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Grief and Healing: the use of visual metaphors in Alfonso Cuarón

Gravity (2013)

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master's
Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

This work is dictated to those who watched me grow little by little my dear parents, to my brothers and sisters who supported me during this journey, to my emotional supporter my dear husband, to my friends Zineb, Nihed, and Soukaina for being by my side all the time, and to all my friends who gave me love and courage to finish this challenge successfully. It was not an easy journey at all but Alhumdulillah for giving me the strength and patience to overcome all the struggles and I ask him to guide me in the upcoming future. And long story short, I survived.

Ouafa

I dedicate this to my family. Your unwavering support and unconditional love have been my guiding light through every challenge and my greatest cause for celebration. Everything I am and everything I achieve is because of you. I have learnt so much from this experience even though it was tough, but Alhumdulillah of what I achieved.

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Abstract

This study examines Alfonso Cuarón's film *Gravity* (2013) as a profound cinematic exploration of grief and healing, suggesting that its visual devices serve more than an adornment or narrative luxuriation, but provide a necessity to represent psychologically the trauma and resolution. Using a formalist analysis of foregrounded cinematic elements — cinematography, mise-en-scène, and iconic visuals (e.g., void/vacuum of space, debris reoccurrences, weightlessness/fetal positions, elemental rebirth) — the study visually traces the disjointed progression through various stages/models of grief (including Kubler-Ross' 5-stages). The close reading demonstrates how *Gravity* utilizes its immersive audio-visual vocabulary to represent protagonist Dr. Ryan Stone's process of moving from emotional paralysis and isolation to a sense of empowerment and revitalization, thus rendering subjective emotional states into universally archetypal narrative experience. This transdisciplinary study moves beyond dialogue to contest anti-trauma narratives, thereby offering a critical examination of how trauma is visually represented on screen.

Keywords: Cinematic storytelling, grief, healing, trauma, visual metaphor.

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General Introduction

Background of the Study

Cinema is the most potent form of narrative medium, with the ability to communicate very dense information and generate powerful emotional experiences. The unique strength of motion pictures is that it incorporates visual, auditory, and temporal information in such a way that it can tell stories and present information in an experiential rather than purely intellectual manner of thinking, and thereby having effects on emotions. Unlike words on the page, which convey meaning through sequential arrangement (with caveats), film expresses itself through a multisensory language (with caveats) — the framing of a shot, the movement of a camera, the play of light and shadow, and the pace of editing. That turns filmmaking into showing rather than telling, and makes abstract ideas feel immediate, tangible, and universally relatable.

The expression of ideas in film operates through a symbolic system where the formal apparatus itself becomes a carrier of meaning. Consequently, a filmmaker does not merely narrate a story but actively constructs a perspective and guides the audience's emotional response through deliberate cinematic techniques. A manic editing pace can create a feeling of urgency or excitement, a languorous, prolonged camera move can create a feeling of introspection. The calculated use of sound design and score can prefigure events or voice a character's unvoiced inner juggling of soul. Taken together, the 'how' of cinematic storytelling therefore becomes as semantically nuanced as the 'what', and as a result film can exert a high degree of subtlety when dealing with complex themes such as memory, loss and identity, that may well be unparalleled.

Among the key elements of this cinematic language is the tool of the visual metaphor. A visual metaphor shows an image or a sequence of images to talk about an abstract idea, an emotion or a theme, and it asks the audience to think about one thing in terms of another. Visual metaphors are not decorative but are crucial in the representation of concepts and thus meaning construction in visual media, as shown by the metaphor of the outstretched hand in an otherwise empty frame of a Christian-oriented documentary film (Forceville 1996). They use iconic images, *mise-en-scène* and cuts to make jarring, often subliminal, associations. A dying flower might represent a character's diminishing hope, or a maze-like structure might be a metaphor for a mental state of disorientation. This approach enables filmmakers to tell inferential story and emotional details quickly and poetically, often without a single word of dialogue.

The importance of visual metaphors is not limited to stylized embellishment; they are narrative tools that can deepen character development, bolster themes, and turn the audience into active collaborators in the process of unraveling the film's layers of meaning. By rendering intangible psychological processes in explicit visual terms, filmmakers can express the inexpressible — giving shape to grief, giving landscape to despair, and giving image to redemption. This research aims to investigate this very attribute, analyzing how the distinct cinematic techniques and visual metaphor in particular, can make films capable of representing even the most elusive facets of human existence.

Literature Review

The subject of mourning and recovery has undergone extensive investigations in various data, including psychology, literature, and film studies. Studies have analyzed how stories portray the emotional and psychological experience of loss and healing.

One of the most dominant theoretical models of grief is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages of grief, which identifies denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance as critical stages of processing loss. Subsequent researchers such as Stroebe and Schut (1999) advocated the Dual Process Model, which suggested that grieving did not occur in a linear, but rather oscillated between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping. These psychological theories have entered into literary and cinematic representations of the experience of grief and have contributed to shaping the way audiences comprehend characters' emotional journeys.

In literary analysis, metaphors and narrative structures have been considered to be means of expressing grief. C.S. Lewis' *A Grief Observed* (1961) is a classic autobiographical reflection on mourning which replaces its rawness with philosophical contemplation. the journalist Joan Didion's *the Year of Magical Thinking* (2005) rips widowhood apart with a personal narrative edge and a clinical side, showing the way literature metabolizes trauma. For example, storytellers such as Attig (1996) claim that telling the story is a source of healing that permits individuals to create meaning out of happenings or loss. Film scholars have examined how visual forms of storytelling, like cinematography, editing, and symbolism, convey mourning. Non-chronological narratives and metaphorical imagery depicting untreated grief and emotional catharsis, shared by films such as *Manchester by the Sea* (2016) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) have been examined in its varied artistic manifestations. As Plantinga has argued (2009) film's affective reach is indeed in its power to elicit empathy, rendering grief stories wholly and profoundly immersive for audiences.

The film *Gravity* has been explored from a variety of angles, from its technical prowess, to its themes and its use of metaphor. A number of commentators' center on *Gravity*'s revolutionary photography, long takes and the work that emerged from the technology itself; Bordwell (2016)

commends Cuarón's employment of 3D technology and the interactive quality and sense of embodiment it produces. While the film's scientific and technical focus in representing space has been juxtaposed against its allegorical level of narrative, it taps in the current genre debates over whether it is hard science fiction or an allegorical narrative about survival (King, 2014).

Many critics and scholars read *Gravity* as a prolonged allegory on mourning and renewal. Ryan Stone's environment of zero gravity parallels her desolation, and her struggle to make it back to Earth represents a path to recovery. Mittell (2015) contends that interpretive interpretation is augmented by the film's visual motifs including the final Water-Exiting and the fetal position scene, which strengthens the theme of resurrection and renewal. Others such as Davies (2017), read *Gravity* as a feminist narrative, in which Stone's fragility and strength subvert stereotypes of gender representation in the context of survival. The dialogue and script in the film is quite limited and the actions and visuals within it give way to these great discussions about cinematic metaphor and emotional connection.

Previous research on grief and recovery applies an excellent solid bridge with which to examine both theme and style in *Gravity*. Although some scholarship discussed its figurative implications, additional analysis can enhance understanding of the ways in which Cuarón's visual storytelling shapes the psychological and emotional transformation of his characters.

Statement of the Argument

While psychological models describe stages of grief, they often fail to capture its visceral, non-linear reality. Literary accounts such as Krystal's do not capture the full sensory impact of loss

and recovery. This severs a sense-making relation of how visually mediums such as film could portray the path from trauma to healing.

The fundamental issue is that there is no obvious way to consider how the cinematic form—using visual metaphors, filmic techniques, and so on—can represent the unseen, emotional workings of grief. This research explores the way that film communicates such intangible affective experiences as denial, despair and acceptance by fashioning visually perceivable narratives that go further than mere words.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

- 1) How do *Gravity*'s visual metaphors (like debris, fetal imagery, and evolutionary symbolism) reflect the Kübler-Ross model of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance)?
- 2) What cinematic techniques (lighting, camera movement, sound design) amplify the emotional arc of Stone's healing process?
- 3) How does *Gravity* contribute to broader discourses on trauma representation in visual media?

Aims of the Study

This study aims to explore a robust theoretical framework that synthesizes the analytical approach of visual metaphor studies with established psychological concepts of grief and healing, thereby creating an interdisciplinary lens for film analysis

The research intends to apply this integrated framework through a meticulous formalist analysis of Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*, examining how its deployment of cinematic techniques

functions as a complex system of visual metaphors that artistically symbolize the psychological stages of grief and narrate a significant journey of emotional recovery.

Significance of the Study

This research integrates film studies and psychology and presents a unique model for comprehending the role of visual metaphors in the enrichment of emotional narratives. This study adds to the academic comprehension of healing-oriented cinematic narratives and their significance in society by situating *Gravity* within trauma theory. It also highlights the capacity of cinema to offer a common linguistic tool for expressing complicated emotional processes such as mourning and recovery.

Research Methodology

In conducting research, this study adopts a qualitative research approach. It is appropriate for this study given that the main research questions are focused on how nonverbal, visual components (e.g., mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound design) create layered metaphors.

The analysis proceeds by a tightly-stitched scene-by-scene (close reading) of Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*, examining how its technical and stylistic decisions symbolically express psychological conditions.

Structure of the study

The study is designed to allow an onward march of the work from the setting forth of a theoretical base, through detailed examination of a text, and then again through a summary of the results.

The Introduction chapter maps the research field by providing background to the study, a concise review of literature to identify gap, and a clear statement of the research problem, the research questions and the overall research objectives.

The first Chapter structurally explains disciplinary terms such as “grief,” “healing” and “visual metaphor,” Most of them speculate on the cinematic space landscape as a figurative space for inward psychological struggle. The chapter ends by making explicit and justifying the Formalist position as the main tool of analysis.

The second chapter extends the existing framework onto the film text in response to the structure, which is patterned on the protagonist's psychic trajectory. It moves from space being defined as an emotional terrain, through the deconstruction of the visual metaphors employed to describe the process of mourning (e.g. tether, debris, weightlessness), and onto an exploration of visual symbols of healing and regrowth (e.g., fetal imagery, elemental symbols). In each of these subsections specific formal techniques – long take, point of view shots, lighting, sound design – are rigorously connected to their metaphorical and psychological resonances.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to Grief and Healing

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Introduction

This chapter lays the groundwork for understanding the complex interplay of grief, healing, and visual metaphor within cinematic narratives, specifically focusing on their representation in the film *Gravity*. It aims to define key psychological concepts related to grief and healing, establishing a theoretical lens through which to analyze the film's narrative arc. Furthermore, the chapter will explore the power of visual metaphor in cinematic storytelling, examining how filmmakers utilize imagery to convey abstract emotions and experiences. A crucial aspect of this investigation will be the conceptualization of space not merely as a setting, but as an active cinematic landscape that profoundly connects with the themes of grief and healing. Finally, this chapter will outline the application of a formalist approach, which emphasizes the analysis of film form, as a valuable methodology for deciphering *Gravity*'s non-verbal visual metaphors and their contribution to the film's thematic depth.

1.1. Defining Grief and Healing

Grief is the complex emotional, physical, and psychological response to loss, particularly the death of a loved one. The process of dealing with this loss is often referred to as mourning, and it's a deeply personal journey with no set timeline. Understanding grief and healing often involves looking at psychological models that provide frameworks for this journey.

1.1.1. Psychological Definitions of Grief and Healing

Grief and healing have long been central themes in psychological studies, reflecting the human journey through loss and recovery. This section explores how scholars and clinicians have approached these concepts from various psychological perspectives.

1.1.1.1. Psychological Definitions of Grief

According to Merriam dictionary, grief is a deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement. (Merriam Dictionary, 2025).

In the same line, grief is a normal, universal reaction to losing someone close, and it is best understood as a process rather than a fixed state. While most people adjust and recover within about a year, others may experience a prolonged and intense grieving period. This extended reaction, known as prolonged grief disorder, occurs when the transition from acute grief to a more integrated, adaptive form of grief does not take place. (Caroline Schoo; Yusra Azhar; Saba Mughal; Preeti Rout, 2025).

Moreover, several influential models have attempted to define and categorize the experience of grief. These models are not prescriptive rules but rather guides to understanding the typical emotional landscape of loss.

- Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief:

One of the most well-known frameworks is the Kübler-Ross model, which describes five stages a person may experience after receiving news of a terminal illness or experiencing a significant loss. These stages, as outlined in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, are:

1. **Denial:** A state of shock and disbelief, where one may deny the reality of the loss.
2. **Anger:** Feelings of frustration, resentment, and a search for blame.
3. **Bargaining:** A desperate attempt to regain control, often involving "if only..." statements or making deals with a higher power.
4. **Depression:** A period of deep sadness, isolation, and reflection on the loss.

5. Acceptance: Coming to terms with the reality of the loss and finding a way to move forward.

It's crucial to remember that these stages aren't linear; people may move back and forth between them or experience them in a different order.

1.1.1.2. Psychological Definitions of Healing

Until recently, the idea of healing was largely overlooked in both medical and psychological research and education. Cassell (1991) observed that the term healing was rarely mentioned in the subject indexes of medical and psychology textbooks until the previous century. He argued that modern medicine, heavily influenced by the methods of the physical sciences, became more focused on studying the human body than on addressing the human experience of disease and pain. Although the 20th century brought remarkable advances—such as the discovery of sulfa drugs in the 1930s and antibiotics in the 1940s, which greatly enhanced physicians' ability to cure—these achievements did not necessarily improve their capacity for psychological healing. As Siegel (1990) noted, “our power to heal people and their lives seems to have diminished as dramatically as our power to cure diseases has increased” (p. 141). Because medicine tends to prioritize diseases and physical conditions over the person enduring them, concepts like suffering and healing remain largely absent from its discourse. The same holds true for psychology, which, despite its focus on the human mind and behavior, has generally limited itself—even in clinical and health branches—to examining the causes, treatment, and recovery from mental and physical illnesses, with little attention to psychological healing.

In Latin, the term “healing” originates from *healan*, a word that encompasses both the physical and spiritual dimensions of a person as subjects of restoration. According to The Chambers Dictionary, healing means “becoming whole and healthy,” while the Oxford English Dictionary

describes it as “to save, purify, cleanse, repair, and mend.” From a psychological perspective, healing can be seen as achieving an inner state of well-being, harmony, balance, and peace. It is a process that restores the alignment between mind, body, and spirit, often involving a shift in consciousness, a redefinition of one’s reality, changes in attitude, and an expanded outlook on life. While healing may not alter the circumstances themselves, it empowers individuals to respond to them effectively and appropriately. (Jyoti Anand; Ajit K Dalal, p4). In doing so, psychological healing fosters hope, acceptance, release of blocked mental energy, the resolution of inner conflicts, and the emergence of fresh insights.

While physical illness or injury can cause suffering, psychological healing does not depend on recovering from these conditions. Nor is it dependent on eliminating the material causes of distress, such as job loss, the end of a relationship, bereavement, or social and natural disasters. Healing can take place even when external circumstances remain unchanged; it happens when the inner turmoil fades and the individual attains a sense of inner peace and well-being. (ibid, p5).

1.1.2. Conceptualizing Healing as a Narrative Arc: From Trauma to Transformation

Conceptualizing healing as a narrative arc involves transforming the experience of trauma into a coherent and meaningful story, a process that facilitates recovery and personal growth. Complex trauma, arising from repeated, prolonged exposure to distressing events like childhood abuse or neglect, often fragments an individual's memories and sense of self, making it difficult to process the full scope of their experiences. Storytelling serves as a powerful therapeutic tool by helping survivors organize these fragmented memories into a structured narrative, which can lead to a more cohesive sense of identity and reduced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This process of

creating a narrative allows individuals to move from a place of victimhood to one of empowerment and resilience.

A key aspect of this narrative arc is the reframing of trauma. Through techniques like externalization, individuals can separate themselves from their trauma, viewing it as an event they endured rather than a defining characteristic of their being. This shift helps reduce feelings of shame, self-blame, and despair, fostering a sense of agency and control over their life story. The act of telling one's story, whether through writing or spoken word, can also facilitate emotional catharsis, allowing for the release of suppressed emotions like grief or anger, which contributes to emotional relief and healing. Research indicates that the therapeutic processes involved in creating a trauma narrative include emotional catharsis, the creation of linguistic representation, habituation of anxiety, empathic witnessing of injustice, developing an explanatory account, and identifying purpose and value in adversity.

Furthermore, healing through narrative extends beyond the individual. In families affected by trauma, sharing stories can change how members relate to one another, allowing them to witness each other's resilience and begin solidifying a refined identity as both individuals and a family unit. At a community level, storytelling, particularly within frameworks like C-HeARTS, acts as a conduit for transformation by fostering justice, critical consciousness, and collective memory, enabling communities to map out paths of resistance and achieve justice-informed outcomes. For Indigenous communities, narrative is a fundamental traditional practice used to interrupt the transmission of intergenerational trauma, with digital storytelling workshops demonstrating promise as a healing tool by reaffirming cultural strengths and disrupting historical trauma. Ultimately, healing is not merely the absence of disease but involves the ownership of one's situation, integrating painful events into a

narrative identity characterized by agency, self-acceptance, connection, and empathy. This process of becoming the author of one's own story, rather than just the hero, is central to navigating illness, trauma, and loss, and is essential for moving forward with resilience and hope.

1.2. Visual metaphor in film

Visual metaphors are a powerful tool in cinema, allowing filmmakers to convey complex ideas, emotions, and themes through imagery rather than words. By embedding symbolic meaning within visual elements, directors can enrich narrative depth, evoke subtle emotional responses, and guide audience interpretation. In cinematic storytelling, these metaphors transform ordinary images into layers of meaning, often leaving a lasting impression on viewers and offering fertile ground for analysis in film studies literature.

1.2.1. Definition and significance of visual metaphor in cinematic storytelling

A visual metaphor uses an image to represent a noun, implying a specific connection or resemblance. They are frequently used in films, television, photography, and even advertising. The meanings these visuals convey can advance a narrative, engage an audience or consumer, and reinforce a central theme. (Kyle Deguzman, 2025).

A visual metaphor in cinematic storytelling is the use of a visual image, object, or sequence to represent an abstract idea, emotion, or theme without explicit dialogue or explanation. It creates a powerful, non-literal comparison between two seemingly unrelated things to convey a deeper meaning (Whittock, 1990). Unlike a visual symbol, which often has a culturally fixed meaning (e.g., a dove for peace), a visual metaphor's meaning is derived from its specific context within the film's

narrative. It challenges the audience to actively engage with the imagery, interpret the connection, and uncover the subtext

The purpose of a visual metaphor largely depends on the medium in which it appears. In advertising, the aim is often to persuade consumers, whereas in film, the objective may be to entertain viewers. Despite these different goals, both rely on capturing and maintaining audience engagement. For filmmakers, clear and concise communication is essential, and visual metaphors are ideal for this task, as they can convey meaning simply through imagery. (kyle, 2025).

In the same line of thoughts, visual metaphors are a fundamental tool for filmmakers because they enhance storytelling on multiple levels, making a film more layered, immersive, and emotionally resonant.

1.2.1.1. Subtext and Emotional Depth:

Visual metaphors allow a filmmaker to communicate complex emotions or psychological states that would be difficult or clunky to explain through dialogue. For example, a character physically trapped by an object (like a locked door or a birdcage) can serve as a visual metaphor for their emotional confinement or loss of freedom. This method creates a more poetic and impactful connection with the audience, bypassing intellectual analysis to create an immediate, visceral understanding.

1.2.1.2. Character and Theme Development:

They are essential for enriching character arcs and reinforcing a film's central themes. A recurring visual motif—like a wilting flower to represent a character's declining spirit—can track their internal journey without a single line of dialogue. This technique provides a subtle, yet powerful,

narrative shorthand that solidifies the audience's understanding of the story's core ideas (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

1.2.1.3. Efficiency and Universality:

In a medium where every frame counts, a single visual metaphor can convey a vast amount of information quickly and efficiently. By transforming intangible ideas into tangible visuals, directors can create a universal cinematic language that transcends dialogue, making themes accessible to a global audience. For example, the use of color palettes—such as red to signify danger or passion—is a common visual metaphor that is understood across cultures.

1.2.1.4. Enhancing the Viewer's Experience:

Visual metaphors invite the audience to become active participants in the storytelling process. By requiring viewers to decipher the hidden meaning, the film becomes a more engaging and intellectually stimulating experience. This encourages re-watching and analysis, as new layers of meaning can be discovered with each viewing. As film theorists like Sergei Eisenstein argued, the juxtaposition of images creates a "montage" of meaning that is more than the sum of its parts, a concept that underpins the power of visual metaphor (Eisenstein, 1949).

Therefore, recognizing the value of visual metaphors requires first understanding the broader power of metaphors.

In other words, visual metaphors in film use images or sequences to represent abstract ideas, emotions, or themes without direct explanation, encouraging audiences to interpret deeper meanings. They enrich storytelling by adding emotional depth, developing characters, and reinforcing central themes through subtle, recurring imagery. This technique allows filmmakers to convey

complex concepts efficiently, creating a universal cinematic language that transcends dialogue. By engaging viewers in decoding these visuals, films become more immersive and intellectually stimulating. Ultimately, visual metaphors transform ordinary scenes into layered, symbolic moments that resonate long after the film ends.

1.2.2.Examples from film studies literature

This part presents examples from film studies literature illustrate how visual metaphors function to enrich a film's narrative. These examples demonstrate how filmmakers use specific images to create deeper meaning and emotional resonance for the audience.

1.2.2.1.The Slaughtered Bull in Strike (1925)

One of the most famous early examples of visual metaphor comes from Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's film *Strike*. In a pivotal sequence, Eisenstein juxtaposes footage of Tsarist soldiers brutally killing striking factory workers with shots of a bull being slaughtered. This technique, which Eisenstein called intellectual montage, creates a powerful visual metaphor: the workers are being butchered like cattle. This comparison, established solely through editing, bypasses dialogue to deliver a visceral and ideological message about the dehumanization of the proletariat by the Tsarist regime (Eisenstein, 1949).

1.2.2.2.The Green Light in The Great Gatsby (1974 film adaptations)

The green light at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock is a potent visual metaphor for the elusive nature of the American Dream and the past that Gatsby yearns to recapture. In the film, the light is often shown shrouded in mist or at a great distance, mirroring Gatsby's unattainable desire for Daisy and his idealized past. This visual element, taken directly from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel,

becomes a recurring motif that represents Gatsby's false hope and the impossibility of recreating the past. Its meaning is directly tied to the film's central themes of wealth, class, and the destructive power of nostalgia.

1.2.2.3. The Monolith in 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

Stanley Kubrick's iconic monolith is a prime example of a visual metaphor used to represent an abstract concept. It appears at key moments of human and proto-human evolution, first teaching a group of apes to use tools, and later serving as a celestial guide for humanity's journey to the stars. The monolith is a visual metaphor for the catalyst of evolution, intelligence, and the unknown. Its smooth, black surface contrasts with the primitive and chaotic worlds it appears in, visually communicating a force of order and progress. Its meaning is not explained but is inferred by its function in the narrative, leaving its ultimate purpose open to viewer interpretation and enhancing the film's philosophical depth (Bordwell & Thompson, 2012).

1.3. Space as cinematic landscape

In film, space as a cinematic landscape is a powerful tool used to externalize the internal emotional states of characters, particularly the experiences of grief and healing. It's not merely a static setting but an active element that shapes narrative and psychological meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2012). The way a director frames, edits, and uses space creates a visual and emotional connection, making the environment a reflection of a character's mind.

1.3.1. Space and Grief

The representation of grief often involves a disconnect between a character and their environment, manifesting in two primary ways:

1.3.1.1. Empty or Isolated Spaces:

Directors often place grieving characters in vast, empty landscapes or isolated, desolate rooms. This use of open, uninhabited space is a visual metaphor for the psychological void left by loss, mirroring the character's feelings of loneliness, disconnection, and emotional paralysis (Bachelard, 1964, pp. 6–7). The character may feel insignificant against a vast backdrop, which reflects their sense of being overwhelmed by grief. For instance, a character walking alone on a deserted beach can visually convey their profound solitude.

1.3.1.2 Confined or Cluttered Spaces:

Conversely, grief can be shown through a claustrophobic or cluttered environment. This represents the character's feeling of being emotionally trapped or suffocated by their sorrow. The clutter can symbolize the emotional baggage and unresolved memories that prevent them from moving forward. The physical confinement acts as a direct visual parallel to their psychological state of being "stuck" (Pallasmaa, 2012, pp. 29– 31). A character holed up in a messy room surrounded by relics of the past is a classic cinematic representation of this state.

1.3.2.Space and Healing

The journey of healing is often marked by a transformation in a character's relationship with space, moving from entrapment to liberation.

- **Opening Up Space:** A common visual arc shows a character moving from a confined space to an expansive one. This transition is a visual metaphor for their emotional release and growing sense of acceptance (Deleuze, 1986). For example, a character who was once

confined to their home finally venturing outside into a wide, open field symbolizes a newfound freedom and emotional expansion.

- **Reclaiming and Reordering Space:** As a character begins to heal, they may physically reclaim their personal space. The act of cleaning, reorganizing, or returning to a place that held painful memories but now feels manageable is a visual cue that they are regaining control over their life (Bachelard, 1964, pp. 58–60). The reordering of their physical environment reflects the reordering of their internal world and the integration of their loss into a new, more manageable identity.
- **Connecting with Natural Space:** Nature often serves as a setting for healing. Natural landscapes, with their cyclical and indifferent nature, provide a sense of continuity and perspective. A character finding solace in a serene forest or by a calm lake can be a visual metaphor for finding harmony and peace within themselves after a period of inner turmoil (Frampton, 1982, pp. 78–80)

Briefly, in film, space is more than a backdrop—it actively reflects a character’s emotional state, especially in journeys of grief and healing. Grief is often shown through empty, isolated spaces that mirror loneliness or confined, cluttered spaces that symbolize emotional suffocation and unresolved memories. Healing, on the other hand, is depicted through spatial transformation: moving from enclosed settings to open landscapes to represent emotional release, reclaiming and reorganizing personal space as a sign of regained control, and connecting with natural environments to symbolize peace and harmony. These visual shifts in space create a powerful metaphorical arc from loss to renewal, allowing audiences to feel the emotional journey without words.

1.4. Formalist approach

The formalist approach in film studies focuses on analyzing the artistic and structural elements of a film—such as composition, cinematography, editing, sound, and visual design—to understand how they shape meaning and audience experience. By prioritizing how a story is told over what is told, formalism is particularly valuable for examining Gravity’s non-verbal visual metaphors, as it reveals how cinematic form communicates complex ideas and emotions without reliance on dialogue.

1.4.1. Formalism analyzes how film form

The formalist approach is a critical method that centers on a work’s structure, style, and form, rather than its subject matter or external context. It involves close examination of elements such as language, imagery, symbolism, and narrative techniques to reveal the meanings and effects generated within the work itself. By focusing on these internal features, formalism offers deeper insight into how form influences meaning across different genres. (Fiveable, 2024).

Also, Formalism can be described as a critical approach that views the text chiefly as a constructed arrangement of words. Its emphasis lies on the organization and structure of the language itself, rather than on the meanings behind the words or the biographical and historical context of the work.

In film theory, formalism is a critical perspective that highlights the artistic and technical dimensions of filmmaking. It examines how elements like cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène contribute to a film’s meaning and aesthetic impact. Formalist critics maintain that these techniques are not passive tools for delivering a story but actively shape how viewers experience and interpret a film. The core principles of formalism include prioritizing the study of formal elements, exploring how they generate meaning and artistic value, emphasizing the craft of filmmaking itself,

and setting aside external influences—such as historical or cultural context—as the main lens for analysis (Sarah Lee, 2025).

In brief, the formalist approach emphasizes analyzing the structure, style, and artistic techniques of a work rather than its external context. In literature, it highlights the arrangement of language, imagery, and symbolism, treating the text as a self-contained unit of meaning. In film, formalism focuses on elements like cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scène, showing how they actively shape the audience's interpretation. By prioritizing these internal features, formalism reveals how form itself generates meaning and aesthetic value. This makes it a powerful method for understanding both literary and cinematic works beyond historical or cultural influences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has established a theoretical foundation for examining the intertwined themes of grief, healing, and visual metaphor within cinematic narratives, with particular attention to *Gravity*. By clarifying key psychological dimensions of grief and healing, and highlighting the narrative and emotional power of visual metaphor, it has provided the conceptual tools necessary for a deeper analysis of the film. The discussion of space as an active cinematic landscape underscores its role in externalizing internal states and guiding the viewer's emotional engagement. Finally, the integration of a formalist approach offers a focused methodology for interpreting *Gravity*'s nonverbal visual metaphors, paving the way for a nuanced exploration of how cinematic form can embody complex human experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

Film Analysis

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Introduction

This chapter explores how Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) employs visual metaphors to depict the intertwined processes of grief and healing. At its core, the film is not only a survival drama set against the backdrop of space but also a profound psychological journey centered on Dr. Ryan Stone, a character defined by personal loss and emotional struggle. Through its innovative use of cinematic space, imagery, and symbolism, *Gravity* transforms the external environment into a mirror of Ryan's inner state. By analyzing the metaphors embedded in space, weightlessness, tethering, water, earth, and other elemental symbols, this chapter examines how the film narrates grief as a movement from isolation and detachment toward resilience, rebirth, and reconnection. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates that *Gravity*'s power lies not in dialogue but, in its visual language which externalizes the invisible journey from trauma to healing.

2.1.Space as Emotional Landscape

In *Gravity*, space functions as more than a physical setting; it becomes an emotional landscape that mirrors Dr. Ryan Stone's inner turmoil. The vast vacuum and overwhelming silence externalize her numbness and disconnection, while the persistent threat of floating debris serves as a metaphor for the intrusive memories of trauma that continually disrupt her attempt to find balance. Through these visual choices, the film transforms the external environment into a reflection of the character's psychological state, making space itself a central metaphor for grief and its haunting persistence.

2.3.1.The Vacuum and Silence of Space Representing Emotional Numbness

In *Gravity* (2013), outer space becomes a projection of Dr. Ryan Stone's grief. After the shuttle's destruction, the audience hears nothing but her frantic breathing as she spins into darkness. This silence reflects her psychological state following the death of her daughter: detached, suffocated, and unable to voice her pain. As Chion (1994) notes, silence in cinema often operates as an "expressive absence," and here it externalizes Stone's emotional paralysis. Her line, "I had a daughter... she was four. She was playing in the schoolyard, and she slipped and hit her head" underscores the unspeakable emptiness of her loss, which the sound design mirrors through oppressive quiet.

The endless black void amplifies this numbness. The long takes and weightless rotations place her in an infinite, anchorless space, visually echoing her disorientation. Just as she is cut off from Earth, she is cut off from life itself. Bordwell and Thompson (2012) emphasize that cinematic space often conveys subjective states, and in this case, the vacuum externalizes Stone's emotional detachment. Her isolation in space becomes a metaphorical echo of her isolation in grief, dramatizing her inability to reconnect after her daughter's death.

2.3.2. Obtaining Debris as Metaphor for Traumatic Memory Intrusions

If silence embodies Stone's numbness, the recurring debris storms symbolize intrusive traumatic memories. Each wave of destruction arrives without warning, tearing apart what little security she finds—whether in the ISS or the Soyuz capsule. This relentless recurrence mirrors the way grief re-emerges in sudden, uncontrollable waves. As Herman (1992) explains, trauma often returns through the "involuntary intrusion" of memory, and in *Gravity*, the orbiting debris enacts this principle visually and viscerally.

The metaphor becomes explicit when Stone voices her despair: "No one will mourn for me. No one will pray for my soul." This moment, shows how her suppressed trauma—rooted in her

daughter's death—returns with destructive force, threatening her survival as much as the debris itself. Just as the debris cycles back every 90 minutes, her grief resurfaces relentlessly, preventing her from finding lasting stability.

Thus, both the silence of space and the destructive force of debris transform outer space into an emotional landscape of grief. The vacuum externalizes her numbness, while the debris dramatizes her traumatic memories. Together, these metaphors align the physical dangers of survival with the psychological challenges of mourning, turning Stone's fight for life into a symbolic struggle for emotional healing.

2.2. The Process of Grief

In *Gravity* (2013), Dr. Ryan Stone's journey is not only a physical struggle for survival but also a profound metaphorical exploration of the grieving process. The film visualizes mourning as a dynamic movement between holding on and letting go, between paralysis and eventual renewal. As grief theorists such as Worden (2009) explain, loss initiates a psychological cycle that requires the bereaved to confront attachments, endure disorientation, and gradually rebuild meaning. Cuarón translates these stages into visual and spatial metaphors: the tether that binds Stone to Kowalsky symbolizes her emotional dependence and fear of abandonment, while its eventual detachment signifies the painful but necessary step of release. Likewise, her experience of drifting weightlessly in space conveys the destabilization and lack of grounding that often accompany bereavement.

Through these cinematic choices, *Gravity* illustrates grief not as a linear process but as a series of destabilizing experiences that force Stone to reorient her relationship with loss. The tether and the sensation of weightlessness thus become central metaphors, embodying both the vulnerability of mourning and the gradual movement toward resilience and acceptance.

2.3.3. Tethering and Detachment: Emotional Dependencies and Letting Go (Kowalsky as Symbol)

One of the most powerful metaphors for grief in *Gravity* is the tether that connects Dr. Ryan Stone to astronaut Matt Kowalsky. At first, the tether provides safety and stability, symbolizing the emotional dependencies that bereaved individuals often cling to in the aftermath of loss. When disaster strikes, Kowalsky literally becomes Stone's lifeline, guiding her through chaos and giving her the strength to keep moving. This attachment reflects the psychological need for support and connection in early grief, where holding onto another figure represents holding onto stability amidst overwhelming pain (Worden, 2009).

However, the film dramatizes the necessity of detachment through Kowalsky's sacrifice. In the critical scene where both astronauts are drifting into space, Kowalsky realizes that his continued presence will jeopardize Stone's survival. He urges her to release him, stating calmly, "You have to let me go." This moment symbolizes the painful act of releasing attachments to the past, echoing Kübler-Ross's (1969) argument that acceptance in grief often involves letting go of what cannot return. Stone's reluctance mirrors the universal struggle to hold on to what is lost, but Kowalsky's detachment forces her to confront the necessity of independence.

The tether's physical severing thus becomes a profound metaphor for grief's turning point: the recognition that survival and healing demand release. As scholars note, metaphors of connection and detachment are central in narratives of mourning because they capture the paradox of grief—needing to remember while also needing to move forward (Neimeyer, 2001). In Stone's case, Kowalsky becomes less a lost comrade and more a symbolic figure of transition, pushing her toward autonomy and the beginning of self-reliance.

While the severing of the tether with Kowalsky dramatizes the necessity of letting go, Stone's subsequent experience of drifting in weightlessness deepens this metaphor of grief. Therefore, detachment from her lifeline leaves her suspended in space without grounding, a state that visually and symbolically mirrors the instability mourners often feel after a major loss. Yet, the shift from tethered security to unanchored weightlessness thus marks a progression in her grief journey, moving from the painful act of release to the destabilizing disorientation that follows. This transition illustrates how grief not only involves letting go of attachments but also confronting the profound sense of imbalance and vulnerability that comes in its wake (Worden, 2009; Neimeyer, 2001).

2.3.4. Weightlessness as loss of grounding and stability

In *Gravity*, the motif of weightlessness functions as a powerful metaphor for the disorientation and instability that often follow bereavement. When Dr. Ryan Stone drifts untethered in space, spinning uncontrollably after the shuttle's destruction, the absence of *gravity* visually externalizes her psychological state. The loss of grounding reflects her inability to find stability after the death of her daughter, echoing the way mourners often describe themselves as "floating," "adrift," or "disconnected" in the early phases of grief (Worden, 2009). The camera's long takes of her rotating body, paired with muffled sound design and labored breathing, intensify this effect, situating the viewer inside her disoriented perspective.

This suspension in a void is not only a technical depiction of space travel but also a symbolic representation of the destabilizing force of trauma. As Neimeyer (2001) notes, grief often entails a rupture in one's sense of meaning and orientation, leaving individuals struggling to reconstruct their identity and direction. Stone's aimless drifting dramatizes this existential rupture, where the absence of physical grounding parallels her lack of emotional and psychological footing.

Moreover, weightlessness underscores the theme of vulnerability. Without the anchor of gravity or a tether, Stone is exposed to the infinite void, highlighting the fragility of her survival. This mirrors what Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) describe as the “chaotic stage” of grief, when individuals feel engulfed by instability and overwhelmed by forces beyond their control. In *Gravity*, the physical state of free-fall becomes a cinematic translation of this inner turbulence, emphasizing how loss dismantles not only external structures of support but also the very foundations of self.

Thus, the recurring imagery of weightlessness encapsulates grief’s destabilizing impact: the loss of grounding, the vulnerability of existence, and the struggle to regain orientation in a world transformed by trauma. By visualizing emotional disarray through spatial disorientation, the film transforms the absence of gravity into a metaphorical absence of stability, making Stone’s journey of grief both visceral and universally recognizable.

To sum up, while weightlessness in *Gravity* symbolizes disorientation and the destabilizing impact of grief, the film gradually shifts toward a contrasting imagery of grounding and renewal. Stone’s passage from drifting in the void to eventually re-entering Earth’s atmosphere marks a symbolic transition from emotional paralysis to the possibility of healing. As she moves from the absence of gravity to the physicality of water and earth, the narrative reorients her journey away from instability and toward rebirth. This shift prepares the ground for the next stage of analysis, where the motifs of water, earth, and physical rebirth embody the resilience and transformative potential of grief’s aftermath.

2.3.Rebirth and Symbolic Healing

The final act of *Gravity* transforms survival into a symbolic narrative of rebirth, where cinematic imagery becomes a metaphor for Ryan Stone’s psychological healing. After enduring the

disorientation of grief and the terror of near-death, her journey culminates in a visual cycle of renewal, structured around archetypal images of birth and elemental rebirth. The film draws on fetal imagery, elemental transitions—fire, water, and earth—and the climactic act of rising to her feet to depict Stone’s emergence from despair into resilience. These motifs resonate with psychological frameworks of grief recovery, which emphasize the integration of loss into a renewed sense of self (Neimeyer, 2001; Worden, 2009). By staging Stone’s survival as a process of symbolic regeneration, Cuarón situates grief not as a static state but as a transformative journey—one that moves from vulnerability and fragmentation toward grounding, strength, and new beginnings.

2.3.5.Fetal Imagery in the International Space Station

One of the most iconic images in *Gravity* is when Ryan Stone curls into a fetal position inside the International Space Station, floating in front of a circular airlock. This shot evokes the womb, suggesting a moment of regression into safety before symbolic rebirth. The fetal pose, combined with the cocoon-like framing, represents Stone’s psychological retreat—a pause in her struggle where she metaphorically returns to the origins of life (Smith, 2014). From a grief perspective, this imagery resonates with the concept of “continuing bonds,” where the mourner negotiates a temporary withdrawal before moving forward (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). Here, Cuarón uses visual metaphor to mark Stone’s transitional state between despair and renewal.

2.3.6.Elemental Symbolism: Fire, Water, and Earth

Stone’s reentry to Earth unfolds through a sequence of elemental trials that mirror ancient rebirth myths. First, fire surrounds her capsule during atmospheric reentry, functioning as a purifying force and symbolizing destruction that clears the way for transformation (Eliade, 1958). Second, water dominates as she plunges into the ocean, an archetypal rebirth image where immersion signifies

cleansing and the start of new life (Cirlot, 2001). Finally, Stone's reconnection with the earth—crawling onto the shore—signals grounding, stability, and reconnection with life after chaos. This elemental progression aligns with grief theories that frame loss as a transformative journey, where individuals pass through symbolic thresholds to achieve renewed meaning (Neimeyer, 2001; Worden, 2009).

Therefore, Stone's reentry stages a mythic rebirth: fire purifies, water cleanses, and earth grounds her in renewed life. Each element marks a symbolic threshold, echoing ancient archetypes of transformation. This progression mirrors grief as journey through trials that ultimately restore meaning and resilience.

2.3.7. Rising to Her Feet: Metaphor of Resilience and New Beginning

The culmination of Stone's journey is captured in the simple but powerful act of standing upright after crawling from the water onto land. Her shaky but determined steps embody resilience, symbolizing the reclamation of agency and stability after disorientation. The camera lingers on her feet pressing into the soil, emphasizing the contrast between weightlessness in space and roundedness on Earth. This closing gesture reflects psychological healing, echoing the resilience literature that frames recovery as not a return to a past state but the construction of a new identity forged through adversity (Bonanno, 2004). Stone's rising to her feet thus becomes the final metaphor of survival—not merely living after grief, but living transformed.

2.4. Cinematic Techniques Enhancing Metaphor

Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* does not simply tell the story of Ryan Stone's grief; it immerses the audience in her experience through distinctive cinematic techniques. The film's celebrated long

takes and point-of-view shots, for example, place the spectator inside Stone's helmet, replicating her isolation and disorientation as she drifts through space (Bordwell, 2013). Lighting and color shifts further externalize her psychological state: the cold, bluish tones of deep space visually echo her numbness and despair, while the gradual introduction of warmer hues during her descent toward Earth suggests emotional awakening and healing (Smith, 2014). Spatial framing also plays a crucial role, as Cuarón repeatedly positions Stone's small, fragile body against the vast void, only to later frame her in closer, more grounded compositions that imply reconnection and resilience (King, 2015). Finally, Earth itself functions as a visual goalpost—first distant and unattainable, later growing nearer and more tangible—as Stone's grief journey shifts from detachment to renewed belonging (Scott, 2013). These techniques demonstrate how *Gravity* transforms cinematic form into an embodied metaphor for mourning, survival, and rebirth.

2.4.1. Long Takes and POV Shots for Immersive Grief Experience

Cuarón's use of extended takes and POV shots in *Gravity* intensifies the spectator's identification with Ryan Stone's grief. The famous 13-minute opening shot establishes the immersive style, refusing to cut away from Stone's perspective as catastrophe unfolds. When her tether snaps and she spins uncontrollably into the void, the camera shifts into her helmet, forcing viewers to see and hear from her perspective—the muffled breathing, distorted radio static, and dizzying visuals replicate the sensory chaos of panic and loss (Bordwell, 2013). This immersion symbolizes the disorienting first stages of grief, when time feels stretched and unbearable (Worden, 2009). By aligning the camera so closely with Stone's embodied experience, Cuarón transforms cinematic technique into a metaphor for the overwhelming immediacy of bereavement.

2.4.2. Use of Lighting, Color Shift, and Spatial Framing to Indicate Emotional Transformation

Visual design in *Gravity* externalizes Stone's inner emotional journey. Early scenes are dominated by harsh whites and cold blues, echoing her emotional numbness and detachment following her daughter's death. For example, the stark contrast of her figure against the black void conveys profound alienation (King, 2015). As the narrative progresses, the film introduces warmer lighting and colors, particularly in the scene inside the Russian Soyuz capsule where Stone curls into a fetal position bathed in a reddish glow—signifying both vulnerability and the possibility of rebirth (Smith, 2014). Spatial framing also shifts: at first, Stone is dwarfed by the immensity of space, visualizing her insignificance and despair. Later, tighter framings during her descent toward Earth signal regained grounding, as if the camera itself affirms her re-entry into life and stability. Through these evolving visual cues, *Gravity* constructs grief as a process of moving from emotional isolation toward renewal.

2.4.3. Earth as Visual Goalpost: From Distance to Closeness

Throughout *Gravity*, Earth functions as the ultimate metaphor for hope, belonging, and the possibility of emotional restoration. Early in the film, Earth is depicted as distant, unreachable, and often framed as a silent reminder of what Stone has lost—her daughter, her past life, her sense of stability (Scott, 2013). This distance mirrors the early stages of grief, when normal life feels inaccessible. Yet, as Stone struggles to survive, the visual representation of Earth gradually shifts. In key sequences, the planet grows larger, brighter, and more immediate in the frame, especially during her final re-entry. As flames engulf her capsule, Earth's blue-green surface dominates the screen, signaling her symbolic and literal return to life. The shift from Earth as unattainable backdrop to embracing presence encapsulates the grieving process: moving from separation to reconnection, from despair to renewed grounding in existence (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996).

In other words, Earth evolves from a distant reminder of loss to a vivid symbol of renewal, mirroring Stone's journey through grief in *Gravity*. Its growing presence on screen reflects her shift from detachment to reconnection with life. This visual transformation embodies the grieving process—moving from despair and disorientation toward healing and restored belonging.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Gravity* communicates Dr. Ryan Stone's journey through grief and healing primarily through its rich use of visual metaphors rather than dialogue. The vast emptiness and silence of space externalize her numbness and isolation, while debris, tethering, and weightlessness symbolize intrusive memories, emotional dependency, and the destabilization of loss. The elemental imagery of water, fire, and earth, along with the fetal position and final act of standing, construct a powerful arc of rebirth, resilience, and renewal. By transforming abstract psychological states into concrete cinematic images, the film allows viewers to witness grief not as a static condition but as a dynamic process that moves toward healing. This analysis underscores how *Gravity* demonstrates the unique ability of cinema to render internal emotions visible, immersive, and universally resonant.

General conclusion

This study demonstrates that Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) is an exemplary cinematic accomplishment that uses stunning CGI not for spectacle alone, but to convey a universal, non-linguistic story of grief and healing. The film functions as more than a simple sci-fi tale; it acts as an allegory for the human experience of enduring profound loss and struggling toward recovery.

Through a formal and astute analysis, this research illustrates how the film's cinematic language (spatial, imagistic and technical) externalizes the internal psychological state of its protagonist, Dr. Ryan Stone. The vast, stillness emptiness of space becomes an objectification of emotional numbness and aloneness, while the scattered fields of debris feel bodily reminiscent to how trauma memory intrudes in a repetitive pattern. Vital metaphors — the tether, the act of cutting it — render vivid the painful imperative to untangle ourselves from emotional attachments; a sense of weightlessness evokes just how disorienting such rupture can be.

By contrast, the story arc of the film finds it gradually wending its way from despair back to redemption, traveling symbolically through a birth-and-death cycle. Fetal images, and then elemental progressions of fire, water, earth: mythic cycles of purification followed by cleansing and ultimate grounding. In getting to her feet on solid ground one last time, Stone's performance serves as a powerful gesture of resilience, the taking back of agency and the coming into being of a new self.

In making its visual shape so much an extension of its psychological content, *Gravity* confirms the way films are empowered to render abstract emotional processes visible, inherently absorbing and universally shared. It's evidence that visual metaphors are not pristine ornament but narrative tools, ones that can paint the landscape of human emotion with a clarity and force often

unattainable in dialogue. In the end, *Gravity* presents a strong case that there is an important role for cinema as a vessel through which to process trauma, giving visuals to the inexpressible and establishing that healing is not linear but rather an act of transfiguration out of estrangement and into connection, out of despair and into a hard-earned embrace of life.

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الملخص

يقوم هذا البحث على دراسة فيلم " الجاذبية " (2023) للمخرج ألفونسو كوارون باعتباره استكشافًا سينمائيًا عميقًا للحزن والشفاء، إشارة إلى أن استعاراته البصرية تخدم أكثر من مجرد زينة أو ترف سردي، ولكنها توفر ضرورة لتمثيل الصدمة والحل نفسيًا باستخدام تحليل شكلي للعناصر السينمائية المقدمة - التصوير السينمائي، والميزانسين، والمرئيات الأيقونية (على سبيل المثال، الفراغ / فراغ الفضاء، وتكرار الحطام، وانعدام الوزن / وضعية الجنين، والولادة الأولية) - تتبع الدراسة بصريًا التقدم غير المترابط من خلال مراحل / نماذج مختلفة من الحزن (بما في ذلك المراحل الخمس لكوبلر روس). توضح القراءة الدقيقة كيف يستخدم فيلم " الجاذبية " مفرداته السمعية والبصرية الغامرة لتمثيل عملية انتقال بطلة الرواية الدكتورة رايان ستون من الشلل العاطفي والعزلة إلى الشعور بالتمكن والنشاط، وبالتالي تحويل الحالات العاطفية الذاتية إلى تجربة سردية نموذجية عالميًا. إن هذا العلاج المتعدد التخصصات لنظريات السينما وعلم النفس حول الحزن لا يتفق مع "ثقافة الإغلاق" والسرد المضاد للصدمة، بما في ذلك التفسيرات النفسية في هذه المناقشة بما يتجاوز مجرد الحوار، وبالتالي تقديم مساهمة قيمة في إثارة إشكالية التمثيلات البصرية للصدمة الممثلة على الشاشة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السرد السينمائي، الحزن، الشفاء، الصدمة، الاستعارة البصرية.