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## **Images of Addiction. Representations of addictions in films.**

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**ABSTRACT:** A film clip archive on tobacco, alcohol, drugs and gambling was assembled, consisting of 140 scenes from 47 Finnish and international films. A typology of representations of addiction is developed on the basis of the semiotic theory of modalities. It centres around four modal groups: willing, competence, ability and obligation. The classical image of modern addiction is lack of will or loss of control. This is represented in alcoholism films with strong AA-influence. Competence is often involved in drug scenes showing people enjoying their individualistic freedom and skill in building authentic identities. Ability is a core theme in gambling movies but sometimes it plays a role in alcoholism scenes too. Obligation, or necessity, plays a role in especially drug scenes where the subject struggles with a pressing desire or need. Examples of these types of scenes are described.

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## INTRODUCTION

Beliefs about addiction are elements in the process of addiction itself. Dependencies involve neurobiological mechanisms that are not precisely known, but it is well established that similar conditions, be it substance use or other kinds of addictive behaviours, cause very different reactions both in the patient and in the environment in different cultural contexts. It may even be the case that cultural beliefs have an impact on the mechanisms. Addictions are, in Ian Hacking's (1999) words, "interactive kinds". In contrast, "indifferent kinds" such as quarks, are indifferent to what we think of them, although their existence as objects depends on knowledge, i.e. theoretical knowledge about them and techniques for observing them. But beyond that, they do not respond to our beliefs and understandings. Addicts do. Not only do societies react differently to different types of unreasonable repetition, also emotional and physical *perceptions* of individuals differ, depending on cultural definitions of them. Voracious drinkers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Europe and North America probably experienced somewhat similar feelings as their possible AA descendants two hundred years later, but their reactions and attempts to keep themselves in control must have been very different. Disbelief in being addicted is often an important self-serving justification for not quitting (as well as the *belief* in one's addicted condition may be!).

Jon Elster (1999) has argued on the basis of rich research evidence that although some emotions are probably universal, and even animals have them, an emotion is perceived differently in societies where it has a name than in societies where it remains merely a "proto-emotion". Hard-core emotions such as fear, hate, parental love or sexual love, and perhaps jealousy, are based on perceptions directly – we do not need to think about them in order to feel them because they are wired in us by evolution. Others, such as artistic emotions, grief, pity, gratefulness and so on, are cognitive, and we can even produce them by cultural means – by singing, for example.

How can we study beliefs or representations of addictions? Films are a good source of material on different types of beliefs about addiction. The classical early Hollywood alcoholism movies (Room 1985) are good examples of a scourge that became a relatively popular theme in big audience films. In the 1970s and 1980s a number of European wide- audience films on hard drugs were made, such as *Christiane F.* Again, in the 1990s the new recreational drug wave inspired a number of drug-related films, and smoking has been a theme in an increasing number of films. Eating disorders started to appear in movies when attention to them was paid elsewhere in the media, by experts and otherwise. Film-makers may react to the publicity evoked by the scares much like journalists – if they are good for the agenda of public worries they are good for the flicks. But how is it possible to represent addiction on the screen? Addiction is, by definition, a craving that escapes reason and explanation, and therefore a condition beyond representation. Obviously, there must be indirect ways to construct narratives around them, which means that they often are outsiders' reactions to and interpretations of the addicts' reactions, rather than direct representations of the addicted experience itself. This paper develops a socio-semiotic model for analysing beliefs about addiction on the screen, based on Greimasian semiotic theory. The theory has three corner stones, laid by structural linguistics and anthropology: 1) meaning-making involves universal structures, of which classifying (making distinctions) and narratives are fundamental; 2) meaningful representations of the world involve values that are communicated as modal relationships between agents in narratives; 3) representations of the world are constructed from a point of view. Constructions of the point of view are called enunciative structures and can be quite complicated, and usually are very difficult to analyse. The central concept in the

analysis of the point of view is focalisation, which refers to the person in a story whose emotional or intellectual experience is being transmitted to the audience. For example, in the scene from *Rio Bravo* analysed below, the focalisation is on the indignation of the onlookers as well as on the feelings of the alcoholic.

#### MOTIVES, NORMS, BELIEFS, REPRESENTATIONS OR IMAGES?

Many different approaches and theoretical vocabularies have been developed to analyse the cultural elements of behaviour. The most traditional approach involves the idea of norms and values that *regulate* behaviour; another is related to beliefs and *preferences*; representation is a concept that has been used in many different senses. Criminological theory talks about vocabularies of *motive* (Gerth and Mills 1954), or about neutralisations (Sykes and Matza 1957). These terminological families involve bundles of background assumptions of which we should be aware when we choose our language.

Let us take “beliefs” as an example. The word suggests consciousness and rationality, and even if we tend to think of addiction as their opposite, they can be used as conceptual instruments in theorising addictions. A special set of beliefs concerns the rewards and punishments the addict expects. These beliefs may be socially conditioned and sanctioned, for example when young persons start smoking or taking drugs as a reaction to peer pressure. Addictive behaviour can be compared to any consumer behaviour, and indeed was theorised as such by the economic theorists Gary S. Becker and Kevin Murphy (1988) in their landmark paper on addiction and rational choice. They showed that even fully rational utility maximisers with foresight may end up in a condition of addiction, if we account for *internalities* i.e. the fact that present consumption sometimes increases the satisfactory dose in the future (addiction researchers would call this tolerance, economists call it consumption capital). Ole-Jorgen Skog (1999), Jon Elster (1999) and George Ainslie (1992) have elaborated the model to explain why addicts usually struggle to get out of their addiction and why they tend to relapse.

Other names for the perceptive/meaningful moment in behaviour and its interpretation such as expectancies (Paglia and Room 1999), motives, norms, attitudes, and the like, focus on the behaviour itself, its experienced effects and its regulation. More generic terms such as constructions or representations include another dimension of meaning-making, namely that the behaviour itself and the way it is thought and talked about may refer to things that are quite indirectly related to the immediate reference, for example drinking or substance use. The representations that we have of our own and of others’ actions are not always directly related to what we apparently do and observe. A famous example comes from the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. According to his account, a Balinese cockfight is not just a cockfight, and talk about it is not just talk about the cocks, fights and the people around but a symbolic and emotional representation of the reality of the Bali society and its social structure. As Geertz puts it in a classic quotation “...it is a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1973, 448). Another, more familiar example is that drinking is often used as a symbol for masculinity, gender relations in general, the relationship between social classes etc. Also recreational drug use often articulates values such as competence, individuality, freedom from conventions or other feelings of superiority of users vis-à-vis the “ordinary society”.

For this reason the term *images* describes better the perceptive-cognitive moment in action than more goal-oriented expressions such as motives or expectancies (see also Room & Walden 1978), or expressions that refer specifically to the experience of or rules governing the behaviour such as beliefs, representations, attitudes or norms.

Unlike “construction”, the term image does not imply an author, neither does it imply arbitrary determination. Unlike “representation”, the term image does not imply that users or observers are articulate and clear about what is representing what. The terms “images” or “governing images” imply that out thoughts, feelings, ways of speaking, as well as the acts and gestures related to behaviour may “stand for” or give meaning to the behaviour but at the same time signify quite different things such as gender relationships.<sup>1</sup> Images are both embodied and culturally embedded in that they reflect corporeal feelings while they also articulate cultural experiences far beyond the experience of a drug, for example. Images are important in giving meanings to action and in rendering it interpretable to others. Images are inevitably interactive – they communicate our experiences to others, and others “make sense” of them. Their meaning is not fixed but can change and be changed even in the same context. We can play with images, so that for example expressions of grief can be intended as amusing (irony). Images always have several layers of meaning, ranging from simple perception-emotion relationships to extremely complex forms of representation that require large investments of cultural capital and high degree of reflexivity to produce and to interpret them. Images, like Elster’s beliefs (which are a special type of images), have “real” effects on experience and on behaviour.

## NATURE, CULTURE AND “THE OTHER”

Images associated with cultural practices always contain images of the “other” as well as of the “me” or the “us”. In the usual case, the “other” of the image is the morally less valued one and represents the negative pole from which one wants to distance oneself. For example, middle-class customers in central Helsinki bars described working-class drunkards in suburban pubs, which they “would never visit”, as cap-headed dirty brutes who do not know how to drink (Sulkunen 1992). However, the reverse may also be true, like in the famous Nordic myth about the “Continental drinking culture” where alcohol causes no harm, in contrast to our own cultural incompetence (that has been caused by too much state control and images of the forbidden fruit).

Claude Lévi-Strauss has in his work shown (see Sulkunen 2002) how cultural images such as myths have a strange but intuitively understandable reflexive characteristic. As cultural representations of our human existence, they reflect our awareness of the difference between culture and nature. For example in myths about food, nature is represented as the raw material from which food is processed and elaborated through cultural classification and techniques of preparation. On the other hand, food may return to nature by rotting, getting spoiled or dirty, or because it already has been used for food (excrement). (Figure 3) We regularly observe similar distinctions in representations of morally precarious experiences such as intoxication. The “other” is depicted either as raw, for example a child or a savage who has not yet learned what it means to be intoxicated - and who has not attained the status required for engaging in it. Alternatively, the “other” can be described as rotten, such as a dirty, stinking and irresponsible alcoholic, who has engaged in too much of the cultural practice of drinking but lost hold of the imagery and rituals that distinguish the experience from the mere visceral fact of being drunk.

(Figure 1. should come here)

## FADING IMAGES

Images of morally precarious actions are cultural representations of the distinction between nature and culture itself. Therefore I call them *reflexive images*. Through them “we tell us

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<sup>1</sup> In theoretical terms, the concept “images” implies an implosion of the traditional distinction between the signifier and the signified in a sign (see also Maffesoli 1993, Ch. 1).

the story of ourselves". They maintain mutual recognition and group cohesion, especially when they are strongly ritualised. They also have a regulative function, like toasting and singing drinking songs, which pace out the drinks, or define the proper amount and help to single out deviance.

But what happens to images in the process of addiction? Elster (1999) has suggested that in addiction, cravings become decreasingly based on cognitive beliefs and increasingly based on perceptions that directly trigger off craving (cue dependency). Expanding the notion of beliefs to cover the whole range of reflexive images, we might say that addiction drains out the images governing the behaviour. This can be looked at from two points of view: the observer and the observed. They are related and interact, therefore they are really not separate images, but from the point of view of clarity the distinction is useful.

From the observer's point of view, addictive behaviour appears as meaningless and without motivation. Cultural definitions of the behaviour do not seem to fit and the addicted person seems to lack the characteristics of a subject. An alcoholic, for example, is often described as a person who lacks the competence and will-power that is associated with adulthood and adult intoxication. Even the pleasure is no longer there:

... no, no, you can't find any... nothing to do with the life situation, none of those things, all family relationships are OK, job and all, there is nothing there, he himself cannot give the reasons either, but not a day passes where he wouldn't get to the grocery store, he will buy a few bottles of beer, and on weekends that quantity will double, I cannot say why  
(from an interview study)

Even the images of sociability become empty. In our interviews (Sulkunen et al 1997) on urban pubs people who do not like them commented: "It's always the same people sitting there...", insinuating that the social relationships become empty of solidarity and meaningful function, and regress into just "sitting" there, drunk. As a result, the image of the addict tends to be placed in the "rotten" corner of the cultural triangle, where the imagery of cultured pleasures of intoxication turns into its disgusting opposite, over-used, dirty excrement no longer making sense.

From the point of view of the addict, a similar fading out of meaning takes place. Studies of anorexics, for example, often find that the rationale initially attached to the self-controlling impulse becomes its own object (Puuronen 2004). Feelings of shame and regret probably involve similar rotten images of the self. In attempts to quit and relapses, short-circuited cue dependency operates unmediated by cultural images of the desire. It is reported that many addicts at this stage do not even experience craving for the substance before a relapse, just the force of the habit itself is too strong to resist the cue (Koski-Jännes 2001).

## THE MODEL: FOUR DIMENSIONS OF MODALITIES

In modelling the image space we focus on the subject (e.g. the drinker and his actions or interactions with others) rather than the object (e.g. the drink or its effects) of the behaviour in order to make comparisons across different types of addictive behaviours. As is well known, the alcoholic is typically pictured as someone who has a defected will and is driven by the desire or craving for a drink. In AA-inspired alcoholism films such as *Under the Volcano* directed by John Huston (1984) the hero wants his ex-wife back but is unable to resist the drink and dies instead. Will is a semiotic dimension of what we call *modalities*

(Sulkunen & Törrönen 1997a). It is the will, not the desire or the pleasure, which qualifies the person as a *subject* in the story – and vice versa, the lack or frailty of will turn the story into a tragedy.

Other modalities are *obligation* (duty), *ability* and *competence*. Films about eating disorders, such as *The Secret Life of Mary-Margaret* (Alan Coulter 1992), *Monster’s Ball* (Marc Foster 2001), or *Girl, Interrupted* (James Mangold 1999) tend to focus on the ambivalence of the subject towards her (or his) inner sense of duty to conform to others’ expectations. Excessive sexual interest is often represented in films, for example in *Rules of Attraction* (Roger Avary 2002), or *Levottomat 3* (*The restless 3*, Minna Virtanen 2004) as breaches of promises (duty) made to another person. Even more pronounced emphasis on neglected duty towards other persons is typical in films about excessive involvement with work, such as *Liar, Liar* (Tom Shadyac, 1997) or *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis 2000).

Films about drug users such as *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle 1995), *Traffic* (Steven Soderberg 2000), *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes 1999) or *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan 1999) may present scenes of initial *competence* in using drugs and enjoying the effects, often contrasted with the dullness of ordinary life, but in the course of the narrative the original competence is lost and the story turns into a disaster. Sometimes drug films present stories of miraculous recovery, usually with the help of a healer or a healing community. In such cases it is *ability* fostered by help from somebody that defines the value of the subject’s narrative trajectory.

Will and competence are called endotactic modalities – they refer to inherent moral qualities of the subject. Ability and obligation are exotactic modalities: they connect the subject with other subjects as the source and reference of the modal quality represented by the narrative. Competence and obligation are virtual modalities, meaning that their presence is immanent and evident even if the story does not proceed to the realisation of these qualities. In a film about sexual addiction, *Levottomat 3*, moral condemnation by the environment represents the heroine’s duty to abstain from sexual acts already at the beginning, long before the story runs into catastrophic consequences that result from breaking this duty. Many Western films start with what is called “the qualifying test” where the hero demonstrates exceptional competence (courage, wit, fast gun) and is recognized as a special person by the villagers, long before the story evolves into action where this competence is realized. In contrast, ability and will can only be represented by actual action, and therefore they are called actual modalities. The four groups of modalities are called pragmatic, since they refer to relationships in the narrative itself rather than modalities that describe the narrator’s attitude to the story (believing or knowing the story to be true or real; these are called epistemic modalities). Pragmatic modalities can thus be represented in a four-fold table:

Table 1. Classification of pragmatic modalities

<i>PRAGMATIC MODALITIES</i>	<i>endotactic</i>	<i>exotactic</i>
<b>actual</b>	will	ability
<b>virtual</b>	competence	obligation

These four modalities are dimensions, not either-or qualities. When a story develops in a film, the subject usually undergoes a transformation. In addiction films we hypothesize that it typically is a transition from a state where the dominant modality is first strongly present but gradually weakens or becomes contradicted.

## FILMS

We have collected 140 scenes from 47 films. The scenes represent addiction to alcohol (47), drugs (34), tobacco (17), gambling (16), sex (8), food (10) and work (5). The country of origin is USA (28 films), Finland (8), France (6), UK (4) and West-Germany (1). The year of release varies from 1947 to 2004. 28 films date from years since 1990.

We started our collection from 544 films recorded from Finnish public TV channels by the Social Research Institute of Alcohol Studies in 1984-1989. Most of the films (359) are American, Finnish or French. Unfortunately the quality of these recordings has deteriorated over the years somewhat. The list of these films was first screened mainly with Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)) to identify films that might have useful scenes. These films were checked first.

Another method was to use search engines (IMDB, Google) to identify films about the seven addictions. These were then searched in the SRIAS collection, in the City Library of Helsinki and in private video shops in Helsinki. The available selection is quite limited, and therefore only three films could be located. The Finnish Film Archive does not lend out their material.

Film experts were also interviewed. More recent movies have been easier to locate than older ones. Addiction scenes are very difficult to spot in films that are not specifically about addiction, since addiction scenes are then not included in the synopsis or in the key words. In such cases the whole movie must be screened, which is time-consuming.

So far fourteen movies have been rejected, because they had no suitable scenes.

The technical procedure of collecting the data is difficult. Films in VHS format were digitalised with a digital video camera, and then the DV-tape of the camera was printed on a DVD in the University AV-Centre. Scenes from DVDs had to be first copied on VHS and then on DVDs, which deteriorated the quality.

## THE SAMPLE

The scenes were selected in view of using them later as vignettes in group interviews. This placed some restrictions on our selection, which do not, however, interfere with the aims of this paper. For example, some scenes are too much based on dialogue, which would present problems of translation and other problems of interpretation. Often a scene that would otherwise qualify requires too much background from the rest of the film's story; these were also excluded. Some scenes were excluded because they were repetitious – this was the case mostly on alcoholism, which is by far the easiest to spot. Problematic gambling also tends to be represented in films in very standard stereotypic fashion, with the lit card table in a dark room, quiet and serious looking players around it usually with some tense music at the background. Sex addiction was difficult to spot, because we wanted to avoid pornographic effects.

The selected scenes were analysed and classified according to Table 2 below. Not all cells of Table 2 are filled with examples. Either we have missed suitable scenes or they simply do not exist or are extremely rare. In the course of our work we intend to complete the table but do not expect to fill it in completely. The numbers in brackets refer to the scenes we have copied from each film; for example Casino (4) refers to the 4<sup>th</sup> scene copied from that film. Category *unspecific* refers to cases where the modality dominating the scene is not clear, or in which several different modalities are at play simultaneously in a complex way.

Table 2. The selected scenes classified by type of addiction and dominant modalities

<b>addiction/modality</b>	<i>willing</i>	<i>obligation</i>	<i>competence</i>	<i>ability</i>	<i>unspecific</i>
<b>alcohol</b>	Hirtettyjen kettujen metsä (3) Sideways (1) Rio Bravo (2) Les Cousins (1) The Happy Alcoholic (1-3)	Gervaise (1) Casino (3)	Intohimon vallassa (1) Key Largo (4) Drifting clouds (1) Sideways (2)	Sideways (2) Les Cousins (3)	Le Beau Serge (1- 3) Les Cousins (2, 4) Leaving Las Vegas (4)
<b>drugs</b>	The People vs. Larry Flynt (2) Drugstore Cowboy (1) Trainspotting (2)	Rules of Attraction (2) Casino (4)	Human Traffic (2) Christiane F. (2) Traffic (2)	Freaking Beautiful World (2)	
<b>tobacco</b>		Catch me if you can (1, 2) Docteur Francoise Gaillard (2) Monster's Ball (3)	Docteur Francoise Gaillard (2)		Drifting clouds (2)
<b>gambling</b>	Casino (1)		The Cinninati Kid (2, 3) Rounders (1-3)		The House of Games (1) California Split (3, 4)
<b>sex</b>	Levottomat 3 (2, 3)				
<b>work</b>		Liar, liar (1-3) Cast Away (1)			
<b>eating</b>		Glutton (1- 2) Secret Life of Mary- Margaret (1-4) Girl Interrupted (1,2,)			



We expect the scenes to be subject to many different interpretations in the interviews – these are what group interviews are designed to tap. In this paper, I demonstrate the use of the model in the production of what is called the “researcher’s reading” in reception studies. In order to make sense of how viewers interpret the material, and in order to make selections, the researcher must have a clear idea of the scenes independently of the reception by others. For the sake of brevity, I only present my analysis of five scenes that seem to incorporate relevant elements of images related to different types of addictions. The classification in Table 2 is based on several viewings, on knowledge of the film’s context and on our own theoretical preconceptions of the dimensions of addiction. Nevertheless, the classification represents only one possible interpretation, not the objective “meaning” of the scenes. Its function is to search for variation to cover as many theoretically possible cases as possible, in order to offer tags to which the interviewees can attach their own positions and use the scenes to articulate them.

## MODAL DIMENSIONS OF ADDICTION

As Robin Room (1985) has shown, the classical alcoholism films of the golden years of Hollywood are strongly influenced by the AA-flavoured conception of alcoholism as loss of control or “disease of the will”. As is clear from our sample, a similar focus on will-power is in one way or another typical of alcoholism scenes in many kinds of films from other periods and countries, belonging to other genres and styles.

Let us look at *Rio Bravo* (1959)<sup>2</sup>, where the selected scene is relatively straightforward. The sheriff (Wayne) of a small town in southwest Texas must keep custody of a murderer whose brother, a powerful rancher, is trying to help him escape. He and his deputies - a disgraced drunk (Martin) and a cantankerous old cripple (Brennan) - must find a way to hold out against the rancher’s hired guns until the marshal arrives.

The younger deputy (Martin), known as excellent gun hand, has the shakes. The sheriff tells him to take a drink, the whole bottle. Music from outside reminds the alcoholic deputy of something and he pours back the glass of whisky, not spilling a drop. The scene is focalised on the sheriff and the cripple, who are indignant about the deputy’s giving in to his craving and deteriorating back to nature. His exceptional competence as gun hand is about to go wasted at a moment when his companions would most need it; the lack of will-power is therefore also a lack of solidarity, a sign of selfishness and therefore infuriating. This must be a familiar scene in alcoholics’ families: at a moment when something important is expected to happen: a birth-day party, beginning of a vacation or an important visit, the alcoholic gives in to his or her craving and spoils it for everybody. “Take the whole bottle!” is a bitter remark of frustration and jealousy, facing disloyal and selfish pursuit of the secret, nameless and silent desire. The deputy holds his craving this time. It is important that the decision comes from his will, ignited by the music, and not from a sense of duty or reaction to the sheriff’s orders. This is what shows that he is a serious alcoholic – nothing but a sudden burst of will-power would stop him. Through his will he regains agency, which he is about to lose, and returns him back to society and culture from the sphere of rotten human wrecks.

The sense of frustration comes from the focalisation, which is on others’ feelings rather than those of the alcoholic. This is also the case in the scenes from *Le Beau Serge* (Claude Chabrol 1958), where the wife drags the drunken Serge to bed and is

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<sup>2</sup> *Rio Bravo* (Howard Hawks 1959; John Wayne, Dean Martin, Walter Brennan)

threatened by his violence, although her bitterness is not as strongly the outcome of the alcoholic husband's disloyalty as it is of the concrete discomfort and fear she has to face because of his drinking. In the scenes from *Sideways* (Alexander Payne 2004) the focalisation is on the drinker, who has divorced from her wife and drinks in jealousy. Similar images of self-destructive drinking abound in movies (a well-known example is Claude Goretta's *La Provinciale* (1980)), but then the sense of addiction is much weaker: these are (anti)heroes who drink in a suicidal way *for a reason* and at their own will. Therefore the reactions of others appear as pity or sorrow rather than frustration and jealousy, and the image of alcohol addiction has a less poignant AA-hue.

It may be that the American view of alcoholism as a disease of the will is a less universal way of understanding addictions than has been thought. Our selection contains material that indicates how addiction can be conceived in other terms, still retaining elements that suggest at least dependence if not addiction in the same way as we are accustomed to think about drinking. Let us take smoking as an example. In *Docteur Françoise Gailland* (1975)<sup>3</sup> Dr. Gailland (Girardot) is a specialist in a hospital but also a heavy smoker who ignores warnings. She neglects her husband and children; and has a lover. Problems emerge when her son is caught for stealing. In the selected scene Dr. Gailland is supposed to tell a patient about cancer diagnosis but instead lights up a cigarette with her. In this case it is not a weak will to stop smoking but breaking an obligation – her professional duty – that characterises the addiction. Smoking does not take Dr. Gailland away from her tasks or social relationships; instead she appears to ignore her obligation to tell the truth to the patient, and even to believe the truth in her own case. In a later scene she looks at her X-rayed lungs when a colleague, not knowing it is her lungs, tells her that it is a clear case of cancer. She is shocked: only then does she believe what she should have believed and taken seriously long ago.

It seems to be quite common that neglecting one's duty - to keep a contract or promise, to maintain a relation of trust, to be honest – rather than weakness of will is used in film images of tobacco addiction. In *Catch Me If You Can* (Steven Spielberg 2002) the son gets annoyed at her mother who lights up a cigarette. He is upset because she breaks a promise. In *Monster's Ball* (Mark Foster 2001), Leticia chain-smokes but abuses her overweight son for eating candy, and later offers a cigarette to the father of her new boy-friend although the father already has lung-disease. In *Drifting Clouds* (Kaurismäki 1996) Ilona, the heroine, smokes ignoring the warnings of her husband. The list could be continued for quite long, to show that in the case of tobacco it is not necessarily the weak will but failure to keep a promise or to mind warnings, which characterise the addiction. Regression to nature from culture is often depicted in a quite straightforward way as regression towards death by the smoker. The focalisation may be on the smoker, not on others, and yet, the smoking itself is meaningless or at least does not have an apparent function. The desolation of smoking is the smoker's problem, who may be depicted quite lonely in the misery of looming death, whereas the wretchedness of alcoholism is often seen from others' point of view. This is paradoxical in the sense that in real life and in policy discourse we tend to emphasise the harm from alcohol to the drinker, whereas the harm from smoking concerns also others. In movies, however, images of tobacco addiction may emphasise irresponsibility, lack of trustworthiness and irrationality of the smoker, but not the suffering of others as much as in the case of alcoholism. Still, obligation is an exotactic (refers to the subject's others) and willing an endotactic modality (refers to the subject).

Our material includes four scenes on work addiction, three from *Liar, Liar*

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<sup>3</sup> *Docteur Françoise Gailland* (Jean-Louis Bertucelli 1975; Annie Girardot)

(Tom Shadyac 1997)<sup>4</sup> and one from *Cast Away* (Robert Zemeckis 2000)<sup>5</sup>. Obviously, working too much becomes a problem when it takes time away from family members and other near ones. It involves not keeping a promise, in semiotic terms failing obligation, and this is how the selected scenes construct the malaise. In *Liar, Liar* Fletcher Reed, a successful lawyer, spends more time at work than with his son Max. Max wishes for his birthday that his dad would not lie for a day. Fletcher gives Max a birthday present that his secretary has bought. The box contains baseball equipment. Max enthusiastically wants to play, but Fletcher says he must turn back to work. Max is disappointed. In *Cast Away* the husband is called to work in the middle of the Christmas party, and exchanges presents with his wife in the car on the way to the airport, full of guilt for leaving. As in alcoholism scenes, the problem tends to be seen in the eyes of others, but the frustrating element does not spring from the lack of the endotactic modality of willing; it is more directly related to the interaction itself. Also, what is so interesting or so pressing at work is often described, and the desire to work is not as nameless as an alcoholic's desire to drink. In these images, work "addiction" is in fact the result of conflicting obligations rather than a weakness of will facing a nameless desire. The regression to "nature" is not as frightening as in the case of other addictions.

The drug scenes we have selected operate on the dimension of competence, which like willing is an endotactic modality, i.e. refers to the subject itself. Competence is an acquired but inherent skill, like using language, riding a bicycle or walking. Especially in the new drug wave movies of the late 1980s and 1990s, drug use is often depicted as intentional manipulation of the mind that requires a lot of skill. Catastrophes regularly occur but they are preceded by a preliminary stage of competent use. Often the competent use aims at alleviating a problem, like in *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan 1999).<sup>6</sup> It describes a week-end of clubbing friends. Jip (Simm) has sex problems, Lulu (Pilkington) is disappointed with men. Nina (Reynolds) hates her job at a fast-food joint, her boyfriend Koop (Parkes) is jealous; Moff (Dyer) has difficulties with his conservative family. The friends use ecstasy and display the experience. By Sunday, Jip and Lulu become a couple, Moff quits drugs. In other films the problem may be just boredom, or drugs are used as a protest against parents' hypocritical bourgeois way of life, like in *Traffic* (Steven Michael 2000). It is interesting that in drug movies the drug use often has quite explicit functions; only when addiction develops, these functions are replaced with the pounding force of the nameless desire.

In gambling movies such as *The Cincinnati Kid* (Norman Jewison 1965)<sup>7</sup> the dominant modality is often ability. Ability differs from competence in that it is a capacity that depends on an outsider, a "helper" in semiotic terminology. In *The Cincinnati Kid* a rising poker star Cincinnati Kid (McQueen) plays against an old maestro Howard (Robinson). The dealer Shooter (Malden) confuses the game, dealing in favour of The Kid to revenge Howard an old loss. The Kid wants Shooter to deal fairly, because he wants to beat Howard with his skill. The Kid loses, thanks Howard for the game but demands that Shooter comes to his place, because he wants a revenge for his loss. It is typical of gambling movies that the play depends on collaboration, wanted or not, between several actors. A bad player, one who gets addicted to the excitement, is often depicted as one who loses interest in the loyalties and collaboration, and the game itself takes over his passion. It is usual that the drama which develops is in fact a drama of suspicion of fraud, a doubt

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<sup>4</sup> *Liar, Liar* (Tom Shadyac 1997; Jim Carrey, Maura Tierney, Justin Cooper)

<sup>5</sup> *Cast away* (Robert Zemeckis 2000; Tom Hanks, Helen Hunt)

<sup>6</sup> *Human Traffic* (Justin Kerrigan 1999; John Simm, Lorraine Pilkington, Shaun Parkes, Danny Dyer, Nicola Reynolds)

<sup>7</sup> *The Cincinnati Kid* (Norman Jewison 1965; Steve McQueen, Edward G. Robinson, Karl Malden)

about the opponent's ability and fairness.

## THE SECRET

Secret is a dominant element in most of our images of addiction. In the American alcoholism movies the hidden bottle is a standard theme, and it is very frequently the case also in our samples from European films. Surreptitious drinking is a key theme in most images of intoxication in Finnish drinking culture, even among the middle class (Sulkunen 1992). Secret is a modality (Sulkunen and Törrönen 1997b) that involves knowledge: secret is something which is, happens or is done, but which does not appear. Anyone who knows a secret has a special relationship to reality, and anyone who wants to keep something secret has a special relationship to those who are not supposed to know. As Simmel (1964) observed, secret is not a solitary state of knowledge; on the contrary, it is a very intense social relationship.

In our selection, the scenes on anorexia/bulimia exemplify the theme of addictive secret in the most interesting way. In *The Secret Life of Mary-Margaret* (Alan Coulter 1992), Mary-Margaret, a teen-age girl gets obsessed about her weight. She starts to diet. She realises that she can eat if she throws up. The whole movie is about how she tries to maintain, first the secret of her bulimia, and later the secret about eating and vomiting. In *Glutton* (Lauri Törrönen 1989) a young girl Taina gets obsessed with her weight. Skipping school lunches she buys sweets and vomits or eats a cake from the fridge alone in bed. In *Girl, Interrupted* (James Mangold 1999) three girls in a clinic for mental patients are surreptitiously changing pills: Susan and Lisa trade their pills with Daisy, who secretly eats huge amounts of chicken in her room and needs medication to vomit, and they get Valium in return.

The films we have sampled on eating disorders seem to reproduce standard images of anorexia/bulimia as over-reaction to the sense of duty to look good and slim, and to be otherwise acceptable to boy-friends and fathers. The pronounced elaboration of the theme of the secret gives additional weight of the social dimension of this addiction. However, equally important is the loss of meaning associated with the food or eating itself; it is the secret, not the food that is social. Appetite has deteriorated from culture back to rotten nature: sheer desire with no regulating social elements.

For obvious reasons, secret is also an essential element of sexual addiction. In our selection the scenes from *The Restless – Levottomat* (Minna Virtanen) the secret is emphasised in a scene where the addicted woman meets her lover on the balcony of a ballroom full of distinguished guests, her husband among them. In another scene from the same film, she meets her lover in a yacht at a harbour, where the husband is observing her secret rendezvous at a distance on the harbour's pier.

## CONCLUSION

It is often argued (e.g. Giddens 1994) that in advanced modern societies we tend to expand the conception of addictions to cover almost any behavioural anomalies. Addiction is behaviour that the individual does not seem to control. The individual in some way loses his or her agency, the capacity to regulate his or her behaviour, and instead of enjoying the pleasures coming from it, submits oneself to pain and suffering, often causing misery to others as well.

Our material on images of addictive behaviour in films appears to qualify this view. The loss of agency is not always a matter of weak will. The loss of agency may have different dimensions according to the modality that dominates the image. In many

images of alcoholism the loss or recuperation of will power is the essential feature. But in others, such as smoking or eating disorders, neglecting one's duty or over-reacting to it may be a more prominent feature of the image. In drug movies, strangely enough, it is often the loss of competence rather than loss of free will which determines the addictive process. It is paradoxical that drinking, which in policy discourse is very often seen as a health problem concerning most directly the individual drinker, is in film images mostly seen with the eyes of others (or in semiotic terms focalised interactively), whereas smoking – usually thought as the problem of others – is depicted as an individual malaise. Films about gambling frequently involve not only precarious relationships of trust but also evolve around ability, help from the outside. Our examples of addiction to work hardly meet the criteria of addiction at all, since they are really images of conflicting obligations or passions, not wilting modal dimensions that regulate the behaviour.

All images of addiction seem to involve, one way or another, the theme of the secret. Secret is an intensified social relationship between the addict, the persons for whom knowledge about the addiction and the addict's behaviour is pertinent, and the desire that animates the addict's behaviour. The secret may protect the addict from shame, guilt or anxiety, as the case may be, but in any of these cases it underscores the tension between the addict's sociability and his or her isolation from normal social interaction.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In this respect addiction, and intoxication in general, resembles the relationship between the sacred and the profane in Durkheim's classical analysis.

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List of figure captions:

Figure 1: Nature, culture and the “other”

Figure 1.

