Subjectivity in the New Hollywood Cinema: Fathers, Sons and Other Ghosts

Vojkovic, S.

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Chapter 1

Processing Banality, Structuring the Sublime: ET - The Extraterrestrial
A Case of Triple Mobility

Steven Spielberg is the name most frequently associated with new Hollywood. While Justin Wyatt traces the articulation of the high concept film through Spielberg, Thomas Schatz traces the emergence of new Hollywood itself through Spielberg’s *Jaws*. The “brand name” Spielberg, marks an era where the status of the filmmaker as well as the film has been redefined. Not only the films but also the author’s presence has acquired an increasingly commercial status within the public sphere. The international and commercial imperatives of contemporary culture have made it clear, as Timothy Corrigan asserts, that commerce is now more than just a contending discourse (Corrigan, 1998: 38–63). Due to this move in contemporary culture the practices of auteurism need to be reexamined in terms of the wider material strategies of social agency. The commercial status of the auteur’s presence has affected his or her role within the public sphere and, in Corrigan’s view, the author has become part of an agency that “culturally monitors identification and critical reception” (43). This agency, according to Corrigan, determines the way “the subjective expresses itself through the socially symbolic” (61).

A question that interests me in relation to this discussion is the following: how does the subjective vision of a social agent such as Spielberg get expressed on the level of the filmic text? More precisely, my main concern here is the co-dependency between social agency and narrative agency. The expression of the subjective through the socially symbolic, I would argue, is closely related to the ways the socially symbolic expresses itself through the subjective. Therefore, to gain insight into the ways narrative is bound up with social agency we need to engage in an analysis of the films. As the analysis of the film *ET-The Extraterrestrial* demonstrates, precisely the bond between the ideological determinations and the subjective vision of the highest narratorial authority conditions the resolution of the narrative. This “authority” is to be understood as the agent with the highest authority in the process of narrating, and it must not be confused with the author-filmmaker.

When it comes to the new Hollywood blockbusters, the agent with the highest authority is expressed on the level of the fabula. This means that the specific way of storytelling, which I have called fabulation, mobilizes the subjectivity on this level. Therefore,
as far as determining the narratorial authority in blockbuster films is concerned, special emphasis needs to be placed on the ways fabula affects the structuring of subjectivity. Because the structuring of subjectivity is closely related to the ways narrative agency is constituted through vision, the problem of subjectivity is inextricable from the problem of focalization. In the course of this chapter I will demonstrate that the focalizor is an unstable entity, and focalization can be attributed to an internal (first-person), or to an external (third-person) narrator. I will argue that this instability is one of the central features of a text such as *ET-The Extraterrestrial*. The resolution of this instability, however, will require an intervention of the fabula, for both the “first” and “third” person are the same person framed by a higher narratorial authority. The collapse of the fabula onto the story, which conditions the resolution, echoes an intervention of the vision from above, of a higher narratorial authority - a specter who “fathers” the fabula.

**The Terms of Analysis**

Elliot is a lonely boy, living with his mother, an older brother and a younger sister in a family house, somewhere in the LA suburbs. The father has “extraterrestrialized” himself from this home. He is away in Mexico with his new girlfriend. The mother is constantly busy, the older brother has his own pals and is not interested in Elliot, the sister is too young. The arrival of the little, friendly alien, whom Elliot names ET, seems to be the best thing that could have happened to Elliot - he finally has someone to be with. ET, however, needs to go home. He did not intend to stay on our planet, he was left behind. Gradually, he becomes very ill from life on Earth. Another person who is aware of ET’s presence is the man who was on the scene at ET’s arrival - “Keys.” As the film progresses he is coming closer to locating ET in Elliot’s home. The intervention of “Keys” will have a crucial effect on the positive outcome of events. For at this point Elliot has become so attached to ET, that he too is dying from ET’s fatal illness. “Keys” will help to save Elliot by taking part in the process of separation, and this will enable ET to finally go home.

As the analysis will demonstrate, Elliot’s attachment to ET is expressed through the instability of the focalizor. This instability in turn, is dependent on the conflicting positioning of these two characters in the film. The text works to convince us that ET is a prod-
ject of Elliot’s imagination, while at the same time, ET is posited as a focalizing agent on whose point of vision the filmic narration relies. The decomposition of the act of focalization practically means that Elliot, as a subject, is dependent on ET’s image, whereas ET, as a product of Elliot’s imagination, is conversely dependent on the image of Elliot. This conflicting positioning of the two characters I will call the “decomposing of the character image.” The interdependency between the characters puts pressure on the notion of character-bound narration, and therefore has repercussions on our understanding of the subjective vision that is to be attributed to a character via its alignment with the camera. Both visions are necessary for the narration to take place. The implied narrator relies on ET’s vision, yet Elliot’s vision is necessary to produce the vision of ET.

The interdependency between Elliot and ET will become a threat to both characters; ET will have to disattach from Elliot in order to go home, otherwise he will die. If ET dies, Elliot will disappear with him. The resolution, which involves separation, requires a different strategy, and as this is elaborated in the film, the intervention arrives on the level of the fabula. There are three lines of action in the film: ET’s line, Elliot’s line, and the line of action of “Keys,” the man who is himself in search of ET. Related to these lines are the three “homes” in the film – ET’s home far away from Earth, the home that is Elliot’s mind, and Elliot’s physical home in the LA suburbs. The separation of ET from Elliot requires an intervention into Elliot’s mind home, but for this to occur, “Keys” will first have to arrive at Elliot’s physical home. Therefore, the restitution of Elliot’s subjectivity ultimately requires an intervention “from the outside,” or more precisely, the fabula needs to intervene into the story. “Keys” will emerge as a personification of a narratorial authority, the one who ultimately resolves and gives meaning to the play between focalization and narration.

The paradox implied in the interdependency between the two characters in ET-The Extraterrestrial is thus radicalized in the triple function that the notion “home” entails: as lineage, belonging and dwelling place. The collapse of “homes,” I would argue, is comparable to the collapse of the narrative levels. On the level of the story, where the play between narration and focalization generates the paradox, ET’s return home is both regressive and progressive: on
the one hand, it points to ET's going back into Elliot's mind where he was invented; but on the other hand, it also points to a forward movement, toward ET's home somewhere in the vast universe. This tension is confirmed in the film's closing when ET is about to depart from Earth and finally embark on his journey home. He touches Elliot's forehead with his index finger and tells him, "I'll be right here."

When we take into consideration the fabula we can note the third term that the home alludes to; apart from "home" as Elliot's mind, and ET's "home" far away in the universe, there is the physical home, where Elliot lives with his family. This is the only home we can actually see. It is the place where most of the events which depict the interaction between ET and Elliot occur. If we were to rely solely on the vision of the characters, the only home that any of them has seen is Elliot's home in the LA suburbs. Nevertheless, once we take into consideration the play of narration and focalization in relation to the pertinent signifiers in the text, we can trace the imaginary status of ET, and hence, both prospectively and retroactively, we can perceive him as a product of Elliot's imagination. A way to accomplish this is first of all to abandon the notion of subjectivity as a unified investment which is to be expressed through the focalization of a character. This implies, as Bal proposes, that we take into account focalization on (the characters) which also invests the narrated content with subjectivity. In that respect, I will work with Bal's definition of narration as an intersubjective process of the "first person," "second person" and "third person," implying that the point of vision establishes the narrating agent or person (Bal 1997: 142-160). Hence, what needs to be taken into account is that focalization or the point of vision is at work even if it cannot be attributed to a specific character.

The interdependency between the two images can be divided into three phases: in phase 1, ET is elaborated as a focalizing agent on whose point of vision narration depends; in phase 2, the working of cinematic signifiers infers that ET is a product of Elliot's imagination; in phase 3, as a result of the processes which occur in the first two phases, Elliot figures as ET and vice versa. These effects are produced in two different ways. On the one hand, the cinematic signifiers (looking, framing, angle, shot/reverse shot and camera movement) simulate a reciprocity of the viewing points. When char-
acter narration is taken into consideration in relation to focalization, however, we can observe a clash between the external and the internal vision.

On the other hand, the viewing points simulate a reciprocity between the two images, of Elliot and ET. That is, there appears to be an intersubjective exchange between the two characters. Yet, taking the cinematic signifiers into consideration, we can conclude that these are working to reject the implied reciprocity. My analyses will show that the interdependency between the two character-images is best understood in terms of the tension between the levels of narration. To determine the level of narration, we need to distinguish between subjects of vision, internal and external, which in turn help us to determine the subject of narrating. We can do this if we focus on the separate units, which, in terms of the analysis of the film can be understood as scenes. Since the dependency between the two characters evolves sequentially, and is traceable not only on the level of the story but also on the level of the fabula, a few randomly proposed scenes would not suffice to encompass the operation of image decomposing. I will therefore make a selection of the pertinent scenes as they are related to the fabula. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that the structuring of subjectivity - which involves the decomposing of the character image as well as its restitution and traceable on the level of separate scenes - is co-dependent on the operation of triple mobility. In other words, subjectivity is structured through the process of fabulation. I contend that this interdependency, manifested through the collapse of the fabula onto the story, is one of the defining features of the new Hollywood blockbusters.

I will first concentrate on the elaboration of the three phases where the dependency between the character-images of Elliot and ET is established. The main emphasis will be placed on the ways the story is told. The telling or narrating is inextricable from the focalizing, which inevitably involves characters. As I have already stated, the specificity of the text in question is that character-bound narration is split between internal and external focalization which directly affects the character-image of both Elliot and ET. As a result, the character-image becomes decomposed. Just as importantly, the decomposition of the character-image as it is related with the play between levels of narration coincides with a narration that “tells”
that the impossible is possible - ET is a product of Elliot's imagination, yet he is the agent on whose point of vision narration relies. He is both imaginary and real.

The Clash Between Internal and External Focalization

The film commences with the camera panning down from the starry sky to the forest. A shot from a slightly high angle follows, revealing a bald spot in the forest and on it a luminous spaceship. There is a dissolve into branches, a slow pan to the left through the branches to another dissolve. Through the branches we see a detail of the spaceship. The series of dissolves continues, again a detail of a pine branch, now an alien hand enters the shot, strangely shaped fingers touch the branch then move it slightly as if to get a better view. In the background, a small creature is entering the spaceship. ET is, thus, introduced metonymically into the scene and in the film. The slow camera movement to the left enhances the presence of the agency producing this ostensibly subjective vision. Much later in the film, when the hand of "Keys" enters the shot and taps on the quarantine glass to get Elliot's attention, the metonymic operation will acquire the status of a metaphor, reminding us of our own, as well as Elliot's first encounter with ET.

The series of details that follow the introductory metonymy are viewed from a very low angle. Low angle functions as a sign of subjectivity. It will prove to be one of the most pertinent signs in the film for determining the narrative agency. There is another cinematic sign in this part of the scene that enhances the impression of a subjective vision: at this point there are still no cuts between the shots. Each of the four shots that follows dissolves into the next one. A dissolve is principally employed in films to signify the passing of time, which often involves a transformation of some kind. In this scene, the dissolves are separating the series of shots depicting the objects that the creature hiding behind the branches is observing. The usual method would be a cut from one shot to the next. This is an efficient way to maintain continuity but it is a process that appears much more abrupt than a dissolve. ET's ability to make us see "smoothly," to manipulate time, to both expand it and condense it, while transferring his attention from one object to the next, tells us something about the gentle nature of these creatures. This capacity to visualize "gently" complements their "sensitive"
actions: being so small, they appear almost vulnerable. This impression is confirmed once we see the way they communicate with each other - when they have something to report, their hearts begin to glow.

The glowing hearts turn out to be an alarm-signal, announcing the presence of an Earthly creature. A detail of alien fingers follows while the camera is moving closer to a plant (shot 9). The camera movement suggests a subjective vision and in the first instance, this could be attributed to ET. In the next shot we see a rabbit looking in the direction of the hand, implying that this vision could have been produced by the little animal (shot 10). Focalization is being thematized here. There is both a conjunction and a disjunction of focalizers - focalization is "split" and "joint," for it can be attributed to two different agents. There is another shot filmed from the same angle where the alien hand is carefully pulling the plant from the ground. In the next shot, the rabbit is still looking. Now, we can clearly connect the focalizer with the focalized object. The rabbit is thus the "character" who actually looks and in the shot that follows we see the object of his attention. Strangely enough, the rabbit is the only agent who can be identified as a true "experiencer," for he is the only one who is, without a doubt, acting as an internal focalizer (shots 10 and 12). From his point of vision, however, he can tell us only what a rabbit can tell, for he is watching the world from his extremely low angle, from an eye level limited by his tiny stature.

Nevertheless, the insertion of the rabbit into the scene is quite functional because it introduces the possibility of telling the story from an alternative point of vision, other than one produced by a human being, for example. As is the case with most of ET - The Extraterrestrial, the predominant point of vision in the film is produced from ET's eye level, which corresponds to the eye level of an eight-year-old child - Elliot. In the subsequent shot, which is extra long, the enormous
trees are contrasted with the tiny creature walking through the forest (shot 14). A shot of the trees follows, viewed from an extremely low angle. Again, there is an extra long shot of ET walking through the forest; now, the focalization in the previous shot can retrospectively be attributed to ET. ET continues his exploration of the forest, the camera simulates his movements, panning across the trees, moving slowly through the grass.

This idyllic encounter with Earth is interrupted by the sudden arrival of cars and a group of men with flashlights (shot 21). The entire action is presented from a low angle: we see tires in mud, feet rushing, men viewed from the waist down. At first, we attach the vision presented from a low angle to ET. An example is a shot of feet walking through the mud where the camera slightly tilts and reveals ET (shot 25). Nevertheless, in the shot that follows we realize that what appeared in the first moment as potentially ET's subjective vision is in fact embedded in a higher narrative frame. A man cut from the hips down, with a batch of keys hanging in the foreground ("Keys") and a flashlight in his hand is moving to the left. The camera pans to the left following his movement and as he moves away from the camera we can see his entire figure. There is a pan to another car where other searchers are standing. Finally, the camera tilts down and reveals ET hiding in the bushes (shot 26). Hence, the one instance where ET is actually looking, and for a moment acting as an internal focalizor, becomes overruled by the look "from above." This moment is quite significant because it depicts a situation where ET's vulnerability is deployed through his subordinated point of vision. Most importantly, this overruling look designates an external focalizor. Yet the camera movement suggests the presence of a quite powerful force, capable at the same time of focalizing subjectively.

On the basis of the analysis of the opening scene 1 conclude that the narrative agency is composed
through the clash between the internal and external focalization.
Cinematic signifiers are continuously indicating that we are dealing
with an internal focalizor, yet throughout the largest part of the
scene this vision cannot be described as strictly internal. Thus, even
though we see everything from a clearly subjective perspective, liter-
ally learning to see the world from this focalizor’s eyes, we begin to
wonder about the nature of the subject behind this focalization. This
alleged internal focalizor is at the same time acting as an external
focalizor. All these clues point to ET; his presence in this scene is
confirmed through his vision which can be attributed to him retro-
spectively. We first have to remember how the objects were focal-
ized, however, before we can understand that ET may be the one
hiding behind these internally focalized visions. The implied uncer-
tainty is confirmed on two separate occasions. The first one is the
brief exchange of shots between ET and the rabbit. Here, the rabbit
emerges as the agent with a higher narrational authority because we
see him looking. The fact that the rabbit is seen from his own eye
level infers, however, that an intersubjective exchange is taking place
even though only one of the subjects is identified. On the second
occasion the uncertainty is of a different order; by subordinating
ET’s status as a narrative agent, it signifies that there is a higher
narratorial agency.

The Overlapping of “Persons”
The following sample scene depicts the first encounter between
Elliot and ET - Elliot believes he has seen something in the garage
that evening and he goes in search of it. Even though he insisted
that something strange was in the garage, his older brother and his
friends only made fun of him. His mother couldn’t be of any help
either, for even if she did believe “something” was there, in her view
that something was probably dangerous and needed to be taken
away. Elliot seems to be alone in his search, so alone that he can
only share his thoughts with himself. As he is approaching the corn-
field he is addressing himself, telling “Elliot” that he is crazy for
engaging in this action. He is wearing a jacket and he is equipped
with a flashlight, but when the camera tilts toward the ground to
reveal the curiously shaped footprints, we notice that Elliot has ven-
tured on this exploration in his socks. Hence, all this is happening
close to home.
Elliot is moving slowly toward the camera, hiding behind the leaves. Suddenly ET’s face emerges through the leaves (shot 6). Terrified, Elliot begins to scream. A shot/reverse shot order follows where Elliot and ET are made to exchange looks. Actually, this method is employed to create not only an ambiguous focalizor but also an ambiguous subject. If we take into account the act of looking, it becomes evident that both Elliot and ET are looking in the same direction. There is a crucial contradiction here: on the one hand, the entire scene is elaborated from the angle which corresponds to Elliot’s/ET’s eye line, but on the other hand, the direction of the looks (shots 5-11) intimates that Elliot could not have seen ET nor could ET have seen Elliot. We therefore need to answer two questions: did Elliot and ET see each other at all? and, can either one of them be treated as a subject?

The reciprocal inability to exchange glances or the emphatic creation of the eye-line mismatch must be observed in relation to the similarity of re/actions, framing, shot duration, and ultimately compared to the sequence of Elliot’s close-ups where he can be described as practically ”reacting to himself.” In this second series of shots which range from 4 frames, hence, just a fraction of a second, to a second and a half, the instances of Elliot looking and screaming are cut precisely to the instances of Elliot looking and screaming. Technically speaking, these shots can be described as “jump-cuts” - they disturb the rules of continuity, the purpose of which is to provide spatial and temporal orientation. In both sequences of shots, the former, where an exchange of shots simulates in fact the exchange of looks between Elliot and ET (5-11), and the latter, where there is an exchange of shots and accordingly, an exchange of looks between Elliot and Elliot (13-17), there is a clash between external and internal focalization.

This clash between focalizors, I would suggest, corresponds to the overlapping of ”persons,” that is,
subject positions. In the sequence of shots 5-11, Elliot can be perceived as ET, and ET as Elliot. The impossible exchange of looks between the two characters creates the possibility for substitution. Since we are following Elliot into the cornfield to see what he will find there, it is his narrational authority that comes into question. Not only is he elaborated as incapable of producing a vision of ET, but there seems to be an additional confusion: the Elliot/ET exchange (5-11), gives way to the Elliot/Elliot exchange (13-17). He seems to be terrified of himself just as he was terrified of ET. Considering however, that he actually hasn’t seen ET, the image that frightened him can be understood as a “blank image,” an imaginary something, onto which even the image of himself can be displaced. This is possible, I would argue, because Elliot as a focalizor is simultaneously acting from the outside and from the inside, split between the internal and the external narrator. The overlapping of external and internal focalization in this scene, and the respective overlapping of narrators points to the simultaneous presence and absence of both Elliot and ET.

The scene ends with Elliot in medium close-up, getting up from the ground followed by a swift traveling of the camera to the left. In the first instance we relate this movement filmed from a low angle, to Elliot, but Elliot is soon left behind while the fast traveling continues. This final overlapping of “persons” expressed in the shift from Elliot’s focalization to the focalization we could potentially attribute to ET, exploits the essential contradiction for further development of the narrative: it leads the viewer to believe that the impossible is possible, that whatever Elliot/ET did/didn’t see, exists anyway. The outcome of this scene brings to the fore the relation between narration and focalization: in the scene’s closing we can conclude that the split/joint focalizations are in fact the semiotic product of a narration that “tells” that the impossible is possible. To come to this conclusion we
need to distinguish the subject of seeing, or the focalizer, and the authority of framing, that is, the narrator. The play of focalizations produced by the subjects of seeing undoubtedly affects the narrated content. The specific framing of the narrated content enables us to assign meaning to the clash of visions. It is in that respect that we can conclude that the narratorial authority leads us to believe that what Elliot saw is both imaginary and real.
Overlapping of Narrational Levels

In scene 3 there is no frenzy of shot/reverse shot mismatching; the function of the shot/reverse shot set-up that is employed in this scene confirms that Elliot actually did see something. Elliot’s position in the family is clear by now: his mother Mary, brother Michael and sister Gertie do not believe him, and the father who according to Elliot would believe him is momentarily in Mexico, so Elliot cannot tell him. The scene opens in external focalization. Elliot is lying in a patio chair in front of the garage covered with a blanket. In shot 1 the camera pans from Elliot’s face to the blanket in order to reveal ET. This intervention allows Elliot to act as a focalizor. Focalization is still external, but Elliot is temporarily appointed as the subject whose vision we are to share: ET in counterlight, coming out of the garage.

In shots 3, 5, 7 and 9, however, the identical framing and angle established in the opening of shot 1, before the camera intervenes to reveal ET, suggests also the limitations of Elliot’s point of vision. In these shots, the position of the camera does not correspond to the position from which Elliot is watching ET. Even more importantly, Elliot is framed together with the object of his vision, hence, his vision is embedded in a higher narrational frame. This infers that the shots are focalized externally. The same strategy is employed in shots 11 and 13, where the camera is placed above Elliot’s head in a slightly high angle, his back facing the camera, and ET facing Elliot. Therefore, Elliot is not acting as an internal focalizor. This implies that his vision is not reported in the “first person.” An external focalizor, a “third person” is showing us what it is that Elliot sees. I consider this a crucial difference, yet a difference that is overlooked in the theories of filmic narration which adopt Genette’s concept. This is the difference between character narration focalized internally and character narration focalized externally.¹

This distinction is crucial for a text such as ET-
The Extraterrestrial, for unlike Elliot, ET can focalize internally. In the externally focalized shot 1, where Elliot's vision is mediated, we see ET coming out of the garage and moving in the direction of Elliot. In the next shot, shot 2, the camera moves closer to Elliot in medium close-up, simulating ET's vision. Furthermore, the angle and the position of the camera in shots 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10, where Elliot is the object of focalization, correspond to ET's position in the mise-en-scène. The analysis of the scene demonstrates that Elliot needs an external focalizer to see ET, while ET can act as an internal focalizor. ET is elaborated as the "first person" for he is able to produce an internally focalized vision, while Elliot is elaborated as a "third person." The overlapping of persons in a single image or the splitting inferred by the dual focalization at work in sample scene 2, is now transposed into two separate images - the image produced by an "I" (ET's vision), and the image produced by a "he," (Elliot's vision). In the previous scene we could note an overlapping of focalizors, which results in the overlapping of "persons." In this particular case, we can trace an exchange of persons, but when we take into account focalization, we can conclude that this is not an even exchange. The exchange between external and internal focalization indicates an overlapping of narrational levels.

The concept of narration as an intersubjective process enables us, therefore, to trace not just the play between subjectivity and objectivity. We can also trace a process where the narrative agent is composed through a "joint vision." This has a drastic effect on the character-images of both Elliot and ET. While each of them may appear as an actor, neither one of them functions as a subject. These assertions will become even more convincing once we observe the play between narration and focalization in the following scene.
ET as a Product of Elliot's Imagination

In scene 4, ET and Elliot are juxtaposed in a situation which simulates the experience of mis/recognizing oneself in one's own mirror image. This scene dovetails with the previous one. Elliot has managed to lure ET into his room by feeding him "M 'n M" candies. He has been using this "Hansel and Gretel strategy" all day long - spilling the candies intentionally to mark the way home; and, evidently, the plan worked. Now, ET is standing across from him, staged as Elliot's mirror reflection. ET performs every move Elliot makes with such synchronicity that eventually we need only to see what ET is doing, as in shot 10, to know that Elliot is doing exactly the same. The scene hinges on the shot/reverse shot set-up and a seemingly equal distribution of narratorial authority. In principle, Elliot is the initiator of every action, which leaves ET with the role of the copycat. But this is based on Elliot's misrecognition of himself. For in the sequence of shots 3 to 15, which present the exchange of looks between ET and Elliot, ET is focalized externally, while Elliot is focalized internally. Elliot is persistently focalized from ET's subjective point of vision, whereas Elliot lacks the point of vision where his subjective experience could be entrenched. The reiterative shot/reverse shot pattern dominates the entire scene. It counterposes "first person" narration to the "third person" narration and emphasizes the paradox that ET, although a product of Elliot's decomposed subjectivity, can actually see Elliot. In addition, this pattern enhances the split between the narrational levels in the apparently perpetual absence of unification. Herein lies Elliot's misrecognition - the image of ET he sees is not a unified subject. It is a product of the conjunction of subject positions belonging to two separate levels of narration and two separate character images - his and ET's.

It is in the scene's closing that the dialectical relationship between internal and external focalization is attained. For it is then that the formerly uneven dis-
tributio nn  o f narratoria l authorit y  betwee n  Ellio t an d  E T  
is finally balanced. The achieved balance definitively points to the illusory nature of Elliot's experience: just at the moment that his eyes are closed and he is practically asleep (shots 22, 24), Elliot is finally able to focalize internally (shots, 23 and 25). In shots 17 to 25, both ET and Elliot are weary, their eyelids are heavy and they are ready to fall asleep. Each one ultimately withdraws to his side of the room, but interestingly enough, only Elliot's withdrawal is elaborated. He is walking backwards toward a chair with his eyes closed, whereas ET on the other hand, can only be assumed to have moved to his side of the room. We encounter ET after he is already placed among the various objects displayed in the background, in the shot which succeeds the shot of Elliot asleep (shot 23).

The imbalance of narratorial authority is thus temporarily resolved and complicated in the profusion of a single, almost overly simplistic shot/reverse shot pattern, thanks to the play of internal and external focalization. The newly established reciprocity of the points of vision infuses the scene with an oniric quality. This quality forces us to renegotiate our notions of the imaginary and the "real": in shot 26, the last shot in the scene, the camera moves towards Elliot in close-up as he is sleeping. This kind of unmotivated, and thus, self-conscious camera movement, is a cliché device of the classical Hollywood style. It had a very concrete purpose. The camera moving toward the face of a person sleeping was usually employed to announce a subjective experience of a character, as a sort of trajectory into a character's dreamworld. In this text, such an announcement does not really transfer us into some concrete subjective experience which in Branigan's terms would imply that we have crossed the border from an objective "nonfocalized" state into some subjective experience of a character. Elliot could be dreaming that ET exists, but then again, the tracking and the low camera angle signify at the same time that some
little creature is moving close to Elliot. We have noticed this type of movement before, most pronounced in the closing of scene 2.

The specificity of this textual system does not lie in the strict separation between subjectivity and objectivity, but as analyses repeatedly confirm, in the interplay of "persons," that is, external and internal narrators, and the conjunction and disjunction of visions. In this scene, as in the previous one we can trace a discrepancy between levels of focalization. The continuous exchange between external and internal focalization enables us to conclude that there is a constant play at work between narratorial agents. Each of the characters is dependent on the play of subject positions. This play is the product of a narration that reconfirms that the impossible is possible. Even if we are not sure whether ET is imaginary or real, we do know that he is "out there."

**The Impossible Place of the Focalizor**

The elaboration of scene 5 relies, to begin with, on a device that is generally not employed in the rest of the film - the establishing shot. It is the first establishing shot as far as the interaction between Elliot and ET is concerned (shot 1). It is thus interesting to see to what extent, or if at all, it improves our sense of orientation. Elliot is alone at home with ET. He has convinced his family that he has a fever and cannot go to school. The graphic composition of the shot allows us to notice immediately that due to the strong counterlight all the objects in the room appear to be of the same texture, including Elliot and ET. The dominant space is the foreground, a table stacked with curiously shaped contours which convey the sense of a two-dimensional world. Both ET, who occupies the left side of the frame, and Elliot, who is posited on the right side, blend equally well into this exotic setting.

They are anchored by the massive table in the foreground which serves as the unit of measure and
spatial orientation. ET, who cannot speak and whose head is just above the surface of the table, is like a little child. In the course of the scene Elliot acts increasingly patronizing towards ET. Since ET’s head seems “fixed” to the table, he can easily be perceived as an object, much like the fishbowl, the peanut-shaped piggy bank, or the toy “Star Warrior” Lando Calrissian, who can act and talk back only through Elliot. This entire interlude only highlights the crucial issue: it prepares the terrain for further exploration of the imaginary status of ET and the progressive elusion of Elliot’s image. In the establishing shot, the camera is behind the table which marks the distancing from both ET and Elliot, and accentuates the axis of action. Already in shot 3 the 180-degree rule (which regulates spatial orientation and match-on action and vision), is broken: in shot 2, Elliot is framed with the fishbowl in the foreground. The camera is thus in front of the table. He is looking from the right side to left repeating his name, addressing ET. The following shot (shot 3), however, depicts a detail of ET’s feet.

The shot of ET’s feet is a sequel to a half-medium shot of Elliot who has just introduced himself. First of all, the shot alludes to the impossible place of the focalizor; the 180-degree rule is abandoned to provide us with the view of this peculiar detail. Secondly, in the previous shot, (shot 2), Elliot is not looking downward toward the floor, where the feet are located. To the extent that ET’s feet are a part of the diegesis, the shot can be perceived as extradiegetic. On the one hand, this vision appears external because, according to the direction of the looks, the camera angle, and the position of the characters within the mise-en-scène, it cannot be attributed to either Elliot or ET. On the other hand, the detail of ET’s feet is focalized from a privileged position, alluding thus to a very subjective vision after all. Furthermore, as a disruption of spatial, temporal and consequently, narrative continuity, ET’s feet seem to belong to an undefined space which is
detached from Elliot. ET is "coming from another place," as it were, yet he is there with Elliot.¹

The notion that ET may be an imaginary character is reinforced in the further elaboration of the scene depicting the interaction between ET and Elliot. In fact, only Elliot is talking and addressing ET, showing him his toys and personal gadgets. The exchange of shots between Elliot and ET is only a simulation of an intersubjective exchange. This is most strongly emphasized through their mutual inability to produce a vision of one another. They are supposedly communicating, yet according to the cinematic signifiers, they do not see each other. In shots 5, 7, 9 and 11, Elliot, focalized externally, is in medium close-up, in semi-profile leaning on the table, while ET's head is just above the surface of the table framed between the fishbowl on the left and Elliot on the right. These are shots where Elliot is showing something to ET. In shots 6, 8 and 10 where ET's reaction is to be expected, we note that ET's reaction may actually be coming from somewhere else - more precisely, shot 6, (the transition from shot 5) depicts ET from practically the same angle as in the previous shot. The camera is slightly repositioned to the left, giving us a closer view of ET's head as he is watching the toy in Elliot's hand. Shot 8, which succeeds shot 7 figures as another reaction, yet here, Elliot is in medium close-up playing with his toy warriors. In shot 10, the sequel to shot 9, which again is framed as 7 and 5, we are offered a detail of the fishbowl and Elliot's toy shark.

The impossibility of an intersubjective exchange is even more evident in the final part of the scene. Here, Elliot is looking but the vision he is producing corresponds neither to the direction of his look nor to his position within the mise-en-scène. In the transition of shots 14 to 15, 16 to 17 and 18 to 19, the close-up of Elliot focalized from his own eye level, is cut to a medium shot of Elliot and ET. In shots 14, 16 and 18 Elliot is focalized from his own eye level,
possibly even from a slightly lower angle, yet in the shots that supposedly display his vision, 15 and 17, he is focalized together with ET, from a slightly higher angle. Since the transitions do not obey the rules of continuity of the classical Hollywood style, (this applies to a considerable extent to the previous sequence of shots as well) they can be perceived as jump-cuts. These jump-cuts do not cause disorientation; it is rather a case of disturbed continuity of space and time: Elliot is in a close-up addressing ET, but he is constantly looking in the direction which doesn't correspond to ET's place within the mise-en-scène. As a consequence, the space of Elliot's close-up becomes detached from the space where he is interacting with ET.

The importance of the off-screen space, the space outside of the frame is especially stressed in shot 16, (Elliot's close-up) where ET according to Elliot is eating his toy car. In shot 17, Elliot snatches the toy away from ET and he asks ET if he is hungry. In the next shot, shot 18, where Elliot is in close-up, he answers the question by himself; he tells himself that he is hungry, which is the only concrete response in the entire "communication process" with ET that Elliot receives.

On the basis of the analysis of the scene we could conclude that narration in the first part of the scene is focalized externally whereas in the second part there is a shift to internal focalization. Things are a bit more complicated than that, however. The external vision which informs us of the interaction between the two characters can hardly be described as strictly external, for it is too overtly restricted to what the characters see, or rather, to what they do not see. It would be even more incorrect to describe the focalization in the second part of the scene as internal: Elliot is elaborated as a character who figures as a subject of vision (shots 14, 16 and 18). Hence, there is implied shift from external focalization to internal focalization. When we observe the content of his vision, we notice that it
does not correspond spatially or temporally to the place from which it was perceived. The undecidability between external and internal vision suggests that although Elliot cannot see ET from the place where he is, this does not mean that ET does not exist. ET appears to be in a different time/space continuum.

**Character-Image Under Erasure**

The opening of the following sample scene relies on our ability to recall the composition of the establishing shot in the sample scene analyzed above, where ET occupies the left part of the frame and Elliot occupies the right part. In the following scene, the room still has the earlier atmosphere, but now Elliot is interacting with his older brother Michael. As the smaller creature Elliot occupies the former position of ET, whereas Michael as the larger one will for the moment stand in for Elliot. Elliot soon pushes Michael toward the foreground where he is to wait until Elliot brings in the “goblin.” This is a special moment. Elliot is finally going to prove to Michael that the goblin really exists, but as the scene is elaborated, we are not sure whether the goblin is ET or Elliot. There is something even more important occurring here, and it has to do with Elliot’s capacity to act and to be perceived as a subject.

Michael is in the foreground, facing the camera, making faces and mocking Elliot, while in the background Elliot is preparing to display ET. In shot 8, Michael, in medium-shot turns around and in the following shot, shot 9, Elliot, framed to his knees is standing next to ET. In shot 10, Michael is in medium close-up, looking in the direction of Elliot and ET, flabbergasted. Finally, with a serious expression, he only manages to utter his brother’s name. In the next shot (shot 11), Michael’s vision produces a close-up of his younger brother. Strangely enough, then, he appears totally shocked by the sight of Elliot. It seems that ET’s presence has enabled Michael to finally see his younger brother and conversely, on account of ET, Elliot has been able to engage in an intersubjective exchange. But there is another exchange that took place here - the character-image of ET is exchanged for the one of Elliot. While it is completely certain that both Michael and Elliot can focalize internally, the question that emerges is - why is the image of Elliot employed in place of the image of the “real” goblin? Who or what did Michael actually see?
Elliot standing in for ET confirms the elusiveness of his own character-image. This can have serious repercussions for his subjectivity, for ET may be the product of his imagination.

**Placing a Call to Someone “Above”**

Before ET can return home he has to "phone home" and arrange for a spaceship to come to Earth. While hanging around the house, he manages to construct a “communicator” out of discarded gadgets and toy parts. It seems that the purpose of this "ready made" device is to produce meaning rather than a connection with a planet millions of light years away. Surprisingly enough, the meaning it produces is that it works. The “call” has to be made from that place in the forest where ET's spaceship has landed in the film's opening, and Elliot has to find a way to smuggle ET out of the house. He works out a scheme which involves his siblings: the three of them will go trick-or-treating on Halloween. Gertie will leave the house earlier, but their mother will be led to believe that ET, dressed up as a ghost is Gertie. Elliot and ET will go off to the forest to place the call, and afterwards they will meet up with Michael and Gertie.

Elliot is giving instructions to Gertie, who is marked in the off-screen space, while he applies make up in front of a mirror. It is a one-shot scene which starts with Elliot's close-up. As the camera pulls back to reveal Gertie, we realize that it is Elliot's mirror reflection emitting instructions. The notion that Elliot is slipping away is later fully elaborated in the scene in the forest. This scene can also be treated as a sequence of scenes, for it is interrupted with the shots of the surveillance crew wiring Elliot's home while the family is out. The arrival of “Keys” and his men makes ET's call home even more urgent. Now, it is not only illness that threatens ET; if he doesn't get away he may be turned into a lab specimen. Since the intrusion into Elliot's home is happening while he is in the woods with ET, he has no knowledge of it. For the moment he is helping ET set up the communicator and they are waiting for it to start transmitting signals. They both look as if their health has considerably deteriorated. Elliot's Halloween make-up enhances this impression.

There are two simultaneous processes at work here: 1) ET's intention to break away from the image of Elliot, in order to 2) establish a link with a higher narratorial agency. Quite literally, he is
waiting for a response from someone “above.” The scene can be divided into 3 units: unit 1 (shots 1-12), unit 2 (shots 1-10) and unit 3 (shots 1-11). Unit 1 displays the loss of ET’s power to focalize internally. In the opening of unit 1, the image of Elliot appears in a separate shot (shot 2), preceding the shot of ET (shot 3). Both ET and Elliot are focalized externally. No contact between them is established in the two subsequent shots. In shot 2, Elliot is looking right to left scratching his face with his right hand. In the following shot, ET is looking in the opposite direction scratching his face with his left hand. Although contact isn’t established between Elliot and ET through an exchange of looks for example, we can establish a connection between the two images. The connection consists of similarity manifested in reversibility. The image of ET appears as the mirror reflection of Elliot’s image, which conversely implies that Elliot can be perceived as the reflection of ET.

Shot 3 confirms the implied loss of ET’s power to focalize internally. In shot 2 Elliot is looking upward, in shot 3 ET is looking upward. Neither one sees anything; their looking produces no vision. Only when they are placed together to perform a synchronous action of looking upward (shot 4), can they see (shot 5). The branch strung with rope is thus a product of a shared vision - it is focalized internally by both Elliot and ET. This is reconfirmed in shot 6 where they again focalize together, and see the branches (shot 7). In the previous sample scenes, the interdependency between the two images was established through the continual exchange of the external focalization with internal focalization. The implied narrator relied on ET’s vision yet Elliot’s vision was necessary to produce the vision of ET. Now, the interdependency is established literally, they are locked together as it were, (shots 4, 6, 9 and 12) which leaves the impression that ET may not be going anywhere after all.

In that sense, their looking upward is extreme-
ly significant, because there is no one "out there" to return their look. It is this absence of vision from above that charges their situation with a sense of hopelessness. In the closing of unit 1 (shot 8), the communicator begins to operate, signaling the possibility that someone "up there" has received the message. In the short pattern formed in shots 4-7, Elliot and ET are both looking toward the branches and manage to produce a vision of the branches. Their look remains unreciprocated, however, because there is no one out there who can return their look. This pattern is disrupted by the insertion of the shots of the communicator (shot 8, 10, 11). In shot 12, Elliot and ET are still linked together, yet they are expressing hope. The (absent) vision from above that is awaited as a response to the longing looks of Elliot and ET is displaced onto the communicator. The insertion of the shot of the communicator affects the further development between the images of ET and Elliot - in shot 12, Elliot “slips” to the edge of the frame.

Unit 2 (shots 1-10) further problematizes the established interdependency. But now, ET is trying to break away from Elliot. In shot 6, Elliot takes position opposite ET, trying to convince him to stay. ET motions his head to the left. A slight pan follows, dropping Elliot from the shot. Shot 7 is a close up of ET looking up (a jump-cut), while off-screen Elliot is still cajoling him to stay. In shot 10, as in 8, for a moment, Elliot is dropped from the shot. But then he moves backwards and sinks to a kneeling position. He is looking up, towards ET, while ET also looks upward, repeating, “Home, home...” In unit 1 we could trace internal focalization in the instances where Elliot and ET focalize together. In unit 2, the shots are focalized externally. In unit 3 (shot 1-11), a whole new pattern is established in relation to vision.

In unit 3, for the first time in the film, ET and Elliot can engage in an intersubjective exchange and, what is more, they can focalize internally. Nevertheless,
this exchange is not at all reciprocal. In shots 8, 9 and 10 from unit 2, ET persistently avoids sharing the space in the shot with Elliot or establishing eye-contact with him. Elliot’s sinking to a kneeling position at the end of unit 2 links his point of vision to the low angle in unit 3. The kneeling position furthermore secures the vantage point of a “divinity” for ET. In shots 2, 4 and 6 Elliot is focalized internally from a high angle, hence “from above” whereas ET is focalized internally from a low angle, “from below” (shots 1, 3, 5 and 7). Elliot’s voluntary subordination proves that nothing is resolved yet. On the contrary, the situation is even more complicated because ET has literally become bigger than Elliot. Elliot is not only dependent on ET. The disparity in the angles of vision additionally suggests that he is completely dominated by ET.

ET ultimately breaks away from this high/low pattern; rather than returning Elliot’s look (shot 7), ET looks up. A low angle shot of the trees follows (shot 8), then again a shot of ET looking up (shot 9). By looking away from Elliot, ET is repeatedly trying to break away from Elliot. ET’s search for contact outside and away from Elliot implies a crisis for both character-images: ET’s look is not reciprocated and neither is Elliot’s. As subjects, they are both left stranded, as it were, which indicates that they are mutually dependent on a higher authority - someone or something that will make it possible for ET to return home and finally resolve the crisis.

In fact, when Elliot wakes up alone by the communicator, he walks around in his Halloween cape searching for ET until he assumes ET’s position from shot 9. He is looking, yet what follows is not his vision, but only a fade-out. Elliot seems to have vanished.

Mother’s Failure to Resolve the Crisis

Having spent the night in the forest and realizing that ET has disappeared, Elliot looks around but does not manage to find him. He returns home alone and pleads with Michael to go back to the forest to find ET. The following sample scene opens in Elliot’s room. Elliot and ET are lying on the floor opposite each other dead-alive. The situation is highly dramatic. Michael is inviting the mother into the room to help them. As it turns out, the mother cannot save Elliot because she is in such a panic that she cannot distinguish between Elliot and ET.

Throughout the entire scene, ET is the one who is calling
“mother” and reaching out to her, while Elliot is completely disconnected from her. In the opening of the scene a shot/reverse shot pattern is established between the mother and ET (shots 3-7). In shots 3 and 5 she is focalizing internally, producing a vision of ET (shots 4 and 6), and strangely enough, she does not see Elliot. In shot 7 she looks, and in shot 8 Elliot briefly returns the look. He immediately turns his head to the right, however, urging a cut to ET (shot 9). The mother is now in a close-up (shot 10), reacting again to ET and not to Elliot. ET continues to address her as she orders Michael to take Gertie out of the room (shots 12 and 15). The shot of the dying ET is interpolated (shot 15) as a follow-up to the shot of Gertie (shot 14) who is trying to tell her mother that ET is harmless. With Elliot eliminated from the action, because the mother fails to see him, there is only the image of ET, who in mother’s eyes signifies a threat. Just as she cannot see Elliot, she cannot perceive ET as a weak creature who desperately needs help.

In the montage sequence (shots 12-22), which depicts the mother’s panic and the resulting “last minute evacuation,” ET is the danger from which she wants to escape. The mother’s inability to resolve the crisis and intervene productively in the restitution of Elliot’s subjectivity is radicalized in the closing of the scene, particularly in the transition of shots 19-21. In shot 19, the mother is on the left, with her back to the camera, Michael is on the right carrying Gertie toward the camera. In the background, on the left we can see Elliot on the floor. The mother and Michael are moving diagonally. As the shot progresses Michael crosses to the left side, revealing ET on the floor in the background on the right. The mother, displaying the tendency to move diagonally, seems to be rushing toward ET. This is confirmed in shot 20 where ET is reaching out to her. In shot 21, the mother is crouching. We still do not see Elliot. It seems she is ready to pick up ET. When she stands up again and turns toward the cam-
era, she is carrying Elliot.

In the continuity of action, the shot of ET replaces the hypothetical shot of Elliot who is actually picked up from the floor in shot 21. If ET is figuring as both a threat for Elliot and as Elliot himself, it means that when ET remains alone on the floor, reaching out, screaming for mom (shot 23), that the mother did not manage to rescue her son. The opening of the scene additionally demonstrates that there is no intersubjective exchange between the mother and Elliot. The mother does not recognize him as a subject. Hence, the rescue operation will have no effect because the mother cannot help Elliot restore his subjectivity. For this to happen, a father figure will need to emerge on the scene.

The Fabula Collapsing onto the Story
The one person who, according to Elliot, could definitely know what ET is about is his unreachable “extraterrestrialized” father. The absence of an adult male figure is emphasized throughout the entire film. In Elliot’s line of action, the only adult male person is a teacher who is framed from the waist down. Outside Elliot’s line of action the all-male surveillance crew are following their own line of action, searching for ET. The outstanding figure is “Keys” who also pursues the search alone, lingering on, trying to track down the alien. The first clue he finds are the M ’n Ms, the clue intentionally left for ET to lure him to Elliot’s home. In this last phase, “Keys” has finally arrived at Elliot’s home. Just in time, it seems, to release Elliot from having to be ET in order to prove that ET exists. As I have already mentioned, the rescue of both Elliot and ET is linked to the working of subjectivity, which can principally be traced on the level of the story. The interdependency between the two character-images analyzed in the first two phases points to the paradox mentioned earlier: ET is the focalizing agent on whose vision narration depends, yet at the same time he is elaborated as the product of Elliot’s imagination. This implies that the mapping of subject positions through the play of visions is a semiotic product of narration which “tells” that the interaction between Elliot and ET is taking place at “home.” The way in which the narrative space is inhabited by Elliot and ET enables us to conclude that ET’s home can also be understood as Elliot’s mind.

In addition to the film’s ending, when ET touches Elliot’s
forehead and tells him he will be "in there," another scene points to Elliot's mind as ET's home. The first time ET expresses his desire to phone home he points toward the sky; the shadow of his index finger is projected onto Elliot's forehead. While these clues support the notion that ET may be the product of Elliot's imagination, or that he can be stored in Elliot's memory, the findings established on the narrational level have enabled us to observe the ways "home" affects Elliot's subjectivity. Similarly, the crisis of Elliot's subjectivity traceable in phase three, is bound up with the home produced through the play of subject positions. The resolution of the crisis will occur at home, but this requires another person to step into that narrative space. The restitution of subjectivity will come to coincide with the rescue operation that takes place in Elliot's physical home. Hence, fabula will need to intervene into the story. The rescue operation involves the separation of Elliot and ET, an operation involving a whole crew of scientists. The one who will resolve the crisis of Elliot's subjectivity, however, is "Keys," the only adult figure who can see Elliot without confusing him with ET.

When "Keys" approaches Elliot in the following sample scene, he is outfitted like a spaceman. In the opening of the scene, an "alien" hand enters the shot and taps on the quarantine glass to get Elliot's attention. Elliot is under medical treatment; he opens his eyes but appears only semi-conscious. The following shot is a close-up of "Keys" and we can attribute the dismembered alien hand to him. He is wearing a helmet and we notice the image of Elliot reflected in its surface, an announcement, as it were, of the potential recuperation of his character-image. "Keys" displays here a spectral quality, the visor shields his face, and to produce a vision of "the man behind the mask" Elliot has to rely on what he hears.

The man, dressed in an outfit that echoes the armor of Hamlet's dead father, does not say, "I am thy
father’s spirit," but he can be interpreted as a father-figure nonetheless. Even though Elliot can focalize internally in the scene and engage in an intersubjective exchange, what truly propels the exchange is the voice Elliot hears behind the visor, rather than the vision of the spaceman’s spectral figure. What he hears cannot strictly be separated from what he sees, because the “specter’s” voice conditions Elliot’s vision. Conversely, the content of Elliot’s vision, the unidentifiable man with a helmet on his head lends authority to the voice. The “authority of the voice” as a condition for the production of a specific vision brings up the second implication that the concept of focalization entails: we are ultimately conditioned to perceive the world in a certain way, or in other words, we are told how to see. The “authority” invested into the spaceman’s dismembered voice is the voice of the “father.” Hence, “Keys” is a personification of narratorial authority. As the one who restores the crisis he accordingly gives meaning to the interplay between focalization and narration in the film.

The restoration of Elliot’s subjectivity is elaborated in accordance with the spectral nature of this man who visits him. While the spaceman’s position within the mise-en-scène appears fixed, Elliot is elaborated as if “switching places.” In shots 2, 8 and 10 the spaceman is in a close-up, focalized from his own eye-level, with the image of Elliot reflected in the visor. In shots 4 and 6 the two of them are focalized together in a sort of an establishing shot which enables us to draw conclusions about their positions within the mise-en-scène. It is evident that “Keys” is oriented left to right, which according to the 180 degree rule, would impose the right to left orientation on Elliot. In shots 1, 3, 5 and 7, however, Elliot is oriented left to right. This is especially pronounced in the transitions of shots 4 to 5, and 6 to 7. In shots 5 and 7 the camera crosses the axis as if renegotiating spatial relations: Elliot’s head, positioned on the right side of the frame in shots
4 and 6, is suddenly on the left side (5 and 7). Furthermore, in shots 1 and 7 he is framed closer than in shot 5, although all three shots are focalized from the same position, Elliot’s low eye-level. And finally, in shot 3, he is viewed from a slightly higher angle. Considering that the spaceman is not changing his position within the *mise-en-scène*, the different positions from which Elliot is viewed retroactively allude to the spaceman’s ubiquitous vision.

Even though the only two shots focalized externally (4 and 6) anchor the two characters into the *mise-en-scène*, focalization and the working of the cinematic signifiers are laboring to simultaneously establish and disavow the narratorial authority of both Elliot and the spaceman. What is more, the constant uncertainty about the spatial relations conveys the impression that they are elaborated as being both equally imaginary and real. The alien hand in the scene’s opening draws attention to Elliot’s (and our) encounters with ET from the beginning of the film, where the shots of ET’s hand, operating metonymically, suggest a very present, subjective vision. In this sample scene, it is the spaceman’s hand that enters the shot, and the former metonymic operation now acquires the status of a metaphor. What this means is that the impossible/possible place from which Elliot is viewed in shots 1, 5 and 7, serves to emphasize the spectral nature of “Keys” and asserts that, just as ET’s hand was standing in for an unfamiliar agency, the spaceman’s hand is standing in for ET. Furthermore, it thematizes the return of the unfamiliar as familiar. The invention of the “fatherly alien” who can take the place of “alienated father” is what finally conditions Elliot’s subjectivity. Elaborated as ET, but capable of acting as a subject, the spaceman “Keys” becomes an ideal substitution for ET, just as ET was the ideal substitution for the absent father. Elaborated as the substitution for ET, he makes the departure of ET possible. Elliot’s little hand viewed from his own point of vision now con-
firms that Elliot can be a subject like the “father” who has come to take ET’s place.

And sure enough, in the subsequent scene which depicts the separation of Elliot and ET, Elliot’s capacity to act as a subject is proven (scene 10). He regains his character-image by going through the pain of separation. In this scene Elliot and ET are finally able to reciprocally exchange glances. This implies that their interdependency is definitively resolved.

**The Father As a Spector**

If *ET - The Extraterrestrial*, as here analyzed, can indeed serve as an example of the textual system at work in the new Hollywood cinema, it suggests that the specificity of this system lies in the interplay between narration and focalization or, in the subtle conjunctions of “persons” and focalizors. The accompanying effect of this system is the decomposition of the character-image. Decomposition of the character-image puts pressure on the notion of character-bound narration. With respect to this, I have argued that in filmic texts a distinction needs to be made between character narration focalized internally and character narration focalized externally. The continuous exchange between external and internal focalization infers a corresponding clash between levels of narration. The specificity of narration in this film is that it produces a clash of visions, joint or split visions or an overlapping of narratorial agents, in order to “tell” us that there is a constant uncertainty between reality and fantasy, between the possible and the impossible.

By tracing the play between focalizors I was able to determine the ways vision affects the structuring of subjectivity in filmic narratives. The discussion of focalization does not end here, however. For in Bal’s view focalization is to be understood beyond the story-world itself, which implies that vision can be accounted for even if it cannot be attributed to an “experiencer” or an identifiable entity. Bal’s concept of the focalizer needs to be regarded in relation to her concept of the narrative consisting of three layers: the text, the story, and the fabula. This in my opinion is crucial for the discussion of subjectivity in new Hollywood films such as *ET - The Extraterrestrial*. For as the analysis of the film confirms, the structuring of subjectivity is ultimately coterminous with a world-view constructed on the level of the fabula.
The decomposition of the character image as it is related to the conflicting positioning of subject positions as well as points of vision, prepares the terrain for the “fatherly alien” who will bring order into Elliot's “home.” The collapse of the fabula onto the story, which corresponds to the collapse of “homes,” is dependent on the notion of triple mobility. Triple mobility infers a mobilizing of subjectivity on the level of the fabula and gives way to the process of fabulation. Fabulation affects the process of telling, or rather, it structures the telling according to a specific world-view: when the father is absent, the home is a crisis. The crisis involves the father and the son. The world can survive only if the father is re-invented. Although the working of subjectivity can be traced on the level of the story, the fact that resolving the crisis in Elliot's mind home, requires the arrival of the “father” to Elliot's physical home points to the function of the fabula in the process of telling.

The fabula in question may be understood in terms of a tendency, characteristic of new Hollywood cinema, to redefine but also re-institute patriarchal myths, to give a new face to history, or simply to repair the father. There is something else we can conclude at this point: even though the invisible narratorial authority, personified by “Keys,” has the power to resolve the crisis of Elliot's subjectivity, it simultaneously points to its own spectral nature. If we return to Spielberg and his vision as a social agent, *ET-The Extraterrestrial* proves to be a very useful point of departure. Firstly, it enables us to problematize vision in relation to “home” as a structure of meaning, which governs subjectivity. Secondly, and this will be even more clear in the analysis of *Back to Future*, the sense of a troubled home reflects the very prominent preoccupation of this cinema with a troubled paternity. This concern with restoring order at home in turn has significant social and historical implications.

I will explore the notion of “home” further in the following chapters. In chapters three and seven, I will focus on home as archive, in the Derridian, but also Benjaminian (messianic) sense, where it can be understood as a memory of the past projected into the future. In chapter three, I will particularly take up the significance of home as the mnemonic archive for the preservation of people's origins. Indeed, racial intolerance, oppression and injustice signify also that “archive” is out-of-joint, that there is a mal d'archive, as Derrida describes it. This sickness of the archive -
archive fever - indicates that both home and history are out of order.

Footnotes

1 In "The New Hollywood," Schatz states the following, "Jaws was a social, industrial, and economic phenomenon of the first order, a cinematic idea and cultural commodity whose time had come. In many ways, the film simply confirmed or consolidated various existing industry trends and practices" (19). Wyatt's position in his High Concept is that high refers not to high art, but to a film's high visibility, memorability, and simplicity. From the perspective of marketing, this concept involves the look, the hook, and the book, (the look of the images, the marketing of hooks, and the reduced narratives (22). Wyatt begins with a famous comment by Spielberg, "if a person can tell me an idea in 25 words or less, it's going to make a good movie. I like ideas, especially movie ideas, that you can hold in your hand." Ibid. In "Jaws, Ideology and Film Theory," Stephen Heath draws on Jaws to point to the ways Hollywood cinema, much like the avant-garde film, engages with the material conditions of film in order to produce an "other" cinema.

2 This unidentifiable vision is crucial for genres such as fantasy, horror, thriller or science fiction. There is no need to say that these genres could not at all function without the manifestation of a "supernatural subjectivity," without the invisible forces that intrude upon, or threaten the characters' worlds, or invest the characters with a contradictory meaning as is the case in ET-The Extraterrestrial. In Spielberg's Jaws, for example, this strategy is in the first instance employed to increase suspense. It takes quite some time in the film until we actually see the shark but we do see people attacked and being killed. More importantly, the shark is made present through its focalization (enhanced by a memorable music score introduced in the very beginning of the film). We do not see the shark looking, but we do know that the film is about a shark; when we see the shots filmed under water where the camera is moving closer toward a body swimming, this vision can retrospectively be attributed to the shark. What causes suspense and discomfort is precisely the fact that this vision is so overtly subjective yet the focalizer itself is not revealed. The remarkable side of this kind of uncertainty is that even though it is concretely the vision of the shark, it can simultaneously be attributed to a focalizer outside of the fictional world. As a result, it can come to represent an outside force that has a sort of a "shark-like" effect in itself. This becomes clearer when we take into consideration the fact that the officials of a small town try to cover up the fact that the killer shark visits their beaches. Since they do not take immediate action, such as to close the beaches, these officials are themselves responsible for the deaths. The vision from beneath the sea, the controlling gaze that kills can thus symbolically be attributed to their corrupt ideology.

3 In "Structural Analysis of Narratives," Roland Barthes reminds us that in Aristotelian poetics, the notion of character is secondary, entirely subsidiary to the notion of action: "Later the character, who until then had been only a name, the agent of an action, acquired a psychological consistency, became
an individual, a ‘person,’ in short a fully constituted being.” Barthes adds, however, that from its very outset, structural analysis has been reluctant to treat the character as an essence. In *Morphology of the Fairy Tale*, Vladimir Propp, has reduced characters to a simple typology, based not on psychology but on the unity of actions assigned to them by the narrative. *Image-Music-Text* (104-5). Since then, the problems raised by the classification of the characters of narrative are in the process of being resolved. Greimas, for example, has proposed to describe and classify the characters of narrative not according to what they are but according to what they do, thus, as actants. Considering that this participation is ordered in couples, the infinite world of characters, as Barthes points out, is also bound by a paradigmatic structure which is projected along the narrative. The view that I have apprehended is the distinction established by Mieke Bal between actors and characters. In the chapter “From Actors to Characters,” Bal states that an actor is a structural position, while a character is a complex semantic unit (1997). According to Bal, character is the actor provided with distinctive characteristics which together create the effect of a character. On the basis of the semantic content, that is, of different principles which work together, the image of the character is constructed. It is within this line of thought that I am referring to the decomposition of the character-function, as well as the decomposition of the character-image.

This “triple plot-line” can be opposed to the double plot-line which characterizes the classical Hollywood style. See Bordwell, Steiger and Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, in particular part 1, section “Story Causality and Motivation” (2-23). In classical Hollywood cinema one plot-line principally involves heterosexual romantic love. They add that more commonly, “the second line of action involves another sort of activity - business, spying, sports, politics, crime, show business -, any activity, in short, which can provide a goal for the character” (16).

It is in this sense that the events and images which seem too obvious and even banal can allow us to catch a glimpse of the sublime. I have introduced the notion of the sublime in the title of this chapter in order to underscore the film’s capacity to simultaneously mobilize the working of the story and the fabula. Although the exploration of the sublime is not the focus of this study, relevant inspiration for this view is Ginette Verstraete’s discussion “From the Sublime to the Ridiculous Is But a Step” in her *Fragments of the Feminine Sublime: In Friedrich Schlegel and James Joyce*. See also Brian McHale’s discussion of the rhetoric of contrastive banality in *Postmodernist Fiction*. McHale especially emphasizes the relation between banality and the fantastic. Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov’s study of the fantastic, McHale asserts that the banalization of the fantastic sharpens and intensifies the confrontation between the normal and the paranormal (76-77).

Bal specifically theorizes focalization in part 2 of *Narratology* which deals with aspects of the story (142-160). Nevertheless, to comprehend fully the implications of the concept it is necessary to take into consideration the references to focalization in part 1 which discusses the text, as well as to part 3, which deals with the elements of the fabula.

Technically speaking a dissolve is the superimposition of a fade-out over a fade in. In a fade-in, the screen is black at the beginning and the image
appears gradually. It is considered a “punctuation mark.”

A match would imply counteropposing left-right orientation, to right-left orientation, for example.

I will return to this difference in chapter 4. This is very much related to the notion of cinema as an ideological apparatus which induces an imaginary response on the part of the spectator. It positions the spectator by addressing him or her through visual devices such as first-person point of vision and shot-reverse-shot cutting which form a close bond between spectator and the text. As I have explained in the introductory chapter, the psychoanalytic theory of suture, predicated on the capacity of cinema to position the viewer and “stitch” him or her into the text, takes the character’s alignment with the camera rather loosely. These views are based on the workings of classical Hollywood films. Within suture theory, first-person vision does not distinguish between internal and external focalization based on the character’s inclusion or exclusion from the shot. According to the theory of suture, a character’s view is considered as first-person vision even if the camera is only simulating the point of vision of the character.

In Theory of Film Practice, Burch proposes that cinematic space consists of two different kinds of space: that included within the frame and that outside the frame. He defines screen space as “including everything perceived by the eye.” The off-screen space is divided into six “segments.” Pertinent for the discussion is Burch’s contention that off-screen space may be divided into two categories: imaginary or concrete. “This off-screen space might conceivably remain imaginary if no wider shot, no shot taken from another angle, or no camera movement is introduced revealing the person to whom an arm belongs, to whom an off-screen glance is directed, or the exact off-screen segment toward which an exiting character has headed” (21-22).

In his analysis of Pabst’s Pandora’s Box, Thomas Elsaesser, discusses Lulu’s “symbolic” configuration, by pointing to the clash between the real and the imaginary space. He stresses the importance of the effect of disorientation; on the one hand, the editing and the dynamic of the point of view shots work to establish the illusion of a real space, yet the impossibility of anchoring Lulu within this space invokes the impression of her imaginary nature. The shot of ET’s feet can be taken further, for they appear as an element, to put it in Slavoj Zizek’s terms, which cannot be integrated into the symbolic reality. It is a case where a banal object becomes elevated into a sublime Thing. See for example, Zizek’s discussion on the Hitchcockian cut in his Looking Awry.

For an inspiring account of the multiple ways space can be inhabited, see Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space, particularly chapter 2, “House and Universe.”

The father suffering a crisis is also the main theme of Spielberg’s Close Encounters of the Third Kind and Hook. For a discussion on ET-The Extraterrestrial and Close Encounters see for example, Vivian Sobchack’s “Child/Alien/Father: Patriarchal Crisis and Generic Exchange”, and Marina Heung’s “Why E. T. Must Go Home: The New Family in American Cinema.” In a somewhat different sense, the process of “fathering,” as I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters, is at work in Spielberg’s Indiana Jones trilogy, as well as Schindler’s List. It is interesting to add, that the preoccupa-
tion with the crisis of paternity that characterizes the films of the late 1970s and the 1980s remains central in the year 2000. In those films where Spielberg acts as the producer his role in the process of “fathering” is implicit. In that sense, apart from numerous examples of blockbuster films Spielberg is also engaged in the “fathering” of “art films.” For example, the production company Dreamworks SKG (Spielberg, Katzenberg, Geffen) is behind the film *American Beauty*. Here, the story of a father in crisis is told by a father who is already dead. Hence, even though he is dead he personifies the highest narratorial authority.

**xiii** I am referring specifically to Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. See chapters 3 and 7 of this study.

**xiv** Derrida’s own inspiration in relation to the concept of the archive is drawn from Freud, but it is also related to Benjamin’s concept of history. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin develops the notion of the temporal index of the past, by means of which past is referred to redemption, implying conversely that the future does not have a Messianic function, but that it is interwoven into the historical *now*.

**xv** In chapter 3, where I analyze the films of the *Indiana Jones* trilogy, I argue that the structure of the fabula can be compared with Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*. I discuss the film’s attempt to refigure the Oedipal myth in view of Freud’s attempt to “rewrite” Jewish history.