of the planet "Melancholia." At the end the intimidating though intimate planet and Justine literally merge.[10] In contrast

[9] It belongs to the genre which Grodal calls „passive melodrama": stories in which the characters are passive victims of fate (Grodal 2004, 137 and 149). However, Melancholia also gives room for active change, at least in the case of the depressive Justine who becomes more active the nearer the planet comes.

[10] As Grodal has shown „self-sacrifice"is a typical motif in Lars von Trier's melodramas (Grodal 2004, 137).

to Justine, Claire (played by Charlotte Gainsbourg) is cool and self-confident in the first act but becomes nervous and almost hysterical in view of the approaching planet. Whereas she tries to help Justine at the beginning, it is she who needs help and solace as the planet is threatening Earth. With such narratively motivated changes also the moods attributed to the characters are modified. The affective impact that accompanies such changes can be defined as "transitional moods" (Sinnerbrink 2012, 157). In its expressive dimension the film provokes the interpretation that in the end Claire does not merge with, but is instead destroyed by the planet.

Justine and Claire are therefor two diametrically opposed alternatives of seeing and being in the world or, in brief, of two perspectives. To put it in a nutshell, Justine has a depressed and solipsistic perspective towards the world, whereas Claire has an optimistic and caring one. Their perspectives are interrelated with their moods and vice versa. This is especially true for profound existential and enduring personal moods, since a perspective also implies more than just a current standpoint regarding something. Profound existential and enduring personal moods, metaphorically also entail an existentially relevant point of view towards the world and the way of seeing and being in the world.

This requires that we clarify the concept of perspective. If moods work by the disclosure of worlds – i.e. real worlds and "cinematic worlds" (Sinnerbrink 2012, 148) – they also have something to do with perspectives, that is with our standpoint towards the world or, in other words, how we perceive and evaluate the world. My thesis is that moods are expressions of such perspectives.

4 Ways of Perceiving the World: The Relation between Perspectives and Moods

"Perspective" has at least two main meanings, one technical, the other metaphorical.[11]

(1) Technically, the perspective of a film is first of all the *optical* perspective of the camera, the actual standpoint of the camera in relation to an object. The camera might thereby represent, for example, the visual point of view of a protagonist (subjective perspective or point-of-view shot) or an objective point of view. "Perspective" in the technical sense may also extend beyond the optical dimension. Even the sound can be considered carrying a particular perspective. Some sounds are synchronous, others do not match the frame and its content, for example when the sound anticipates a dialogue which is not yet represented in the image. We can therefor, secondly, also speak of an *acoustic* perspective. And thirdly, there is the *narrative* perspective of a film (first-person-narrator, omniscient narrator etc.), that is from which narrative point of view the story is told. Of course the different narrative point of views are often represented or expressed through the image and/or the sound.

(2) As a philosophical term "perspective" means something else, though it metaphorically deploys the original meaning of the standpoint of a subject in relation to an object. In this sense "perspective" means a way of seeing the world or being-in-the-world of individuals. In this regard, the concept of "perspective" has some striking

[11] Of course in art history the notion of "central perspective" is also important. I will leave this meaning aside here, though.

accordance with moods, which we have also defined as world-disclosing modes of being. Though not the same, perspectives and moods are strongly connected. According to Berys Gaut, the perspective of a fictional character in a film can be differentiated into a) her "affective perspective on events (how she feels about them), b) a motivational perspective (what she is motivated to do in respect of them), c) an epistemic perspective (what she believes about them)" (Gaut 2006, 263). However, what Gaut identifies here as aspects of a perspective are in many approaches also the components of a complex emotion. Obviously, emotions have much in common with perspective too. My conjecture is that how we react affectively thus has something to do with our individual perspective. However, to distinguish a perspective from an emotion more clearly, I would add to Gaut's list that a perspective also has d) an experiential component (which experiences a person has had so far), and e) an overall evaluative and moral perspective (which high level values and moral principles she has). "Perspective", then, is a more holistic or encompassing concept than "emotion". In this regard perspectives are comparable with attitudes towards the world. However, like emotions and even like mere perception – at least according to phenomenology and the new philosophy of embodiment – a perspective is embodied and embedded (cf. Fingerhut et al. 2013). There is no perspective without a body. It is with our body that we make contact with the world, that is also with the world of a film, which uses different means of bringing something in "as if" modes into life (Merleau-Ponty 1994, 87; Voss 2013; Robinson 2012, 340).

MELANCHOLIA shows perfectly how perspectives and moods are connected. As the film expresses, perspectives are not static but can change depending on the environment and a person's experiences. The approaching planet in the film narrative changes the perspectives, and with them the moods of the sisters, or vice versa. Von Trier uses some classic cinematic techniques to express those different perspectives and the respective moods. Slow-motion, for instance, evokes an intense perception of time different from our ordinary time perceptions in reality; it can express and amplify an atmosphere of time gone by and memory; slow-motion also brings into play a particular mood like nostalgia. Moreover, slow-motion has a contagious effect: it is very likely that the viewer feels a sense of gravity and slowness. By slow-motion, close-ups and long takes we immerse to the melancholic atmosphere of Justine's perspective.

"Immersion" is a mode of absorption. Being confronted with the gaze of a fictional character in a close-up, is very likely to immerse the viewer in the mood of the whole sequence compared to when the viewer sees a face from a distance as is the case in a long shot which distances the viewer from the representation. MELANCHOLIA is a good example where we can *feel* the main character's gravity and nervousness, probably even before we know anything about the narrative (Sobchack 2004). As mentioned with regard to the "heresy of paraphrases," moods enable this already mentioned kind of knowledge which cannot be captured in assertions.[12] Being put in a mood by a film allows us, on a prereflective and prenarrative level, to comprehend a perspective even before we know anything else, for example about the bearer of the very perspective itself. By so doing, moods are a means of their own that tell the story in their own non-propositional way and can thereby support the non-propositional knowledge effect of fictions as such (cf. Gabriel 2012). From disclosive, episodic and transitional moods

[12] Cf. Fn 7.

Sinnerbrink distinguishes "autonomous or enveloping moods", which are not subordinated to setting up a fictional world or sustaining emotionally relevant moods (Sinnerbrink 2012, 161). However, in my view, they still express perspectives, even if in a more encompassing diffuse way. Having said that, we can turn to the assumption that the audience at one and the same time cognitively and somatically understands perspectives by means of moods. How is this possible? Following Wellbery – who recites Moritz Geiger's account – I would claim that we can comprehend the moods in a reflective manner *and* simultaneously resonate their phenomenal quality (Wellbery 2003 723). In other words: we can move with the mood without it sweeping us away (Scruton 1997). The difference should be clear: to be swept away means to be lost in affect, no longer distinguishing between our own emotions or moods and the emotions or moods of the fictional characters. To move *with* a mood means to open oneself to the mood and thereby open to the other's perspective, without being totally absorbed. However, in contrast to other artworks which allow more aesthetic distance, film is known for its manipulative and immersive character. It is, therefore, crucial to investigate the relationship between film and moods, since moods can have a contagious effect, precisely because they are global, encompassing, and diffuse. They pervade a whole situation and therefore more easily infect people who encounter the situation. Given this fact and given the additional fact that film often uses specific technical means which can be extremely contagious, such as fast editing, slow motion, sound effects, or a specific lighting or colour, the question arises: How can we as viewers avoid being manipulated? How can we prevent being swept away affectively? A certain degree of immersion seems to be integral to every film experience. This is due to the complexity of movement through space and time which film shares with other art forms like music and architecture. Being moved by a film somehow necessarily belongs to the concept of the moving image. Thus, is a cinematic experience always more or less contagious?

There are two possible paths to answer these questions: One path leads to the concept of aesthetic experience, which can be defined as involving both commitment *and* distance towards the aesthetic object. This does not mean that total immersion and being-swept-away is necessarily problematic. It is just another kind of experience, not an aesthetic one in the narrow sense. For example, riding roller-coasters is completely immersive. It can be great fun. Moreover, it can lead to a very existential experience during which one feels her own body in a very intensive, proprioceptive way. One might feel tension, fear, or elation. But it is not an aesthetic experience as such. Something else must be added, namely a new way of seeing and feeling as well as some kind of reflection. With regard to moods in the aesthetic experience we can thus conclude that they also exhibit a double structure: the felt mood is both real and mediated. As recipients we can still preserve our personal perspective while simultaneously rehearsing the moods which the film provides. While there are cinematic experiences which intend to evoke total immersion and are thus comparable to the roller-coaster experiences – i.g. action movies – there are other films that integrate estranging strategies which facilitate the mentioned aesthetic distance (Grodal 2004, 136). How we perceive a film depends on how complex it is in offering new ways of seeing, feeling and reflecting, and thereby in providing a particular kind of knowledge. Furthermore, how someone perceives a film depends in a large part on the recipients' perspective, context, and background. Viewers are embedded in their world and can

take on an active role of engagement while still maintaining aesthetic distance. Such a holistic view dissolves the dichotomy of immersion on the one hand and disinterested contemplation on the other (cf. Dewey 2005).

The second path is to distinguish between contagion and adoption. Whereas contagion is a passive process, adoption is more active. If we consider viewers as recipients who *adopt* moods instead of being passively infatuated, then we attribute a more active role to them. Von Trier employs both adoption of a very intense mood and at the same time aesthetic distance. Peculiar to this double intentionality is the prelude of the film described above, which consists of hyper-stylised compositions of super-slow-motion images and *tableaux vivants.* The whole effect is painting-like, but, as Scott Loren and Jörg Metelmann argue, "accompanied by Wagner's prelude, the opening also has the quality of a minutely orchestrated cinematic image-ballet sequence reminiscent of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey.*" (Loren and Metelmann 2013, 164). With its surreal though beautiful, poetic images and the Wagner music, the prelude is very moody and immersive, and in this regard grounding for the whole film. However, at the same time it consists of so many artistic and cultural citations, that it draws a distinct line between a mere moody film – for example a classical Hollywood apocalypse film – and a meta-referential arthouse film. Some of the citations are: Tarkovsky's SOLARIS, Resnais's LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD and Millais's painting OPHELIA. By using such an artificial though attractive style, von Trier from the outset implements the possibility of an intense though aesthetic experience. Trained viewers in particular might be interested in the citations rather than just being moved by the atmosphere. Moreover, the expressed moods are ambiguous, even in the opening part: it does not only anticipate the two sisters' two different perspectives and ways of experiencing the world but already juxtaposes the transformations of these two main characters. Like in his other films Lars von Trier experiments here with the affective impacts that traditionally are linked with respective genres and transforms them (Grodal 2004, 129). The destructive approach of the planet contrasts to the romantic music, just like Justine's melancholy in the first main act of the film contrasts with her elated devotion in the second part. Even though the first main act is much more conventional than the prelude, the expressiveness of the aesthetic means and the expressed moods of the initial part linger and affect the reception of the rest.

5 Why Moods Matter in art

Moods are important in relation to art in two respects: Firstly, given that some artworks thematise or express particular moods, they are central for the understanding and appreciation of the artwork as such. They are an integral part of the work for instance just to recognize whether it is a melodrama or a romantic comedy. Hence, when we watch a film such as MELANCHOLIA, where the protagonists' moods are foregrounded and amplified by particular expressive means, it is only cogent that our aesthetic appreciation must also take the impact of these moods into account. Secondly, artworks such as fictional narrative films have the capacity to evoke specific moods in viewers and acquaint viewers with these moods. My hypothesis is that this might be even truer in the case of profound moods than in the case of emotions. Whereas everybody might be familiar with fear of a life-threatening object (a speeding car for instance), not

everybody might be as familiar with permanent, all-pervasive anxiety, world-weariness, or depression.

While an art mood can provoke a human mood, this is not necessary. We can recognize the sadness of a film without becoming completely sad. However, the more expressive a film is, the more it is likely that viewers enter a corresponding mood. This is especially true for films which use music, sound, and other techniques that affect viewers on different levels, namely somatically, affectively, and cognitively.

Still, after having watched a film, viewers are able to shake off the moods, since they were in the first place art moods of fictional characters or the film as a whole and not the viewers' own primordial moods. Does this mean that a mood elicited by a movie is therefore always superficial and transitory and that it ends very easily as soon as the film is over? Are moods evoked by films something like a "Laune", which is the German term for the expression "(not) being in the mood"? One might guess that the moods that films evoke in viewers cannot be more than superficial, insofar as they are moods of others which we just comprehend: At a first glance it seems that art moods concern the characters, the plot, the film as a whole, but they have no direct impact on the viewers' personal lives, insofar as they are mediated. At a second glance, however, it can be argued that particularly the moods and atmosphere of a film can linger for a very long time. Whereas concrete and acute emotions like fear or anger with regard to what happened in the film might fade away already while watching or at least when the film is over, the affective impact as a whole may leave some traces behind. Carroll (2003, 545) calls this the "emotional spillover". In my view, the mood that the film provokes can remain for a longer time and influence their personal mood and behaviour even beyond the film experience. After a sad film, we may lose our appetite; or, by contrast, we see everything from an elated perspective after a funny or romantic film. In this case we can still speak of a superficial mood. However, as I already argued, films, like other artworks, have the capacity to change our perspective on something and therefore can even have the power to change our beliefs, self-knowledge or even our lives. As I also claimed, moods are the corresponding expression of perspectives. Acquaintance with a mood has the potential to change our perspective on something. An adopted mood can be of existential and personal value, since it provides the viewer with a new way of seeing. My conjecture here is that the nature of moods in aesthetic experience lies in their double orientation which is due to the aesthetic framework in which they appear: Firstly, insofar as art moods are mediated and non-primordial, they seem to be superficial and transitory. But secondly, insofar as they help to comprehend a way of perceiving the world and insofar as the recipient reflects on those perspectives and corresponding moods, her being in a particular mood after watching a film also provides her with a new perspective. Thus, an art mood can have an existential and therefore enduring dimension. My conclusion is that it is this complex and apparently paradoxical combination of superficiality and existentiality that distinguishes a mood-centred aesthetic experience from an experience of moods in our every-day life.

6 Conclusion: Gaining New Perspectives

This paper focused on the relationship between moods, perspectives, and film. Moods have been described as intensive, long-lasting and encompassing ways of perceiving

the world. Their cognitive impact recides in their capacity to reveal a kind of knowledge which is implicit rather than explicit, unasserted and non-propositional. Being global, diffuse and pervasive throughout space moods are contagious. They appeal to us in a holistic manner and address our body as a whole. Depression is accompanied by the mood of gravity and world-weariness, happiness by the mood of relief. I have argued that moods are the corresponding expressions of perspectives, which I have defined metaphorically as complex and plural ways of seeing and being in the world. A perspective is a broader concept than mood, although moods can, nevertheless, be defined as strongly connected to perspectives. Both moods and perspectives are integral to films. Many films use the immersive power of music, sound, and editing to evoke particular moods and atmospheres in order to prefocus and predispose the viewer to both the overall atmosphere of the film – for instance a drama or a comedy – and to particular affective states displayed by the fictional characters. The cinematic experience becomes an aesthetic one if a film invites viewers to move with and reflect upon it. The extent to which this succeeds depends, as I have argued, on a large part also on recipients' perspectives and experiences. Trained viewers who watch a cine-reflective arthouse film such as Haneke's or von Trier's react differently from unexperienced viewers. Therefore, the question whether a film and its affective character are overwhelming is also a question of what viewers make out of it. Even though films have considerable immersive and manipulative power, viewers are not passive victims. Instead, they are contextualised (embodied and embedded) as well and bring their own perspectives and moods to a cinematic experience. They are able to contrast and evaluate their own perspectives with those of the film. Perspectives and moods always exist against an experiential backdrop and are contextualised and situated. Furthermore, a perspectivist approach supports the idea that aesthetic experience has epistemic and empathetic functions. We are able to *shift* perspectives; but we are also able to evaluate, adopt, or refuse them in the light of our own perspectives and moods. However, by so doing, we might gain new perspectives on others, ourselves and on the world.

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