The Making of a Spectacle
A technical and aesthetic style analysis of Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings*
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1. ABSTRACT

New Zealand director Peter Jackson’s film style is primarily focused on a technical level. Special effects and progressive filmmaking are some of Jackson’s main characteristics. His trial and error methods have enabled him to be independent and inventive, resulting in unconventional techniques and original technology.

Much of the research made on Jackson and The Lord of the Rings treat subjects like adaptation, special effects, or the franchise. What is lacking in the spectra of study is a technical film style analysis. By examining specific elements such as the camerawork, lighting, editing, special effects, and behind-the-scenes, this essay distinguishes Jackson’s film style on a technical basis with an aesthetic emphasis, discussing and giving examples on both the superior and inferior features of his different attributes.
2. THESIS, AIM, AND METHOD

Thesis
Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy - *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Two Towers* (2002), and *The Return of the King* (2003) - have been thoroughly analyzed and studied from multiple angles such as adaptation, political view, gender and race, economics, franchise, digital and visual effects, soundtrack, modernism, reception, historical context, and more. What seems to be missing though, is a film style analysis of the technical aspects of the trilogy.

Why it has not been made is based on, in my own opinion, an unfortunate lack of significance in relation to Tolkien as a writer, *The Lord of the Rings* as a novel, and Peter Jackson as the interpreter. For a film style analysis to be brought into the light, first there must be a disregard that the novel is by Tolkien, that it is *The Lord of the Rings*, and that it has been made into a cinematic work of art by Jackson. When we stop to look at what we see, we can start to think about how we see it. And yet, this brings further problems, how we see *The Lord of the Rings* is often focused on the visual effects, and not how it is shot, lit, edited, and whether or not the special effects are superfluous or essential.

While this essay is focused more on Jackson’s film style as a director, and not so much on the trilogy itself, these are his most well-known and successful films, and are therefore more susceptible for a technical analysis than his low-budget films, although some examples are made in regard of his reoccurring style techniques.

The main question of this essay is therefore, what are the elements of Peter Jackson’s technical film style? The restriction towards specifically technical film style is mainly because Jackson has always been at the forefront of technical filmmaking, exploring and experimenting with technical and technological elements in filmmaking. However, the aesthetic implications of the technical elements are also emphasized for a broader context. The elements are all there in the center of the frame, but have yet to be analyzed comprehensively.

The key elements arranged for analysis are: camerawork, lighting, special effects, editing, and behind-the-scenes.
Aim
This essay studies selected scenes and also the behind-the-scenes supplements from *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. While the technical aspect is the primary focus, the totality of technical and aesthetic purpose and meaning are analyzed through their context. Therefore, the aim is to exemplify and emphasize both superior and inferior characteristics to show a different analysis apart from the current research.

Method
By using research made by film and literary scholars, combined with a close reading of the films, specific scenes and aspects of behind-the-scenes are studied through their relation. While there is no straightforward research on specifically ‘technical film style analysis,’ the scholars study other technical aspects that coincide with this research. Not only does this essay point out the technical aspects, both superior and inferior, but also examines in relation with the aesthetics of each chosen scene. These are based both on hermeneutics as well as references to the primary and secondary sources.

A presentation of the current research on Jackson and the trilogy begins the essay, followed by a brief introduction of Tolkien and Jackson. The analysis starts with the camerawork, then lighting, special effects, editing, and conclusively with behind-the-scenes. All these sections feature one or several specific scenes that are being analyzed through a technical style aspect, except for behind-the-scenes which focuses more on Jackson’s managerial role and the creations by the crew. Finally, a conclusion is made of the analyzed material.

Clarifications
The film versions used are the extended editions on Blu-ray released in 2011, with the time code added for clarification when needed.

The abbreviations for the films are *The Lord of the Rings* – *Rings*; *The Fellowship of the Ring* – *Fellowship*; *The Two Towers* – *Towers*; *The Return of the King* – *Return*.

Finally, Kristin Thompson will be referred to as Thompson while Kirsten Moana Thompson will be referred to as K.M. Thompson.
3. CURRENT RESEARCH

The current research on Peter Jackson and *The Lord of the Rings* stated here is the secondary literature that has been used for this essay, and also an explanation of the main focus of each work. The three main areas of the research are: franchise, special effects, and adaptation, which are being exemplified here.

*Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson’s ‘The Lord of the Rings’ Film Trilogy*, edited by Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny contain papers on assorted topics. In the introduction of the anthology Bogstad and Kaveny organize them in two categories, “Techniques of Story and Structure,” and “Techniques of Character and Culture.”¹ Most of the essays in this anthology focus on the relationship between the novel and the films, although more precise, “[. . .] essays focus more on the films and books as they relate Middle-earth and its stories than on ways the films fail or succeed based on faithfulness to the book.”² Out of these authors, Kristin Thompson is the only one that has a profession in film studies. The other authors in the first category (which is the relevant one for this research) are mainly scholars in English, mythology, and fantasy literature – especially Tolkien – and their essays primarily treat the areas of adaptation and special effects.

*From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson’s ‘Lord of the Rings’* edited by Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance also contain a collection of essays with varied approaches to analysis. These authors are more associated with film and media research as the majority are film scholars. The editors describe the contents of the anthology with, “[. . .] this book covers both the aesthetics and politics of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy.”³

*Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* by Dan North, who is a lecturer in Film at the University of Exeter, focus on the visual effects in films, with the relation to as stated in the introduction, “[w]hatever other stories they may tell, these films are also about special effects and techniques of visualization.”⁴ This perspective is strongly related to Jackson’s trilogy, and North presents a part of his book to this.

*Understanding The Lord of the Rings: The Best of Tolkien Criticism* edited by Rose A. Zimbardo and Neil D. Isaacs features predominantly literary essays on Tolkien,

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² Ibid., p. 10

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authors such as W.H. Auden and C.S. Lewis, but also features an essay addressing the films by renowned Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey that will be used in regards of the films.

Finally, *The Frodo Franchise: ‘The Lord of the Rings’ and Modern Hollywood* by Kristin Thompson is an extensive – if not the most extensive – work on the films by Jackson. Thompson makes a chronological account of how the films became a franchise from idea to complete result, with primary sources from the creators of the films.

**Why the lack of technical analysis?**

Much of the research on *The Lord of the Rings*, both the novel by Tolkien, and the films by Jackson, have been analyzed on their relationship, through comparison and changes, but nothing has been made in an extensive film style analysis, neither aesthetic nor technical. Going through the secondary literature for this essay, not one of them include the term ‘film style’ in their indexes.

While these works do not focus on the technical aspect of film style, they do touch on the subject. The technical analysis is important because Jackson as a director seems to focus on progressive technical filmmaking, be it detailed sets, digital effects, experimental or highly advanced equipment, rather than stylistic directorial traits. However, his affinity for technical elements has certainly made it his stylistic trait.

To examine why there is no technical film style analysis it has to be deconstructed into several important parts. Firstly, the films are based on one of the 20th century’s most beloved and popular novels. Secondly, the films have been made in a unique way that is unusual for Hollywood or moviemaking in general, i.e. simultaneous shooting of all three films, made in New Zealand with over 95% of the objects created for the films on the island by New Zealanders, a fairly unknown and inexperienced director, and an equally new and inexperienced crew.5

Thirdly, a technical analysis of film style is more focused on the director’s depiction of a story and not the story itself. Most research on Jackson’s trilogy focus on the story, milieu, and characters, while most technical research focus on the effects. While an analysis of the complete works of Peter Jackson would be an option, limiting it to *The Lord of the Rings* is because it is the most well known of his work, and has a consistent use of techniques and style susceptible for this kind of analysis.

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4. INTRODUCTION OF TOLKIEN AND JACKSON

J.R.R. Tolkien

*The Hobbit* by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was published in 1937 and it was a fantastical children’s novel where the story focused on, as it begins, “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” The story revolves around Bilbo Baggins of Bag-End, and how his comfortable life in Hobbiton is turned upside-down as he sets out on an adventure with thirteen dwarves and the wizard Gandalf. As a result of this adventure, Bilbo finds a ring that, when put on, makes him invisible.

*The Lord of the Rings* was written between 1936 and 1949, and focus on the events surrounding the One Ring of power, forged by the dark lord Sauron, and how, in the hands of the hobbit Frodo Baggins, it makes the journey to be destroyed to end the reign of Sauron. Posthumously after Tolkien’s death, books like *The Silmarillion* (1977), *Unfinished Tales* (1980), and the twelve-volume *History of Middle-earth* (1983-96), were edited and published by his son Christopher Tolkien, but were, according to Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey, already in progress before and after the publications of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Tolkien was a professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford University, and with his love of languages as a philologist, the world and mythology he created was “[p]rimarily linguistic in inspiration and was begun in order to provide the necessary background of ‘history’ for Elvish tongues.”

Even though fantasy novels had been written before Tolkien’s works, he reinvented the genre with his high fantasy theme and literary style. The books included maps, appendices on the history of Middle-earth, etymology of names, locations, races, invented languages, and poetry. This attention to detail has been the influence of several genre novels that expand on their own worlds, and has in ways become a standard supplement in the literary realm of fantasy and science fiction. The legacy of Tolkien’s works is today, over 60 years after its publication, still highly relevant and popular, for numerous generations of readers.

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9 Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, p. xv
11 Shippey, *Author of the Century*, p. xx
Peter Jackson

Peter Jackson started making films when he was eight years old, growing up in New Zealand. After he turned sixteen, he started working full-time at a local newspaper, and during the weekends shot and edited his films. Without any formal training, trial and error methods became his film studies, and the result of the seven years he spent at the newspaper, living at home with his parents, saving all his money for his films, his hard work ended up being the splatter comedy *Bad Taste* (1987). The film was recognized at the Cannes Film Festival, and Jackson continued making low-budget splatter films with the puppet-musical *Meet the Feebles* (1989) and the horror comedy *Braindead* (1992), all three becoming cult classics for their humorous, inventive and gory special effects.

Jackson moved on to make a serious drama thriller based on a murder that took place in Christchurch, New Zealand, 1954, called *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) which earned him and his wife Fran Walsh an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay. During the film, Jackson built his visual effects company WETA Digital, a digital division from WETA Workshop that made the special effects for his first feature films. What followed was his first Hollywood funded production, the horror comedy *The Frighteners* (1996), which enabled Jackson to create a film that was featuring over 500 computer effect shots with a relatively small and inexperienced digital effects company.

During post-production of *The Frighteners*, Jackson set out to seek the film rights for *The Lord of the Rings*, a project that he and his wife had spoken of for some time. Jackson himself said in an interview that, “I wanted to do something fantastical, and I thought that that would be so much fun to take that sort of Sinbad genre and combine it with computer effects.” After three years of negotiations and planning, Jackson started shooting all three films simultaneously at the end of 1999.

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14 Academy of Achievement, "Peter Jackson Interview;" p. 1
15 Ibid.
5. ANALYSIS

‘The Lord of the Rings’ seems to me to be a film in which directorial voice takes second place to the technology of film. Jackson certainly guided and shaped the work of his collaborators, but I feel that the technicians, and art directors, and – even more – their technical processes deserve the most attention. - Tom Gunning, “Gollum and Golem: Special Effects and the Technology of Artificial Bodies”16

Presentation of the elements

The elements previously mentioned that are being analyzed are as follows. Firstly, the camerawork examines the aerial shot and the wide-angle close-up. Their attributes are explained and put into context with the selected scenes. Mainly, the aerial shots display vast nature views, while the wide-angle close-ups are used for character close-up. Secondly, the use of lighting is being studied in several different scenes, where the meaning and purpose of natural vs. directional lighting is emphasized. Thirdly, the special effects part provides a brief evaluation of the reliance of special effects in the trilogy, then focuses mainly on an effect called dry-for-wet. Penultimately, the editing techniques are being examined, with a close reading – technically and aesthetically – on three defining scenes with Gollum, as well as two other separate scenes. Finally, behind-the-scenes are studied with focus on Jackson and the crew as inventors and innovators.

5.1 CAMERAWORK

The aerial shot

The aerial shot has numerous ways of being used and shown. This ranges from stationary cranes to helicopters or airplanes, all with separate behaviors of movement, speed, and maneuverability. One of the main principles of its use is to create the setting in a film through an establishing shot.17 It can convey massive cities or vast nature, often with individuals in the midst to enhance their insignificance – or importance – in relation to their surroundings.

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One of Peter Jackson’s most reoccurring elements in *Rings* is the aerial shot with helicopters. These shots convey at least two separate meanings or purposes, and they are closely connected even though they represent both the diegetic and non-diegetic world. The majority of the aerial shots are showing vast sceneries of nature, and while the viewer is told that this is Middle-earth, it also serves as an exhibition of the diverse nature of Jackson’s home country, New Zealand. (Fig. 5.1.1, 5.1.2)

One question raised is if Jackson showed the extents of New Zealand as a marketing tactic for tourism, or mainly because it served many similarities to that of the imagined scopes of nature in Tolkien’s world? Film scholar Kirsten Moana Thompson, in her essay “Scale, Spectacle and Movement,” in *From Hobbits to Hollywood*, states that “[t]he use of New Zealand’s photogenic and enormously varied landscape was a central component in both the narrative’s aesthetics and the marketing and promotion of the film.”\(^{18}\) Even if Jackson primarily saw Middle-earth, K.M. Thompson does not develop any further information whether the marketing was contracted or associated with the filmmakers. Regardless, bold independent marketing firms took advantage of the situation and proclaimed that Middle-earth was actually in New Zealand in an effort of increasing tourism.\(^{19}\)

Furthermore, the aerial shots in *Rings* can be categorized into two different kinds. Firstly, there is the helicopter shot of New Zealand nature, either with or without the characters in the shot. These shots are showing the real nature of New Zealand, with minimal digitally added photography. Secondly, there is the “bigature” shot, where a 1/14 scale miniature set in extreme detail is tracked more freely with cameras rigged using motion-control, giving the illusion of being a helicopter shot.\(^{20}\) The notion of ‘action being filmed’ is omitted, not making the viewer believe it is a helicopter shot, and not making them think it is smaller scale or digitally rendered. Many of the aerial shots that seem like one long take, are edited together very cleverly to give an illusion of continuity from an extreme long shot to close up. And it is this illusion that Jackson is very adamant to represent.

K.M. Thompson writes that the aerial shots of the fellowship’s journey has an aesthetic purpose but concludes it rather contradictory, where “[t]he enormity of the task to return the Ring to Mount Doom is underscored by the placement of tiny characters in vast


\(^{19}\) PureNewZealand, ”100% Middle-earth, 100% Pure New Zealand,” Online video clip, *YouTube*, YouTube, 22 August, 2012, retrieved 7 January, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64qx95Ckrwc>

\(^{20}\) K. M. Thompson, “Scale, Spectacle and Movement,” p. 289
landscapes and suggests the second major stylistic hallmark of the trilogy; the strategic and narrative function of spectacle."\(^{21}\) Following Aristotle’s different elements of tragedy from Poetics, he grades the spectacle as the least important function of all, and that “[t]he production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet”.\(^{22}\) As Thompson declares the spectacle as a ‘major stylistic hallmark’ of Jackson’s films, she puts it ahead of the other principles of narrative function. Worth mentioning, even though K.M. Thompson is being quoted here, her knowledge of the work of Tolkien and Jackson is lacking, where she writes of Gandalf throwing himself off the tower of Isengard, “[a]s he falls onto the back of an owl [my italics] and flies away.” Gandalf falls onto an eagle, which is evident both in the film and the novel, “[a]nd Gwaihir the Windlord, swiftest of the Great Eagles, came unlooked-for to Orthanc; and he found me standing on the pinnacle.”\(^{23}\) While her lack of knowledge of the story and its characters is questioned, her knowledge of the technical features is well-founded.

Being visually appealing is evidently an important matter for cinema, but if it is acting as a stylistic leitmotif, it can degrade other narrative functions and make it visually appealing but intellectually dissatisfying. However, the spectacle and grandeur of the nature shots in Jackson’s film are also a depiction of Tolkien’s vastly detailed descriptions of nature in Middle-earth. To convey his meticulous portrayals of environment in cinematic form is difficult, but Jackson certainly adapted by being consistent in his representation of nature.

The aerial shots in Rings are plentiful, and they serve, in one way, a purpose in conveying the great distance the fellowship has to cross, and in another, the motion-controlled illusion of real aerial shots over bigature sets. While the technique is often used in other films to establish a location quite momentarily, Jackson uses the aerial shots more repetitively and extended to break its establishing nature and make it fluid with hidden editing.

Wide-angle close-up
A wide-angle close-up shot makes for a distorted frame that curves the object in an unnatural way and rounding the shape. It is a technique moderately used in feature films but often in

\(^{23}\) Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring, p. 343
photography. Film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson writes in *Film History: An Introduction* that New Hollywood directors of the 1970s such as Spielberg and De Palma “[r]eintroduced wide-angle-lens compositions reminiscent of Orson Welles, William Wyler, and film noir,” and that the outcome of the shots “[. . .] were often striking depth of focus and distortion of figures.”

The technique has been utilized between several epochs and genres where the main characteristic of the shot remains the distorted nature.

Terry Gilliam is a proponent of the wide-angle shot, in films such as *Brazil* (1985) where the use of wide-angle lenses are seen throughout the majority of the film, making it surreal and comical with its distorted visualization. The technique is also used profusely in Gilliam’s *12 Monkeys* (1995) and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1998) where, once again, the surrealism and the characters extended drug use translates well into the visual perspective of the viewer. Even though the two latter films differ in genre and setting, the wide-angle shot is used consistently, and therefore functions accordingly with the story. Gilliam explains his use of the wide-angle shot in an interview, “[i]t makes me feel like I’m in the space of the film, I’m surrounded.”

One of Peter Jackson’s reoccurring techniques is the wide-angle close-up, a technique that he has been using repeatedly since *Bad Taste* where the majority of close-ups portray the gory details of the special effects, contrasted with an obese man eating custard in an almost perverted way. The use of this close-up is effective, because the films are, once again, surreal and amusingly gruesome, and it became a stylistic leitmotif of the director. However, using techniques such as this one without a consistent correlation to the setting and motif, the shot becomes unmotivated and merely a visual matter for a confusing effect.

In the beginning of *Fellowship*, Frodo enters his home in darkness and senses something wrong, where the frame cuts to a wide-angle close-up of Frodo as a hand reaches out onto his shoulder from behind (Fig 5.1.3). The purpose of this specific shot establishes itself to show Frodo confused, alone, and anxious, not only physically but also mentally. The shot also moves over to Gandalf, who is also shown alone – with his knowledge – and anxious, since he seems to be of the impression that Frodo’s ring is in fact the One Ring of power.

The consistency of this technique is utilized well during the beginning of *Fellowship*, where it mostly continues to show the foreshadowing loneliness of Frodo and Gandalf’s self-

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contained knowledge. Therefore, it appears that Jackson sets the meaning of the close-up by associating it with characters in distress and loneliness, forcing the viewer into their troubled minds.

As the four Hobbits reach the town of Bree at the Prancing Pony tavern, and Frodo fiddles with the Ring, the close-up is motivated. He is in a crowded room but alone in the seduction and power of the Ring. However, when the sequence shows other men in the tavern with the same wide-angle close-up, the meaning becomes misplaced. These men are merely extras in the scene, yet they are treated with the same intense close-up as Frodo is.

Throughout the trilogy, Jackson is quite persistent in using this close-up repetitively, in situations where the characters are not looking or feeling distressed, alone, or frightened, as he establishes the shot in the beginning of *Fellowship*. It stands out as a stylistic element for the director, but seeing this technique being used in several various situations, it loses the connotative aspect and merely becomes a visually distorted shot of spectacle.

### 5.2 LIGHTING

**Helm’s Deep**

Just like camerawork, lighting has different connotations that can increase the theme and setting of a scene, and there are countless ways to enhance or reduce the importance of characters and surroundings.

One specific scene, which utilizes lighting that can be closely examined, is the Battle of Helm’s Deep (Towers 2.43.30). The establishing shot of the preparation for battle display torches placed around the walls of Helm’s Deep. This would usually be an indication of what kind of lighting is going to be used, both for the diegetic environment and the viewer. Yet these torches are merely there for thematic value, they have minimal reflection on the characters or its environment. The second light source that is visible (but not shown) is an assumed moonlight. This would act as the authentic and most probable lighting besides the torches. However, the scene is made inside a studio set, and the conformity to which Jackson seems to follow, is to control all aspects of lighting, instead of relying on natural ambience from the night outside, and adapt the lighting accordingly. By making the scene indoors, he relies more on clarifying lighting rather than authentic lighting.

As the camera tracks the elves and men standing on the wall, a cold backlighting from below is used to highlight their presence, and give them a halo-effect around the edges of
their heads and shoulders. For that halo-effect to be construed appropriately, the source of the backlighting should be difficult to perceive, and the object subtly illuminated. Film scholars Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White in *The Film Experience* writes of “directional lighting” that “[i]t may create the impression of a natural light source,” but also that “[p]rimary sources of film lighting are usually not visible onscreen.”26 With these two guidelines, the problem with the sequence at Helm’s Deep is the interference of the directional backlighting that does not accentuate a natural source, and how it, as a primary source, is distinctly visible onscreen.

During this sequence the backlighting is more perceivable than the halo-effect itself. This is not a warm light emitting from fire, nor is it vibrant, but very even, cold and sharp (Fig. 5.2.1). The primary sources in this scene are the torches and moonlight, where the torches are visible (but not noticeable as lighting the scene) and the moonlight is also visible with a naturally correlated lighting.

This sort of backlighting is often used to intensify something or someone sinister, preferably on a hill or rise, with the camera at a low angle looking up. The effect can be intimidating, but not if it is too obvious. Corrigan/White writes that, “[l]ight . . . define and shape the object or person being illuminated.”27 The implications for this technique are to illuminate the object or person in the frame, not to clarify the light source. A contemporary horror film or science fiction can make use of these diegetically motivated sources of light, but are they motivated in a fantasy or medieval film? The immediate answer would be no, but if all films use a more diegetically motivated source, filmmakers would have difficulty showing scenes at night or darkened locations, and there would be no point in using lighting for meaning or as a stylistic element.

However, there are ways in fantasy and medieval films where the lighting is *more* diegetically motivated than others. If Jackson would have used mainly fire as a lighting source it would probably have contributed to an even more menacing setting for the oncoming battle, but it would also mean that the viewer would see a darker and less clear environment. There is certainly a factor of sacrifice involved in these situations, to compromise authenticity for clarity.

Reasonably, diegetically motivated lighting is hard to use at all times, especially during the night, therefore non-diegetically motivated lighting is frequently used. But in the case of Peter Jackson and *Rings*, the balance between clarity and authenticity often rests upon clarity. Therefore it is possible to assume that what the viewer sees is not exactly what the

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26 Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 83, 81
27 Ibid., p. 83
characters in the films see. The lighting therefore becomes stylized, and while such lighting can extend meaning and thematic setting, it can also become too obvious and merely act as a guiding and clarifying light of the action.

The directional lighting acts as a stylistic element, and Jackson uses it consistently throughout the trilogy, mainly on indoor sets. The main problem with the lighting is how it is adapted to where the camera is placed, and not through a consistency of the environment. Between cuts the lighting falls differently on the set and characters, disrupting the continuity editing, and separates rather than unites each shot. The elements of mise-en-scène are difficult to arrange in a perfect synergy, but to achieve the nearest result, it has to be arranged according to the entire mise-en-scène, and not around a certain element, in the way Jackson seems to have made around the camera. Relating to this, Corrigan/White writes, “[h]ow a character moves through light or how the lighting on the character changes within a single mise-en-scène can signal important information about the character and story.” Even if they referred to the implicated meaning of the diegetic world, it serves as an important part of the correlation between arranging scenes as well. When the lighting is not consistent between shots, it also changes the character and setting, although not as a conscious change, but as a disrupting change nonetheless.

Focused lighting

There are four examples of backlighting a single character that will be examined here. They differ in execution and intensity, but it shows how Jackson often utilizes the technique. The techniques used here are also called bottom- or sidelighting, but will be referred to as backlighting with the alternate positions described.

*The Black Rider*

In *Fellowship*, while the Black Riders are searching for Frodo and the Ring in the Shire, one rider is seen on a hillside, enclosed by trees (*Fellowship* 55.53). A silvery light illuminates the rider from below the hill to the left, and the threatening effect is rich (Fig. 5.2.2). Nevertheless, the light source is unnatural in a rural setting, and seems to be there for clarifying purpose, and not as an intimidating element. This technique fits well in modern sci-fi or horror films, but becomes questionable in a fantasy setting. Even if this is directional

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28 Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 83
lighting that becomes, according to Corrigan/White, “dramatically apparent,” it still does not create the impression of being a natural source.\(^{29}\) If it was a subtle backlighting that was indiscernible from the night sky, and the rider would enter the frame with an ominous halo, marking its silhouette from the rest of the background, the effect would become more potent and believable.

Sequentially, another example of this rider where natural lighting is more effective than the previous scene takes place when Aragorn explains to the hobbits of the Black Riders, or Nazgûl, hunting them (*Fellowship* 1.05.29). The rider is standing in profile during dawn, the sky is slowly turning brighter and the trees surround the rider even more than the previous scene where the rider was more framed between the trees (Fig. 5.2.3). There is only natural light, and the rider’s silhouette and some textual detail can be comprehended. But since there is no obvious backlighting – or any other directional lighting for that matter – this rider somehow melts into the environment as he stands still, and the slightest movement reveals the towering figure on the horse with its covering hood. Comparing these two scenes, the more sinister rider becomes the one that is harder to see. The use of darkness becomes more frightening than the one being displayed with directional lighting in center stage of the frame.

**Gandalf and the impossible illumination**

In *Towers*, Gandalf is watching out over the fields of Rohan at night, seeing the maroon sky over Mordor, as Aragorn walks up to speak with him (*Towers* 1.00.40). The establishing shot show the two characters from behind, as the moonlight is shining from the top left corner of the frame. As Aragorn stands beside Gandalf, a shot/reverse shot sequence takes place with close-up of their faces. Between the cuts, the backlighting shifts in relation to the camera angle, so that in the 45° angle on Gandalf’s left profile, the backlighting is behind his right shoulder, i.e. straight opposite the camera, and as the 45° angle is on Gandalf’s right profile, the backlighting appears behind his left shoulder – again, straight opposite of the camera. The shifting illumination is in conflicting congruence with the moon, which becomes omitted as a natural light source in the shot/reverse shot sequence (Fig. 5.2.4, 5.2.5).

As this is a minor detail that takes some effort to notice, and can be overlooked, it still shows how the scene may have been made with unconventional and clearly non-functional methods of inconsequential editing and lighting.

\(^{29}\) Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 172; 83
Having two characters speak during a shot/reverse shot scene, the use of two cameras, each at a 45° angle on opposing profiles of the characters seems like a standard setup for more simple and correlating editing. Still, the changing lighting from left to right tell of how one camera setup was used with its accompanying lighting, and then changing the camera setup with different lighting. This shows of an inconsistency of prepared lighting at sets, where the lighting mainly is placed accordingly with the camera placement and blocking of characters.

All light on Théoden King

In Towers, before the battle at Helm’s Deep, Théoden is being clad in armor by Gamling, and they are alone in the echoing hall of the Hornburg. Behind Théoden is a doorway that emits an extremely intense backlighting similar to that of an enormous spotlight. It appears more like a theater stage rather than a film set (Fig. 5.2.6, 5.2.7). The symbolic meaning of the lighting is open for interpretation; Théoden is the renewed King, where the people of Rohan depend on his leadership and victory, and he is clad meticulously with fragmented shots of various pieces of armor to also show his delicacy. However, regardless of the aesthetic meaning, the lighting is far too strong to project a halo-effect surrounding the edges of his silhouette. The focus of the scene lays not so much on Théoden, but on the lighting itself. Where lighting is supposed to be a supplement to the narrative, the characters, the action at hand, and not at the center of it, it becomes a spectacle in focus.

The Mines of Moria and digital lighting

Tolkien’s establishing description of when the fellowship becomes trapped in the Mines of Moria reads, “[a]nd all light was lost.” Film scholar Kristin Thompson reflects on this passage in the films in her essay “Gollum Talks to Himself” from the anthology Picturing Tolkien, where she argues for the use of “very low light” as a conventional standard instead of complete darkness. While this standard has become accepted as still conveying darkness, where often characters in low light seem to be walking in complete darkness, Jackson also uses this technique, although more staged and controlled, as with the battle of Helm’s Deep.

However, compared to the previous examples of lighting, this is one sequence where the lighting is skillfully constructed in a completely unconventional way. For the most part

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30 Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring, p. 405
31 Thompson, Gollum Talks to Himself, p. 32
the light is digital, a technology created by digital colorist Peter Doyle, where “[t]he system allowed for color grading to be used selectively for only one object or area within a shot.” Since most of the areas in Moria are digitally lit in this way - with the exception of Balin’s Tomb - the overall consistency of digital illumination becomes authentic and not a noticeable difference between physical and digital lighting.

As they enter the giant halls of Dwarrowdelf, the light from Gandalf’s staff illuminates the pillars as they walk through. The light from his staff is barely centered on the ground around the fellowship, and at the same time it lights up the massive pillars surrounding them (Fig. 5.2.8). This has a meaningful connotation where the cold light of the fellowship is small and focused; they are clearly not in a powerful position, but also wants to be obscure and almost hidden.

After the battle in Balin’s Tomb, they are back in the halls of Dwarrowdelf, this time running from the orcs pouring out from everywhere. As they are surrounded, Gandalf intensifies the light from his staff, and the orcs form around a circular ring of light against darkness, and the illuminated staff serves both as a clarifying diegetically motivated light, and also as a source for good against evil. The mixture between natural lighting and directional lighting comes from the same digital source, which is a clever development between the two elements.

From their entrance into Moria, Gandalf has controlled the setting of light with his staff, both as the clarity for the viewer, as well as a connotation of being righteous, pure, and good characters. This becomes masterfully challenged in the shift of power as the Balrog approaches with its fiery red light. Once again, as with the approaching orc army in darkness, the sound and emitting light of the Balrog is the emerging force of terror. The Balrog itself does not appear directly, but is carefully and frightfully established by the shifting tone of the cold, pure, white light from the small (in comparison of scale) wizard to the consuming and scorching red light of the sizable demon (Fig. 5.2.9). In response to the Balrog, nearly everyone in the fellowship loses their previous status in some way, they trip, they fall, they look weary, fumbling and scared. Finally, when the Balrog reveals itself, Gandalf is almost completely engulfed in its dominating light. The light from the staff is barely visible, but it still serves as a small light of hope (Fig. 5.2.10). As the Balrog and Gandalf fall down the chasm, the erratic and action-driven lighting from both characters disappear and the actual lighting, as well as the symbol of hope, falls with them.

32 Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p. 280
This course of action shows a resourceful way of using a singular light source that holds both a physical and symbolical meaning. It certainly enforces the trial and error approach Peter Jackson has had throughout his career, where the more questionable ways of lighting, such as the backlighting of characters and the Helm’s Deep sequence, and the ingenious use of digital lighting in the Mines of Moria coincide in the same trilogy as a technical and stylistic element of mise-en-scène.

5.3 SPECIAL EFFECTS

Tom Gunning, in his essay “Gollum and Golem,” from the anthology *Hobbits to Hollywood*, describes Peter Jackson’s *Rings* as a work where the “directorial voice takes second place to the technology of film.”33 Tom Shippey in his text, “Another Road to Middle-earth,” from *Understanding The Lord of the Rings* bears a resemblance in opinion, as he writes “[i]n some respects *The Lord of the Rings* remains an ‘action movie,’ even a ‘special effects movie.’”34 Finally, Kristin Thompson in *The Frodo Franchise* writes that “[p]robably the film’s careful, imaginative design, more than anything else, won over fans and made them more willing to excuse the changes in the plot.”35

These three authors, two of them film scholars, and one fantasy and medieval literature scholar, seem to be in consensus that the films are not only reliant on its special effects, but also accepting of the fundamental changes in story and character because of it. This refers back to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, where the least important element of spectacle is distinguished as a major leitmotif of the trilogy.

In adapting a novel – especially a fantasy novel – the transfer of characters, action, and dialogue is already established, and requires only minor modification. And while Jackson’s setting of Middle-earth required advanced technology to be created cinematically, it still does not only serve as a supplement to the essence of the narrative, but often one of the leading elements.

Peter Jackson himself enforces the notion of the trilogy being emphasized on spectacle and special effects, “I’d always wanted to make a fantasy film . . . [w]ith monsters

33 Gunning, *Gollum and Golem*, p. 320
35 Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p. 86
and ogres and trolls and sword fighting and big battles and castles.”

Jackson’s previous films also relied heavily on special effects; it has always been one of his leitmotifs, and not so much a supplement to the narrative, except for Heavenly Creatures. By comparison, in New Zealand journalist Denis Dutton’s article “Dazzling, Sure – But to What Effect?” the criticism is not held back, “Jackson’s epic represents the victory of special effects over dramatic art.”

Similarly critical is Verlyn Flieger, professor of mythology and medieval literature, who writes in “Sometimes One Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures” from Picturing Tolkien, that the dominant special effects are “done to death,” and that they are “[.] in effect for the sake of effect rather than to support the story or the theme.”

These separate reflections concur to the same aspect of special effects, although with different approaches in appreciation or disapproval.

The special effects in Rings are – in general – spectacular to behold. Peter Jackson and his crew worked progressively in developing new software and techniques that would allow them to push both the physical and digital filmmaking process forward. Although there are some groundbreaking digital and special effects uniquely created for the trilogy, there is one technique that stands out as a more questionable attempt.

Below the surface

In the films Jackson has employed a technique called dry-for-wet, used in television and cinema since the 1960s, where the actor is not under water, but through the use of slow motion, fans, lighting effects, filters – and lately, digital air bubbles – gives the illusion of being under water.

In Rings, this method has shown both its benefits and limitations. Primarily of benefits – and probably the main reason – is the safety of the actors. Being under water can be difficult and dangerous, even though there are safety personnel on set if anything goes wrong. Using the dry-for-wet technique lets the actors focus solely on

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36 Academy of Achievement, ”Peter Jackson Interview,” p. 3
39 Thompson, The Frodo Franchise, p. 279 ff; Gollum Talks To Himself, p. 28
acting without holding their breath and without blurry vision. It also gives more control for everything in mise-en-scène, with lighting, special effects, filter, blocking, and camera movement.

The limitation of this method is most visibly the authenticity. During the final moments of *Fellowship*, Frodo is on a small boat about to leave for Mordor on his own, when Sam walks out in the water to reach his boat. As he gets submerged in the water it cuts to him being “underwater” using the dry-for-wet technique (Fig. 5.3.1). The illusion of being submerged lacks the necessary conviction because of mainly one problem, which is the flowing hair and cloak. The effect of air blowers is quite distinctive from clothing and hair moving underwater. As Sam moves, his hair does not have the slithering motion that occurs underwater. Nor does the cloak flow in the same way, thus it is probably strung up and pulled, in combination with air blowers to convey an illusion of underwater movement.

The illusion of continuity editing is to keep the narrative moving, even though the shots are fragmented and separate. In this scene the spatial action is broken as the actor Sean Astin evidently acted “underwater” in a studio, and not below the boat with Frodo. Even if they could not shoot the scene below the surface of that particular river, shooting a real underwater sequence in a pool set, would have strengthened the illusion of Sean Astin actually being submerged just below the boat, since the underwater shot lasts for merely twenty two seconds. There is a definite spatial disruption between when Sam is swimming in the actual water, being submerged in the dry-for-wet technique, and finally when being dragged up onto the boat from the water again.

The same effect is used in both *Towers* and *Return* as well. In *Towers*, Frodo plummets forward in the Dead Marches and see the dead spirits below. Elijah Wood actually falls flat into the water, but the next shot shows the dry-for-wet sequence of him. However, as Gollum drags him out of the swamp he is in reality submerged. Additionally, these scenes are quite similar; they both show Sam and Frodo in stationary positions in a medium shot during the dry-for-wet scenes.

The scene in *Return* differs from the previous two. As Déagol and Sméagol are fishing in a river, Déagol gets dragged under by a large fish, and a wide shot of a more visual set shows plants, the fish, and also a hint of the surface in the gloomy water. As the fish drags Déagol towards the center of the shot, the sight of him not being underwater is more palpable than the two previous examples (Fig. 5.3.2) While Sam and Frodo were unmoving, Déagol is dragged through the river, and his movement resembles nothing like being under water. In
comparison with the other two scenes, as Frodo and Sam were fixed in position, they were also adding to the authenticity – or more correctly – the movable scene makes the effect more artificial and fails in conveying the illusion.

The dry-for-wet technique has been used for over five decades of filmmaking, and while Jackson and his crew makes films in a technically progressive manner, this specific technique stands out as not only old-fashioned, but also quite poor in its execution. While many underwater scenes in other films omit the action of characters diving or submerging into the water, the use of dry-for-wet might be authentic enough. However, as Jackson features both the submerging and reemerging of the characters, the shift between the real and simulated becomes even more evident. As there are so many ingenious inventions and solutions of special effects in Rings, this stands as one of the blatant errors of his trial and error method of filmmaking.

5.4 EDITING

During the production of Rings, as all three films were shot simultaneously during a fifteen month period of principal photography, Jackson supervised the shot sequences via satellite feed as up to six shooting units were spread out over New Zealand for different scenes.\(^\text{41}\) The problem with this method is the lack of immediate control and limited point of view for Jackson. The scene with Arwen and Frodo being chased by The Black Riders is an example where the editing looks to be disrupted due to a lack of planned action between the continuity of shots.

Other editing techniques that are being analyzed are three diverse scenes where the duality of Gollum is established and explored both aesthetically and technically through editing. The final part of this chapter explores a scene where the balance between good and evil is conveyed forcefully with editing and its aesthetic meaning through technical means.

The discontinuous chase

During the scene where Arwen and Frodo are being chased by the Black Riders (Fellowship 1.20.26), there occur some disruption in the continuity editing, spatio-temporal action, and 180-degree rule without proper indication or consistency.\(^\text{42}\)

\(^{41}\) Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p. 38

\(^{42}\) Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 149 f
The sequence begins at night where Arwen rides away from right to left of the frame. The look on Aragorn’s face and the exclamation from Sam, “What are you doing?! Those Wraiths are still out there!” indicates along with the non-diegetic music that time is of importance, yet the next cut disrupts this by showing them riding in daylight, now from left to right instead, without a distinct change in the music. If the music had changed significantly during this cut, it would have been more logical, but Aragorn’s worry and Sam’s outburst does not connect well with the break in the spatio-temporal action and continuity editing.

At one point in the chase sequence the shots alternate quite diffusely between Arwen and a chasing Black Rider. As she rides through a forest, the shot mostly shows trees in the speeding action, but a Rider can be defined nonetheless, and the effect is intimidating and clever as he seems to come from nowhere. However, while the chasing Rider comes from left to right the next shot shows another Rider racing from right to left. The possibility of Arwen colliding with it seems perfectly imaginable, but the next shot shows Arwen riding from right to left also, looking back at the chasers. This is a break of the 180-degree rule that crosses the axis, and although it is not a definite rule, it confuses the spatial relationship. The shot may well be intentional, as “disjunctive editing” which Corrigan/White define with two major functions, “[. . .] to call attention to the editing for aesthetic, conceptual, ideological, or psychological purposes, and to disorient, disturb, or viscerally affect viewers.” 43 To compare these traits in this scene, the aesthetic, conceptual, ideological, and psychological purposes are difficult to connect, the main focus of the editing seems to simply visualize how Arwen looks back both to the right and left. The action is driven by suspense and speed, without any conceptual, ideological, or psychological purposes, at least regarding the editing. So its function can be linked with disorientation, disturbance, and visceral affection more purposefully. However, it still acts as a disrupting element of the continuity, and while Corrigan/White means that this type of editing “[. . .] can even coexist with continuity editing in the same film,” it is a solitary occurrence in the chase sequence that looks more misplaced than stylistically deliberate.44

Finally, the environment changes abruptly during this sequence, from dense forests to wide open plains, followed by a completely different kind of woodland from the initial dense forest. With the irregular pattern of shifting scenery in relation to the spatio-temporal action, the sequence has more fragmented shots than it has continuity.

43 Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 172
44 Ibid.
If the editing is meant to signify that the chase takes a longer time than just the moments that are shown, the intention is absent because many shots are connected very deliberately, at the same time other shots seem to be disconnected in time and space as well. The lack of a planned sequence between the separate shots becomes apparent, and can be a result of too many camera angles and numerous takes that disrupt the blocking of characters and continuity.

The Gollum/Sméagol conflict
There are three key scenes with Gollum that establishes and develops his duality. Two of them take place in *Towers*, the final one in *Return*. These scenes are both masterfully executed as an aesthetic and psychological aspect, and at the same time as a technical feat with inventive editing styles. There is a fourth conflict at the end of *Towers* as well, but this one does not excel in editing compared to the other three, and will therefore not be included.

*Gollum I*

The primary scene takes place when Sam and Frodo are sleeping at night and Gollum sits some distance away talking to himself (*Towers* 1.38.56). There is an establishing tracking shot from one 45° angle of Gollum to the opposite angle of him. At the left camera position Gollum expresses, “Wicked. Tricksy. False,” with a vile expression, and as the camera tracks to the right, he changes both facial expressions with dilated pupils as well as a more nasal rather than guttural voice, and responds as Sméagol, “No. Not master,” with a gullible face. In relation to the camera in this shot, he faces the direction of the lens, and while it moves, he moves his head and sight accordingly. The camera tracks back to Gollum’s side, where the dialogue is now in effect.

The first cut to Sméagol in the shot/reverse shot conversation makes for a remarkable composition. If the two personalities would be separated and viewed together in a single frame, their eyeline match would be looking at opposite directions. Instead of actually having “them” facing each other, and making a more obvious eyeline match, the duality of Gollum/Sméagol is very much a psychological condition, and the editing is cleverly constructed to add a frightful performance of “their” dialogue. Kristin Thompson adds that, “[t]he moment’s subtle combination of framing, camera movement, editing, and character glances,” becomes demanding even for herself as a film expert to perceive from the
beginning.\textsuperscript{45} The editing even disrupts the spatio-temporal action where Gollum and Sméagol are not only separated by facial expression and different voices, but also body positions, which is an inventive way of distinguishing the duality into two different characters. Thompson argues that if the body positions were accurate as one individual between shots, “[...] such precision would be distracting.”\textsuperscript{46} The result is pleasing yet disturbing on both an aesthetic and technical level.

\textit{Gollum II}

Faramir and his men have caught Gollum in the Forbidden Pool with the help from Frodo, and he is about to be questioned (\textit{Towers} 2.26.32). Gollum lies in a fetal position crying with his back turned and no visible face, and after some whimpering of what seems to be the personality of Sméagol, he relaxes and Gollum’s sinister voice appears and his right hand gently caresses his own left shoulder. Sméagol answers by curling up again whimpering, whereby Gollum straightens a bit and asks, “Why does it cry, Sméagol?”

Shippey refers to the previous scene as an exorcism where Sméagol “[... ] banishes Gollum, his worse half, with the words, three times repeated, ‘leave now, and never come back.’ The exorcism is successful but not lasting.”\textsuperscript{47} Evidently, the banishment was temporary, where Sméagol is interrupted in his most happy state of mind sitting and singing in a secluded pool with a fish in his hand. Consequently, the solution of showing the innate resentment of Gollum in this second conflict is through a single angle carefully closing in on the creature as he lies against the stonewall.

Gollum, who is showing his duality more clearly in this single shot, obscures his face completely in contrast with the previous scene where the facial expressions were the dominating elements. The only editing in this scene is the few shot/reverse shots that show Faramir, but it is still important in relation to the first one of Gollum’s conflict with Sméagol, as it develops radically from editing two separate characters in dialogue, to a single shot where only the voices and body expressions act as dramatic action. The omission of Gollum’s face is skillfully made, where in the end of the scene he slowly turns around engulfed in Gollum’s rage and a facial expression that is intensely disturbing. Shippey means that, “Gollum returns [... ] when Sméagol feel himself betrayed by Frodo to Faramir at the

\textsuperscript{45} Thompson, \textit{Gollum Talks to Himself}, p. 35
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 36
\textsuperscript{47} Shippey, \textit{Another Road to Middle-earth}, p. 243
Forbidden Pool [. . .]. The reaction of Gollum is clear that, what Shippey meant as an exorcism of Gollum, it now becomes an exorcism of Sméagol in a sense.

_Gollum III_

The final Gollum/Sméagol conflict resembles the first example as it takes place during night when the hobbits are sleeping (*Return* 23.32). This structure follows a more straightforward shot/reverse shot with eyeline match as Gollum speaks to his reflection in a pond. Again, an establishing shot of him being one character with two personalities is made, where the dialogue begins through an over-the-shoulder shot, with the reflected image in center of the frame. The editing afterwards departs into shot/reverse shot showing separate characters again.

The significance of making Sméagol address his reflection, as with the first example, is vital on both an aesthetic and technical level. As it relates to the first conflict, it also shows “them” in conversation through an eyeline match, although this match is possible, compared to the first, which is edited together as an illusion for the viewer and as a statement of Gollum’s madness. This is in fact, the first conflict where it actually shows physical indication of Sméagol “facing” Gollum. The previous two differ in two ways, i.e. through editing and verbal exchange. As the scene takes place, Gollum’s personality is placed in the reflection of the pond, where the vile facial expressions and constricted pupils, while Sméagol is the one looking down with dilated pupils, and a nonsensical expression. The implication of this through a technical point of view is that the camera is placed at a high angle looking down on Gollum, and facing upwards from a low angle at Sméagol. Corrigan/White explains the problematic meaning of these angles which can, “[s]ometimes indicate psychological, moral, or political meanings in a film, as when victims are seen from above and oppressors from below,” but this is by no means a strict formality, and exceptions are constantly made for conflicting or original meaning.49 This scene is a good example of a conflicting meaning where, according to Corrigan/White, Gollum would be the victim and Sméagol the oppressor. However, Gollum is the manipulative and powerful personality here, even though he is framed in a high angle shot. The importance of showing their dialogue through the pond’s rippling surface is to show the fragile boundary between the two personalities, culminating in the end where Sméagol drops a rock in the pond so that the reflection of Gollum is rippled into disorder, and succumbed into one being.

48 Shippey, *Another Road to Middle-earth*, p 243
49 Corrigan/White, *The Film Experience*, p. 113
This is also the one conflict where Gollum’s duality is displayed in front of his own eyes, in a way climaxing his disturbed and deranged mind, and also visually symbolizes the unstable bond of the two personalities in the rippling pond.

The progression of Gollum’s complex nature is ingeniously expressed through the combination of editing techniques, or lack of editing, as in the second scene. There seems to be a conscious choice in using different technical ways of portrayal, to show Gollum’s internal struggle. If all of the three conflicts had relied on one specific editing technique, his complexity would not have been indicated or developed. It is through the editing that Gollum becomes more complex, as the first conflict expressively shows. Regarding the second conflict, which does not use any editing besides the shot/reverse shot to Faramir, it relies more on the visual and characteristic element of Gollum. But the omission of editing Gollum in an environment where he becomes parted into two characters from one body is even more vital for his representation and for the experience of the viewer. Finally, the third conflict develops Gollum to see himself in a reflection, completing the transformation and domination of Gollum over Sméagol.

Gandalf the White

The final film features one of the most intricate and visually spectacular scenes in the trilogy, where the arrangement of editing, sound, music, action, visual symmetry, and symbolic meaning is expressed.

Faramir and his soldiers retreat from the besieged Osgiliath with the Nazgûl terrorizing over them (Return 1.12.36). The establishing shot is an extreme long shot where the soldiers of Gondor ride from Osgiliath and the black mountain line of Mordor to the left of the frame (Fig. 5.4.1). Dark clouds are looming perfectly in line with the edges of the black mountains, and to the right of the frame the open plains are covered in misty skies where they ride for refuge. As they ride away the Nazgûl swoop down and pummel the fleeing soldiers. The sound is filled with the screams from both men and the fell beasts that the Nazgûl ride on. The non-diegetic orchestra and rumbling choir set the tone of despair. The camera is constantly moving, chaotically searching for the action, when it cuts to a static shot of Minas Tirith, and in the obscuring haze a riding figure is emerging. The next shot show soldiers and citizens of Minas Tirith watching as the hazed figure rides out to confront the engagement, naming him ‘Mithrandír,’ and ‘The White Rider.’ A cut to medium close-up of Gandalf with Pippin in front of him confirms his identity (although by different names and
titles), and then a returning cut to the extreme long shot, reestablishing the action of the symmetry and symbolism of the frame. From the right comes a small figure in white riding on the pale brown fields, with light grey clouds and sun-strewn mountains in the background. From the left the terrible Nazgûl soar over the fleeing soldiers, all in black, covered by darkened clouds that almost creep along the action. The shots with the soldiers and the Nazgûl constantly feature the dark clouds, fast editing and aerial camera movements, while the shots of Gandalf are more unwavering and controlled camerawork, with the sun shining intensely on him.

The setting changes when a tracking long shot follows Gandalf closing in on the soldiers. The orchestra and choir ends, and a single soft falsetto consumes all sound, at the same time Gandalf rises his staff to emit a strong white light, with the diegetic sound of a thunderclap. The cut to the reestablishing extreme long shot returns, this time Gandalf and the soldiers are closer, and the dark looming clouds are not as consuming as they were in the previous shot. The light from Gandalf’s staff is concentrated on the Nazgûl, who are now retreating (Fig. 5.4.2). Cutting to the tracking long shot of Gandalf again, the sound of the thunderclap is reversed, as he rides towards the fleeing men. The camera follows the riders and turns slightly to the right, where Minas Tirith starts to cover the frame. Verlyn Flieger examines the relation between omitted and added visual effects and verbal interchange in the films. While she is of the opinion that “[. . .] the visual nature of film is ideally suited in certain instances to get maximum impact from images without words,” this sequence makes the most of visual narrative without dialogue and minimal words.\(^{50}\) However, she also writes in regard of Tolkien’s invention of languages and its importance to Rings, that, “[. . .] a story so reliant on the right word for its impact and one whose genesis [. . .] is best left to word rather than picture.”\(^{51}\) While Flieger seems to have higher regard for the novel instead of the films, alteration and interpretations must be applied, and while this scene omits dialogue altogether, its visual description of the textual sequence exploits the cinematic elements not only as a rendition, but also as an original creation by Jackson.\(^{52}\)

The technical elements such as fast versus controlled editing, or violent versus static camera movements, has not only visual appeal, but also expressive meaning, giving the motion of the camera and editing a projection of the mental state of the characters it follows.

\(^{50}\) Flieger, Sometimes One Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures, p. 47

\(^{51}\) Ibid.

\(^{52}\) Tolkien, The Return of the King, p. 87, the event in the novel barely covers a single page, where ”[. . .] he raised his hand, and from it a shaft of white light stabbed upwards,” is the most obvious part that relates to the visual of Jackson’s scene.
There are mainly three aspects of visual points in this scene, the first being the omnipotent one that shows the establishing and reestablishing shot of action from a distance, where it divides the frame into good against evil through the contrasting mountains, dark versus light clouds, the ruins of Osgiliath in relation to the pale brown fields. The second aspect is the tumultuous one, with the fleeing soldiers and the terrorizing Nazgûl, where the camerawork and editing is chaotic and fast. The third one is the virtuous, with Gandalf as the savior, where the camera angles are grounded and steadily tracking him. The diegetic state of characters and action is transferred into the technical style to enforce it, and the sound mixing adds to where Gandalf banishes the Nazgûl from their prey with his light, while also deafening the non-diegetic orchestra and choir with a soft falsetto.

The amalgamation of these distinctive visual aspects enriches the symbolism and theme of the scene, by adding purpose to the technical aspect of representation in the frame.

5.5 BEHIND-THE-SCENES

A director’s film style is mostly associated with the elements of mise-en-scène, editing, dialogue, cinematography, and sound. But as DVD releases and online capabilities develop, supplementary material becomes more important, where behind-the-scenes is more or less standardized today. Often do directors invite the public to follow the making of a film, but not on a comprehensive level like Peter Jackson did with Rings. The behind-the-scenes material made for the trilogy replicates, in a way, Tolkien’s appendices as Jackson labels and categorizes the supplementary material in appendices as well. In regards of technical film style, Jackson incorporates the behind-the-scenes material as a standard element of his work, as Thompson states in The Frodo Franchise, “[f]rom the start of his professional filmmaking career, Jackson was inclined to record behind-the-scenes material for each production [. . .]”

These documentary additions enhance the viewing pleasure in an extended way. Since much of the behind-the-scenes not only shows shooting sequences, but also the details regarding set design, clothing, armor, weapons, prosthetics, digital software programs, motion capture and more, the illusion of what the viewer see is altered, but not ruined. Thompson writes that Jackson “[a]rranged for particularly detailed video documentation of

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53 Thompson, The Frodo Franchise, p. 113
54 Tolkien, The Return of the King, p. 379
55 Thompson, The Frodo Franchise, p. 208
every stage and ordered that virtually everything from the production be kept.” This adds a layer of understanding how different problematic scenes were made, where most of the creative solutions were authentic and believable, while a few others were not, such as the dry-for-wet scenes.

Some of the technical elements of Peter Jackson’s film style is how he goes beyond the necessary means of physical props, sets, costumes, prosthetics, make-up, and pushes the technological software and various techniques to its very edge in order to get the most authentic illusion obtainable. According to Thompson, “[m]ore than 95 percent of the roughly $330 million film was made in New Zealand,” where the project employed over 22,000 people between 1998-2004, and that “[a]lmost all of the 48,000 objects made for the film were manufactured as if they were to be used in the real world, not simply to create illusions in a film.” The problem with creating this amount of objects, is that so much work goes into the details that it might not be visible in the films, or even omitted all together in the end. Does it really add to the illusion or authenticity with clothing made in different scales and different weaving to look identical or is that merely an unnecessary fact for the documentary material to report? There is certainly a sign of quality in a tailor-made costume by an artisan tailor that can endure lively acting, but does that ever concern the viewer’s thought process or reception of the film? Are for example the handmade fletchings on the arrows noticeable for the few seconds they appear in the background? These are the troubles with much of what Thompson states as “overdesigned” and “overdone” supplementary props and costumes; they contain no purpose or addition until watching the documentary material.

The technical and technological creations however, are developing additions that explain the process and ingenuity behind the illusion from the films. Watching the intricate and detailed design of the bigature sets show how they developed a fairly used technique in filmmaking of miniature sets, and shot it with motion-controlled cameras that were more mobile than during a live action set, but still on a large enough set for it to look authentic and in correct scale. Dan North calls it a “surgical delicacy,” that enhances the narrative with the digital and live action shots that creates “[a] consistent, spatio-temporal whole.”

Making traditional filmmaking techniques more innovative and complex seems to be a common rule for Jackson, and at the same time trying to develop entirely new and undone

56 Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p. 114
57 Ibid., p. 284; 91
58 Ibid., p. 94
59 Ibid., p. 77
60 North, *Performing Illusions*, p. 174
methods. This is a unique and contrasting combination that surely has its foundation in Jackson’s working class upbringing, where he almost single handedly created his films with very limited funds and experience, but with a resolute and highly imaginative mind. Jackson explains, “I could only film on Sundays ‘cause I had a full time job, and I had to work a sixth day overtime pay, ‘cause now to pay the expenses of this film.”

In a sense, Jackson’s main trait as a director and filmmaker is experimenting with technical and technological methods of creating film. Dutton, who at least gives Jackson some praise for making the Rings trilogy, writes “[h]is managerial capacities and showman’s instincts have allowed him [. . .] to beat Hollywood’s hotshots at their own game,” and that “[h]e has given hundreds of inventive New Zealanders worthwhile, lucrative work [. . .]” which in a way compliments Jackson for making creative jobs for New Zealanders, but also criticizing their work indirectly by condemning the films in his article.

On the subject of experimenting, Shippey points out that it is “[m]uch cheaper in a written medium, conformism much more of a threat in movies,” which is a valid general statement, but conformism can barely be assigned to Jackson’s trilogy, neither technical nor aesthetically. The connection Shippey seems to assign the trilogy to conformism is with “audience pressure” and to “[a]djust his production accordingly.” While it is possible to find changes that are “bowing to popular taste,” it is mainly character conception, such as Legolas action-role and Gimli’s comic relief, and character appraisal, such as the female heroes who gain a stronger role in the films compared to the novel. However, changing character personalities does not coincide with popular taste or audience pressure, quite the opposite, since the characters and their actions shape the story. Therefore, as Jackson changed some of the personalities of the characters, and uplifted some female ones, he went against conformism. From a technical aspect, he shot all three films simultaneously, far away from Hollywood, with a moderately inexperienced crew, developing software and making unusual amounts of props and detailed sets, which also went against conformism.

Regarding character development, creating Gollum was one of the unique innovations that were authentic and believable, and at the same time it gave Jackson the opportunity of showing the process of generating Gollum, from motion-capture with actor Andy Serkis, to the digital process of making him come alive on screen. Dan North points out that, “[. . .] we

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61 Academy of Achievement, ”Peter Jackson Interview”, p. 5
62 Dutton, Dazzling, Sure – But to What Effect?
63 Shippey, Another Road to Middle-earth, p. 237
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
need to be persuaded that Gollum is alive in order to believe in him as a diegetic presence, but we also need to be aware of the performative aspects of the illusion.”66 The complexity of ‘believing the illusion’ is performed skillfully; the advanced digital rendition of Gollum combined with Andy Serkis’s performance enabled the authenticity of the illusion.

Another interesting aspect of the films regarding the immense documentary material, and the desire to show and explain much of the developing stages of both physical props and digital scenes, is the situation of the people working with the films. Peter Jackson was, at the time, a fairly new and inexperienced director that had to create and invent much for his earlier work, also hired many Kiwis that had a similar background. As Thompson writes, “[m]any of the film’s crew members [. . .] had worked their way up through the industry without [. . .] training,” and that in Weta Workshop, under lead designer Richard Taylor, only 28 out of the 158 people had worked in film or television prior to working on Rings.67 With such an approach to filmmaking, the innovations and desire to be progressive became clearer and unconstrained when everyone involved were inexperienced but aspiring filmmakers. This also enabled a more open work environment where the cast and crew had a closer relationship with each other, and the loyalty towards Jackson, which coincidentally gave him more creative control.68

The behind-the-scenes material, which was included on the DVD releases of each film, added more layers to the narrative itself, as it delved deep into the aspects of filmmaking as well as the mythology of Middle-earth. This is, therefore, a part of Peter Jackson’s film style, albeit a more technical aspect rather than aesthetic one. He had a persistence to convey authenticity of every detail, how obscure it was or how little screen time it had, it is still something that had to look authentic. In the films he tells the viewer to believe it is real, while in the documentary material he tells the viewer how he made the illusion of its realness. The contradicting explanations raise the fact that films are fictive, but they can be believable if made well.

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66 North, Performing Illusions, p. 175
67 Thompson, The Frodo Franchise, p. 307; 309
68 Ibid., p. 81. Marketing president Joe Nimziki had made a suggested poster based on audience research with a busy and loud design. Jackson disliked it and made a mock-up poster that was simple, and the cast refused to attend the marketing campaign if they went with the suggested poster and not Jackson’s.
6. CONCLUSION

Brief summary
The technical elements of Peter Jackson are evidently an important aspect of his filmmaking. He often combines the aesthetic narrative with innovative and advanced technical and technological components, where he mainly focuses on spectacular imagery.

His trial and error method and do-it-yourself attitude enabled him to create one of the world’s most recognized film franchises based out of a small remote country with a miniscule film industry, hiring local artisans and filmmakers with little experience, and shooting three major films simultaneously.

By utilizing New Zealand’s diverse and remarkable nature in the form of reoccurring aerial shots, not only did Jackson convey a plausible Middle-earth, but also put his home country on display as an inserted advertisement. While filming the actual nature of New Zealand, he combined the same aesthetic of the shot on detailed bigature sets with motion-controlled cameras and digital imagery.

Throughout his career, Jackson has applied certain techniques such as the wide-angle close-up. While it is a personal trademark of the director, the usage of it in *Rings* establishes itself with a meaning of being anxious, alone, and confused, but becomes stylized after the first half of *Fellowship* and loses its aesthetic meaning in favor of the director’s persistent use in numerous different situations.

Lighting is one of the most vital elements of mise-en-scène, where mood, setting, characters, and focus can be affected by it. As Jackson had sets built for both indoor and outdoor scenes, the lighting became more controlled. This was both beneficial and problematic, as directional lighting undermined natural lighting heavily, for clarity instead of authenticity. The use of techniques such as backlighting was more visible in the source itself, rather than the illuminated characters or object, such as the Black Riders, Théoden King, and Helm’s Deep, while the use of digital lighting in the Mines of Moria became both authentic and symbolic in its technical and aesthetic meaning.

Special effects in *Rings* were one of the films’ major characteristics, and while many techniques, both digital designs and handcrafted material, were innovative and impressive, there were some effects that lacked in those regards, especially the dry-for-wet technique.

The editing of *Rings* showed both an unprepared method of arranging a scene, where the principal rules of continuity editing was interrupted, but also ingenious ways of
displaying Gollum’s duality through shot/reverse shots and eyeline match, and using editing to emphasize meaning between the physical and mental states of different characters.

As behind-the-scenes are often an extra supplement of DVD releases, Jackson has made the documentary material a much more vital part of the films and the process of making them. He created a world where the illusion was believable and at the same time showed how the illusion was made in a contrasting but inventive approach.

Concluding results
Concerning the research and studies made on the films it becomes somewhat clearer as to why there has not been an extensive technical film style analysis made yet. The majority of the scholars are centering their analysis on an aesthetic relation to Tolkien’s work, and while reviewing their educational background and academic positions most of them are literary scholars. And while the research also feature film and media scholars, their areas of analysis are focused on political, social, and to some technical extent, specific digital and special effects. The main reason for the lack of a technical style analysis is, in my opinion, because of the films dependency on spectacle.

While film style often means distinguishing mise-en-scène, editing, dialogue, cinematography, and sound, Peter Jackson can also be associated with extensive and correlated behind-the-scenes, trial and error methods, and as a cinematic technologist. These are the elements of his film style, and by no means a compensation for the filmmaking qualities he lacks. He has successfully enabled all his unconventional elements to be his directorial style, and while he is more predisposed to explore the technical and technological development of storytelling, rather than the aesthetics of mise-en-scène, the spectacle remains at the forefront of his filmmaking. The aforementioned scholars, regardless of how their opinion of Rings and Peter Jackson differ, they are in unison about the films being highly related to spectacle. Because of its dominant position in the films, it overshadows other areas of aesthetics and approach to analyses. At the same time it is contradictory, since much of the studies around the spectacle of Rings is based on a technical and technological viewpoint. However, the main approach of studies is based on what we see, and not how we see it. The aesthetic meaning and consistency is lacking, all due to the predominant element of spectacle.

As a director, Jackson is self-taught in every sense, and as this has both its benefits and difficulties, it can be processed accordingly through the research made in this essay. The benefits of being self-taught and independent gave Jackson the persistence of seizing control
of the making of *Rings* almost entirely. Insisting on making the three films simultaneously in New Zealand was unconventional, but beneficial for the small country to build an industry quite rapidly. And instead of hiring established effects companies and film crew overseas, he built and bought his own companies in New Zealand and employed native talent. This boldness resulted in a laid-back work environment that thrived on ingenuity and progressive filmmaking with trial and error methods instead of traditional structures.

The difficulties of this arrangement are of course the experience and education. While much of the innovative techniques and technologies were developed for *Rings*, such as the quality of digital effects, and the detailed props, armor and clothing, the long withstanding principles of filmmaking were neglected. Does this undermine Jackson as a successful and talented director? Not really, it merely shows how a film founded upon spectacle cannot only draw the attention of popular acclaim, but of critical reception as well. Consequently, also becoming a subject for analysis on several different matters. Therefore, even though Jackson thrives on technical and technological areas of filmmaking, while lacking in aesthetic meaning and consistency, his worth as a director is not diminished, it only becomes characteristic.

As Jackson continue to create films, his style will undoubtedly develop. The technical elements will probably continue to be his dominant leitmotif, but because of his trial and error methods, learning by doing gives him the practice of applying some kind of meaning or consistency to his technical abilities.

Conclusively, there are no definite principles of filmmaking. It is the original, daring, and experimental directors that explore and advance the cinematic arts. However, being able to use the technical and aesthetic elements with consistency and expressive awareness, understanding the principles of traditional and contemporary cinema, and thus follow, contradict, or direct them forward, is what makes a great filmmaker.
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Production Company: New Line Cinema, WingNut Films
Location: New Zealand, USA
Year of release: 2001 (Blu-ray release: 2011)
Producers: Barrie M. Osborne, Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, Tim Sanders
Executive Producers: Mark Ordesky, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Robert Shaye, Michael Lynne
Director: Peter Jackson
Screenplay: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson
Director of Photography: Andrew Lesnie, A.C.S.
Film Editor: John Gilbert
Original Score: Howard Shore
Actors: Elijah Wood (Frodo Baggins), Ian McKellen (Gandalf), Liv Tyler (Arwen Undómiel), Viggo Mortensen (Aragorn), Sean Astin (Samwise Gamgee), Cate Blanchett (Galadriel), John Rhys-Davies (Gimli), Billy Boyd (Peregrin Took), Dominic Monaghan (Meriadoc Brandybuck), Orlando Bloom (Legolas), Christopher Lee (Saruman), Hugo Weaving (Elrond), Sean Bean (Boromir), Ian Holm (Bilbo Baggins), Andy Serkis (Gollum)
Film Length: 208 min (228 with additional credits)

The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers - Extended Edition
Production Company: New Line Cinema, WingNut Films
Location: New Zealand, USA
Year of release: 2002 (Blu-ray release: 2011)
Producers: Barrie M. Osborne, Fran Walsh, Peter Jackson
Executive Producers: Mark Ordesky, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Robert Shaye, Michael Lynne
Director: Peter Jackson
Screenplay: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Stephen Sinclair, Peter Jackson
Director of Photography: Andrew Lesnie, A.C.S.
Film Editor: Michael Horton, Jabez Olssen
Original Score: Howard Shore
Actors: Elijah Wood (Frodo Baggins), Ian McKellen (Gandalf), Liv Tyler (Arwen Undómiel), Viggo Mortensen (Aragorn), Sean Astin (Samwise Gamgee), Cate Blanchett (Galadriel), John Rhys-Davies (Gimli), Bernard Hill (Théoden) Christopher Lee (Saruman), Billy Boyd (Peregrin Took), Dominic Monaghan (Meriadoc Brandybuck), Orlando Bloom (Legolas), Hugo Weaving (Elrond), Miranda Otto (Eowyn) David Wenham (Faramir), Brad Dourif (Grima Wormtongue), Andy Serkis (Gollum), Sean Bean (Boromir)
Film Length: 222 min (236 with additional credits)

The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King – Extended Edition
Production Company: New Line Cinema, WingNut Films
Location: New Zealand, USA
Year of release: 2003 (Blu-ray release: 2011)
Producers: Barrie M. Osborne, Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh
Executive Producers: Mark Ordesky, Bon Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Robert Shaye, Michael Lynne
Director: Peter Jackson
Screenplay: Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson
Director of Photography: Andrew Lesnie, A.C.S.
Film Editor: Jamie Selkirk, Annie Collins
Original Score: Howard Shore
Actors: Elijah Wood (Frodo Baggins), Ian McKellen (Gandalf), Liv Tyler (Arwen), Viggo Mortensen (Aragorn), Sean Astin (Samwise Gamgee), Cate Blanchett (Galadriel), John Rhys-Davies (Gimli), Bernard Hill (Théoden), Christopher Lee (Saruman), Billy Boyd (Peregrin Took), Dominic Monaghan (Meriadoc Brandybuck), Orlando Bloom (Legolas), Hugo Weaving (Elrond), Miranda Otto (Eowyn), David Wenham (Faramir), Brad Dourif (Grima Wormtongue), Karl Urban (Eomer), John Noble (Denethor), Andy Serkis (Gollum), Ian Holm (Bilbo Baggins), Sean Bean (Boromir)
Film Length: 251 min (263 with additional credits)

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