

Natalia VYSOTSKA

“MOMENTS OF BLACKNESS BETWEEN CINEMATIC
FRAMES”: MOVIE CODE IN RALPH ELLISON’S
JUNETEENTH

Abstract: The paper sets out to explore various modes, in which cinematic code operates in the novel *Juneteenth* authored by the renowned (African) American writer Ralph Ellison and published posthumously in 1999. The text edited by John Callahan, his literary executor, is a section of the manuscripts of Ellison’s unfinished second “novel-in-progress”. The action in *Juneteenth* revolves around its core idea expressed through the plot lines, characters, imagery, as well as narrative strategies, and consisting in the writer’s belief that the fates of Blacks and whites in the USA are inextricably interwoven (it is their inseparability that accounts for America’s cultural uniqueness). The novel’s central argument is reinforced, in particular, by massive recourse to cinematic discourse. The movie code functions in *Juneteenth* on several textual levels. Thematically, its presence is legitimized by the twist in the story when Bliss, one of the book’s two protagonists, goes through a short-lived career in film-making before moving on to big-time politics, with both careers bringing to light his manipulative proclivities. This narrative plane called for juxtaposing two forms of “low” culture – Black church service and early American movie industry. Discussion of their common and dissimilar features is based on the propositions developed by Walter Benjamin and cinema theoreticians (Sergei Eisenstein, Yuri Tynianov, Viktor Shklovsky, Vadim Skuratovsky). Verbally re-coded cinematic techniques (camera moves, shifting point of view, montage), are, in their turn, made ample use of in the text’s narrative and spatial-temporal structure predicated upon both its semantics, and general modernist orientation of Ellison’s writings. Thus, his poetics is in line with transition to “spatial form” (J.Frank) characteristic of modernist fiction. Last but not least, cinematic semantic field is also used to mediate configurations of whiteness-blackness-power on the symbolic level of their construction.

Keywords: Ralph Ellison, *Juneteenth*, cinematic code, ritual, film, editing/montage, transmediality, “spatial form”

© 2018 Natalia A. Vysotska (Doctor Hab. in Philology, Full Professor, Kiev National Linguistic University, Ukraine) literatavysotska@gmail.com

Наталья ВЫСОЦКАЯ

«МГНОВЕНИЯ ЧЕРНОТЫ МЕЖДУ КИНОКАДРАМИ»: КИНЕМАТОГРАФИЧЕСКИЙ КОД В РОМАНЕ РАЛЬФА ЭЛЛИСОНА «19 ИЮНЯ»

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются различные модусы функционирования кинематографического кода в романе выдающегося (афро)американского писателя Ральфа Эллисона «19 июня», изданном посмертно в 1999 г. и подготовленном к печати его литературным душеприказчиком, проф. Джоном Каллаханом. Текст представляет собой часть рукописи незавершенного второго крупного произведения Эллисона. Идейным стержнем романа, находящем выражение в его сюжете, образной системе и повествовательных стратегиях, представляется убежденность автора в том, что в США судьбы черной и белой рас неразрывно переплетены (именно это и обуславливает уникальность американской культуры). Утверждению этого центрального тезиса служит, в частности, активное обращение писателя к кинематографическому дискурсу. Кинокод функционирует в произведении на нескольких текстуальных уровнях. На уровне тематики и сюжетики он оправдан краткой кинематографической карьерой одного из двух центральных персонажей – Блисса, будущего видного политика, в обеих ипостасях которого задействованы манипуляционные практики. В ходе анализа этого нарративного пласта сопоставлены две формы «низовой» культуры – негритянская церковная служба и ранний американский кинематограф, причем пункты сходства и различия между ними намечены на основе идей В. Беньямина и теоретиков киноискусства (С. Эйзенштейн, Ю. Тынянов, В. Шкловский, Ю. Лотман, В. Скуратовский). Вербально перекодированные технические приемы кинематографа (монтаж, движение камеры, смена планов и точек зрения), в свою очередь, широко использованы на уровне повествовательной и пространственно-временной организации текста, что обусловлено как его содержательной стороной, так и общемодернистской направленностью творчества афро-американского автора. Поэтика прозы Эллисона коррелирует с переходом к «пространственной форме» (Дж. Фрэнк) в литературе модернизма. На символическом уровне кинодискурс служит медиатором между «белизмой», «чернотой» и «властью» в процессе конструирования модели взаимоотношений между ними.

Ключевые слова: Ральф Эллисон, «19 июня», кинематографический код, ритуал, фильм, монтаж, трансмедиальность, «пространственная форма»

© 2018 Наталья Александровна Высоцкая (профессор, доктор филол. наук, Киевский национальный лингвистический университет, Украина) literatavysotska@gmail.com

“...here, in the U.S. at least, culture has successfully confounded all concepts of race”.

Ralph Ellison¹

Whether highly acclaimed as one of the most important American writers of the past century or severely censured as lacking in radicalism, Ralph Ellison seemed always a few steps ahead of his critics and of his time. The epilogue to his (now unquestionable) masterpiece, *Invisible Man*, first published in 1952, at the dawn of civil rights movement and two decades before the concept of multiculturalism has embarked upon its controversial career in the U.S.A., contains the words that neatly summarize the whole multicultural project: “America is woven of many strands; I would recognize them and let it so remain [...]. Our fate is to become one, and yet many – This is not prophecy, but description”.²

Ellison’s next major publication that saw the light five years after his death in 1994, goes even farther in its comment upon the dialectics of “plures” and “unum” in the U.S. reflecting changes that have transpired in the nation’s self-perception over about half a century. The text entitled *Juneteenth* and edited by Ellison’s literary executor Prof. James Callahan is an excerpt from Ellison’s much awaited, but never finished second novel.³ Though at first its answer to the sacramental question “How can the many be as one?” reads as a mere rephrasing of the previous book’s dictum – “Through a balanced consciousness of unity in diversity and diversity in unity, through a willed and conscious balance”⁴, – it is further elaborated to suggest a closer interconnection than mere coexistence between America’s “many strands”. In focusing on the need to seek “ever the darkness in lightness and the lightness in darkness”⁵, Ellison’s text postulates relations between races/ethnicities/cultural discourses as marked by interpenetration, symbiosis, hybridity – in short, modes of interaction that, according to many theorists, have long informed American scene and can, therefore, provide useful guidelines for re-

¹ “Study and Experience. An Interview with Ralph Ellison.” In *Chant of Saints. A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*, eds. Michael S. Harper, Robert B. Stepto. Urbana-Chicago-London: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979: 458.

² Ellison, R. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995:577.

³ The volume containing all the parts of the previously unpublished manuscripts and edited by James Callahan and Adam Bradley was released in 2010 by Random House as *Three Days before the Shooting...*

⁴ Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York : Random House, 1999: 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 20.

reading the nation's history, culture, and literature. Thus, Ellison's key tenets sound very much in tune with the pronouncement that "we are now and have always been a culture in which a vast range of voices and traditions have constantly shaped each other in profound ways".⁶ It looks as if for him the truth, which it has taken others decades to grasp, had been always there to see. Current theoretical turn both from constructing American culture and literature as homogeneously monolithic, and from "pigeonholing" it in the name of pluralism (to use Werner Sollors' phrase) to its reconceptualization as "radically comparative, hybrid and transnational in its origins, constitution and dynamics..."⁷ has been already approbated in Ellison's fiction.

Similarly, Ellison's beliefs that "American culture would not exist without its Afro-American component, or if it did, it would be quite different"⁸ or that every single "true American" is "also somehow black" resonate with Toni Morrison's project of rereading mainstream American literature from the perspective of detecting in it more or less implicit, but ubiquitous, Black presence. According to Morrison, African presence in the U.S. has always been too important to go unnoticed; its absence from the canon, then, is due to deliberate refusal to see, with the whole body of mainstream texts performing a kind of "flight" from Blackness.⁹ In Ellison's novel a failed attempt at fleeing Blackness is materialized, with one of the principal narrative voices belonging to an individual of uncertain racial origin brought up in a South Western black community and later escaping it to enter the white world.

One can't but agree with John Callahan that "[i]n conception and execution, *Juneteenth* is multifarious, multifaceted, multifocused, multivoiced, multitoned".¹⁰ From the panoply of its aspects, this paper will only focus on one – inventive uses to which cinematographic discourse is put. It seeks to look at the ways units of cinematic language understood as a specific semi-otic system are decontextualized and re-coded through the verbal medium to

⁶ Fishkin, S.F. "Interrogating 'Whiteness', Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture." *American Quarterly* 47:3 (1995): 456.

⁷ Erkkila, B. "Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance." *American Quarterly* 47:4 (1995): 589.

⁸ "Study and Experience...": 458.

⁹ Morrison, T. "Unspeaking Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." In *Criticism and the Color Line. Desegregating American Literary Studies*, ed. Henry B. Wonham. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996:16-29.

¹⁰ Callahan, J. "Introduction." In Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York: Random House, 1999: xxi.

reinforce the novel's central argument about fateful interrelatedness of races in the USA.

The movie code operates in *Juneteenth* on several textual levels. Thematically, it refers to Bliss' short-lived career as a budding film-maker (the reader has little access to it apart from fragmented glimpses, but its importance is borne out by the fact that movie terms and commands tend to recur in dying Sunraider's raving). Narratively and stylistically, Ellison's rich and polyphonic fiction heavily relies on cinematic techniques. Last but not least, cinematic semantic field is also used to mediate configurations of whiteness-blackness-power on the symbolic level of their construction.

Between (Black) Ritual and (White) Politics: the "Cinema Stage"

Juneteenth largely owes its structure to call and response model central in Afrocentric cultures (Ellison remarks in his notes that "[t]he method is naturally antiphonal"¹¹). Short introductory chapters present the basic situation – the shooting of Senator Sunraider notorious for his rabid racism while he is speaking at the Senate, while the parallel plot line deals with an abortive attempt by a group of Southern blacks led by Reverend Hickman to prevent the shooting. The rest of the novel is made up by the (mostly unspoken) dialogue between fatally wounded Sunraider and Hickman, the only person the dying Senator wants around. The inseparably intertwined past of the protagonists (and, symbolically, the two races in the U.S.A.) marked by love and bitterness, self-denial and betrayal is revealed not so much in the few spoken words, as in their inner monologues often represented through stream of consciousness technique ("The mind becomes the real scene of the action", Ellison states¹²). The story that can be reconstructed from bits and pieces is the following: as a young boy whose race was unknown the Senator, then called Bliss, was raised by Alonzo Hickman, black musician turned revivalist. Bliss was trained to become a preacher and was involved, in particular, in church services. Having run away, he tried his hand at movie-making and later made a brilliant political career owing his success to the "verbal exhilaration", that is, rhetorical virtuosity.

With all its emphasis on verbal prowess, the novel's texture is lushly synesthetic – by means of the word magic the text engages readers' visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile sensors in the perception process. The predom-

¹¹ "Notes." In Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York: Random House, 1999: 352.

¹² Ibid.

inance of visual imagery, in my opinion, results from the tension between various connotations attributed in contemporary culture to the tropes of “looking/seeing”. On the one hand, its theorists insist on the privileged status of sight (as opposed to touch in earlier epochs) in the modern “society of spectacle” that tends to present the world to human beings not directly, but in mediated forms.¹³ The links between “seeing/looking” and power have also become the object of exploration. Debord’s critique of Western philosophic “oculocentricity” that, in his opinion, reaches its climax in the total spectacle correlates with Foucault’s even more pessimistic view of human position in contemporary society – not on the stage, and not in the orchestra stalls, but in a Panopticon, under the unfailing gaze of omnivident “eye of power” (“... the gaze has had great importance among the techniques of power developed in the modern era...”¹⁴). In both societal metaphors, every individual concurrently plays the parts of the observer and the observed, is constantly subject to the threat of being stripped of his/her subjectivity and objectified by a look.

On the other hand, the significance of vision in modern society underscores the implications of not being seen, being invisible – a recurrent trope in African American tradition used to denote the white world’s denial of representation to blacks. In his discussion of identity’s dialogical nature, Charles Taylor accentuates the importance of recognition/its absence in identity formation concluding that “non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being”.¹⁵ Apparently, Ellison who has entitled his great novel *Invisible Man* was not only highly sensitive to this particular cultural code, but also contributed much to establishing its centrality in African American cultural discourse. The ways it is used in *Juneteenth* deserve a special study. Let me cite but one example to illustrate Ellison’s audacious recourse to the trope of seeing: at the beginning of the novel, when the group of “Southern Negroes” appear in the Senator’s office in Washington, D.C., his (white) secretary is trying to get rid of them. After a moment, however, “she had a suspicion that, for all their staring eyes, she actually didn’t exist

¹³ See Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle*, transl. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994.

¹⁴ Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*. N.Y.: Pantheon, 1980: 155.

¹⁵ Taylor, C. “The Politics of Recognition.” In *Multiculturalism. A Critical Reader*, ed. D.T. Goldberg. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994:75.

for them”.¹⁶ The writer ironically signifies upon his own metaphor reversing its direction (here it is applied to a white bigot’s invisibility for black community) and thereby subverting its effect. My purpose in mentioning it here is to build a link between a more general topos of “looking/seeing” and cinematic discourse as a specific field of its functioning.

Cinematic discourse as a thematic component in *Juneteenth* can be usefully analyzed drawing upon Walter Benjamin’s ideas set forth in his seminal study *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). As is well known, the philosopher opposes the unique and original work of art «imbedded in the fabric of tradition» to repeatedly reproduced artifacts of modern era dating back to the invention of photography, in which artistic functions have been delegated to “the eye looking into a lens”.¹⁷ The first mode was inextricably linked to the cult, thus being «never entirely separated from its ritual value», while the second possesses primarily «demonstration value» and performs not a «ritual», but a «political» function.¹⁸ For Benjamin, the film is the most powerful agent of the change, since its “destructive, cathartic aspect” consists in “the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage”.¹⁹ Ellison’s text seems to fit into this pattern: performing the part of Jesus Christ rising from the dead during the Easter service, the boy Bliss was immediately involved in a traditional ritual with its symbolic overtones of death and rebirth. In his transformation into a politician he passed through a “cinema stage” becoming “Mr. Movie-Man”, whose power over people consisted in his ability to manipulate them through a camera. As a matter of fact, Hickman’s “direction” of Christ’s resurrection also implied managing public mood (there is obvious truth in Sunraider’s reference to the old preacher as a “trickster”), but there Bliss had to play a passive part, while in shooting (or projecting) a film his control over collective (sub)conscious lay in «moments of blackness between cinematic frames» determining the direction a movie takes. Following Benjamin, Ellison lays special emphasis on the relationship between the movies and politics. In his notes for the novel he points out that “the viewer is manipulated in the dark and he [Bliss – N.V.] is the manipulator”.²⁰ What he means is obviously editing (or montage) as cinema’s crucial artistic device that Ellison interprets, similarly to Russian

¹⁶ Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*: 4.

¹⁷ Benjamin, W. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In Benjamin W. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken, 1969: 219.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*:224-26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*:221.

²⁰ “Notes”: 360.

formalists and Sergei Eisenstein, as a qualitatively new entity – not as mere “connection” between the frames, but as their “differential change”²¹, as a “leap to a new dimension with regards to intra-shot layout”.²² This compares to Benjamin’s description of the film where “the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones”.²³ Moreover, the viewing process forces the audience to take the position of the camera and thereby imposes a certain angle of vision upon reality. Much of Bliss’ life in Ellison’s novel is hidden “between the frames”, as well as the true motivation underlying his vicious anti-Negro attacks. Thus, his fascination with manipulating the audience in the dark “carries into his politics, wherein his motives are hidden behind what appears as simple racial prejudice, but in his twisted way he sees himself as putting pressure on Negroes to become more powerful through political action”.²⁴ In this manner, the protagonist’s fictional movement from a (black) religious ritual to (white) politics logically incorporates cinema into its trajectory as a potent vehicle of manipulating human beings on individual and collective levels. This narrative move reflects modern philosophy’s insistence on the interdependence between spectacularity and power grounded in the notion of representation, of usurping the right to speak on behalf of others, which in “black and white” context produces distinct racial reverberations.

Considering the pair “ritual” – “film” from a somewhat different perspective, the text appears not so much to oppose, but rather to juxtapose them as black and white cultural matrices represented, respectively, by two versions of “low” culture – Afro-American musical/verbal folklore culminating in a syncretic church service, and early melodramatic Hollywood movies. The first model is jointly and interactively experienced by the black community, since the ritual admits of no onlookers emotionally involving everybody into its mythic reality. This type of experience contrasts with individual consumption of the film, whose seeming “collectivity” is but “quasicollectivity” since, as Laura Mulvey points out, mainstream film conventions “portray a hermetically sealed world” producing for the audience “a sense of separation”.²⁵ This distinction between experiencing the two cultural forms

²¹ Tynianov, Yu. *Poetika. Istoriiia literatury. Kino* [Poetics.Literary History:Cinema]. Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1977: 337.

²² Eisenshtein, S. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh* [Selected Writings: in 6 vols]. Vol. 3. Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ., 1964: 443.

²³ Benjamin, W. “The Work of Art...”: 226.

²⁴ “Notes”: 360.

²⁵ Mulvey, L. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen* 16 (1975) : 9.

resurfaces in the story. After a mentally deranged white woman interferes with a black church service claiming Bliss as her son, the boy starts looking for his “white” mother in the cinematic images of Mary Pickford and other silent film stars. The violation of black religious ritual on the narrative level foregrounds a white secular ritual – film going. Bliss as an “innocent” viewer easily transcends the flatness of the screen and immerses himself in the illusory depth of cineworld; his imaginary “escape” into it forestalls his actual escape into the white world. His identification with the white male character is signaled by the pronoun “we” – “...and suddenly we turn and fire a pistol...” – with his desire for the lost mother naturally inviting psychoanalytical interpretations. At the same time, black characters represented in the film about the Civil War only as a stereotypical and non-personalized crowd metonymically reduced to their “old clothes, head rags, bonnets and floppy straw hats” are also referred to as “our own people”. This necessarily dual identification with both blacks and whites lies at the core of the protagonist’s (and, Ellison believes, America’s) dilemma. At the same time, insofar as Ellison’s point is not to perpetuate, but to disrupt the binary opposition of “black” and “white” in the U.S. for the sake of a more holistic vision of the national identity, he does not absolutize the differences between ritual and film as two forms of cultural expressions. In fact, from their very inception, cinematic practices have been compared and often equated to ritualistic and mythological ones, as well as to surrealist dream reality. Cinema’s obviously synthetic nature invited analogies with primeval syncretism of archaic arts.²⁶ Concurrently, cinema’s ability to visualize various ontological modalities, no matter how unrealistic, with the same degree of mimetic verisimilitude, prompted its contextualization within oneiric cultural paradigm. The concept of film as a “‘screening’ of inner speech enabling an insight into its structural laws with oeidetics prevailing over the word”²⁷ had a special appeal for modernist writers with their emphasis on the representation of psychic processes. Consequently, film’s distance from traditional art forms argued by Benjamin is somewhat modified by its treatment in the context of myth. Ellison synthesizes the triad “myth-film-dream” in the sequence presenting Sunraider’s final surrealist raving/vision. It also features the convergence of two varieties of folklore/myth – traditional and modern, sacred and profane, black and white: the hero’s “cinematographic” pursuit over

²⁶ See for example V. Lindsay’s *The Art of the Moving Pictures*, 1915, Abel Hans’ idea of cinema as a “new church”, works by international semioticians, etc.

²⁷ Skurativsky, V. *Ekranni mystetsva u sotsiokulturnykh protsessakh XX stoletia*. Part I. Kyiv: KMTS Poeziia Publ., 1997: 43.

train car roofs is combined with Brer' Rabbit tales' imagery and with the train motif common for African American culture and charged with multiple connotations²⁸.

Cinematic Techniques in *Juneteenth* as Transmedial Code

It seems expedient to discuss the uses of cinematic code in *Juneteenth* on the narrative level within the framework of intermediality, the concept increasingly applied over the past decades to address "eternal" issues regarding interrelations between various art forms and/or their synthesis. The umbrella term commonly believed to be coined by A.A. Hansen-Löve in 1983²⁹ has become widespread largely due to semiotic turn in the humanities urging one to treat all art forms as "media". Among various types of intermedial relations classified by Jens Schröter into four discursive models, "transmedial intermediality" is arguably most appropriate for characterizing the ways cinematographic techniques operate in Ellison's text on the stylistic and narrative planes since it refers to formal structures not "specific" to one medium but found in different media³⁰, as is the case in question.

Transmedial code manifests itself in the fact that the text heavily draws upon cinematic principles cited by Keith Cohen as having the most significant effects for fiction, that is, "a spatial configuration of the flow of time, an innate relativity and perpetual shifting of point of view, and a vivid discontinuity of the narrating material by means of montage"³¹. Ellison's text shares many of these characteristics with other modernist texts, which, according to Joseph Frank, shifted from temporal to spatial frame of reference due to their predilection towards the timelessness of myth. The study of T.S. Eliot's and Ezra Pound's poetry and James Joyce's and Marcel Proust's fiction led the

²⁸ See, for example, Williams, Sh.A. "The Blues Roots of Contemporary African American Poetry." In *Chant of Saints. A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*, eds. Michael S. Harper, Robert B. Stepto. Urbana-Chicago-London: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979: 123-35.

²⁹ Hansen-Löve, A.H. "Intermedialität und Intertextualität. Probleme der Korrelation von Wort- und Bildkunst. Am Beispiel der russischen Moderne." In *Dialog der Texte*, eds. W. Schmid and W.-D. Stempel. Wien: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1983: 291-360.

³⁰ Schröter, J. "Discourses and Models of Intermediality." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13:3 (2011). Online at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1790>>

³¹ Cohen, K. *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1979: 208.

scholar to the conclusion that in their works “syntactical sequence is given up for a structure depending on the perception of relationships between disconnected word groups”.³² Structures of this kind, to be properly understood, require juxtaposition and simultaneous perception. What are the effects he is speaking about, if not differently described cinematic techniques – montage, simultaneity? Cinema is known to combine properties of both temporal and spatial arts being an art of time in the forms of space. Frank accounts for the shift from temporal to spatial paradigm by modernists’ desire to transform the temporal world of history into the timeless world of myth. Given James Joyce’s and William Faulkner’s indubitable impact upon Ellison’s writings, as well as the overall modernist thrust of his oeuvre, it is no wonder that the text of *Juneteenth* also displays signs of this “spatial shift”. Ellison has chosen for the epigraph a fragment from T.S.Eliot’s poem *Little Gidding* envisioning the task of memory as “liberation from the future as well as the past”, that is, an exit into the timeless mythic dimension, with its ultimate goal being, according to Eliot and Ellison, renewal and transfiguration in another pattern.

Long ago, at the dawn of the cinema perceived by many as the triumph of veracity, Russian Formalists have perspicaciously pinpointed selection as one of the basic categories underlying film semantics. (“Cinematography’s primary material is not the object that is shot, but a certain manner of shooting it”³³; «Visible world is given in the film not as such, but in its meaningful correlations”³⁴). Following upon their ideas, Yuri Lotman argues that cinematographic point of view as a principle of text construction is identical to a novel’s – what they share in common is their original narrativity. The shift of focus from Sunraider to Hickman and back determines changing viewpoints largely isomorphic to the camera movements and different shots, while the episode of a white woman’s intrusion into the black service makes use of “slow motion” technique – “...he was looking around at the old familiar grown folks, seeing their bodies frozen in odd postures, like kids playing a game of statue [...]...he could see the coffin still in motion, seeming to rise up of its own will, lazily, indulgently, like Daddy Hickman turning slowly in pleasant sleep...”³⁵

³² Frank, J. “Spatial Form in Modern Literature.” In Frank, J. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991: 114.

³³ Shklovskii, V. *Za 60 let. Raboty o kino* [Sixty Years. Works on the Cinema]. Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ., 1985: 31.

³⁴ Tynianov, Yu. *Poetika...*: 330.

³⁵ Ellison, R. *Juneteenth* : 156-58.

The text's architectonics as a two-voice remembrance allows the use of a variety of cinematic principles, in particular, in the treatment of temporality. "Cinema, by virtue of its material, knows only the present".³⁶ In the novel, too, the past brought back to life in the protagonists' subjective recollections is presented as the present. The external action in the 300-paged novel encompasses only classical 24 hours, but their duration can stretch ad infinitum due to restored moments of the past. Yuri Tynianov's observations about the relativity of cine-time are applicable here – the repetition of a sequence produces an impression of long duration in spite of its infinitesimal "showing time". In Ellison's text, the function of such a "replayed sequence" is performed by recurrent scenes in the hospital ward inscribing the events of many years into a single temporal frame. Lotman stresses cinema's special ability to present time "irregularly, to compress and to stretch it arbitrarily that determines fictional time formation"³⁷; this idea correlates with sophisticated employment of time deformations ("chronoschisms") in modern fiction. The memory's subjective and discreet nature enhanced by the reminiscing character's moribund condition in Ellison's text psychologically motivates the text's sharp perspectives and montage effects. This is especially manifest in the last chapter where Sunraider's fading conscience directly links instant changes of scene to cinematic conventions – "as though he were watching a scene from a silent movie".³⁸

To sum up, *Juneteenth's* cinematic code is in line with current cultural trend towards breaking down increasingly porous boundaries between art forms and towards growing interpenetration between elements coming from various semiotic systems. Concurrently, it operates inside the novel's ideational core with its appeal for a new concept of American identity – not "black" or "white", but "somewhere in between black and white", that is, hybrid. Ellison's text places in plain view the painful problems inherent in this project that calls for deconstructing the binarity of black and white. This task, in its turn, can only be attained, he believes, if white America accepts its own "grain of blackness", and both adhere to the national creed of democracy and self-reliance. Cinema as a powerful mass-manipulating medium is instrumental in the protagonist's desire to "create a political identity out of racial prejudice"³⁹, and in this aspect it presents an unwelcome alternative to

³⁶ Lotman, Yu. *Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki*. Tallin: Eesti raamat, 1973: 16.

³⁷ Ibid.: 102.

³⁸ Ellison, R. *Juneteenth* : 327.

³⁹ Ibid.: 359.

traditional black ritual. However, as he moves towards existential awareness of the races' ultimate oneness in the U.S., seemingly opposing cultural forms start merging and mingling in his imagination. Ellison's "invisible man" is on his way towards becoming an "indivisible man", an American.

REFERENCES

- Benjamin, W. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In Benjamin, W. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken: 217 – 51.
- Callahan, J. "Introduction." In Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York: Random House, 1999: XI- XXIII.
- Cohen, K. *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1979.
- Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle*, transl. D. Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books, 1994.
- Eisenshtein, S. *Izbrannyye proizvedeniia v shesti tomakh* [*Selected Writings: in 6 vols*]. Vol. 3. Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ., 1964. (In Russ.)
- Ellison, R. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage International, 1995.
- Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York.: Random House, 1999.
- Erkkila, B. "Ethnicity, Literary Theory, and the Grounds of Resistance." *American Quarterly* 47:4 (1995): 563- 94.
- Fishkin, S.F. "Interrogating 'Whiteness', Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture." *American Quarterly* 47:3 (1995): 428 – 66.
- Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Frank, J. "Spatial Form in Modern Literature." In Frank, J. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1991; 107-33.
- Hansen-Löve, A.H. "Intermedialität und Intertextualität. Probleme der Korrelation von Wort-und Bildkunst. Am Beispiel der russischen Moderne." In *Dialog der Texte*, eds. W. Schmid and W.-D. Stempel. Wien: Wiener Slawistischer Almanach, 1983: 291-360.
- Lotman, Yu. *Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki*. [Semiotics of the cinema and the problems of cinematographic aesthetics] Tallin: Eesti raamat, 1973. (In Russ.)
- Morrison, T. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." In *Criticism and the Color Line. Desegregating American Literary Studies*, ed. Henry B. Wonham. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996:16-29.
- Mulvey L. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16 (1975): 6 – 18.
- "Notes." In Ellison, R. *Juneteenth*. New York: Random House, 1999: 351-68.
- Schröter, J. "Discourses and Models of Intermediality." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13:3 (2011). Online at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1790>>

Shklovskii, V. *Za 60 let. Raboty o kino* [Sixty Years. Works on the Cinema]. Moscow: Iskusstvo Publ., 1985. (In Russ.)

Skurativsky, V. *Ekranni mystetsva u sotsiokulturnykh protsessakh XX stolittia* [Art of Cinema in Socio-cultural Processes of the XXth Century]. Part I. Kyiv: KMTS Poeziia Publ., 1997. (In Ukr.)

“Study and Experience. An Interview with Ralph Ellison.” In *Chant of Saints. A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*, eds. Michael S. Harper, Robert B. Stepto. Urbana-Chicago-London: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1979: 451-69.

Taylor, C. “The Politics of Recognition.” In *Multiculturalism. A Critical Reader*, ed. D.T. Goldberg. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994:75–106.

Tynianov, Yu. *Poetika. Istoriiia literatury. Kino* [Poetics. Literary History. Cinema]. Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1977. (In Russ.)