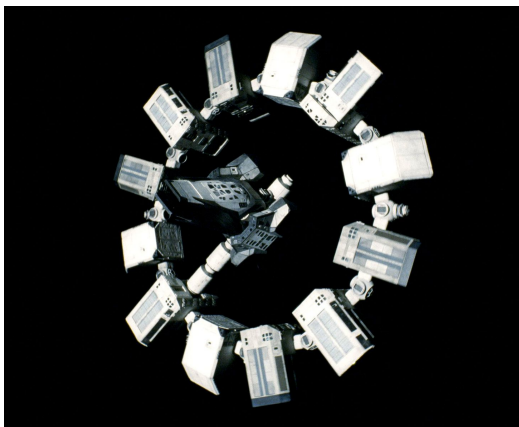


### **Time and Love in *Interstellar***

*How does the form of the scene enhance the overall meaning of the film?*

What will remain of humanity when we lose the place that unites us all? What is humanity's place in the universe? Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* addresses existential questions like these, portraying the adventure of intrepid adventurers on an intergalactic expedition in search for a new home for the doomed human population. When Joseph Cooper, the film's protagonist, leaves the dwindling planet Earth, his daughter is a young girl and he promises that he will be back to see her. As his mission comes to an end, Cooper barely makes it back in time to reconnect with his daughter, now an elderly woman, before she passes away. Cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema employs a variety of wide-angle Imax lenses, intimate close-ups, and an imaginative soundtrack to convey the recurring theme of the passage of time, while commenting on the power of human affection.

Van Hoytema's choice of an Imax wide-angle lens drastically increases the field of view in shots and depicts the vastness and loneliness of space. In a scene where Cooper and his crew are heading to a wormhole near Saturn, the wide lens captures the entire ship along with black



parts of deep space. Cooper's ship has 12 different pods and an arm joining one of these pods to the middle. As the ship slowly spins clockwise and decreases in size, the audience can see the resemblance it has to the face of a clock – a universal symbol for the passage of time. As the vessel spins

outward, it slowly becomes a speck in the engulfing darkness of space, while at the same time binding the crew within its limits. The sound of their voices in the stark silence only serves to make them seem more isolated. Van Hoytéma also uses a fade to black cut to show the passage of time in this scene. With this technique, several years pass in a matter of seconds; Cooper's clocklike ship quite literally experiences, manipulates, and traverses time. With so much emptiness around the ship, the crew is imprisoned by time, and time becomes a major theme as the movie unfolds.

Van Hoytéma captures an intimate conversation between Cooper and Amelia Brand, one of his crew members, giving it extra emotional meaning through the strategic use of lighting and close-ups. This scene immediately follows a three-hour excursion on a planet, and upon their return, the crew realizes they lost 23 years on Earth due to time relativity. As they discuss which planet they should visit next, Dr. Mann's or Edmund's, Brand discusses her affection toward Edmund, and how it draws her to go to his planet: "Love is the only thing that transcends dimensions." This is a moving moment in the film, as the characters come to the revelation that life has moved on in their absence, seen visually in the highlighted white reflection in Brand's eyes in an otherwise dark and bleak backdrop. Time is the one thing they cannot escape. Furthermore, the documentary-style frame structure, with Brand photographed at a quarter-turn, gives her credibility as she discusses "the one thing science cannot explain": the power of human connection. The distance of this shot is up-close and personal, helping with the development of this emotion-filled conversation. The wide-angle close-up in the tight spacecraft is a juxtaposed combination, portraying feelings of both intimacy and claustrophobia. This intimate frame, however, does not follow the typical lighting patterns. Van Hoytéma purposely keeps a dark

background and refrains from additional lighting to emphasize the crew's loss of time; if they waste any more, they will not be able to save their loved ones back on Earth.



Van Hoytema's use of wide-angle and long shots continues throughout the film, where they are coupled with the strategic selection of soundtracks to further convey meanings in scenes. In the latter half of the movie, a failed docking attempt by the rogue Dr. Mann (played by Matt Damon) causes an explosion on a compartment of the main ship, leaving it spinning out of control. Cooper's only chance of making it back alive is to dock onto the ship; the humanlike robot, accompanying him on the ship, calls this act "not impossible", to which Cooper responds, "No, it's necessary." It becomes clear that his subsequent actions are passion-filled and induced by his love for his children. A wide-angle, birds-eye-view shot shows both Cooper's vessel and the clockwise-spinning, debris-spewing vessel on which he is trying to dock, along with the massive blue planet underneath. The imagery of this scene becomes a visual metaphor for the film; the crew's lack of time is portrayed with the spinning clock-like ship with debris flying out in every direction, and the love Cooper has for his children is shown through his frantic attempt to dock.



To further emphasize the theme of time, Hans Zimmer's soundtrack strategically drops to a tempo of 60 beats per minute, resembling not only a heartbeat, but also the ticking of a clock. This parallels other scenes in the movie where this deliberate reminder of time passing adds to the sense of urgency, tension, and desperation that is consuming the main characters.

An in-depth examination of Hoyte Van Hoytema's cinematic techniques in *Interstellar* reveal more connections to the general themes of time and love. His use of wide-angle lenses, intimate close-ups, and compelling sound effects serve to both emphasize these themes and add a sense of urgency to the situation, as well as ultimately strengthening the relationship between the actors and the audience. Through Hoytema's thoughtful and creative cinematography, the audience recognizes that science and love exist mutually: science allows us to explore, love motivates us to explore. The audience is also shown the vastness of the universe, portraying life on Earth as insignificant and meaningless. The end of the film leaves the audience caring not about collecting scientific data, but hoping that Cooper is able to make it out alive and see his daughter again. Undeniably, one of humanity's future generations will be faced by a similar problem to the one depicted in the film. As Professor Brand repeats several times throughout the film, "Do not go gentle into that good night."

## Works Cited

*Interstellar*. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Performed by Matthew McConaughey and Anne Hathaway. Paramount Pictures, 2014.