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Does Every Picture Really Tell a Story?

Film Photonovel Magazines and the Question of Visual Sequentiality

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Abstract

The present article deals with the forgotten genre of the film photonovel and the magazines that published this kind of movie adaptations in the decade between 1955 and 1965. It studies the various models that were copied or appropriated by this genre that was most popular in Italy and France. The main focus lies on the manner in which the layout principles of these magazines manipulated the narrative and sequential principles of the movies they adapted. How did they succeed in offering new forms of visual montage that enabled them to combine storytelling on the one hand and portrait photography on the other? Finally, the paper discusses the differences between the better-known movie story magazines which fictionalized the movies while illustrating them with set pictures, and the film photonovel, in which word and image combinations were directly inspired by the photonovel magazines.

Keywords

cinema, ciné-roman-photo, cineromanzo, film photonovel, layout, *Mon Film*, *Nous Deux*, photonovel, pose, sequence

1. A special case of cinema in print¹

Cinema is a medium that has been trans-medial from the very start. Even during the so-called ›silent era‹, it already combined sound and image (*intermediality*). At the same time, it also circulated through very different channels or host media (*transmediality*)². Cinema did not only exist as moving images projected on screen, it equally existed in print format, more particularly as pictures in print (celebrity photographs, publicity postcards, film posters, and the like) or as images printed in various types of publications (illustrated reviews or advertisements, gossip and publicity section of movie magazines, theater programs, published scripts, novelizations containing pictures on their covers or inside the books, film novels with images, etc.). The material production of this type of pictures in print was immense³ as well as more stable than the movies themselves (pictures in print had a longer life-span than the celluloid strips of analog cinema). These pictures also reached a much larger audience: movie images in print were seen by more people than the ones who actually went to the theater, including in the period where moviegoing was still the most popular entertainment format. Moreover, we know that for some critics⁴ what really mattered were these ›fixed‹ images, not the moving ones as seen on screen. In other words, film is not a single although hybrid medium, it is a network of cultural practices that involve various types of mediation and that cannot be seriously

studied without taking into account the role and place of cinema in print, among other elements.

Periodicals play a crucial role in this production. On the one hand, most general magazines had regular movie sections (reviews, gossip, actualities, sometimes linked with the fashion or celebrity section, but also with other types of entertainment such as serialized melodrama or, on a more trivial level, the weekly horoscope, not only written ›in the stars‹, but sometimes also ›by the stars‹). On the other, the film industry immediately generated the publication of specialized movie magazines, targeting various types of audiences (professionals, film lovers, general readership). Some of these magazines have become iconic—can one imagine film studies without the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, typically read by more than just one specialized type of readers?—, others have been rapidly forgotten or were simply ignored.

In the following pages, I would like to focus not on a particular magazine but on a specific type of magazine that, until recently, has been largely, if not totally, overlooked, in spite of its important presence in the larger whole of both film and magazine culture: the Franco-Italian *film photonovel* (Italian: *cineromanzo*, French: *ciné-roman-photo*).⁵ More particularly, I will investigate a particular aspect of the visual treatment of the movie material, namely the way in which these magazines, which only published *sequentially arranged* images, treat the fundamental question of *narrative sequentiality*. Since the movies they ›reproduced‹ in magazine format were, in

principle, always narrative movies, that is the average feature movie as commercially released in traditional theaters. The main argument of this reading is that sequential arrangement does not always translate into narrative sequentiality in film photonovels. These sought rather to balance the narrative function of their images with other functions more reminiscent of celebrity photos, poses, pinups and magazine layout. These publications are always popular magazines, that is super-mainstream, anything but avant-garde or modernist, and thus very comfortable with the hegemonic role of storytelling in twentieth-century media culture.

2. Intermediality and transmediality in the film photonovel

The film photonovel is a characteristically European variation on the universal formula of the ›movie story magazines‹, the beginnings of which go back to the first years of narrative cinema itself. Defining these magazines as »a seldom studied but long-lived and robust ancillary product of classical Hollywood cinema [...] devoted to article-length fictionalizations of feature films [...] flourish[ing] in a variety of forms from the late 1920s through the 1970s,« Adrienne L. McLean adds: »Film historians generally agree that the first regularly produced mass-market fan periodical was *Motion Picture Story Magazine*. It began publication as a monthly in 1911 and, as its title suggests, was devoted primarily to ›fictionizing‹ current films into

story form and illustrating them with publicity stills.⁶ Things are certainly changing today, with the book publication of Chris Marker's film *The Jetty* (1962) as a turning point and the (still very timid) start of a shift from mass media magazine culture to elite book publishing.⁷ But in the heyday of the medium, the only publication format was the weekly or monthly magazine sold in the newsstand at a more or less attractive price.

Like these movie story magazines, the film photonovel was a fan-oriented mass medium format, extremely popular yet rather short-lived. It appeared around the mid-fifties and vanished rapidly after the mid-sixties, except in some niche branches of genre cinema, mainly (spaghetti) western, horror, and pornography.

What was different was the semiotic structure of the film photonovel. Contrary to the movie story magazines, which were a kind of illustrated short novelization⁸, film photonovels retell the story with the help of images—not images alone, but images with speech balloons and captions, and in general they do it not in short form, 6 to 8 pages, but in long form, generally some 50 pages, occupying most of the available pages of a single magazine issue, yet never without abandoning the fundamental characteristics of a magazine, with a strict periodicity and a systematic miscellaneity, for instance. Even the magazines that devoted most of their available space to just one movie made room for other sections or rubrics, mainly reportages on the life and work of successful actors, movie reviews, advertisements, information



Fig. 1a/b *Mon Film* no. 513 (July 20, 1956): front cover, and 7; ca. 30.5 cm × 20.5 cm; author's collection.

on other publications of the publisher, and, last but not least, pinup photography.

It does not suffice to label the film photonovel as an *intermedial* format, joining words and images (with a strong emphasis on the latter). One should also underline the fundamentally *trans-medial* character of the film photonovel, which has to be situated at the crossroads of a wide



as a brief pictorial depiction of the content or the advertising of the stars. The difference becomes very clear if one compares adaptations of the same movie (*Pane, amore e...*; director Dino Risi, 1955, with Sofia Loren and Vittorio De Sica), first in the movie story format of general-interest movie magazine *Mon Film* (fig. 1 a/b), then in the film photonovel version (*Ciné Sélection*, fig. 2 a/b). In the former, the images foreground the stars, while the story can only be understood via the accompanying text (there are indeed short captions, which is not always the case, but they do not make sense without the text itself). In the latter version, the story is told by the images themselves, complemented by captions (in capital letters) and dialogues (in lowercase letters) that are added to the images themselves.

As already stated, the film photonovel brings together a reflection on hybrid or intermedial sequence and page layout issues, but also on transmediality and medium migration, as I will specify in the next paragraphs. In addition, the film photonovel medium—I call it a medium rather than a genre, since any kind of movie can be transferred to the film photonovel format—is typically not a book, as in the case of a novelization, but a magazine.

Yet what is meant by transmediality in the case of the film photonovel? Even if it is not possible to reduce the transmedial spectrum of the format to a one-to-one adaptation of one medium into another, there are various ways to define the field of transmediality. In the specific case of the film



Fig. 2a/b *Ciné Sélection* 5, no. 74 (September 1962): front cover, and 34; ca. 25.2 cm × 18.3 cm; author's collection.

photonovel, transmediality takes at least three different forms.

Answer 1: The film photonovel is an example of cinema in print, more precisely a visual novelization, not as book, but in magazine format. This difference is obviously not purely technical. It crucially hints at a crucial difference in cultural status as well as retail and distribution mechanisms. Film photonovels were never sold in bookshops.

Novelizations were only (very) rarely found in newsstands. The former were disposable items. The latter could enter private and public libraries and find their place on the shelves next to other books.

Answer 2: At the same time, it is also the reissue of an existing movie in a photonovel format.¹⁰ For nonspecialists, the difference between both (fig. 3 and 4) is often difficult to observe. To keep the guessing short: the first page is a photonovel,

that is the formal model of the film photonovel, an example of which can be seen in the second page. At first sight, one may think that the difference comes down to the use of print in example one (photonovel) and drawn language in example two (film photonovel), but in practice both the photonovel and the film photonovel can use both. What helps distinguish both genres has mainly to do with the background of the scenes: in the photonovel, it is generally poor due to lack of money to build a special setting, and it is only rarely backlit, for the same reason:

As already suggested by the comparison of the two versions of *Pane, amore e ...* (see fig. 1 and 2), the impact of the photonovel on the visual dimension of movie novelizations appears very clearly in the history of cinema in print in magazine format: the ordinary format of the images in the narrative of a movie story magazine, which predates the emergence of the photonovel as a new medium in 1947 (see below), involves their ornamental and aesthetic use (thanks to the images, the written story becomes more pleasant to read). After the rise of the photonovel as a highly successful commercial medium, many printed movie story narratives abandon the movie story presentation techniques. They turn to a format that imitates the photonovel, mainly in terms of page layout and selective representation of the body, often reduced to talking heads. Here I already insist on the term ›imitates‹, the copy being quite different from the original, as we will see below. In the magazine history of cinema stories in print,

the photonovel seems a real turning point, with a clear before and after. In practice, however, things are more complex.

Answer 3: Whatever the relationship between photonovel and film photonovel, there is a third party in the game, for the model the film photo-

novel is imitating, namely the photonovel, is not an ›original‹ one but a derivative that is itself the creative and transmedialized transformation of another model. The reasons for seeing the photonovel, an apparently completely new medium, as a transmedialized medium are twofold.



Fig. 3 »Le Quai des amoureux.« *Bel Amour* no. 5 (June 1964): 24; ca. 26.0 cm × 20.5 cm; author's collection.



Fig. 4 »Nuit de nocces.« *Hebdo Roman* 4, no. 5 (February 4, 1959) [adaptation of *The Wedding Night Year*, dir. King Vidor, 1935]: 1–57, here 22; ca. 26.0 cm × 19.0 cm; author's collection.



Fig. 5 *Grand Hôtel* 1, no. 1 (June 29, 1946): front cover; ca. 34.5 cm × 25.0 cm; author's collection.

First of all, the photonovel is certainly a very new medium, which appears overnight in 1947 in the context of the so-called ›women's magazines‹, but this new medium is actually the direct remediation of another one, equally new and young, that had appeared in same field of the women's



Fig. 6 »Ames ensorcelées« [›Enchanted Souls‹, French translation of »Anime incatenate«, ›Souls in Chains‹, 1946]. *Nous Deux* 1, no. 1 (June 29, 1946): 2–6, here 3, opening page of the first drawn novel; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.

magazines market one year earlier, namely the ›drawn novel‹ (not to be confused with the modern ›graphic novel‹). The pioneering magazine is *Grand Hôtel*.¹¹ The cover illustration of the first issue (fig. 5) shows a couple about to enter a movie palace showing »Anime incatenate« (fig. 6), a non-

existent movie, which the readers will discover once they open the magazine, not as an illustrated movie story, but as a drawn novel, presented as the adaptation of an equally nonexistent novel.

Second, this ›drawn novel‹, as it is called today, is the transmedial merger of three other cultural practices: a) the literary genre of the melodramatic installment novel, b) the story world and glamour of cinema (readers are expected to recognize the storyline as well as the Hollywood actors copied in the drawings), and c) the language of comics, whose almost photorealistic style aims to resemble real film stills. All these elements (melodrama, cinema, comics) already existed and even coexisted in the female magazines of the interwar period, but not in their novel specific form and in *Grand Hôtel* they are mixed into something never seen that becomes the model of an innovative type of magazine, dramatically successful in the pre-television years.

One year later, the success of *Grand Hôtel* and others' drawn novel format will be suddenly challenged by the appearance of a new type of magazine publishing, offering a new type of story: photonovels (initially called: ›love stories with pictures‹). For the publishers, these photonovels are a cheaper and thus economically more profitable and sustainable form of the drawn novel (fig. 7). For the readership, the difference to the existing drawn novel format is not immediately clear, as can be seen in a 1949 documentary by Michelangelo Antonioni on the shooting of a (real) photonovel, *L'amorosa menzogna*.¹² Here

the director presents drawn novels as part of the photonovel industry.

This ›confusion‹ is easy to understand, given the countless formal and thematic correspondences between both media. The photonovel copies many aspects of its highly successful predecessor, including the page layout. As shown in the examples below, all taken from the first period of *Il Mio Sogno* (›My Dream‹, later *Sogno*, ›Dream‹), one of the leading photonovel magazines, the photographs are cropped and designed in such a way that they continue the ›dynamic‹ page layout of the drawn novels. At the same time, the photographs themselves are heavily retouched, not only in order to add with pencil and ink the background that was missing due to the lack of budget (it is easier to add on the picture the painted columns of an oriental palace than to build a real palace for the shooting ...), but also in order to blur the boundaries between the ›beautiful‹ images of the drawn novels and the ›poor(er)‹ images of the photonovel.

3. The dialectics of sequence and single image in the photonovel

Based upon the previous analyses, it is now easier to define our objects, first the photonovel and then the film photonovel, in terms of magazine culture and layout principles. As already mentioned, photonovels as well as film photonovels are ›always‹ published in magazine format. In both cases, all pictures are always sequentially arranged. In this

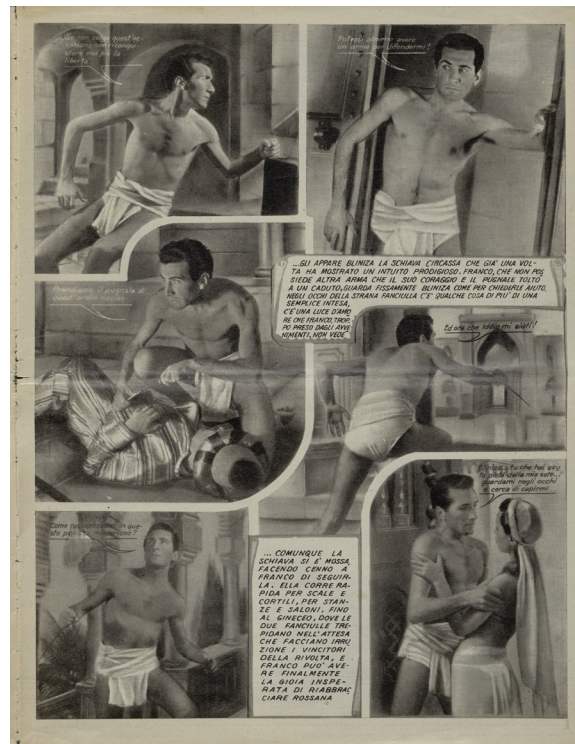


Fig. 7 ›Le vie dell'amore [›The Ways of Love‹]. « *Il Mio Sogno* 2, no. 1 (January 1948): 9–12, here 10f.; each page ca. 37.0 cm × 25.0 cm; author's collection.

regard, however, there is a real divide between both media.

Let us start with the photonovel. First of all, it should be stressed that photonovel magazines are thematically ›exclusive‹. They have one dominating content, namely ... photonovels. Other elements may be present, but in principle, there is a strong ›overlap‹ between content and magazine. Even if photonovels share (a small portion of the) magazine space with other types of con-

tent such as advertisements, letters to the editor, gossip section, etc., all content is always strongly photonovel-linked or photonovel-oriented (the letters to the editor, for instance, are often answered by the readers' favorite actors or actresses ...). Second, photonovels also occupy the full space of the magazine, that is: they are not only included inside the magazine, they already start at the cover (front and back), and this non-dichotomy is interesting from a narrative and sequential

point of view. Photonovel magazines are sold in newsstands (fig. 8), not by subscription, because their target audience does not have enough money to spend on subscriptions. Their covers help the sale, because they combine two roles: an aesthetic one (they have to be attractive in order to get the attention at the expense of the dozens of other comparable magazines) and a narrative one (they present a single, fixed image, which should be strong enough to trigger a whole story).

In other words, these covers feature single images, not sequences, hence the necessity to select images that combine the basic selling proposal of the new medium of the photonovel on the one hand: the physical presence of the actors, all of them relatable characters, is within easy reach, one can really touch them, unlike the stars on a movie screen. On the other, it is a certain narrative potential: more or less like the illustration of a book, more precisely the illustrations one found on the covers of then common pulp fiction pocket books—and this is another transmedial dimension¹⁴.

Thus, what defines the photonovel, among other elements, is the attempt to bridge the gap between cover and interior pages: the cover is supposed to become a kind of photonovel in one single image or glance. But this logic cuts both ways: inside the magazine, the pages of the serialized stories are supposed to supersede the mere sequentiality in order to maintain the power of single images even within sequences. The unique selling proposal of the photonovel, in marketing



Fig. 8 *Nous Deux* no. 282 (October 1952): front cover; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.¹³ Please notice that the couple is no longer going to the movies, but buying magazines. The boy on the right is reading *L'intrépide*, a comics magazine published by the same company as *Nous Deux*. (1946): 2–6, here 3, opening page of the first drawn novel; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.

and cultural terms, is not the story (no more than a variation on old-fashioned melodramas which the reader already knows) but the photographic image of the stars, and this image would be harmed by too smooth an integration of the individual images in the narrative chain. The single image of the cover becomes a sequence, while the sequence of the interior pages becomes a single image. This very oscillation between the uniqueness of the image and the narrative series is a fundamental dimension of the medium's logic. Photonovels that cannot be read with pauses in order to linger over individual images do not work. In a similar vein, single images that are just poster or pinup images without any narrative drive cannot function well either. The cover and double spread from *Marielle* (fig. 9, 10) are a textbook examples of this basic mechanism.

The cover of the *Marielle* issue offers more than enough material to help the reader imagine which kind of story will be told. The double spread expands on a striptease scene which hardly progresses. The organization principle of these two pages is less the unfolding of an action (the undressing of the lady) than the attempt to present a visually attractive composition that one can read in all possible directions while daydreaming—as a heteronormative male reader, one supposes¹⁵—on the ›sense of an ending‹ (namely nudity) that will, of course, never take place. How is that goal achieved? Here, it is possible to distinguish three levels.

Level 1: Traditional photonovels in magazine format are not published as complete stories, but



Fig. 9 *Marielle* 4, no. 41 (February 1970): front cover; ca. 33.0 cm × 26.0 cm; author's collection.

as short installments (4 to 6 pages, generally). This may seem a detail, but apart from the impact on storytelling (high-paced rhythm, cliffhangers, etc.), it also means that readers always keep a good overview of the complete installment which functions as a unit, not only from a narrative point of view (most of the times, the rule ›one action per installment‹ prevails), but also from a visual one (photonovel readers can effortlessly look at pages or double spreads in a single glance, and often it

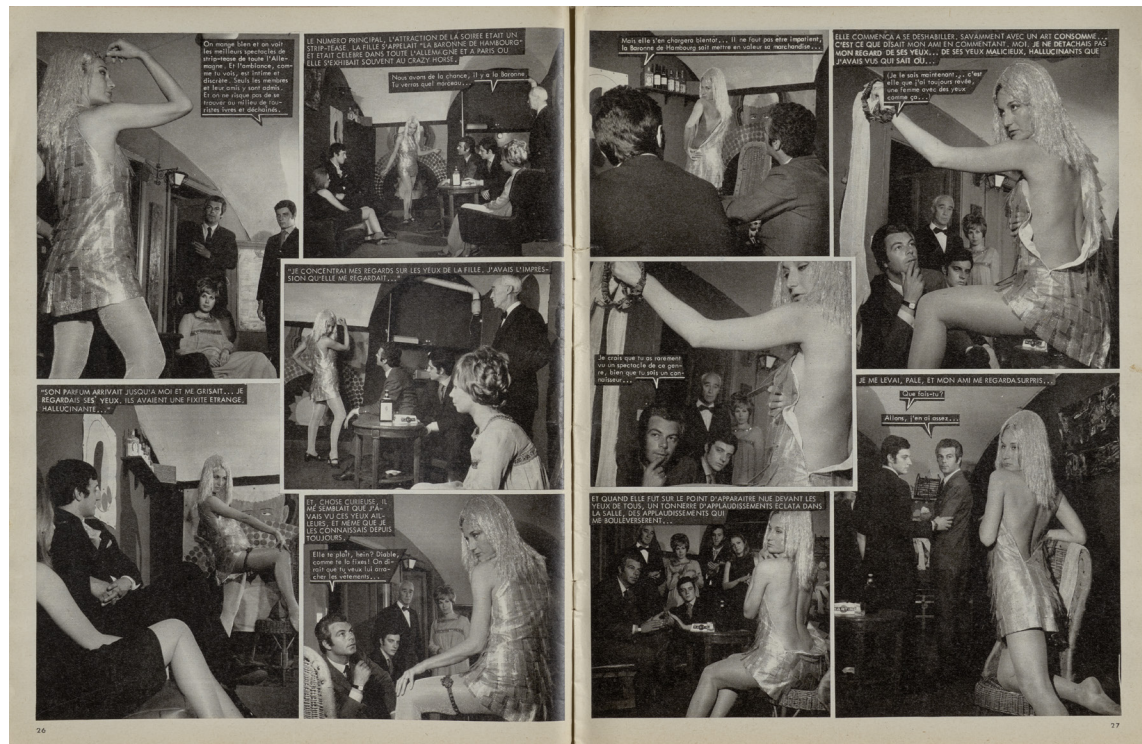


Fig. 10 »Ma vie n'est qu'à toi [My Life Only Belongs to You]!« *Marielle* 4, no. 41 (February 1970): 26f.; each page ca. 33.0 cm × 26.0 cm; author's collection.

suffices to turn just one page to read the complete installment). The result of these publication constraints strongly reinforces the functional merger of sequence and single image.

Level 2: The traditional layout structure of the photonovel is that of the more or less mechanically applied grid, a structure that is both a highly linear narrative and potentially tabular or translinear. In the first case, one is encouraged to read ›panel after panel‹, from left to right, and

›tier after tier‹, starting from the top of the page and progressively descending before turning the page—as already stated, as a mainstream mass medium, the photonovel cannot turn away directly from these conventional rules. In the second case, it is the global perception of the page as a diverse yet unified image, for instance by spotting all kind of visual analogies and asymmetries, that comes to the fore. In principle, the photonovel is supposed to keep a safe balance be-

tween both. Yet given the stereotypical character of the stories, which does not foster a close reading of the narrative, and the systematic repetition of a limited number of characters, always shown from more or less the same distance and point of view, the attention of the reader rapidly shifts to what is key to the medium: the representation of faces and bodies. This shift inevitably implies a stronger focus on details and single images and the role of translinear composition principles, which does not always depend on narrative or sequential arrangement.

The possibility of making this kind of spatial ordering is a way of transforming the model of the *sequence* (temporal, chronological *succession*) into the model of the *medley* (spatial *juxtaposition*). This change is not an isolated phenomenon. In fact, it is facilitated or accelerated by the absence of something that one may expect in the photonovel, but that is missing most of the times, namely the representation of an action as divided into its successive moments. The photonovel does not do offer this type of ›chronophotographic‹ representation, for two fundamental reasons.

On the one hand, there is the gap between the sequential order of the images on the page and the non-sequential order of the actual reading of these images. In fact, since the number of images per page is generally small, many readers may be tempted to immediately look at the bottom right, that is the ›end‹, just as they may look at the complete page before examining individual images,

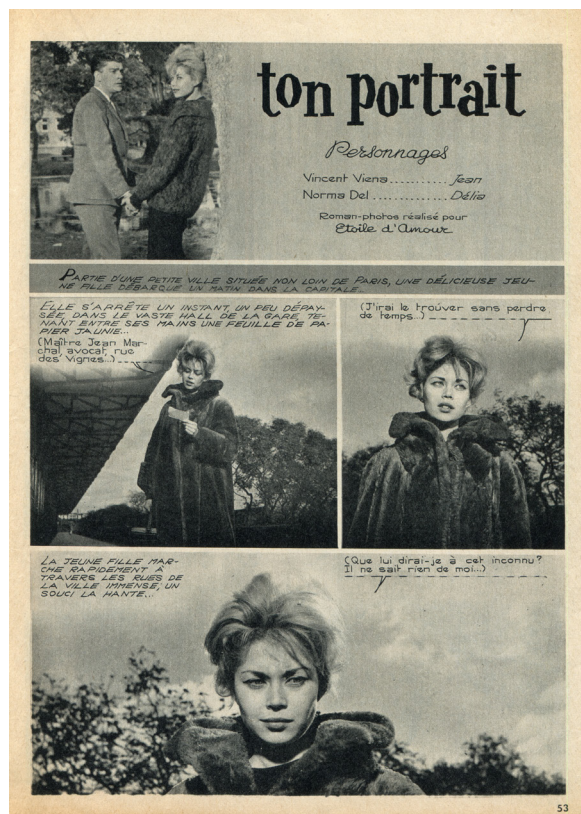


Fig. 11 Ton portrait [›Your Portrait‹]. «Étoile d'Amour 11, no. 9 (October 1961): 53–82, here 53; ca. 26.0 cm × 19.0 cm; author's collection.

etc. This gap makes the simulation of strict narrative and sequential orderings quite meaningless. Why go on ›spelling‹ the phases of an action whose completion will only be reached in some final image, if the reader knows in advance how the action will finish? On the other hand, the difficulty of convincingly representing a complete action in a single fixed image is well known, the result

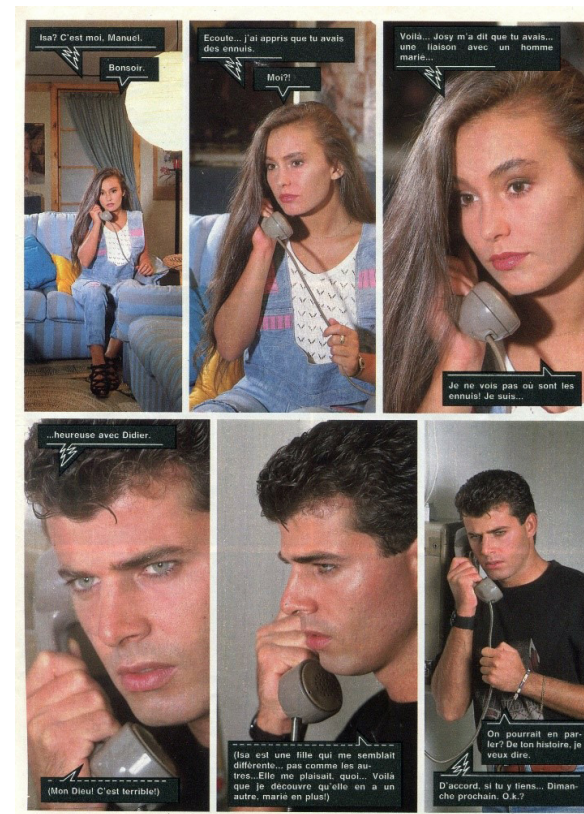


Fig. 12 Chacun sa chacune [›Every Jack has His Jill‹]. «Kiss Color 13 ([1981]), no. 139: 15; ca. 28.0 cm × 21.0 cm; author's collection.

being often either unclear or very artificial. Thus, the photonovel wisely prefers to show nontemporal variations on what is most appealing to the audience, namely the face and body of the actors, while telling the story with the help of captions and speech balloons—and given the formulaic character of most stories, words and images can easily be dissociated (fig. 11 and 12).

Level 3: The traditional photonovel image or panel is that of the portrait or the two shot, that is of denarrativized and even totally ›posed‹ shots, well known by both photonovel fans and critics. Indeed, this ›pose‹ is often accused of being an example of the medium's aesthetic ›poverty‹.¹⁶ In practice, however, the artificial pose of many characters is the perfect counterpart as well as the *sine qua non* of the move from visual *action sequence* to medley *page composition*. In addition, it also enhances the fascination exerted by the faces and bodies of the actors, whose implicit model is not totally unlike that of the pinup, another transmedial dimension of the photonovel that offers an ordinary, daily life, girl-and-boy-next-door version of high-glamour pinup and celebrity photography. Historically speaking, however, this preference for the pose, which will return in the film photonovel, can also be read as a symptom of the lasting influence of stereotypography, namely the selection of key moments or highly symbolic attitudes, all of them easy to interpret, and thus as the disclosure of the gap between an old-fashioned way of making images and a more modern idea of chance and randomness. As mentioned at the very beginning of this reading, film photonovels never really claim to be modern.

To summarize, the features of sequence and layout of the photonovel perfectly match the needs of a medium that faces the potential divide between cover and interior pages, but also that of the double necessity of having to tell a story (often a stereotypical and formulaic one, but mass me-

dia are essentially narrative) while also having to display seducing and relatable bodies. The combination of the above-mentioned techniques tends to highlight the fascination of the page within the story as it unfolds. By doing so, it partially changes the sequence into the support or hosting medium of something else: the portrait one finds on the cover, where it appears to be strongly narrativized. The fact that this cover is often a drawing does not harm this transformation at all: drawings are easier to cognitively narrate than photographs.¹⁷

4. Image versus sequence

From the combined point of view of sequentiality and transmediality, film photonovel magazines raise a fascinating question, since the medium remediates not just one but two different media (movies and photonovels), each of them offering a different take on the mechanism of sequentially organized images. As we have seen, sequentiality in movies does not work the same way in photonovel magazines and this divide has many consequences for what we will observe in film photonovels, which adapt movies via the photonovel format.

In the case of the movie (and as already stated, film photonovels mainly treat mainstream, that is *narrative* movies), the notion of sequence is both vital and relatively straightforward. Films unfold their images in a linear way, even if the story they tell is open to all kind of narrative manipulations,

and the linearity of the projected images was a given, the spectators of these years could not transform it as they pleased: the theatrical projection of the images did not allow for the active dialogue with images we are now familiar with since the spread of videocassettes and the beginning of home cinema. In mainstream movies there is always a story to tell and readers of the film photonovel want the magazine to retell the movie's narrative content. The magazines are therefore supposed to respect the original works. Contrary to what often happens in movie adaptations, ›creative‹ interventions at plot level are not really allowed. Moreover, one should not forget that even if the makers of a film photonovel version would like to change the narrative, it would be very difficult, if not impossible to do so, for the simple reason that there is no time or budget available to shoot new images. Granted, the magazines can use two types of images, actual film frames and set pictures, but the latter only rarely offer a different content—most set pictures are mixed with film frames in order to add a kind of pinup image. Film photonovel magazines have to work with the material lent or offered by the film distributor, who keeps an eye on the final result¹⁸, and they have to respect the sequential arrangement of the film.

The magazine format is decisive in this regard: the linear and narrative montage of the pictures is facilitated by the fact that film photonovels are in principle always complete stories. Unlike what happens in photonovel magazines, where serial-



Fig. 13a/b *Mon Film* no. 663 (July 1959): front and back cover; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.

Fig. 14 The blurring of boundaries between pinup cover and film frame. »Faibles Femmes [Three Murderesses].« *Mon Film* no. 663 (July 1959): 3–52, here 21; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.

ization is the general rule, publishing movie adaptations in installment form would not make much sense, since the public already knows the stories in most cases, even without having seen the movie themselves. Film photostories are always published after the theatrical release, never before, and the typical installment features of the

photonovel magazine format, such as cliffhangers, would be utterly absurd. Moreover, one can only admire the smartness and often good aesthetic taste with which the (anonymous) authors/technicians of the adaptation manage to present a feature movie in approximately 200 to 300 images.¹⁹

In the case of the film photostory, the notion of sequence seems hegemonic and unproblematic, at least theoretically speaking. However, in practice one also observes that the notion of sequence is treated in such a way that it makes room for something else we also noticed in the photonovel: a tendency for the medley and the portrait, that

is toward the treatment of the sequence in a non-linear way. Even in the film photonovel, which apparently is forced to repeat the strict linearity of the movie images, there is an implicit tendency to push toward tabularity, and it cannot be denied that this tendency results from the influence of the photonovel magazines. Yet how does the film photonovel achieve that transformation of the ›classic‹, that is linear as well as sequential, organization of the narrative sequence?

The magazine format is crucial in this regard. It allows, for instance, the film photonovel to reinforce the ›narrative pinup‹ effect of the cover, often close to the aesthetics and rhetoric of the movie poster, and which is directly linked to the movie images inside the magazine, contrary to the usual photonovel cover, often devoted to ›generic‹ themes. (fig. 13 a/b and 14). In addition, the film photonovel also explores the many connections that may include the other paratextual elements inside the magazine, such as the gossip section, often built around pinup photos of movie stars, the pinup back cover and the centerfold, a less frequently used bonus in photonovel magazines, where the glamour of the actors is neither stressed nor rendered as really necessary. Average readers may identify with both movie stars and ordinary people, but when it comes down to relating to them on a daily basis, ordinary looking actors are preferred to movie stars.

This work on the cover as well as the paratext foreground the image of the star, regardless of the



Fig. 15a/b »Riso amaro [›Bitter Rice‹].« Cineromanzo Gigante no. 2 (November 1954): front cover and 28; ca. 33.5 cm × 27.0 cm; author's collection.

movie starring him or her,²⁰ and this foregrounding powerfully enhances the position of tabularity. Film photonovels retell already told stories, but they allow to endlessly gaze at what disappears after the theatrical projection: the body of the actors and actresses, and this foregrounding does not need to be linked to narrative sequentiality.

Yet in order to produce this effect, film photonovel magazines do not only use their cover

and paratext. The inclination toward ›de-sequentialization‹ also defines the internal properties of the images themselves as well as the way in which they are arranged by the page design.

To start with, one can observe that the medium underscores some of the most striking procedures or protocols of the photonovel, such as the preference given to the pose (the number of ›action‹ pictures is amazingly low) and, even more surpris-

ingly perhaps, the lasting influence of the photo-novel's refusal to present ›segmented‹ actions, that is single actions presented via a sequence of temporally successive fragments. In film photonovels, the action is suggested via the text: film photonovels follow the speech balloon and caption techniques of their model, the traditional photonovel. But also via the implied narrativity of the single image: every picture tells a story, even if the sequence of pictures sometimes fails to do so. These general choices are perfectly in line with the role given to celebrity or pinup photography within the sequential image, as if the film photonovel tried to convert each of its pictures into a variation of the images found in the paratext (cover, back cover, centerfold, other paratext).

The film photonovel even adds other layers of visual and layout techniques that further increase the desequentializing or tabular effects already present, yet less explicitly, in the photonovel. More precisely, one can mention here four techniques that film photonovel magazines frequently combine.

First, the use of nearly identical images (fig. 15 a/b), which ›block‹ sequential narrative, but draw attention to the pictures themselves, regardless of their position within the sequence. This is a way of stressing the refusal of ›action‹-driven panel to panel transitions, at least at the visual level: the story progresses at textual level but comes to a stand-still at visual level.

Second, the medley-like composition of the page (fig. 16 a/b), whose layout principles are not



Fig. 16a/b »Les Parapluies de Cherbourg [›The Umbrellas of Cherbourg‹].« *Mon Film*, no. 732 (January 1965): front cover and 4; ca. 30.0 cm × 22.3 cm; author's collection. Please notice on the cover page the difference between the film photonovel image, a pinup photo of Catherine Deneuve, and the photonovel image below, which has a clear narrative dimension. The title »Bonheur en danger«, ›Happiness in Danger‹, strongly underlines this narrative twist. On p. 4, one easily recognizes typical medley chiasms and rhymes between the top and bottom tier, whose ABBA structure accompanies the CC structure in the middle.

determined by narrative logic but by visual contrasts and correspondences at the level of the whole page or double spread.

Third and fourth, as a way of combining the two previous techniques in an original way, there is a certain way of playing with the grid (fig. 17 a/b).

On the one hand, the grid can become exaggeratedly static and repetitive: many pages present variations on just one image, with only one small change either at the top left or at the bottom right. The unifying, tabularizing effect of this technique is clear.

On the other, the grid is brutally interrupted, either inside the page (a larger picture is integrated), or between pages (the grid disappears, to be replaced by a full-page image). Larger and full-page images are often typical ›pinup‹ photos, and they inevitably also have an impact on the way one reads the smaller images, since there is no radical difference between larger and smaller images content-wise.

In this article, I tried to show that a sequential arrangement does not always translate into narrative sequentiality in film photonovels, which sought rather to balance the narrative function of their images with other functions more reminiscent of celebrity photos, poses, pinups, and types of magazine layout. In this regard, the similarities and

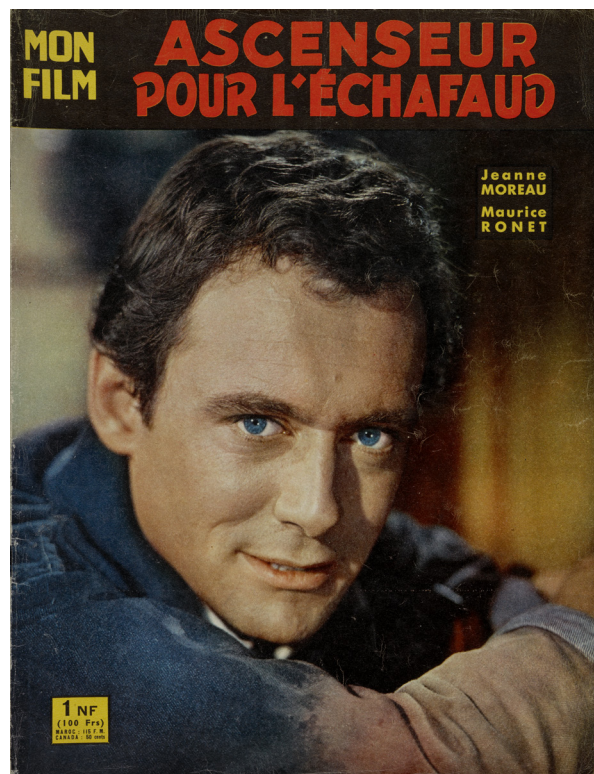


Fig. 17a/b »Ascenseur pour l'échafaud [›Elevator to the Gallows‹]. « Mon Film no. 681 (October 1960): front cover, and 38; ca. 30.5 cm × 23.5 cm; author's collection.

differences between photonovels and film photonovels are key, but of course the ›full‹ story is more complex, while the description of the film photobook remains prototypical. There are definitely exceptions and counterexamples, and certain elements should be examined in more detail, for instance the difference between the French and the Italian production. In general, however, the case

of the film photobook demonstrates that even in narrative media the link between sequentiality and storytelling is open to further debate on how to actually read the transitions from one image to another.

Notes

- 1 My most sincere thanks to the editorial staff and the two anonymous reviewers of this article, who helped me to convert the initial draft into a real publication.
- 2 On the difference between transmedia and intermedia, see Baetens and Sánchez-Mesa, »Literature in the Expanded Field«, 290.
- 3 For a (wonderful) example, see Rössler, *Filmfeber*, 10–40.
- 4 For example Roland Barthes, who did not write a lot on cinema, but extensively on photography, and who systematically based his analyses of cinema on film stills, not on moving images. See his famous article on Eisenstein, »The Third Meaning«, which explicitly refers to film stills, not to moving images.
- 5 For a general introduction to the history of the medium, see Baetens, *The Film Photonovel*.
- 6 McLean, »New Films in Story Form«, 3.
- 7 Marker, *The Jetty*.
- 8 On the novelization »genre«, see Baetens, *La Novellisation, du film au livre au roman*.
- 9 English title: *Scandal in Sorrento*.
- 10 The photonovel is often but erroneously taken for »comics with images«, a comparison that only makes sense at the level of the page layout (both media share the same »grid«). For more details, see Baetens, *Pour le roman-photo*, 95–130.
- 11 Of course, the title is a direct reference to the eponymous Greta Garbo movie of 1932, dir. Edmund Goulding, itself an adaptation of the 1929 bestselling novel by Vicky Baum.
- 12 »The Love Lie«, starring Ana Vita, who like many other movie actresses started her career in the photonovel business. The film can be accessed on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oMv4uIVNIIs>.
- 13 *Nous Deux* was the French sister magazine of *Grand Hôtel*. Both magazines maintained for many years a drawn cover illustration (in the case of *Nous Deux*, things changed in 1969 for instance), while their content had been moving away from the drawn novel and replacing it with photonovels (a gradual process that came to its end around 1960). On an historical note: the co-presence of an old character, an adult couple, and a child strongly emphasize the transgenerational as well as the »innocent« character of the love stories inside (photonovel magazines had to fight prejudices of »amoralism«).
- 14 See Rabinowitz, *American Pulp*.
- 15 It is worth mentioning that all sociological surveys have disclosed the quantitative importance of the male readership of a medium often discarded as »typically female«. For a general discussion of these gender issues, see Baetens, »Le roman-photo: fait par des hommes, lu par des femmes?«
- 16 For a debunking of the photonovel as stereotype, see Kobry, »Le Langage du photo-roman«, 155–81.
- 17 For the discussion of a historical example, which cannot be automatically transferred to the 1950s but which may add interesting insights to the analysis of modern magazines (it addresses the clash of engravings, the »old« medium, and photographs, the »new« medium, in nineteenth-century journalism), see Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 15–46. This analysis clearly demonstrates the advantages of the old medium in terms of narrative and rhetorical power, which explain the (initially) successful resistance of the old medium to the new one.
- 18 See various historical testimonies in Morreale, *Lo schermo di carta*.
- 19 I will not address here the ideological and other twists that may be given to some stories, which do not primarily concern questions of sequentiality and transmediality, see Jan Baetens, *The Film Photonovel*, 60f.
- 20 By the way, the role of the director in this kind of publications is minor in comparison to that of the stars—a typical feature of commercial, non-art-house cinema.

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