UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Allegories of Industry and the Limits of Reflexivity in Hollywood, 1992-2006

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Visual Studies

by

Erik Watschke

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Catherine L. Benamou, Chair
Associate Professor Kristen Hatch
Associate Professor Bliss Cua Lim

2014

© 2014 Erik Watschke

DEDICATION

To

my dad

who introduced me to the movies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
LIST OF TABLES		iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		v
CURRICULUM VITAE		vi
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION		vii
INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER ONE:	"He Made the Whole World Laugh and Cry": The Mythologization of the Film Artist in *Chaplin*	23
CHAPTER TWO:	"Love Never Dies": The Status of the Image and Cinephilic Reaction in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*	65
CHAPTER THREE:	"There Are No Boundaries": The Status of Sound and the Transnational in *The English Patient*	109
CHAPTER FOUR:	"From the Creator of *Being John Malkovich*, Comes the Story of the Creator of *Being John Malkovich*": *Adaptation.*	171
CHAPTER FIVE:	"Are You Watching Closely?": The Status of Story in *The Prestige*	223
CONCLUSION		277
BIBLIOGRAPHY		310
FILMOGRAPHY		324
APPENDIX:	Industrial Chronology of the New New Hollywood	337

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
Table 5.1	Narrative Structure of *The Prestige*	235

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my committee chair, Professor Catherine Benamou, who encouraged me to pursue a film historical project in the first place, and whose guidance and tireless support helped transform and strengthen my study at every stage. I am also indebted to Professor Bliss Cua Lim and Professor Kristen Hatch, who served on the committee and contributed important advice and encouragement throughout my research and writing. At crucial early stages, Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki and Professor Amy Powell contributed important feedback regarding the conceptual framework of my project, and for this I am grateful.

My research would not have been possible without financial support from The School of Humanities, University of California, Irvine, which granted me a Summer Dissertation Fellowship at a critical point in my studies. I would also like to thank Valerie Sanchez and UCI's Institutional Review Board for assisting in the implementation of primary research procedures. Over the years I have been greatly assisted in my studies by several key staff at UCI who deserve recognition and my thanks: Film & Media Studies Department Manager Peter Chang, Department Assistant Kelly Swanholm, and Visual Studies Graduate Coordinators Madeline Mullens, Caroline Mcguire, Shauntay Larkins, and Clara Quijano.

Archival research could not have been completed without the help of the great librarians at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences' Margaret Herrick Library. I am much obliged to Jenni McCormick at American Cinema Editors, and the staff at The American Society of Cinematographers for assistance in gathering information and facilitating primary research. I would also like to give special thanks to Tom C. McCarthy at Sony Pictures and Marc Wanamaker of Bison Archives for graciously agreeing to be interviewed about their work on the films studied.

Years of collegial support and encouragement have indebted me to my comrades in Visual Studies and dear friends Christina Spiker, Vuslat Demirkoparan, Shahriar Fouladi, Kristen Galvin, Cecilia Joulain, and Patrick Boyle. I am thankful for the support of my parents in this endeavor. My father, Frank Watschke, was my original inspiration to become a scholar of film, and my only regret is that I did not finish in time for him to see how far I have come. My mother, Terry Watschke, has been my most ceaseless advocate from beginning to end, and has continued to encourage me even from many miles away. Finally, I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to Racquel M. Gonzales, who provided advice and criticism, aided in research, generally challenged me to make my project better, and without whose support and affinity I would not be where I am today.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Erik Watschke

EDUCATION

2014	Ph.D. in Visual Studies, University of California, Irvine
2010	M.A. in Visual Studies, University of California, Irvine
2007	B.A. in Studies in Cinema and Media Culture, University of Minnesota

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

2012-Present	Adjunct Professor, Film Studies and Journalism, Irvine Valley College
2012-13	Teaching Associate, Humanities Core, University of California, Irvine
2012	Teaching Associate, Film & Media Studies, University of California, Irvine
2007-11	Teaching Assistant, Film & Media Studies, University of California, Irvine

FIELD OF STUDY

Visual Studies, Film History

ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS

2014	Paper, "There Are No Boundaries: A Crisis of Sound and the Transnational in *The English Patient*," presented at *Film & History* Annual Conference, Madison, WI, October 31
2010	Paper, "Exilic Space in the City of Refuge," presented at "Contingent Communities," Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature Conference, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, October 15

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Allegories of Industry and the Limits of Reflexivity in Hollywood, 1992-2006

By

Erik Watschke

Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Studies

University of California, Irvine, 2014

Professor Catherine L. Benamou, Chair

This dissertation examines technological and paradigmatic changes to the American Film Industry of the last twenty-five years through the lens of popular modes and methods of reflexivity, as manifested in selected film texts. I argue for the historical importance of this period, referred to as "The New New Hollywood," in transforming issues of labor, authorship, and audience within United States-based film production. This entails an analysis of the way that discourses are narrated within Hollywood films themselves, along with the rhetoric of trade organizations, film critics, and film studios. I do this through a series of case studies of films and their promotional materials.

In the first three chapters respectively, I analyze Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin* (1992) for its employment of literal reflexivity in the biopic genre, Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) for its metaphorical reflexivity concerning digital imaging, and Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996) as an independent-blockbuster whose sound allegories comment on transnational filmmaking. In the last two chapters, I analyze Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002) as a *film-à-clef* that literally dramatizes screenwriting conventions, and finally, Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006), whose allegorical

reflexivity centers on the current state of cinematic illusionism.

Ultimately, I consider how these films and the rhetoric surrounding them alternatively represent and mystify debates concerning independent and blockbuster film forms, photochemical and digital technologies, and the work of narrative feature filmmaking. The broader goal of this study is to historicize recent Hollywood forms that arise between the early 1990s and mid-2000s, and suggest that the development of new, specific definitions of "Hollywood" and "filmmaker" are necessary to an understanding of contemporary globalized media industries. This is due to three key historical shifts that characterize the period: changes in ancillary marketing strategies, transformation of formal and narrative structures, and the digitization of the technical processes of cinema.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary American cinema is exceedingly hard to define as American in national terms, and only ever more elusively cinematic with each passing year. Outsourcing and the development of ancillary markets – where often not only production has been shifted overseas, but the audience as well – have tended in recent years to make any proposed nationality for Hollywood difficult to logically ascertain. Empirical studies reveal that a quite large number of Hollywood films are, on the whole, routinely not made by Americans or for them: while the importation of foreign talent to Hollywood has been a popular strategy since its earliest days, more recent is the way in which blockbuster Hollywood film production has focused largely on international marketing and exportation of U.S. products even more so than the sale of these products within North America.[1] Even simply tracing the financing of film production is a difficult prospect when many of the United States's largest and most successful film studios have been purchased in recent years by, and function as subsidiaries of, larger substantially multi-national media corporations, some of which began by the 1990s to be financially-centered elsewhere in the world.[2] In short, it becomes possible for the first time for a film to be created entirely

---

1 Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, and Richard Maxwell argue persuasively based on empirical research, that while Hollywood has always dominated international market places, it is in the late 90s that the Hollywood domination of foreign film industries, based on percentage of international distribution and marketing, and in terms of profit margins, begins to reach extreme proportions. Toby Miller, et al. *Global Hollywood* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

2 Majority ownership of MCA/Universal, for instance, passed from Matsushita (a Japanese electronics conglomerate), to Seagram (Canadian beverage manufacturer), to Vivendi (French telecommunications company) in a period of only a few years, while 1989 saw the purchase of Columbia/Tristar by Sony Corporation. A major exception to this de-centering of Hollywood has been Lions Gate, which began as a Canadian production company (founded in Vancouver, British Columbia) but in the last decade has relocated major operations to Santa Monica. See Richard Maltby, "Nobody Knows Everything: Post-classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment," and Tino Balio, "A Major Presence in All of the World's Important Markets: The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s," both in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,* ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998) 21-44, 58-73, for a good

outside the United States, produced and directed by non-Americans, and marketed heavily to overseas territories at the expense of domestic audiences, and still be rather orthogonally described as a “Hollywood” film.

Likewise, the traditional definitions of what constitutes “cinema” have come to be challenged in the last twenty years. While it would be dubious to repeat the oft touted notion that cinema 'is dead,' what must be understood is that “the cinema,” when understood (as it should be) as an institutional practice or apparatus rather than as a medium, is in exponentially dramatic decline. Beginning in the 1990s, feature-length motion pictures began for the first time in the United States to achieve higher profits from post-release platforms such as home video and television than through initial theatrical distribution. Every year since has seen a further decimation of the cinema audience. Additionally, 35mm film, the most popular medium through which to actualize the cinematic apparatus throughout the majority of the twentieth century, has now fallen by the wayside to digital technologies of acquisition, recording, distribution, and exhibition. All told, motion pictures have largely ceased to be created or presented on film, and are most often not projected at all – let alone within the communal space of the cinema. Thus, it becomes exceedingly difficult not only to describe an 'America film industry' as separate from other diversified media ventures worldwide, but also to describe this filmed entertainment in cinematic terms. What one is left with is something akin to 'multinational filmed entertainment industry,' or rather 'multinational video entertainment industry.'

In any event, the years of 1990 to 2005 must be understood as a profoundly singular

---

breakdown of infrastructural changes to companies and the de-centering of media conglomerates during this period. An additional indispensable source on the organization of the film industry in this regard is Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 2nd Edition (Malden: Blackwell, 2003).

period for Hollywood that deserves detailed investigation for continuing film historians. As I will argue, this periodization runs from the early adoption and development of historic technological, narrative, and organizational shifts in the industry – when they become possible – and concludes when these shifts have become ubiquitously normalized throughout the industry – at the moment when they become dominant. Importantly, these changes present crises of hegemony; the shifting industrial imperatives of the period fundamentally determine the ability of Hollywood to represent itself, what can be represented by whom, and what modes of representation are even possible under such conditions.

This dissertation will explore the ways in which the evolving industry has been dealt with from the inside. Specifically, I address the question of what kind of impact changing industrial mandates have had on the ability of filmmakers to critically reflect on their own medium and their place within it. Here, I employ a wider usage of the term "filmmaker" than is typically done: in this study a filmmaker is anyone who crucially participates in the creation of a motion picture. This includes not only directors and screenwriters – around which debates concerning "authorship" have historically revolved – but also cinematographers, editors, sound designers, composers, actors, and other industry professionals. A key argument of this dissertation is that development of technologies and formal paradigms during this period force debate about creative agency among professionals to the fore in many new ways, and that this becomes exceedingly apparent in films and their promotional materials. Here, I argue that the study of industrial reflexivity can be a mechanism by which to make sense of changes to historical terms such as "independent" and "filmmaker" in this light.

Historical Background and Periodization

It is crucial in this respect to understand the trajectory of digital technologies of representation, distribution, and exhibition as coming to critical fruition during this time. In particular, the early 1990s gave rise to the widespread usage of computer-generated imagery – pioneered in the 80s – which by the end of the decade had advanced to not only supplant more traditional pro-filmic special effects techniques, but also began to challenge the perceived supremacy of photochemically-acquired images within the mantle of 'cinematic realism.' This process necessarily entails a shift of much film creation to the post-production phase, and has dramatically altered the industrial positioning of such professionals as cinematographers and colorists, among others. The second frontier came in the mid-90s with the widespread adoption of digital editing platforms that seemed to quickly prove to producers that computers could be used even more efficiently and cheaply to cut films together, or eventually, to eliminate the need for film entirely. This goal came within sight by the late 90s, when the prospect of digital techniques of distribution and exhibition were tested, and led within ten years to the ubiquitous adoption of digital cinema projection. And thus, now even the projectionists at movie theaters have been drastically affected by technological industry imperatives.

In conjunction with these shifts – and at least partially facilitated by them – is the large scale transition during this time from substantially domestic cinematic concerns to a reliance on international markets and diversified products for the majority of film industry profits. Crucially, it seems blockbuster films that operate at high upfront cost, have nevertheless been adopted as the most profitable theatrical film form when widely exported to overseas theaters. Here, paradigmatic shifts in the worldwide marketing of

major motion pictures are crucial to determining a definition for the blockbuster film, which involves not only a high budget, but also a specific set of marketing strategies. Chief among these is the "high concept" strategy whereby one should be able to describe the concept behind a film in a quick, concise statement, with the selling point of the film being easily deduced without the need for an overabundance of dialogue or verbal explanation. This can include films that are based on pre-sold properties, feature already famous and internationally popular stars, or those that will otherwise introduce some kind of compelling spectacle or situation that may translate well cross-culturally.

The blockbuster film form and the notion of high concept marketing had been popularized as early as the 1970s, during a period that theorists such as Thomas Schatz have called "The New Hollywood."[3] According to Schatz, the tease of a conceptually modern *auteurist* cinema in the United States at the end of the 1960s – referred to as New American Cinema, and said to encompass an influx of film school trained directors who dialogistically interact with both the tropes of Classical Hollywood *and* various European avant-gardes and art house cinemas – gives way by the middle 1970s to a New Hollywood industry that is foremost based on spectacle. Shifts in industrial imperatives lead to noticeable formal paradigm shifts as well as epic films that supposedly become more plot-driven at the expense of character. As Justin Wyatt additionally argues of the New Hollywood, fundamental changes in marketing and production strategy begin to be employed after the success of such 'summer blockbusters' as *Jaws* (1975), are perfected during the 1980s, and are completely normalized by the 1990s.[4] This includes the shift from a concentration on

[3] Thomas Schatz, ed., *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Vol. I, Historical Dimensions: The Development of the American Film Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[4] Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas, 1994).

long theatrical runs to concerted 'opening weekend' campaigns designed to strategically gain a majority of profits very quickly, and especially formal and narrative changes to film products concurrent with a renewed emphasis on foreign markets.[5]

Yet, Hollywood filmmaking from the 1990s to 2000s – or the *New* New Hollywood – represents a substantially different period than what has been theorized to have taken place in the 70s and 80s. Specific important developments here include the industry's reversing course on notions such as horizontal media integration.[6] By forfeiting its original cinema-specific purposes and strategies to accommodate an ever-changing integrated media marketplace, the industry can be shown to have initiated fundamental changes to promotion, distribution, and exhibition strategies, which I argue contributed to the new forms of self-commentary to be observed. Along with the shift to the primacy of foreign markets for the blockbuster, this specifically involved the concomitant shift in the definition of the "independent film" – the blockbuster's opposite. Whereas historically, "independent" has largely denoted a film that was not financed by a major studio, the New New Hollywood independent is more directly relatable to critical reception and distribution strategy; in this context "independent" largely means a low-budget film that courts artistic acclaim on the domestic film festival circuit and during a subsequent limited theatrical release in which it will most likely recoup its costs. By comparison, in the 1990s the New New Hollywood

---

5 Maltby's study suggests that (as of 1998) it was not out of the question for blockbuster Hollywood movies to make up to 90% of their revenue outside of the United States (Maltby, "Nobody Knows Everything," 36). Another crucial source on the de-centering of Hollywood and its ancillary markets in this regard is Allen J. Scott, "Hollywood and the World: The Geography of Motion-Picture Distribution and Marketing," in *The Hollywood Reader*, ed. Toby Miller (London: Routledge, 2009) 162-184.

6 As opposed to vertical integration – in which a single company controls a single filmic product through all the stages of production, distribution, and exhibition – with horizontal integration the same company controls a single intellectual property across various media incarnations such as the novelization, soundtrack, toys, and other merchandising, home video and digital distribution strategies, and the aforementioned wide-scale outsourcing of production.

blockbuster came to represent a film that opens widely – on thousands of screens simultaneously – in the now conventional wisdom that given its quick feeding to home video, television, and digital streaming platforms worldwide, it must make a substantial gross profit within the first weekend of its release. It is the organizational shift of the industry proper that facilitates this definitional change, as more and more independent film production companies were purchased in the 90s by the large conglomerates, who in turn paradigmatically contributed to the advancing of the notion of "independent film units" as branded subsidiaries of the multi-nationals, and this effectively made the previous definition of independent film obsolete.

Yet, a third space emerges during this time which seems antithetical to these mandates entirely: that of the independent-blockbuster. For some filmmakers in particularly advantageous positions, this interstitial space allows for the reflexive exploration of industrial positioning to the extent that these films succeed both metadiscursively and financially – winning over domestic critics and international audiences. Films in this space are exceptions to the rule, however, and often arise as marketing anomalies: independent films that end up crossing-over into blockbuster international success in apparent transgression of the industry's new mandates. And yet the independent-blockbuster seemingly proves that complex artistic "low concept" filmmaking can continue to be financially lucrative, on a limited basis, going into the twenty-first century. The focus of this dissertation is to examine how this industry-in-organizational-crisis views itself, and thus to explore the limits of self-critique within these particular industrial constructs. I will do this through an in-depth analysis and historical contextualization of several critically and commercially successful films from the period,

examining how they meta-discursively situate themselves at the crux of these crises.

Theoretical Foundations

The study of reflexivity has long been present in literary theory, yet became a crucial subject in film theory in the 1970s and 80s, arguably in response to post-WWII new wave cinemas that seemed invested in iconoclastic fourth-wall breaking and the post-modern turn in art. Robert Stam's seminal work *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard,* critically defines a set of reflexive modes – ranging from a playful or "ludic" mode to a more dialectically materialist "didactic" one – that immediately serves to challenge previous theories about the supposed inherent political nature of reflexivity.[7] Here the crucial point that Stam counters in relation to previous scholarship is the notion that reflexivity has any pre-determined political value; by contrast, as he suggests, it can be used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes, and most reflexivity studies going forward have tended to adopt this premise.

Perhaps the most crucial point is Stam's suggestion that reflexivity and realism should not be considered as necessarily antithetical terms or concepts. Rather he proposes that the critical distinction to be made is between realism and illusionism, through which reflexivity becomes a fundamentally *realist* tenet in post-structural theory. A chief contribution of Stam's work is thus in definitively establishing reflexivity in film as being primarily defined as that which is anti-illusionistic: that which seeks to draw attention to its own methods of persuasion. In this vein, ludic reflexivity is associated with cinematic in-jokes such as Buster Keaton's traversal of a cinema screen in *Sherlock Jr.,* whereas an "aggressive" mode is associated with the modernist avant-garde in their supposed attempt

[7] Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

to structurally remove all traditional systems inherent to verisimilar representation. Finally, the didactic mode is situated between these proposed extremes, within post-modernism and the various new waves that seek to elucidate the falsity of particular conventions of traditional narrative cinema in an iconoclastic manner.

In addition to Stam's typologies, a separate division between modes of reflexivity – that of the literal versus the metaphorical – is also important to define. David E. James has been crucial in finessing this distinction which often involves whether a text narratively depicts people or things associated with filmmaking at the primary level of the diegesis, or whether this reflexivity takes place at the secondary level of allegoresis, in which something depicted by the film or even its form can be associated with filmmaking practice. In *Allegories of Cinema,* for instance, James prominently applies an allegorical reflexivity to works of the 1960s American Structural avant-garde.[8] Here, the pure film texts, consisting at times exclusively of scratches in film frames and flickers of light, are "allegories of cinema" specifically because they are entirely devoid – in a way Stam might see as aggressive – of any material representation not specific to film itself.

The phenomenon of metaphorical – or allegorical – reflexivity has been additionally explored by theorists such as Garrett Stewart, in his 1999 work *Between Film and Screen*.[9] Following in the footsteps of James, Stewart reads a number of "allegories of film" into the actual narrative structures of Hollywood films themselves, often focusing on the literal visual depiction of developing photographs and film stock within the diegesis of these narratives as reflexive departures from the films' otherwise escapist appeals. In efforts such

---

[8] David E. James, *Allegories of the Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[9] Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photosynthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

as this to explicate a critical ontology of film as portrayed in general in motion pictures, what is sometimes left behind is cultural and historical specificity. Additionally, of course, visual invocation of film materials is not necessarily indicative of the *cinematic* process.

Other prominent scholars have subsequently popularized this manner of discerning and reading reflexive allegory in particular classical and post-classical film texts to varied psycho-sexual and political effect. Here a specifically allegorical mode of reflexivity in Alfred Hitchcock's films became a popular topic throughout the 80s, and was widely theorized during this time by scholars such as William Rothman, in *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze,* and Tania Modleski, with 1988's *The Women Who Knew Too Much.*[10] Such studies often focus on what Rothman has termed the "auto-reflexive critique" in which directors like Hitchcock metaphorically illustrate their own subject positions within the film industry via allegorical allusions within the plots and structures of their films. Since the initial boom in reflexivity studies, frequent filmic targets have included not only Hitchcock, but certain counter-cinema *auteurs* such as Jean-Luc Godard – who also figures prominently in Stam's study of the didactic mode.

Similar is the trend toward making reflexivity generic, where 'the reflexive film' is often used synonymously with a particular set of narrative or stylistic tropes. Jane Feuer, for instance, has done critical work in establishing the sub-genre of the backstage musical as a necessarily reflexive genre throughout Hollywood history, where the self-conscious presentation of performance as contrived and artificial is ostensibly reflexive of the work of the musical itself; the spectacular nature and seeming virtuosity of the performances also re-configure the mythology of Hollywood – a process Feuer describes as the fluctuation

[10] William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); and Tania Modleski, *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1988).

between demystification and remythicization.[11] This critical discourse serves the important function of establishing that reflexivity at times is not only ludic, but perhaps even further, *anti*-didactic in regard to its presentation of the actual realities of the film industry. Though "industry" at times can become a monolithic term, I use the term "industrial reflexivity" here simply to refer to an acknowledgment by the text – or paratext – of socio-historical idiosyncrasies within shifting business practices, stylistic imperatives, or technological innovations of Hollywood filmmaking.

Whereas reflexivity in the New New Hollywood seems ever-present and encapsulating of new forms, the academic study of contemporary reflexive practices has waned since the 1990s. In approaching the industrial reflexivity of contemporary Hollywood cinema itself, there have been few in-depth studies done on the subject to date. These include *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (2008) by John Thornton Caldwell, as well as several further articles from scholars such as J.D. Conner.[12] In all of these cases the critical trend has been to indict conservative or ludic reflexivity, usually as it pertains to literal – narrative-based – strategies of reflexive practice, and to almost universally decry these methods as the furthest evolution of a self-serving Hollywood mythology. Caldwell in particular devotes much of his study to analyzing the arguments of entertainment industry trade publications and their self-assessments of the business(es) of Hollywood, as well as behind-the-scenes documentaries, arguing that industrial reflexivity at times becomes the best kind of viral

---

[11] Jane Feuer, "The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," in *Film Genre Reader II,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 443.

[12] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); JD Connor, "The Projections: Allegories of Industrial Crisis in Neoclassical Hollywood," *Representations* 71, 48-76.

marketing campaign for companies attempting to generate interest in their products. Most crucially of all, Caldwell engages with the work of "below-the-line" labor – those film professionals (editors, sound mixers, colorists, etc.) whose salaries historically have appeared below the dividing line on a film budget sheet, and thus do not have guaranteed contracts – and how these professionals do and do not fit into self-mythologizing narratives emanating from the industry itself.

Where my investigation of reflexivity differs from the previous literature is in positing socio-historical contingency as one of the most important markers of what makes "reflexivity" a coherent and useful term in the first place. What I mean by this is to suggest that scholarship must critically move beyond the conjecture that "reminding the audience that they are watching a film" is in-itself constructive or noteworthy. Rather, demystification of narrative processes, industrial practices, and the basic assumptions about how movies work on people is a different order of critique, which cannot be simply accounted for within the current understandings of reflexivity in the critical lexicon. Indeed, once a film is labeled as "reflexive" it becomes exceedingly difficult to challenge this assumption without being called into counter-intuitiveness: how can it not be reflexive if it is "about" Hollywood? Caldwell's work has been constructive here in elucidating the potential destructive nature of some reflexive practices, yet, what is called for is a wider discursive scope that accounts for the new divergent types of metadiscursive critique that are particular to contemporary industrial problems because they are particular to contemporary apparatuses.

In practice, filmmakers themselves seem to be more aware than ever of these diverse dichotomies of reflexive practice and their consequences for a skeptical post-modern

industrial audience. Illustrative of this is the historical example of the opening program of the 2000 Toronto International Film Festival. Titled "The Preludes," the segment presented works by ten prominent Canadian directors who were specifically solicited by the organizers to contribute a short film each with the one and only condition that it be "inspired by the festival" and thus ostensibly, be *about* Canadian filmmaking.[13] This was just one among several special events designed to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Festival; however, as most of the films ultimately reflect on film in general rather than something specifically Canadian, "The Preludes" also give testament to the widely claimed notion concerning TIFF that it functions as a dramatic epicenter for "Hollywood North,"[14] the insinuation that the Canadian Film industry is itself a dependent and contingent ancillary market in the outsourcing of production and financing by Hollywood companies. Indeed, whereas most other prestigious film festivals of the scale of Toronto convene juries and award various critical prizes, TIFF – which is publicly attended – offers only an audience award in addition to its primary focus as an expansive marketplace for international film buyers and sellers, including huge contingents from American studios, who often utilize promotional endeavors at the Festival in order to kick off the domestic (U.S.) awards season each September. Much of the time the audience award, for instance, goes to a popular American film in anticipation of its imminent Oscar run.

Thus, "The Preludes" contain varying levels and types of reflexivity. Atom Egoyan's *The Line* (2000) is among the most literal of the films. In it, in a single long take, Egoyan

---

[13] "Press Release," Bell Canada Enterprises, November 10, 2000, accessed March 4, 2014. http://www.bce.ca/news-and-media/releases/show/bell-canada-and-toronto-international-film-festival-bring-film-to-the-internet

[14] Charlie Keil, "'American Cinema' in the 1990s and Beyond: Whose Country's Filmmaking is it Anyway?" in *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties,* ed. Jon Lewis (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 56.

pans across the legs of filmgoers waiting in line outside a theater. Over this visual, the soundtrack posits a plethora of conversational snippets in which the filmgoers mundanely discuss and debate various aspects of the film to be seen and whether or not they think they will like it. In the words of Egoyan himself, this represents a compendium of every conversation he had ever overheard while waiting in line to see a movie. Because this film, like the rest of "The Preludes," played immediately before the various features premiering at the festival, its ludic reflexivity could scarcely be more literal: its diegesis prefigures a precisely similar scenario to that which festival goers would have just immediately experienced outside the theater. As such, it is no wonder that some festival goers apparently found the film tedious upon forced repeat viewings.[15] In this, it is important to note that although a ludic parody clearly exists in *The Line* it is not one that criticizes any element of film production, distribution, or exhibition, but rather squarely targets the (pro)cinematic audience itself, seemingly siding against film spectators who have been too easily disillusioned by the film products before them.

In contrast, the most abstractly reflexive of the shorts is Guy Maddin's *The Heart of the World* (2000). On its face, it is indeed not immediately apparent what – if anything – this film has to do with the film industry as it portrays a futuristic world populated by characters attempting to save the earth from imminent destruction. The film is shot in the style of a black & white silent film, with jump cuts, and sudden changes in film speed that likewise recall the early period. As if the referent were still opaque, Maddin populates his world with caricatures of Soviet cinema: from Anna the "state scientist" hero to the villain Akmatov "the industrialist", who attempts to impede her trip to the earth's core. In its

[15] Travis Crawford, *Filmmaker Magazine,* online edition, accessed March 4, 2014. http://filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/fall2000/columns/tiff.php#.Uy2ctaJuq7t

finale, the film's only literal signifier of the cinematic apparatus becomes its closing title cards that reveal that “Kino!” – the Russian word for cinema – is what is found to exist at the center of the earth. And here, Maddin's film both creates a structural allegory of cinema, in comparison to Egoyan's literal strategy of reflection, while also substantially shifting the target of critique to that of his fellow filmmakers. Undeniably, the direct appeal to “save the world,” when juxtaposed with Maddin's radical departure from contemporary formal conventions throughout the short film, metaphorically demands that the director's peers likewise breech the contemporaneous mandates on continuity-based narrative filmmaking. The metaphor is also unapologetically cinephilic – claiming that movies are “the very heart of the world” – in comparison to the apparent cynicism of Egoyan's entry.

Crucially bridging both of these modalities is David Cronenberg's *Camera* (2000), which intermixes both a literal invocation of the filmic apparatus with a structural allegory of contemporary cinematic practice. It does this through its literal depiction of a film crew, made up of young children, who prepare a scene and shoot it in what appears to be a household kitchen. While this unfolds, actor Leslie Carlson, the subject of the children's film, tells the story of how the children found a mysterious old camera. As he is made up, Carlson's narration turns bizarre, with him describing the camera as something sinisterly destructive in the contemporary film business. Linked with this literal reflection is a subtle structural allegory: the majority of the film is shot in low contrast video, however the final shot – which the children have been setting up throughout the entire narrative – switches the short to well-lit and color-timed 35mm film. Carlson begins his story again, word-for-word, as “The Camera” now tracks in on him and his macabre expression. The central message of the film may appear obtuse; however, what is clear is the invocation of a

substantial difference between video and film, concurrent with Carlson's meta-commentary on the evils of filmmaking.

Rather than treat these modes in vacuums, throughout the dissertation I crucially interweave discussion of these trends to explore the possibilities and limits of industrial reflexivity in both its literal and metaphorical forms as they exist in the New New Hollywood. Specifically, this entails examining the hypothetical and actual abilities of the literal and metaphorical signs – diverse modes that nevertheless sometimes exist within the very same film – to accurately narrate historically-specific industrial practices. In this vein, though it may sound counter-intuitive to suggest, some texts identified by scholars as literally reflexive are not necessarily reflexive of the industry that they inhabit even if they invoke ostensible signifiers of the cinematic apparatus. Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), for example, connotes the same type of ludic reflexivity discussed by Stam in such classical texts as *Sherlock Jr.* Namely, the literal presentation of a fantastic world in which classical movie characters can and do step off the screen and into the theater to interact with audience members on their own terms. However, as a film of the New Hollywood cinema of the 1980s, Allen's film seems structurally and narratively divorced from considerations of its particular industrial position as a text that mythologizes the transhistorical magic of Hollywood.

Ultimately, the film's reflexive critique comes in the form of its vilification of actual Depression-era Hollywood professionals who betray the heroine's expectations, just as the fictional Classical Hollywood screen character she loves proves innocent and loyal. Beyond the obvious problem of literalizing a figurative misapprehension about how the cinematic apparatus phenomenally operates in the space of the theater, the film's nostalgia for the

classical Hollywood film text avoids the question of implicating Hollywood product in the process of betrayal. By Stam's own definition, it seems hard to describe *Purple Rose of Cairo* as narratively or structurally anti-illusionistic, precisely because the notion that Classical Hollywood film even constitutes illusionism is both literally and figuratively denied by the film. Here, Allen's only substantial reflection upon the cinematic apparatus is to reify its mythic claims.

Similarly, New Hollywood-era films that have sought to accurately illustrate problems of labor and technological practice within the contemporaneous industry have often been historically handicapped by the mandates of their forms. In this vein, Richard Rush's *Stunt Man* (1980) stands as a rare example of a literally reflexive film that deals significantly with the plight of a contemporary below-the-line film professional: the eponymous stunt performer. Throughout the film, the character of the stunt man is seen abused by the director who seems to dramatically undervalue the safety risks taken by the performer. Yet, such a potentially didactic meta-critique on industry practice, which over the years has led to countless deaths on-set, is weakened by the formal disavowal of the actualities of film production. In many scenes, the film-within-a-film devolves into a supra-diegetic depiction of diegetically pro-filmic events: often the stunt being performed seems to transcend the spatio-temporal limits of the diegetic set, and the players travel to – and are filmed from – positions that should not be possible given the diegetic crew and equipment present. In essence, the film thus visually encodes these sequences as scenes from the finished film-within-a-film, and in an oft repeated Hollywood cliché, this usually entails the yelling of “cut” by the director, and the pulling back of the camera to reveal the diegetic set, once again as it should always have been. Structurally, this formal strategy

betrays the legitimate laboriousness and collaborational quality of film set-ups, for the widespread myth that cinema is something that simply *happens* in front of the director's camera all at once. Thus, the film has seemingly performed a below-the-line trade-off in which form challenges content: narrative depiction of dangerous labor practices is compromised by the structural hiding of the actual technicalities of these practices.

The preceding examples foremost suggest that even films that are widely understood as "reflexive" of Hollywood, often maintain, and by their natures even promote, Hollywood mythologies that are demonstrably false. Then, why call it reflexivity? Here lie the stakes for this project, for only through a clear understanding of the continually evolving typologies of reflexivity, can one unpack the consequences of the recognition – or misrecognition – of these allegories of industry by the film-going public. That is to say; how problems from labor practices to technological challenges are contained, and how they can and cannot be challenged through the medium of film. As Caldwell suggests, most literal reflexivity of the last twenty years functions largely to make mythologies concerning filmed entertainment ubiquitous; therefore, investigating the textual and paratextual promotion of these misapprehensions, and the fissures that arise when they are narratively or structurally challenged, allows for a deeper understanding of the trajectory of the New New Hollywood itself.

Chapter Structure

I proceed through the dissertation not only with several case studies of film texts, but also their paratexts; industrial rhetoric in the form of advertising, critical commentary, discussions with filmmakers, and trade journal investigations are amongst the most important sources of primary research for analysis of the New New Hollywood period.

Additionally crucial here, are not only reviews and discussions of the films in publications such as *Variety,* but also the specific debates about techniques utilized in the films which are analyzed in publications such as *American Cinematographer* and *Creative Screenwriting.* In addition to this, I interviewed some film professionals directly concerning their participation on these films in order to get valuable first hand insight from below-the-line workers. Finally, I attended several presentations, exhibitions, and panel discussions at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences featuring several filmmakers' discussions of their work on these films and more generally their philosophies on filmmaking. What is of note is the degree to which the film professionals in these publications, in promotional documentaries, and in person implicitly situate their films within – or outside – larger trends and imperatives of the industry, and their rhetoric thus becomes an essential historiographical tool through which to understand the films themselves as meta-discursive texts.

In Chapter One, I present Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin* (1992) as an investigation of an artisanal mode of filmmaking that was supposedly once possible in early Classical Hollywood, but bereft of power in the contemporaneous industry. Notably, this mythologizing of the person of Charles Chaplin as ultimate early cinema *auteur* – in which Chaplin singularly encapsulates all the major roles of film production (actor, director, writer, composer, editor, etc.) onto himself – is actualized through the classical genre of the Hollywood-specific biographical film. In the chapter, I propose that the New New Hollywood biopic, as a generalizable form of literal reflexivity during this time, is complicated by issues of formal and technological complexity that work against its narrative premise, and begin gesturing toward the allegorical. Namely, this involves a focus

on consulting personnel, designers, and the iconicity of the actors' performances necessary to reinvigorate a public interest in Charlie Chaplin.

In Chapter Two, I argue that Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) functions as an attempted avant-garde Hollywood epic, that metadiscursively constructs a post-mortem ("Love Never Dies") on the state of the New American Cinema director as public intellectual. Here, Coppola's refusal to employ new technologies of visual representation, and the concomitant refusal to fulfill generic expectations are mostly responsible for this phenomenon. What comes to the fore in *Dracula* is a specifically structural reflexivity that largely avoids direct literal instantiation of the contemporaneous film industry, except by way of negation. By "structural" I allude to one of David James's specific categories of metaphorical reflexivity that involves a foregrounding of the specific materiality and processes of motion pictures at the formal level: by what the filmmaker physically does to the film frames.[16] In this regard, I argue that the major concern for the filmmakers – which in this case critically involves the contribution of a large number of pro-filmic visual effects engineers, photographers, and artists – is to struggle with the very stakes of photographic realism in an age of burgeoning digitization.

In comparison, in Chapter Three, I argue that Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996) struggles to locate an interstitial space between the art film and the Hollywood blockbuster. As a post-classical epic historical romance, arguably more than any other film from the New New Hollywood, Minghella's film embodies the critical form of independent-blockbuster with obscure origins and destination. But how does it narrate this struggle for industrial position? Again, metadiscursive practice creates allegories of cinema

[16] James, 237-279.

where more literal modes of reflexivity are, perhaps by necessity, avoided. Yet, rather than focusing on visual metaphors, in this case my argument centers on analysis of the much understudied idea of sound allegory. Here, the work of sound mixing and film editing are paramount to discussion of the film's role as a historical interlocutor for the prescribed usage of digital post-production technologies in the conveyance of intensely complex narrative structures.

In contrast, I focus in Chapters Four and Five on contemporaneous screenwriting precepts. First, I argue that Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002), functions as an aggressive example of a New New Hollywood *film-à-clef*: the diegetic story of a screenwriter working in the industry, which, although fictionalized, is meant to represent actual professionals and their experiences in the film industry at the literal level. Coming out of what some theorists have already called a proverbial "American New Wave," the film ostensibly flouts all traditional narrative rules in an attempt to be an iconoclastic self-reflection on the conventionality of the filmed entertainment industry. More solidly inhabiting the contemporary definition of independent film, *Adaptation* represents a renewal of the discursive debate concerning primary authorship between director and writer, and as such my focus will include analysis of the work of screenwriting manual consultants, the "spec world" of pre-production and filmic adaptation, and most importantly that of the screenwriter himself.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I suggest that Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (2006) marks a mitigated closing to this period of re-alignment of precepts, as it significantly participates in the industry-shifting normalizing of non-linear narrative structure for blockbuster Hollywood productions. Notably, whereas *Adaptation* operates primarily in the literal

mode, Nolan's film constructs its meta-commentary on contemporaneous imperatives of narrative structure through thinly veiled metaphors. In explicating the film's focus on turn-of-the-century acts of magic, I include analysis of the work of the screenwriters, practical effects consultants, and cinematographer, among others. I have chosen to close on Nolan's film because his is also the site that most directly evokes the notion of illusion and illusionism in its metadiscourse on the film industry.

Ultimately, what these case studies narrate in conjunction with one another is a major transformation of the status of cinematic authorship over the course of the last twenty years. What I hope to suggest through this comparative analysis is thus an answer to the question of indeed what makes a filmmaker a filmmaker in the New New Hollywood. Further, I will explore to what extent the evolving forms of industrial critique can and cannot succeed in illustrating both the artistic limitations of independent film production since the 1990s and the effects of digitization on the industry. Throughout the following chapters, I argue that historically-specific contextual understanding of these works and their paratextual industrial rhetoric is essential to assessing the struggle for industrial positioning among Hollywood film professionals of this period. And only in seeking to understand these struggles over technology, aesthetics, and narrative paradigms can the revelatory power of industrial reflexivity, and its limits, be revealed.

CHAPTER ONE
"He Made the Whole World Laugh and Cry": The Mythologization of the Film Artist in *Chaplin*

> The Hollywood-on-Hollywood film is one of Hollywood's favorite genres, the perfect multilevel stage for the medium to celebrate its favorite subject, namely itself. Excavating its own history, paying homage to its estimable contribution to world civilization, rewarding itself with gold statuettes, the motion picture industry didn't need French critical theory to collapse ironically in on itself for an orgy of self-caressing self-reflexivity.
>
> – Thomas Doherty, in his review of *Chaplin*[17]

A completely black screen is suddenly invaded by the back-lit silhouette of a little man who appears in a doorway. The flood of brightness that surrounds this figure reveals little more than his shape. He wears baggy pants, large outward pointing shoes, a bowler hat, and carries a cane. This otherwise anonymous figure stands silently for a moment in front of the camera, before striking a pose by placing a hand on his hip and heavily leaning on his cane so that it dramatically bends. Finally, he hooks the door with the heel of his foot, draws it to a close behind him, and returns the scene to total darkness without having shown his face or uttered a single word. This is the first shot of Richard Attenborough's 1992 biopic *Chaplin,* and it wastes no time in succinctly expressing the warrant of the film to come: that this iconic figure should be immediately recognized as the person of Charles Chaplin, or more precisely as his beloved character known only as the Tramp. The following title sequence proceeds likewise without dialogue, further anticipating that no exposition will be necessary to explain black and white images of Robert Downey, Jr. sitting in front of a lit mirror removing silent film makeup. By the time the film offers up any aural explication, Downey has completely removed costume and face paint alike – effectively the

[17] Thomas Doherty, "*Chaplin* (Review)," *Cineaste,* March 1993, 75.

character facade presented in the opening shot – and has even supra-diegetically morphed into full color. This sequence thereby negotiates the relations of the film's dynamic industrial reflexivity: namely, what will be the interplay between Charles Chaplin, a legend of the Hollywood film industry and the subject of the film; the Tramp, as the iconographic symbol through which the popular memory of Chaplin is almost universally evoked; and the actor Robert Downey, Jr., as an index by which to understand and interpret the importance of Chaplin's life and work.

In this chapter, I argue that *Chaplin* is doubly reflexive towards the Hollywood film industry circa 1992. At the literal level of the narrative, the film criticizes the industry that destroyed its greatest star, and then allows the industry to redeem itself in retrospect. Yet, on the metaphorical level, the film also structurally (utilizing David James's definition of structural) highlights the differences between historical periods in Hollywood in order to indirectly critique contemporary film products. By using *Chaplin* as a crucial example of a film that employs both of these two distinct modes of reflexivity in parallel to one another, I examine the metadiscursive possibilities of the biographical film (or biopic) as a popular form in the New New Hollywood, and argue that it can be difficult to disentangle a programmatic critique of the industry from (self)mythologizing narrative functions inherent to the biopic form. With this case study, I challenge the notion that allegorical and literal reflexivity cannot exist side-by-side one another, and thus argue that a single filmic text can simultaneously utilize multiple reflexive modes to separate and competing effects.

From the beginning of its narrative appeals, *Chaplin* treats Charles Chaplin as a distinctive icon in the history of American filmmaking. Covering the years chronologically between a young Chaplin's first impromptu performance on a vaudeville stage at the age of

five until his receipt of a lifetime achievement award some seventy years later, the film frames the story of his life as one that exists in the contemplation of his career. This is important as – contrary to some critic's summaries – the film does *not* cover his whole life, but rather through this framing makes the argument that Chaplin's *work* is the true point of interest. No matter how much the film necessarily delves into his personal experiences – namely his troubled relationship with his insane mother Hannah (played by Chaplin's own real life daughter Geraldine Chaplin) and a series of failed romances with sometimes much younger women – the film constantly explores these situations primarily in order to assess how they have profoundly influenced Chaplin's career.

Toward this end, *Chaplin* employs a frame story by way of which the viewer begins in "the present" of the 1960s: a point when Chaplin has already had his Hollywood career brought to an ignominious end by being deported from the United States. Here, the plot conceit is that Charlie is re-counting the story of his life to the editor of his soon-to-be-published autobiography.[18] The narrative then flashes back for the majority of the film to the many disparate points in Charlie's career that have brought him to this point. This structure effectively creates a tragic play out of Charlie's fortunes and misfortunes, which culminate at the conclusion of the second act with J. Edgar Hoover – the main villain – successfully banishing Chaplin from the country. The film's finale importantly allows the narrative to project into the future (the 1970s) for a virtual epilogue to the tragedy: the depiction of the U.S. government reversing its decision in time for Charlie to return once

[18] The editor is played by Anthony Hopkins – a subsequent stalwart of biographical film subject roles, with his portrayals of C.S. Lewis, John Quincy Adams, Richard M. Nixon, and most recently Alfred Hitchcock. The last example creating an intriguing dialogistic intertextuality between *Chaplin* and *Hitchcock* (2012) in the way that both films create mythologies about genius *auteurs* who had to fight against the Hollywood studio system; though Hitchcock focuses on the making of a single film (*Psycho*) rather than attempting to cover the whole career of its subject.

more to Hollywood and tearfully accept an Honorary Oscar to thunderous applause.

As I will argue, this is all to suggest that Charles Chaplin was a genius in the system; perhaps *the* genius of the system of early Hollywood, and that the presumed lines of criticism of the film are to be whether or not it has fairly – that is to say accurately – captured the genius' story. By 1992, Charles Chaplin as an icon of a (nearly) lost cinema was once again on the minds of the industry largely due to the efforts of British film historian and preservationist Kevin Brownlow. Granted unprecedented access to the Chaplin archives in Switzerland by Chaplin's widow, Brownlow began a campaign in the early 1980s to recover and restore as much Chaplin material as possible. The culmination of this work, a documentary produced with David Gill, titled *Unknown Chaplin,* debuted on the British ITV Network in early 1983[19] before being presented that fall at the Venice International Film Festival to widespread notoriety.[20] The three-part film presents commentary from Chaplin's former associates, as well as assembled footage of previously unreleased Chaplin material. The effect was two-fold. First, the documentary presented new material from a silent era filmmaker, and thereby not only altered the canon of extant Chaplin films, but invigorated critical interest in his earliest methods of filmmaking; after all, much of the footage assembled by Brownlow and Gill consists of "outtakes." Second, the restorations forced a wider contemplation of the very concept of "lost films," and thereby arguably a greater appreciation for the bits of film history re-captured by the archivists.

In October of 1992, only months before the world premiere of Attenborough's film, CBS/Fox in collaboration with Image Entertainment announced that it would release

---

[19] Chris Dunkley, "Playing It Safe," *Financial Times*, January 26, 1983.

[20] Nigel Andrews and John Pym, "Good Woody – and Chaplin Too," *Financial Times*, September 9, 1983. The reviewers of the festival go on to lament that the idiosyncratic form in which the three-part film was presented included that it was dubbed in French and shown on low quality videotape.

brand-new laserdisc editions of Chaplin's most celebrated films.[21] This was promoted extensively in advance of *Chaplin*'s release due to the digital re-mastering of original film negatives made available by the Chaplin archives, which likewise began releasing newly-struck and restored prints (that would also eventually make their way to home video audiences through distributors such as Kino and Criterion), as well as production logs and other archival materials from Chaplin's collection. This effectively implicates Attenborough's film in a cross-promotional enterprise to re-issue, re-release, and importantly to re-distribute (on various home video formats) the works of Charles Chaplin for a whole new audience. As early as 1993 – in the midst of the film's first theatrical run – Downey himself spoke to this goal of the production when he said (in response to a question about whether or not the film will be successful) "The most important thing to me is that people go see Chaplin movies."[22]

Thus, the important question to contemplate is what Chaplin as a symbol represents for the New New Hollywood. Here, the tagline on the film poster indicates the perception of his ongoing reputation – as well as speaks to the ultimate promotional message of the film – when it states "He made the whole world laugh and cry... he will again." Beyond the possible allusion to additional restorations in the wake of Brownlow's work, the anachronism of the phrase echoes the anachronism of Chaplin's career, and likewise points toward an attempted reclamation of Chaplin's legend. With this, *Chaplin* is an illustrative example of the state of the biographical film going into the New New Hollywood period; it tempers classical emphases on the championing of fame acquisition and success as a marker of

---

[21] Dennis Hunt, "CBS-Fox / Image Promise Dramatic Restoration of Chaplin Films," *Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 1992.

[22] Cyndi Strivers, "Trampled," *Premiere,* January 1993, 70.

greatness, with a reiteration of the classical tropes of perseverance against adversity and individualized talent as the affirmation of righteousness. Further, and most aggressively, "...he will again," hints at what I will argue is the structural impulse in the film toward crediting Chaplin as a necessary co-author of his own biography. It has been claimed of the biopic as a genre, that at its most basic it is a Hollywood version of public history.[23] Of course a Hollywood-*themed* biopic is not only a narration of history, but also specifically a narration of Hollywood history, and I will consider *Chaplin* in comparison to other Hollywood-on-Hollywood films from this period. In this vein, Attenborough's *Chaplin* is not just a summation of the life and career of Charles Chaplin; it also creates an essential metadiscourse on classical Hollywood movie artistry in transition. Importantly, it does this by combining literally reflexive narrative invocations of industrial history, with metaphorical allusions to Chaplin's own shifting modes of obsolete artisanal production.

Lord Attenborough and the Biopic in the New Hollywood

Over the decades leading up to the production of *Chaplin,* Richard Attenborough crafted a name for himself in the British and American film industries as a celebrated actor and director. With early efforts such as *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), Attenborough became noteworthy for his sustained interest in exploration of the futility of war – applying such critiques potentially controversially even to 'the good war.'[24] Most famously, he supposedly struggled for 20 years to make his most celebrated film *Gandhi* (1982), an epic telling of the life and death of the great Indian leader who preached

[23] George F. Custen, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History,* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

[24] His critique of the badly mismanaged Allied Operation Market Garden during the later days of World War II stands in ironic contrast with his arguably more patriotic earlier appearance as an actor in the World War II prisoner-of-war camp drama *The Great Escape* (1963)

non-violence in response to British colonial oppression.[25] This reputation and success as a director has only been eclipsed in more recent years by Attenborough's formal recognition as a distinguished representative of the United Kingdom in the dramatic arts: knighted in 1976, created a peer in 1993, and awarded the Presidency of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in 2003.[26]

One of Attenborough's preferred generic forms, during this time of increasing cultural cachet, has undoubtedly been the biographical picture. His success in the 1980s with both *Gandhi* and *Cry Freedom* (1987) – a depiction of the last days of Anti-apartheid South African activist Steve Biko – garnered him enough genre-specific acclaim that by the time he began work on *Chaplin*, some press had begun labeling him as the quintessential maker of film biographies. Charles Maland, in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, for instance, claims that the project might seem unappealing to anyone else, but that it distinctly fits Attenborough's recent modus operandi, going so far as to call *Chaplin* "the culmination of his work in the genre."[27] By comparison however, a 1993 article in *Premiere* suggests that Attenborough may have only settled on the *Chaplin* biography as a compromise suggested by Universal Pictures when they rejected his plan for a film on American Revolutionary figure Thomas Paine.[28] If the filmmaker-specific biopic is an ideal form for interrogating Hollywood industry, Attenborough's output in this specific sub-generic form is limited to one film; this suggests that his filmic interest in the industry appears to be secondary to his

---

[25] Stephen Hay, "Attenborough's *Gandhi*," *The Public Historian* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 86.

[26] David Robinson, *Richard Attenborough* (London: British Film Institute, 2008).

[27] Charles Maland, "How Much Chaplin Appears in Chaplin? A Look at Attenborough's Screen Biography," Literature/Film Quarterly 25, no. 1 (January 1997): 49-50. Maland prefaces his charge with "And who would possibly dare to make a film about such a brilliant comic performer as Chaplin, knowing full well that a mistake in casting could easily sink the project? The answer, of course, is Sir Richard Attenborough, whose 1982 *Gandhi* and 1987 *Cry Freedom* (on South African apartheid for Steve Biko) helped established his credentials as a maker of biographical films."

[28] Strivers, 67.

more generalized fascination with the biographical film form, and also his continual adeptness at employing it to critical success well into the New New Hollywood era. Indeed, following *Chaplin*, Attenborough's next three films – his entire 1990s output – fall into this genre of historical biography, but none concern audio-visual entertainers: *Shadowlands* of 1993 (about author C.S. Lewis), *In Love and War* of 1996 (focusing on a young Ernest Hemingway), and *Red Owl* of 1999 (featuring the eponymous conservationist).

Here, the most idiosyncratic distinction about *Chaplin* when defined as a Hollywood biopic circa 1992 seems to be the way in which this generic decision has been portrayed paratextually as an untimely one by the filmmakers involved. In the aptly titled making-of documentary *Chaplin: Strolling Into The Sunset*, Attenborough tends to focus on only two subjects concerning the philosophy of his film: biopics and impersonation. Concerning the nature of the biopic in contemporary cinema, Attenborough makes several statements suggesting that the biopic as a genre has fallen out of fashion, if it was ever popular in Hollywood in the first place. This point is apparently considered by the director to be self-evident to even the casual film viewer, with his suggestion: "It was very difficult to get set-up. As you may well imagine, making a biographical film is not the most easy subject matter in which to finance."[29] Yet the suggestion that biopics were out of fashion in the industry of 1992 seems awkward at best for a director whose work competed in the very same award season with such films as *Malcolm X* (1992), *The Babe* (1992), and *Hoffa* (1992). Indeed, the critically-acclaimed output seems riddled with "Great Men" biopics, to use a term from Dennis Bingham, who argues *via* case study that many of the traditional connotations of the

[29] *Chaplin: Strolling Into the Sunset,* (Lionsgate, 2008), DVD (Lionsgate, 2008). Promotional documentary included as a special feature for *Chaplin* home video release.

classical biopics continue into the contemporary period.[30] Furthermore, in an exhaustive study, Carolyn Anderson has shown that the biopic has been a fairly popular and pervasive form in Hollywood from the 1930s through at least the 1980s.[31] Maland also points to an array of entertainer-subject specific biopics – including *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942), *The Glenn Miller Story* (1954), and *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) – dating back to the classical period to suggest that in every way, *Chaplin* should not be considered generically out of the ordinary.[32]

George F. Custen's study, on the other hand, tracks more than a hundred biographical films up to 1960, and suggests that the biopic is a largely understudied and misunderstood form through which the U.S. film industry created essentializing myths about American history and ideology.[33] Custen argues that whereas the biographical film was immensely ubiquitous in the classical period, its popularity has waned ever since. However, Custen's argument seems to concern the proportion of biopics to other films in Hollywood, and though made at precisely the same time as Attenborough's own suggestions about the untimeliness of the genre, his claim does not necessarily refute Attenborough's premise. In particular, Custen suggests that biopic production, as a sign of the times, has largely switched to other distribution mechanisms such as cable television, a medium arguably better suited for the genre.[34] The filmmaker biography, in this context, seems to reinforce

---

30 Dennis Bingham, *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

31 Carolyn Anderson, "Biographical Film," in *Handbook of American Film Genres,* ed. Wes D. Gehring (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 331-35. For her entry, Anderson conducted a study of over 200 American films that she classifies as "bio-pics."

32 Maland, 50.

33 Custen, 1-31.

34 Ibid, 2. Custen claims after a peak (in terms of number of films) during the 1950s, that "the biopic seems, since the 1960s, to have faded away to a minor form," yet he lists the cable TV channels AMC and TNT as new popular destinations for biographical films.

similar mythical narratives about the film industry specifically, as the wider array of biopics have done concerning American culture more generally. For Custen, this primarily includes the promotion of fame as a marker of success, and the creation of a particular demographic archetype that best fits this ideology from a twentieth century hegemonic perspective. From the classical period onward, an astounding 73% of biopics have focused on a person who had died by the time of filming, 72% are about people born before 1900, 72% are about men, 57% have focused on people in the entertainment industries, and 44% have been Oscar-nominated.[35] Of course, *Chaplin* satisfies all of these criteria.

The crux of the problem with understanding the biopic as an industrially reflexive form is, thus, not that it is proscribed from the industry, but primarily that there is nothing definitively *cinematic* about the genre. This may seem to be a challenge to Custen's claim that the biographical film from its earliest stages depended on the advancement of a Hollywood version of public history; as he suggests, the biopic "routinely integrates disparate historical episodes of selected individual lives into a nearly monochromatic 'Hollywood view of history.'"[36] Yet, Custen's definition of "Hollywood" myth-making largely entails content-driven emphasis on supposed American ideological imperatives, as well as Fordist modes of production specific to the Hollywood Studio Era that streamlined this type of storytelling convention. This emphasis on "disparate historical episodes" is obviously formal – as it clearly involves the implementation of specific types of narrative structuring – yet it is not purely cinematic: it is worth noting that many of the classical era biopics discussed by Custen are based on written works that just as adequately frame public lives in this way. As undeniably conducive to industrial reflection a filmmaker-themed biography

[35] Ibid, 50.
[36] Ibid, 3.

may be at the narrative level, it becomes clear that *formally* the biopic can be expressly *uncinematic* in its mode of reflexivity. That is to say, it may tell a story that focuses on the industry, but do so without as a matter of necessity relying on cinema-specific tools.

In this vein, *Chaplin* is a complex case. At the level of the story, Attenborough simply turns out a film about the 'greatest movie star' (rather than the greatest baseball player, etc.) with more emphasis on the 'greatest' than on the 'movie star.' The critical press seem to note just such a phenomenon concerning presumptions of Attenborough's true interest in making *Chaplin*; as *Premiere* tellingly notes "For Attenborough, Chaplin is the cultural equivalent of Gandhi," and Attenborough too makes the explicit comparison: "In the world in which I lived, nobody had a greater impact than Charlie."[37] Doherty furthers this point of comparison between the two films when he claims that Attenborough's transition in subject matter is "not so much a move from the sublime to the ridiculous as a leap into a different order of sublimity."[38]

Yet, the Hollywood biopic is foremost a mythologizing force, and, when literally depicting Hollywood itself, it is likewise a *self*-mythologizing force. With *Chaplin* as the crucial example, a return to the plot framing conceit demonstrates that it is hard to argue the film, structurally speaking, is anything other than a tragedy. Yet, the cinematographic presentation of the framing device also intriguingly creates an air of self-awareness within the film, as if the text were to realize and acknowledge its role in generating narrative myths. This comes particularly to the fore when the elderly version of Chaplin, as narrator, explains to his editor the method by which he originally created the iconic Tramp. It is of note that this conversation is explicitly connected in the narrative to a debate between

[37] Strivers, 66.
[38] Doherty, 76.

Chaplin and the editor about how Chaplin has portrayed this event in his written autobiography. “I mean the words just poured out, it practically wrote itself,” says Chaplin, before the film flashes back to this moment.

The younger Chaplin comes through a costume and prop storage room door and is immediately drawn to a hat rack; the reverse shot reveals in his point-of-view why this has been the case as the soon-to-be infamous bowler glows with a supernatural blue aura around it, beckoning Charlie to come near. In slow motion, it seems to dance up his arm and onto his head as he smiles proudly. There comes a racketing noise from off-screen that stands out chiefly, because Charlie reacts as if he has heard it despite the fact that this has been an otherwise diegetically silent flashback. His reaction shot confirms that this is the sound of his signature cane, which is anthropomorphically shaking about, attempting to catch Charlie's attention, before it launches itself toward his outstretched hand. But the editor challenges this story's veracity when he interjects “Bullshit, and you know it.” On this line, the image freezes the moment in time with the cane in mid-air, almost as if the word itself has prevented it from ascending into Charlie's hand, hypothetically completing the mythical tale. It is important to note that an almost unnoticeable special effects shot is employed here, by which only part of the screen is frozen, while Downey is still able to move his head and suddenly direct his gaze off-screen seemingly toward the voice that is calling him out, thereby making this a specifically *cinematic* joke.

“But the truth is so... boring,” says the elder Chaplin as he begins to recount what actually happened. This, of course, more appropriately involves the depiction of several hours worth of trying-on different combinations of hats, canes, and shoes. How this is portrayed is key, as it involves one of the first instances of structurally coding the film so as

to approximate how it would look and sound if it were made by Chaplin himself. First, this is accomplished by simulating the cinematography of an early cinema hand-cranked – then sped-up – silent film, thereby allowing Downey to pratfall around the room at a rapid pace in the style of silent film comedy. Second, over this visual rhetoric, composer John Barry substitutes Charles Chaplin's own musical composition for the original score. These two formal devices collude to suggest formally, that this is a story being told directly by Chaplin (in a fashion precisely similar to his directorial style), even while the narrative stipulates that this is *not* the story that Chaplin, the character, wanted to tell. This becomes exceedingly difficult to deny as a conscious part of the cinematographic strategy of the film, especially with *American Cinematographer*'s suggestion that director of photography Sven Nykvist not only constantly viewed Chaplin's films, but also consulted with the son and grandson of Charles Chaplin's original cinematographer Rollie Tothero.[39] I will return to the notion of structural allegory, but the ultimate importance of this sequence is that it demonstrates that the film text is reflexive of its implication in the dissemination of truth claims about Chaplin's legend, and that this involves interrogating already widely-perceived myths about his life.

But is this a story that the major studios wanted to tell? The publicity for the film suggests not[40], and this is key to understanding the film's metadiscursive industrial commentary. According to historian and archivist Marc Wanamaker, who served as a technical and historical consultant on *Chaplin,* Attenborough's original plan was for an epic

---

[39] David Heuring, "Nykvist Continues Storied Career with Chaplin," *American Cinematographer,* January 1993, 37.

[40] Strivers, 65. Strivers notes that according to Attenborough, he spent two years developing the project at Universal Studios, only to have the company back-out at the last minute. Though it is unclear specifically why Universal ultimately passed on *Chaplin*, Strivers speculates that there was fear that Chaplin was either too unlikeable when divorced from his Tramp character, or that he would be unrecognizable to younger film-goers at any rate.

ten-hour miniseries that would have aired on television.[41] This would have allowed for a much wider depiction of people and events in Chaplin's life than the feature film, however, the financing was evidently completely withdrawn by MCA Universal at an extremely late moment in the multi-year pre-production for the series. According to Wanamaker: "After all this preparation with the studios, the costumes were designed, everybody had their scripts, everybody was pretty much ready to shoot, when Universal pulled the plug. And we never got a proper answer of why. I've asked Attenborough many times; he doesn't know particularly why."[42]

The published paratextual materials seem to echo this point: the very title of a 1993 write-up in *Premiere* –"Trampled" – is telling on this account. A clever play on the reader's presumed recognition of Chaplin's lovable character, it also suggests that the film *Chaplin* was one marked by a stifling of creative force. The sub-title goes further, exclaiming "For Richard Attenborough, deciding to direct 'Chaplin' was easy. Getting somebody to pay for it? Quite a different story, poppet."[43] The article foregrounds the suggestion that *Chaplin* was caught in a pre-production nightmare, passing ownership several times while Attenborough struggled to complete it. The director was evidently forced to compromise much of his original concept and vision so that *Chaplin* could be independently financed in a shorter form for theaters. As Wanamaker explains of the tense situation after Universal dropped the project:

> He [Attenborough] shopped it around to different film companies. And he got Carolco, and they said "all right, but it has to be a film: two hours and twenty minutes, no longer. That's it. Not two and a half hours. Two hours and twenty minutes, no longer." So Attenborough had to go back to the drawing board, take this

[41] Marc Wanamaker, interview by author, Los Angeles, February 27, 2014.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Strivers, 65.

> ten hour miniseries script, and condense it down by cutting, cutting, and cutting, into a movie script of two hours and twenty minutes... Can you imagine? He did it. He managed it. He had to manage it; he was paying a fortune in hold money.[44]

Wanamaker has additionally suggested that the work of trimming the script was equaled by the stress – subsequent to the shooting of the film – of editing a four hour work print down to Carolco's prescribed 140 minutes.[45] Attenborough reportedly said of the editing process "it was agony."[46] Nevertheless, the film was completed to the independent production company's standards and released to theaters in the winter of 1992 to some critical acclaim, but ultimately a domestic commercial loss; this is possibly attributable to several years' worth of accrued costs. Although this anecdote seems to contribute to the mythology of artistic pressure, it also testifies in real terms to the limitations placed on representation by the mandates of the feature film form: in this case the forced excision of 77% of an intended narrative on Hollywood.

Mimetic Ambiguity and the Icon as Formal Contradiction

In terms of the film's promotional materials, most intriguing is Attenborough's public discussion of "impersonation," which evolves throughout the *Strolling into the Sunset* documentary to further emphasize the virtuosity of Downey's performance. Biographer David Robinson here reiterates this point when he notes that he was "very nervous about asking a modern actor to impersonate Chaplin."[47] Robinson seems to suggest that this has more to do with the unparalleled talent of Chaplin personally, rather than any overall shift in artistic merit across periods in Hollywood history. Nevertheless, the comments continue

---

[44] Wanamaker, interview. Wanamaker maintains that Attenborough may have lost as much as a million dollars of his own money in the interim period: "So Attenborough, with his own money paid guards to guard the studios... He had to pay the rent to the land owners, he had to keep Stuart Craig and others on salary, he couldn't allow them to leave."

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] *Chaplin: Strolling Into the Sunset* promotional documentary.

to assume wholesale that accuracy and fairness, in this case, are interchangeable. In essence, the warrant of the film in the eyes of the filmmakers returns to the implicit notion that if Downey in particular – or the film in general – fails, then it will have been a failure of impersonation above anything else: the inability of the filmmakers to adequately duplicate Chaplin on-screen and thus to perpetuate the necessary message concerning his film artistry.

When interpreted in this way, dramatic mimesis is arguably a necessary component of the film's appeal. Doherty's review seems to succinctly stumble onto the specific stakes for this particular biography when he notes that *Chaplin* is in a specific category of biopic that will rely on a relatively unknown actor to become the man he plays, specifically noting by comparison that this will not be the case for *Malcolm X* or *Hoffa*.[48] I would argue that in the public perception of *Chaplin*, the specific performativity necessary to the story further exacerbates this notion. First, in general, the story of a performer will always necessarily involve an attempt to duplicate that performer's routine – whether this entails singing, dancing, or comedically pratfalling in a specifically recognizable way. Second, and more importantly to the stakes of Attenborough's film, this involves duplicating supposedly non-replicable traits. After all, the entire premise of the film is that Chaplin is a singular icon, specifically *because* no one is like him, nor can be. This is unlike non-performance-based biopics precisely because successful mimicry is contingent upon demonstrating the *cinematic* virtuosity of Charles Chaplin, through specifically *cinematic* means (at least

[48] Doherty, 76. "The two classic biopic strategies are 1) to cast an actor whose established weight and stature forges a sort of double barreled impersonation in which the persona of the great star subsumes the persona of the great man (recent examples include Denzel Washington in *Malcolm X* and Jack Nicholson in *Hoffa*), or 2) to cast a relatively untested talent whose unfamiliar screen presence can bleed into the original with the force of revelation (Larry Parks in *The Jolson Story*, Gary Busey in *The Buddy Holly Story*)." Doherty indicates that Chaplin encapsulates the second category.

partially via Robert Downey's performance of him, which is contingent on the formal tools of the motion picture). For comparison, this is not like *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936), whose protagonist is primarily noteworthy for having invented a scientific process that saved lives; rather, this is the story of a protagonist whose notoriety comes almost exclusively from his ability to entertain people on film. Downey himself fuels this notion amongst the press when he says "Chaplin was a genius, but you can fake being a genius when you're being filmed – you just sit there like you're a genius. The hard thing is to get up and do what the genius did physically."[49] This is the ultimate textual contradiction for *Chaplin*; the film, by necessity, involves a formal strategy that challenges its own ostensible narrative purpose.

From the outset, emphasis is given, within the film's paratextual addresses, to the perceived success of Downey's duplication of that which is essentially Chaplin. Much press goes even further by suggesting that the perception of success or failure of Downey's performance is perhaps the only appropriate line of criticism of the film itself; a negative critique will likely focus on Downey's inability to portray the greatness of Chaplin, while a positive critique will inherently appreciate Downey's virtuosity in achieving this end. *Sight & Sound* certainly demonstrates this theory in effect with the straightforward indictment "A rambling bio-pic, short on detail and insight, but rescued from irrelevance by Robert Downey Jnr's brilliant performance."[50] In such a sparse review, referring to a film as "rambling," charging that it is without "detail" or "insight," and yet still coming to a positive conclusion in under 20 words, highlights the level of importance generally attributed to

[49] "The tours de force Oscar voters love," *Premiere,* October 1992, 102.
[50] Mark Kermode, "*Chaplin*," *Sight & Sound,* June 1993, 66. A review of the film accompanying its imminent home video release.

performance, in this case seemingly paramount over all other aspects of the film.

This would tend to suggest that Downey as the mimetic performer is one of the primary filmmakers of the piece. It is Maland who points out in his write-up of the film, that Downey spent over a month in consultation with pantomime and scholar of Chaplin's performance methods Dan Kamin, who supposedly taught him how to act – in the most literal sense – like Charles Chaplin.[51] Wanamaker reiterates this point, stressing the multilevel intensive approach of Downey's training and research for the role:

> Robert Downey, Jr., who was playing him [Chaplin] of course was tutored. For example, he needed a dialogue coach. Then David Robinson tutored him on the general history of Chaplin, you know, what he was like, what his personality was like. Then he had another tutor for movement and dance, because Chaplin was a great dancer, a great stunt man, [with] great movements. [Chaplin was] a mime, he had to study mime, and do all this kind of stuff, and then I was brought in to tell him about Chaplin and his social life.[52]

Virtually all the press for the film, 1992-1993, focuses in some way on the rigorous job Downey undertook to become Chaplin and the amount of risk involved for the film should the public perception be that he has failed. An October ’92 write-up of likely Oscar contenders “The Tours de Force Oscar Voters Love,” calls Downey the “Key Player” concerning *Chaplin*'s chances with Academy voters.[53] It is worth noting that Downey is one of the few actors in the article to get this distinction, which calls the *screenwriter* the “Key Player” of *Glengary Glen Ross*, the *producer* the “Key Player” of *Lorenzo's Oil*, and so on.[54]

Yet, all of this is complicated by the historical and sustained textual and paratextual slippage between images of Downey (made up as Chaplin) and those of Chaplin himself. The January 1993 *American Cinematographer*, for example, features Downey in Chaplin

---

51 Maland, 53.
52 Wanamaker, interview.
53 “The tours de force Oscar voters love,” 102.
54 Ibid, 102-103.

makeup on its cover. Misleadingly, the above-the-title feature promises that this issue will "Focus on documentary filmmaking," and more egregiously still, the cover story is titled: "*Chaplin:* A Life in the Limelight."[55] None of these phrases give any indication whatsoever that the larger-than-life cover photo is of an actor playing a part in a narrative film. On the contrary, the wording of the cover seems to suggest that the focus will be on Chaplin, the man, rather than *Chaplin,* the film. Nothing but the italicization of his name hints otherwise. And here lies the critical matter of concern with the Attenborough biopic: that any interest in the film itself – and its appeals – has become completely secondary to the review and revision of the life and times of its notorious subject.

The 1993 *Premiere* write-up on the production also contributes to this kind of confusion, only in exactly the opposite fashion. Though explicitly about Richard Attenborough's quest to make the film, the magazine integrates several images of Charles Chaplin himself throughout the article. This time the motive of this iconographic confusion is laid out early in the piece when the caption accompanying a photo of Chaplin and Jackie Coogan from *The Kid* declares "CHAPLIN ON VIDEO: Chaplin's greatest features and shorts are available on CBS/FOX Video..."[56] Subsequent pages – refraining from this original explicit advertising appeal – pair captioned images of Chaplin from *The Gold Rush*, *City Lights*, *Modern Times*, and *The Great Dictator* with the written article that is exclusively about problems on the set of Attenborough's film. And thus the paratext of *Chaplin,* relying on iconographic confusion, begins also to indexically associate itself with the original Chaplin films in a bit of cross-promotional marketing. Although these images are ostensibly

---

[55] *American Cinematographer*, January 1993, cover.

[56] Strivers, 68. The ad goes on to offer up the price of $19.98 each for VHS, or $68.98 each for "A New CAV Laserdisc Series."

still linked to the home video ad, by the conclusion of the article, they have become the only visuals on the page, replacing larger images from the film set earlier in the piece. This effectively suggests not only that the appeal of *Chaplin* is inextricably linked to the actual work of Charles Chaplin, but also that – counter-intuitively as it may seem – the production stills from the film itself do not as adequately convey the meaning of the text as do the actual images of its famous subject.

This slippage is compounded by the fact that Attenborough's claims about the original virtuosity of Downey's performance seem upon inspection of the film to be misleading. In an interview concerning the perceived importance of specifically not using Charles Chaplin's work at any point as a substitute for originally-shot footage, Attenborough outright claims that everything the viewer sees in *Chaplin* is Downey's re-creation, and that absolutely no appropriation of Chaplin has been employed in the film. However, this is patently false on at least two glaring occasions. First, in a scene that depicts Charlie and his brother viewing the first cut of *The Kid* in Charlie's screening room, actual footage of Jackie Coogan in that original film is used. This already is tantamount to essentializing Charles Chaplin down to his iconic image alone; as if to suggest that appropriation of a scene from one of his *films* (that he not only starred in, but also wrote, directed, and scored) is fair game so long as the actual pictorial image of Chaplin's Tramp does not appear. Any debate on this subject becomes moot, however, after a reaction shot of Charlie and Syd laughing at the Coogan footage is followed by a glimpse of the final shot in that sequence from *The Kid*: one that as a matter of fact does contain the fleeting image of Charles Chaplin as the Tramp scampering with Coogan away from a police officer. Here, Chaplin's comparatively long distance of framing aids Attenborough in his charade; the

camera is not quite close enough to fully reveal Chaplin's face in comparison to Downey's.

The final sequence of the film also, and much more explicitly, violates Attenborough's proposed tenet to not use the image of Chaplin. When the elderly Charlie is invited back to Hollywood for his Lifetime Achievement Award, the film treats the viewer to the actual montage shown by the Academy on that very day. A compendium of scenes from *City Lights*, *The Great Dictator*, *The Gold Rush*, *The Kid*, and *The Circus* plays with their accompanying soundtracks: the actual iconography of Charles Chaplin, at last replacing the simulations. At first, there is a medium shot of Downey in heavy make-up being helped to the podium of the theater stage, with the internally framed, film-within-the-film montage of Chaplin's work only occupying a space above his head – diegetically occupying a fictional space in the film's narrative. However, a moment later, Attenborough dispenses with this formality by effectively cutting from his film to the presentation of the montage itself. Only the sound of the laughs from the audience and the echo of the montage-soundtrack simulating the theater's acoustics maintain diegetic continuity with the elder Charlie onstage. Though editor Anne Coates does cut back to reaction shots as he watches the scenes play out, Downey is in such heavy elderly make-up, that he becomes almost unrecognizable as the Tramp on the screen he is watching.[57] This creative decision is important for two reasons. First, at the narrative level it highlights the humanity of Chaplin as a filmmaker divorced from that with which he is most often associated: his onscreen persona. Indeed, the film's finale reverses the set-up of the opening sequence, which had begun the film imaging Chaplin as the darkened silhouette of the Tramp. Here, the diegetic

[57] According to Strivers, it supposedly took seven hours to apply this make-up to Downey on the day of filming, and she notes: "His hands have been largely immobilized by layers of latex wrinkles. He can barely open his mouth. His assistant has to help him when he wants a cigarette, and he can drink only through a straw." 69.

depiction of the Academy Awards tribute is the narrative culmination of the tragedy of Chaplin's life, closing on his own tearful contemplation of his bygone career. The Academy acknowledgment becomes the ultimate square-up by which Hollywood can atone for its mistakes and reclaim Chaplin as one of its own.

Second, Downey's figuration on-screen, formally, also adds to his essential iconicity an element of indexical relation to Chaplin's oeuvre, ultimately shedding the mentality of physical resemblance to the Tramp so that he may physically stand beside the Chaplin films and direct primary attention to them. In effect, Downey—aided by Coates and Nykvist—is finally allowed to become a spectator of the icon he has been portraying for the last two hours, and his tears of sadness suggest foremost that he is moved by the work. Turning away from the screen toward the diegetic audience (and effectively the film audience as well), he recedes from the frame as Nykvist readjusts his camera onto the montage playing above him. No longer addressed to the diegetic audience in front of the elderly Charlie, the montage is now addressed directly to the viewer, with the borders of the diegetic movie screen becoming coterminous with that of the film itself. The last image is the final shot from *The Circus* in which Chaplin looks directly into the camera before scampering off into the sunset; effectively, Downey cedes the final "bow" as Chaplin to that of the man himself. An iris-out brings the montage—and Attenborough's film—to a close. The film allows Chaplin's own work to have the final word in his biography.

The essential contradiction of the film lies in the fact that its virtuosity is both contingent upon and destroyed by its mimetic component. Jonathan Romney of *Sight & Sound* is indicative of the trend here, when he praises aspects of Downey's performance, all the while suggesting that the only "proper Charlie" is the one revealed in the closing

montage.[58] At least one contemporaneous critic concurs with this insinuation, when he argues of the final montage that "These clips provoke a genuine emotional response, and pay tribute to what made Chaplin special more than anything that preceded it [in the film]."[59] More generally, this stands as the ultimate problem of the biographical film form as a mode of industrial reflexivity: it literally asks to be judged on its self-mythologizing content alone, even if it alternatively contains more dissonant formal and structural critiques of the industry. For all of Attenborough's claims concerning the seeming timeliness or untimeliness of the production of *Chaplin*, at the level of the narrative it is in theory transhistorical. It does not matter whether it is made immediately after Chaplin's exile, ten years later, or even fifty years in the future; the 'story' remains the same. The only elements that give the film's reflexivity its historical contingency are its formal strategies in comparison to other films released around the same time, and, at the most basic level, the initial creative decision to make the film when it was made (as opposed to some other time). So the question becomes: what other structurally-reflexive components of *Chaplin,* apart from Downey's impersonation, evolve through the film parallel to – and arguably on a separate trajectory from – its narrative appeals?

Structural Allegory as Indirect Negative Critique of the Present

In a scene that predicts later appeals from *The Artist* (2011), Chaplin argues with his brother on the topic of whether or not the Tramp should "talk." Charlie is convinced that the Tramp's essential appeal cannot survive the ascendancy of synchronized sound film, and he scoffs at the suggestion that as an artist he can simply adapt to the changing times. As much as this diegetic debate between characters functions to propel the literal narrative of the

[58] Jonathan Romney, "*Chaplin*," *Sight & Sound,* January 1993, 43.
[59] Edmond Grant, "*Chaplin*," *Films in Review* 44, no. 5/6 (May/June 1993): 193.

film, this scene is also one of a scattering of metaphorically reflexive moments in the film's allegorizing of contemporaneous industrial problems. The most obvious precept of the industry that Attenborough has suggested he would like to critique is that the Hollywood of the '90s is overly restrictive on the creative minds that seek to work within it (as the classical Hollywood had been as well in various ways). This becomes a self-reflexive moment for the film with Attenborough's continued paratextual frustration with having been beholden to major film studios, even in the production of an ostensibly independent motion picture. As I will suggest further in later chapters, this becomes an increasingly contentious issue when the term "independent" becomes less synonymous with "independence" and more frequently is used simply as a stand-in for "low-budgeted." When interpreted in this way, Charles Chaplin, as an icon, comes to symbolize not just the possibilities of the old Hollywood, but also the disadvantages of the new. And where the tragic frame story directly argues that Chaplin was unable (or unwilling, as in the case of the ascendancy of sound) to continue to succeed in the paradigmatically and technologically shifting industry, the audio-visual style of the film further suggests indirectly that a hypothetical Chaplin – an independent filmmaker in the truer artisanal sense – also could not hypothetically succeed within the industrial parameters of the New Hollywood where even "independent" films are seemingly managed by major corporations.

The notion that *Chaplin* is nostalgic for the lost possibility of artisanal filmmaking in America comes forth most vociferously in a scene in which Charlie and his cadre flee across state lines, smuggling the negatives of *The Kid* with them so that they may finish editing the film before it is confiscated by authorities. Notably this, like the scene of the Tramp's invention, is structurally coded as a Chaplin film. Just as the gang's car passes over the state

line into Utah, the soundtrack erupts into the Chaplin-penned score from *City Lights* (1930); specifically, this is the frenetic main title theme that plays whenever the Tramp stumbles into a variety of chaotic schemes to bilk authorities in the bustling city. Paired to this sound are the images of Sydney Chaplin attempting to sneak his famous brother – disguised via shawl and wheelchair as an elderly woman – into a Salt Lake City hotel with the reels of the unfinished film. The scene plays out at an accelerated pace which again simulates the look of a film shot at 18 frames-per-second but projected at 24; Charlie and his brother stumble around the street at the comedically rapid speed that invokes the popular perception of what silent films 'looked like,' not because they actually did, but because this is how they appear now. In a way that also approximates – at least the popular perception of – sound-era silent films (such as *City Lights*), there are a few scattered diegetic noises in this otherwise silent scene: a car door slamming, a motor-car speeding by, and so on. By the time Charlie must stand up out of the wheelchair to help his assistant carry it up some stairs, before climbing back in and hoping no one noticed (a nod to the Chaplinesque sight gag), the soundtrack has shifted to *City Lights*'s 'boxing' theme – the music that plays in that film whenever the Tramp gets carried away in disruptive shenanigans. This aural and visual aesthetic continues until Charlie and his gang are able to steal away to a private room, and finally complete their important work. The suggestion becomes that the success of the biggest star in the world was contingent on his ability to work as a guerrilla filmmaker, personally splicing pieces of film together in a makeshift flat even while the law was after him.

The musical motif and jumpy image aesthetic return when the small crew is discovered and they sprint through similar antics, this time literally chased by a swarm of

ridiculously bumbling policemen. This is not a Chaplin film, but rather a film about Chaplin's life, and one might be hard-pressed at the suggestion that this scene in any way suggests a truth claim about the facts that it depicts. Yet, the appeal to non-fiction is an often presumed part of the stakes for a biographical film. In effect, such a structural allegory works to make Charles Chaplin a co-author of his own biography, whether or not this adds or detracts from the story's veracity. Specifically, this stylization serves to accentuate the authenticity of Chaplin's legendary status even while setting aside historical accuracy concerning his life. Likewise, the contextual message becomes clear in scenes such as this: that what made Chaplin great above all else was his *auteurist* dedication to the craft, specifically an unwillingness to compromise his total creative autonomy even in the face of legal hurdles.

This is a continuing message that is echoed much later in the film when Chaplin is ruined by J. Edgar Hoover's campaign to have him thrown out of the country as a communist threat to America. Charlie is on an ocean liner in New York Harbor when he finds out about his deportation, and the image of his tiny body in extreme long shot gazing back at the Statue of Liberty recalls *The Immigrant* with its sad irony. As a filmic allusion to Chaplin's own previous commentary on immigration in America, this image might go subtly by without recognition of its metaphorical value, except that the film has already presented the analogous shots from *The Immigrant* during a very explicit debate between Charlie and his brother Syd concerning whether or not it is humorous to make fun of U.S. Customs officials.

The pro-filmic elements of *Chaplin* likewise emphasize narrative reflexivity through their vivid depiction of real world silent film set elements. For the depiction of film

production sequences, production designer Stuart Baird attempted to accurately rig all of his constructed sets with actual silent film equipment or precise replicas. According to Wanamaker, this entailed exhaustive consultation of archival records in conjunction with the prop production company, Hollywood for Hire: "...if they don't have it, if it doesn't exist, which a lot of it doesn't, then they take my photograph [of the silent film set], they blow up certain sections of it, and they make the equipment. They create it. And they built a whole bunch of early lighting for the Keystone studio scenes in *Chaplin*."[60] Though this painstaking reproduction work can largely be attributed to the utility of maintaining strict historical accuracy for the sake of verisimilitude, allegorically these moves point back to an emphasis for the filmmakers on obsolete techniques that supposedly required more artistic ingenuity on the part of the filmmaker. *American Cinematographer* notes, for instance, that director of photography Sven Nykvist was on a "quest to recreate the harsher lighting conditions of early filmmaking."[61] Nykvist's conundrum, of course, was that he was at times required to use extremely powerful lights as props in front of the camera as well as outside the frame; the challenge was to photograph a scene in 35mm color Panavision with lights specifically designed to expose much slower, black & white silent film stock. According to Nykvist, "the lighting was so much simpler, by necessity. It was much more difficult to get an exposure, so they used a lot of light. It also has to do with creating deep shadows. But of course it was necessary [for us] to do it the old way – we were shooting what they were shooting."[62]

The importance of these structural clues is not simply that they may remind the astute viewer of silent film in general – or the work of Charles Chaplin specifically – but

---

60 Wanamaker, interview.
61 Heuring, 37.
62 Ibid., 37.

rather *how* they do this: by demonstration. This is especially important when the film continues to precisely duplicate the look and feel of a silent era (Chaplin) film, with such tropes as the incessantly used iris-in/iris-out and stylized wipes as transitions between temporally disparate scenes. In effect, with these fleeting moments, the film approximates a silent film aesthetic that highlights the distinction between Hollywood's past and present by foregrounding the way in which it is different from the contemporary norm. This is not only the story of Chaplin's life in the way in which he would have wanted to tell it, but more importantly the suggestion is that this is the kind of film that Charles Chaplin would have made if he were still working in the industry. At least, that is, to the extent that this is even possible. In particular, the film has gone a long way in establishing Charles Chaplin's dedication to technological and narrative anachronism, and seems through this stressing of Chaplin's untimely artistry to indirectly critique the present paradigms; these metaphors highlight Attenborough's resistance to the irresistible forces taking over Hollywood, such as the siphoning of film projects like his into organizational forms incompatible with his narrative intentions, and the technological advances of the New New Hollywood that seem to make artisanal filmmaking impossible.

It is fitting that the film's closing credits utilize just such a structural allegory: the use of picture frame-laden title cards denoting the subsequent fates of the film's characters. These silent filmesque title cards – replete with a white line-border accentuated by ornate floral flourishes at the upper left and lower right-hand corners of the frame – not only involve explication of character developments, but simultaneously label the characters' images with the names of the actors who portray them. Thus, the film combines reflexive modes by linking the visual aesthetic of early cinema style actor credits with biographical

information about real people where the narrative explication or dialogue would be on an actual silent film inter-title of this nature. The film has also inverted the early cinema practice, which would often include the title cards at the beginning of the film or dispersed throughout at the point of an actor's first appearance on-screen. Finally, over this series of visuals, Barry conducts a modern arrangement and orchestration of Chaplin's own musical composition, “Smile,” as the aural conclusion to the Chaplin tale. This all serves as a doubly reflexive reminder that the film has continuously relied upon a sustained narrative and formal melding of fictional characters, historical people, and the actors who portray them.

The Story of (Some) United Artists

As I have suggested, the mythologizing of the artisanal *auteur* – though conveyed through structural and formal means – is dependent upon the narrative suggestion that Chaplin created his work in a self-contained void, surrounded by no one on his artistic level of genius, and achieving the creative freedom to remain independent. Consequently, the episodes of Chaplin's life that *are* told are even less revealing of the film's mythology than those that are *not*. In particular, I point to the film's indirect depiction of Chaplin's involvement in the founding of the legendary production company United Artists in 1919: a hallmark event for a story concerned with the possibility of an intellectual *auteur*-driven Hollywood. At the literal reflexive level, the film implicitly portrays the founding of the United Artists Production Company with its portrayal of Chaplin's friendship with co-founders Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford. However, most conspicuous by his complete absence from the film is the fourth founding member: D.W. Griffith. Notorious for his racist epic *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Griffith's association with Chaplin is almost completely erased by Attenborough's film. The only explicit mention of even the name D.W.

Griffith, comes in the closing credits (on Kevin Kline's title card) where it simply lists him as one of U.A.'s founders.

Chaplin is hardly alone in its mainstream Hollywood erasure of Griffith from industrial histories. In 1999, for instance, the board of directors at the Directors Guild of America voted unanimously to scratch Griffith's name off of their Lifetime Achievement statuette, which had previously graced the shelves of the likes of Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles, among others.[63] The problem here quite obviously is not that this is not fair to Griffith, but rather the inverse: this indicates the level at which Hollywood frequently attempts to better its own story through omission of its more regrettable and offensive moments. Attenborough's film is implicated in this, seemingly because he would rather not associate the great leftist master filmmaker with an infamous bigot. Indeed, depicting the meeting between Chaplin and his colleague Griffith, might have posed a narrative conundrum as it would undoubtedly disturb the crafted mythology: that Chaplin's biggest problem was that he steadfastly refused to associate with social conservatives and was ruined in response. Such a meeting would also stale the proud stance that Charlie takes against the Nazis because they hate "the rest of the world," deaden the impact of his fun at the expense of J. Edgar Hoover, or even render nonsensically trivial a scene in which he chastises Pickford and Fairbanks for cheating on their spouses. Nevertheless, Griffith was depicted in the original script, and most certainly would have been portrayed in the longer miniseries had it been produced.[64] Such suggestions indeed add fuel to the fire of critics and biographical film scholars alike, who point to the long form of television as a better

---

[63] Ted Elliot, "DGA is Right, D.W. Griffith was Wrong," *Los Angeles Times,* December 27, 1999.

[64] Wanamaker, interview. Wanamaker maintains "There had to be a whole Griffith section [in the miniseries script] because Charlie knew Griffith, like everybody. Charlie looked up to Griffith because Griffith was the independent filmmaker of the time."

potential medium for avoiding the "Hollywood" form of selective storytelling.

Griffith is not the only famous Hollywood personality with links to Chaplin that is left out of the film. Also excised from this narrative wholesale is Fatty Arbuckle, a comedian who worked with Chaplin on many of his earliest Sennett shorts. While seemingly a minor oversight, the absence of Arbuckle from the narrative serves indirectly to perpetuate a notorious myth concerning one of Chaplin's most famous routines. In *The Gold Rush*, Chaplin sticks two forks into dinner rolls and, spinning them around as simulated miniature legs in front of his face, creates a visual gag often referred to as the "Oceana roll" or simply the roll dance. Yet, historical reference reveals this routine was performed first by Arbuckle in *The Rough House* (1917), and then subsequently appropriated by Chaplin in homage to Arbuckle years later.[65] The film, however, has Charlie seemingly inventing the routine at a dinner party in which he shows his disinterest in J. Edgar Hoover's pontifications at the other end of the table by distracting the other guests with his humorous tabletop shenanigans. Fittingly, it seems, *Chaplin* not only falsely attributes the gag to Charlie alone, but also uses its enactment as another tool to mythologize Charlie's progressive audacity in insulting Hoover, his political rival.

By comparison, only briefly depicted is Chaplin's early involvement with Mabel Normand (Marisa Tomei) at the Mack Sennett Studio. Rather than highlighting the novelty of Normand – as a woman in the early cinema period – having attained directorial status on some of the Sennett shorts, the film generally denigrates her foremost as an adversary of Chaplin – at best, a hindrance to his creativity, at worst, an untalented director who sets out to sabotage his career. One scene depicts her complaining about Chaplin's sexism to Sennett

[65] Bob Young jr., "Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle," in *American Classic Screen Profiles.* ed. John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 7.

(Dan Aykroyd), only to have Sennett immediately side with Charlie behind her back: “Chaplin, you've got to help me with Mabel, she actually thinks she can direct!” This is played for comedy. As a final insult, Tomei's closing credits title card includes the most unflattering of all the actor photos: a still from the scene in which Normand is angrily yelling at Charlie. In it, her face is lit up with an unruly rage even as the other character portraits seem to be posed and refined in their demeanor. What is worse is the way the title card tersely sums up the rest of her career by stating only that she “was involved in a drug and sex scandal surrounding the murder of a Hollywood director in 1922. She never acted again.”

Indeed, with its selective depiction of real women from Chaplin's life, the film ultimately reinforces Custen's argument concerning the gendering of biographical films of the classical period. Namely, this entails a championing of the individualist enterprise of a great man who encounters virtually every female character as either a hindrance or a muse. Of the most 'positive' influences on Charlie from a romantic perspective, both Hetty Kelly, his “first love”, and Oona O'Neill, his last, are played by the same actress (Moira Kelly) in a casting decision that links these women in the overarching trajectory of the major love story sub-plot of the film. Kelly – who like Charlie's mother Hannah is shown to be not quite succeeding in show business – rebuffs Charlie's offer of marriage just prior to his first fateful trip to the United States, initiating a chain reaction that will lead to Charlie's eventual Hollywood stardom. At the opposite end of the spectrum, O'Neill – daughter of the famous playwright and an aspiring actress – meets Charlie at the point when he has already achieved his fame and fortune, but at the expense of personal happiness. In the film's final section, it is thus O'Neill who eases Chaplin into contented retirement after his deportation:

namely by abandoning her own ambitions in Hollywood to marry Charlie and have a half dozen of his children.

On the other hand, the portrayal of women who get in the way of Charlie's career runs a full gamut of archetypes from those resentful of his work to the borderline deranged. Charlie's first wife Mildred Harris (Milla Jovovich) is portrayed in the film as easily manipulated by her lawyers, whose legal maneuvers cause Charlie's flight to Utah to prevent *The Kid* from being seized as community property. Paulette Goddard (Diane Lane) – whose relationship with Charlie is otherwise portrayed as a happy one – formally figures as the dramatic opponent of Charlie's career in a montage pitting his months long obsession with completing the film score to *Modern Times* (1936) against her continually unanswered appeals for him to spend more time with her. "Did you lose your other wives this way?" she asks in the final scene of the sequence. "I think so, but you'd have to ask them," he replies without getting up from his piano. In comparison, Joan Berry (Nancy Travis) is presented as mentally ill in her obsession with Charlie; in a montage of her own, Berry honks her car horn outside his house in the middle of the night, later garishly rakes her shoe across the metal of his front gate in a bid for attention, and finally takes to crawling on all fours through the sprinklers of his front lawn. She subsequently sues Chaplin for child support for a baby she claims to be his, a fact disproved by a blood test.

Ultimately, Charlie's own mother serves many of these narrative purposes all at once: as one of Charlie's main sources of inspiration and also the woman who psychologically traumatizes him with her development of insanity and subsequent committal at Charlie's own hands. As a matter of story convention, Hannah Chaplin's failure onstage in the first act of the film is a directly inciting incident on the narrative: his first

ever “performance” at the age of five is a successful attempt to save her from hecklers. Furthermore, because she is portrayed by her own granddaughter Geraldine, Hannah becomes the central figure of the film's paratextual narrative of authenticity. Importantly, the film's account of Chaplin's life was endorsed by the Chaplin family,[66] and Geraldine's prominent appearance within the film offers the most direct cinematic testament to this. In particular, many uncomfortable scenes depicting Hannah's descent into madness, and her devastating effects on Charlie, are potentially indemnified from the charge that they are either inaccurate or insulting by the very fact that they are entrusted to Geraldine as interlocutor, conceivably using her own discretion in their portrayal. Nevertheless, this does not alleviate the classically programmatic fashion in which they figure in the transformation of the film's protagonist into a great man of history. One might argue that this trajectory may have been unavoidable in a biopic concerning Charles Chaplin, who was indisputably influenced in life by a series of failed and bizarre relationships, and yet this is the very point to be made concerning the narrative limits of the biographical film form in regard to gendered subjectivity.

A Continuing Trend or a Singular Phenomenon?

What is clear is that the biopic as a form will always, by definition, have to account for those stories it chooses to tell and those it chooses not to. In the specific context of *Chaplin*, the question is not so much of 'why Chaplin', but rather 'why *not* so many others?' It becomes paramount, thus, to put Attenborough's biographical film into comparison with

[66] Wanamaker, interview. Here, he describes a time during which even Chaplin's cousin, Betty Tetrick Chaplin, visited the set: “She was living in Carlsbad, I think, and she married Ted Tetrick, who was Chaplin's business manager from about 1932 up until '52 when Chaplin left town forever. So I brought them up to the set to look at the Chaplin Studio, and they built one of course, and it was very emotional because they would walk around and almost feel like Chaplin's presence was there. The interesting thing about this whole film is this fine line between the real people of Hollywood and the myth.”

some of the numerous successful and unsuccessful others subsequent to that moment. Tim Robbins' *Cradle Will Rock* (1999) and Benjamin Ross's *RKO 281* (1999), for instance, create similar 'genius in(spite of) the system' narratives, this time concerning the aura of Orson Welles. Strictly speaking, Robbins' film is more of an ensemble story focusing on Welles as just one collaborator in the collective authorship and performance of the eponymous play. The film nevertheless sends a similar message of artistic perseverance against reactionary censorship and anti-leftist politics. The denouement portrays the legendary performance of the 1937 Marc Blitzstein musical by its cast and crew "from the house" when they are prevented from legally presenting it on stage. In any event, in seeming support of the premise that audiences' interest in these kinds of behind-the-scenes glances at historical entertainers was waning, *Cradle Will Rock* was a spectacular failure at the box office.[67]

While *Cradle Will Rock* was released to theaters, *RKO 281,* produced by HBO for a premium cable broadcast, more directly supports Custen's contention about the biopic genre migrating to the small screen by the 1990s. Yet, it hardly fits his suggestion that the contemporary made-for-television biopic offers "intriguing transmutations" of the genre that suggest a "very different ideology of fame than their cinematic counterparts."[68] Ross's film, as conventionally as *Chaplin,* offers up a genius in his most legendary guise: this time, the director of *Citizen Kane* (1941). The very title, *RKO 281* – the preliminary studio production number of Welles's film before it got its name – immediately indicates the hermeneutic appeal: the untold story of how a master *auteur* turned an anonymous project into an indisputable classic. In this, the tagline from the poster dispenses with all pretenses:

---

[67] "*Cradle Will Rock*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 10, 2014, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=cradlewillrock.htm. On a $36 million budget, the film grossed less than $3 million.

[68] Custen, 2. Custen does not give an example for this phenomenon.

"The true, behind-the-scenes story of the greatest movie of all-time, *Citizen Kane*." In its narrative framing of Welles in this way – capturing his life from the fallout of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast through the completion of his influential film – Ross indeed produces a meta-critique on fame and fortune in-as-much as it narrates the creation of *Kane vis-à-vis* Welles's perseverance against the machinations of William Randolph Hearst, whose entrenched power exemplifies that which the young upstart filmmaker is attempting to critique. For *RKO 281,* Welles's text is not only the "greatest movie of all-time" because of what it achieves formally or narratively, but also because of the turmoil surrounding its making. Welles's notoriety, achieved through the greatness of his artistic endeavors in the face of adversity, is painted as admirable.

On this topic, a further unconventional, but intriguing formulation would be to consider the documentary *It's All True: Based on an Unfinished Film by Orson Welles* (1993) as an additional biopic on Welles in this vein. Coming right in the midst of the same biopic and restoration pushes as that for Chaplin, the film chronicles Welles's ultimately failed attempt to produce a feature film in three parts in Latin America before having the project cancelled by RKO in 1942. With the filmmakers assembling and restoring much of Welles's original footage (that is, that which has not been lost), this makes the film an intriguing project in both regard to the larger biopic propensity toward narrating an admirable artistic struggle on the part of the director – this time in a regrettably losing effort – and also in allowing him to co-author his own story. The fact that the project effectively debuts previously unseen work by the cinema legend, also puts it in rhetorical resonance with the marketing of both *Chaplin* ("…he will again"), and the Brownlow restorations that cycle alternatively between suggestions that either the life or the work is of upmost importance

in a filmmaker biography.

A problem arises in this biopic trend with Tim Burton's *Ed Wood* (1994), which seems to relish an idea of badness rather than artistic virtuosity in the traditional sense. That is to say, Burton problematizes taste in a way that the previously mentioned filmmakers do not. Wood poses an interesting counter-example to Chaplin and Welles to say the least, because he is infamously considered by critics to be among the worst filmmakers of all-time, due to his ultra-low-budget and largely laughable attempts at serious horror and science fiction. Dennis Bingham classifies the film as an "Anti-Great Man" biopic and goes so far as to suggest that, narratively, Burton's film as a parody counters the more traditional "idols of production."[69] Fittingly, in a sequence of intertextual dialogism, Burton's Wood actually meets Orson Welles and is enthralled by him, claiming him as his cinematic hero. The sequence, which takes place historically just prior to Welles's battles with Universal over control of *Touch of Evil* (1958), sees the famous director give a motivational pep-talk to the young would-be *auteur* on the merits of circumventing the money men and pursuing one's own creative vision, as he claims to have done successfully on "*Kane*." Wood is prompted to demand that his producers allow him to complete his own impending masterpiece, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), his own way. Implied is that the greater critique of the industry is found in the exploration of its most absurd dejected personality, who, despite great ambition, seemingly failed to achieve even the most limited artisanal success in his own time that Chaplin or Welles accomplished. The irony here is that the embrace of camp within the film and its simulation of camp aesthetics has caused *Ed Wood* to become much more popular with critics over the course of the last

[69] Bingham, 151.

twenty years than Attenborough's ode to a quintessential master. At the time of its release, *USA Today* even put Burton's film in specific comparison with *Chaplin* in its positive review: "When it comes to Hollywood biopics, it figures that Charlie Chaplin would get a stinker…and Edward D. Wood would get a great one."[70] If the cinema of the '90s is a place where Chaplin or Welles could not have succeeded (at least in as much as is indicated by interest in the narratives of their biopics), can one say in dialogue with Burton's film conversely that Ed Wood too could not have *failed*?

Alternatively, Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* (1998) seems to take the filmmaker biography succinctly into the territory of the serious social problem film; its narrative follows director James Whale's personal life after retirement, and this time period is given much more importance, it seems, than a sustained discussion of his work. Within the piece, the director of horror classics *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Invisible Man* (1933) continually reflects upon his earlier life, but in comparison to the former examples, these flashbacks are fleeting, sparse, and often focus more on his relationships, and the trauma he experienced during World War I, with only a brief depiction of his filming of *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). The main conflict of the film, rather, is Whale's taboo homosexuality, and how he struggles to overcome depression and loneliness in the last days of his life. Ostensibly the story of a gay British director in Classical Hollywood, critical attention around its release tended to focus on how Ian McKellen, as an openly gay British actor in the contemporary Hollywood, seemed to create a layered self-reflexivity by portraying a role with so many similar biographical elements to his own life.[71] By queering the genre, Condon's film

[70] Mike Clark, "Year-End Top Ten," *USA Today,* 1994.
[71] Kenneth Turan, "Sir Ian McKellen Treats Acting as the Province of the Gods," *Los Angeles Times,* November 4, 1998.

attempts to tell the story of a subject long kept out of such conventional usages of the filmmaker-specific biography.

Likewise, Mario Van Peebles' *Baadasssss!* (2003) promotes the narrative of the trendsetter *via* the story about the making of a single important film. Intriguingly, this time the filmmaker's own father is the subject. The tagline for this poster similarly highlights the reflexive importance of casting *and* the iconographic slippage that it creates: "A Father. A Son. A Revolution." Here, Mario Van Peebles – casting himself as Melvin Van Peebles – lends a dynamic authenticity to the film's subject-matter, even more so than the introduction of Geraldine Chaplin into the narrative of Attenborough's *Chaplin*. The viewer is asked to appreciate that Mario, as a child, actually lived through the experience of the making of *Sweet Sweet Back* (1971), and thus is particularly invested in getting the story "right." Most crucially, this is a film that avoids the parodic, in contrast to other New New Hollywood films that are supposedly "reflexive" of the history of Blaxploitation, and instead delivers a serious homage as a political statement about the erasure of certain films and their contexts from industrial history.

Ultimately, the warrant on *Chaplin* seems to be astoundingly low in comparison to these other examples; in order for the text to do its work, the viewer must effectively sympathize with, if not outright pity, the person of Charles Chaplin even while being alerted to his unprecedented commercial and critical success. In fact, this is actually the point: that he had success and yet still led a tragic life. The comparison of referents between *Chaplin* and the Welles bios is most apt when one considers the conflicted, *Citizen Kane*-esque tragic moments of the former. These are capped by the depiction of Chaplin's first return to England after having achieved his fame and fortune in Hollywood: a sequence that is book-

ended by scenes in which the star has emotional run-ins with both adoring fans and ridiculing passersby. The first scene begins as Chaplin's train is pulling into the London station. It aggressively splices conflicting emotions by positing the very first moment in which Charlie is recognized through the train car window by adoring fans as the immediate epilogue to a conversation that traumatically reveals to Charlie that his long lost love, Hetty, has died. Two grinning servicemen rush up to the train, pounding on its window and shouting ecstatic greetings at Charlie, before a reverse shot makes Charlie's reaction a two-fold one; Downey's speechless face reveals bewilderment at being recognized, while it simultaneously suggests that he is holding back tears at news of his personal misfortune. Charlie exits the carriage without a word, and waiting to step off the train, buries his face against a wall while crying silently. When his assistant attempts to fix his disheveled clothes and asks "What are we going to do, Charlie?," Chaplin expressionlessly responds with a single word: "smile."

This is the single moment of the film that best exemplifies its complex premise. With Downey's line, the scene at this point literally enacts the lyrical message of the song "Smile." Originally composed by Chaplin himself as a melody to be played over the ambivalent tragic ending to *Modern Times,* the song's opening verse – "smile though your heart is breaking" – is invoked instrumentally by composer John Barry at this very point in Attenborough's film. Just as Charlie steps off the train, the film's score abruptly shifts melodies in synchronization with the cut to his POV of a staggeringly large crowd that has gathered. By the time Charlie is rushed by several children – who break through a police barricade in order to quickly press him for his autograph – all diegetic noise has completely ceased on the soundtrack, and Barry's orchestration of Chaplin's music dominates the scene. At first,

utilizing only the string section, and throwing “Smile” into an off-putting minor key, Barry tampers a bit with the arrangement and chord progression of the continuing chorus. He briefly leaves the melody unresolved on a single dissonant chord before bringing in a methodically rhythmic piano to play out the scene. On-screen, this melancholic effect is followed by the image of Charlie hoisted triumphantly onto the shoulders of policemen and paraded through the station toward a “Welcome Home Charlie” banner. Taking his own advice – the score seems to suggest – he continually forms a hollow smile on his face, and holds up his hat in salute to the crowd.

Conversely, the second half of this sequence captures Charlie walking alone down a nearly empty street before turning into a pub for a “quiet drink.” In conflict with the legendary report that he was once able to enter and lose a Charles Chaplin look-a-like contest, here Charlie is unable to proceed without being immediately recognized by the patrons of the bar. Blocking and internal framing formally mirror thematic isolation, as the bar and a structural column spatially separate Charlie from a gaggle of patrons, out of which one drunkard aggressively insults him. After having a drink thrown at him, Charlie quickly ducks out through the back door into an alleyway, attempting to find relief. However, in a single long shot this is revealed to be futile; the camera pans and tilts from the ground as Charlie walks past it, revealing to him and the audience that the light illuminating the alley is his very name in towering letters, advertised above the title for *The Kid* on a theater marquee. Escaping his fame and fortune is a lost cause, and the sequence concludes with narrator Chaplin explaining to his editor that this is the moment he knew that he “had no home.” This reconfiguring of fame and success is precisely what sets apart the film's legendary subject matter – and consequently its narrative purpose – from

classical iterations of the biographical film genre. Charlie is the man who has everything and yet nothing: the most famous movie star in the world who would rather be anonymous.

This results in a mitigated critique of fame that is slightly different from the one located in television at this time by Custen. Of course, the status of *Chaplin* as a would-be television miniseries complicates this notion. Importantly, this shifted in mid-production the organizational strategy of the film's release and promotion. In comparison to others – *Ed Wood, Gods and Monsters,* and *Baadasssss!,* all mitigated their possible losses by remaining solidly independent – *Chaplin,* ultimately became trapped in a presaging of the independent-blockbuster form; on an inflated budget of $31 million, it may actually have lost money worldwide (it grossed under $10 million domestically),[72] seeming to demonstrate in the process the essentialness of the precepts of the New New Hollywood. Here it either cost too much or not enough, caught between blockbuster mentality and that of the independent film. And the incompatible difference between a 144 minute theatrically released feature, as it became, and a ten hour made-for-cable miniseries, as it was once to be, is perhaps a contingent factor in this outcome. In my next chapter, I will explore a film that goes even beyond this in terms of challenging 1990s budgetary precepts. Yet, its comparative success in transgressing this New New Hollywood logic may indeed relate to its more elusive metaphors of Hollywood cinema.

[72] "*Chaplin*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 12, 2014, accessed October 12, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=chaplin.htm. Last updated October 12, 2014.

CHAPTER TWO
"Love Never Dies": The Status of the Image and Cinephilic Reaction in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

I have offended you. I am only looking for the cinematograph.
I understand it is a wonder of the civilized world.
– Dracula (Gary Oldman), *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* Francis Ford Coppola, 1992

In the previous chapter, I began my investigation with a discussion of the literal mode of reflexivity in one of its most evocative and excessive forms (the biographical film), but in this chapter I examine a film that solidly operates in the mode of metaphorical reflexivity, and thereby I hope to begin to shed light on a more elusive form of reflexive practice. At a crucial narrative moment in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), when the two romantic leads cross paths for the first time, a conspicuous topic of conversation pervades their interaction. The scene begins with an iris-in that evolves out of a turn-of-the-century London street map before capturing Dracula violently awaking from his slumber in a crate at Carfax Abbey. From here, the viewer is transported to the street with a jerky and faded tracking shot that surveys passersby as a carny voice makes exclamations about the wonders of the Lumieres' newest invention. The jerkiness – achieved through the playback at 24 frames-per-second of footage originally shot hand-cranked closer to 18 – may or may not be immediately striking, but then again one does not shoot a sequence of film in 1992 using a nearly one-hundred-year-old Pathé camera only so that it will not be noticed.[73] This is precisely what has just happened.[74] Moments later,

---

[73] George Turner, "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*: A Happening Vampire," *American Cinematographer,* November 1992, 43.

[74] On the set of the film, behind-the-scenes footage reveals director Francis Ford Coppola instructing the camera operator to duplicate the tempo of a fast waltz with his cranking, but he is careful to point out that the cranking should be varied slightly so as not to be too smooth – that is, so as to be noticeable. *In-*

when Dracula finally meets Mina, the object of his gaze, he feigns interest in the cinematograph as a way to disguise his true intentions. His ruse eventually leads to the pair emotionally bonding in a scene that unfolds within the cinema parlor itself, replete with close-ups of magic lantern props and silent film screens with which the filmmaker repeatedly intercuts his characters' life-changing encounter. In short, they begin to fall in love at the cinema.

This, of course, begs the question of why Dracula would be so interested in the wonders of the cinematograph. Especially, that is, in a film version of the tale that is explicitly marketed as *Bram Stoker's Dracula*; if this is indeed the film version that is truest to the novel, then why is there such an emphasis on a prop-motif that makes absolutely no appearance in the book? Yet, the cinematograph specifically, and more generally, the traces of the cinematic apparatus, make frequent appearances in the film. As I will argue in this chapter, Coppola's film contains many such structural allegories of the cinema that make it metadiscursive of the Hollywood film industry at that time. Specifically, this is because it draws frequent attention to the fact that it is decidedly *not* participating in many of the industrial imperatives taking hold at its time of production, as it concerns the best or most effective way to generate spectacular visual illusions on screen. Despite the suggestion of the branding of the title, Coppola's *Dracula* is most certainly not Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in form or function, though indeed it may be in many respects an attempt to turn the literary qualities of Stoker's book into referentially cinematic qualities that better suit the medium of film and its purpose. Through an analysis of the film itself, its place in a larger industrial history of spectacular illusionism, and the paratextual rhetoric surrounding the film's

---

Camera: The Naïve Visual Effects of 'Bram Stoker's Dracula," directed by Kim Aubry (ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions, 2007), DVD (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007).

production and release, I suggest that it is a film that is consumed by an interest in its own position within the transforming industry. By referencing early and pre-cinema devices and techniques – indeed actually utilizing these in the making of the film – *Bram Stoker's Dracula* situates itself at the crux of a nostalgic cinephilia concerning cinema's past, and by extension, a critique of its perceived future.

Furthermore, for a film that denotes several different competing notions concerning its essential author, *Dracula* contains a multitude of structural allegories of the cinema that challenge even the possibility of singular authorship for such a work. However, where James tracks these techniques as belonging to the so-called structural film *avant-gardists* of the 1960s (hardly a part of the Hollywood mechanism),[75] a similar process of medium-specific reflection occurs within *Dracula* a well. Where avant-garde filmmakers were able to create these allegories by scratching film or painting frames – an artisanal and potentially individual enterprise – *Dracula,* as an epic Hollywood film in both narrative scope and practical formal effects, necessarily responds with visual allusions (and illusions) that are more complexly collaborative in their evocation of socio-historically specific Hollywood artistry: hand-cranked cameras, pro-filmic optical illusions, early cinema "pixilation," and the narrative depiction of proto-cinematic devices. Unlike *Chaplin,* whose reflexive exploration of the artisanal operates heavily in the literal mode, *Dracula's* reflexivity is more elusively based on formal metaphors within the film. In essence, the preponderance of these specific formal cinematic codes and practices – in suggesting the film's anachronism – serve as a meta-textual critique of the state of Hollywood *auteurism*, which is contingent upon digital technologies of representation in the early 1990s.

---

[75] James, 237-279.

Additionally, part of the immediate commercial problem of the film, as will be discussed later, is the way in which the action of Bram Stoker's novel plays out on screen contrary to Hollywood imperatives about straightforward narration (particularly in generic consideration of the horror film form). *Dracula* relates the events in the lives of its characters in a novelistic epistolary form: most scenes begin or end with voice-over narration from a variety of different characters who often draw attention to the ways in which they are communicating these facts diegetically to other characters. We are shown the letters they are writing, or the diary entries they are completing, or even the early sound recordings they are making on a phonograph. In this respect it is much in-line with Bram Stoker's novel, written in an analogous epistolary form in 1897. Nevertheless the decision to narrate the film in such a manner complicates any clear focalization of the narrative – in conflict with typical Hollywood imperatives concerning straightforward storytelling – making it sometimes difficult to ascertain just who is telling us what and for what purpose.

The film also duplicates the basic plot points of the novel far more closely than previous adaptations: a Victorian solicitor travels to Transylvania to meet the mysterious Count Dracula, only to find out that the count is a vampire who must feed on the blood of the living in order to survive. Dracula arrives in London and promptly begins his vicious pursuit of the women whom he desires, biting them and turning them into vampires until he is hunted down and destroyed by a group of heroic vampire hunters. But here the similarities seemingly end, with the film introducing a number of elements that appear to be peripheral, and at times even antithetical, to the idea of the novel. For example, the opening scene takes the spectator back in time to suggest that the fictional vampiric

Dracula is in reality the historical thirteenth century prince known as Vlad the Impaler. Further, and more aggressively in regards the tone of the novel, the film depicts Dracula's pursuit of the main heroine as a tragic love story rather than villainous plot, with Mina becoming a willing accessory to the vampire's plans, before being forced to mercy-kill him out of undying love.

The poster from the film's original release suggests just how much of the appeal of the film was based on these types of controversial changes to the original source material. “Love Never Dies” is the tagline. Centered in the image are the figures of Gary Oldman (Dracula) and Winona Ryder (Mina); she is standing in front of him offering up her bare neck and shoulders as he stares menacingly ahead with a hand across her chest. Perhaps the message is ambiguous – at once connoting passion and deviousness – but what is clear is the foregrounding of the relationship between Dracula and Mina as the central issue of the film. Other crucial characters such as head vampire hunter Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins), and the novel's romantic lead Harker (Keanu Reeves), are relegated to the gray borders of the stone arch that frames the more prominently depicted couple. This despite the at that time recent fame of Reeves and especially Hopkins, who had just won his Academy Award for Best Actor one year earlier. What is clear is that this is a film that is utilizing, but also challenging the perceptions surrounding the Dracula legend. Of course not to be missed – that is to say, billed above the names of any of the actors – is the note that this is “A Francis Ford Coppola Film.”

Whose *Dracula* is it Anyway?

Produced by Francis Ford Coppola's company American Zoetrope, and released through Columbia Pictures in the winter of 1992, *Dracula* comes at a virtual apex of

industrial change regarding the sustainability of new animating and recording technologies in the industry, but it also comes at a crucial moment in the career of its director. Making a name for himself in the early 1970s with tremendously successful films such as the critical and commercial smash-hit *The Godfather* (1972), Coppola quickly rose through the ranks to become one of the preeminent *auteurs* of a short-lived New American Cinema that was dominated by the idea of serious artistic *auteur* projects within Hollywood, post-collapse of the studio period. As Michael Sragow puts it, Coppola "impressed the press as the one member of the 'movie generation' who broke into the studio system and kept one foot outside it."[76] It appears to many scholars such as Sragow, that Coppola's persona was one characterized as institutionalized outsiderism, a celebrated filmmaker who could both delight sophisticated critics even while he raked in profits for the producers. However, the introduction of the spectacular blockbuster mentality of the later 70s – reigning in a "New Hollywood" characterized by a resurgence of big budget super hits that were more plot-driven – seemingly dealt a difficult blow to the idea of the character-driven master-filmmaker in Hollywood. Accordingly, Coppola's career took a turn after *Apocalypse Now* (1979) as he struggled to evolve with the changes in the industry. As Sragow notes, many critics and filmgoers alike seem to have painted this later film as the beginning of Coppola's "descent into creative chaos."[77] The 1980s were for the director a tumultuous period of adjustment characterized by moderately successful to relatively uneventful projects that failed to capture the same kind of recognition that he had previously enjoyed. Thomas Doherty bitingly sums up this type of widespread critical feeling about Coppola circa 1992

---

[76] Michael Sragow, "Godfatherhood," in *Francis Ford Coppola Interviews,* eds. Gene D. Phillips and Rodney Hill (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 169. (Originally published in *The New Yorker,* March 24, 1997).

[77] Ibid, 169.

in his critical appraisal of how important *Dracula* would potentially be in reviving Coppola's career in his piece entitled "Reviving an Undead Career: Coppola Sucks the Life Out of Stoker's Hoary Classic":

> Throughout the Reagan-Bush era, the man who made some of the most brilliant films of the 70s – *The Godfathers* twinpack, *The Conversation, Apocalypse Now* – was by turns, quirky, mediocre, and dreadful. The teencake posing of the rebels without a clue in *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish,* the brainless *One from the Heart,* the upscale smugness of his episode of *New York Stories*, the abortive *Godfather III* – all were cinematic experiences as fuzzy and detached as the video playback system FFC used on his sets.[78]

Doherty further engages the vampiric metaphor when he predicts that *Dracula* will be just the film to "awaken a flatline career from the ranks of the undead."[79]

Such critical appraisals of the 1980s Coppola, in anticipation of the 1990s Coppola, were far from uncommon. Even Coppola himself participated in the popular crafting of this narrative concerning his career trajectory by the end of the decade. In a 1992 feature in *Premiere* on the upcoming release of *Dracula,* Coppola is quoted as self-consciously promoting the idea that despite previous successes and the resulting high expectations thrust upon him, he had encountered frustration with the industry: "Let's face it. My whole career I'm always kind of a promising director who never quite was able to really... I mean, people think I'm very powerful and famous, but my own view is that I'm struggling to put it together."[80] Later in the same article, he implicitly furthers the mythology of the disenchanted *auteur* in isolation, while growing nostalgic for a time when he apparently had more creative freedom: "This last couple of years, I've been more remote. I am becoming more like I was when I was young; I really am most happy when I can be by

---

78 Thomas Doherty, "Reviving an Undead Career: Coppola Sucks the Life Out of Stoker's Hoary Classic," *Cinefantastique,* ("The Making of *Bram Stoker's Dracula*"), October 1992, 59.
79 Ibid, 59.
80 Rachel Abramowitz, "Neck Romance," *Premiere,* December 1992, 51.

myself and just fantasize."[81] What seems to have been clear to Coppola and his critics alike, is that if he was going to make *Dracula,* it would need to be a big hit or he might not recover. Or at least this was the way his stake in *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was widely conveyed to the public at the time of its marketing: a big high concept film, yet a deeply personal project, that would either prove or disprove that an old school film brat could still be culturally relevant in the New New Hollywood of the 1990s. But why yet another adaptation – Stoker's titular vampire had appeared in film form hundreds of times in various cultural and historical contexts by 1990 – as the vehicle to re-launch a career in this way?

Coppola's *Dracula* has been read alternatively as allegorizing everything from the director's disaffection with the Catholic Church to his commentary on the rising AIDS epidemic.[82] However, in the zeal to determine the director's purpose, what the few scholarly theorists who have covered the film have routinely failed to note is the nearly convoluted way in which Coppola became involved with the project in the first place. Indeed long before *Bram Stoker's Dracula* became Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula,* it was James V. Hart's *Dracula.* Hart, the screenwriter, began work on his concept for the adaptation by some accounts as early as 1977.[83] Evidently inspired by reading the novel for the first time and being disappointed that he had never seen a film that was able to capture the book's essence, it was Hart who fashioned the screenplay as the version Bram Stoker himself would have created. Ultimately, Hart's selling power was doubtless helped out by his work on another successful re-imagining of a beloved property as the writer of Steven

---

81 Abramowitz, 57.

82 Iain Sinclair, "Invasion of the Blood," *Sight & Sound,* January 1993, 15. Sinclair goes so far in his critical appraisal of the film as to call Gary Oldman's look in the film that of a "customized plague manikin elaborately made-up for an AIDS benefit."

83 Gene D. Phillips and Rodney Hill, eds., *Francis Ford Coppola Interviews,* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004, 287.

Spielberg's *Hook* (1991). It would seem that the screenwriter had become almost famous for his habit of downplaying his own creative input in favor of tremendous fidelity to what had otherwise been previously unfaithfully adapted works.

Hart's continued declarations of absolute fidelity were nevertheless lost on many writers. In an article in *Sight & Sound* which attempts to situate *Dracula* in the larger history of adaptations of the novel, Kim Newman notes that Dracula was always a romantic character involved with seducing his female victims, but notes that it is not until the late 1970s and 80s that the notion of "love" became predominant, and that Hart's version merely exacerbates the recent phenomenon.[84] Elsewhere in the same issue, Henry Sheehan likewise characterizes Hart's treatment as turning Stoker's tale from a horror story into a "fairy tale" and noting with wry irony that the film would probably "horrify" Stoker, despite its marketing. In an interview with Sheehan, Hart seems to at least nominally accept the accusation that the concept tacked-on to the property was merely a marketing tool to better sell the film to a younger demographic: "What we brought to the book was a love story that doesn't exist in the book to tell it the way it was written, but make it accessible to a modern audience."

It was not until around 1990 – nearly a decade and a half after its inception – that Coppola even became aware of the project. At this point, according to an interview in *Premiere*, the film had been purchased by the USA Network for possible development as a made-for-cable movie.[85] It was foremost to have been a vehicle for star Winona Ryder whose appeal to the 'MTV Generation' was supposedly a major selling point for producers. The story disseminated in much popular press around the time of the film's release is that

[84] Kim Newman, "Bloodline," *Sight & Sound,* January 1993, 12.
[85] Abramowitz, 52.

Ryder had met with Coppola not long after having had to drop out of his *Godfather Part III* for health reasons, and as she was eager to work with the legendary director one way or another, it was she herself who first mentioned the *Dracula* script while having lunch with him.[86] Formerly under the working title of *Dracula: The Untold Story,* the film quickly received a marketing makeover when Coppola came on board. Once straddling the borderline of low-brow kitsch, by 1991 most publicity began to focus on the project as an outlet of personal expression by Coppola, the *auteur*.

The director seems to have felt an immediate connection with Hart's original concept, concurring that the novel had not up to that time been appropriately adapted for the screen. Often in interviews, Coppola repeated a story about how he had been drawn into making a version of *Dracula* as far back as 1958 when he used to read the book to children as a camp counselor.[87] However, elsewhere this mythology is tempered by Hart himself who claims that upon their first meeting Coppola had questioned him about why he would want to make a version of *Dracula* in the 90s.[88] Despite holding to the Hart rhetoric of unflinching fidelity to the novel all through the marketing stage of the film, and even subsequent to its release, industry publications begin to reveal another obsession for Coppola as he began work on the project. It seems that what exactly it meant to appropriately adapt the novel for the screen – in Coppola's eyes – might have been changing. The touchstone event was his much publicized sacking of his entire special effects crew. According to reports, the director was extremely unhappy with the fact that seemingly everyone around him was pushing for him to embrace computer-generated

---

86 Ibid, 52.
87 Ibid, 52.
88 Steve Biodrowski, "Dracula: The Untold Story," *Cinefanstatique,* October 1992, 12-13.

imagery techniques on the impending production.[89] Soon, the idea of this as specifically Coppola's Dracula would be one consumed in the press by investigations of its place in the evolving world of special effects technologies within a brand new New Hollywood.

The State of Cinematic Illusion at the Beginning of the 1990s

> I have not been getting what I have been asking for. I've been asking for shadows and illusions and double impositions... and... and... imagination.
>
> – Francis Ford Coppola, before firing his special effects team, June 1991[90]

To see how novel Coppola's decision was even in the early 1990s Hollywood film industry, one need only look to the contemporaneous work of those filmmakers who had taken up the mantle of the New Hollywood where Coppola and company had left off. If the New American Cinema had been characterized by Coppolas and Scorseses, the New Hollywood Cinema had harkened the ascendance of prodigies like Steven Spielberg in the later 1970s and James Cameron in the 80s. As noted by Thomas Schatz and other scholars, it is largely Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) that demonstrated the effectiveness of the idea of a summer blockbuster for the first time, and this concept began to dramatically alter studio imperatives surrounding what would become an economically resurgent New Hollywood of the 1980s.[91] It was precisely this New Hollywood which likewise seems to have been conducive to the high concept seriality of James Cameron's horizontally integrated science fiction franchise work on such blockbusters as *The Terminator* (1984) and *Aliens* (1986). Indeed, fantasy and especially plot-driven spectacle seem to be the common strands here. Yet an even more conspicuous connection between these filmmakers and Coppola's own *Dracula* in particular becomes apparent in the popular discourse surrounding the film's

---

89 Steve Biodrowski, "Coppola's Dracula," *Cinefanstatique,* October 1992, 24.

90 *In-Camera*, promotional documentary.

91 Thomas Schatz, ed., *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Vol. I, Historical Dimensions: The Development of the American Film Industry* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

release: the formal approach to fantastic special effects.

New media theorist Lev Manovich traces the recent history of the development of 3-D digital imaging as exuding continuous widespread expansion from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s.[92] Coincidentally, this runs roughly coterminous with scholarly theorizations of the New Hollywood in which Spielberg and Cameron had been most successful, and it is fitting that Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) and Cameron's *Terminator 2* (1991) are precisely the films mentioned in *The Language of New Media* as Manovich's primary examples of how computer-generated imagery had been industrially tested to stellar effect at the beginning of the decade, and became normalized as a standard of the industry within the next few years.[93] Manovich even implicitly indicates that the evolving technologies themselves may have gone a long way in creating industrial imperatives for the blockbuster concerning spectacular narratives of fantasy and science fiction in conflict with less otherworldly projects; as he notes, synthetic imaging technology even today is more easily used to depict "the fantastic and the extraordinary than to simulate ordinary human beings."[94] Thus, the emergence of and widespread adoption of techniques of computer-generated imagery, and the trajectory of fantasy narratives in Hollywood are inseparably linked in seemingly reciprocal industrial response.

The debate over digital imaging during this time is characterized by Manovich as one that concerns the difference between cinematic and synthetic realism.[95] As the argument

---

92 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001, 195).

93 Manovich, 200. "Along with a few others, these films by James Cameron and Steven Spielberg were responsible for turning Hollywood around: from extreme skepticism about computer animation in the early 1990s to a full embrace by the middle of the decade. These two movies, along with the host of others that followed in their wake, dramatically demonstrated that total synthetic realism seemed to be in sight." 200.

94 Ibid, 194.

95 Ibid, 196.

goes, concern for the preservation of cinematic realism is based on the misapprehension that digital imaging cannot be as "real" as the reality recorded by the cinema camera. In contrast to this position, Manovich poses the crucial point that synthetic images are *too real,* as in *more* real than their cinematographically illusionistic counterparts.[96] In other words, synthetic images produced digitally do not contain the same kinds of limitations of the camera's vision and actually need to be degraded at times to better approximate the imperfections of the filmic image. Examples might include needing to add graininess that was not originally there or trying to simulate the depth-of-field effect that is produced by the use of camera lenses that create a decidedly unrealistic perspectival distortion of the space in front of them. This problem of altering the picture – and as I will deal with in the next chapter in regard to sound – so that it better approximates cinematic expectations rather than real-world fidelity is key here. The crucial distinction of note is that between ontological reality and photoreality: contrary to some notions, what is actually inherent in the rhetoric of 'computer fakery' – and the debates surrounding its advantages and pitfalls in terms of cinematic illusionism – is not one concerning the best representation of physical reality, but rather the best simulation of photorealism.

An important distinction must be made here between computer-generated imagery and digitally acquired picture. This may sound counter-intuitive, as at a semantic level digital video will always, in a sense, be "computer-generated" in the images that it (re)presents. However, the critical difference in terms concerns images acquired through a digital approximation (through the use of a camera lens) of a pro-filmic space in the physical world versus images (or parts of images) that are originally engineered in virtual

[96] Ibid, 202.

space and *applied* to the representation of that world. Indeed, contrary to the beliefs of many digital cinema advocates, even the most advanced high definition video cannot, to this day, approach 35mm film in terms of qualities such as tonal contrast and dynamic range. This is for the scientific reason that photochemical film does not employ sampling in the same way that digital media by definition does. As an analogue (continuous) medium, film cannot be broken down into discrete units, and therefore the question of film's "resolution" is somewhat nonsensical.[97] In any event, Manovich's argument from the appeal to the *appearance* of photorealism arguably only applies to computer-generated images or image parts, because digitally acquired images of physical objects (even with high definition) are most certainly not "more real" or even more verisimilar than those acquired photochemically with a fast 35mm film gauge. This happens to be tangential to Manovich's specific point in this regard, which indeed does apply particularly in this case to CGI incorporated into a film image.

Like *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2, Dracula* also attempts self-consciously to photorealistically depict something that cannot exist in reality. However, it just as self-consciously avoids employing any of the digital imaging methods pioneered by those former films, and this is foremost what makes their direct comparison so apt to the discussion of the evolution of the technology of cinematic realism in the early 1990s. That is to say, the crisis of cinematic realism described by Manovich: one that is primarily concerned with how effectively "real" that people and things within the narratives *appear*

[97] In this, some scholars may make the mistake, owing to the sometimes visibly noticeable size of film grain, of presuming that the grain is a discrete unit. However, this is incorrect, as can be demonstrated especially with larger grains that can be blown-up to reveal the exposure of a large spectrum of color across the surface of a single grain. As a continuous medium, film will have a continuous spectrum of visual information across any divisible portion of it that is capable of being photochemically exposed.

to be on-screen, rather than how the narratives themselves relate to contemporaneous reality. This was indeed the story covered in trade publications prior to the release of Coppola's film, with *Dracula* and *Terminator 2* routinely touted as exemplary counter-examples to one another by everyone from critics to the filmmakers themselves.[98] By mid 1992, this specific comparison was so pervasive that even star Keanu Reeves hawked the premise in an on-set interview: "They're going back to an old school of filmmaking. Old school in the sense that, you know, *Terminator 2* is all computer graphics, and this is like, you know, ropes and mirrors, and you know, that kind of hocus pocus which is delightful."[99]

Very quickly, it seems, an interest in how real something looks on-screen turned for Coppola and his crew into a question of how well something on-screen will resonate with audiences, and the implication that these two notions might not be entirely interchangeable. As can be seen in his outburst against his soon-to-be-dismissed crew in June of 1991, Coppola crucially proposes not only that following the industry mandate toward CGI is somehow less creative in its inception than previous methods, but perhaps most damningly of all, that it connotes a lack of "imagination." Thus for Coppola, the concern for redeeming that which is considered 'cinematic' in the American Cinema seems to include not only the photorealism of his fantastic images, but also the perceived authenticity that traditional cinematic illusions present to the spectator in contrast to the artificial trickery of computer-generated images. Here 'authentic' takes a double meaning espousing not only the notion – running counter to Manovich's logic – that camera generated effects will be experienced as more real than digitally generated ones, but also

---

[98] Mentioned by Biodroswski, and Coppola himself in *Cinefantastique* October 1992, and by D.P. Michael Ballhaus in *American Cinematographer* December 1992.

[99] *In Camera,* promotional documentary.

the idea of being true to oneself and one's ambitions in conflict with a creativity-stifling industry.

It is important to point out here that Coppola's mandates take the specific form of a rejection of digital technologies for the production of the *visual* track only, and that this proscription reportedly did not include the sound track as well. Indeed, according to supervising sound editor Tom C. McCarthy, Coppola was actually adamant on their first meeting that the film employ digital editing of the sound tracks in an embrace of a new and efficient technological practice at that time.[100] Here, as McCarthy notes, this is only an apparent contradiction: "Francis is very experimental. And there's certain things he's looking for and he understands the movie-making process. And he might use a digital philosophy for one aspect and a more traditional analogue aspect for another part of it. And he was very smart in the selection of how he put the film together."[101] This reversal of mandates between the visuals and sounds seems to suggest that it is indeed not simply a phobia for the digital that fueled Coppola's idiosyncratic decision on *Dracula.* Rather, this distinction suggests that there is something particular to the ontological state of cinematic images that Coppola felt would be lost with digital imaging. Alternatively, this may suggest a bias toward the visual on Coppola's part in terms of what is classically cinematic in a medium-specific way, or perhaps more specifically an acknowledgment that for most of Coppola's career the majority of sounds recorded for his films quite obviously were not produced by legitimately pro-filmic noise anyway (a realization that would hypothetically make a proscription on digitally edited, or even digitally recorded sound a moot point).

There seems also to have been an implicit economic concern in the rejection of CGI;

[100] Tom C. McCarthy, interview by author, Los Angeles, December 7, 2012.
[101] Ibid.

it took scores of engineers over two years to create some of the special effects shots in *Jurassic Park,* at a cost that would be insurmountable except for the most extravagantly supported blockbuster projects at that time.[102] By comparison, Coppola was given just 68 days to complete principle photography on *Dracula.* Coppola's solution was to shoot nearly 100% of *Dracula* – both its interior and exterior scenes – on a sound stage in Hollywood to save time and costs. Reportedly the Second Unit, led by Coppola's own son Roman, worked for the most part concurrently with the first and for the same number of days in order to capture the scores of effects shots that were indispensible to the project. "I had to demonstrate I could make a big production efficiently and not go over budget," notes Coppola in *Premiere,* adding "You know this is Hollywood, and you gotta do it the way those people wanna do it."[103] This notion of Coppola as the tireless *auteur* struggling against oppressive studio bureaucracy in order to restore his mythic career was the ubiquitously presented one, and yet is just as ever-present in the text itself as in the paratextual accompaniments.

Allegory of the Undead

A few scholars such as Iain Sinclair have looked to the vampiric content itself as the leading component of historical allegory here.[104] The idea that Coppola has something crucial to say about AIDS in the 1980s, for instance, tends to put *Dracula* in line with theorizations of other films such as *Lost Boys* (1987) or *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). Hart himself gives fodder to the AIDS allegory noting "In a sense, vampirism is the Victorian

[102] Manovich, 201.
[103] Abramowitz, 51.
[104] Sinclair, 15. Sinclair states that the Dracula myth works best when it "taps our present panic," going on to mention trouble in the Balkans and the collapse of communism as possible factors in an invasion allegory.

equivalent of AIDS."[105] Dyer, in a critical write-up for *Sight & Sound*, notes the complicated way in which the Dracula myth has evolved over the years to consistently dramatize allegories of contagion in the form of the evolving instances of subaltern referents. In this trajectory, he critically assesses that Coppola's film has failed to sufficiently queer Dracula, and instead continues to allow masculine heterosexuality to highjack the Other; here, he compares the film (unfavorably) with Anne Rice's novel which was then in development for adaptation as *Interview with the Vampire.*[106] In noting his understanding of the Christian allegory of the film – prefiguring Dracula as a Christ-like figure – Dyer seems to reiterate that Coppola's version is behind the times.[107]

What is clear is that a thematic element of contagion most definitely exists within the text, and yet it might not point to as conspicuous a cultural referent as some theorists would have it. Rather, a careful examination of popular and industry press pages reveals many sustained public explorations of what the supposed purpose of the film had been. Notes *Premiere*: "As Dracula needs blood to sustain his life after death, so Coppola needs *Dracula* to sustain his immortality, or at least his tenure in Hollywood."[108] Another allegory clearly emerges in the form of Dracula as a stand-in for Coppola's own career, and much popular press was quick to take up this narrative. Yet, only Tom Whalen, writing for *Literature/Film Quarterly* in 1995, attempts to make the case for a succinctly reflexive message embedded within the film.[109] Whalen's is also the only scholarly reading to examine the cinematograph scene, though he stops short of realizing its full structurally

[105] Biodrowski, 13.
[106] Richard Dyer, "Dracula and Desire," *Sight & Sound,* January 1993, 8.
[107] Ibid, 12.
[108] Abramowitz, 50.
[109] Tom Whalen, "Romancing Film: Images of Dracula," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (April 1995): 99-101.

allegorical potential when he posits only that it is shot "as if we are watching an old film projected at sixteen frames per second."[110] Here, Whalen fails to fully appreciate that the scene indeed was hand-cranked on an old camera, rather than simply having been made to duplicate this. Ultimately, this is an important distinction to make, as after all, the novelty of the sequence is not simply that it simulates an old filming style, but that it actually does employ the style in question.

As the filmmakers working on *Dracula* no doubt would argue, synthetically referencing the old style might even be counter-intuitive to the point of the exercise itself: to demonstrate that the old cinema tricks can function sufficiently *without* the aid of the new technologies of representation that attempt to supplant them. In fact, one might posit just as strongly that implicitly the argument being made suggests not only that the new technological methods are superfluous to the in-camera effect here, but that they are indeed incapable of achieving the same effect photorealistically. Nevertheless, Whalen does take important note of the dramatic way that Dracula as a character is made almost synonymous with the history of cinema itself. In his examination of the later sequence in the cinema parlor, he crucially notes that Dracula's dialogue to Mina which warns her "Don't be afraid," comes simultaneously as the *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* in the background.[111] A corollary becomes clear here: Dracula is uncannily misunderstood by Mina in precisely the same way in which the early film spectator is presumed to have misapprehended the ontological threat of the arriving train. Or, as Whalen describes the allegorical connotation of the sequence, Dracula's seduction is roughly equated with the

[110] Ibid, 99.
[111] Ibid, 100.

seduction of the cinema itself.[112]

In Whalen's reading, Dracula *becomes* the camera. As he notes, when Dracula looks at something – usually someone he is attacking – the spectator experiences his gaze through jump cuts, frantic zooms, and swooping cranes.[113] Interviewed in *American Cinematographer*, Director of Photography Michael Ballhaus describes how he utilized "pixilation" techniques to create this type of effect on the film; the film would be exposed a frame at a time and then the camera would be moved dramatically, so that Dracula's POV would frantically jump around the space in a jerky and uneven manner.[114] These sequences too, were filmed with the old Pathé camera, and Roman Coppola describes the pixilation as a stop-motion process that is used to suggest the "animal mode" of Dracula's vision.[115] The crucial notion that Whalen only implicitly touches on, is that the point-of-view of Dracula is often thus conveyed directly through the grammar of cinema itself specifically in contrast to the way in which most of the other character's perspectives are focalized through the more novelistic epistles. One could rightly further argue here that Coppola's film has gone a long way in converting the book's literary referentiality into a form that is more synonymously cinematic. Specifically, that is, by making the one character who does *not* get to narrate any of the action in the novel, precisely the one that sees with cinematic vision. And of course this is precisely the flawed cinematic vision that Dracula (and *Dracula*) ennobles even as theorists such as Manovich decry it as a false promise of reality. Whalen concludes based on his reading of the film that Coppola is "paying homage to his art form", and that the God to

[112] Ibid, 100.
[113] Ibid, 100.
[114] Turner, 43.
[115] George Turner, "Dracula Meets the Son of Coppola," *American Cinematographer,* November 1992, 48.

whom Dracula refers in his final moments is the "god of special effects."[116] Yet shockingly Whalen does not take these observations further than a prototypical – and for the most part non-historicized – reflexive critique: Dracula equals cinema. The evidence, however, clearly suggests that if this allegory is to hold, then certainly Dracula does not merely equate with the cinematic apparatus in general, but more precisely a specific kind of 'undead' cinema.

In point of fact, the only theorist to use the actual term "self-reflexive" to describe *Bram Stoker's Dracula* has been Thomas Elsaesser in his contribution to *The Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,* edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith in 1998, where he examines the complexities of the changing Hollywood industry at that time.[117] Yet, Elsaesser seems to locate the film's basic reflexivity more in the ludic form of conspicuous filmic citation: the many cinematographic references to previous Dracula films and other horror icons embedded within the film. For Elsaesser, it is this kind of self-conscious referencing of the classical cinema, within the supremely post-classical narrative structure of the film, which has caused him to single it out as a preeminent example of early 1990s intertextuality.[118] As he suggests, in this way, "post-classical" cinema consumes the history of the classical even while it looks forward to its own narratively incomprehensible future. Thus, what is important for Elsaesser is not the notion of structural allegory, despite his implicit utilization of the 'undead' metaphor to describe the tropes he is discussing.

From the earliest discussions with the filmmakers employed on *Dracula*, however, the specifically formal prescription for old school film tricks receives much more attention than the contextual allusions to specific previous films. In other words, the stressed point

---

[116] Whalen, 101.
[117] Thomas Elaesser, "Specularity and Engulfment: Francis Ford Coppola and *Bram Stoker's Dracula*," in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema,* ed. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 191-208.
[118] Ibid, 193.

seems to be located in the notion of creating a fully modern (or post-modern) film in the *way* early cinema directors would have done so, not just simply to re-create the visual iconography of a history of filmmaking. Though the latter idea may indeed be present in the film text, it is – in the publicity spread by the filmmakers – noticeably secondary to their repeatedly stated purpose to advance the former notion. In the fall and winter of 1992, publications from *American Cinematographer* to *Cinefantastique* repeatedly stress the rhetoric of using old style *technical* magic in reference to *Dracula* while sometimes relegating talk of the film's visual allusions to the periphery. In short, illusion trumps allusion.

Ultimately, what stubbornly refuses to die, it seems, is the particular cinephilic attitude itself. It is this structural allegory which pervades the text in a much more historically meta-discursive manner than has yet been discussed. Formally, this takes shape in *Dracula's* excessive reliance upon archaic methods of illusion creation as overcompensation for the perceived threat of the new technologies-of-illusion ascending Hollywood at the moment in which the film was being made. At every narrative opportunity, Coppola continually returns not only to early and pre-cinema references but to an insistence on formally adopting the practical techniques of the same.

A shadow puppet show depicted during Dracula and Mina's tryst in the cinema parlor is only the most obvious example here. The show instantly evokes the memory of the film's prologue battle in the way it crudely represents soldiers impaling one another via the cast shadows of moving paper cut-outs. Not only does the spectator get a diegetic depiction of the shadow play technology, but also – in its intra-textual referencing of the film's opening sequence – the subtle suggestion that this very method of illusionism was actually

used to achieve the earlier, more impressively illusionistic example of the depiction of impaled soldiers on the true diegetic battlefield.[119] For his part, Tom McCarthy mentions this sequence in particular as an example of how the simple execution of the visual illusion also affected the sound design on the film:

> You see that thing later in the cinematheque that he [Coppola] had. Here's this old way of projecting images and he starts his film with it and you're adding and applying sound to it so you have to apply that sound in a more... [in an] older type of way... So you know, it would seem silly if you had too advanced sound elements going for that particular shot. You had to play what you were seeing and not necessarily have a dramatic sound for everything.[120]

In this audio-visual scheme, the careful eye must undoubtedly notice upon contemplation that impaling actual actors on the large film set (as in the opening of the film) is in theory as easy as creating the illusion with paper cut-outs (as in the later scene at the cinematheque): so long as one casts the objects in silhouette so as to flatten the space in which the action takes place and thus effectively disguise the true relation of impaler to impaled, the method is precisely similar.

One might even recall the early cinema phenomena of "Hail's Tours" as being subtly referenced in the film. Again this occurs both via the visual reference of a fake elevated train car – a citation which in this case is comparatively more hidden than others in the film in the careful and effective virtuosity of the illusion which posits it diegetically as a 'real' train car – and via the actual engineering on-set of a theoretically similar device to render such

[119] The original storyboards for the film depict a seemingly more elaborate opening battle sequence, apparently in regard to Hart's initially detailed description of the battle, which includes dialogue between soldiers and several different shots of fighting from different perspectives. Most of this is excised in the style of the proto-cinematic technique in which the sequence was ultimately shot. *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* (unpublished shooting script with storyboards), October 13, 1991, shots designed by Francis Ford Coppola, Michael Ballhaus, and Roman Coppola, chief illustrator Peter Ramsay, Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

[120] McCarthy, interview by author. Here, McCarthy went on to state his philosophy of filmic sound on not only this film but elsewhere as: "I always say it this way: the sound is the frame around the picture. It shouldn't take away from the picture itself. The picture is the art work. Sound is just the frame around it. It enhances it."

illusion on film. For this, one of the most industrially-lauded shots in *Dracula*, Coppola's crew have apparently created a complicated stage set-up combining traveling mattes and an in-camera double exposure to achieve the startling visual suggestion that Dracula is watching the hero, Harker, from the background sky as he journeys by train through the Transylvanian countryside. In essence a straight forward optical trick, to describe this effect as simple would nevertheless be preposterous. To achieve it, the camera made two passes over the space of the sound stage: first, over Keanu Reeves sitting in an elevated cut-out of a train car being rocked on its axis while three *separate* traveling mattes rolled on individual tracks at different speeds (in order to simulate the human propensity to see the more distant planes of a far-off landscape as 'moving more slowly' than the immediate foreground) on the stage behind him. Only then, was the camera wound back and exposed over the course of a second pass, on the same area, now masked except for a traveling blow-up of Gary Oldman's eyes in the background sky.[121]

The effect in the finished film is a shot that mimics the use of extreme deep space photography with the perspectival motion of the background – that is to say, it does not just move, but seems to move in relation to the point-of-view of Harker in the traveling train, a crucial difference that is difficult to time in the passing and the filming of the originally separate shots – in relation to the supposedly moving train. Here it is important to point out, that with the menacing eyes peering down through the clouds in the sky, the emphasis has clearly been on the authenticity of objects in the pro-filmic space rather than “realism” per se. The use of flat objects at various distances in a multi-planed *mise-en-scène* would seemingly be the way Georges Méliès would have contrived to produce such an illusion

[121] *In-Camera,* promotional documentary. The effect is explained by Roman Coppola.

circa 1900, and yet the execution of this particular special effect seems to have astounded contemporaneous viewers – even within the industry – when the filmmakers declared that no animation was used to produce it.

The fact that even Elsaesser seems to doubt the claims made by the filmmakers regarding their abstention from contemporary synthetic image technologies is indicative of just how pervasive the use of digital imaging had already become in Hollywood by this time.[122] This also especially reinforces the notion that the technology was sophisticated enough to cloud clear indicators of its use in the first place – a notion the filmmakers on *Dracula* also seem to categorically reject. Nevertheless, it was apparently safer to assume that Roman Coppola was being publicly deceptive, as a film of the scope and magnitude of *Dracula* would almost certainly employ computer-generated imagery, or at least optical printing technology. How could it not? The methods espoused by Coppola and his collaborators on *Dracula* were at that point most certainly considered long dead by the emerging New New Hollywood standards, and yet something about the industrial embrace of the digital was repellent enough to cause the highly-touted revival of these older methods in this case.

"Naïve" Visual Effects

> So the movie was based on several innovative, risky ideas. That all of the effects would be done in-camera and not with the benefit of modern computer or optical printer technology. We would try to do our own naïve effects, and that would give the film a more mythical soul.
>
> – Francis Ford Coppola

> It was just the challenge of doing it the hard way, and the pleasure of knowing that's how it was done in the past. And we were staying in that tradition.

[122] Elsaesser, 204. "...if we believe the publicity department's assertion that the film contains no digital effects – done as an 'authentic pastiche' of the thrusting enthusiasm and craftsmanlike pride associated with the early cinema's inventor-bricoleur-pioneers."

– Roman Coppola, Visual Effects and Second Unit Director[123]

The subtitle of a specially produced behind-the-scenes documentary on *Dracula* reveals succinctly where the novelty of the project is presumed to lie: *In-Camera: The Naïve Special Effects of Bram Stoker's Dracula.* To suggest that the special effects are "naïve" is to immediately predetermine that a rejection of synthetic imaging, even as early as 1992, is at best whimsical and at worst unsophisticated or simplistic; that is, the suggestion of naïveté fairly shouts that the filmmakers have in some way misapprehended the possibilities of their own medium. One can make no mistake about from whom the word "naïve" is taken as a descriptor, as Coppola himself (and his son) sprinkled a number of instances of 1992 publicity for the film with this exact phrase.[124]

However the scenes and effects highlighted in the documentary suggest a definite sense of irony on the part of the filmmakers. For instance, in describing an on-set illusion which allows Dracula to appear in front of a mirror without casting a reflection, Roman Coppola describes the method as "That old trick that the Marx Brothers used so nicely, in which you think there is a mirror, but in fact there's an empty space and a duplicate set beyond."[125] The implication here is that the naïveté is really the backdoor to cleverness: the illusion appears to be completely complicated to achieve without post-production printer effects, and yet the method used had been utilized for sight gags in the 1930s. The filmmakers' stubborn refusal to accept that this could not be done in an actual pro-filmic space, has led them to return to the classical for inspiration, and through their research they have supposedly stumbled upon not so much a naïve solution to the problem, but

[123] *In-Camera,* both quoted in the promotional documentary.
[124] Biodrowski, 26.
[125] *In-Camera,* promotional documentary.

rather a profoundly effective one that the filmmakers have here given a second chance.

Dracula goes even further than this with some of its most simplistically achieved illusions which are meant to present Dracula's castle as a vortex of otherworldly evil that somehow eschews the physical laws of nature. This includes several scenes of Oldman crawling up and down the castle's exterior walls, and Reeves suddenly falling sideways (rather than down) across a ledge as he tries to escape. Both of these are described by Roman Coppola in the documentary as eerie illusions which are meant to optically complicate the viewer's sense of perspective in relation to the horizon. This is presumed to create uneasiness and vertigo in the audience because the force of gravity is seemingly warped or destroyed in surprising ways. Yet, upon closer inspection the climbing up and down walls seems more reminiscent of the cheap effects the 1960s *Batman* series as much as anything devastatingly scary: a slap on the wrist to filmmakers who might spend thousands of dollars and employ harnesses and greenscreen technology (or rather bluescreen as was the contemporaneous process) to achieve a gravity effect, rather than simply learning how to turn the camera on its side.

Likewise, a shot in the finished film which captures several rats running across the ceiling of Castle Dracula's cellar – upside down, of course – as Harker wanders quizzically unaware in the deep space background below them, suggests a similar address. Seemingly the most "naïve" of all the effects presented as such in the documentary, this shot virtually chastises both viewers and the industry itself for an interest in unnecessary – that is to say more expensive, or less photorealistically effective – technological methods. The way in which Roman Coppola describes the method behind achieving the effect furthers this notion of a reflexive scolding of sorts. Only the bottom portion of the film was exposed, with

real rats running across a beam on the floor, while the rest of the shot was masked to prevent exposure. Then it was simply a question of turning the camera upside down, reversing the masking, and filming Keanu Reeves stalking through the cellar. The in-camera double exposure here is so easily achieved that it bears mentioning the idiosyncratic way in which the director himself claims simply in *Cinefantastique*: "I'm proud of that shot."[126] Clearly the pride comes not simply from deducing how to shoot the effect, but rather in the execution of it, and the conspicuousness of the finished product in the film. Perhaps also the pride comes mainly from what it represents: a demonstration.

Again, the major point is that the digitization of the cinema, in and of itself, is not the phantasmagorical villain despite what some theorists might contend. Rather, it is digital or synthetic *imaging* that is the implicit problem for Coppola and his crew. In point of fact, Coppola has long embraced the use of a digital intermediate for post-production color-timing and digital editors alike. *American Cinematographer* even notes Coppola's use of video playback on the set of *Dracula* itself.[127] This fact seems to prove that the problem with the digital is decidedly not an infatuation with film stock against more recent recording technologies – at least, that is, in the post-production stage. Rather the formal logic of *Dracula* much more definitively suggests that the concern amongst the filmmakers is for the preservation of an original, pro-filmic event. The refusal on the part of Coppola of not only synthetic imaging (produced digitally), but also of even traditional optical printing effects, further suggests this notion. It would seem that whatever connivance the effects team would have to perpetrate in their elaborate illusionism, all was fair game if, and only if, the *mise-en-scène* was ostensibly 'real.' The equation here is simple: if a sequence or shot

[126] Steve Biodrowski, "Directing the Horror Epic," *Cinefantastique*, October 1992, 35.
[127] George Turner, 48.

depicted a physical thing as existing in the diegetic space of the narrative at that moment, then an actual physical thing would have to exist in the pro-filmic space in front of the camera at that moment.

An article by Craig Barron, director of matte photography on the film, seems to enforce this point in its discussion of the impending obsolescence of "latent images" in contemporaneous matte work.[128] As Barron suggests, optical printing had largely already caused a large scale abandonment of latent image matte processes; what had traditionally been a process of using actual painted mattes on sets in the *mise-en-scène* was, by 1992, routinely replaced by post-production tricks. Namely, this tended to include the analogue optical printer, which as an apparatus joins two separate sets of footage to create special effects shots in which something in the background and something in a separate foreground must be combined to diegetically illusory effect. Evidently, according to the paratextual rhetoric, even this stage of modern post-production was eschewed by Coppola as apparently infringing on the naïve effects mandate. Further, it seems, computers had eroded the reliance upon painted mattes even more, and the fact that Coppola hired several different matte companies to build and film actual mattes at a moment when such a step was considered horribly inefficient, reinforces an unflinching dedication to the authenticity of pro-filmic objects in space.[129] Crucially, the mattes – sometimes completely flat images – and constructed miniatures alike point out how absurd a continued notion of realism based on the primacy of the old cinema methods truly seemed for many at this point. Many scenes with matte and miniature work, in their absurdly contrived artificial perspectivalism, defeat any argument that posits that the actual object in the pro-filmic space must (in reality) in

[128] Craig Barron, "Making Modern Matte Shots—1992," *American Cinematographer,* December 1992, 65.
[129] Ibid, 67.

any way resemble the diegetic object it is meant to represent *except* from the distorted angle from which it is captured by the camera's lens. To put it simply, only "cinematic" realism matters here: the photorealistic way that the objects become captured on the film in a way that succinctly approximates for the viewer the illusion that is sought after. Judgments about the ontology of the content – especially in a fantasy film that has nothing to do with conventional realism – are relatively moot on this point.

The most noteworthy example of this phenomenon (artificial perspectivalism based on the position of the camera to pro-filmic objects) is a scene that begins at the gates of a castle in the distant background, and gives the immediate impression of Wellesian composition-in-depth. This involves the manipulation of several physical planes of action within the pro-filmic space, even if the actual distance between these spaces is illusory. First, Dracula and Mina converse in the immediate foreground. Second, immediately behind them stand the giant gates at the entrance of the estate, one plane further back. Finally, figured in the seemingly distant background is the actual castle high on a hill, which looks to be hundreds of feet away and near the horizon line of the composition. However, this too is merely an illusion produced *within* the space of the mise-en-scene of the set. As related by the filmmakers, "Hillingham Manor" is actually a tiny scale miniature suspended in the air on a hidden crane arm. When raised to the proper height, and removed to the appropriate distance – in actuality no more than a foot or two behind the gate on the very same interior stage as the actors themselves – this gives the intense impression of renaissance perspective in the camera eye that causes the viewer to apprehend a huge distance between the characters and the castle. Here, Roman Coppola himself implicitly refers to the imperfect vision of the cinema camera when describing the "forced-

perspective" that is in fact *necessary* in order to achieve such an illusion in pro-filmic space.[130] This discussion reveals what has arguably been at stake all along: not the loss of realism itself, but the loss of the cultural position of the cinematic real, which is destroyed by digital objects that have never existed anywhere except in the computer program that created them.

Here, it becomes apparent that Manovich has slightly missed the discursive point to be made regarding the positing of CGI's 'fakeness': it is not that the filmmakers – and conceivably their target audience – "miss" the cinematic way in which they are accustomed to seeing the world with imperfect vision, but rather that they miss the security of knowing that there ever was something there in the pro-filmic space at all. The security that this cinematic vision affords the audience, through its appeal to (imperfect cinematic) realism, involves the indexical way in which the film image is pre-supposed to point back to something tangible. Here, the unwritten pact between filmmaker and spectator – that some basic reality did at some point ontologically stand before the camera for the audience's benefit – harkens to recover "the cinema's" privileged place in an earlier cultural hierarchy of viscerality in art; in short, this concerns the struggle to preserve the cinematic trace from falling into meaninglessness.

Chiefly implicated in this process is the body of the performer him or herself. Of note here is how this emphasis on transforming Gary Oldman into a plethora of seven creepy gangly monster-forms, further runs at cross-purposes with Hart's intentions for the film's love story aspect.[131] This is at least the way it has become understood in the press, with Kim Newman, for instance, insinuating that the grotesque makeup may actually be

[130] *In-Camera,* interviewed in the promotional documentary.
[131] Steve Biodrowski, "Vampire Effects," *Cinefantastique*, October 1992, 40.

responsible for a perceived failure on the part of Oldman to be a satisfying romantic hero.[132] According to McCarthy, the sound design was also somewhat restrained for this very reason: not prefiguring Oldman as too grotesquely creepy (as a still necessarily romantic character).[133] However, the visual grotesqueness is more densely and overtly presented since a primary appeal of the reliance on authentic pro-filmic events is the promise that Oldman will consequently suffer for his craft – and for the audiences' benefit. That he will leave a piece of himself on the film record is an attraction that cannot possibly be duplicated by synthetic imaging. And suffer he did if the film's marketing is any trustworthy indicator: his twelve piece "old age" makeup alone supposedly took up to two people up to six hours to apply, and he apparently had it applied to his body on eighteen occasions during principle shooting.[134] *Cinefantastique* would also have cinemagoers profoundly respect Oldman's arduous transformation into the bat-form of the monster that required an inadequately ventilated body suit that, according to makeup designer Matthew Mungle, Oldman found immediately intolerable "because of his metabolism."[135] It is even reported that on several occasions Oldman was driven to virtual madness by sitting in a makeup chair for hours only to wait subsequent hours for the shots to be set-up, and sometimes to be told that he wouldn't be needed that day after all.[136] It is Ryder herself who claims to have referred to him as "The King of Pain" while shooting.[137]

Perhaps nowhere is the film's emphasis on celebrating its own material reality and baroque visual virtuosity more apparent, however, than in Coppola's publicized decision to

[132] Newman, 13.
[133] McCarthy, interview by author.
[134] Biodrowski, "Vampire Effect," 40.
[135] Ibid, 41.
[136] Ibid, 42.
[137] Abramowitz, 55.

ornately decorate his actors with the help of legendary Japanese costume designer Eiko Ishioka. Referred to in an *American Cinematographer* write-up as a famous "conceptual artist," Ishioka likewise erodes Hart's ideas for the film's merger of fictional Dracula with historical Vlad the Impaler via intensely colored baroque flowing capes, gowns, and dandy suits which hollowly hint at the Victorian setting but cloud historical and cultural specificity just as much in other moments.[138] The battle armor designed for Prince Vlad, for instance, grotesquely suggests flayed muscles on its blood red exterior in a way that is supposedly based on Japanese designs rather than that which was likely to have been used by a medieval Transylvanian prince.[139] The importance here has been placed upon unadulterated baroque virtuosity. Instead of conveying an overwhelming concern for historical accuracy, the designs stand out in many of the purposefully sparsely decorated interior sets as a visually dense pro-filmic attraction all on their own; sublimely excessive in their often total lack of narrative motivation.

Discussion of the design of the armor in particular performs a virtual double duty on promoting the myth of the film by merging the promotion of Ishioka's intense creations with Oldman's intense sacrifice. The suit had 107 individual pieces that had to be grafted onto Oldman's person including finger, chest, and shoulder pieces, and it reportedly took great difficulty getting the actor into it as "Esioka [sic] had ordered that no visible closures be used."[140] The costume took so long to fabricate that it initially was not ready in time for shooting, and then on his first take in it, Oldman smashed into a wall and destroyed a

[138] Ron Magid, "Effects Add Bite to *Bram Stoker's Dracula,*" *American Cinematographer,* December 1992, 57.
[139] Ibid, 57.
[140] Ibid, 57.

portion of it, which had to be subsequently refurbished.[141]

Ultimately, this near fetishization of the pro-filmic event in both the trades and the film itself is partnered most conspicuously with the fascination with proto-cinematic illusion effects whenever Dracula casts a shadow on the walls of his castle. In the finished film, the effect is that a towering thrown shadow appears at first to be cast by Dracula's body, but moments later begins to move menacingly across the wall independently of his person. The easy solution would have been to simply animate a false shadow in post-production, but obviously that would not do here: someone would actually have to cast a real pro-filmic shadow on the wall, and naturally this couldn't be the actor in front of the camera who is moving independently of it. Here, Ballhaus suggests in an interview that it was "quite difficult to achieve" continuing that "We had a dancer behind [Gary Oldman] and a dancer created his shadow and doubled his movements in sync with him."[142] The lighting choices here also utilized the similar aesthetic value that was inseparable from actual old school technique with Ballhaus claiming that he had to use flicker boxes and moving light for most shots primarily because of the fact that there were no electric lights in Dracula's time.[143]

The final illustrious merger of pro-filmic infatuations for the film brings together miniature forced-perspective, moving scale props, archaic lighting effects, and the importance of actual cast shadows hitting the *mise-en-scène* in a shot which simulates the surrealistic image of a train traveling across the face of Harker's diary, and was so challenging to engineer on the stage that it seems to have been largely misunderstood in

[141] Ibid, 58.
[142] Turner, 39.
[143] Ibid, 39.

the finished film's effect. Utilizing a miniature train with functioning steam, the only way to get the shadow from the steam to pass over the book with an in-camera effect – that is without combining these features with optical printers or simply animating the shadow – was to backlight the scene so that the steaming train passes (in the middle ground) between the angled light source (in the background) and Harker's diary (in the immediate foreground, directly in front of the camera). However, this created an anomaly: the train had to be removed to a distance from the camera of at least twenty feet in order to properly maintain the desired scale, and crucially disguise its status as a miniature. Yet, at this distance removed from the camera (and the journal), it no longer casts shadows on the journal, which is now too far away from the light and train to achieve the effect. The father/son team of visual effects supervisor Gene Warren, Jr. and visual effects camera operator Christopher Lee Warren, thus set about engineering a suitable alternative, which reportedly involved the manufacture of a twenty foot wide super-sized prop version of Harker's journal.[144] Here the book is set twenty feet away from the camera, directly in front of the miniature train, so that the shadow of the train's cascading steam is indeed cast across the pages of the book. The fact that the book is a prop is completely disguised.

Thus, despite its intense dissection of filmic illusions, *Dracula* is not anti-illusionistic, for the appeal of the film necessarily premises itself on precisely the same kind of virtuosity that Spielberg so adeptly espouses in his comments about the seamlessness of the integration of digital effects into *Jurassic Park*. At worst, it matters not at all if the widest audience is even aware of the techniques used to attain these illusions, and at best – more likely considering the heavy marketing of these behind-the-scenes discussions – it matters

[144] *In-Camera*, promotional documentary. Christopher Lee Warren explains this design.

only that the audience subsequently recognize and admire the brilliance of the illusion. Thus even in its conflict with contemporaneous Hollywood illusionism, *Dracula* maintains not that illusionism itself is destructive, but merely that an older kind of (naïve) illusionism is best.

Disappointing Expectations and Assumptions about Authorship

The question remains, to whom are these paratextual materials addressed? Thomas Austin's empirical audience study suggests that if Coppola was expecting his virtuosity to be widely appreciated, he would have to have been sadly mistaken.[145] Chief among the negative reactions to the film in Austin's survey was that it far too greatly defied the audience's generic expectations. To put it simply: it was not scary. The second intolerable offense of the film – especially for the 1990s – was the incoherence of the plot. Coppola's journal entries reveal this to be his first, most pressing concern; certainly this took precedence above and beyond whether or not the effects would be recognized, or if the film was sufficiently horrifying.[146] And thus Coppola reveals the underlying concern that trumps the rest: whether or not complex narration used toward artistic purposes can remain tolerable in the era of spectacle *vis-à-vis* a straight forward plot that had been normalized by the early 90s.

The character of Dracula himself seems to have been a primary point of contention in regard to the placement of sympathy, and the conflicting authorial agendas no doubt erode an easy reading of the character in any event. Coppola himself expresses frustration

---

[145] Thomas Austin, "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*: *Gone with the Wind* Plus Fangs," in *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s.*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, 114-151.

[146] Gene Philips, "Fright Night: *Bram Stoker's Dracula*," *Godfather: The Intimate Francis Ford Coppola* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 296. See reprinting of Coppola's Journal: "The end especially let them down."

over this point of contention in his own journal entries which re-cap his observation of an early test screening: "They wished for a more dramatic kill of Dracula."[147] This point, coupled with the concurrent fear of audience misapprehension about what exactly happens to the characters at the end of the story, meant that Coppola re-shot the climactic scene. Commenting on this down-to-the-wire nature of the film's post-production schedule, McCarthy maintains "We stayed on the film until November of that year…We were under tough guidelines and deadlines. We were basically working seven days a week. We were working sixteen hours a day. Francis continued to change the film. And not small changes, but big changes."[148] In the original ending, Dracula is killed by Harker and his vampire hunters, but apparently with this conclusion, audiences were evidently unclear on what the implication was for the now vampirically transformed Mina's ability to either enjoy a happy *or* a sad ending. As a result Coppola altered the finale so that Mina is allowed to melodramatically decapitate Dracula – importantly in tears and only after he has begged her to "release" him. This, in theory, solves little of the confusion however, as it both further humanizes Dracula's suffering yet also reinforces the fact that Mina must be released from his terrible spell so as to return to the true hero Harker. Thus in its final moments the film suffers the ultimate fate of a text caught in the crossfire of too many competing authorial agendas and industrial forces pulling it in different directions for different reasons to different effect, and seems to almost metadiscursively flirt with its own loss of a cohesive intelligibility by embracing narrative ambiguity once and for all.

Coppola's journal also reveals his relief with the commercial success of the film.[149] In

---

[147] Ibid, 296.
[148] McCarthy, interview by author. The film premiered on November 13, 1992.
[149] Phillips, 298. Coppola retreated to Guatemala so he "wouldn't have to worry about how the film opens."

answer to whether or not the film could stand up as an example of old school cinematic artistry maintaining its tenability in the New New Hollywood that represented its downfall, Coppola would have to content himself that the film made back its budget many times: reportedly over $200 million worldwide.[150] Additionally, *Dracula* went on to win three Oscars at the 1993 Academy Awards ceremony. It should be added that these all related to some of the most aggressively marketed formal aspects of the film with two concerning its elaborately designed *mise-en-scène*: one for Eiko Ishioka's Best Costume Design, and another for Greg Cannom, Michele Burk, and Matthew Mungle's Best Make-up. David Stone and Tom McCarthy, as the supervising sound editors, also won the newly grafted award for Best Sound Editing. Additionally, Thomas E. Sanders and Garrett Lewis were nominated for Best Art Direction, reiterating again the main attributes for which the film would be critically praised as artistically noteworthy: its archaic technical mastery of spectacle.

The film largely pre-dates the notion of the independent-blockbuster, but for the most part is too large to be considered an independent film (from a $40 million budget, it grossed double its cost in North American alone, and was not organizationally independent, being produced directly by Columbia Pictures and American Zoetrope).[151] Rather, it seems more appropriate to label it as an attempt to create an epic art film. Describing the creative attempt to transcend genre expectations, McCarthy states: "this was more of an art film than a horror film, or a love story… or any of that."[152] Here, *Dracula's* structural allegories of the cinema make it metadiscursive of an industry consumed with unapologetic

---

And later "I knew it would have to do at least seven or eight million dollars not to be a disgrace."

[150] Ibid, 298.

[151] "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*," Box Office Mojo, accessed October 11, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=bramstokersdracula.htm. Accessed October 11, 2014.

[152] McCarthy, interview by author.

technologies of spectacular illusionism: self-consciously rebuking what audiences and industry wanted it to be. That is, to the extent that this was industrially tolerable. However, Coppola's film cannot be divorced from the larger agenda of a horizontally integrated Sony Corporation; whatever Coppola's hopes may have been for creating a deeply 'cinematic' *Dracula,* Sony added a novelization, a board game, and even a video game *Dracula* that partially dismantle the notion irretrievably.[153]

In this context, *Dracula* becomes a litmus test for the continued virility of Hollywood in accommodating what must be viewed, despite its complicated multi-faceted authorship and synergistic scope, as a deeply personal film for its director. Coppola himself describes his frustration with the special effects crew that he fired in precisely these terms, when he notes that the reason they had to go was because they were pushing him to make films "the way everyone else was doing it."[154] He has further suggested that his subsequent collaboration with Roman was born out of the notion that he could only trust his own family; because he had brought up his son in the old style he knew he could count on him to guard and maintain the formal logic of the project from its detractors.[155]

And yet, what this description of the film as a "personal vision" also achieves is a devaluing of the excessive amount of the film that proceeded through pre-production, production, and post-production without the involvement of Francis Ford Coppola at all. Here, the allegories of cinema throughout the film indeed attest to the intensely collaborative nature of it, as a narrative feature film, in comparison to hypothetical examples of artisanal or avant-garde productions. Indeed, the much-touted second unit led

[153] Austin, 135.
[154] *In-Camera,* promotional documentary.
[155] Ibid.

by Roman Coppola (as both second unit and visual effects director) is emblematic of this phenomenon, where an entire parallel crew seemingly created – because of the effects-driven nature of the film – just as much of the motion picture as the main crew did. Some aspects of *Dracula's* complex audio-visual style, in this regard, necessitated drastic measures on the part of its filmmakers: for example, supervising ADR editor David B. Cohn's renting out of three separate apartments (in Napa Valley, New York, and London, England, respectively) for the duration of post-production on the film because of his need to travel to these diverse location's facilities for the supervised re-recording of audio tracks.[156] The threat of the digitization of cinema thus also seems to pervade this discourse of the early cinema craftsmanship of the film; as McCarthy alludes to, the digitization of many of these processes today make such transportation unnecessary (and thus unfeasible). And routinely these processes are therefore outsourced to technicians in other parts of the world, who might never meet at all, but can be succinctly connected by instantly downloadable digital platforms. Here, the director of the New New Hollywood film need not be in the same hemisphere as that of the majority of production and post-production man hours completed on his or her project.

Ultimately, this undying notion that 'the Cinema' is something created by a singular artist in the field – even if the field is a sound stage at Columbia Pictures – rather than something programmed by engineers on a computer, remains among an ever-shrinking set of filmmakers. At stake for Coppola is the unfettered ability of his camera-pen to write these personal stories on his own terms; to maintain the cinema's place as a relevant art form in the face of that promise's perceived destruction in the New New Hollywood. Here, Dracula,

[156] McCarthy, interview by author.

as a significant historical emblem, does not merely equal the cinema, or the cinema camera, but perhaps, for Coppola, a historically undead cinema artist.

Continued Resistance

One of the next projects produced (but not directed) by Coppola suggests there was much more behind the director's decision to create a *Dracula* for the 90s than the prototypical vampiric allegory: one would be pressed to ask what the contagion allegory within *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994) might be under such circumstances. At stake in the re-imagining of horror classics within the New New Hollywood is something far more complex and metadiscursive, even as much as the resistance to industry imperatives has also appeared to have been futile. For most of Hollywood, the contagion was contained. Nevertheless, with *Frankenstein,* the logic of casting a master thespian in the role of the monster obsolescently holds. In fact, Zoetrope perhaps stretches this kind of old school, theatrical approach to the classic monster to its proverbial breaking point: by putting Hollywood heavyweight Robert DeNiro in the role of the monster and heavily marketing the film around that decision. Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that DeNiro would play the role in heavy make-up, rather than more contemporary forms for the visualizing of monstrosity, owing to director Kenneth Branagh's status as himself a theatrical thespian. In this context, Branagh seems concerned more with the status of Mary Shelley's novel as a work of great literature than as a proverbial icon of the classical Hollywood horror film, James Whales's *Frankenstein* (1931).

Another important example of this phenomenon in regard to the monster movie, is Frank Marshall's *Congo* (1995), which in the middle of the decade seemed to stretch this virtuosity principle to the breaking point. In the wake of *Jurassic Park,* Marshall arguably

attempted to capitalize on the high concept notion of human protagonists being trapped in the home environment of primordial beasts. Yet, in comparison to the former film, *Congo* primarily used human actors in prosthetic suits to portray its monster gorillas, by 1995 a strictly taboo scenario that resulted in a mixed reputation for the film. Indeed, a preponderance of gorilla films in the intervening years have either mixed CGI with practical animatronics, such as Ron Underwood's remake of *Mighty Joe Young* (1998), or have dispensed entirely with any effects that are not computer-generated, such as Peter Jackson's remake of *King Kong* (2005).

Nevertheless, even as recently as Joe Johnston's *The Wolfman* (2010), one can see a similar preference for a 'real' pro-filmic monster – when deemed feasible by producers – to break the perceived monotony of animated villains that continue to be branded as inauthentic by certain actors and directors within the industry. Johnston's film here has the added pressure, arguably even more so than Coppola's, of remaking a classical era Universal monster movie – George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941) – which was penned by screenwriter Curt Siodmak as an original creation of the cinema. Thus, it is worth noting that Benicio del Toro was adamant, as the actor in the leading role, that he be transformed into the eponymous monster to the maximum extent possible via exhausting make-up rather than CGI, and as a producer of the film, that he brought in legendary old school creature-creator Rick Baker for this express purpose.

The question of publicized resentment of digital imaging in and since the 1990s, thus, does not end with Francis Ford Coppola and his foray into neoclassic horror. On the contrary, his film merely set the stage for similar cinephilic reactions from other film school aesthetes as the decade progressed. Quentin Tarantino's much touted disinterest in CGI, or,

especially the use of digital acquisition of images, is prescient here. From the kung fu western epic in two parts *Kill Bill* (2003-2004) to generically reflexive "Grindhouse" action film *Deathproof* (2007), Tarantino has continued to use stunt personnel in conjunction with practical and full-scale visual effects, and on these productions completely refused to employ computer-generated imagery. Additionally, Tarantino's theater, The New Beverly Cinema (for now) exclusively shows films on film. And most recently, in response to the increasingly ubiquitous prevalence of digital cinema, Tarantino declared at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival that "As far as I'm concerned, digital projection... is the death of cinema as I know it... Digital projection, that's just television in public. And apparently the whole world is ok with television in public, but what I knew as cinema is dead."[157]

Coppola's fellow film brat Martin Scorsese has likewise, at times, made idiosyncratic and specifically anachronistic film choices based on a relatively unabashed preference for the look and effect of old movies. This importantly includes his attempt to bring back Technicolor (or rather the attempt to recapture the look and feel supposedly inherent to the classical Hollywood Technicolor processes). With *The Aviator* (2004), a biopic on Howard Hughes that importantly depicts his time in Hollywood, Scorsese elected to depict the world of classical film in the formal guise of classical film:

> I really am fascinated by color. When I was a kid, the movie theater was my refuge. And many of the films I saw were two- or three-strip Technicolor. Basically, I took the two-color thing all the way up to 1936, which is when three-strip Technicolor came in. To me, it was like the sense memory of that time. I imagined that world that way, especially Hollywood.[158]

Here, Scorsese refers to the way that he instructed the post-production color timers to

---

[157] "Tarantino Declares the 'Death of Cinema' at Cannes," *Toronto Star,* May 23, 2014.

[158] Martin Scorsese quoted in Bob Strauss. "Wing Men: Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese Mustered Howard Hughes-like Intensity to get *'The Aviator'* Off of the Ground," *Daily News of Los Angeles.* December 12, 2004.

purposely blast out the images with the non-subtle hallmarks of two-strip Technicolor (for scenes depicting a time when that process was used) and three-strip Technicolor (for later diegetic periods depicted in the film when the new process had taken over). Notably, however, the director did not phenomenally revive the actual processes, which involved photochemical saturation, but rather elected a digital color correction process that would supposedly duplicate this *appearance*. This crucial difference results in the completed film exhibiting, at times, extremes of orange and teal that flood some exterior sequences with the appearance of an abstract otherworldliness as they attempt to evoke the bygone era as photographed in the classical era.

The resistance to New New Hollywood spectacular imaging may appear to be a manufactured crisis, but has been far from trivial in terms of the perception of the state of cinema's cultural cachet going into the twenty-first century. In the next chapter the question of cinematic reality in the 90s age of digital recording again comes to the fore, this time in the form of hyperreal generated sound. Like the crisis over the cinematic visual image, this too will suggest that films complicating the division between classical and post-classical Hollywood can be just as intertextually referential as Elsaesser posits, *and* successful in the New New Hollywood, despite the seeming obsolescence of their forms. In this, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is just one instance of an already dead form that refuses to die.

CHAPTER THREE
"There are No Boundaries": The Status of Sound and the Transnational in *The English Patient*

ELAINE: Why is everyone talking about "*The English Patient*, it's so romantic"? God, that movie stunk!
BLAINE: I kinda liked it.
ELAINE: No you didn't.
CAROL: Elaine, Elaine, did you just see *The English Patient*?
GAIL: Didn't you love it?
ELAINE: No!
LISA: How could you not love that movie?
ELAINE: How about, it sucked?
– *Seinfeld*, "The English Patient", NBC, 13 March 1997

I have thus far argued that three primary shifts characterize the period of the New New Hollywood, and thereby govern the limits of reflexive practice during this time: an organizational shift in marketing and audience, a shift in formal plot structures, and a technological shift to digital mechanisms of representation. Arguably, no film from this period more distinctly connects all three of these industrial crises as much as Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996). As an over-performing independent-blockbuster, the film occupies an interstitial space that, according to 1990s industrial paradigms, is counter-intuitive to survival. Whereas *Chaplin* and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* mitigated the periphery of this space, *The English Patient's* level of critical acclaim, controversy, and financial success go far beyond either of these earlier films, making it a bona fide cultural phenomenon in the winter of 1997.

Within three months of its initial theatrical release, the film had become the topic of conversation on no less than one of America's highest-rated television programs, *Seinfeld.* The March 13th episode of NBC's hit situation comedy, titled "The English Patient," dealt

heavily with the U.S. public's supposed infatuation with Minghella's film, ultimately arguing that this fascination was counter-intuitive at best. In one of the main plot-lines from the episode, the character Elaine is forced to encounter the film over and over, much to her chagrin. What is worse, everyone around her – her friends, her partner, her boss – all seem to love the movie as much as she despises it. Elaine would rather watch the fictional *Sack Lunch,* a screw-ball comedy purportedly starring Dabney Coleman, than Minghella's film, which she explicitly criticizes as deceptively passionless and boring. The message is clear: *The English Patient* is not the type of movie that is supposed to be that successful with mainstream audiences. The suggestion that foremost *The English Patient* lacks redeeming entertainment value is bolstered by Elaine's frustration with the people around her, whom she insinuates do not actually like the movie but are simply bowing to the cultural pressure of appreciating an important film. This much is evident in her reply of "No you didn't" when her own boyfriend claims to have liked it.

Within two weeks of this episode's airing, *The English Patient* again became the subject of attention for a large TV audience; this time on the night of March 24th, 1997, when it dominated the 69th Academy Awards. Seemingly unfazed by *Seinfeld's* commentary, Academy voters bestowed 9 awards on the film – many more than any other nominee, including a "Best Director" statue for Minghella and the prize for "Best Picture" of the year. In this, the film is arguably a 1990s anomaly. Here, the discussion of the film on the NBC series is perhaps related to the ways it goes against the evolving trend of critically popular films of that time. First, the film was independently-produced; by the standards of the evolving 1990s definition of "independent film," it can at least be said that *The English*

Patient was not directly financed or distributed by one of the major Hollywood studios.[159] Second, the film aggressively departs from the prevailing narrative structure of popular films of that moment: it has an exorbitantly long running time (162 minutes) with little action, yet the plot is challengingly non-linear and epistolary in its multiple focalizations of narrative action. Concordant with the film's narrative complexity, *The English Patient* was also ahead of its time in being completely digitally edited and mixed. Finally, the film garnered a popular perception that it was not American at all, but a decidedly British outsider in Hollywood. As I will argue later, this final perception does not hold up to scrutiny: several key personnel are British citizens, but that is where the "Britishness" ends, with the film not having been filmed, financed, or set in Great Britain.

For distributor Miramax Pictures, *The English Patient* became a touchstone for the perceived national crisis of 1996: namely the loudly expressed notion among film critics that none of the most artistic or innovative films of the year were American blockbusters. "For the first time in the glorious history of Hollywood, the mighty studios have been crushed to dust by critical and commercial acclaim for such defiant independent creations as *The English Patient, Fargo, Secrets and Lies,* and *Shine,*" noted *The Gazette* of the Academy Awards.[160] Or, as *The St. Peterburg Times* acerbically summed up:

> Old Hollywood, age 69, died Monday night at its spring home in Los Angeles. The cause of death was determined to be complications from neglect, which strikes investigators as odd since an estimated 1-billion people were watching at the time. […] Then came reports that only one film with major studio support, a big star and ticket sales to match was among the finalists for the coveted best-picture prize.

---

[159] This fact is mitigated by the realization that financing/distribution was handled by Miramax Pictures, already by that time a subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company. Yet, the relationship between Disney and Miramax founders, Harvey and Bob Weinstein, supposedly allowed for the "creative autonomy" of the smaller company. Such assertions are the subject of scholarly debate.

[160] John Griffin, "Oscar Embraces the Indies," *Montreal Gazette,* March 22, 1997.

Friends whispered that it was only a matter of time.[161]

Cameron Crowe's *Jerry Maguire* (1996) is the "one film" of reference, which seemed the only solidly United Statesian studio project among all the nominated films. Even the Coen Brothers's *Fargo* (1996) – in its celebration as an instant classic American independent film – arrived via idiosyncratic British production and distribution channels.[162] This made 1996 a definite outlier. In the previous 10 years, no Best Picture winner had been produced by a company outside the United States, and few ranked as "independent" in terms of production cost or distribution origins.

In this respect*, The English Patient* became a 1990s independent-blockbuster par excellence, produced at a fraction of the cost of its immediate predecessors *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *Braveheart* (1995), but able to boast about grossing roughly ten times its budget internationally: $231,976,425.[163] This is a profit margin not even equaled by the following year's Academy winner *Titanic* (1997), which quickly became the highest grossing film of all-time domestically and internationally, yet was also one of the costliest in history. While *Titanic* seemingly proved the rule that great commercial success comes from great upfront expense, *The English Patient* defied this evolving industrial logic. Indeed, with a reported budget of $27 million, the film crosses just *over* the boundary of a veritable interstitial danger zone from $25 to $60 million: the range of budgets within which a film during this time, according to empirical research, stood no less than a fifty percent chance

---

[161] Steve Persall, "Old Hollywood is Dead: RIP," *The St. Petersburg Times,* March 2, 1997.

[162] Alisa Perren, *Indie, inc.: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 169. *Fargo* was primarily financed by London-based Gramercy Pictures, which also, ironically, maintained ownership as North American distributors of the film.

[163] "*The English Patient*," Box Office Mojo, last modified February 17, 2014, accessed February 17, 2014. http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=englishpatient.htm

of absolute commercial failure.[164] Implicitly, responsible producers would keep their films either significantly below this range, solidly in the safer realm of the independents, or invest enough capital to put their film above it, into the potentially lucrative land of the blockbuster giants. *The English Patient* is the only "Best Picture" of the entire 1990s with a reported budget that falls definitively *within* this range.[165]

Crucially, as I will argue, *The English Patient* is fundamentally metadiscursive of its own counter-intuitive industrial positioning, and its very success makes it a litmus test for reflexivity in the New New Hollywood. The film itself opens with several shots of an anonymously held brush painting images on parchment; it takes much of the credit sequence to determine that the illustrations represent swimming human figures. This first sequence is already a visual reflection on the work of metaphor. The painting of the swimmers shown only in unestablished extreme close-up is impossible to interpret in its representational quality until after the entire figure is completed and revealed to be a swimming person. Alan Nadel stops short of explicitly perceiving a self-reflexive quality of the allegory enveloping this credit sequence, when he claims that the painting is analogous to the geographic labeling and colonial claiming with which the film's narrative will presently concern itself; the ink from the brush transforms the parchment in ways – "not just an inscription but a conversion" – that are not natural or immediately apparent in their

---

[164] Perren, 157. Perren cites a study by Leonard Klady which additionally concludes that the most profitable of all films in 1996-1997 were those that cost *at least* $60 million, with the next most profitable range lying from $8 million to $15 million.

[165] The one possible exception to this is 1994's *Forrest Gump.* With an officially reported budget of $55 million, it occupies a space near the top end of the range. However, Robert Zemeckis's film is also one of the most industrially notorious examples in history of the supposed practice of "Hollywood accounting," by which a production company dramatically over-reports expenditures in an effort to keep a film "officially" in the red. The accusation lodged against the film by insiders and critics is that Paramount Pictures's official (seemingly incredulous) position that the film took a net *loss* despite its high gross, was calculated, among other reasons, to avoid payment on percentage contracts that would have been triggered by a reported profit. See Bernard Weintraub, "Gump, a Huge Hit, Still Isn't Raking in Profits? Hmm," *New York Times,* May 25, 1995.

totality.[166]

Here, Nadel has importantly seized upon the notion that from its earliest moments, *The English Patient* is structurally concerned with cultural definition. This becomes even clearer when a dissolve transitions the film from the parchment to an extreme long shot of the iconically similar sand dunes of the Sahara, where the immanent clash of cultures will take place. Yet, beyond a metaphor for the depicted events and things *within* the diegesis, the painting also foregrounds the very process of fragmentary storytelling. As is only later discovered, these opening illustrations represent a European's attempt at depicting the paintings discovered at the "Cave of Swimmers – an artifact of prehistoric North African cultures – in a literal act of transcription. In essence, this presages not only the narrative content, but also the structure of the film's narrative conceit toward the fragmentary revelation of important information as well as its thematic preoccupation with transcultural communication.

With this opening enigma, a hermeneutic plot is quickly set in motion: a mysterious pilot (Ralph Fiennes) is shot down over the desert, and found by allied forces during World War II. He is badly burned and has lost the memory of who he is and, importantly, from where he came. This "English Patient" – as his caretakers come to call him based on his accent – bonds with a French Canadian nurse, Hana (Juliette Binoche), who agrees to set-up a solitary hospice for him in an abandoned Italian monastery. The rest of the film proceeds in non-linear epistolary fashion, as the Patient struggles to remember who he was before

[166] Alan Nadel, "Mapping the Other: *The English Patient*, Colonial Rhetoric, and Cinematic Representation," in *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives of Film,* ed. David Blakesly (Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2003), 25. Nadel does go on to reference the actual credit titles in this same discussion, yet this is largely in how the film titles also themselves are metaphorically analogous to the act of labeling and inscription, making the relation between the painting and the credits more associational than directly symbolic.

his crash. Linked to the reading of the Patient's copy of Herodotus's *Histories* – heavily annotated with his own personal notes, etchings, and pasted with additional tokens from his previous life – the film reveals its answer to the Patient, and the audience, only in fragments. As it turns out, "the English Patient" is not English. He was once known as Count Lazlo de Almásy, a *Hungarian* archeologist and cartographer. Through his travels, Almásy became involved with Katharine Clifton (Kristin Scott Thomas), the wife of his British colleague Geoffrey (Colin Firth), and pursued an adulterous affair with her that was painfully interrupted by the onset of the war.

In the present time-frame, a Canadian spy named Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe) arrives at the monastery and reveals that all of Almásy's former acquaintances are now dead. He accuses The Patient of having murdered the Cliftons, before revealing that he had himself been betrayed to the Germans by a man named Almásy. In the ultimate reveal of the film, The Patient realizes through flashback his culpability in the deaths of both Cliftons: when Geoffrey discovers the affair, he attempts the murder-suicide of all parties by purposely crashing his plane. However, Geoffrey succeeds only in killing himself and seriously injuring his wife. Katharine later dies only after Almásy is prevented by British soldiers – who believe he is a *German* spy – from returning to the site of the crash to rescue her. Now distraught in the knowledge of the tragedy that has befallen him, the Patient insists that Hana end his suffering by administering a fatal dose of medication.

Existing scholarship on the film is dominated by post-colonial readings. For Hsuan Hsu, psycho-sexual analysis can be applied to explicate the film's post-national ethics; the illicit love affair, when actualized through Almásy's "cartographic" gaze upon Katharine, is a commentary on geographic mapping by the colonial powers during the Second World

War.[167] Hsu argues that the film makes this connection through its formal partitioning of Katharine's body as if a land to be conquered: Almásy constantly views her through screened windows that replicate a cartographic grid, and literally speaks of laying claim to particular parts of her body. Nadel's own interpretation bears a resemblance to this type of reading at least in his connection of the cinematic gaze to mapmaking, which he argues is the "quintessential colonialist activity."[168] And yet, Hsu's interpretation also seems to rely upon the notion that the film specifically posits adulterous romantic love as subversively at odds with the national allegory: national boundaries include not just the lines draw on the map, but also the sanctioning of marriage by the state. On the other hand, linguistics scholar Bronwen Thomas sees the central metaphor of the film as that of the mirage – the Patient quotes Herodotus as comparing it to history itself – and how its invocation within the film is emblematic of notions such as the falsity of nationhood and the characters' sense of self-identity, the illusions of which are shattered by the war.[169] For Thomas, an emphasis remains on sense of place and the character's preoccupation with the localities that make up their world.

Yet, the movie poster's tagline "In love, there are no boundaries" goes well beyond these notions of post-national ethics and is itself a cipher for the film's overall industrial reflexivity. For the diegetic characters, these boundaries may revolve around marriage and nation, but for the text, the "boundaries" that are not respected also include those of film structure, audience, and origin. Minghella's film in the light of reflexive metaphor is not just

---

[167] Hsuan Hsu, "Post-Nationalism and the Cinematic Apparatus in Minghella's Adaptation of Ondaatje's *The English Patient,*" in *Comparitive Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing,* ed. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), 49-61.

[168] Nadel, 22.

[169] Bronwen Thomas, "'Piecing Together a Mirage': Adapting *The English Patient* for the Screen," in *The Classic Novel From Page to Screen,* ed. Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 199.

a text concerned with transnational flows in general, but with the subjectivity of transnational Hollywood filmmaking specifically. Here, I seek to isolate the thematic and structural indicators of parochial incoherence within the film and its paratextual materials so as to suggest that this commentary on the transnational is reflexive of an industry in definitional crisis. Like *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, the reflexive mode of the film is primarily metaphorical rather than literal, but whereas Coppola's film actualizes its central metaphors through its visual apparatuses, Minghella's film does so more elusively through aural signifiers. As can be shown through careful analysis, the film's sound allegories and narrative structure – in comparison to the narrative content and the film's popular reputation – stretch the limits of audio-visual reflexivity in 1990s Hollywood to the breaking point. *The English Patient* is a crucial text of the New New Hollywood precisely because it becomes a film that, above all, struggles with an inability to define itself in the interstitial space that it inhabits.

The British-American Patient?

Er ist ein Englander.
– German officer

Are you German?
– English officer

The first lines of Minghella's film reveal that the essential problem for the mysteriously titular Patient is that everywhere he goes he is mistaken for the enemy: the Germans think he is English, the English think he is German. Neither are correct assumptions. This is arguably the centralizing metaphor of the film: nationalistic labels in a transnationalized world are, at best, completely meaningless, and the continued reliance upon them, destructive. And where the "English Patient" is not English, so too is *The English*

Patient not English, contrary to widespread belief.

The novel upon which the film is based was written in 1992 by Sri-Lankan-born Canadian author Michael Ondaatje, and quickly became an international best-seller. Despite this geographic origin, it went on to win the Booker Prize – one of the most prestigious awards in British literature, which is rarely won by foreign entrants. *The English Patient* is the first Canadian book ever to achieve this feat.[170] For Douglas Barbour, the strength of the novel relates to its self-referential "labyrinthine" structure in which four main characters narrate individual experiences of being dislocated by the war with a seeming emphasis on the subject of writing history itself.[171] Thomas likewise argues that the novel's diegetic dialogue could just as aptly describe the structure of the story itself – concerning the reading and annotation of Herodotus – making the book at least implicitly reflexive of its written form from the outset.[172] Importantly its narrators include not only the mysterious Patient, but also Hana, Caravaggio, and a Sikh sapper Kirpal "Kip" Singh. In the film adaptation, Kip (Naveen Andrews) appears as a more minor supporting character who engages in an affair with Hana as she struggles to take care of the Patient. But in the book, Kip, along with the other three characters, drives chapter-length subjective back-stories.

It is worth noting that not only structurally, but also intertextually, both Hana and Caravaggio have arguably stronger agency than either Kip or even the Patient, as both of these characters have traversed Ondaatje's published oeuvre. His previous work *In the Skin of a Lion* prominently features Caravaggio and Hana in an earlier time in their lives, and

---

[170] Douglas Barbour, *Michael Ondaatje* (New York: Twain Publishers, 1993), 206.
[171] Ibid, 211. "*The English Patient* is as much about the power of written narratives as it is about the power of passion. Early on, the text calls attention to the strength books can exert..."
[172] Thomas, 199.

Barbour notes that "It is oddly delightful to meet them again."[173] Without being a proper sequel to the earlier novel, the book nevertheless dialogistically frames the specifically Canadian protagonists as paramount in an evolving narrative that escapes the confines of the individual novel. In essence, this arguably pushes the Patient himself to the role of episodic guest star, rather than singularly preeminent hero of the novel.

The film version, by comparison, seems slightly less of a multi-protagonist narrative than its source. Written and directed by British filmmaker and playwright Anthony Minghella, *The English Patient* sheds much of the structural specificities of the novel arguably to translate the dense story into a more succinctly presentational medium. This particularly entails the excision of back-stories and subplots of most characters, but by comparison, artificially inflates the centrality of the Patient's particular subjective experience, specifically because of a refusal to cut most anything from his narrative.

For Minghella, the optioning of the book was a re-imagining of his prior reputation. The filmmaker enjoyed an idiosyncratic career path, working as a college lecturer in the 1970s before turning to writing in the 1980s. Starting his creative work in the world of the British stage, he quickly won acclaim as the winner of London Theater Critics' awards in 1984 and 1986 for "Best Newcomer" and "Best Play," respectively.[174] From the theatre, Minghella next transitioned into television, where he penned teleplays for such popular series as ITV Network's *Inspector Morse.* Finally, with 1990's *Truly, Madly, Deeply,* Minghella was given the chance to direct a motion picture based on his own screenplay; the film, solidly independent in its production and stagy in its presentation, focuses on a woman who is visited by the ghost of her dead husband just as she is beginning to attempt to move

[173] Barbour, 207.
[174] Mario Falsetto, *Anthony Minghella: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), x.

on with her life. From many critics, Minghella drew favorable comparisons of his text to that of the concurrently released and much more commercially successful Hollywood film *Ghost* (1990) in his complex heart-breaking treatment of similar subject matter. For *Truly, Madly, Deeply,* Minghella went on to win the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award for "Best Original Screenplay." Having thus crafted a name for himself as an intimate, writerly *auteur*, the comparative grandeur of *The English Patient* – despite being a "small film" by many industrial standards – was for Minghella a departure in both the scope of the project and in its status as the already meritorious original work of someone else. Nevertheless, the filmmaker's steep reputation in all things culturally "British" – the academy, the London Theatre scene, ITV and BBC – have no doubt gone a long way in 'accenting' his first major Hollywood film as "British" as well.

Yet, from its inception this was to have been an American motion picture, acquired at the behest of Minghella by double Academy Award winning independent producer Saul Zaentz of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984) fame. Under Saul Zaentz Productions, *The English Patient,* in point of fact, was to have been a much larger Hollywood blockbuster financed directly by no less than 20th Century Fox. This would have significantly altered the film's reputation, if not the actual text itself, but was unfortunately not to be. Dissension arose between Minghella and Fox over his casting decisions. If the publicity is to be believed, the studio demanded that Kristin Scott Thomas be replaced in the role of Katharine with "a star the caliber of Demi Moore."[175] Minghella refused. As a result of this, and citing budget concerns, Fox dropped out of the deal, throwing *The English Patient* into production limbo on the eve of its shooting.

[175] David Benedict, "Cutting to the Quick," *The Independent,* March 6, 1997.

Paratextual materials suggest that when Fox pulled out it was Harvey Weinstein who was in an advantageous position to save the production from oblivion by picking up a multi-million dollar tab to executive produce and distribute the film in North America. As *Variety* noted in its retroactive declaration that 1996 had been the "Year of the Indie," "Able to churn the money his company had made off of the likes of *Pulp Fiction*, *The Crying Game*, *Il Postino* and other hits, Miramax's Harvey Weinstein stepped in and filled the budget gap."[176] Incorporated in 1979, Miramax Pictures had functioned primarily as an independent film distributor for most of the 1980s.[177] Moving into the 1990s, however, the Weinstein Brothers courted a reputation as the premiere independent film house in regard to the perceived innovation and artistic relevance of its releases in comparison to the major studios and other independents alike. In particular, this often entailed importing foreign films purchased on the international festival circuit. The Walt Disney Company purchased the company in 1993 making it a "semi-independent" subsidiary of a major studio, but allowing it to retain its developed image and supposedly, its sense of autonomy.[178]

By 1995 Miramax had begun to promote the idea of the "indie blockbuster" as a virtual brand identity for itself with the success of *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Arguably, more than anything, Harvey and Bob Weinstein became associated with their aggressive marketing campaigns during the distribution of films rather than their part in the productions. In line with this trend, throughout the winter of 1996-97, the company spent millions promoting the idea of *The English Patient's* independent nature: an artistically innovative work that had to fight to be made, and would not have been if the

[176] Robert Koehler, "Year of the Indie: 1996," *Daily Variety,* January 17, 2003.
[177] Perren, 2.
[178] Ibid, 155.

majors had their way. Minghella himself played a part in this marketing of the film's smallness as a selling point, noting that larger studios "can't afford to nurse films and filmmakers in the way that indies can and must," in regard to the work of the Weinsteins and Saul Zaentz.[179]

This line of argumentation about the film's supposed unconventional nature and resultant status as 'little film that could' entered contemporaneous academic and critical discourse alike around the same time. Theorist Evan Smith, for instance, links together two of the cultural preoccupations of "independent" film in the 90s – formal artistry and cheapness – when he categorizes *The English Patient's* complex and evasive storytelling alongside *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Lone Star* (1996) as indicative of these being "small films" that are beginning to compete "head-to head with mainstream Hollywood fare."[180] The explicit comparison to "Hollywood fare" is picked up by critics as well, with most concurring that this does *not* describe the film regardless of its epic appeals: "A love story across continents and time, yes. Conventional Hollywood fare? No."[181]

Despite this heavy marketing by Miramax (or perhaps because of it?), many in the industry and the press continued to describe the film in the terms of an art house British import. Most dramatically of all in 1999 the world's leading interlocutor of all things Anglican cinema – The British Film Institute – included *The English Patient* among its list of the "Top 100 British Films of All-Time."[182] The industry poll asked respondents to select films that they considered to be "culturally British" even in the possible event that

---

[179] Timothy M. Gray, "Indies, Bios Circling the Globes," *Daily Variety,* December 20, 1996.
[180] Evan Smith, "Thread Structure: Rewriting the Hollywood Formula," *Journal of Film and Video* 51, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1999-2000): 77.
[181] David Benedict, "Cutting to the quick," *The Independent,* March 6, 1997.
[182] "Best 100 British Films Full List," BBCNews, last modified September 23, 1999, accessed February 28, 2014. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/455170.stm

misapprehension would inadvertently result in films with little or no links to British production origins be added to the list. Ultimately, however, *The English Patient* indisputably fails the most real definition that exists for Britishness: the *legal* one. According to the 1999 Amendment to the Films Act of 1985, for the purposes of taxation, the British government considers a film to be "British" only if 70% of its total budget is spent on "filmmaking activity" within the United Kingdom *and* 70% of its labor costs are paid to citizens or permanent residents of Commonwealth countries (including Canada) or the European Union.[183] The previous law under which Minghella's film would have been judged at the time of its 1997 British release was even more restrictive, specifically mandating that at least 92.5% of a completed motion picture have been photographed within the UK to qualify.

Owing to these contrasting definitions, a proverbial double-speak arises in much of the press at the time. For some commentators, the film somehow is and is not British all at once. This is seemingly the case with Sarah Gristwood of *The Guardian,* who describes it as "The 'English' movie that's causing a stir in the States," as she examines the contemporaneous fascination that Americans were having for British popular culture.[184] Yet, the very same article also rightly notes:

> But that Englishness is belied by a look at the credit list. In Ondaatje's life, England was only an interlude between Sri Lanka and Canada; Minghella was born on the Isle of Wight of Italian parents; Zaentz is an American of Russian-Polish extraction; and other non-English leading lights include two of the four stars (Binoche and Willem Dafoe), the line producer and the director of photography."[185]

To this list she could have also rightfully added "film editor" and "sound designer."

---

[183] "British Film Given Definition," *The Guardian,* August 27, 1999, accessed on March 1, 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/film/1999/aug/27/3.
[184] Sarah Gristwood, "Medical Miracle," *The Guardian,* November 29, 1996.
[185] Ibid.

Digital Authorship in Post-Production

With so many disparate origins, describing the authorship of *The English Patient* is an elusive task. However, at least one more "author" needs be discussed in putting the film into historical context. In his non-fiction publication, *The Conversations,* novelist Ondaatje seems to suggest as much, noting of his observation of the post-production of the film: "When I watched Walter Murch … I knew *this* was the stage of filmmaking that was closest to the art of writing."[186] The "stage" to which Ondaatje refers is film editing, and the person, Walter Murch, is the filmmaker who both edited the visual track and mixed the sound of *The English Patient.* Arguably, Murch has achieved more of a reputation as co-author of films than any of the other below-the-line filmmakers discussed in the chapters thus far. One of an original cadre of USC film brats that included friends and associates George Lucas, John Milius, and Caleb Deschanel, Murch is allegedly the first person ever to be described as a "sound designer," when Francis Ford Coppola himself used this term to denote Murch's contribution to the creation of *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

Minghella for his part in the crafting of this reputation has humbly stated that working with Murch involves "the tacit understanding that he is a fellow filmmaker, a peer, *not* a servant of the director."[187] During the post-production of their later collaboration on *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (2000), Minghella further testifies to even bolder effect: "To have a brain like that in the cutting room... It's not so much what he does as an editor that is so thrilling. It's the whole film-maker, the intelligence, the gravity. And with sound, it's as if

[186] Michael Ondaatje, *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), xviii.
[187] Anthony Minghella, "Waiting for Provocation," in Ondaatje, *The Conversations,* 274.

you've never really heard pictures until you've been with Walter."[188] By comparison, in other paratextual rhetoric, the director has specifically painted himself as a technological novice in the consideration of film production. Reportedly, on *Truly, Madly, Deeply,* Minghella admitted to the crew that he did not know even know what "coverage" was, and has suggested that he was able to survive the shoot only because he theatrically relied upon uninterrupted long takes.[189] Thus, the writer-director has indeed entrusted a large portion of the storytelling of his film to a "fellow filmmaker" who, being both the sound designer and editor, enjoys an advantageous position in terms of the authorship of an interstitial film such as *The English Patient*: a film that requires "independent" solutions to the creation of "blockbuster" effects and atmosphere.

Filmic sound, for instance, becomes the respite of the independent-blockbuster as it definitively aids in the epic dimension of off-screen spectacles that cannot be photographed on a budget. What aural theorist Michel Chion might describe as "added value" or sound "in the gap"[190] is paramount here to such a film, which must create breath-taking images largely in the imaginations of spectators, without those spectators noticing that they have had to do much of the work themselves in 'seeing' the supposed causes of these noises. Murch himself describes this phenomenon in the preface of Chion's book, when he champions the creation of "dimensionality" by sound designers, whose role he sees as helping to create mental pictures and memories of the film world that are "not actually present."[191]

---

[188] David Thomson, "It's As If You've Never Heard Pictures Before," *The Independent,* February 6, 2000.
[189] Falsetto, xi. Minghella further suggests: "There is virtually no editing in *Truly, Madly, Deeply* – just assembly."
[190] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound On Screen,* trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
[191] Murch, in the forward to Chion, xxi.

The bombardment of the medical tent near the beginning of *The English Patient* is a quintessential example. From across the tent, Hana inquires about whether a dying soldier from Picton knows her partner. His response that is inaudible to her from her vantage point is that her sweetheart "bought it yesterday... Shot to bits." It is at this moment that the German attack dynamically interrupts the tension: in low angle Hana attempts to cross the room to the wounded fuselier, but pauses at the sound of a scorching whistle that seems to be coming from outside the tent behind her. A crashing noise on the soundtrack is accompanied by a puffing open of a hole at the back of the tent which reveals a plume of smoke. "Hana, get down!" screams the doctor who tackles her to the ground as the tent begins to shake. More noise of whistles follows accompanied by apparently exploding bombs. Disparate medium shots of swaths of flame take the audience momentarily outside to the "battlefield," which is never presenting in an establishing shot, but is rather completely defined by spatially indeterminate cuts to people crouching, running, and climbing. But for the most part, the sequence devolves to close-ups of the doctor and Hana writhing on the ground while flashes of white light synchronize with the rattles and percussive blasts of seeming artillery fire. Hana's cries are virtually drowned out by the cacophony of death that seems to surround her just as she comes to the realization that "he's dead!" Importantly, without the addition of these cascades of explosively rendered sounds, the World War II "battle" is simply visually indicated by little more than timed flashbulbs, fireworks, a shaking tent, and a shaky camera. Yet, the sheer recognizable complexity of the sound design – less obvious than the bomb blasts, is the quiet clanking of unseen metal objects, the dull thumping of boots on wood and the squishing of mud – mixes several isolated tracks to acousmetric effect, drawing attention entirely away from the

limitations of the pro-filmic staging.

Likewise Murch's use of aural perspective in a later scene is essential to communicating the spectacle of the film when a jeep explodes out of focus in the distance. Some publicity materials feature a closer distance of framing for still images of the incinerated army vehicle, yet in the actual film, the sustained take on the jeep as it speeds ahead of an allied formation of trucks – internally framed over Hana's shoulder from inside the truck in which she rides – causes the jeep to become almost visually imperceptible. The sound of the beeping horn of the jeep as it seemingly moves away from the foreground perspectivally mimics a sort of doppler effect with higher pitch than previously and gradually muted-volume in order to three dimensionalize the flatness of the image. Something of a cheat cut follows – masked by a momentary reaction shot of the Patient – and takes the audience to a slightly shifted point-of-view, no longer framed at all, sustained for only a moment before the jeep is launched into the air with a burst of fire and smoke. Yet, at this point the visual spectacle is dramatically minimized by distance, focus, and shifting angle; the visual effect may or may not be achieved by the destruction of an actual speeding jeep for all the audience knows. However, the great distance between the camera and the exploding object is enforced by the initially loud, yet *echoing* boom of its blowing up; this noise clearly reverberates through a large open-air space at some distance removed from the recording device like a rocket launched across the sky. Here the minutely delayed sound of falling debris (perhaps suggestive of distance) is nevertheless crisp, featuring clear punctuations that connote individual pieces of metal or wood items as they hit one another and the ground (suggesting a closeness that seems by comparison to dispense with realism in the name of dynamic fidelity). The sound design subliminally paints a picture

more impressive than the imaged pro-filmic event.

The formal surprise of these early explosions sets the stakes for Minghella's later reversal of form into an exploration of cinematic suspense. While Kip frantically struggles in a ditch to defuse a bomb with a crushed fuse, a column of tanks drives toward him, with their concussive vibrations on the bridge above him threatening to trigger the bomb at any moment. As the oncoming tanks are never visually established to occupy the same space as Kip and his associate Hardy, the main indication of this is the increasingly loud rumbling of their engines, the creaking wood of the bridge overhead, and a high-pitched hum that comes to sonically represent the quaking environment in which Kip finds himself panicking. At the point when the hum becomes a more ominously bass-toned wail, Kip has dropped his pliers into standing dirty water, and scours to retrieve them, the gentle plopping of the liquid dramatically juxtaposed with the violence of the overpowering vibrations. The rumble stops a moment before he cuts the bomb's wire and breathes a sigh of relief in silence. With the camera close on Kip throughout most of the sequence – intercut with long shots of the tanks – it is primarily the sound that sells the story of his rising tension.

Perspectivally dimensional off-screen sound, in a later scene, also conveys the uncomfortable tragedy of Hardy's death by explosion 'off in the distance.' While DP John Seale's camera initially captures Hardy in the town square climbing atop a booby-trapped statue, Murch cuts away to Kip and Hana at the monastery prior to the detonation. The narrative function of the scene is to structurally implicate the audience in Kip's subsequent debilitating guilt at having not been there to save Hardy, instead dreadfully “hearing” the aural signifier of his friend's demise from miles away. In apparent admiration for the design of this sequence, which Ondaatje did not write in his book, the novelist argues “It's taking a

real and technical problem, and solving it with a metaphor."[192] Here Ondaatje is mainly referring to Minghella's decision to excise from the screenplay the bombing of Hiroshima that figures prominently in the novel. Both Ondaatje and Murch here seem to agree that the death of Hardy in the town square is a programmatic surrogate for the dread of the Hiroshima bombing. Here, the "technical problem" is not being able to shoot something on the epic scale of an atomic bomb, in addition to the perceived narrative problem of telescoping the story too far beyond the immediate characters and their problems. Murch's edit and mix address both these concerns.

Yet, in its more subtle iterations, the metaphorical walls of sound at times also threaten to disrupt the thematic intelligibility of the narrative. Thomas, for example, incorrectly characterizes "the silence and emptiness of the desert" represented within the film's contrasting soundtracks: scenes set in Cairo are loud and overwhelming, while scenes set in the open desert are quiet and devoid of noise.[193] However, in truth, Murch's desert is often overflowing with idiosyncratic noises that are evidently forgotten by reviewers of the film after the fact. There is the sound of wind even when there appears to be none. There is also the buzzing and ticking of various insects not shown, and sand scratching surfaces that would be impossible to hear this clearly and loudly (if at all) from the vantage point of the camera and accompanying recording devices, or even that of any of the diegetic characters.

Here, as with the bombs, Murch makes full use of Chion's notion of rendered sound – sounds that are seemingly more real than reality – by creating a desert environment that is not at all realistic, but which satisfies artistic ambition toward an atmosphere that creates narrative meaning *in spite of* its lack of logical connection with the images on-screen. This is

[192] Ondaatje, *The Conversations,* 213.
[193] Thomas, 210.

already venturing toward what Murch calls "the metaphoric use of sound."[194] These rendered sounds are such because they could not have been even hypothetically recorded in the environment that they are meant to represent, and for Murch they serve a "poetic" purpose beyond being convincingly realistic to the imaged setting: "To evoke with sound a space that is silent."[195] Put another way, the importance of insect sounds is not that they could realistically be heard by characters trapped in the desert, but rather that the act of being able to hear them is in of itself suggestive of the characters' isolation.

What becomes clear here is that the sound mixing and editing on the film responds to contemporaneous artistic imperatives, but does so as a product of a new burgeoning technological mandate: the adoption of digital technologies. Importantly, *The English Patient* was the first Academy Award winner in the categories of both "Best Film Editing" and "Best Sound" to be completely digitally edited and mixed. In many ways, it would have been difficult to produce the various sequences and soundscapes of the film without digital editing and recording devices. According to paratextual materials, one of Murch's implicit arguments in favor of digital sound is that these new technologies allow him to acquire, with fidelity, a near limitless number of individually-isolated tracks and overlay them with one another with precision where older analogue methods would technologically provide for only a few tracks to be mixed to a possibly degraded result.[196]

In terms of image, the film is arguably even more indebted to digital editing platforms. Murch notes that the film includes over 40 time transitions (breaks in the linear

---

[194] Walter Murch, in the forward to Chion, xx.
[195] Ondaatje, *The Conversations,* 118.
[196] Ibid, 305. If, as Murch here proposes, a sound editor could (as of the mid-nineties) mix up to 99 separate soundtracks using digital apparatuses rather than analogue, then this exponentially increases the sound department's ability to entirely re-author film sequences.

progression of narrative events): many more than any film he had worked on up to that time. *The English Patient* is also more difficult to visually edit than most films because of what Murch refers to as a complex "convergent structure."[197] This means that visually the film's plot is initially focalized from clearly separate points-of-view; not until after these characters and their perspectives converge in the same diegetic space and time, can the audience begin to develop a logical understanding of their relations. Here, the editor must insure that this "convergence" is paced correctly – that is, it comes at an early enough point in the film so as to not prolong audience confusion – and that the focalization of sequences is logically consistent with whether or not it comes before or after the convergence. Ironically, it is Ondaatje himself who points out to Murch that he has been forced to cheat his own premise here, by including a flashback sequence focalized from the subjective perspective of *Caravaggio* long after the film has converged on the *Patient's* subjective point-of-view for all flashbacks.[198] One of the main technological efficiencies of digital editing platforms is thus the editor's ability to quickly pull up disparate sequences, create and re-create a seemingly infinite number of assemblages of the movie without the associated material costs and labor of doing so physically with film.

It is important to note that Murch's decision to edit *The English Patient* digitally is not synonymous with contemporary digital editing technique: despite confusion over this terminology, there was no digital intermediate used on *The English Patient* in terms of finished film product. This seems a trivial and obtuse distinction to make, however in terms

[197] Ibid, 253.

[198] Ibid, 254. For comparison, Murch points to the structure of *The Godfather* (1972) as a classic example of "divergent structure": a film in which many characters begin in the same diegetic space and time, establishing their relations to one another, so that they can subsequently diverge. This conceivably gives the editor more narratological freedom in cutting scenes from different points-of-view after the divergence has taken place.

of the ontology of the photographic image, it is an absolutely imperative distinction. Using Avid software, "digitally editing" a motion picture circa 1995 entailed the process of electronically scanning the unedited processed film, uploading this scan into the Avid editing suite program, digitally re-arranging the electronically scanned copy of the film into an edited product, then using the recorded information, returning to the film stock to mechanically duplicate the "cuts" made to the electronic copy with the digital software. The electronic copy never becomes the finished film, nor are release prints ever struck from a digital recreation. There is no digital intermediate that affects the cinematographic quality of the finished film. As Murch explains: "The images have not been disturbed, only the computer instructions for what you do with the images."[199] In short, a film could be technically digitally edited without its images being digitally acquired or processed.

Murch also points to the directorial appeal of a virtual assembly – compared to a "destructive" one – when he notes that directors can now continue to view an uncut shot in its entirety during the ongoing editing process.[200] With destructive assemblages, the shot can only be viewed in edited pieces once it is cut that way; it cannot be re-assembled into a single uninterrupted take. This is where Murch's work suggests yet another interstitial space created during this period for filmmakers to seek to inhabit: one that preserves the virtuosity of the pro-filmic while taking advantage of the efficiencies of digital technologies.

As film editor, Murch also literally changes the story of *The English Patient* at times from its original envisioning, relying on advancing filmic technologies to do so. Specifically, this can be seen in the sequence of the Patient's final confession to Caravaggio, to which

---

[199] Walter Murch, *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing.* 2nd ed. (Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 2001), 81.
[200] Ibid, 84.

Murch added previously-filmed reaction shots of Hana. Where once (in the book and screenplay) the scene took place in private, now (in the finished film) Hana eavesdrops on the event and can be reasoned to proceed from this point forward in the film with the full knowledge of the Patient's story as a motivating force on her decisions and actions. Of course, this also – through Kuleshev's famous effect – changes the meaning of Hana's facial expressions, taken off the cutting room floor from a cut love scene between Hana and Kip. Technologically, this required the additional aid of visual effects artists to remove Andrews from the shots through a process of optical printing so as not to disrupt this new interpretation of the content.[201]

Murch is also, according to publicized literature, the filmmaker most responsible for crafting the narrative content of a sequence in which Caravaggio is tortured by the Nazis.[202] In the completed film, the interrogator flaunts pictures in front of Caravaggio accusing him of being an Allied spy, while Caravaggio desperately changes the subject by rambling about cheating on his wife. In response, the interrogator nonchalantly toys with the idea of amputating either Caravaggio's hands or fingers as a punishment for this offense. In a suddenly panicked state, Caravaggio responds in reaction shot: “Don't cut me.” But in the reverse shot, the interrogator continues, staring at his own hands while offering to let Caravaggio keep his fingers in exchange for information. Murch cuts to an even closer shot on Caravaggio who this time hysterically exclaims: “Don't cut me, come on!” The audience

---

[201] Ondaatje, *The Conversations,* 134. It is also, of course, potentially problematic for a film about Western colonialism to literally erase one of the only ethnic minority actors to have a substantial speaking part in the film from a sequence that might have furthered his character's back-story. This is a similar phenomenon to how the screenplay from the outset excised much of Kip's main role in the book, relegating him to a more minor subplot of the film. In a later section on the film's marketing, I will expand on the industrial importance of the film's compression or outright excision of all subplots from the book that are not the main “love story.”

[202] Ibid, xx.

gets a close-up of a fly crawling on Caravaggio's thumb. There is also a close-up of the shadow of the interrogator's hands simulating amputation as it falls over Caravaggio's own. All of this, when inter-cut with Caravaggio's terrified expressions, causes the "torture" to become filmically structural, with the cinematography itself seeming to psychologically torment Caravaggio.

The scene as cut and mixed was not penned in the novel or early treatments, but is actually created through an excessive number of takes on the day of shooting. Specifically, Dafoe repeated the line "Don't cut me," during various takes that were never meant (by the director) to be used. Yet, Murch not only used the line, he chose to double it sequentially in the sequence, so that Caravaggio's pleading becomes purposely repetitive, and the interrogator's reactions to this pleading all the more sinister.[203] Murch's reading of the logic of the dailies apparently differed from Minghella's, perhaps owing to Minghella's experience of actually being there on the day of shooting the scene, while Murch was not. Reportedly, Murch prefers never to be on-set when a scene he will cut is being shot because of the experiential baggage that comes with the direction and set-ups. Rather, he argues that his job as an editor is specifically to be able to look at shot footage with completely fresh eyes, unaware of how the events appeared in reality and the resultant issues of intentionality that can cloud a viewer's interpretation of what is actually there in the footage. In this, Murch sees an explicit camaraderie with the eventual filmgoers, describing himself as an "Ombudsman for the audience."[204]

---

[203] The dialogue does in fact appear in a similar form in at least one of the unpublished versions of Minghella's screenplay: "CARAVAGGIO: Don't cut me. MULLER: Or was it Toronto? CARAVAGGIO: Don't cut me. Come on." Anthony Minghella, *The English Patient* (unpublished screenplay), Undated, the Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

[204] David Thomson, "It's As If You've Never Heard Pictures Before," *The Independent,* February 6, 2000.

It is John C. Eisele, arguing in *Cinema Journal*, who is perhaps the first to point out a cultural transformation of the torture scene from its origins in the book and script – in which an Italian interrogator calls for the amputation and an Italian nurse performs it, and early drafts of the screenplay do not mention the ethnicity of the nurse – into the filmic iteration in which a German gives the command for the punishment while a Middle Eastern nurse carries it out.[205] For Eisele, this is indicative of *The English Patient's* status as a "Hollywood Eastern," positing the logic of the torture on the shoulders of the film's Orientalist view of Islamic corporal punishment in which the German interrogator is simply exploiting this racial stereotype: "This is your nurse, by the way. She's Muslim, so she'll understand all of this. What is the penalty for adultery?"

On the other hand, Murch tells Ondaatje that he actually researched German interrogation techniques from the WWII period in preparation for cutting the scene, something that might at first sound excessive for a film editor who will in no way encounter the sequence until after it has been written, acted, and filmed.[206] Nevertheless, Murch's interpretation of the narrative events here, supposedly evident in the way that he chose to cut the scene, is that it is not the interrogator's initial intention to actually go through with the amputation. Rather, it is his disrespect for the "demonstration of weakness" he sees in Caravaggio's repeated plea of "Don't cut me," that sadistically makes him change his mind and pursue the torture at all costs. It is worth noting that in the dramatic pacing and order of the shot-reverse shot pattern, it is after the second "Don't cut me," that the interrogator's facial expression changes as if he is momentarily taken aback. In reaction shot, he pauses to

[205] John C. Eisele, "The Wild East: Deconstructing Genre in the Hollywood Eastern," *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 77.
[206] Ondaatje, xx.

look at Caravaggio, before momentarily turning to stare at the stenographer, asking in seriousness "Are thumbs fingers?" Only at this point does Murch survey the room of nervous expressions on the faces of the other German soldiers. After a moment, the stenographer now begins warning the interrogator about the Geneva Convention's prohibition on torture, but at this point not even Caravaggio's desperate offer to tell the interrogator anything he wants to know can deter him from the sadistic act. Perhaps most importantly, this suggests Murch's own interest in structurally communicating parochial – that is nationalistic – nuances and imperatives: the supposed essential WWII-era German-*ness* conveyed by the editing in the sequence that is meant to repulse the audience specifically on those terms.

Literalizing "Accented Cinema"

Whereas Hamid Naficy maintains that exilic and diasporic cinema's "accent" comes more from the production modes and styles of its dislocated filmmakers than from the aural accents of diegetic characters,[207] *The English Patient* tends to literalize this concept in its thematic exploration of dislocation and parochial comfort; it is *literally* Almásy's accent that thwarts him on multiple occasions. However, when taken as emblematic of industrial reflexivity – Almásy is misunderstood in a precisely similar way to that in which the film as a text is misunderstood – even these "literal" accents can become metaphorical motions toward industrial metadiscourse. Here, this is not so much tantamount to a film predicting its own future reputation, as it is indicative of a larger reflexivity of the industry that is itself in definitional crisis, and of the challenges the filmmakers faced in defining their place within it. Here, it might be difficult to consider a Hollywood independent-blockbuster to be

[207] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

a work of “accented cinema” proper; rather, it becomes a Hollywood co-option of the tools and themes of accented filmmakers. This is not to say that the source material of the novel *The English Patient* would not be potentially ripe for adaptation by an exilic filmmaker, and after all Ondaatje is himself writing from a place of experience in the global diaspora. Additionally, there may well be conceptual analogies between the interstitial modes of production that Naficy relates to accented filmmakers, and the interstitial industrial space that a film like *The English Patient* occupies.

Visually, the film puts up boundaries around several of the characters who are dislocated from their homelands because of the war. Much has been written already about the cartographic grid that often captures and traps Katharine's body – or parts of her body. But Caravaggio too is trapped by gridded bars in the opening shot of the torture scene, at once obviously his most vulnerable moment. Here, he is framed entirely within a single square grid in the ceiling bars of the interrogation area, which is introduced in an extreme high angle shot. Looking almost directly down on Caravaggio, the audience view him crouched in such a way that the grid seems to be holding him prisoner as much as the handcuffs around his wrists. In contrast, the Patient's dislocation, though also actualized through cinematographic means (which I will discuss in the next section), is more of a temporal one. This is fitting for the character who has no interest in his geopolitical homeland, but is rather a prisoner of the present, not able to go into his own past.

Aurally, the interstitial accent of *The English Patient* is potentially even more literalized, for reasons not the least of which are that the characters so often literally vocalize parochial concerns and their challenges. It is not just the fact that the characters talk about subject matter that is relevant here; the importance is how they often

conversationally demonstrate the allegories of cinema with which the film concerns itself. An early example here involves Almásy's stated dislike of adjectives. Seemingly fundamental building-blocks of cultural communication, Almásy paints them as excessive: "A Thing is still a thing no matter what you put in front of it; big car, slow car, chauffeur-driven car... it's still a car." Implicit here is his distaste not so much for the grammar itself, but its artificial labeling of difference. In essence, this seemingly trivial argument between Almásy and Katharine thus presages not only the tragic ending of the film, but also, by extension, gives a commentary on the process by which this happens.

Throughout *The English Patient*, Almásy seems to be the arbiter of the film's point-of-view, constantly standing as the diegetic voice of reason who reminds other characters of the frustrating irrationality of their parochialism. This point is arguably most evident when the Patient philosophizes about Hana's acceptance of Caravaggio into the monastery as a semi-permanent guest. In the first meeting between Hana and Caravaggio – also the first introduction of Caravaggio to the audience – she and the audience come to see him through the bars of the closed gate in the monastery's front yard. When he immediately refers to her by name, she is at once startled, and in a close-up reaction shot she cowers a bit behind the rusted metal cross that she has been carrying. Even when he notes that he spoke to her friend Mary, Hana is still hesitant. When he explains "I think we're neighbors," the imprecision of this suggestion seems even more enigmatic (if the stranger lives next door, how could he not be sure if they are neighbors?). Yet, when he adds the caveat "My house is two blocks from yours in Montreal," she immediately smiles. Caravaggio is invited in. When Hana later explains to the Patient: "There is a man downstairs. He brought us eggs. He might stay," he responds inquisitively: "Why? Can he lay eggs?" To this she gives a two word

response: “He's Canadian.” The Patient reacts with indignation at the logic of this apparent reasoning. In a diegetically rhetorical question to Hana, but arguably to the audience as well, he ponders: “Why are people always so happy when they collide with somebody from the same place? What happened in Montreal when you passed a man in the street? Did you invite him to live with you?”

The film's meta-commentary dispenses with all subtlety when Hana's defense that “There is a war. Where you come from becomes important,” is immediately rebuffed by the Patient: “Why? I hate that idea.” She has no answer. Again, the dialogue alludes to its own tragic finale, but also becomes an aurally structural signifier of the Patient's own contextual statement. Here the literal accents of the actors subliminally code his rebukes as legitimate: Hana's accent and Caravaggio's – owing to the two actors’ different nationalities – seem aurally incompatible with the notion that they both come from the very same neighborhood in Montreal. Dafoe, an American from Appleton, Wisconsin, has done little to alter his natural accent. An exception comes in the earlier scene when he attempts to roll the “ou” on “out” in the line, ironically, where he is introducing himself: “My name is David Caravaggio, but no one ever called me David. Caravaggio they find too absurd to miss *ou*t on.”[208] With this, Caravaggio performs a sleight-of-hand magic trick – pulling an egg out of Hana's ear – that potentially acts at once as an metaphor for the line's deception. Like the accent, the magic trick fails, with Caravaggio inadvertently dropping the egg on the ground where it breaks: a literally shattered illusion.

Hana's accent was also a point of minor controversy according to publicity materials,

[208] This would be more of an Anglophone Canadian accent anyway. Caravaggio could hypothetically be an Anglo Canadian by birth or upbringing – both he and Hana were in the book – but this would, nevertheless, likely make Hana more incredulous toward him when he claimed to have been from her neighborhood in Montreal.

based on the fact that in the book, Hana and Caravaggio are both from Toronto, Ondaatje's home town.[209] Yet, Juliette Binoche, as a celebrated French actress, formally betrays this notion with her clearly non-English inflections. Thus it was deemed that Hana would be re-written as French-Canadian specifically for Binoche. Yet, as already indicated this also throws the role of Caravaggio into question, as well as Hana's friend from the beginning of the film, and the fatally injured fusilier, all of whom sound as if they were more Western Canadian than Quebecois. On the other hand, as obvious as it seems based on accent that Binoche is continental French, completely hidden in this regard is Kristin Scott Thomas's own French nationality. Born and raised in England, and one of the perceived stalwarts of the film's basic Britishness, Scott Thomas immigrated to France at an early age and has lived there for many years. Reportedly, Scott Thomas considers herself much more French than English, having attained French citizenship, and has even threatened retirement from the movies based on geographic distance from Hollywood and the desire to remain in Paris.[210]

The cultural masquerade also includes Fiennes and Andrews, who both (at least ostensibly) attempt to veil their actual Englishness. Andrews, who inflects the South Asian accent of a Punjab Sikh, largely hides his natural London accent. The case of Fiennes is necessarily more complicated by the fact that the plot at times idiosyncratically calls for the recognition of his accent to be a losing endeavor; that is, at times the audience must interpret it differently than the other characters do. In the exchange that gets him arrested, Almásy speaks with a sort of guttural inflection and frictive consonant stops ("I have been

[209] Liam Lacey, "Michael Ondaatje: In the Skin of a Filmmaker," *The Globe and Mail,* November 9, 1996.
[210] Decca Aitkenhead, "Kristin Scott Thomas: I cannot cope with another film," *The Guardian,* January 31, 2014.

walking for three days. I do not want to spell my name. I want you to give me this car."). When he pronounces his name, the British soldiers question him about his nationality. However, in his first speaking scene, Fiennes conversely exaggerates the long vowels and non-rhoticness of his words ("Might I have a sip of water?"/"I remember her garden, plunging down to the sea...Nothing between you and France"). Besides the contextual implications of the vivid description of the coast, his accent itself also indicates to the questioner and – as suggested by publicity materials – to most audiences, that this truly is an "English Patient."

And yet, with all its veritable invocations of and cultural dislocations from "Englishness," the film never visually depicts England itself. This is, as Thomas astutely points out, despite the importance of flashback sequences taking place in England in the novel.[211] One might point immediately to a two-pronged economic imperative for an explanation of this absence: first, the need for Minghella to excise superfluous scenes from an already exorbitantly long screenplay. Reportedly, the "first assemblage" of the film was four and a half hours long even without the novel's English sequences.[212] But this effect moreover thematically renders Britain as a phantom land that is cinematically inaccessible to those who would visit it. Only dialogue – rather than audio-visual flashback – focalizes Katherine's memories of the place. This also further highlights the distinction between Almásy and his cadre of British companions who all seem to feel varying levels of loyalty to the place that holds no interest for Almásy; in their final meeting, Almásy's friend Madox at first invites "Come visit us in Dorset when all of this is over," before realizing "You'll never

[211] Thomas, 211. Among these crucial back-stories is Kip's subjective remembrance of the time he spent working for a member of the English aristocracy.
[212] Ondaatje, 166.

come to Dorset."

Hsu is among the first to point out that the film is not only anti-colonial in this regard, but may indeed be post-national in a much more radical way when it "concludes on a generalized dissolution of boundaries."[213] Accordingly, the reading of Katharine's final letter to Almásy as she lies dying in the Cave of Swimmers reveals her ultimate realization of these arbitrary distinctions in both narrative content and filmic structure alike. Here, Katharine's words employ the terms of bodily, political, and geographic distinction reciprocally in metaphors and similes:

> ...we die rich with lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have entered and swum up like rivers, fears we have hidden in like this wretched cave. I want all this marked on my body. We are the real countries, not the boundaries drawn on maps with the names of powerful men. I know you'll come and carry me into the palace of winds. That's all I've ever wanted, to walk in such a place with you, with friends. An earth without maps.

This explicit invocation of the transcultural is also made structurally demonstrative precisely because the message narratively crosses both space and time when the editing and sound transition from Katharine's voice into that of Hana, seated by the Patient in the present. For Hsu, this also entails the metaphorical dissolution of the imaginary signifier of cinema itself; when diegetically the light in the cave goes out on Katharine in the midst of her writing, so too has the cinema screen faded to black. I would counter here that the allegorical reading can be taken much further than the psychologizing of the film's post-nationalism, and into the realm of transnational reflection on the fractured film industry of the 1990s that persists in labels and distinctions that may be false or no longer apt. The Patient notes in his confessional postscript to Caravaggio: "So yes, she died because of me...Because I loved her...Because I had the wrong name."

---

[213] Hsu, 60.

Sound Allegory, Suture and Rupture

In the forward to Chion's *Audio-Vision,* Murch notes that the sense of sound naturally occurs in humans in utero before the other senses have even developed, and he argues that the whole narrative of film history has been a "mechanistic reversal of this biological sequence."[214] Accordingly, since the silent period – when the cinematic apparatus allowed sight to take on this primary role – sound has usually been considered subservient to the image. In its attempts to complete the picture of the world, the cinema, for Murch, often runs the risk of deteriorating its own specific capabilities toward the "reassociation" of sounds and images that do not belong with one another, but that can create new meanings in the audience's imagination. "Sound in the gap," as he refers to this phenomenon using Chion's term, goes beyond that which is perceptually realistic and opens up new levels of dimensionality and interpretation.

As I would argue, one of the first noises heard in *The English Patient* – the rumble of an airplane engine – at once reflexively allegorizes this notion of additive aural signification. Beginning with a single woodwind halfway through the credit sequence, Gabriel Yared's musical score hits its first dramatic crescendo featuring full orchestra right after the transition from parchment to desert landscape. Concurrent with a virtual tracking shot of the sand dunes, and the traveling shadow of an airplane, comes an additional buzz on the soundtrack – seemingly a diegetic sound produced by the airplane immediately off-screen. Yet, the intriguing thing about the sound is how it mimics the lower string section of the orchestra, playing along in ominous harmony with the woodwind. This becomes clear as the image of the plane itself invades the frame from above, and the buzz gets louder and

[214] Murch, in the forward to Chion, viii.

crosses audio channels. The decision in post-production to adjust the noise of the diegetic airplane engine so that it is in-tune with the bass of the non-diegetic orchestral score is one of the most distinguished sites of formal crisis for the film, simultaneously signaling the need for sound to suture the visual story world – a verisimilar paradigm – but also the ambition for sound to overpower the narrative and draw attention to its own artistry – a virtuosity paradigm. Here, the near mutually exclusive precepts of the sound design collide metaphorically in painting *The English Patient* as both an artistic independent foreign film and quintessential Hollywood blockbuster.

The subsequent crash of the de Havilland Tiger Moth biplane is the strongest self-reflexive allegory of the film: "Tiger Moth" being both the name of the British-manufactured plane flown by Almásy and the actual name of the film's official production company. Tiger Moth Productions incorporated in Berkeley, California in the summer of 1995, in conjunction with the Saul Zaentz studio, and at the point when *The English Patient* had already been trapped in pre-production hell for a time.[215] A company seemingly created exclusively for the development of the film, Tiger Moth has no other credits (to date) to its name, and while reportedly still holding the copyright on *The English Patient,* the corporate entity has apparently ceased to exist in any other context.[216] The narrative thus immediately alludes to its own troubled production history (even if it does so anachronistically) when Almásy and Katharine are shot down over the Tunisian desert. As is revealed only at the end of the film, Almásy's refusal to leave Katharine behind is

---

[215] "Tiger Moth Productions, Inc." Corporation Wiki, accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.corporationwiki.com/California/Berkeley/tiger-moth-productions-inc/42667289.aspx The corporate wiki report is based on "Articles of Incorporation" filed with the California Secretary of State on August 31st, 1995 by associates of Saul Zaentz.

[216] "Tiger Moth Productions," The Internet Movie Database, accessed January 20, 2014. http://www.imdb.com/company/co0034657/?ref_=fn_al_co_1

precisely what causes his downfall: an interesting corollary to the film's own near destruction based on Minghella's reported refusal to part with Scott Thomas as one of his leads despite Fox's demand that she be re-cast.

Thus, the company's logo, which competes with that of Miramax for ownership of the film in the opening credits, is conspicuous by its indexical relationship to the first scene of narrative action. Fittingly, the destruction of the "Tiger Moth" is achieved largely through sound and editing rather than with a spectacular visual. This structurally alludes to an independent film mentality. Crucially, for most of the anti-aircraft assault, the camera is in close enough to obscure the environment through which the plane is supposedly flying, leaving only a nondescript sky. The crash itself is only implied visually by a medium close-up over the shoulder of the pilot in his cockpit; fog surrounds him, he attempts to regain control, tilting the plane, but a white light engulfs the pro-filmic space as he struggles to escape. All the while the soundtrack has transitioned evermore menacingly from the blasts of the guns to the splintering of metal and the popping of springs, and finally to the sputtering of the airplane engine as it is 'going down.' The entire sequence ends, still on the struggling pilot, with the sound of rushing winds virtually melting into the noise of a wailing animal as the screen idiosyncratically fades to white. Not until several minutes later does the film reveal the fate of the Tiger Moth, billowing smoke and buried in a sand dune off in the distance: the sound, editing, and distance of framing have cheated immensely in classic independent style. Additionally, in his final confession, Almásy literally labels the airplane as the transcultural object by which he actualized his subversive post-national ethics: "I got back to the desert, and to Katharine, in Madox's English plane with German gasoline. When I arrived in Italy, they wrote on my medical chart 'English Patient.' Isn't that

funny? After all that I became English."

By contrast, Geoffrey's crashing of his flashy yellow Boeing Stearman aircraft – an *American* plane – is at once the most *visually* iconic sequence of the entire film. Optical printing technology allows the filmmakers to put the recognizable figure of Ralph Fiennes directly in front of the crashing airplane, so that when he ducks down it seems to miss him by mere inches. First, an extreme long shot of the plane approaching in deep space as Fiennes steps into the foreground is followed closely by a point-of-view shot from the cockpit of the aircraft so that a legitimate spatial relation between a full-sized plane in flight and Almásy's person (framed within the plane's sights) can be established, even if the distance allows for a stand-in to take Fiennes's place. The reaction shot of Fiennes, intercut with the plane now colliding with the ground right behind him, is crucial in heightening the visual effect that allows for this illusion: Fiennes cannot simply be in front of a rear projection, as the plane and debris actually traverse the foreground space that he occupied before diving out of the way, and this debris seems to careen forward to the very position of the camera itself.[217]

At this point, Murch actually extends the time of the plane crash, nearly duplicating a now conventionalized action movie aesthetic of overlapping action by which the spectacular stunt is shown sequentially from several different camera angles and distances even if this nominally violates the spatio-temporal continuity of the diegetic event. The plane has already seemed to pass over Fiennes's location, and yet the succeeding shot, a low angle of Fiennes (or his stunt double) falling into a ditch, reveals the blurred plane passing overhead again. Fiennes crouches in the ditch for several seconds before a reverse

[217] This effect is hypothetically achieved by reversing the projection process; by compositing Fiennes into the shot of the crashing plane, rather than the other way around.

shot – from the hypothetical perspective of his original location atop the ditch – reveals the plane now careening end over end away from the camera's position; that is, to suggest the plane has crashed right through the camera on its continued trajectory. However, the crash is still not concluded: the succeeding tracking shot perpendicularly dissects the scene as the plane's wing, wheel, and tail break apart before the audience's eyes in a full-scale cascade of destruction from screen right to left. Murch cuts once more to the preceding shot of the plane's disintegration, before bringing the event to a close with the plane's tattered remains plowing to halt with its propeller close enough to kick dirt up onto the camera's lens.

Thus, whereas the crash of the Tiger Moth does not actually appear on-screen at all, the crash of the Stearman appears visually dissected over the course of slightly expanded plot time. Importantly, this sequence also takes place in flashback toward the climax of the film, despite existing diegetically prior to the Tiger Moth crash. As such, the Stearman crash functions narratively as both an inciting incident and as the climactic harbinger of the film's ultimate tragedy: that which literally makes the classic Hollywood love story happen. It is worth noting that at this point, Almásy and Katharine have already parted ways, and it is only the excessive grandeur of the plane crash that causes their 'tragic' affair to end on any note other than mundane uneventfulness. Arguably for this reason, the film's publicity materials aggressively highlight the cinematic spectacle of the Stearman crash, making it a prevailing emblem of the film: a dramatic signifier of the film's purported mainstream marketability, and a preemptive challenge to the charge that the film might be boring or artsy. This includes prominently featuring the crash in all of the trailers and television spots for the film, sometimes repeated so that it actually crashes twice over the course of the trailer (appearing to be two separate planes crashing at conceivably separate points in the

advertised film). The original theatrical trailer even contains narration that aurally refers to a plane crash – one that narratologically must be that which burns the Patient ("They found him near a plane crash in the Sahara..." – while images of the *Spearman* crash invade the screen. Finally, it is the glossy yellow Spearman, rather than the Tiger Moth, that graces most of the diverse release posters and home video covers for *The English Patient*.

This sustained comparison makes most evident the competing tasks for Murch as an editor and sound mixer: the need to provide for the narrative intelligibility of the film's images in relation to sounds, but also his personal prescription that rendered sound "should stretch the relationship of sound to image whenever possible: to create a purposeful and fruitful tension between what is on the screen and what is kindled in the mind of the audience."[218] Here, Murch argues for "the metaphoric use of sound" understood as the artistic rendering of a noise that will signify for the audience something far beyond the literal interpretation that an object before them has produced the recorded sound. The most obvious example of this within *The English Patient* is a ringing bell that according to Murch stands-in for the taste of a plum on the Patient's lips: just as Hana feeds a plum to the Patient, the faint sound of a chiming church bell begins to sound in the seemingly distant background, with the volume of the bell increasing slightly with the transition to a close-up of the Patient's mouth dripping with plum juice. In a subtle devolution of narrative verisimilitude, the bell abruptly fades away just before the Patient's line "its a very plum, plum." The reason this defies narrative coherence involves the lack of a logical explanation for how the diegetic sound of a conceivably stationary bell could come into and then fade away from the aural perspective of likewise stationary people. Yet, this appears to be the

[218] Murch, in the forward to Chion, xix.

case. Lacking overt narrative value, the bell thus becomes succinctly metaphoric for the supposed contented sublimity it aurally represents in reaction to, and as a representative of, the tactile experience of the Patient's simple pleasure at tasting the fruit. Here, the soundtrack reflexively connotes the very limitations of the cinematic apparatus, as it draws attention to the filmmakers' inability to duplicate the sense of taste via filmic means, but likewise explores the virtuosic possibility of symbolic substitution.

While the effect in the instance of the ringing bell is metaphorically dense, the technique can also be heard in a plethora of subsequent points in the film where Murch employs sound bridges to precipitate the English Patient's image-based memory lapses. As such, the “metaphoric use of sound”, it seems, also serves the narratively pragmatic purpose of maintaining spatio-temporal clarity where visual indicators alone might not suffice. The sound of Hana playing hopscotch, for instance, 'triggers' the Patient's memory of dancing, clapping, and drumming around a campfire, suggesting less of the symbolic understanding of the ringing bell, and more a sound bridge that relies upon aural iconicity: the resemblance of the sounds to one another in the Patient's mind. This is made clear by the manner in which a high angle shot of Hana – as if from the Patient's window – immediately precedes a knowing close-up of the Patient listening to the noise. The relationship of the sound to the Patient's memory is made explicit by the way in which the hopscotch sounds and the clapping and drumming cross-fade with one another in the aural equivalent of a dissolve to the next sequence, even while the figure of the Patient in bed remains on-screen. By comparison, Murch does not dissolve the visual track, but rather abruptly cuts to a shot of the Patient's campfire flashback, depending on the precipitant campfire noises to explicate the subsequent transition of scenes. Unlike the ringing bell, the sound metaphor

in this case elucidates the narrative structure of the film; whereas the bell is subtle and attached to something of lesser importance to the overall story, the hopscotch-to-clapping analogy is aggressively stressed and actually facilitates the progression of the film's plot at this point. The transition from hopscotch to clapping sounds also programmatically establishes the standard by which the audience will be called upon to make sense of the film's plot hereafter: the Patient's memory comes back to him in disjointed fragments based on aural triggers in the present time period that remind him of particular episodes from his past.

Later, and in stark contrast to sound allegories dependent upon acoustic resemblance, the indexical use of the word “paper” initiates the film's first shift in flashback focalization away from the Patient and toward the perspective of Caravaggio. This index is oral and aural. To Caravaggio's sudden abrupt question about what the proper gift is for a first wedding anniversary, the Patient responds with this one word reply, repeated several times with varied emphasis (alternately more and less confident: “Paper. Paper? Paper. Paper?”). The Patient's evident uncertainty at Caravaggio's line of thinking in asking the question codes the precipitated sound bridge – the sound of a typewriter click-clacking from the next scene – as ambiguously outside his purview. The relation between the spoken word “paper” and the sound of a typewriter is not one based on aural resemblance, but rather on association. Thus, the sound design here poses a complexly semiological solution to a narrational cheat: namely, the logical interpretation that, in contrast to earlier bridges, the Patient cannot “hear” the typewriter. Instead, for the first time the sound that points to a subjective memory is being produced by the Patient, but interpreted by another character whose memory the Patient cannot access. As Caravaggio was the one to have asked the

initial question, and who appears in the following scene in the same spatio-temporal environment as the clacking typewriter, the subliminal conclusion is that the association is taking place in Caravaggio's mind.

Yet, one of the singular noises of the film that does most to combine narrative purpose with a transnational thematic concern comes when Kip taps his can of condensed milk while chatting with the Patient. The rapping of his knife against the can evidently triggers the Patient's memory of a hurried journey through Cairo, as it is followed closely, first, by a screeching car horn that precisely duplicates Kip's uneven *tempo* on the can (matching the noise beat-for-beat), and then by the sound of a hammer hammering with a similar *timbre* to that of the can. A moment later, when as has become customary throughout the film, a visual cut takes the audience to the diegetic source of the preceding sounds, an over-crowded Cairo marketplace associatively links the Patient's present and past in terms of colonial conflict. Where Kip and the Patient have just been debating the morality of British rule over India, the flashback graphically illustrates a potentially iterative example of cross-cultural collision; as it turns out, the horn belongs to an automobile carrying Europeans (Almásy and Katharine are the passengers, though the driver is Arab) as they careen through an alleyway that is blocked by local artisans, the source of the hammering. Perhaps narratively trivial, the frantic honking of the horn nevertheless explicitly exudes the frustrations of a set of westerners – members of the Royal Geographical Society no less – inconvenienced in their passage through a Cairo street by the presence and labor of actual Cairenes. In essence, the horn on the soundtrack makes more apparent what might be difficult to communicate by the visual of the car alone; namely it signals a perception of inconvenience and entitlement that might not otherwise

be apparent, when the automobile comes up against the literal tools of a burgeoning local infrastructure. So here the sounds draw symbolic attention to both the overall setting and individual props within it as they alternatively represent Almásy's apparent transnational philosophy. Particularly, this entails his underestimation of his own cultural privilege in being able to navigate local, national, and international environments with only trivial obstruction, until he is confronted with a sudden loss of that privilege in the tragic climax of the film that brings about his downfall.

Thus, the sonic transition from the sequence with Kip and the Patient to the flashback in the Cairo marketplace is central for two major reasons. First, it is the Patient himself who humorously prefigures the milk can as a symbolically loaded prop at this point in the film when he notes that he and Kip agree on almost nothing except their shared preference for condensed milk: "one of the truly great inventions." This line can be couched with a further sense of irony based on the historical origin of sweetened condensed milk as a western innovation that allowed for the transport of the milk product across much wider reaches of space and time without refrigeration: a burgeoning necessity for the intercontinental travel associated with nineteenth century colonial expansion, or possibly as seems to be the case in the narrative of *The English Patient,* global war. Minghella and Murch possibly play on this irony when they intersperse the Patient's satisfied sips of the beverage with his comments that Kip is not reading Rudyard Kipling properly. It is worth noting that the specifics of the argument here also reflexively fixate on literary, and conceivably filmic, discourse on the importance of form versus content; ultimately the Patient's concern with the literature is its poetic nature and the flowing style of its prose, with the ideological imperatives inherent to the book's content of little or no weight in his

assessment. In response, Kip is first exasperated by the Patient's valorization of Kipling – in effect stressing the fact that formal virtuosity cannot excuse the author's racism – and then becomes more playfully indignant that the Patient has drunk all his milk.

Second, the setting of the Cairo marketplace itself has already figured in the plot of the film as a site of intercultural commerce that is revisited *via* the lovers' mad dash back through it. When last Almásy and Katharine met in this location, he insisted that her failure to bargain over the price of a rug that she purchased had insulted the local sellers by demonstrating her ignorance of the cultural etiquette involved in such transactions. "They don't often get foreign women in this market," he exclaims moments after she has bumped, and attempted to apologize to, a Muslim woman fully covered by a burqa. Her stated disbelief in the genuineness of his concern for Egyptian customs goes as far as the visual clash of her costume against the differing attire of the people who cluster around her. This demonstrates Katharine's out-of-placeness in the present location, which nevertheless includes her concurrent refusal to be labeled as "foreign" by Almásy. Here, the subsequent cacophony of milk can, car horn, and pounding hammer draw these reference points into a literal collision on the soundtrack, associating instruments of international communion and colonial conflict as the common tropes among the film's diverse characters.

Despite their potentially elusive nature, the terms of such metaphors are established early on in the film, by way of example, by the sheer excessiveness with which Katharine's campfire story is linked through editing with the film's impending love triangle. Indeed, in the establishing shot of the sequence, Minghella's blocking configures the trio into a physical triangle – Katharine center frame with her back to the camera, Geoffrey to her left, and Almásy on her right – as she begins her tale of (what else) the destruction of King

Candaules's marriage by the actions of his wife's future lover Gyges.[219] After the spatial configuration of the campfire is laid out, a tracking shot scans across the silhouetted backs of the adventurer's heads as Katharine, framed in medium shot and now facing the camera continues the tale, importantly with her eyes gazing alternatively at each of the listeners to demonstrate that she is telling the story to all of them. However, as Seale's camera tracks left, the blurred figure of Almásy invades the screen in the foreground. Precisely on Katharine's line "until she's [the Queen] standing naked in full view of Gyges, and indeed she was more lovely then he could have imagined," Seale suddenly racks focus to Almásy in the foreground, who at Katharine's line looks away in apparent embarrassed contemplation.

After a moment, in apparent regard to Katharine's line, "But then she looked up and saw Gyges standing in the shadows," Almásy turns his attention back to her, and indeed when Seale racks focus back to the more distant spatial plane, Katharine is now conspicuously staring directly at Almásy. A quick shot-reverse shot on the future lovers' connected gazes is followed by a reaction shot on Geoffrey, who, apparently oblivious to the matter, playfully interjects into Katharine's story "Off with his head!" and laughs. Murch cuts back to Katharine – importantly with Almásy back in the frame – continuing her tale in the words of the Queen with "Either you must submit to death for gazing upon that which you should not, or else kill the King who has shamed me..." Here, Murch importantly cuts back in dissection of the line to Geoffrey's naïve smile: "...and become King in his place." At

[219] In the tale, legendary in western literature and art, but apparently based on actual historical persons, the King of Lydia entreats one of his own generals to gaze upon the naked body of his wife. Being discovered by the Queen, she gives him the option either to die for his impudence, or in prefiguring the King's own guilt in subjugating his wife to this insult, kill the King and take his place. At the level of the narrative of *The English Patient,* Minghella (working from Ondaatje's story) eventually draws further parallel to this tale when Almásy asks Geoffrey to re-consider leaving his wife at the camp (that is, in Almásy's care) just before their affair begins.

the conclusion of the story, and over a re-establishing shot of the entire camp, comes an unidentified adventurer's joking advice: “So let that be a lesson to you, Geoffrey.” The visually structural parallel in conjunction with the content of the dialogue is excessive to the point of establishing the future plot of this love story, yet its aural component is also compelling. Namely, it should not be missed that the narration of this story transitions into the spoken words of Katharine in the flashback from their original status as Hana's dialogue in the present, as she herself is reading the story of Gyges to the Patient. The cross-cultural metaphor is thus touched off by Hana's struggled mispronunciation of the name of “Candaules,” and the Patient's belabored correction to her.

The excessiveness of the depiction of Katharine's campfire story is thus reflexively essential to a discussion of filmic metaphor because of the way in which it literally enacts the process of allegoresis: the audience should not miss that Katharine's story actually refers to the characters in the film. Yet, the recognized foregrounding of this sequence early on in the film's plot, as it is still laying out its formal strategy, serves to reveal a bias toward the visual for many scholars, especially when imputing metaphor and allegorical significance to prop-motifs and narrative situations. In these cases, sound is often treated only as a passive mechanism used in the recognition of visual and narrative symbols. However, as can be seen (and heard), when it comes to Murch's techniques on *The English Patient* – as both (visual) editor and sound designer – sound is rarely subservient to the visual track. Often, when transitioning between temporalities, Murch marries these two, as he also does in the 'spectacular' scenes, when it becomes most necessary to overwhelm the audience with audio-visual majesty. Yet, by comparison, sound routinely takes the lead in alluding to transnational thematic concerns even at the points in which the plot and visual

track are otherwise most concerned with the unadulterated depiction of Katharine and Almásy's love affair.

In this, the ultimate example comes during an infamous scene at a Christmas party in which Murch surrounds the audience – by illusionistically surrounding Almásy and Katharine – with allegorical walls of transcultural dislocation. In order to sneak away with him, she fakes a dizzy spell and escapes from an interior courtyard cafeteria in which, luncheon commenced, British soldiers are reveling to "Deck the Halls." As Katharine and Almásy duck through a door and hallway searching for a private space away from this crowd, their perspectival relation to the outer world briefly allows for Arabic religious chanting 'off in the distance' to displace the unseen English accordion's rendition of "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" for a time as the most conspicuous sound apart from the lovers' own scuffling noises. After retreating to a secluded pantry and beginning to embrace, the chanting competes only with the sound of birds chirping as the diegetic soundtrack to Almásy's seduction, and becomes most distinct on a close-up of his hands removing Katharine's Christmas pin and unzipping her dress. Suddenly, a bagpipe dramatically interrupts the scene, seeming to signify through the mixing of the audio channels, that Almásy has Katharine up against an interior wall. Noticeably in proximity once again to the soldiers, the recklessness of their actions is highlighted when the English carolers join with the pipes on "Silent Night." At this point, the cross-cultural clash of Egyptian and English noise – importantly these become virtually synonymous with "Islamic" and "Christian" – is brief, as the volume of the singing soldiers ultimately drowns out the chanting entirely.

This sonic collision occurs at the precise moment that Almásy's hand, in close-up,

caresses Katharine's skin above her necklace, renewing his fascination with her suprasternal notch. Whereas this visual metaphor for sexualized geographic colonization has already been discussed by scholars of the earlier scene of love-making, this later sequence enacts cultural imperialism in the form of musical domination just as this metaphor is recalled on-screen. Louder female voices join in the carol from a separate audio channel: they sound to be on the other side of the couple, or at least closer to them. After another moment, the non-diegetic musical score – absent from the sequence until now – enters the fray when Yared's compositon strikes a sudden and overpowering chord progression on the soundtrack in regard to Almásy beginning to lift Katharine's dress. Then the score quickly fades and continues this pattern of flourishes in apparent unison with the alternatively aggressive, then hesitant gestures of the couple. As Murch cuts to various shots of the carolers in the courtyard, and adjusts the sound levels accordingly, this effect produces a chaotic aural battle between diegetic and non-diegetic sound as they both ebb and flow. The fact that by now the carolers are singing the song as a round causes them to interfere with the clear recognition of their own melody as much as it does the score, and the bagpipe is noticeably out of tune with the non-diegetic orchestration. Finally, just as Almásy slams Katharine against the wall in the throes of unguarded passion, the main theme from Yared's romantic lietmotif crescendos and drowns out the carolers and chanting completely – yet significantly allows the diegetic sounds of their slamming-about to remain, and by enhancing their echo, amplifies them – in aural signification of the couple's now reckless disregard for their surroundings. The scene draws to a close acoustically when the soldiers' concluding toast of “Happy Christmas!” breaks the aural monopoly and transitions into their rendition of “God Save Our Gracious King.”

The design of the soundtrack in this sequence serves two obvious but orthogonal purposes: first, at the basic level of verisimilar suture, to dramatically heighten the suspense of the couple's adulterous rendezvous. Will they get caught? Every exceedingly loud (from their perspective, close) stereophonic noise suggests that they may. And the way that Almásy bumps into Geoffrey, dressed as Santa Claus, around the corner a moment later further illustrates this dimension. Yet thematically, this sound design also creates metaphorical resonance with Katharine's inability to feel at home, at once engulfed in cultural signifiers that compete for dominance. It is directly after this exchange that Katharine begs Geoffrey to go back to England, describing her longing with similar tactile expressions to that with which the Patient himself characterized England in the opening of the film: she wants to see "something green," and misses "the rain." It is here that Geoffrey, still costumed in the robes of Father Christmas, counters that they cannot leave because "there might be a war."

Widening and Contracting Interstitial Spaces

The question remains is *The English Patient* the opposite of a post-classical Hollywood film or is it the *essence* of a post-classical Hollywood film? One might begin by consulting the film itself on this issue: the most explicit literal reference to film history in *The English Patient* comes in a sequence that places Almásy and Katharine at an outdoor movie theater screening of *Gold Diggers of 33* (1933). First, when he's late, she sits through the opening newsreel alone and becomes agitated by a propagandistic appeal to the unity of the British people in the face of the impending German threat. By the time he arrives, she has decided to break off the affair. The film evidently skips most of the ensuing argument, when a cut takes the audience to the "Pettin' in the Park" number of the Hollywood musical

playing before them. Just as the movie on-screen is celebrating the transformative powers of love near a narrative finale ripe with successful romantic couplings, Seale's craning camera drops down behind the elevated seats of the theater audience and reveals Katharine and Almásy with their backs to the screen: “I better go now,” she says before attempting to depart.

As she stands and turns to face him the flicker from the movie projector reflects on her face throughout the entire exchange and the jolly tune still echoes in the background as she tries to say goodbye. In an exchange imported directly from the book he tells her “I want you to know I'm not missing you yet.” In response, she confidently states “You will.” Turning to leave, she accidentally bumps her head on one of the theater stand's metal supports, and awkwardly pauses to assess her injury, before continuing off without looking back. This sequence of events as laid out in the film is crucial as it places the bumped head *after* Katharine's parting declaration, instead of *before*, which is the case in the novel. The effect, unlike in Ondaatje's book, allows for the uncomfortably humorous accident to completely thwart Katharine's powerful exit, and ends the scene on a note of awkwardness. The other pressing point of comparison between the novel and film in this instance is that in the novel the sequence takes place in a “botanical garden,” and Katharine runs into a gatepost before regaining her composure and announcing “You will.”[220] Here, setting the sequence in a movie theater, Minghella's screenplay invokes an unmistakable comparison of how his film is operating to that of the classical Hollywood musical romance playing behind the characters.

[220] Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient,* Reissue (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1993), 158. The couple do at one point walk past a movie theater, but this is brief and Almásy only describes hearing gramophone music. The exchange in question, however, comes later while in the park.

In terms of sheer self-referentiality, this effect thus paints the film as seeing itself outside the simplistic Hollywood world. The moment importantly teases the audience with the notion of a subversive ending (by Hollywood epic standards): that in which ultimately nothing at all remarkable happens as a result of the affair. From the perspective of the film as an art house independent, this might have followed a narrative trend towards uneventful realism, where banal relationships dissolve without either tragic or overly-happy consequence. However, the film of course does not end its narrative here. Rather, it reworks this meta-commentary into a melodramatic register that is punctuated directly between the Stearman crash and the fatal case of mistaken identity. When Almásy is forced to carry the injured Katharine to the shelter of the Cave of Swimmers, the tone has completely changed: "Don't you know? I've always loved you." Yared's score crescendos on this (Katharine's) line to its now recognizable love motif, drowning out all diegetic sound, namely Almásy's uncontrolled weeping as he slowly carries her across the lush wind-swept landscape to her tragic destiny. As one of the leading emblems of the film in terms of how it has been used in advertising, this sequence seems to catapult the notion of the film as a classical love story again to the fore, in a schizophrenic publicity campaign that alternatively casts the film as conventional and unconventional.

The actual billing of the cast of the film is as responsible as anything for this kind of confusion over what the 'main plot' of the film involves, and by extension what type of movie this is supposed to be. In the finished film, Binoche receives second billing behind Fiennes in the role of the title character. This is justifiable owing to Binoche's excessive screen-time – higher even than Fiennes himself – and her central role in bringing together many of the subplots of the film. Rhetorically, this is also self-evident from the very title: the

English Patient is only a "Patient" from Hana's perspective, and no one else's. However, by the time of the Academy Awards, Miramax had settled on marketing Binoche as an "Actress in a Supporting Role," submitting her for consideration for the award of the same name. By comparison, Scott Thomas was nominated by the Academy as the lead actress of the film, despite the smaller part, and likely relying upon – and furthering – the notion that *The English Patient* is primarily about the romance between Almásy and Katharine above anything else.

Structurally, this perhaps relates to the continued perception of the classical Hollywood male gaze, elucidated by film scholars since the 1970s, as a psycho-sexual concept that prefigures a gendered, heteronormative assumption about the typical audience, and thus formally maintains a stress on male subjectivity. Katharine is formally portrayed, as Nadel and Hsu note, as the object of the title character's desire; despite the difference in screen-time, cinematographically Katherine is the character at whom Almásy spends the most time looking, while Hana is the character by whom the Patient is most often passively seen. Thus the suggestion that Hana is a main character undercuts the hypothetically traditional gender conventions of Hollywood just as it highlights the screenwriting imperative violation towards agency for the Patient. Almásy does little in the film *besides* pursue Katharine and philosophize on the world from his bed. Most of the rest of the film, from his perspective, consists in things that happen *to* him. The primary role of Katharine's to-be-looked-at-ness[221] in selling *The English Patient* to potential audiences is testified to by the publicity materials for the film. Several of the posters feature Scott

[221] A concept from psychoanalytic film scholar Laura Mulvey by which she charges that the way female bodies were typically filmed in classical Hollywood coded them primarily as objects "to be looked at" from the perspective of a male scopophilic regime. See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen.* 16. no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 11.

Thomas's image rather than Binoche's, usually with her figure partially obscured by Fiennes who is embracing her under the tagline concerning the boundaries of love. There is one notable exception to this trend: Binoche appears prominently on the French-language poster for *Le Patient Anglais,* with the size and framing of her image eclipsing even that of Fiennes himself in the foreground.

The original theatrical trailer likewise suggests the marketable primacy of one subplot above all others: a passionate romance that was ruined by global war. Over a montage which intercuts the scenes of passion with shots of the two airplanes, the complete narration proceeds:

> They found him near a plane crash in the Sahara. A man with no name, no country, and no past. But beyond the mystery that holds him captive lies the memory of the love that can set him free. [pause] From the Academy Award-winning producer of *Amadeus* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*... From the international best-selling novel... comes a film by Anthony Minghella. Ralph Fiennes, Kristin Scott Thomas, Willem Dafoe, and Juliette Binoche. *The English Patient.*

Critical to the promotion of the tragic romance angle, the narrator pauses momentarily for a snippet of dialogue exchanged between Almásy and Katharine in the Cave of Swimmers; she asks him to promise to come back for her, and in reaction shot he does so. Here, the trailer attempts to craft a high concept marketing strategy out of an otherwise arguably low concept film. Namely, this entails the suggestion that the film can be summed up roughly: 'a World War II pilot gets amnesia and has to struggle to find his long lost love.' To this representation of the plot, is added a methodical orchestral score – interrupted only briefly for the unadulterated original sound design of the epically crashing airplanes – and supplementary promises: former award winners, famous and popular source material, and a plethora of stars. On this final note, the trailer has also dramatically rearranged the actual billing of the film, moving Scott Thomas up to second, and thereby reinforcing the idea that

this film primarily centers on the two lovers.

A post-Academy Awards television spot, by comparison, relies even more excessively on direct appeals to cinematic grandeur, as well as a further transformation of the supposed plot of the film:

> Winner of 9 Academy Awards, including Best Supporting Actress, Best Director, and Best Picture of the Year. [pause] They found him in the desert. A man with no name, and no country. A man they called "The English Patient." Now... to unlock the mystery of his past, they must discover the truth that will set him free. [pause] Named on over 80 Top-ten lists. Hailed by critics as "a cinematic triumph." "A brilliant film." "This.. is what movies can do!" Ralph Fiennes, Kristin Scott Thomas, Willem Dafoe, and Academy Award winner Juliette Binoche. In a classic story of adventure... mystery... and passion. The most acclaimed film of the decade. *The English Patient.*

Around a minute shorter than the theatrical trailer, the television advertisement excises parts of the montage sequence, and does not allow it to be driven purely by an uninterrupted musical score for nearly as long. As can be seen, the advertising has shifted high concept strategies, dispensing with allusions to the reputations of Zaentz, Minghella, and Ondaatje, and delivering instead an aggressive appeal to the already-attained cultural and historical importance of the film as in-and-of-itself the primary reason that filmgoers should see the movie. The spot also interjects an up-tempo musical theme, briefly replacing the slower melancholic strings with crashing cymbals and frantic synthesizers following the narrator's exclamation "This... is what movies can do!" and culminating with a crescendo on "classic story of adventure... mystery... and passion."

Additionally important to recognize in the television ad is a shift in purported narrative agency: now it is "they" who will solve the mystery of the Patient, where "they" may be presumed to indicate Hana and Caravaggio, who appear on-screen discussing the Patient at this moment. The effects of this seemingly trivial change are two-fold. First, it re-frames the story as one of action, rather than highlighting the potentially undesirable

reality that this is a film in which the touted main character is physically bed-ridden for much of the running time. Second, it highlights Binoche's contribution to the film's success; it is now the repeated invocation of Binoche's Oscar win that frames the entire spot. Nevertheless, the passionate scenes between Scott Thomas and Fiennes remain a staple of the ad's visuals, Almásy's promise to return is still an essential part of the soundtrack, and the billing order is still incorrect.

Even as the cultural ambiguity and complex narrative structure of the film were alternatively celebrated and denigrated by the Hollywood press in regard to the film's apparent outsider status, its subsequent success domestically and abroad seemed to go a long way in causing several critics to completely reverse course on this rhetoric. In a write-up of the Oscars the next day in *New York Daily News,* one reviewer challenges the suggestion that this was anything other than a conventional, even classical, Hollywood film in a description reminiscent of the film's own publicity materials:

> Sure, a so-called "independent" won a fistful of Oscars at the 69th annual Academy Awards last night. But […] Academy voters overwhelmingly favored a classic, epic-style feature that could have been made 30 years ago by a director like *Lawrence of Arabia's* David Lean. *The English Patient* had it all: period atmosphere, lush romance, visual splendor, adventure and star power.[222]

The comparison to *Lawrence of Arabia* – an actual British film, but with Hollywood epicness – becomes somewhat pervasive at this point in the critical discourse. Tom Shone takes this reasoning even further when he declares that *The English Patient* is: "as if David Lean had made *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Brief Encounter* but not waited in between, instead making them as the same movie."[223] And Janet Maslin is unquestionably the first to have made this comparison when she (positively) reviewed the film on the same night of its

[222] Lewis Beale, "English Patient was just what Academy ordered," *New York Daily News,* March 25, 1997.
[223] Tom Shone, "An Affair to Remember," *Sunday Times,* March 16, 1997.

original November premiere: “He [Minghella] has described what he aspires to here as 'epic cinema of a personal nature.' With its immense seductiveness, heady romance and glorious desert vistas at the *Lawrence of Arabia* level, *The English Patient* imaginatively lives up to that description.”[224] By literally subscribing to the director's narrative of intention, Maslin maintains the focus on the film's virtuosic 'smallness,' ironically by comparing it visually to one of the largest films in history.

Returning to *Seinfeld's* allusions to the film's supposed obnoxious ubiquity, one can further see what the stakes are of *The English Patient's* unconventional narrative structure in discursive conflict with its neo-classical narrative and visualizations. Within the episode, Elaine's shouting at the movie screen that the Patient should “stop telling your story and just die already!” is emblematic of this phenomenon. The problem is that Elaine, as a cynic, does not subscribe to the hype surrounding the movie for the simple reason that she does not find it entertaining or uplifting in the way that those around her do. The repeated (and by Elaine's standards, unsuccessful) appeal that “this is what movies can do!” is precisely what the *Seinfeld* episode is attempting to critique: the contemporaneous trend toward falling in-line with the prevailing opinion on popular texts regardless of whether it holds up to scrutiny.

The Continuity of Meta-discursive Indie-blockbusterism

Arguably all of Miramax's subsequent award winners (prior to the Weinsteins's departure from the company in 2005) increasingly follow a trend toward ever more explicit industrial allegory. John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love,* the 1998 Oscar winner, duplicates both the perceived “Britishness” of Minghella's film and an even more narratively literal

[224] Janet Maslin, “Adrift in Fiery Layers of Memory,” *The New York Times.* Late Edition. November 15, 1996.

focus on performativity and art in regard to contemporaneous discourse. Essentially, the film is a backstage musical without the musical component, the film depicts William Shakespeare's (Joseph Fiennes) romance with a fictional actress (Gwyneth Paltrow), where one of the main configurations of the plot is that their attraction to one another is wrapped up in their mutual respect for one another as artists. A number of possible industrially reflexive problems arise for Shakespeare: first, he has writer's block and is seemingly unable to survive in the harsh commercial dictates of Elizabethan business practices. Furthermore, Shakespeare is "censored" and nearly arrested for violating decency rules regarding the use of women in the theater. Yet, as with the history of Miramax award winners, he ultimately wins high praise and celebration. Notably, Shakespeare succeeds because he proves through his play *Romeo and Juliet* that he is able to "capture the nature of true love," and this, in-line with its rather conventional formal construction, may indeed cloud any apparently critical reflexivity that is perceived as inherent to the film, as it primarily mythologizes notions of the transformative power of entertainment when 'the industry' gets out of the way of the artist. Even more so than *The English Patient, Shakespeare in Love* capitalized on an exorbitantly expensive publicity campaign by Miramax; reportedly, in record setting fashion, the Weinsteins spent $16 million on ads and publicity targeted specifically to Academy voters, eclipsing the film's entire projected budget.[225] This move paid-off, with the film scoring a number of top prizes.

In comparison, Rob Marshall's *Chicago* (2002), delves into a more direct critique of 'show business,' and thus also only alludes specifically to the Hollywood film industry as a part of the wider entertainment world. Based on a musical from the 1970s (itself a re-boot

[225] John Kiscock, "Shakespeare accused of unfair campaign," *Calgary Herald,* March 9, 1999.

of a 1926 stage play), the timing of *Chicago's* release signaled an attempt, following the success of Baz Luhrman's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), to revitalize the long withered Hollywood musical. Yet, at a time when conglomerated 'show business' connotes a single industry that exceedingly monopolizes control of many of the formerly separate industries, the film's critique could indeed be a response to this synergy. Focusing on a pair of would-be singers Roxie Hart (Renee Zellweger) and Velma Kelly (Catherine Zeta-Jones) who have their careers at first stalled – but then advanced – by the murders they commit, the film seems to settle on a generalized indictment concerning the public's infatuation with salacious celebrity scandals. In as much as the stage-performing sensations quite literally get away with murder *and* get a joint theatrical contract as a specific result, many in the industry point to the evident self-critique at play. The film generally pushes the notion that people in show business are insincere, and that many audiences can be indicted for being charmed by such vapid entertainers. Toward the conclusion of the film, when Roxie questions whether or not their partnership will work as they hate each other, Velma remarks "This is the one business where that doesn't matter."

On this point, the film operates in two different registers: on the one hand it is dedicated to the virtuosity of performance inherent to the spectacular nature of (and talent displayed through) its musical sequences, but at the same time it is ideologically critical of the gritty cutthroat business in which the glamour that the burgeoning starlets perceive about show business is shown to be an illusion. Further, unlike *Shakespeare in Love,* this critique takes on a specifically formal quality: the film alternatively embraces and dissects the concept of a backstage musical by structuring some of the most elaborate sequences as sometimes warped daydreams of its main characters, but almost always reflexively

performing these on an actual theater stage. The diegetic reality of the stage comes into question and serves to foreground the conventions of performance through a series of metaphors for the protagonists' artificiality: a spotlight literally goes out on Roxie when her murder case concludes with an acquittal but she's still upset that no one wants to take her picture, and earlier her lawyer (Richard Gere) wins the case by both figuratively and literally doing a tap dance. Ultimately, *Chicago* signaled the continued dominance of Miramax independent-blockbusters at the Oscars, winning the Best Picture Award in 2003 over larger studio productions such as Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) and Miramax's own Martin Scorsese-helmed *Gangs of New York* (2002), coming in at a fraction of the cost of these others, but still finishing as one of the highest-grossing films of the year.[226]

In the middle of the decade, however, the Weinsteins permanently fell out with Disney, and sought to reboot their creative autonomy *via* the founding of the more unambiguously independent film studio The Weinstein Company. Nevertheless, their subsequent offering of *The King's Speech* (2010), directed by Tom Hooper, maintains both of the through-lines of cultural ambiguity (read: British historical drama) and a narrative emphasis on the virtuosity of performance. Namely, this comes in the form of the film's focus on King George VI's (Colin Firth) battle with a stutter in advance of his first nationwide radio broadcast to the subjects at the onset of the Second World War. This makes it nominally reflexive in terms of its dissection of the methodologies of media propaganda. Toward this end, and quite controversially, at one point George is shown watching a film of Adolph Hitler in apparent admiration of his rhetorical skill; when a

[226] "2002 Yearly Box Office." Box Office Mojo, last modified October 8, 2014, accessed October 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2002&p=.htm. Last updated October 8, 2014.

young future Queen Elizabeth asks him what the German dictator is saying, he remarks "I don't know, but he certainly seems to be saying it rather well." Here, in conflict with *The English Patient, The King's Speech* is unapologetically nationalistic in its evocation of Britishness: the fate of the British Empire seems to rest on the ability of George – as a good king – to charismatically inspire his subjects to the righteousness of the pending war. In 2011, following the Weinstein trend, *The King's Speech* dominated the Academy Awards in a way that was evidently considered a foregone conclusion by Academy producers; prior to the announcement of the Best Picture Award winner, the telecast presented a montage of all the nominees, but with the sound of Firth's monologue playing over every single one.

More recently still, the Weinstein Company won out again in a head-to-head contest (with Paramount Pictures) over self-reflexive Hollywood narratives, when Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2012) bested early favorite Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2012) at the Academy Awards. Here, *The Artist* is the most literally reflexive film of the bunch, presenting – in the tradition of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) – the story of a silent film star attempting to deal with the coming of synchronized sound. It is also the most global of all the "American" films in terms of filmic structure. The perception of cultural ambiguity – and arguably the film's very success – is almost entirely due to the audio-visual coding of *The Artist* as a classical Hollywood era silent film. Its "Frenchness" comes through only in its final moments, when Jean Dujardin's pronounced accent is literally heard for the first and only time on the soundtrack.

One conclusion to be drawn from this trend is that allegories of cinema have seemingly become more explicitly literal in the Weinstein films of recent years, as Hollywood arguably moves into a new era entirely. However, the decentralized organization

of the industry becomes ever more obscured and opaque in the film texts that arise out of this interstitial space of the independent-blockbuster. And, as the following chapter explores, the literalizing of self-reflexive narrative often encounters insurmountable problems in conveying industrial reflexivity within the paradigmatic mandates of the industry.

The closing scene of *The English Patient* is appropriate to recall. Choosing to end the film at the point in the story just before the plot begins allows Minghella to succinctly conclude on a note of parochial fatalism: Almásy takes off in the Tiger Moth and flies off to his destiny.[227] And yet this final flashback – which incoherently comes after the only person whose memory this could represent is already dead[228] – is intercut with Hana's departure from the monastery down the road to Florence. The scenes formally balance one another, as the Tiger Moth flies screen-left away from the sun, and Hana travels screen-right. Almásy will not arrive at his destination, but Hana's fate is unknown and punctuated by her smile. The final shot, Hana's point-of-view, points directly into the sun and fades to white. This juxtaposition thus highlights the conflicting forces at play in a film that must have both a hopeful and fatalistic finale: a romantic epic for some, and complex think-piece for others.

[227] A revised draft of the script dated August 28, 1995, goes even further in presenting Almásy's ultimate fate, concluding with "the sound of gunfire," and the description of Almásy's realization that the plane is under attack. Minghella, *The English Patient* (unpublished shooting script), "Revised Draft," August 28, 1995, the Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

[228] Thomas reads this as a "resurrection" of Almásy and Katherine, noting his interpretation of this sequence as similar to a dream, and thus he argues that the film ends on a more unabashedly positive note. 226.

CHAPTER FOUR

"From the Creator of *Being John Malkovich* Comes the Story of the Creator of *Being John Malkovich"*: Spike Jonze's *Adaptation.*

CHARLIE: I'm insane. I'm ouroboros. I've written myself into my screenplay. It's self-indulgent. It's narcissistic. It's solipsistic. It's pathetic. I'm pathetic. I'm fat and pathetic.

DONALD: I'm sure you had a good reason. You're an artist.

– Charlie Kaufman (Nicolas Cage) and Donald Kaufman (Nicolas Cage), *Adaptation.,* written by Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman

Thus far, I have explored first, modes of literal reflexivity in the early 1990s and second, the exceedingly opaque forms of reflexive metaphor within the burgeoning independent-blockbuster during the same period. It is with the late 1990s literalizing of Robert Stam's ludic form of self-reflection that one may finally begin to see the effective differentiation between the so-called structural meta-film and the ironically self-referential one. For David James, the structural avant-garde was "reflexive" precisely because it approached the idea of pure film in a minimalist manner: if one seeks hypothetically to eliminate any and all formal elements or conventions that are not peculiar to the cinematic apparatus, then what one is left with is, by definition, an unadulterated focus on the cinematic process laid bare. Thus, while it may be an obviously futile line of argument to pursue questions of which film in a comparison is "more reflexive" than another, an important line of inquiry is investigating how different films approach their reflexive practice as either a distraction from or a supplement to their narrative and formal structures of meaning-making. Simply put, diegetic dialogue about the film industry does not necessarily equal formal self-reflection, even if the dialogue literally focuses on the

structure of narrative filmmaking. I argue that nowhere is this more apparent than in Spike Jonze's *Adaptation* (2002).

The first shot of the film is shaky and hand-held. The angle is canted, and the lens flares to near white-out as the camera attempts to automatically adjust to the natural light cascading into the room through the windows at which the camera is naïvely pointed. Compensating for this seeming mistake, the camera operator wildly searches the room for a subject of interest before zooming-in to a single seated figure. If a behind-the-scenes video aesthetic is not clear enough already at this point, the subtitle announces this in literal terms: "On the set of "Being John Malkovich" Summer 1998." This claim is aggressively supported by the camerawork, which at first 'misses' its subject, framing too low to a restaurant table and wine glasses before a moment later tilting up to properly capture the face of the seated figure. Such corrections suggest even louder than the subtitle itself that this is documentary footage in as much as they portray that which might be excised from a completed narrative film. Furthermore, the awkward reframing indicates a documentary crew is behind the camera; they evidently have not blocked the shot, nor do they seem to be immediately aware of where to station the camera in regard to points of interest that are not pre-arranged.[229] The sound echoes this phenomenon as a myriad of voices crowd the scene without clear sources or mixing: there is simply noise all around the crew. Finally, the de-saturated low grade video on which this sequence has been shot meshes harshly with the visual quality of the 35mm color-corrected film upon which the rest of the movie is about to be presented. As I would argue, these visual and aural cues are essential to the

[229] One could argue that the style here implicitly mimics the hypothetical documentary ethic of observational cinema, that is, showing up on the scene of a happening without a script or an idea of what will or will not happen, but attempting to film it as best as one can. Often this will produce sudden zooms and racking of the camera around a location when the filmmaker's attention is drawn to something out of the frame.

series of truth claims that are about to follow, and upon which the entire narrative premise of the film will rely.

This is a 'real' movie set, with 'real' movie professionals: in quick succession four separate re-framings and their accompanying subtitles introduce the audience to: “John Malkovich, Actor,” “Thomas Smith, First Assistant Director,” “Lance Acord, Cinematographer,” and finally “Charlie Kaufman, Screenwriter.” There has been a purposeful slippage between actual on-set personalities and diegetic characters existing in a fictional story world. The person identified as “Charlie Kaufman, Screenwriter” is actually actor Nicolas Cage, who is portraying Kaufman in the film. The point here is not to suggest that the filmmakers would prefer viewers to be ignorant of their star, and that one might presume that he is indeed actually a screenwriter captured in a documentary about the making of *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Rather, the importance of this sequence is that it suggests the singulative approach to the interpretation of the film's depicted events: these are 'real' people and the things that 'really' happened to them at some fixed point in the past. This, I would argue, is an idiosyncratic truth claim to make for a film that is patently fictional in both character and plot.

What unfolds after this opening is a narrative that has been described as deeply reflexive and self-reflexive at the literal level. Screenwriter Charlie Kaufman receives a commission to adapt a non-fiction book called *The Orchid Thief,* by Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), into a screenplay. He struggles with writer's block and is forced to re-imagine the book – which depicts Orlean's investigation of the life story of controversial flower collector John Laroche (Chris Cooper) – as a fantasy, a love story, and ultimately a suspense film. At the point in which Charlie, Orlean, and Laroche all begin to interact with one another within

the diegesis of the film, many critics have argued that *Adaptation* has literally become the movie whose creation it supposedly depicts: the film-within-a-film begins to feature a screenwriter named Charlie attempting to write a screenplay about Orlean even as this is the very plot that is unfolding on-screen.

After consulting with esteemed real life contemporary screenwriting guru Robert McKee (Brian Cox), Charlie asks for help from his twin brother, Donald. When Donald suggests that the Orlean in Charlie's screenplay could be having an affair with Laroche, this is indeed what the twin brothers discover about the Orlean and Laroche who exist in their diegesis as well. This revelation sets the stage for a suspenseful denouement in which Orlean and Laroche attempt to kill Charlie and Donald in order to keep their secret safe. Charlie dutifully integrates this scene into his screenplay, which he co-credits to his brother and, self-reflexively, all of these plot points make their way into the actual (extra-diegetic) credits of *Adaptation:* the film is "based on The Orchid Thief by Susan Orlean" and is "written by Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman." All of this occurs despite the fact that Orlean never had an affair with Laroche – certainly this was not the subject of her book – and arguably more importantly, there has never been any such person as "Donald Kaufman."

Thus *Adaptation* treads the line between biography and fantasy-based fiction. As I will argue, *films-à-clef* employing literal reflexivity in this way succeed in convincing audiences that they are reflexive by appealing either to what Gérard Genette calls the singulative interpretation of diegetic events[230] – in which it must be pre-supposed that these events did actually happen to someone in the industry at some point – or the iterative

[230] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

interpretation – in which it must be likewise pre-supposed that the events have happened and continue to happen to many people within the industry. The important concept becomes that of resonance: the necessary empathy the audience must feel toward one or more of the diegetic characters in interpreting them as veiled forms of real people. And the semiological breakdown of the film's literal reflexivity is precisely contingent on this fact, namely because many of the truth claims of the film are not literally true.

The greatest example of this is in the film poster's tagline. The line begins with a familiar antecedent: “From the creator of...,” one whose history can be traced to almost universally denote an actual film professional involved with the production of some famous work which the advertisement would like readers to associate with the new work. Second, the tagline preys upon another distinct formulaic expression: “Comes the story of...,” after which usually comes some description of the main character and/or conflict of the new work. Yet in this case, the full tagline reveals that these entities are precisely the same person: in a reflexive pun – or one might say a pun *on* reflexivity – the full line declares in violation of expectations: “From the Creator of Being John Malkovich, Comes the Story of the Creator of Being John Malkovich.” Here, the poster utilizes precise film advertising grammar to make the very literal claim that this is a movie about “the creator” of *Being John Malkovich*, and when it becomes clear that the film's plot surrounds a character named Charlie Kaufman, the film has thus made a second larger claim about the filmmaking process itself: “Charlie Kaufman, Screenwriter” = “creator” of movies.

However, where the film’s narrative crafts a message about the singular authorship of motion pictures, its formal qualities betray this assertion. Even the opening sequence suggests this, with a 'realness' achieved only through the intense virtuosity of filmmakers

who have contrived to make it *look* 'real' in a manner that must be completely disavowed by the critical press that have stressed that this as a film *about* writing. Further, the film's emphasis on the creative human element involved with filmmaking makes it, like *Chaplin* and earlier biopics, relatively silent on the phenomenological work of the filmic apparatus itself, beyond critiques of the people who created it. Through *Adaptation*, I argue that the literally reflexive *film-à-clef* of the 1990s and early 2000s, often necessarily reinforces misapprehensions about Hollywood labor and technical processes even as it explicitly claims essential reflexivity towards the industry.

Conflicting Authorships

Arguably the most important point to make about this opening scene – one of only two brief scenes that diegetically take place on a movie set in an entire film on the process of movie-making – is that which is missing from its quick hierarchy of professionals: the director of the film.[231] *Adaptation* is the second feature film directed by Spike Jonze. A young writer and videographer from Maryland, Jonze seems to fit certain elements of the model of what Derek Hill has called the American New Wave filmmaker of the 1990s-2000s.[232] He has seemingly courted a reputation toward the prototype of a youthfully rebellious music video and commercials director concerned more with shaking things up audio-visually in a way to resonate with the MTV generation, than aspiring to so-called sophisticated narration, and the scripts for both of his first two films were penned by someone else. Likewise, rather than enter into the cultural discourse as an overt film brat

[231] On a side note, the only film directors who actually do appear in the film (not portraying film directors) are Curtis Hansen, who plays the role of Orlean's husband, and David O. Russell, who plays one of their dinner guests.

[232] Derek Hill, *Charlie Kaufman and Hollywood's Merry Band of Pranksters, Fabulists and Dreamers: An Excursion into the American New Wave* (Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2008).

like some of his contemporaries and predecessors, Jonze has noted that he first came into the business out of high school as a freelance writer and photographer for *Freestyling*, a skate-boarding magazine.[233] And Jonze does not shy away from this unconventional, non-cinematic lineage: when asked if he still feels (as of the release of *Adaptation* in 2003) a connection to skate-boarding, Jonze replied that it is "such a big part of my life," before going on to re-assure the interviewer that he may not even permanently settle on filmmaking as a career going forward.[234]

Being John Malkovich was the first feature-length film directed by Jonze, making him one of the essential "creators," even if he is not at all depicted in a movie that is "The Story of the Creator of Being John Malkovich." As the title suggests, this first film also depicts an actual Hollywood film personality in the person of actor John Malkovich, though in an ostensibly more surrealistic way than in *Adaptation*. The story centers on a group of entirely fictional characters who stumble upon a gateway that allows them to transport themselves for a limited time only into the mind and body of Malkovich without his knowledge or consent. Like *Adaptation*, *Being John Malkovich* contains almost no scenes that take place on a film set (despite featuring a film actor as one of the main characters). Nevertheless, metaphorically, the seeds of reflexivity are already planted in this earlier film, which can be read as a meditation on star idolization and wanting to "be" somebody whom one only knows from the movies. Though this is not quite auto-reflexive, as the hypothetical target of critique in the metaphor that is literalized falls squarely on the audience rather than the filmmakers, *Being John Malkovich* is reflexive of the apparatus; arguably it has

---

[233] Aaron Meza, "Spike Jonze," *Interview,* December 2002/January 2003. 66.

[234] In response to the question "Do you feel that directing is the end of the journey for you?" Jonze replies: "I hope not! I hope that whatever is interesting and fun and exciting and I haven't done before, I could always try. Just learn new things." Meza, 66.

more to say about the work of the film text as a signifier than it is a literal critique of professionals in Hollywood.

The other thing that Jonze's first two films have in common is that they were written by Charlie Kaufman. Initially interested in theatre acting, a reported self consciousness led Kaufman to transition to NYU film school to become a director.[235] And yet, it was through writing that Kaufman ultimately broke into the entertainment business, first with short stories at *National Lampoon,* and ultimately on television series such as *Get a Life* and *The Dana Carvey Show.* Throughout most of the 1990s, he struggled to make a name for himself on various sketch comedy shows and sitcoms, but often ended up writing episodes and sketches that went unproduced; as publicity retroactively situates, this is largely because of Kaufman's idiosyncratic and absurdist style in both black comedy and drama. Allegedly, the reason for his big break into feature films came only when Francis Ford Coppola somehow ended up reading his script for *Being John Malkovich* and passed it to his son-in-law at the time, Spike Jonze.[236] In an interesting precedent that would follow Kaufman through his career, the initial impression of many industry insiders had been that the screenplay was "unfilmable," but Jonze was not deterred, and importantly had the connections to get Malkovich himself in on the project.[237]

From *Being John Malkovich* onward, Kaufman began to achieve a wide-reaching reputation in Hollywood as an eccentric genius, associated through his collaboration with Jonze and, on his second film *Human Nature* (2001), Michel Gondry, with the emerging so-called New Wave. Yet even this did not result in all of his work finding its way from written

[235] Doreen Alexander Child, *Charlie Kaufman: Confessions of an Original Mind* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 6.
[236] Ibid, 15.
[237] Ibid, 16.

page to completed film, and *Human Nature* has to be classified as a mitigated failure at the box office. Kaufman's response to criticism here is telling in establishing his reputation for absurd irony (that begs to be interpreted as the opposite of what it literally denotes) that may be misunderstood by mainstream audiences:

> When people criticize *Human Nature,* it's usually over what they see as this simplistic idea that nature is better than civilization. In actuality, that has nothing to do with what the movie's about. In fact, the movie was mocking that simplistic idea. The movie is a parody of that stupid notion.[238]

Adaptation is the third feature film (that was actually produced) to be written by Kaufman, and bears all the literally reflexive marks of a screenwriter in crisis: given a tremendous amount of artistic freedom, Kaufman, like Charlie in the film, struggled to satisfy expectations while remaining loyal to his personal convictions about non-conformity. In a reversal of fortune from his earliest days, it seems, this time Kaufman himself had been handed something that was "unfilmable."

Finally, the 'author' of *Adaptation* who never had any interest in creating a movie, is Susan Orlean. A journalist who has worked at *The New Yorker* since 1992,[239] Orlean's work is decidedly non-fiction, yet no less eclectic and creative than *Adaptation's* other authors. Her books over the last twenty years include an exploration of Hollywood canine Rin Tin Tin, a meditation on what makes *Saturday Night* so special in American culture, and a chronicle of her varied journeys and interactions entitled *The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup: My Encounters with Extraordinary People.* What ultimately became *The Orchid Thief: A True Story of Beauty and Obsession,* began as a series of articles written by Orlean as

[238] Ibid, 54.
[239] Rachel Clarke, "The Power Behind the Flower," *Premiere,* December 2002. 66.

an investigation of the often nefarious orchid business in Florida.[240] An emphasis on plant propagation and the passion that growers like John Laroche exude for the flowers beyond even human relations, make the book admittedly anti-cinematic by Hollywood standards. But this would only be a problem if Orlean envisioned the story as a film, which she did not. In fact, in publicity for the release of the film, she conveys to *Premiere* that not only was she never asked to adapt the book herself at the time of its optioning, but that she has never even considered screenwriting more generally as a tenable path.[241] Most interesting of all, the December 2002 write-up that explicitly compares Orlean and Meryl Streep, indicates that despite her ultimate happiness with the finished film, Orlean initially requested the producers change the name of her character to reflect the newly fictional status of Kaufman's characterization of her: "I called them and said 'It's great, it's crazy, just use a different name and have fun.' And they said 'We don't *want* to use a different name! C'mon, everyone's using their real names! You've got to! Look at Charlie! He's using *his* real name!'."[242] What this publicity reveals, is that upholding the non-fictional status of the film characters, despite their fictionalized versions, was considered of utmost importance for the production that must label itself as both a wild fantasy *and* the story of real personalities.

Is *Adaptation* Really About Adaptation?

An interview with Kaufman suggests that his idea of altering *The Orchid Thief* to be about a screenwriter named Charlie Kaufman is, by its very design, a mode to anticipatorily defend the text and himself against a particular type of fidelity criticism, and an ethical

[240] Child, 58.
[241] Clarke, 66.
[242] Ibid.

conundrum based especially on the non-fictional status of his would-be characters and situations:

> One of the main reasons I got stuck, and one of the main reasons I included myself in it, was because I was in a position that felt enormously unethical to me. Because I was putting words into real people's mouths and I didn't know how to do that. I'm not going to say 'Susan Orlean said this,' and I'm not going to say that she had this happen to her when she didn't. So I came up with the idea that the only way that I can frame this, is to say that *I'm* saying that she said this. This is clearly a fiction.[243]

Yet, despite this conjecture about the story unfolding within the mind of the screenwriter-protagonist, a number of sequences involve elements that seem at least ambiguously outside the purview of Charlie, or further, are cinematographically coded as part of Orlean's own story that Charlie is reading to himself. Here, one might suggest that Jonze's film employs Pier Paolo Pasolini's proposed cinematic equivalent to the modernist novel's mode of free-indirect discourse, a proverbial free-indirect point-of-view: shots and sequences that are ambiguously oriented in terms of focalized identification with a diegetic character who becomes a double – to the literate film audience – for the particular and often political perspective of the author him or herself.[244] Here, the modernist reading of narrational strategy would be complicated by the fact, first, that Kaufman did not direct the sequences of the finished film, and second, that unlike Pasolini, Kaufman does not act in the movie himself (or in this case *as* himself). Rather, what Derek Hill has referred to as the hallmarks of a "postmodern, pathologically ambidextrous fantasist"[245] appear in the film specifically because of the unreliable nature of the reality Kaufman is crafting at multiple intertextual levels. Particularly this includes climactic turns to the absurd in both the credulity of the

[243] Child, 59.
[244] Pier Paolo Pasolini. *Heretical Empiricism,* ed. Louise K Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 176.
[245] Hill, 28.

plot and how it is presented as escaping the trajectory of the imaginative ravings of a desperate screenwriter.

In *Interview*, Meryl Streep extenuates Kaufman's point that the film should not even seek to realistically portray Orlean or her plight: "...after meeting with Charlie Kaufman and then doing a reading with Nic [Cage], I realized that the real Susan and the one I'd be playing were nothing alike. So I didn't have the burden of similitude."[246] Indeed, whereas the fictional Charlie Kaufman seems obsessed with the elusive nature of Orlean, and how to depict her in his screenplay, his actual Hollywood counterpart has strayed dramatically from this principle, crafting an image of Orlean that foremost suits the trajectory of his evolving story: a story, one might add, that bears no resemblance to actual events in Orlean's life. In other words, the behind-the-scenes story is fundamentally oppositional at many points to that which is depicted onscreen despite critical conjecture that "Hollywood was never so honest" in regard to Kaufman's auto-reflexive critique.[247] Kaufman's Orlean embarks on a drug-induced adventure, pursues an illicit extra-marital affair, and ultimately solicits and attempts to commit murder in order to protect her reputation.

The irony here is doubled in regard to the casting of Streep as well as her performance. First, this "burden of similitude" is indeed lifted because of a two-fold phenomenon: Orlean is neither an audio-visually recognizable celebrity *nor* the main character of her articles and book on Laroche (her title character). Therefore, Streep's characterization is able to at least nominally evade what Frederic Jameson sees as one of the important and understudied intertextual components of film adaptation: the expectations that the audience will have regarding character traits described or envisioned

[246] Brad Goldfarb, "Meryl Streep," *Interview,* December 2002/January 2003. 150.
[247] Child, 60.

in the written work in explicit comparison to the star-driven Hollywood version of such a work.[248] This becomes all the more apparent a creative distinction when comparing the depiction of Orlean to that of McKee by Brian Cox, who reportedly did study mannerisms and inflections of the noted screenwriting guru with the express intention of imitation, or even notably for Cage in the role of Kaufman himself. Second, this belies a concurrent trend in adaptation studies – spearheaded by theorists such as Robert Stam – to include evermore complex intertextual analyses in the tradition of Bakhtinian dialogism: the linguistic influence that a hypertext can anachronistically have on the meaning of its source material. The most straight-forward example often given comes when a film or television adaptation causes fans to revisit (or read for the first time) the book upon which the adaptation was based. In this case then, the irony of depicting Charlie as overly concerned with doing justice to Orlean's work and life, even while the actual Kaufman takes dramatic liberties in-so-doing, comes from the conceivable shift in professional reputation for Orlean that could be presumed to accompany the release of the film. Charlie's concern for Orlean's reputation is here cinematically manifested by an absurdist disregard by Kaufman for Orlean's reputation; that is to say, that depicting her story or personality is at best tangential to the metadiscursive exploration of Kaufman's own industrial positioning despite the conjecture that the film is "based on" her work.

In this regard, *Adaptation* is not so much *about* adaptation, as it may indeed be about the preoccupations of adaptation criticism. It is at least symptomatic of this discourse. Several discernible trends can be traced through the classical and post-classical era as

[248] Frederic Jameson, "Afterword: Adaptation as a Philosophical Problem," in *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity,* ed. Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 215-234.

noted by James Naremore in his 2000 anthology on the subject: first, beginning in the early cinema period this involved a push toward fidelity criticism, by which the artificial distinction between high and low culture is enacted by the implicit suggestion that films are – by nature of their popular mass consumption – in a disadvantageous position to faithfully represent the high art of classic works of literature.[249] The repeated suggestion that Kaufman, and his film character Charlie, tried to "faithfully" adapt Orlean's work and was not only unable to, but was uncomfortable attempting to do so, already alludes to this perceived crisis both within the text and its paratext.

Later, in the post-war art film period, the notion of film's medium-specific subservience to written work was largely replaced by the adaptation criticism of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics and their followers, who began on the international stage to advance the director-centric *auteur* theory.[250] Indeed, the now canonical 1954 *Cahiers* entry from François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," famously attempts to elucidate the difference between the "*metteur-en-scène*" and the *auteur* along the explicit lines of those directors who rely on the importation of prestigious literary content into their films (whom Truffaut decries for lack of originality) and those who understand and craft a cinematic style that resists the notion that literature can be translated wholesale into film.[251] In contrast to the previous school of thought, this mentality stressed that being 'true to the spirit' rather than the letter of the source material was often a sign of sophistication on the part of directors who understood the need to dispense with written source material

---

[249] James Naremore, "Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation,* ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 1-15.

[250] Ibid, 6. Naremore refers to this mentality as it relates to the concept of film adaptation specifically as both modernist and "Arnoldian": from nineteenth century cultural theorist Matthew Arnold's conjecture about the civilizing force of great art, this time applied to the cinema itself.

[251] François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader,* ed. Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 9-18.

that was antithetical to the medium-specific tools of filmic meaning-making. *Adaptation* both responds to and confounds this tenet at the narrative level by seeming to embrace the notion of necessary infidelity toward Orlean's material, and yet continuing to prefigure the screenwriter as primary filmic author, with Jonze as the proverbial *metteur-en-scène*, erased from the film narrative entirely, and often credited in publicity as co-collaborator at best.

The limits of *auteur* theory have already been explored at length over the preceding decades, and *Adaptation's* refusal to designate its film-within-a-film primarily as the creative vision of the film director has found few detractors. Most recent studies of film adaptation, such as the ones put forth by Robert Stam, seek to avoid positing an antagonistic relationship between film and written literature by adopting post-structural methods of investigation by which both source and adaptation are deeply inculcated in the signification process, and are not in competition with one another.[252] Accordingly, sometimes even the appeal to evaluative comparison along the lines of medium-specificity as a concept is decried in studies such as that of Naremore, who sees much of this rhetoric as a symptom of outdated "high modernist aestheticism."[253]

This point plays upon the critical conjecture that for much of the history of adaptation study at the academic level – largely in English and Comparative Literature departments – film adaptations have been defined as satellite texts for the study of the original source novels. For Robert Ray, this historical occurrence can be traced at least in part to the initial assumption in academic and critical circles that novels and (Hollywood)

---

[252] Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation,* ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1-52.

[253] Naremore, 6.

films were in communion with one another because of a shared emphasis on narrative.[254] In essence, mid-century academia began to create a virtual selection bias, by which the very subset of films even typically categorized as adaptations was seemingly limited by the prestige or reputation of its literary source. Naremore goes even further than Ray in pointing out the idiosyncratic way in which films based on divergent sources such as poetry, comic books, and stage plays are often left completely out of the discussion of adaptation owing to the perceived primacy of the novel (and the *significant* novel at that) in crafting this discourse.[255] Here, even Jameson seems to implicitly subscribe to the notion that a film adaptation perhaps by definition must have a literary corollary (mostly classic novels) in order to make sense as such.[256] What is clear is that along these well-established lines, *Adaptation,* as the filmic presentation of non-fiction writing, might not even have entered the critical lexicon *as an adaptation* if not for its explicitly literalized auto-reflexive critique of the supposed adaptation process, and the paratextual materials that have promoted this as a central message of the film.

In other words, the film comes into a discussion of filmic adaptation primarily because its title is *Adaptation* (rather than *The Orchid Thief*), because its very plot centers on the crafting of a screenplay from previously written material, and because publicity for the film centers on the fact that it is singulatively reflexive of Charlie Kaufman's experience.

---

[254] Robert Ray. "The Field of 'Literature and Film,'" in *Film Adaptation,* ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 38-53.

[255] Naremore, 1-2. Here, he concludes: by way of example "Thus we immediately think of the film *Mrs. Dalloway* (1998) or even of the more freely derivative *Orlando* (1993) as adaptations, but not of *The Set Up* (1949, based on a narrative poem), *Batman* (1989, based on a comic book), *His Girl Friday* (1940, based on a play), *Mission Impossible* (1996, based on a television series), or *Twelve Monkeys* (1995, based on an art film). Even in the realm of the novel the range of things usually discussed under the rubric of adaptation is quite narrow."

[256] Jameson, 215-218. All of Jameson's filmic examples in this vein (other than the hypothetical ones, or those that are a "logical possibility") come from widely circulated, and often classical novels.

Here, the first of several contradictions surrounding the film centers on the fact that it is effectively viewed as an adaptation because it literally claims that it is, rather than because it necessarily fits or does not fit the various presumed markers of such a category among either critics or theorists. By comparison, consider Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (1963), which similarly depicts an attempt by a diegetic screenwriter to adapt a written work to film: Homer's *The Odyssey.* For its literal and allegorical invocation of the cinematic apparatus, including scenes on a diegetic film set and the invocation of Brechtian fourth-wall breaking, *Contempt* is categorized by Stam as self-reflexive, however, he does not classify it as an adaptation in-and-of-itself, but rather merely as a film "whose diegesis revolves around *the attempt to make a film adaptation* of *The Odyssey*" (emphasis added).[257] Yet, conversely, Stam also chooses to lead off his edited volume on film adaptation theory with an immediate sustained discussion of Jonze's film: "I will take as my point of departure for discussion one of those rare feature films that not only *is* an adaptation, but is also *about* adaptation, and that is actually *entitled Adaptation...*"(emphasis in original).[258] Despite the fact that both films involve a similar narrative relationship to their source material – their stories depict the attempted adaptation – one actually becomes an adaptation and the other does not. This arguably comes about for two reasons: first, because of Kaufman's fantastical construction of his diegesis that in the minds of many reviewers allows the film to literally become the movie Charlie is writing, and second, because of a paratext that explicitly labels the film as a *film-à-clef*, or a fiction based on real events. Stam plays on this notion when he explains the necessary paratextual understanding of how the film came about because of a legitimate contract Kaufman received to adapt *The Orchid Thief,* concluding: "Thus,

[257] Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature,* 21.
[258] Stam, *Literature and Film,* 1.

Adaptation is simultaneously an adaptation and an original screenplay, one which turns a non-fiction book into a fictional adventure."[259]

Notably, a semantic slippage occurs in the film wherever the concept of film adaptation is equated with – or at least associated with symbiotically – the process of biological adaptation, namely evolution by natural selection. I would argue that these are mutually exclusive definitions. The first, as Naremore has suggested, has primarily to do with the concept of *representation:* a filmic adaptation, or more generally any "representational artifact,"[260] is such because of its attempt to present or recreate something from another art form or medium. Conversely, the second definition of "adaptation" more strictly concerns the process of transformation itself. That is, a book does not "become" a movie. Even if the tools of dialogism suggest that these intertextual signifiers transform one another in how audiences can perceive them thereafter, it is difficult to equate this critical theory with a biological process by which one ontologically mutates, supersedes, and replaces the other forever.[261]

And yet this distinction is repeatedly clouded within the film. In the second sequence of the film, when Charlie asks in voiceover "How did I get here?" the reply comes in the form of a filmic sequence that might be perceived as a non-diegetic insert if not for the subtitle

---

[259] Ibid, 1.

[260] Naremore, 9.

[261] Here Stam evidently disagrees, when he seizes upon the metaphoric use of the concept of mutation employed by Kaufman in the film: "Yet if mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see filmic adaptations as 'mutations' that help their source novel 'survive.' Do not adaptations 'adapt to' changing environments and changing tastes, as well as to a new medium, with its distinct industrial demands, commercial pressures, censorship taboos, and aesthetic norms?" (*Literature and Film,* 3). The analogy is poetic and eloquent, if somewhat unscientific; in point of fact, biological "survival of the fittest", as Stam refers to it, does not help a non-mutating organism to survive. Rather it precipitates the extinction of the non-mutating members of the group, so that the only way the analogy would work here, would be if a twenty-first century preference for recorded media were to become so dominant that those were the only works archived and all extant copies of Orlean's book were somehow lost so that it could never be read again in any context, except through the viewing of the film version. In essence: if Kaufman's work physically destroyed Orlean's.

that establishes it as a part of the story: over a shot of fiery lava, the title announces "Hollywood, CA" and after a moment adds the qualifier "Four Billion and Forty Years Earlier." What follows is a montage of all life evolving on earth. An explosion of lava morphs into time-lapse footage of snow forming across a rocky plain, which itself dissolves to primitive creatures swimming under water. More fast motion follows: amphibians crawl up out of the water, insects and green plants rise up out of the ground in close-up, a falling asteroid wipes out the dinosaurs, and ultimately primates rise up to become bipedal just as the street grid of Los Angeles spreads out across the land. The final shot delivers on the promise with the birth of a baby, evidently Charlie himself. Importantly here the sequence is framed between two sequences – the set of *Being John Malkovich* and the meeting with the film executive Valerie – in which Charlie has difficulty navigating the film world. As if the analogy between Charlie's job writing scripts and biological evolution were not clear, later in the film he even more explicitly connects these notions; pacing around his bedroom and frustrated by his inability to adapt the story about flowers to film, Charlie locates *The Portable Darwin* and begins to read. The following black & white insert depicts Charles Darwin in his study (signified with the caption "England, One Hundred Ninety Years Earlier") as he explains his theory that all organisms on earth must have descended from one ancient ancestor. Editor Eric Zumbrunnen cuts back to Charlie reading the book, and becoming inspired. Intriguingly, it has been Darwin himself, in suggesting the notion of shared common ancestry, who has assisted Charlie in writing his screenplay: his own adaptation.

Arguably, this is where the film mystifies the very realm it is purporting to investigate, as it explicitly diverges from a specific meta-critique of screenwriting, and

relates this critique rather to a universal theme completely outside the industry. As Charlie charges in his narration: “It is the journey of evolution, adaptation, the journey we all take, the journey that unites each and every one of us.” Taken at face value, this suggests that the story concerning Charlie's screenplay is simply an illustrative vehicle through which to drive home a deeper point about transformative experience. Yet, if one suggests that *Adaptation* is not actually about the process of cinematic adaptation, but rather about how this analogy can be applied to something else, then is this to concede that *Adaptation* is not narratively reflexive? This suggestion seems absurd, and a distinction must be made again between the ludic and the didactic. The plot of the film focuses on the “journey” of Charlie Kaufman in creating a screenplay for *The Orchid Thief* either so that the audience can extrapolate a life lesson from this experience, or (as some critics would have it) to ironically reject this claim based on the singularly idiosyncratic experience of being a screenwriter in Hollywood. Either way, what becomes clear is that the interpretation of the film's essential reflexivity is contingent upon the individual reputations of the filmmakers as well as the overarching trajectory of the perception of self-reflexivity in American film at the turn of the twenty-first century.

A Hierarchy of Reflexive Modes in the New New Hollywood

Both Derek Hill's periodization and his selection of films and filmmakers for comparison in his elucidation of the turn of the century American New Wave retain the goal of redeeming a concept of *auteuristic* film art for the United States, the likes of which are pre-supposed to have been unquestionably achieved by French iconoclasts in the 1960s. Often, it is the very fact that these filmmakers eschew traditional rules of cinematic narration that this iconoclasm can be recognized as postmodern fabulism, and here Hill

seemingly betrays a highbrow/lowbrow taste imperative, where he evaluatively compares the absurd as it is configured in the films of Wes Anderson, for instance, to the absurdity of more popular comedies such as the Farrelly Brother's *Dumb & Dumber* (1994).[262] Box office analysis supports a conjecture about implicit high art pretension here; Anderson's *Rushmore* (1998) – which Hill praises – cost $20 million dollars to produce, received only a limited domestic release over its first two months in theaters, and actually took an overall loss at the North American box office (there is no information on any international release during its first theatrical run).[263] On the other hand, *Dumb & Dumber* – decried by Hill in specific comparison – figures as a text book example of the 1990s independent-blockbuster: coming in at a cost of only $17 million, the Farrelly's film made nearly half its huge gross of $247 million in overseas markets.[264] For its part, *Adaptation* fits neatly into this trend as a twenty-first century American indie; with a budget of $19 million, the film grossed $32 million worldwide, but nearly 70% of this came from American theaters (like *Rushmore, Adaptation* initially received a limited festival release, perhaps owing to this perception of its complexity).[265] The critical argument concerning the virtuosity of "absurdity" is also duplicated in the popular press as it concerns explaining the apparent breakdown in audience on *Adaptation*: "Complex, confusing, head-scratching movies that enthrall some movie-goers while infuriating others as he seeks to blur the lines between

---

[262] Hill, 93. The point of comparison paints the Anderson film *Bottle Rocket* (1996) with adjectives like "real" and "genuine" in regard to its effect on audiences.

[263] "*Rushmore,*" Box Office Mojo, last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=rushmore.htm.

[264] "*Dumb and Dumber*," Box Office Mojo. Last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=dumbanddumber.htm.

[265] "*Adaptation*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=adaptation.htm.

reality and fantasy, Jonze has a partner in the absurd in Charlie Kaufman..."[266]

By comparison, Chris Dzialo refers to the indeterminate temporality of Kaufman's work as a contest in the screenwriter's mind between the unbeatable mandates of feature film form and the need to confound narration and screen time, a category he calls "frustrated time."[267] Here, Dzialo connects Kaufman's propensity in *Adaptation* toward selective use of temporally signifying inter-titles – and alternatively unlabeled scenes that may thus take place at times that are orthogonal to the diegetically progressing narrative – to the narratology of Gérard Genette. In particular, Dzialo applies Genette's singulative and iterative forms of signification to Kaufman's screenplay, to suggest that the narration is complex enough to confound these forms; the film shifts back and forth between the two, or perhaps is ambiguous enough to logically espouse both or neither:

> Perhaps we are seeing several singulative actions one time each ("narrating *n* times what happened *n* times" [Genette, 1980, p. 114]), or seeing one singulative action repeated several times over ("narrating *n* times what happened once"[p. 115]). Alternatively, is each scene of Orlean typing actually a case of the iterative ("narrating one time [or rather: at one time] what happened *n* times" [p. 116]), in effect "standing in" for all such typical instances?[268]

Here, the noteworthy aspect of Kaufman's narrational strategy is thus demonstrated by his apparent evasion of the conventional Hollywood mythologizing enabled by narrative systems that universalize individually depicted events and tropes. Rather, for Dzialo, what "frustrated time" foregrounds – via its unintelligibility – is the typical way in which Hollywood films create a slippage between iterative and singulative narration in the first

---

[266] "Keeping up with the Jonze," *Film Review,* March 2003. 52.
[267] Chris Dzialo, "'Frustrated Time' Narration: The Screenplays of Charlie Kaufman," in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema,* ed. Warren Buckland (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 108.
[268] Ibid, 114.

place.[269]

But what this suggestion crucially misses is how the film's literal reflexivity threatens to re-introduce this slippage as it pertains to the depicted events in their role of presenting a picture of the "real" world: in this case the Hollywood film industry. That is, much of the textual and paratextual rhetoric exclaims that the crucial "honesty" of the film is not its outlandish depictions of affairs and murder, but rather the arduous process of adapting a screenplay: at once a singular and iterative action for Charlie Kaufman. Accordingly, for many reviewers, the importance of a scene between Charlie and Valerie the film exec, or between Charlie and his agent, is that these are potentially iterative acts in Kaufman's screenplay; their importance derives not just from the specifics of their conversations on *The Orchid Thief,* but also the way they resonate as typical. Kent and Nathanial Jones allude to this in their reading of the opening meeting between Charlie and Valerie: "She's the kind of person who smiles at the talent and then badgers his agent to badger him into meeting his deadlines – one of the little touches that seems incidental to *Adaptation* but that is in fact central to its considerable emotional punch."[270] The fact that the primary importance of the scene to these reviewers revolves around what they can glean about Valerie's *type* is telling, and their conjecture that this only *seems* trivial to the meaning of the film is astute.

What becomes clear in regard to the narrative of *Adaptation* as a *film-à-clef*, is that if one presumes something is iterative of the life of characters in the diegesis, this opens up the possible and probable interpretation that these acts are also iterative of other (real) people in the industry. A review in *Sight & Sound* takes this as a flat assertion – likewise

[269] Ibid, 116-117.
[270] Kent Jones and Nathanial Jones, "Hearts and Flowers," *Film Comment,* November/December 2002, 25.

referencing the scene of Charlie's conversation with Valerie – when it refers to the sequence itself as an adaptation of what all writers "invariably" go through in Hollywood: "*Adaptation* opens with a nice version of this scene, Charlie and a studio executive discussing how he might adapt Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief,* each pretending not to notice what the other is saying."[271] The statement here is loaded with non-specific extrapolation: "this scene" (read: 'this type of situation') is already known to many, and Kaufman's "version" of it is "nice" because it taps into the larger discourse. Examples like this demonstrate that the stakes of formal clarity are higher in a film that employs literal industrial reflexivity than those that do not. In essence, the iterative reading becomes naturally conducive to the suggestion of a slice-of-life industrial reflection: the audience is supposed to be glimpsing into a conversation that has happened and continues to happen to screenwriters all the time.

This iterative interpretation inadvertently also makes reflexivity in its literal form generic. By definition this generalizes the individual narrative events, so that they always represent something thematically larger than a specific socio-historical point about the characters or situation depicted.[272] The story of one screenwriter's frustration in life and in his career, becomes a meditation on screenwriting as a process in the contemporary industry, and – in some paratextual material – is frequently expanded even further to suggest that it simply captures Hollywood, period. The point is that the literal mode is much more conducive to such interpretations – at times it completely relies upon them – than the

---

[271] Henry Bean, "Self-Made Heroes," *Sight & Sound,* March 2003, 19.

[272] Coincidentally, in regard to the previous chapter, an interesting commentator on this phenomenon has been director Anthony Minghella, who states in the publicity materials for *The English Patient* that "Film is very poor at iteration." Here, he is commenting on what he specifically felt he could not do in adapting Michael Ondaatje's novel into a feature film. (Quoted in "A Conversation with Screenwriter and Director Anthony Minghella," documentary featurette included on the special features of *The English Patient: Miramax Collector's Edition* DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2004).

metaphorical mode and other forms of meaning-making in Hollywood.

All of this results in a selective appreciation of self-reflexivity by scholars and critics alike, many of whom place *Adaptation* in an implicit hierarchy of supposed cinephilia. For example, reviewer Alan Jones confidently charges that "Movie buffs and the cinema savvy will adore *Adaptation* because it breaks every rule to smartly spoof multiplex mentality."[273] Unpacking such a claim is a multi-faceted endeavor: first, as I will discuss in more depth later, charging that *Adaptation "*breaks every rule" is tenuous. Second, this claim predicts that the more industry-literate filmgoers will enjoy the film's reflexivity, while implying that others may not. This ascribes a high brow taste mentality to positive readings of the film, while suggesting that those who do not like it do so because they do not understand it. The paradigmatic word here, though, is "spoof." For this opens the door to a line of criticism that challenges the reviewer to explicate a difference between this film and a myriad of other "spoofs" of Hollywood convention that do not receive such high marks. The simple, yet problematic answer would be because it is written by the creator of *Being John Malkovich* instead of the creator of *Lethal Weapon* (1987).[274] In short, the assessment of reflexivity in Hollywood is often complicated by the assumption that only certain films, filmmakers, and film movements, such as the hypothetical American New Wave, can function as cultural inheritors of the most didactic forms of reflexive practice from the earlier European New Waves.

In some instances, it is seemingly *because* Kaufman's script dares to be as self-obsessed as it is perceived to be that it is thereby championed by critics as the purest form

[273] Alan Jones, "Movie Spotlight: *Adaptation*," *Film Review,* March 2003. 79.

[274] Here, I reference screenwriter, and eventual director, Shane Black, who wrote *Lethal Weapon*, and whose later film *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2005) I will go on to argue "spoofs" and satirizes Hollywood conventions almost as bitingly as Kaufman's film but to not half the critical acclaim.

of reflexive critique in Hollywood. Take, for example, Glenn Kenny's four-star review of the film from the January 2003 edition of *Premiere:* Kenny first teases that his will be an overwhelmingly negative review of the film when he spends the entire first paragraph of his write-up bemoaning Screenwriter Kaufman as a "whining, sniveling bore. Self-conscious to the point of near-paralysis..," before cleverly revealing that he was talking about the character in Kaufman's brilliant screenplay, and not the screenwriter himself.[275] The more Kaufman insults the fictional version of himself, it seems, the more anxious some critics have been to vehemently disagree with his assessment. For others, it is *because* Kaufman indeed does subscribe to every rule that he ostensibly wants to break, that the movie gains its probative reflexive value. For example, the *Cinefantastique* assessment from March of 2003 that argues "...Kaufman makes *Adaptation* do everything he insists it won't – in other words, *Adaptation* contains romance, suspense, and characters who grow, change and 'learn something.'"[276] In any event, reviews which do not form a positive opinion along the lines of the cleverness of self-criticism are few indeed.

This mentality comes to the fore most aggressively in consideration of several scenes dispersed throughout the film in which Charlie literally masturbates on (or sometimes just off) screen. Here, several analyses of the masturbation sequences for their metaphorical implications abound. Lucas Hilderbrand, for instance, argues that the film effectively connects masturbation – as a depiction of the "autoerotic fantasy" of the screenwriter – to the personal creative process of writing.[277] Masturbation may well be a powerful self-reflexive metaphor in regard to the individual work of the writer, but this is difficult to

---

[275] Glenn Kenny, "Reviews: *Adaptation*," *Premiere,* January 2003, 18. Kenny goes on to say that the film is "fantastic, in every sense of the word."
[276] J.B., "Film in Brief: *Adaptation*," *Cinefantastique,* February/March 2003, 75.
[277] Lucas Hilderbrand. "*Adaptation* (Review)," *Film Quarterly* 58, n. 1 (Fall 2004): 36-43.

translate into an industrial reflexivity of the necessarily collaborative process of filmmaking. Here, it is important to note that the masturbation sequences are actualized as cinematic jokes: each derives from a combination of misleading editing and obfuscated camera angles (visualizations of Charlie's fantasies concerning his waitress, Valerie, and Orlean respectively, are intercut with Charlie's secluded masturbation, twice merely connoted by the camera's dissection of a portion of his body). This is a medium-specific grammar that is difficult to ascribe to the written page, and as such, make at least Zumbrunnen and Acord, if not Jonze, co-authors of the scenes.

Semantic precision reveals the rhetorical turn that Kaufman often makes in these moments. The very first line of the film is indicative of this trend: “Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head?” Here, the first clause conveys the self-doubt that many critics appreciate as “honest.” The second clause, in suggesting his self-loathing, paints Charlie as truly pathetic. The problem, however, is that this second part is not true of the actual Kaufman on a very literal level; several critics here actually take the time – and feel the need – to point out that Charlie Kaufman is not actually bald. Indeed, one might well point out that the majority of the self-critical charges that Charlie espouses (that he's bald, overweight, and unhappily single because of a paralyzing fear of women) are fictions. Here, as well, the paratextual rhetoric is careful to correct the record, and implicitly signal the need for Kaufman to present himself as being even more pathetic than he may or may not be in real life. Glenn Kenny's review is a good example here; first noting that Kaufman in actuality has “a healthy head of hair and a wiry frame,” Kenny goes on in the same paragraph to note his propensity towards secrecy in regard to his private life: “The 'real' Kaufman doesn't give too many interviews, and in those interviews, he doesn't let on much

about his life."[278] This is the problem – seemingly trivial – with auto-reflexive critique: when it takes dramatic license with its own supposed introspective nature, it begins to beg the question of how it is not making self-reflexivity exploitational.

The Gendering of Creative Force

It is scholar Sergio Rizzo who suggests that part of Kaufman's wrestling with the writing of *Adaptation* has a specifically gendered view of industrial professions, namely the predetermined notion that the screenwriter has come to be associated with a feminized position in the wake of *auteur* theory and its large-scale adoption by film-going society and film producers alike.[279] For Rizzo, Kaufman's anxiety fits into a larger industrial narrative concerning the castration of the screenwriter at the hands of directors, producers, et al., who do damage to the original vision of a film (the vision of the screenwriter). Much of the critical commentary seems to support Rizzo's reading of *Adaptation*.

Taking this further, I argue that *Adaptation* is symptomatic of a larger trend in industrial self-reflexivity that routinely attempts to disown and disavow its own privilege. What Bean fails to note in his write-up is that no matter how little "power" a screenwriter might have in the crafting of Hollywood films, *Adaptation* demonstrates at least that he or she has the power to narrate this disenfranchisement in feature film form. This, of course, may or may not result in the unadulterated vision of that screenwriter being produced, or that his or her film will even be made at all, but nevertheless one could scarcely attribute such "power" to below-the-line workers. In terms of the literal reflexivity of the film, this meta-narrative concerning who can and should author motion pictures is actualized in a

[278] Kenny, 18.
[279] Sergio Rizzo, "(In)Fidelity Criticism and the Sexual Politics of *Adaptation*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October 2008): 299-314.

succinctly gendered way: at the heart of the narrative is the plight of a male screenwriter who must turn a female-authored book into a filmable screenplay. From the perspective of Charlie Kaufman, as the protagonist, this is indeed the main story conflict of the film.

In a rare scene of female against female subjectivity, *Adaptation* depicts a meeting between Orlean and Valerie. When Orlean interjects that she's "never written a screenplay before," Valerie quickly reassures her "Oh don't worry about that, we have screenwriters to write the screenplay." For the film, Orlean's problem is that she never thought of her work as a possible movie, while Valerie's problem is that she has no idea how to make it into a movie: enter Charlie Kaufman, who in fact is the next person we see in an immediate cut to the 'present' time-frame, the character called upon to solve both of these problems.

Here, it is Derek Hill who suggests that the central point of comparison between Charlie and Susan is that one seems to enjoy the writing process while the other does not.[280] Of course, Susan has no problem writing her series for *The New Yorker*, and even in turning it into a book, precisely because the problem with adapting it as a screenplay is that it is specifically anti-cinematic. The problem lies in turning it into a movie. And it is at this point one can easily point out the way in which creative force in its cinematic context is specifically gendered throughout the entire film: all of the problems for Charlie in his task of cinematic adaptation are represented by women – Orlean has written an unfilmable book, the studio executive does not "understand" what Charlie wants to do with his script, the make-up girl thinks that Donald is brilliant and loves being his "muse" – while all of the solutions are proposed by men: Charlie's agent, Donald, and ultimately Robert McKee.

Here, the film seizes upon a number of psycho-sexual metaphors: first, Laroche's

[280] Hill, "There is No More Watching." *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.* ed. David LaRocca (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 208.

repeated description of the insect pollination of plants as "making love" turns upon the notion of the passivity of the plant in relation to the insect's active penetration of it. Passivity and activeness (among McKee's own markers for poor and well-written screenplays, respectively) thereby take on a gendered configuration. Second, the film itself creates a crucial analogy between flowers and women in a scene in which Charlie goes to an orchid show in Santa Barbara. The sequence begins with the voice-over narration from Orlean while onscreen Charlie is looking at flowers at an Orchid show, apparently hearing her words on the written page of *The Orchid Thief*: "There are over 30,000 known species of Orchid. One looks like a turtle. One looks like a monkey. One looks like an onion." On each of these, Charlie's point-of-view shot reveals in close-up the flower in question. Yet, in the midst of the sequence the narration shifts from the voice of Orlean to that of Charlie himself when Acord pans the camera left to denote a change in focus for Charlie from the flower to a woman standing nearby. It is Charlie who continues the voice-over: "One looks like a school teacher. One looks like a gymnast. One looks like that girl in high school with creamy skin," and so on. At the conclusion of the scene, Orlean herself becomes identified with the Orchid. On Charlie's line "One has eyes that contain the sadness of the world," a dissolve from Charlie's saddened expression takes the audience to Orlean in her home, staring off melancholically. Whereas the orchid has been (futilely) proposed as the subject of Charlie's screenplay, women are likewise the unobtainable object of his gaze.

In a scene in which he must defend himself against a missed deadline, Charlie further connects these notions in his indictment of Orlean's work: "It's about flowers," "It's that sprawling *New Yorker* shit," "I can't structure this," and later "there's no story." At this point, Charlie's apprehensiveness around women is dramatically effaced by the constant

digressions of his agent, whose more obvious misogyny – he quickly relates everything they discuss to whether or not he would "fuck her up the ass" – foils Charlie's exasperation with Orlean's writing style. Yet, it is this same disgusting agent who first comes up with the idea of fictionalizing the events of *The Orchid Thief* as a solution to Charlie's problem. This is the solution he does not want to take, but ultimately must; it is worth noting that as much as Charlie rebukes Donald for following a prescribed "structure," this is the exact word he has already used in complaint against Orlean in explaining what her work lacks. Furthermore, what Charlie previously described as "great sprawling *New Yorker* stuff," when he was hopeful, has become "that sprawling *New Yorker* shit," now that he is disillusioned with the process.

The other character who does enjoy the process of writing – that is, who enthusiastically writes – is Donald, who ultimately comes to represent a fantasized version of Kaufman who has redeemed the masculinity of the screenwriter in a both figurative and literal way. Donald is successful because of his engagement with McKee's active screenwriting principles. However, he is also successful because of his confidence, which is routinely sexualized throughout the film. In comparison to Charlie, Donald adeptly flirts with a makeup artist on the set of *Being John Malkovich* and presents it as too easy to Charlie: "She was flirting with *me*." Later, at a party, Donald makes crude gestures and describes right in front of the makeup artist how he planned to have sex with her that night (a gesture she somehow finds charming). Suggestively, this confidence translates to interactions with female celebrities as well; when Charlie calls Donald on the phone from New York he discovers a film star is there: "Catherine Keener is in my house?" Donald nonchalantly replies "We're playing boggle." Finally, and most importantly, when Charlie is

too intimidated to talk to Orlean in even a professional context, Donald volunteers to step-in and take his brother's place; the sequence depicting this meeting begins abruptly *in medias res* with both Donald and Orlean already jovially laughing as if, for Donald, hobnobbing with the author is no trouble at all.

Finally, it is McKee who seems to authoritatively guide Charlie into the solution(s) to his problem, and at the most basic level McKee's advice can be whittled down to a diagnosis that Charlie (as a screenwriter, but more importantly as the protagonist of his own movie) needs to be less passive; he has to learn how to make things happen, rather than wait for others to do it. When Charlie conveys that it is too late for him to go back and re-write the whole screenplay, McKee gives the crucial advice: "The last act makes a film. Wow them in the end, and you've got a hit." And it is at this point in *Adaptation* – the final third of the film – that both a narrative and structurally reflexive shift occurs: Charlie enlists Donald to assist him, and the film begins to jump into more active genres (mystery, romance, and crime film). All the while, Charlie and Donald must attempt not to break number seven on the list of McKee's Ten Commandments of Screenwriting: "Thou shalt not use *deus ex machina* to get to thine ending."[281]

Here, the irony with which McKee is presented as better suited to advise Charlie on how to adapt *The Orchid Thief* than Orlean, becomes another gendered plot point of the film. Charlie travels all the way to New York specifically to meet Orlean, but then becomes paralyzed and unable to speak while standing next to her in an elevator. In contrast Charlie

[281] *Deus ex machina* translates as "god in [or from] the machine" in Latin, and refers to a practice by which ancient Greek plays would end with a god coming down to the stage to suddenly and without warning intervene to save imperiled characters. This is discussed at length in McKee's book *Story,* in which it is one of the worst offenses a screenwriter can commit. Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 357-358. McKee's "Seventh Commandment" is here quoted directly from *Adaptation.,* but it apparently comes from his actual screenwriting seminar.

shouts across several people outside the convention hall in order to get McKee's attention and to consult with him. With McKee, Charlie also had the nerve to stand in the midst of an auditorium full of people to ask a question. It is worth reiterating the possible double standard in-force with the depiction of McKee by Brian Cox, when one recalls Streep's dismissing of mimesis in her portrayal of Orlean in comparison to Cox's own publicity-rendering thoughts on his portrayal of McKee: "I had attended Bob's class in Glasgow, so I saw the cup of coffee, I saw the cardigan, I saw the slouch, and the invective. Bob said that his son told him, 'Dad, he nailed you.'"[282] Evidently it was of much more importance to get McKee 'right' than Orlean. Yet, Doreen Child hints that there may also have been a double standard here in regard to Charlie himself; Kaufman evidently refused several requests to spend time with Cage (so as to be studied by the actor).[283]

Irony for the Sake of Irony

When it comes to the moments in *Adaptation* that are the most indisputably self-reflexive, often this involves the film collapsing in on itself – as alluded to by Kaufman's own analogy to the ouroboros – when the film literally becomes about the making of itself. It is when Charlie finally relents and decides to attend Robert McKee's seminar in New York that the formal breakdown of the film begins. In the midst of McKee's speaking, Charlie's mind wanders off into a self-critical internal monologue; his voice-over narration continues over a visual montage of McKee presenting a number of overhead projections and graphs, as the sweating face of Charlie appears in a series of reaction shots. Just as Charlie – in voice-over – resolves to get up and leave the seminar, a reverse shot reveals McKee in medium shot staring straight back at him as he exclaims: "And God help you if you use voice-over in your

[282] Jason Matloff, "Scene Stealer: Brian Cox hits a Homer in '*Troy*,'" *Premiere,* June 2004, 36.
[283] Child, 72-73.

work my friends. God help you! It's flaccid, sloppy writing. Any idiot can write voice-over narration to explain the thoughts of a character." Charlie, apparently sensing that McKee has just read his mind, slowly sits back down.

Another crucial example comes when Donald first tries to explain his screenplay idea for "*The 3"* to Charlie. It is Charlie whose first of two lines of criticism of the idea is that "the only idea more over-used than serial killers is multiple personality." The criticism refers to the notion that one should never – if trying to be original – create two characters which are actually just mirrors for one another, as in two sides of one persona; as Charlie puts it, "two aspects of the same person." Here there is another layering of irony to the screenplay, as there is indeed no Donald Kaufman in the real world, and many writers have already pointed out the obvious in noting that he appears to be simply a fictional character as stand-in for the other side of Kaufman's writing psyche. The character who proposes the creation of a multiple personality complex, is himself a creation of this order, while the character who disparages such an idea, has already been the one to employ it.

The second line of criticism leveled by Charlie against Donald at this moment is that the concept is psychologically innovative within the imagination, but that it is completely unfilmable. "How could you have somebody held prisoner in a basement and working in a police station at the same time?" asks Charlie. But when Donald responds with a simplistic filmic solution to Charlie's writerly problem – "trick photography" – Charlie simply rebukes him "That's not what I'm asking." Yet, this is one of the most reflexive moments of the entire film, for it is precisely through trick photography that "Donald" is able to have this very conversation with "Charlie" on-screen. Further, it is fitting that Charlie has no interest in the cinematographic response to his challenge, as this is a component of the filmmaking

process that likewise does not concern Kaufman as a screenwriter.

Adaptation becomes a case of ludic reflexivity masquerading as the didactic mode.[284] The audience does not actually learn anything about how the film industry operates apart from iterative conversations about screenwriting discourse that are played for laughs. Importantly, one must already understand the discourse in order to get the jokes: Donald's idea is derivative, so Charlie's points simply make sense to filmgoers who are tired of unoriginal concepts. Several reviews testify to this point, as frequently critics focus solely on the fact that the film is 'clever' or 'ironic' in their determination that it is positively self-reflexive. Thus, *Adaptation* succeeds on its ability to resonate: it frames Hollywood in such a way as to give the audience exactly what it already thinks it knows about Hollywood. What some stop short of examining is exactly what the effect of such self-reflexive in-jokes is in comparison to (conceivably) many just as self-reflexive moments that are from an array of less celebrated films.

It is also worth noting that a "*deus ex machina*" ending, in the truest sense, was indeed proposed by Kaufman and rejected by Jonze: in an early draft of the screenplay, Charlie is saved from Laroche by the sudden appearance of a supernatural swamp monster.[285] Evidently, the director sent the screenwriter to do revisions that would excise this original concept entirely, and in the final version a simple alligator attack suffices. Nevertheless, via narrative structure, Kaufman has arguably already broken this principle with sudden and dramatic character and genre shifts at the point of Donald getting involved in the writing. In particular, Orlean, as performed by Streep, undertakes a drastic change

[284] Stam for his part eschews his own formal categories and refers to the film as "giddily reflexive." *Literature and Film,* 1.
[285] Child, 70.

from trapped sympathetic philosophizer to deranged villain: formerly longing for something unknown, now obsessed with the Orchid drug, she coaxes Laroche to commit murder on her behalf in the style of a classical noir femme fatale.

Contrary to the claims of most reviewers regarding the third act, however, *Adaptation* has already become the movie Charlie is writing long before his character is inspired to write it as such within the plot. Notably, the scene of all life evolving on earth predicts Charlie's later invention of this conceit within the diegesis, as does a seemingly non-diegetic insert concerning the murder of the historical figure Augustus Margary, which is likewise later shown to be transformed into a ghastly description in Charlie's typed screenplay. Further examples of this are the many "frustrated time" transitions – using Dzialo's terminology – that encode sequences (ambiguously at first) of Laroche and Orlean as coming more from Charlie's mind and electric typewriter than the book he is reading. Here, the subtle hints early on – Orlean's unspoken problems with her marriage (communicated by a depressed glance at her husband just after her own words on flowers have given way to Charlie's on women) – give way to increasingly more obvious clues ("I lied in my book," Orlean incoherently says in the narration that till now has seemingly represented the words of her book). Nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in the sequence in which Charlie describes himself as the ouroboros. Narrating with his tape recorder a sequence from diegetically earlier in the film, he becomes self-aware of this phenomenon and likewise writes this into his screenplay as well: Charlie Kaufman sits writing about Charlie Kaufman sitting and writing about Charlie Kaufman writing about Charlie Kaufman, and so on, as the narrative ironically collapses in on itself in gymnastic *mise-en-abyme*.

The Disavowal of Below-the-line Labor

Finally, the work of the narrative is again – as I have argued is the case for *Chaplin* and *Dracula* – undercut by a formal structure that hints that the parable of the screenwriter as primary author of the film is discredited by the obviously necessary special effects crew; if the invention of Donald is credited to Kaufman, it is with the caveat that he was not involved in the actualizing of the twin brothers interacting with one another on-screen. The invention of a fictional double for Kaufman not only becomes a narratively incoherent meditation on the individual process of screenwriting, but it also importantly becomes a primary mode through which the film audio-visually disintegrates the possibility of cinema being a non-collaborative exercise. It is not only up to Nicolas Cage to play two separate parts at the same time, but it is up to Acord and his crew to achieve this filmic sleight-of-hand in the production and post-production of the film. Yet, the pattern throughout most of the paratextual rhetoric concerning the film remains similar across publications: positive and negative reviews alike focus on writing, directing, or acting. Kent and Nathaniel Jones, for instance, declare without irony "Cage deserves two Oscars for playing two roles... I'm serious."[286] All the while, Jones and Jones do not at all discuss the cinematographic processes necessary to allow Cage to do this.

In opposition, only *American Cinematographer* seems to offer a rebuke to this tone; while some critics have railed against producers and crews who skewer a screenwriter's vision, the publication of the ASC implicitly suggests in an article titled "Writer's Block" that often writers like Kaufman set up difficult challenges for crews to actualize through strictly

[286] Jones and Jones, 27.

cinematic means.[287] In virtual counter to the autoerotic metaphor of Kaufman as screenwriter, the concept of "writer's block" here transforms the allegory to one of a more succinctly cinematic concern. As the cinematographer Lance Acord declares of reading the script for the first time "...I thought to myself, 'This is amazing, but how do we get this on screen?' It's insane."[288] Acord goes on to describe in detail the many challenges of engineering two-shots in which the same actor plays both roles. This importantly includes not only digitally advanced techniques combining background plates and motion-control heads, blue-screen, rotoscoping, and video-monitored double exposures, but also a sustained discussion of the importance of variable lighting designs, shot distances and angles necessary to formally differentiate between the individual brothers. However, when settling as the film does on a singular meta-narrative of how the film was "created," the Kaufman screenplay critically under-considers the dozens of second unit workers who actually did "create" the film's vision on sound stages and in laboratories.

Conversely, the way that the film literally depicts the collaborative process of film-creating is simply via its story-task solution to Charlie's problem: he first seeks help from his own fictional double, then from screenwriting expert Robert McKee. Paratextual material indicates that though he might credit McKee's ideas and concepts in the film, Kaufman has routinely disavowed McKee as even an inspiration for his work, let alone co-author. In a telling interview in *Sight & Sound,* Cox (who supposedly met and studied McKee, and personally discussed the character with Charlie Kaufman) had the following exchange:

---

[287] Hugh Hart, "Writer's Block," *American Cinematographer,* December 2002, 66-73. The title itself seems like a subtle pun, for once turned back on the writer, as the crux of its content focuses on the various challenges in producing and post-producing Kaufman's screenplay.

[288] Acord quoted in Hart, 67.

> Michael Eaton: I remember an interview with Kaufman after 'Being John Malkovich' came out where he was extremely damning towards the McKee-type approach to screenwriting. Do think he's changed his mind?
>
> Brian Cox: He maintains that he never went to a McKee class. I don't believe it. I think he did and got a shock. Because Bob is as romantic as he is. Bob represents the notion of the classic, well-made film that Charlie couldn't write. Bob has been shat on by the Hollywood system much more than Charlie Kaufman.[289]

Evocatively, here, Cox seemingly takes McKee's side in a presumed ideological battle between the two meta-commentators of screenwriting practice. Further, he suggests that Kaufman's disavowal of McKee's influence – and outright criticism of the guru – is disingenuous.

Yet, in terms of his 'collaboration' with his twin brother Donald, Kaufman has taken the opposite approach, sharing credit in any context in which it can be given. This includes not only sharing screen credit, but also the sharing of credit with the WGA (though seemingly "Donald" has never had to procure a membership card or pay any dues with the organization). And thus from the film itself evolves a basic misdirection concerning Hollywood labor, with the trades and popular presses mostly participating in this venture, whether knowingly or not. *Variety* was the first to participate in this ruse in an early write-up of the screenplay even before the movie had begun filming, though it is unclear at this early date if the writer was playing along with the gag or was legitimately mistaken about the co-writer of the upcoming film.[290] Most idiosyncratically of all, when the announcement was made concerning the nominees for the 2002 Oscars, Donald Kaufman was credited alongside with his brother for "Best Adapted Screenplay" for *Adaptation*. This seems to be

---

[289] Michael Eaton and Brian Cox, "McKee and Me," *Sight & Sound,* March 2003, 21.

[290] Michael Fleming, "Brothers in a Conundrum; Rat Pack lives," *Variety,* April 6, 2000. http://variety.com/2000/voices/columns/brothers-in-a-conundrum-rat-pack-lives-1117780287/. In the column, Fleming notes: "Kaufman, who was nominated for his "Being John Malkovich," is creating strong buzz for "Adaptation," an adaptation of the Susan Orlean book "The Orchid Thief" at Columbia, which he wrote with his brother Donald Kaufman (another central character in the pic)."

the first case on record in which Academy organizers knowingly allowed a fictional character to compete for an Academy Award.[291] He did not win.

Here the ludic doubling of Kaufman is echoed in trades and popular press that likewise double Cage. The most egregious examples are images (seemingly behind-the-scenes photographs) in *Film Review*, which show Jonze giving direction on-set to two side-by-side Nicolas Cages. How can this be? Of course, it cannot. Yet, the publication does nothing to explain the provenance of such images in any logical way; the caption accompanying an image of Nicolas Cage sitting simultaneously in both the driver and passenger seat of a car while Jonze looks on reads: "Director Jonze with Nic Cage as Donald Kaufman and Nic Cage as Charlie Kaufman."[292] The second image of this nature shows the two Cages sitting next to one another while Jonze stands over them giving directions, this time accompanied by his boom operator and camera assistants surrounding the sound stage. The caption reads: "Jonze sets up a shot involving both Kaufman brothers."[293] With the filmic style of Jonze and Kaufman as the main topic of discussion in the article that these images accompany, there is merely a single mention of the process by which Cage could have been doubled in a shot from the finished film ("either a composite or split-screen"), and no explanation of why he is seen composited in duplicate into individual pictures said to represent the production stage of the movie.[294] Speaking for themselves,

---

[291] Although there have been many instances of filmmakers using pseudonyms for screen credit and subsequent award consideration, these have for the most part been revealed only after the fact, usually because of a prescient reason to conceal the filmmaker's identity in the first place. A famous example of this is Dalton Trumbo's Oscar for *The Brave One* (1956), which was presented to him years after the original event crowned his front "Robert Rich" as the winner of the award – a time during which Trumbo had been blacklisted.

[292] Ian Spelling, "Keeping up with the Jonze," *Film Review,* March 2003, 52.

[293] Ibid, 53.

[294] I would also point here to an irony in the subtitle of the article which promises "Two lots of Nic Cage for the price of one? The director of film fans' favourite, *Being John Malkovich*, tells how *Adaptation* goes that

the images are at best obvious forgeries that are left unexplained in order to allow the clever incoherence of their function as publicity stills to stand as the ultimate in-joke of the written piece, while at worst they are the iconic representation of paratextual rhetoric that is not only refusing to reflect upon legitimate filmmaking processes, but contributes to their misapprehension.

Jonze, for his part, seems to have been on the whole receptive to Kaufman's vision in explaining the function of the film in the popular press. In a talk with *Interview Magazine*, for instance, Jonze literally laughs off a question concerning the real life people upon which his characters are based, before giving an elusive response that seemingly refuses to correct any misunderstandings inherent to the questioning:

> AM: In both your movies a number of your actors play real people. Are the characters anything like the people they're based on?
>
> SJ: [pause] What was the question? [both laugh]
>
> AM: John Malkovich playing himself, Nicolas Cage playing the screenwriters Charlie and Donald Kaufman... Are they pretty close in real life to what we see onscreen?
>
> SJ: Um... [laughs] I guess that's part of what *Adaptation* is. These are real people and real events, but where is the line between what really happened and what's fictionalized? Pretty vague, huh?[295]

As can be seen, first Jonze neglects to correct the interviewer that Donald Kaufman is not a real person. Second, he refuses to answer concerning any of the "real people" he actually has depicted on film – Susan Orlean, Robert McKee, John Malkovich, or most obviously Charlie Kaufman – choosing rather to answer with an elusive question of his own. It is telling that the director himself has now described his own film as "vague" on the topic of

---

one step further." This is ironic specifically because the article does not in fact explain how this is done. Ibid, 52.

[295] Meza, 66.

what is real and what is not in a moment when he seems content to allow the illusion to go unchecked rather than attempt to demystify it. Even more idiosyncratic on this account is an exchange with legendary film critic Roger Ebert, who reportedly became completely frustrated while interviewing the triumvirate of Nicolas Cage, Charlie Kaufman, and Spike Jonze, when all three of them flat-out refused to answer his straight forward question concerning whether or not Donald Kaufman is a real person. Jonze was the one who ultimately put forth the following evasive reply:

> Well, I just wanna...that's the first question, that Donald question, which is something we get a lot and we don't wanna--we're not trying to be deceptive about it or trying to be, you know, like make a trick out of it, but I guess in all earnestness we want to try and leave it part of the experience of the movie is what, you know. These characters, you know, certain aspects of the movie exist in the real world and part of it's fiction and to try and leave that open so people can have that experience going and seeing the movie without necessarily having it all defined and so I guess that's sort of our concern, in part, about sort of opening that can of worms.[296]

Again, as can be seen here, Jonze has quite ambiguously suggested the singular interpretation of his film *vis-à-vis* an appeal to the "real" that he specifically refuses to define.

One of the ironies of the critical press on *Adaptation* is that it has not at all focused on some of the groundbreaking special effects techniques pioneered on-set, and has rather contented itself to take such complex illusionism entirely for granted. The film text echoes this sentiment with its non-depiction of the production and post-production elements. Ultimately, as such, this is not so much a movie that is about the creating of itself as it is a movie based on a screenplay that is about the writing of itself, a crucial distinction.

---

[296] Spike Jonze quoted in Roger Ebert, "Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze: Twin Pleasures," RogerEbert.com, published December 17, 2002, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/charlie-kaufman-and-spike-jonze-twin-pleasures.

The Doom of Literal Reflexivity

Disavowal of below-the-line labor is not just one of the problems of *Adaptation*, but has become an irreconcilable conundrum for much of the literal reflexivity of this new New Hollywood. Narratives frequently focus on writers, directors, and actors in the system, and when occasionally an 'asshole film exec' is antagonistically portrayed as getting in the way of these creative forces, the industry is quick to call it a biting critique of Hollywood as business practice even if these iterative examples say nothing about actual film products and their audience.

The first obvious comparison is to the film that *Adaptation* has seemingly robbed wholesale the style of its concluding scene: Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992). Protagonist Griffin Mill (Tim Robbins) a sleazy studio executive – who accidentally kills a screenwriter early in the film and spends the rest of the movie covering it up, while ending up with the writer's wife – drives out of a business meeting while discussing a new script idea with a screenwriter on his car phone. Here, the screenwriter's pitch for the movie to be made succinctly matches the plot of the movie that has just taken place: “It’s about a shit-bag producer, a studio exec who murders a writer...” Mill is nervous as he drives down the street, until the writer concludes: “Now he's got to deal with blackmail as well as the cops, but here's the switch... Son of a bitch gets away with it.” Confirming with the writer he asks: “He gets away with it?” In response, Mill is told “Absolutely, it’s a Hollywood ending, Griffin. He marries the dead writer's girl, and they live happily ever after,” just as the dead writer's former wife (Greta Scacchi) appears in Mill's point-of-view shot, waving from their porch. In a formal and narrative technique suspiciously similar to *Adaptation* (produced ten years later), the film has now become, in its final moments, about the making of itself. When Mill

pulls into his driveway and confirms, “If you can guarantee that ending, then you've got a deal,” the screenwriter tells him that the film will be called *The Player,* a fact he bemuses, “I like that,” while he embraces his new wife behind a rising spread of ornate flowers.[297]

Altman also allows a product-critique to play out more explicitly than does Jonze's film by casting another prominent and hypocritically escapist text as the film-*within*-a-film earlier on in *The Player's* denouement, thereby making it succinctly divisible from his own evolving narrative. In this example, the finished film version of a pretentious writer's screenplay evolves onscreen to be everything he demanded that it should not be. Previously, he is seen pitching the story of a girl on death row, who is executed just before the evidence that would clear her arrives; the writer is very specific in his demands that the film not feature any big stars, that would cut down on the “real life” element of it. He likewise refuses to contemplate changing the ending to a happy one for this same reason. Yet, when the finished film is played for the first time, we see that indeed Julia Roberts (playing herself) has been cast in the lead role, and the film's exciting and action-packed finale includes that she is saved from execution by Bruce Willis, who blasts through the prison doors with a shot gun and melodramatically carries her to safety in the film's final moments. Despite the writer’s earlier contention that he would not compromise his artistic integrity by allowing the realist tenets of his script to be sacrificed, he smiles and excitedly applauds what has become a virtual action movie farce that he gleefully optioned to the studio for a big payday.

---

[297] The shot of flowers rising up into the foreground in the final shot of *Adaptation* in conjunction with the narrative device of a movie professional driving home with the perfect ending to his film, the one being depicted at that very moment, as the topic of discussion is just close enough to warrant the possible charge of plagiarism. This is especially true on the final lines of the films' respective protagonists in regard to the ending that has just been devised: In *The Player:* “I like that.” In *Adaptation:* “I like this, this is good.”

In short, *The Player* does not just *become* the movie it is criticizing, it also *shows* the type of movie it is criticizing. Importantly this entails disparaging – of all people – the screenwriter, who unlike Charlie in *Adaptation* is apparently not self-aware of the dramatic irony of his 'sell-out.' This also importantly preserves the legitimacy of pro-filmic environments in this sequence, when the studio professionals are seen watching the completed film on the movie screen, not yelling cut and pulling back to reveal a set like in many historical examples of this cliché. The mode of parody is relevant here when the film takes an unambiguous line against screenwriters who set out to craft something wholly brutal and original, but who end up enthusiastic about their ultimately banal industrial schlock. This is obviously a different order of critique than the stereotyping of Donald or the self-agonizing depiction of Charlie in *Adaptation*. Nevertheless, owing to an infamous proclivity of Altman's style toward meandering ensemble-driven sequences, the film is at times also more narratively iterative of what Hollywood "is like" based on the variety of scenes depicting large groups of sometimes relatively well-established stars, playing themselves at parties and lunches, as the audience eavesdrops on their supposedly typical industry conversations.

Conversely, Shane Black's *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* (2005) has gained significantly less attention as a "reflexive" film than *Adaptation* or *The Player*. Unlike *The Player*, this film comes down on the side of being a murder mystery first (specifically a neo-noir satire), and only a movie about people in the film industry as a distant second. And yet, it takes diegetic self-awareness far beyond that of either Jonze's or Altman's films via its constant, acerbic fourth-wall-breaking. Though this is played largely for laughs, it nevertheless makes *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* at least as narrationally reflexive as either of the other films in-as-much as

the direct address asides constantly entail a running meta-commentary on the logic of movie narratives and how the audience experiences them. From the first lines of the film, the stakes of this approach are made clear when star Robert Downey, Jr. concludes his opening monologue with: “My name is Harry Lockhart, I’ll be your narrator.” At one point, Harry literally stops the film – the visual frames seem to come to a shuddering stop and for a moment reveal the flicker of the supposed projection light – when he deems he has made a mistake in his telling of the story and wants to start over. From here, what evolves is a plot that sees Harry, a small time crook, accidentally scoring the opportunity at a lead role in a Hollywood detective film by stumbling into an audition by mistake just after seeing his partner in crime gunned-down by police. As he improvisationally pushes through with the pretense of the audition, his resultant uncontrollable tears and remorse utterly convince the casting directors of his superior acting talent. Here, the film's title is itself indicative of a kind of meta-commentary on the operation of genre conventions on audiences, alluding to the typical narrative beats expected of a *film noir* or salacious crime film such as *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* itself reflexively embodies.

The film concludes in the same register with sarcastic evocations of the supposed preoccupations of mainstream audiences and cultural elites alike. Despite Downey's assurance to the viewer: “Don't worry, I saw *Lord of the Rings*, so I'm not going to let this movie end like four times,” the characters do indeed get carried away continuing their commentary even after the plot has finished. As the film fades to black for its credit sequence, Downey (still in character) delays the end of the movie so he can continue to talk to the camera. It is Val Kilmer who finally interjects (in character as the private investigator and Hollywood consultant “Gay” Perry) when he chastises the audience for remaining in

the theater, and explicitly comments on the nepotism involved in some below-the-line labor: “That’s it…If you're wondering who the best boy is, it’s someone's nephew.”

In contrast, perhaps the most brutal yet complex indictment of industry labor practices in the last twenty-five years has been the solidly independent *Swimming with Sharks* (1993). Here, we finally get a protagonist who does not represent the 'creative' elements in the industry *or* above-the-line management. Guy (Frank Whalley) starts the film as a personal assistant to Kevin Spacey's loutish studio executive Buddy Akerman, and a good portion of the narrative does indeed focus on Buddy’s aggressive on-the-job abuse of his employee. Most importantly, this includes the film's narrative depiction of the closed-off system of the studio film industry as being cordoned off from most everyone who tries to break into the business on false hopes; a recent graduate of film school, Guy is strung along for months by Buddy – who even plagiarizes Guy's screenplay ideas – before realizing that there is no chance for advancement in the company. *Swimming with Sharks* also narrativizes the gendering of creative roles in the contemporaneous Hollywood industry with its invocation of a female screenwriter caught in an unapologetically sexist business; Guy's girlfriend Dawn (Michelle Forbes) is shown to be a talented screenwriter, but has to sleep with Buddy in order to get her screenplay produced. When Guy snaps in the climax of the film at the discovery of their mutual betrayal of him, he shoots Dawn for her indiscretion rather than Buddy – as is filmically teased via the cheat of Spacey tied-up in Whalley's point-of-view, being followed by Whalley's gun shots into off-screen space – and finally, having now framed Dawn as being a psychotic kidnapper, receives a *promotion* as his reward. The result, is an over-the-top indictment of the business end of Hollywood, nevertheless with a careful avoidance of the discussion of the work of film texts or how they

are created at the production or post-production stages.

Alternatively, Frank Oz's *Bowfinger* (1999) seems to round out the more low brow direction of the ludic form of literal reflexivity. In the film, a struggling director (Steve Martin), in the evident micro-budgeted mold of Ed Wood, attempts to self-finance his independent science fiction adventure film *Chubby Rain.* Studios have passed on his project, but undeterred, he sets about stringing together a band of misfits to function as his cast and crew. Played for laughs, hijinks ensue with the crew's idiosyncratic solutions to filming problems. Namely, this entails attempting to film a famous movie star (Eddie Murphy) in his day to day life without him noticing, so as to edit awkward and poorly shot real world footage from restaurants and social clubs into the exceedingly incoherent narrative of aliens attacking earth. In this vein, the film does succeed in foregrounding – for a change – the actual difficulties of shot set-up, if only by negation (because these filmmakers have neither the resources nor the talent to do it well). Nevertheless, the film, as a marked example of what Dzialo would likely see as the more pointless form of "absurdity" in regard to its popular comedic tone, ends on the successful perseverance of the director who, despite long odds, receives a contract to shoot a kung fu movie.

In Tarsem's *The Fall* (2006) the effect is the same as in *Adaptation*: the imagination of the creative mind depicted simply becomes the finished film before the audience's eyes. Here, a narrative that otherwise teases an industrial subversiveness in depicting a mistreated stunt worker (Lee Pace) during Hollywood's silent period, becomes completely subjugated to a young girl's fantasy that turns the hospitalized stunt man into a fantastical hero. While in the real world, it is revealed that the stunt man did not indeed "fall" from a bridge and paralyze himself in the eponymous diegetic event because of unsafe working

conditions, or unfair expectations on him to perform a dangerous stunt, but rather that he may have "jumped" from the bridge in a depression over a failed romance.[298] By comparison, the girl's fantasies attempt to redeem her disappointment in the stunt worker by figuring him as the ultimate western hero in her own imaginative version of a glossy Hollywood action-adventure. Here, a structural cue to the problematic nature of the history of representation in American movies is nominally referenced by the way in which a plethora of ethnically-coded sidekicks are surreptitiously killed-off by the girl's evolving narrative conceits, so that the implicit ideology of the classical individualist (white male) hero on a quest can take shape.

For his part, Kaufman has strayed back and forth from the usage of literal reflexivity. Alternatively he has embraced the structure of an incredible but apparently resonant industry narrative, such as in his biopic of televisual eclectic Chuck Barris (Sam Rockwell) in George Clooney's *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002), and resisted it with his exceedingly abstract and complex allegories of the human condition, such as Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), for which he won an Academy Award. As a science fiction romance, the film centers on a technology by which subjects can pay to have individual memories erased, but in which the protagonist Joel (Jim Carrey) changes his mind and attempts to resist the process by which sounds and images of his former lover (Kate Winslet) are being excised from his brain. Gondry's film is metaphorically resonant with the notion of cinematic memory itself in the way it stresses the icons of episodic situations and prop-motifs from his life as the essential meaning-

[298] To be clear, the stunt does indeed necessitate that he take a fall off of a bridge, but some of the filmmakers are shown as wary of allowing him to do it in regard to his safety. He ultimately chooses of his own accord to do the stunt, against their advice, either to impress his former lover, or, in a fatalistic disregard for his own life, or worse, an actual attempt at suicide.

makers. The methods by which Joel forgets, and struggles to remember, at the very least seem similar to the act of reconstructing a film's plot from memory: associative and iconic, based largely upon the indexing of memorable situations and images without regard to a chronological recapitulation of his life story.

Kaufman's own directorial debut, *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), serves up a post-modern clash of all these trends by presenting both a literal narrative about a theatrical director (Philip Seymour Hoffman) attempting to create his magnum opus, and an exceedingly obtuse and abstract depiction of the reality around him that similarly glosses over theatrical technicalities. Jonze himself was slated to direct the film, however because he was tied up with pre-production on *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), he had to bow out and give Kaufman, for the first time, relatively unchecked creative freedom in the production of his film.[299] Critics may charge here that challenging *Synecdoche, New York's* abstract diegesis on the grounds of how physical reality is misreported is tangential to the point of the film's post-modern appeal, but this does not suggest that filmic reflexivity is necessary in the first place. However, films that purport to "represent" the behind-the-scenes of theater, television, or film, have the modicum of responsibility to not misrepresent the labor involved in creating these works simply in order to emphasize the introspective nature of the individualized author or artist.

This is ultimately the problem of the literally reflexive film: that the actual laboriousness of shot set-ups and staging is largely incompatible with the ninety-minute plot-driven feature film format. Even more so this is the case when industry imperatives –

[299] Child, 132. Compare this to the infamous nature of his collaboration with Gondry on *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* which reportedly included a huge amount of Kaufman's ideas for the film being vetoed by his director and co-writer.

such as the ones advocated by McKee – come in to play. Never is this more apparent than in the final scene of *Adaptation*, where all intermediate stages of filmmaking – between the writer's page and the projectionist's lamp – are audio-visually erased. At the denouement of the film, after Charlie has finally worked up the courage to declare his love for Amelia (Cara Seymour) in acknowledgment of Donald's sacrifice, he immediately determines to conclude his own screenplay on this point. In the final voice-over narration, he determines while waiting to exit a parking ramp: "I have to go right home. I know how to finish the script now. It ends with Kaufman driving home after his lunch with Amelia thinking he knows how to finish the script. Shit. That's voice-over. McKee would not approve."

Importantly, this is only voice-over because of the status of Cage's line in regard to the medium close-up of him contemplatively sitting in his car, not because Charlie's description of it necessarily denotes voice-over narration as the only possible cinematographic strategy to depict such a sequence. He seems to ponder this when he continues "How else can I show his thoughts? I don't know. Oh who cares what McKee says, it feels right." Indeed, Jonze's film ends with Charlie's internal monologue in complete agreement with this principle: a tracking long shot follows Charlie's car out of the ramp and down the road off into the distance in an apparent embrace of such a classical Hollywood movie-ending cliché: "It's done, and that's something. So: 'Kaufman drives off from his encounter with Amelia filled for the first time with hope.' I like this. This is good." Here, Charlie's denotation that "It's done" in specific combination with the way the film immediately thereafter audio-visually depicts his screenplay exposition just as he reads it, again crucially configures Kaufman as the essential author of *Adaptation*. The audience is taken instantaneously from the moment a screenwriter devises an idea in his mind to that

idea's fruition in the finished film product: in contradistinction of the laborious filming process, Charlie simply imagines the film, and then it happens.

CHAPTER FIVE
"Are You Watching Closely?"
The Status of Story in Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*

> Never show anyone. They'll beg you and they'll flatter you for the secret, but as soon as you give it up, you'll be nothing to them. You understand? Nothing. The secret impresses no one! The trick you use it for, is everything.
>
> – Alfred Borden (Christian Bale), *The Prestige,* directed by Christopher Nolan

After kneeling down on a London back alley staircase to show a child how to perform a simple magic trick, an aspiring illusionist quickly admonishes the boy about these seeming rules by which the magician should live. Namely, he conveys the apparent conventional wisdom that a good magician will never reveal the secret behind his illusions. Yet, from the onset of Christopher Nolan's film, it becomes clear that often the magicians are speaking not merely of Victorian-era stage magic, but rather that they actualize a metaphor that extends to the world of the cinema as well. I am not the first to suggest that there is a cinematic allusion at play in *The Prestige* (2006), which has been cited by Hollywood magic consultants Ricky Jay and Michael Weber as an important text in regard to the confluence of ancient physical illusions and modern movie magic.[300]

In a recent lecture and demonstration titled "Like Magic," Weber, in explicit reference to the aforementioned film scene, and on behalf of his associates at the firm Deceptive Practices – who both consult about the history of magic, and provide their own expertise in creating pro-filmic special effects – made the claim: "We don't keep secrets *from* the audience. We keep secrets *for* the audience."[301] What is clear in this charge, is that there is

---

[300] Ricky Jay, Michael Weber, and Shane Mahan, "Like Magic," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Samuel Goldwyn Theater, Los Angeles, CA, November 20, 2013. Presentation attended by author.

[301] Michael Weber, "Like Magic" Presentation. Weber made this claim, then presented the aforementioned clip, noting that the audience should "pay close attention to what Christian Bale says," because it sums up the

something essentially lost in the revealing to the audience of how illusions at the most basic level are created: that both the illusionist and the audience alike have a shared invested interest in not rupturing the illusion. When phrased more aggressively, as in the quote from the film – "the secret impresses no one!" – the tone is one of accusation on the audience. Further, this charge implicitly suggests that the principle holds for both traditional stage magic and contemporary movie magic. However, where Jay and Weber might draw obvious parallels between stage magic and filmic special effects, I would expand this restrictive definition of movie magic to include not just physical, visual effects, but also more generally the elements of narrative at work in Hollywood meaning-making. Indeed, illusionism involves not only the optical, but also the mimetic nature of plot structures, the formal suturing of story worlds, and the connotation of ideology therein.

With this in mind, I argue that *The Prestige* relies on the pervasive analogy between magic and movie-making to test the very limits of reflexivity in the New New Hollywood. In so doing, I will necessarily proceed through a more sustained textual analysis than in previous chapters, in part because of the critical work left yet to be done in analyzing the structure and form of this film in context; to date, there is almost no scholarship whatever on this apparently lesser known of Nolan's works.[302] And yet a thorough analysis of the film and the paratextual rhetoric surrounding it reveals that it is perhaps his most complexly

---

philosophy of Deceptive Practices.

[302] One exception to this is David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's somewhat idiosyncratic formal discussion of the film in the latest edition of their *Film Art* textbook. However, as this is, necessary to the circumstances of an introductory textbook, more of a summary of important points concerning the use of sound and narrative in the film than a thesis-driven argument about meaning, it largely remains to be seen what if any theoretical or narratological significance can be unpacked by film and media scholars in relation to this film. Bordwell and Thompson for their part are content to give a several paragraphs long plot summary, followed by pages worth of quoting of dialogue motifs and their relation to conveying narrative information, but not much beyond this extensive formal description. See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, "Functions of Film Sound: *The Prestige," Film Art: An Introduction.* Tenth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 298-306.

self-reflexive film.

At the most basic level, *The Prestige* is a puzzle film: a ludic narrative that creates an enigma that must be solved by the audience by reconstructing the story from a fractured, non-linear presentation of the plot. Like many in this late twentieth and early twenty-first century cycle of complex narratives, Nolan's film opens with a series of formal clues that implicitly indicate to the audience how it should seek to interpret the logical structure of the plot toward this end. However, in this specific instance, I would argue, the opening cipher is itself metaphorically reflexive. In a bit of extra-diegetic narration that will also close the film, an *ingenieur* named Cutter (Michael Caine), literally and systematically explains the supposed structure of a magic trick, as nonsimultaneous images of dramatic events from later points in the film fill the frame. I quote it here in its entirety because of its central role in defining the reflexive allegory of the film:

> Every magic trick consists of three parts, or acts. The first part is called “the pledge.” The magician shows you something ordinary: a deck of cards, a bird, or a man. He shows you this object. Perhaps he asks you to inspect it, to see it is indeed real, unaltered, normal. But of course, it probably isn't. The second act is called “the turn.” The magician takes the ordinary something and makes it do something extraordinary. Now, you're looking for the secret, but you won't find it, because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to know. You want to be... fooled. But you wouldn't clap yet, because making something disappear isn't enough. You have to bring it back. That's why every magic trick has a third act. The hardest part. The part we call...“the prestige.”

On “the pledge,” magicians are shown introducing their tricks to diegetic audiences. On “the turn,” the magicians each make something disappear – for one it is a small bird, for another, it is himself – leaving their audiences, in reaction shots, speechless. Finally, for the third act, “the prestige,” one magician is shown in close-up drowning in a water tank while another looks on. None of these onscreen narrative developments are explained before the

film fades to black. Yet, the implication seems clear: the mystery of the film that is about to unfold will be presented in a way succinctly analogous to the described dramatic structure of a magic trick.

The story that evolves between these bookends is labyrinthine and difficult to summarize on the written page. The main characters are two rival magicians in London circa 1887; while Alfred Borden (Christian Bale) is arguably the greater magician – he is the superior hand at creating and achieving complex stage illusions – Robert Angier (Hugh Jackman) is the better showman – that is, he possesses the necessary charisma, charm, and general stage presence to become a star. Initially friends who pool their talents, a tragic accident caused by Borden takes the life of Angier's wife Julia (Piper Perabo), and turns these men into bitter enemies. A deadly game of tit-for-tat sabotage follows in which the magicians destroy everything (and everyone) around them in their relentless push to defeat one another.

Where the structure of the narrative takes its main hermeneutic twist is in the development of Borden's greatest illusion, "The Transported Man," by which he disappears on one side of the stage only to immediately re-appear on the other. Angier is perplexed by this trick, and spends the majority of the film attempting to discover Borden's method for achieving it. When Angier's own efforts to duplicate the trick fail – namely he pays an actor, Root, to play his double in a version he calls "The *New* Transported Man" – he eventually turns to scientist Nikola Tesla (David Bowie) to build a machine that can technologically achieve the desired result. "The *Real* Transported Man" in turn perplexes Borden to the point of insanity, and leads to a startling finale in which, on point of death, the magicians finally reveal their methods to one another (and the audience). As it turns out, Borden is

actually two identical twin brothers who change places on stage; Borden's *ingenieur* Fallon has actually been a second Borden in makeup (played also by Christian Bale in heavy makeup) all along. By contrast, Angier's electric machine literally creates a biological duplicate of himself every time he performs the trick, and in the last sinister moments of the film it is revealed that Angier has been murdering his clones every night at the conclusion of the trick in order to keep his method a secret.

The key to understanding the meta-discursive nature of the film is by unpacking the symptomatic significance of Borden's and Angier's respective solutions. "The Transported Man," as a textual metaphor, foregrounds contentious debates concerning the development of filmic illusionism in twenty-first century Hollywood: how it should be created, why it should be created, and under what circumstances it should be discussed. Importantly, *The Prestige* reflects upon the circumstances of its own construction in an allegorical manner – as opposed to the literalist method of *Adaptation* – in order to structurally indict the cinema audience and industry as complicit in the perpetuation of filmic escapism. This, as will be seen, is a different order of reflexive practice than Jonze's literally reflexive text, precisely because it does not involve a narrative truth claim about individual people in the film industry that may or may not be proven true. Rather it focuses attention on the effects of the cinematographic apparatus as a narrative process in contemporary filmmaking. Though the extent of this perceived allegory may be elusive at times, what seems undeniable is the direct meta-textual appeal to the audience to contemplate these effects. The opening shot, a lateral track over a hillside cluttered with top hats, is accompanied by the lone ambiguously diegetic sound of Borden asking: "Are you watching closely?" In this metaphor of magic tricks and film narratives, the magician has already impelled the film audience to pay

attention.

Christopher Nolan as New New Hollywood Cinephile

To fully understand the extent of *The Prestige's* reflexivity, it is important to understand the career trajectory of its director, and significantly, the persona he has crafted for himself to this point as the New Hollywood cinephile par excellence. Like many in the earlier generations of film brats, Nolan has a much publicized fascination with filmmaking going back to his early childhood, when he too proverbially began playing around with stop-motion techniques on his dad's Super 8 camera.[303] Growing up between London and Chicago, however, the British-American director has cultivated a slightly different model of cultural cachet than the film school generation; from a strictly literary background in his education, Nolan has indeed taken great pride in revealing that he never went to a film school of any kind, and is rather a self-taught filmmaker, learning through trial and error, and by holding jobs performing every conceivable function on an independent film set.[304]

Rising up in the ranks of Hollywood (as an outsider of course) he began to achieve notoriety with his first feature film, *Following* (1998), for challenging foremost the imperatives of carefully delineated focalization, narrative clarity, and progressive chronological story structures. The film follows a writer, the first of what arguably becomes a hallmark of Nolan to cast his protagonists as creative minds – perhaps stand-ins for the filmmaker himself – struggling to make sense of an incoherent world. Notably, as publicity indicates, the director also *auteuristically* produced, edited, photographed, and wrote the film himself, which is often hailed as an ode to micro-budgeted independent filmmaking

---

303 Jeffrey Ressner, "The Traditionalist," *Directors Guild of America Quarterly,* Spring 2012, Online Edition, accessed January 15, 2014, http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1202-Spring-2012/DGA-Interview-Christopher-Nolan.aspx

304 Ibid.

practice at the end of the twentieth century.[305]

Not only is Nolan a self-professed cinephile, but I would also argue that he is the quintessential Post-classical Hollywood 'film-o-phile': one of the last major Hollywood directors to outspokenly champion the use of 35mm film as a medium in the face of widespread industry adoption of digital formats. In an incident now considered legendary in some trades, Nolan reportedly invited a group of important Hollywood directors – including Michael Bay, Bryan Singer, Jon Favreau, Eli Roth, Duncan Jones, Stephen Daldry, and Edgar Wright – to attend a special sneak preview of his film *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012).[306] Yet, when they arrived they were treated to a lecture by Nolan on the superiority of 35mm film to HD video, and an impassioned appeal for them to join him in helping to keep film alive as a medium on the verge of obsolescence. What is clear is that Nolan has achieved a dramatic reputation for cinema and film specificity in not wanting to be forced out of these particular categories of artistic communication.

With *Memento* (2000), Nolan stumbles into the first of a series of films that textually demonstrate this kind of pronounced media specificity in the face of inevitable digital convergence: a film narrative that is almost impossible to convey through the means of any other medium. The film's main subject matter concerns the first person singular focalization of a protagonist who, in line with the major conflict of the story, has no short term memory. The film's screenplay is based on a short story idea envisioned by Nolan's own brother Jonathan who notes pointedly: “Inspiration had struck with the wrong brother.

[305] Andrew Pulver.. “A Cult Following; Christopher Nolan made his first film for pounds 10,000. His second has stars from *LA Confidential* and *The Matrix*,” *The Guardian* (London), November 5, 1999, 12.

[306] Gendy Alimurung, “Movie Studios are Forcing Hollywood to Abandon 35mm Film. But the Consequences of Going Digital are Vast and Troubling.,” *LA Weekly,* Thursday, April 12th, 2012.

I always felt like it was more of a cinematic story."[307] Indeed, where Jonathan's ultimately published work of short fiction, *Memento mori,* succeeds is in its limited diegetic scope: a single instance of a man struggling to remember his past based on clues he has left for himself around his hotel room. In contrast, the film *Memento* utilizes a stringent cinematographic narrational logic to expand the man's story to a two hour murder mystery that successfully shifts around in both space and time. Namely, this is achieved by coding the film as a puzzle, with fully half the film evolving in 35mm color in reverse chronological order, while the other half evolves chronologically in black & white stock, so that Nolan can narrationally force the audience to experience its own disjointed version of the protagonist's anterograde amnesia.

The critical and commercial success of *Memento* as a neo-noir thriller allowed Nolan to break out of the independent film world, and ultimately led to his assignment at Warner Bros. to re-boot the Batman franchise with *Batman Begins* (2005), a now archetypal New New Hollywood blockbuster in every sense of the word: a big budget with concomitant huge international returns despite its challenging time-shifting non-linear narration. Yet, with his mainstream success, Nolan has also publicly and deliberately eschewed many of the supposed industrial mandates of blockbuster film practice; chief among these is of course his ongoing refusal to shoot on digital cameras. His seeming distrust of the digital goes even beyond the resistance of Francis Ford Coppola of twenty years ago, making Nolan an even more untimely traditionalist and film purist than the old master. Reportedly, Nolan has never even used a digital intermediate in assembling dailies and editing his films –

[307] Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Jeff Goldsmith, "*The Prestige*: Q &A", *Creative Screenwriting Magazine,* podcast, October 20, 2006, accessed January 5, 2014, http://creativescreenwritingmagazine.blogspot.com/2006/10/prestige-qa.html

something Coppola himself began to embrace years ago – as he claims this will degrade the final film product and is arguably less efficient.[308] Indeed, Nolan has gone on the record decrying the use of computer-generated imagery to produce filmic illusions as well. He admits to the limited use of CGI by necessity on his larger budgeted films, but insists that this be done to fill in gaps rather than create the overall environment: "I believe in an absolute difference between animation and photography. However sophisticated your computer-generated imagery is, if it's been created from no physical elements and you haven't shot anything, it's going to feel like animation."[309] For Nolan, as Coppola before him, there seems to be a phenomenological difference between how film audiences can interact with a legitimate pro-filmic event and something wholly engineered in digital reality.

Perhaps most notable of all of Nolan's widely-promoted resistances to industry imperatives is his candid critique of contemporary 3D imaging in blockbuster entertainment, which he notoriously refused to apply to *The Dark Knight Rises,* despite the insistence of Warner executives. Here, Nolan has been the most aggressive in his indictment that filmmakers employing 3D processing misunderstand the art form in their exploitation of the new technologies: "The whole point of photography is that it's three-dimensional. The thing with stereoscopic imaging is it gives each audience member an individual perspective. It's well suited to video games and other immersive technologies, but if you're looking for an audience experience, stereoscopic is hard to embrace."[310] Notable here is the

---

[308] Ressner, *DGA Quarterly.* The interview quotes Nolan: "It's cheaper to work on film, it's far better looking, it's the technology that's been known and understood for a hundred years, and it's extremely reliable […] In fact, I've never done a digital intermediate. Photochemically, you can time film with a good timer in three or four passes, which takes about 12 to 14 hours as opposed to seven or eight weeks in a DI suite."

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid. Elsewhere Nolan is quoted more bluntly advocating that 3D is simply not visually appealing to him: "I don't particularly enjoy watching films in 3D because I think that a well-shot and well projected film has a very three dimensional quality to it so I'm somewhat skeptical of the technology […] Until we get rid of the

implicit suggestion that the cinema is a communal institutional practice, and that this process of communication is obfuscated at least in part by the fracturing of the audience into individual wearers of 3D glasses.

With all of this as the career trajectory of Christopher Nolan, he continues to pre-occupy himself with representing source material from other media in succinctly cinematographic ways. In this vein, *The Prestige* is one of his efforts most indebted to the idea of filming a story that cannot be told in any other way except through the work of cinema. And, as it is based on a 400 page epistolary novel, this necessarily involves a drastic overhaul of the material and formal strategies for its conveyance in the same way in which he previously turned a cerebral short story into a psychological thriller with *Memento*, and a comic book into *noiresque* time-shifting crime films with the Batman series.

From Novel Approach to Cinematic Method

The strongest argument for the reading of a specifically cinematographic allegory in Nolan's film is its comparison to the source novel. The book, written by Christopher Priest in 1995, similarly depicts the years-long confrontation between stage magicians Alfred Borden and *Rupert* Angier. It also involves an epistolary structure by which not only these characters, but even their distant relatives focalize chapters of the novel through their first person perspective. Through this structure, the story's duration is extended to roughly 100 years, and the chief framing device that begins and ends the novel is not an *ingenieur's* explanation of magic trick structure, but rather Alfred Borden's great-great grandson discovering his journal during a train ride in 1990s.

---

glasses or until we really massively improve the process, I'm a little weary of it." John Hiscock, "Christopher Nolan: I'm Weary of 3D," *The Telegraph,* April 16, 2013.

All of this, needless to say, has been dispensed of by the Nolan brothers, who are co-writers of the adaptation. Much in contrast to Charlie Kaufman's frustration with the adaptation process, both Christopher and Jonathan Nolan seem largely unfazed by the threat of fidelity criticism in general. Each brother has communicated what seems to be more of a Hitchcockian philosophy of adaptation in his own right. Hitchcock, who famously represented the film-centric medium-specific trend in adaptation theory discussed by Naremore, is quoted by Truffaut as referencing the prevailing discourse: "There's been a lot of talk about the way in which Hollywood directors distort literary masterpieces. I'll have no part of that! What I do is to read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget all about the book and start to create cinema."[311] Echoing this disinterest in fidelity, and in response to a question concerning his first reading of the novel *The Prestige,* Jonathan Nolan conveys: "you realize you know there's no way you can make a movie out of that…you knew you had to cut right from the beginning, and it just kind of gave you license to go 'all right I've got to throw everything out,' and start building with the blocks of what you liked from the book."[312] Elsewhere, Christopher Nolan amplifies this sentiment even more unabashedly: "There is one rule, and that rule is: you have to be prepared to change everything in the book. You have to be prepared to completely throw it away. That is an absolute."[313]

More important than the notation that the Nolans have excised many elements of the book from their screenplay and resultant film, is the exploration of what they have actually

---

311 Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in François Truffaut, *Hitchcock,* Revised Edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 71.

312 Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Goldsmith, *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* podcast.

313 Den Shewman, "Nothing Up Their Sleeves: Christopher and Jonathan Nolan on the Art of Magic, Murder, and *The Prestige," Creative Screenwriting Magazine,* September/October 2006, 62.

changed and seemingly why. Narratively, the brothers have completely cut many of the characters considered orthogonal to the central conflict between Borden and Angier, and they have made much more sinister the situations and people who remain. Rather than a framing device concerning a contemporary man trying to discover something about his familial past, the film version frames the main action through the more immediate trial and condemnation of Borden for murdering Angier. Significantly, a plot point that does not appear in the book at all becomes the main driving force for the conflict of the film; Borden searches in vein through Angier's journal for the solution to "The Real Transported Man" as he awaits his trial and execution. Furthermore, rather than grouping the different epistles sequentially, as in the novel, the puzzle film version of *The Prestige* cross-cuts all these coded points-of-view throughout its plot in a way that seems difficult to imagine in written form.

As Borden reads Angier's journal and flashes-back from the most recent timeline to a previous one in which Angier is working on his illusion with Tesla in Colorado, Angier himself takes over narrating the journal, through which he in turn flashes-back to an even earlier timeline in which Borden is creating his original illusion. Of course, Angier is narratively justified in doing this through the fact that he is reading Borden's earlier journal, which likewise is narrated by Borden again. Most importantly, all of this main action is framed by the previously mentioned opening and closing extra-diegetic narration by Cutter, which does not seem to exist definitively in any of these timelines (even if events depicted in the visual track do).

Represented graphically, the structure can be broken up as in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1. Narrative Structure of *The Prestige*

Opening Narration: Outside Story Time[314]	Timeline 1: The Current Period	Timeline 2: An Earlier Period	Timeline 3: The Earliest Period	Closing Narration (Outside Story Time)
Cutter explains the three-act structure of a magic trick	Borden goes on trial for the murder of Angier. He begins reading Angier's journal.	Angier travels to Colorado to seek out Tesla. (The narrative events depicted in Angier's journal, being read by Borden in Timeline 1)	The two magicians begin a rivalry. (The narrative events depicted in Borden's journal, being read by Angier in Timeline 2)	Cutter re-affirms the three-act structure of a magic trick

Unquestionably, the non-linear and unregimented cutting back and forth across timelines is the primary mode by which the film actualizes its puzzle in the first place. According to Jonathan Nolan, "Chris had come to me and said he wanted the film to work like a magic trick. He wanted the film itself to work like a magic trick."[315] It might be obvious enough then, that the film structure mimics what the film itself claims is the structure of magic, but more importantly here, as those familiar with screenwriting manuals may note, the most obvious use of "three-act structure" in contemporary culture is not stage magic, but narrative feature filmmaking. Graham Fuller of *Sight & Sound* even alludes to the pop-cultural ubiquity of this notion in assessing whether or not such a metaphor for cinema will be understood in *The Prestige* when he notes: "this implied

[314] It could alternatively be interpreted, because of a dialogue sound bridge that precipitates a scene change, that Cutter's exposition is actually the diegetic answer to a trial judge's question from the next scene. However, this would not necessarily account for the shift in Cutter's cadence and volume (from methodical and quiet to straining to be heard) or the perceptible change in acoustic quality of Cutter's voice (from having no echo – is if not recorded out in the world – to having a substantial reverb from the walls and ceiling of the diegetic court room). This interpretation would also not account for the extra-diegetic status of Cutter's closing narration.

[315] Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Goldsmith, *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* podcast.

reference to Aristotle's ancient blueprint for Hollywood movies will be lost on fewer filmgoers than it would have been before screenwriting became a Starbucks phenomenon."[316]

In contrast to the changed elements, Nolan for his part seems anxious to keep the story firmly rooted in Priest's vision of Victorian Era illusion-making. According to historian James W. Cook, this is an era embodied by a gradual transition from traditional modes of sorcery and deception to what scholars tend to describe as "modern magic."[317] Although Cook maintains that "magic resists neat historical periodization," he argues that generally what the nineteenth century represents is a refinement of the magician's positioning in response to Post-Enlightenment reforms, and the nominal status change from illusion presented as fact to illusion presented as illusion; that is to say a transition from magic as a spiritual service to the refinement of the art of prestidigitation, or sleight-of-hand as a mode of middle class entertainment.[318] Here, Cook seems reluctant to define a definitive end to this period, and yet this seems to be precisely what Nolan is looking for in the setting for his film.

In *American Cinematographer,* Director of Photography Wally Pfister communicates this essential need to convey the Victorian period through limited lighting effects and mitigated location-shooting.[319] Here, Pfister suggests that Nolan preferred a "down and dirty" style of depicting the setting that would stress the use of a hand-held camera on practical sets so that the performances of the actors could really shine. Pfister also worked

---

316 Graham Fuller, "The Prestige (Review)," *Sight & Sound,* December 2006, 69-70.

317 James W. Cook, "Modern Magic," *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 163-213.

318 Ibid, 163. As Cook's work involves a historical study of "frauds" during this time, he is apt to point out that the very term "confidence man" is used for the first time as late as 1849, perhaps indicative of this trend toward distrust and the criminalizing of tricks that do not represent themselves as such (201).

319 Jay Holben. "Lords of Illusion," *American Cinematographer,* November 2006. 64-75.

with costume designer Joan Bergin to make sure the character's faces – particularly those of the onstage performers – would pop with the natural and often low key lighting, and this entailed, in Pfister's words "muted tones" designed to give a pronounced contrast.[320] Notably, this reveals a strategy of alternatively stressing and downplaying the most dramatic signifiers of the historical period, perhaps alluding to Nolan's repeated command that he did not want to make a period film despite his insistence on the very particular historical setting. The creative decision to use mostly hand-held camera is expanded upon in the *American Cinematographer* write-up as perhaps the most obvious choice to specifically reject the "period film" label, and make sure the film had a contemporary resonance.[321] This suggests that more important than establishing a suspension of disbelief around the diegetic setting, these mandates are more closely related to capturing the essence of what Nolan believes the era represented for evolving visual media. Here, a "density of information" is represented by production designer Nathan Crowley's chaotically dressed sets, which litter the London streets with papers and posters, one on top of another, sometimes consuming entire walls. In a behind-the-scenes documentary segment, "Conjuring the Past," Crowley seems to suggest this mentality is attempting to present a sort of hyper-version of early modern interpolation: "It's the start of the modern wall, it's Victorian advertising, it's the start of mechanizing, it's the start of the industrial revolution."[322]

The explicit connection to mechanical reproduction as a driving force is important.

---

[320] "Conjuring the Past," *The Director's Notebook: The Cinematic Sleight-of-hand of Christopher Nolan,* directed by Mark Rance, (Touchstone Home Entertaiment, 2007) DVD, promotional documentary, (Touchtone Home Entertainment, 2007).

[321] Holben, 69. According to Pfister: "Chris didn't want the movie's period to get in the way of the storytelling, so we decided to break with convention by using a handheld camera throughout the film, which is not often done in movies depicting the turn of the century!"

[322] Ibid.

This period, of course, is right at the verge of the point of no return for stage illusion, when Georges Méliès is about to begin using that most taboo of magic apparatuses: trick photography. Indeed, some of the earliest "trick films" involve interesting cinematic corollaries to "The Transported Man" as, in essence, a prestidigitorial ode to moving things in ways that they cannot be moved. For example, Méliès's *The Vanishing Lady* (1896) is presented onstage and in direct address to a stationary camera in the house of the theater; here the filmmaker's splicing creates the illusion that a magician's volunteer subject vanishes into thin air, before miraculously returning a moment later. Likewise, *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1901), though it dispenses with the overt figuration of a magician onstage, nevertheless plays on the perspectival illusion created – via masking, double-exposure, and disguised camera movement – when a man's head seems to grow in size and blow up right before the audience. All of these maneuvers conceivably make the Pepper's Ghost phantasmagoria of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exceedingly more versatile and insidious when technologically advanced enough to fundamentally disguise their methods. Needless to say, Méliès is hardly the last magician to migrate to the world of film (see the early serials of Harry Houdini), nor, of course, the last filmmaker to migrate back into the world of magic (consider the later career of Orson Welles).

Interestingly, the coming of the cinema is one thing that Cook, in his exhaustive study, does not mention. This is perhaps due to motion picture film's emergence toward the tail end of his periodization, but it is nevertheless conspicuous by its absence in a study that refers to many mechanistic instruments of illusion in nineteenth century exhibition spaces, museums, and theaters. This includes a prominent discussion of the history of Étienne-

Gaspard Robertson's "ghost show" apparatus in form and function.[323] Such phantasmagoria, often involving mirrors and spectral projectors in the tradition of the magic lantern, have elsewhere been duly elucidated as proto-cinematic devices. Notably, movements such as impressionism and *trompe l'oeil* painting also figure importantly in Cook's argument concerning the migration of visual illusion into the realm of art at the end of the nineteenth century, and some of these examples historically coincide with the moment in which film will begin to import the ocular regime of renaissance space, arguably the most ubiquitous 'optical illusion' of twentieth century recorded media.

In contrast, the specter of the coming of film is cast over the movie version of *The Prestige.* Importantly, one of the most prominent "fathers of cinema" makes an indirect appearance in the film, when Thomas Edison himself is mentioned several times as the phantom enemy of Nikola Tesla's progress. In a scene in which Borden and Angier visit a scientific exposition of Tesla's recent inventions, the showcase is shut down by the authorities before it can even begin in response to heckling complaints from the audience that it is not safe; in response, Alley, Tesla's assistant proclaims that this is all "part of Thomas Edison's smear campaign against Mr. Tesla's superior alternating current!" This may well allude to Edison's well-known penchant for litigious action against rival inventors along the lines of sometimes retroactive patent claims. The precise pre-history of cinema is still clouded for many historians by the fact that Edison's seemingly incredible claims about when exactly he first successfully tested the Kinetograph – perhaps as early as 1889, but just as possibly as late as 1891 owing to correspondence that suggests his renewed interest

[323] Cook, 171-174. Here, Cook even refers to the way in which Benjaminian scholars have denoted the process of the phantasmagoria as itself a metaphor for capitalism as it concerned "rendering the means of production invisible—and projecting bogus images before crowds of urban consumers..."

in cylindrical recording (the Kinetograph is perhaps the first motion picture camera to use a roll of film) – make this history difficult to pin-down with precision. What is more, many scholars now credit Edison employee W.K.L. Dickson – director of "Monkeyshines no. 1 and 2," the first ever test films of the Kinetograph apparatus – and his assistants with the actual invention of the Kinetograph camera and its related peep-hole viewing device, the Kinetoscope.

A now widespread – if potentially completely legendary – tale in film history posits that the very reason "Hollywood" came into existence is because of the specter of Edison's New Jersey-based Biograph Company attempting to gain a legal monopoly over all motion picture production, and thus causing would-be movie moguls to flee to the west coast. A similar conjecture is implied in the narrative of *The Prestige,* where Angier must travel all the way to the isolated Rocky Mountain community to which Tesla has retreated to avoid Edison's persecution. Though Edison never appears onscreen, the work of Edison's henchmen dramatically paints him as an antagonist to Angier's story task, or worse, makes him the actual villain of the piece. In a montage sequence, these men are shown smashing Tesla's instruments, and burning his laboratory to the ground, before Tesla in reaction shot – with the reflection of the flames in his carriage window figuratively consuming him – abruptly departs from Colorado Springs, and the film, for good. When Angier finds the completed device nevertheless, it includes a post script from Tesla that indicates his conjecture that "science" is not ready to accept such a device, and that perhaps the world of prestidigitation "where people are happy to be mystified" will be more apt to embrace it.

The mystification process associated with magic tricks points to an apparent contract between the performer and audience. To this day, many televisual magicians seek

to maintain an implicit virtuosity of pro-filmic illusion by way of the explicit promise that they will not use “camera tricks” to achieve their results. The connotation seems clear that this would be considered cheating the television audience out of the thrill of specifically *not* being able to chalk up the suspense produced to post-production technicians. And a similar analogy can be drawn here to the threat that Tesla's device potentially poses to the phenomenology of Angier's trick; the contract or agreement in this case is that “The Transported Man” is simply a physical or optical illusion, and that the transportation either does not actually take place or it has some unimpressive explanation that it is primarily the magician's role to “mystify.” In theory, as I will return to below, Angier is 'cheating' by using a new technology that fundamentally betrays this principle of sleight-of-hand.

Formally speaking, it is worth noting that “The Transported Man” is indeed never demonstrated through non-cinematic means; that is to say, with a staged illusion in which no camera tricks are present. The first time “The Transported Man” is performed in the plot – the final time it is performed in the story – it is Angier's “Real Transported Man” in the opening scene. In this instance the trick is interrupted and never actually completed at all. The second time a virtual “Transported Man” is performed – prior to its official debut in the story world – it is not on stage at all, but rather used by Borden to surreptitiously enter his love interest Sarah's apartment; in this instance, the transportation is achieved through a simple cut with Bale never appearing on the screen at the same time with his alter ego. The second time it is performed – the first time in the plot in which the official “Transported Man” is performed (when Angier attends a performance and, sharing the audience's narrational focalization, witnesses the trick for the first time) – the trick is again not fully shown onscreen. Importantly, a cross-cut sequence of three shots reveals, first, Angier's

exasperated reaction later in his workshop ("It was the greatest magic trick I've ever seen"). Then, editor Lee Smith cuts to the proverbial point-of-view shot from Angier's perspective back in the theater house: Borden onstage bounces a red ball on the stage and quickly retreats behind a prop cabinet door. Finally, without revealing the result of the trick, a cut takes us to Cutter in the audience, apparently witnessing the illusion on some later date. Importantly, the trick can be heard on the soundtrack: the ball bounces a few times, but comes to a stop with the sound of another door swinging open, and a few disparate claps from the surrounding audience.

On the other hand, the only time that Angier is shown successfully performing "The New Transported Man" – when he switches with Root – a long take is nevertheless shot at a significant distance from the stage so that the audience is removed enough to prevent recognition of the identity of the extras used in place of Hugh Jackman. Similarly a combination of extreme long shot and a cut are used the first time Borden is shown onscreen officially performing what is now known colloquially as the "*Original* Transported Man." Finally, "The Real Transported Man" by definition covers such a wide expanse of space – the Angier in the prestige appears in the upper balcony of the theater *behind* most of the audience – such that barring hypothetical camera movements, it cannot even in theory be shown on film without editing, and it never is. Indeed, the one and only performance of any of the completed versions of "The Transported Man" – excluding the attempts that are sabotaged in the process by Borden, or not otherwise fully shown onscreen – that does not employ editing or exorbitant camera distance, is the one in the revelatory montage in the climactic scene. Here, as in the other brief shots of the flashback montage in which Christian Bale appears doubled on the screen at the same time, this is

achieved through the photochemical optical printing process. All of this is meant to illustrate the perhaps simple point that the trick is not designed to be impressive to the film audience because of the assumption that the audience cannot imagine how the trick is achieved filmically, but rather because of the inability to decipher how the characters (supposedly without the aid of modern technologies of illusion) are able to perform the tricks *within the story world*. This is the essential narrative enigma on which the film turns.

"The Transported Man" is thus a cleverly anti-cinematic illusion presented in a cinematic way: it is easy to achieve through filmic means, and is only hypothetically impressive in a live theatrical context. Even when the film plays on this premise by presenting it once without, as the magicians would object to, cutting away from the action, it structurally demonstrates this with photo-realistic matting, optical printing, and compositing. Of course, it is not necessary to "cut away" in order to put a single actor into separate parts of a continuous pro-filmic space at the same time onscreen. Thus, the Victorian Era must be the temporal setting of this story for the simple reason that this is the latest date in which "The Transported Man" can continue to defer its own obsolescence.

But if so much of the culture of turn-of-the-century magic makes its way into the novel of *The Prestige*, then why is the central conjecture of the film version completely divorced from both novel and the history of magic alike? An almost ubiquitous assumption in reviews and analyses of the film version of *The Prestige* is that its opening conjecture concerning three-act structure, and the narrative reliance upon this conjecture, is naturally adopted from the history of magician's lingo. Yet, this is demonstrably false: in reality there is no basis in the history of magic for the phrases "pledge", "turn", and "prestige" to describe the three acts of a magic trick. Despite a period of refinement and the organization of

professional societies in the mid nineteenth century, what Cook calls the "professionalizing" of magic, mid-to-late century magicians were inclined to agree on very little – sometimes up to and including the very definition of their trade itself[324] – and the notion that any great plurality of magicians across Europe and North America might have come to an agreement on strict and specific signifiers for the process of performance seems unfounded.

Indeed, the closest corollary to this comes in the novel of *The Prestige* itself, in which Priest unpacks his (fictional) three stages of an "illusion," referred to as "the setup," "the performance," and "the effect," respectively. Though he further suggests that the last stage may also be referred to as "the prestige," what is clear is that Priest is connoting this as the result, the product, or the after-effect of the illusion on the audience; not it seems in actuality a structured part of the performance (which is a "stage" all to itself). In any event, the explication of these three stages seems to be of comparatively trivial importance to the novel, coming as a single description 73 pages into the book, and being immediately followed by a delineation of the related "six categories" of tricks, and then an inventory of "techniques of magic," which Priest likewise lays out in some detail.[325] Ultimately, the importance of the term "prestige" in the novel turns upon Angier's penchant for referring to his manufactured doubles as "my prestiges." But the notion of describing a magic trick in "three acts" is completely original to the film. What is more, the formal foregrounding of this narrative conceit in the opening and closing of the film makes it absolutely crucial to the film's meaning. In a question concerning such a schematic, Jonathan Nolan reveals the

[324] Cook, 200. Here, Cook refers to the refinement of prestidigitation during this time as also involving a preponderance of magician's memoirs espousing competing how-to discussions for practical illusions, and notably in terms of professional rivalry the claim that "each and every conjuring star from these years exposed something or someone on stage, whether his own trickery, a demonized carnival mounteback of the past, or a spiritualist medium of the present."

[325] Christopher Priest, *The Prestige* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 73-75.

origin of this idea: "I made all that stuff up. There's no magic history there. The three parts of a magic trick... yeah, it has a nice sort of analogue to film structure."[326]

"Metaphors of Deception" and the Crisis of Story

In the publicity materials for the film, Christopher Priest himself remarks that his book was originally intended as a self-reflexive allegory: "All of the metaphors and all the symbols in the novel are very literary ones. They work as literature."[327] For Priest, the magician is like the novelist, and his trick is analogous to the written narrative. Here, a prestidigitator constructs a virtual story based on misdirection that is not accurate to what happens in the trick ontologically, just like the novelist strives to construct a virtual story in the mind of the reader that might not be synonymous with the written words of the book's explicit plot. Thus, the point of the reflexive metaphor for Priest is its ability, if recognized, to foreground the mechanics and methods of fiction writing. And yet even Priest notes in terms of medium-specificity how such themes may or may not be as precisely prescient for a representational medium such as film: "What I liked about the screenplay of *The Prestige* is the way that the Nolans turned very many of those metaphors into visual metaphors."[328] Here, in order to understand such metaphors, it is important to bring discussion of the film into the contemporary discourse on complex narratives in the New New Hollywood.

As was *Memento* before it*, The Prestige* is a clear example of the twenty-first century Hollywood puzzle film. Warren Buckland – utilizing cognitive approaches to narration from David Bordwell and Edward Branigan – defines this cycle of contemporary films as one that "emphasizes the complex *telling* (plot, narration) of a simple or complex *story*

[326] Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Goldsmith, *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* podcast.
[327] "Metaphors of Deception." *The Director's Notebook* promotional documentary.
[328] Ibid.

(narrative)."[329] Here, the puzzle film creates a new order of challenge to the spectator in working to reconstruct what actually happens in the story world of a film after such a world is depicted through a non-traditional plot structure. Differentiating this cycle from other films that simply employ complex narrational strategies, Buckland further cites: "These films blur the boundaries between different levels of reality, are riddled with gaps, deception, labyrinthine structures, ambiguity, and overt coincidences."[330] Though many theorists put *Memento* and even *Following* into this category, *The Prestige* has been thus far critically overlooked in historical comparison with this trend. Most ironic of all is the inclusion of *Adaptation* in this cycle – at least as much as is advocated by Chris Dzialo's entry in the Buckland anthology – despite the fact that the substance of Dzialo's argument is premised on the notion that the status of *Adaptation's* diegetic spatio-temporality cannot be definitively established even in the end.[331] It seems antithetical to the notion of a puzzle film for the film's structure to postulate a puzzle that cannot be solved, and this is a definitive distinction between Jonze's film and Nolan's film along the lines of complex narrative structures.

Writing in *Cinema Journal*, David Greven is one of the few scholars who has attempted to discuss the narrative of *The Prestige* at all, when he lists the film within his category of post-classical Hollywood cycle, classified as the "double protagonist" film.[332] Though he does not analyze the film beyond listing its title among many others, his working definition and periodization are worth interrogating in relation to the narrative structure of

---

[329] Warren Buckland, ed. *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (West-Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 6.
[330] Ibid, 6.
[331] Dzialo, 107-128.
[332] David Greven, "Contemporary Hollywood Masculinity and the Double-Protagonist Film," *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (Summer, 2009): 22-43.

the film and its metaphors. According to Greven, a unique genre in Hollywood comes about in the so-called "Bush to Bush" era (the late 80s to mid-2000s, roughly coterminous with the Presidencies of George H.W. Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush), which is riddled with a crisis of masculinity in purported response to the political direction of the country.[333] The double-protagonist film is denoted, as the term might suggest, by a narrative structure that contains two protagonists who are often, if not always, pursuing story goals in direct competition with one another.[334] For Greven, these protagonists, almost always male, necessarily act out within the story a fractured battle over the contemporaneous status of American masculinity based on "narcissistic" versus "masochistic" tendencies.[335] One can only presume that Greven means to label Angier as the narcissistic protagonist and Borden the masochistic protagonist of *The Prestige,* though he does not clearly delineate this conjecture.

What is indeed true of the film's structure is that it certainly narrates a battle between two men who variously take shots at the other's masculinity, and indeed destroy all the female figures around them, inadvertently or otherwise, in pursuit of their dramatic contest: that is, to beat one another. The narrative conceit of attempting to solve the mystery of their fellow combatant by reading that man's diary is also clearly conducive to the notion of a doubled story structure; at once the film's plot prefigures Borden as the protagonist when it opens at his trial for the supposed murder of Angier, however, as soon

---

[333] Ibid, 22. Greven draws obvious reference to the book length study by Robin Wood, *Hollywood From Vietnam to Reagan* (1986), and admits as much in terms of his intention to do for the 90s what Wood did for the previous period in terms of ideological survey of Hollywood narratives.

[334] It may be important to note here that for Robert McKee, this kind of logic – in which two or more protagonists have roughly equal narrative importance, but do not share the same story goal – cannot be considered a plural-protagonist film (which would denote a team of heroes), but rather a multi-protagonist film. McKee, 136.

[335] Greven, 23.

as the temporality shifts (along with the narrative focalization) to the visualization of Angier's journal, he himself begins to take over as the character whose story the audience is following. The shift seems to happen again, as one might presume if it fits the "double-protagonist" bill, when Angier's reading of Borden's earlier words transforms the space and time again to that earlier point in both their careers. Yet, here is where I slightly dispute Greven's assertion that both protagonists are given equal narrative weight.

It may be peripherally true that the billing of the film absolutely fits Greven's schematic for the double-protagonist film based on the relatively comparable state of the "star-power" of the film's leads, an essential ingredient for Greven. Both Jackman and Bale were fresh off blockbuster success as top-billed actors – that is, the hero-protagonists – in high-grossing movies at the time of *The Prestige's* release. In this regard, an interesting high concept sell for the movie among comic book fans could well label the film as "Wolverine versus Batman." Here, Nolan's casting unmistakably capitalizes on blockbuster statuses for the sake of marketing his, by comparison, much smaller film. Warner Bros.' *Batman Begins,* with Christian Bale in the title role, opened in June of 2005, with a budget of $150 million, and grossed $374 million worldwide.[336] 20th Century Fox's *X-Men: The Last Stand* starring Hugh Jackman, opened in May of 2006, on a budget of $210 million, for an astonishing worldwide gross of $459 million.[337] By comparison, Newmarket and Syncopy's *The Prestige,* opened in October 2006, strafed the very middle of the Klady Report's 'Hollywood danger zone' with an exorbitant independent-blockbuster budget of $40 million, yet finished with a

[336] "*Batman Begins*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=batmanbegins.htm.
[337] "*X-Men: The Last Stand*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=x3.htm.

comfortable gross of $109 million worldwide.[338]

However, in terms of the textual relationship between the characters that these stars play, it seems difficult to argue that the structure of the narrative is not largely on Angier's side for most of the film: first, the plot begins with his supposed murder at the hands of Borden (who does not initially even deny the charge onscreen as he scowls in silence, coding him as a possible *antagonist*). This echoes the original theatrical trailer, that likewise conveys an extremely selective version of the film's plot. From here, the audience flashback to Angier's journey in Colorado figures him as the proverbially resurrected person of interest – in a style that structurally recalls Burt Lancaster's murder at the beginning of *The Killers* (1946), Peter O'Toole's accident in the opening of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), William Holden's acerbic narrational introduction to *Sunset Blvd* (1950), or even Welles's *Citizen Kane*, the arguable progenitor of all these with its portrayal of Kane's last breath. Finally, in terms of narrative structure, Angier's story task and goal – to discover Borden's secret and the means to outdo it – is given much more narrative weight than that of Borden's, assuming that Borden's story task and goal is likewise to discover *Angier's* secret and defeat *him*. In comparison, Angier's quest takes significantly more plot time (several years of his life taking him halfway around the world) and screen time (nearly an hour of the film) to convey than does Borden's.

Here, one must return to a discussion of Robert McKee's screenwriting mandates that played such a part in the previous chapter and have continued to be discursively pervasive in screenwriting culture from the late 1990s up to 2006 and beyond. Of importance here, is McKee's insistence on narrative structures that adhere to active

[338] "*The Prestige*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 5, 2014, accessed October 5, 2014, http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=prestige.htm.

character-motivated, and well-grounded story arcs. Under his rubric, the three act structure is paramount for a feature length motion picture.[339] In a virtual analogy to the "pledge," "turn," and "prestige" described by the Nolans, each act has a prescribed function. Act One introduces the status quo and then creates a story problem for the protagonist by way of a supposed "inciting incident" that propels the protagonist into the next act.[340] Act Two is the crux of the story, and should present a series of progressive complications and conflicts that get in the way of the protagonist's goal, rising to a climactic moment. In Act Three, the resolution occurs and, usually, this entails restoring order to the universe. But how the writer goes about resolving the story problem is of tantamount importance here, because in the mind of McKee and the plethora of screenwriters who have in recent years adopted his prescriptions, the ending must resonate with the audience or face rejection:

> In Aristotle's words, an ending must be both "inevitable and unexpected." Inevitable in the sense of that as the Inciting Incident occurs, everything and anything seems possible, but at Climax, as the audience looks back through the telling, it should seem that the path the telling took was the *only* path. Given the characters and their world as we've come to understand it, the Climax was inevitable and satisfying, But at the same time it must be unexpected, happening *in a way* the audience could not have anticipated.[341]

If the ending is not properly established, and is instead coincidental, random, or unbelievable in regard to the logic of the preceding story, then McKee refers to this as the "*deus ex machina*," arguably the worst thing a writer can do to alienate the audience.[342] Recalling *Adaptation,* this is exactly what Brian Cox, in the role of McKee, instructs Charlie to avoid, but the fortuitously-timed alligator attack occurs in partial mitigation of this rule

---

[339] McKee does allow for the possibility of more than three acts in a coherent screenplay, but warns that this often involves addition of subplots or excessive story length that bogs down the narrative. However, what is beyond dispute is that a feature-length film cannot in McKee's mind be shorter than three acts: one act is for short stories and brief plays, two acts is for sitcoms and novellas, but three is for the feature. 217.

[340] Ibid, 181-207.

[341] Ibid, 311.

[342] Ibid, 357-358.

regardless.

The Nolan brothers seemed to have anticipated this sort of critical phenomenon when they note the importance of establishing clues early on in the screenplay of what the supernatural ending of the film will ultimately entail, rather than relying on this solution to be fully revealed only at the conclusion (as is the case in the novel). In an interview with *Creative Screenwriting,* Jonathan suggests:

> Chris had pitched me the story first, so I had a pretty good idea that it was going to go supernatural before I started reading the book. And one of the concerns we had right from the beginning was a genre consideration, of, you really have to try and let the audience know as quickly as possible that you're going to go there. If you're going to break the rules of nature you have to be as clear as you can from the beginning.[343]

Yet, the revelation of the third act functions formally to establish that *Borden's* solution to the magic trick has been the one to have been surprising, yet inevitable, *not* Angier's. As Borden explains his secret to a dying Angier, a visual flashback montage re-presents a series of events from earlier in the story, so that the audience can contemplate them in regard to Borden's revelation. Some of these shots are wholly original to the plot at this point: the Borden brothers sitting side-by-side (both portrayed by Bale who is composited into the shot with himself) alternatively putting on and taking off the Fallon makeup, the brothers switching places with one another (both sans makeup) under the stage, and gruesomely, the image of one brother cutting off the fingers of the other so they will "match." Yet, just as many of the shots of the montage are also taken from earlier in the plot and replayed for the audience as-is: the close-up of Fallon saying goodbye to Borden (now revealed to have been Borden – that is Bale – in heavy makeup), the sequence in

[343] Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Goldsmith, *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* podcast.

which Sarah treats Borden's hand wound not understanding "how it can be bleeding again," and finally the sequence of Fallon attempting to shield the girl (who the audience now knows is his own daughter) from the fighting of her previously presumptive parents. Thus, the montage crafts a virtual revisiting of the various formal and narrative elements presented earlier in the film as clues to Borden's secret, and stands as a stark scolding to any audience member who had not been able to put together the pieces of the puzzle. By comparison, the only thing that is effectively revealed about Angier's secret in his own focalized flashback a moment later is that on the first occasion of his testing the Tesla device, he shot and killed the version of himself that appeared in the prestige, and thereafter set on the idea of killing off his duplicates with every successive performance, never really sure if he would be the one to survive each night.

In a review for *Rolling Stone* (and a claim later quoted on the film's DVD cover), critic Peter Travers declares of *The Prestige:* "You want to see it again the second it's over."[344] Arguably, owing to the revelatory power of the closing sequence, much of the publicity for the film repeatedly champions this sort of rhetoric concerning the delights of immediate repeat viewing. Even Bale himself is quoted in *Premiere* as suggesting that as soon as he saw the finished film for the first time, he "wanted to go again straightaway."[345] And this conjecture is indeed a common trend for the contemporary puzzle film. Here, by its structural conduciveness to 're-watching', *The Prestige* actually challenges Greven's charge that it fits neatly into the category of the "double-protagonist" schema at the outset. As I would argue, it is not until the second watching – if the film has successfully achieved its

[344] Peter Travers, "*The Prestige* (Review)," *Rolling Stone,* October 20, 2006.
[345] Fred Schruers, "The Magic Hour: Hugh Jackman and Christian Bale aim to keep you spellbound in Christopher Nolan's latest twisty tale, *The Prestige," Premiere Magazine,* November 2006, 69.

trick on the audience the first time – that Bale's character begins to compete with Jackman's for the "narrative dominance" that Greven stresses.[346]

This is true for the simple reason that on second watching the "narrative dominance" is arguably reversed as the markers of Borden's secret litter the plot with retroactive signification. Originally trivial, character digressions concerning Borden and his family life – a seeming distraction from Angier's quest – now take center stage for their recognized significance. "No one else can do my trick," Borden exclaims to Angier and Cutter in the triumvirate's first meeting. "[Now] I can do the trick I've been telling you about," he says in the scene immediately after being shot in the hand. "We should tell Fallon!" is his first immediate reaction to the news he is going to be a father. Countless others abound. Some even seemingly redeem Borden as a character; now the "I don't know" he gives to Angier at the funeral of Angier's wife Julia – in regard to a question about which knot he tied around her hands before she drowned in a water torture cell – is not so much callous as it is an honest attempt by the non-offending brother to apologize. These former notes of misdirection culminate in Borden's point blank confession to Root that when performing his trick he "used a double." So as to misdirect the audience (the first time) this utterance is cinematographically coded as a lie – Borden arches his eyebrows and overly pronounces his words so as to give the impression that he is merely concocting an outlandish story in order to subliminally drive Root to rebellion again Angier – but on repeat viewing, Borden's confession becomes one of the most aggressive rebukes to audiences who were still fooled at this point.

Most suggestive of all is the dialogue-motif "Not today," which throughout the film –

[346] Greven, 25. "Narrative dominance" is the phrase Greven uses to denote how the protagonists compete over things such as "sexual objects," and notably "audience sympathy."

in response to Sarah's repeated question about whether or not Borden loves her – narrationally encodes which Borden brother is which. Namely, this entails distinguishing the contented Borden brother (the one who is satisfied to leave Angier alone, who is happily married to Sarah, and who is re-united with his biological daughter in the end) from the troubled Borden brother (the one who tied the bad knot killing Julia, who is in love with Olivia, and who dies in the end because he cannot give up his obsession). Here, one might go so far as to charge that Borden's (or "the Bordens'") story goal and task actually shift depending on whether or not the viewer is privy to the secret; retroactively it seems clear that the goal for the brothers is simply to succeed and find happiness with their respective partners, and the story task is to keep their secret forever as their only means of achieving this goal.

This point can be made more apparent through a concise comparison of the sequences in which Jackman performs "with himself" in makeup, with those in which Bale does the same; while the former instance is restricted in narrative scope and played self-consciously, the latter is arguably the most essential part of the puzzle film's enigma, and thus is necessarily downplayed and subdued cinematographically. For example, Jackman appears in prosthetic makeup whenever he is actually portraying the separate character of Root. Yet this makeup is muted to allow for obvious recognition of the actor both because narratively it is necessary to the plot that Root be a veritable "look-a-like" for Angier, and also for the more meta-textual reason of allowing for the recognition of Jackman's virtuosity of performance in playing a dual role. Here, Root is largely played for laughs so Jackman can foil his own exceedingly dark performance in the lead role of Angier. However, the strategy also serves a formal purpose that amounts to cinematic misdirection: the goal

is to divert attention from the fact that Bale is also playing a dual role in heavy makeup as Fallon. In essence, the Root makeup and performance is a part of the virtual "pledge" of the film in this regard, the implicit, unconscious notion, that when a character is performing in facial makeup, he is always easily recognizable.

This becomes exceedingly obvious when both of the magicians alternatively don disguises in order to spy on and sabotage one another. This happens many times throughout the film, but on three occasions it is most important. First, in the opening of the film, in fact the first time Bale is seen on-screen, he wears a simple wig and pencil thin mustache on the night that Borden interrupts "The Real Transported Man" for the last time. These immediately set the stakes for the quick recognition of disguises in the film, as Borden quickly removes these nominal changes to his facial appearance in order to get past a stage hand who stops him. Later, when Angier dresses up for the purposes of shooting Borden during his bullet catch routine, he is wearing an excessively ridiculous disguise: long gray hair, tied in the back with a mustache and gangly goatee. These distinguishing features, that do little to actually obscure his face, guarantee the audience will notice him before Borden sees him (his back is turned), which is crucial for generating the necessary suspense of the scene. When Borden turns around to come face-to-face with the disguised Angier, his instantaneous look of recognition in reaction shot, proves again that the disguises are a losing endeavor. Finally, when Borden comes onstage during an Angier performance with the purpose of crushing a bird cage, he has chosen the same tired and ineffectual disguise, which takes Angier only a moment to notice particularly after spotting his injured hand. This repeated strategy is as much a narrative misdirection as it is a formal one, as it involves, ultimately, a suspension of disbelief concerning the fact that both Borden

and Angier instantly spot and recognize one another every single time they attempt these disguises, and yet the narrative assumption must be that after spending years in close proximity to Fallon – and even after kidnapping and interrogating him – Angier does *not* recognize he is Borden in makeup.

In comparison to these examples, Bale in the Fallon makeup is filmed and blocked completely differently than all of the other characters in the film, with the express purpose of making sure the audience rarely gets a good look at his face, and never for more than an instant. Accordingly, Fallon is routinely shot from behind, or with other characters between him and the camera, and often in movement. Bale rarely looks up to allow the light to catch his face, and almost never actually speaks while on camera. As the plot progresses, however, Nolan and Pfister become exceedingly reckless in guarding the Fallon secret. In a conspicuous scene in which Borden asks Fallon if he can take his daughter to the Zoo, a conversation that by conventional Hollywood standards should be presented in a shot-reverse-shot pattern, is instead given from just one perspective. Shot over-the-shoulder of Fallon, Borden awkwardly stands-out in a relatively long take that may indeed force the typical filmgoer to contemplate why the editor withholds a reverse-shot on Fallon's face. Finally, in the last scene of Fallon visiting Borden in prison, the sequence concludes with perhaps the most suggestive visual cipher yet: after Borden bounces a red ball through the prison bars and over to Fallon – something he literally has only ever done to "himself" in his performance of "The Transported Man" – Fallon appears frontally in close-up for the first time, and with teary eyes utters a soft "goodbye."

Returning to the overarching textual allegory, I maintain that any failure on the part of Jackman's character to keep the audience's allegiance is linked to the sheer

outlandishness of his solution to the story problem: the solution that is "*deus ex machina*" or that which is not itself impressive with regard to Angier's passive role in its creation, and its quite literally unnatural place in the story world. Despite the Nolans' conjecture that the supernatural solution to Angier's problem is formally teased early on – indeed the multiplicity of magician hats in the very opening shot of the film serenely foreground this possibility – they cannot change the narrative status of an action that seems coincidental within the plot and not reflective of the prestidigitorial talents of Angier as a magician. Indeed, as metaphors of deception, the hats and cats within the *mise-en-scène* seem to point toward a supernatural copy machine so aggressively, that taken in comparison to the various other bits of "misdirection" in the film's rule book, they may even be mistaken for red herrings. Nevertheless, in the third act of the film, Angier's secret is officially revealed to be that he purchased a biological teleporter with defects. Thus, the *deus ex machina* ending as allegory is two-fold. First, this is because Angier's solution is not only less "natural" than Borden's, it is also formally less naturalized: that is to say, that the puzzle film's plot arguably buries within itself far fewer orthogonal hints of Angier's solution to be guffawed at in retrospect than it does Borden's. Second, this is because of the excessive way that the allegory is literalized in the narrative, with Nikola Tesla (and his supernatural device) figuring as the primordial "God in the machine" that rescues Angier from an insurmountable problem.

Collaboration versus *Auteurism*

The notion of receiving and not receiving credit is often indispensable to the cinematic allegory concerning filmmaking processes: who does and does not get credit for participating in the construction of narrative illusionism. Notably, the first time in the film

that Angier performs "The New Transported Man," achieved by way of a switch with Root (his double taking his place on stage), he iconically takes a dramatic bow in back-lit silhouette standing just *beneath* the stage as uproarious applause filters through the wood planks that separate him from his audience in swathes of noise and patches of light. As this sequence dramatically highlights, the problem for Angier is that, with this method, he cannot ever be the man in "the prestige." He will never, in his mind, reap the credit for the illusion, and arguably this is what fuels his pursuit of the Tesla method at any cost.

Importantly, by comparison, at the earliest chronological point in the diegesis, things work most smoothly for both Borden and Angier when they unselfishly collaborate. This includes not only with each other, but also the myriad other assistants and *ingenieurs* who are shown to all work together to accomplish the illusions. Notably, it is Julia who specializes in the water torture escape, at the point when both Borden and Angier are merely assistant stage hands. Indeed, the sequence in which Julia dies – perhaps the major inciting incident in the structure of the screenplay – is specifically presented as a breakdown in communication, and thus the collaborative process, based on the would-be magician's egos. Officially, this is a performance of Milton the Magician (Ricky Jay). Yet, ironically, Jay, as a real magician whose consultation on the film included actually teaching some of the other actors how to perform sleight-of-hand illusions,[347] is presented in the film's narrative as among the weakest of old-timer magicians: he certainly is not the one who will get in the tank to perform the escape. In the tragic sequence, he is shown simply walking back and forth around the water tank and evocatively waving his hands, while a litany of other personnel are needed to perform the difficult portions of the trick: Angier

[347] Ricky Jay. "Like Magic" Presentation, attended by author.

and Borden tie specialty knots around Julia's legs and arms respectively, Julia performs the escape via a trick lock, and Cutter, as the *ingenieur* keeps time off-stage, prepared to intervene with an ax should anything go wrong.

As the breakdown in communication takes place onstage during the performance, the tragic accident is connoted not through dialogue or voice-over narration, but via a series of knowing glances among the associates. First, a close-up of Julia's hands as Borden ties the rope is followed by a fast shot-reverse shot pattern on the two as they lock eyes; he has evidently chosen to tie a Langford double knot despite Cutter's warning not to. Julia's glaring expression in reverse-shot signals her unease, but also her unwillingness to break character in the middle of the trick. Milton's fast double clap after hooking Julia's wrists to a hoist, draws further reference to additional invisible labor – backstage technicians – necessary to the trick, as they raise Julia, then drop her into the tank and lower a curtain around the device. When Julia fails to escape in the allotted time, Milton seems completely unprepared and uncertain what to do; in medium close-up he glances with raised eyebrows backstage at Cutter and shrugs.[348] Finally, Cutter is utterly unable to break the glass of the tank, taking twelve swings of his ax, while all the others look on in suspense (like the audience) unable to do anything as Julia drowns.

The ultimate point that seems undeniable, is that these illusions take many different personnel working together to achieve, and cannot or should not be attributed to just the starring magicians themselves. Angier, for his part eventually becomes so obsessed with

[348] Milton here seems to have had slightly more agency in an unpublished revision of the script dated January 10, 2006, in which he is the one who "raises the curtain around the tank, then circles it, working his 'magic,'" and then when the trick goes awry he "rips the curtain down." Christopher Nolan and Jonathan Nolan, *The Prestige*, (unpublished screenplay), White Revision, November 3, 2005, Blue Revision, November 30, 2005, Yellow Revision, January 10, 2006, Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

guarding the aura of his “Real Transported Man” that he absolutely refuses to collaborate with anyone including Cutter. This notion by which Angier seemingly subscribes to the singular artist's virtuosity of performance (needing no help from others) is prefigured by his extreme measures (hiring elderly blind stagehands and even killing his prestiges every night under the stage) that here result in doom for both magicians. Borden is able to infiltrate the backstage area specifically because of the blindness of the workers and Cutter's absence, an action that leads to the breakdown of Angier's trick and the discovery of his “death,” while Borden goes on trial for murder likewise because of the lack of witnesses.

In contrast, a corollary develops between the dues-paying that both Borden and Angier endure – working alternatively as stage hands and scouts for other magicians in earlier portions of the story – and the navigation of below-the-line workers to above-the-line stars via networking. Yet, in consideration of Greven's classification of the masculine crisis of the film, a thorough analysis reveals that this notion has both gendered and class implications in *The Prestige.* First, the female performers are always forced into the position of magician's assistant with no discernible route to advancement. Even Julia, at the earliest stage in the film when she performs the water torture escape is seemingly just an assistant to Milton. More explicitly, Olivia figures as the object of desire for the men and at times a tool that they seek to use against each other.

Most egregiously, Angier sends Olivia to ingratiate herself to Borden by whatever means necessary so as to infiltrate his act. When she begins an affair with Borden, as a result, she is similarly mistreated by him as well; the narrative conceit here is that only one of the Borden brothers ever loved her, a fact with which she is left painfully unacquainted

for her entire part in the story. Further, the film paints Olivia as a virtual amalgam of both the men: she has better prestidigitorial instincts than Angier (she's the first one to spot Borden's disfigured fingers under the gloves he wears), but is also more charismatic than Borden, and can be seen dressing up and improving his act in the way it is sold to the audience later in the film. Combining these traits, the distinct impression is that Olivia might have become a greater magician than either of them, had she had the opportunity to do so.

The difference in the men's social classes is also an important stressed element toward this end. Increasingly less subtle clues to Angier's wealthy and noble status pervade the narrative: Julia suggests that Angier is not his real name, and he confidently tells Tesla that money is no object for him. By contrast, Borden and Sarah are early on in the film shown in desperate straits: they “can't afford a bloody doctor” and argue about whether or not to buy a house. Here, this formally becomes an aurally stressed distinction as well, with Bale inflecting a cockney English accent – he is natively Welsh – to connote a poor urban upbringing. Jackman, an Australian, actually switches accents from American to English at the conclusion of the film when his identity as “Lord Caldlow” is ultimately revealed. Thus, the ability of both to navigate the magic world is at least as contingent on their statuses as it is on what talent they possess. Borden's solution, of course, is achieved by the happenstance of his birth: it is because he is actually identical twin brothers that the other magicians cannot do his trick. While, ultimately, Angier's solution is only possible because of his deep pockets.

It is worth noting that the central puzzle of the film involves an ode to the collaborative process of film production. The conviction that Borden has been performing

his trick without a double – that is, by himself – is proven *false*. Indeed, the original "Transported Man" absolutely requires the brothers to work together. Angier's blanket assumption that the same man comes out of the box in the end – and his steadfast refusal to contemplate the contrary opinion – is both essential to convincing the audience of this fact, and it also reveals his ideological perspective on the novelty of the singularly talented artist. Taking this metaphor further, "The Transported Man" in all its iterations, by definition, is a trick that turns on the illusion of one man doing that which it actually takes at least two men to do: an emblem for any necessarily collaborative media form, and a challenge to the notions of individual authorship.

How Much Reflexivity is Too Much Reflexivity?

Despite being densely self-reflexive *within* the texts of his films, Christopher Nolan elsewhere seems to suggest that after-the-fact reflection on filmmaking practice can, sometimes, in-of-itself damage the work to be done by the cinema purist. Ostensibly, this is an appeal to the adage that the filmmaker should not have to explain his or her film as this indicates that the film has failed to speak for itself. Interestingly, this notion can sometimes even take the form of what one might call anti-reflexivity in the paratext.[349] Jonathan Nolan alludes to this phenomenon, when asked to discuss details concerning deleted scenes from the original script for *Memento*. His response is a simple "no," followed by the following explanation:

> There is a thing with Chris and myself too... It seems to be in vogue now, especially with DVDs and new technology, to sort of to pile all of the materials from the film

[349] This is somewhat analogous to the publicity for *Adaptation,* which also demonstrates a sort of anti-reflexivity. In regard to special effects, this concerns the relative disinterest in their processes across various publications, arguably owing to the need to stress the virtuosity of the performers. This also crucially regards the filmmakers' refusal to discuss the fictional natures of some of the actual people depicted.

> into the DVD and make them all available to the audience, and people love that, […] it seems like now, there's a little too much of that, where I think Chris's vision of how a film should exist is pretty much you know, once you're done with it, you put it together, you get it out there, and that's kind of it.[350]

While ostensibly a nod to version control at the artistic level, in essence, this also suggests Nolan's defensive position that talking too much about the behind-the-scenes of a production will negatively impact the effectual aura of the film that should be maintained.

This is perhaps even more obvious in publicity materials for a puzzle film, which must additionally protect the secret twist of its narrative. Here, analysis of collected publicity stills on the special features page of the DVD release are critical to this point about the guarding of illusions. Namely, this involves the dissemination of a plethora of images of Jackman in various levels of makeup according to his various disguises. Yet, there are no images of Bale in disguise, even in sections such as "Costumes and Sets" and "Behind the Scenes," for the implicit reason that this secret must be maintained. However, the result is that the prosthetic makeup artists on the production do not openly receive credit for the Fallon makeup. A similar phenomenon occurs in the promotional documentary *The Director's Notebook,* when behind-the-scenes footage at times reveals Bale playing a scene with Fallon, both pictured beside Pfister's camera. Here, another implicit sleight-of-hand is at play with the suggestion that Borden and Fallon must be portrayed by two separate actors to figure in publicity material in this way. However, unlike the explicitly misleading publicity for *Adaptation* in presenting digitally doctored images as legitimate pictures from the film set, the provenance of *The Prestige* images is explainable in the context of a double taking on the costume of Fallon when he maintains his back to the camera.[351]

---

[350] Jonathan Nolan, quoted in Goldsmith, *Creative Screenwriting Magazine* podcast.

[351] This also leads to contemplation of one of the most intriguing – if coincidental – ironies about a

An attempted cinematic allegory likewise comes through phenomenally even more intensely through the paratextual materials for *The Prestige* than its textual structure. Namely, the DVD home video release stands riddled with visual metaphors of proto-cinematic optical illusions that are usually referenced by scholars in connecting nineteenth century illusionism to contemporary film magic. First among these is a main screen that features a diagrammed sketch of a crude thaumatrope device that is animated alongside the menu. Representing the nineteenth century optical toy that plays on the principle of 'persistence of vision,' this animated emblem depicts a piece of paper spinning around a threaded string. On one side of the paper is the image of a bird, on the other, the image of an empty cage. As the toy spins, the human eye misapprehends the nature of the object once it reaches a critical speed: the imprint of either side of the paper remains on the retina for a fraction of a second after it has disappeared (the persistence of vision), and therefore often it appears that the bird is *inside* the cage. This is by nature a reflexive illusion because it is necessarily proven false as soon as the toy stops spinning.

On one hand, the menu screen is especially ludic in its referentiality concerning *The Prestige*: the viewer is free to change the image on the thaumatrope through a selection of clickable choices at the bottom of the screen that all allude to important illusions from the film narrative. The thaumatrope can thus be made to depict alternatively a hand and revolver, a woman and a water tank, and a pot and plant that grows out of it. Importantly, these illusions are also symbolic in how they depict the narrative events from the film in ways technically incompatible with the spinning device: the gun and hand clearly represent

---

comparison between Jonze's film and Nolan's: *Adaptation* is written by Charlie Kaufman alone, but the screenplay and publicity for his film explicitly pretends there is a brother. On the other hand, *The Prestige* is written by the two Nolan brothers, who spend a majority of the screenplay and publicity for the film, pretending that it does not depict two brothers.

Borden's "bullet catch" that goes awry and costs him two fingers. Of course, when the illusion is performed correctly, no bullet ever travels out of the gun, and thus the spinning thaumatrope portrays this "illusion" correctly. Yet, a cheat to the mechanics of the device takes place on the screen when, at a certain point a bullet indeed can be seen slowly traveling across the paper from gun *into* the hand. Second, the woman and water tank clearly allude to Julia's performance of the water torture escape in one of the inciting incidents of the film. The water torture device obviously likewise does not hinge on persistence of vision: here the woman alternatively escapes from and is trapped inside the chamber as the device speeds up and slows down. Yet, as with the bullet catch, the screen cheats the trick by the appearance of blue water that slowly fills up the tank and thus seems to drown the woman. Finally, the pot and plant, though not depicting a trick from the film, likely allude to the "orange tree" illusion made infamous by various nineteenth century stage prestidigitators, and still used by *The Prestige's* magic consultant Ricky Jay – who as an actor also appears in the film as Milton the Magician – for the finale of his magic exhibition.[352]

Though nominally then a "magic trick," the thaumatrope device does not itself appear in *The Prestige,* and none of the diegetic magician's tricks depend on the same ocular principle in the actuality of how they work in the story. However, what this does draw attention to is the work of the cinematic apparatus, which indeed does cohere – in its filmed and analogically projected form – only via this persistence of vision phenomenon.

[352] The illusion consists of Jay making an orange tree appear to grow on command, and usually includes a final twist in which breaking open one of the newly grown oranges (to verify that it is real) Jay pulls an audience member's ring out of the orange that supposedly never left the sight of the audience from the moment he pulled it from the tree. Thus, this is a sleight-of-hand trick; Jay's specialty. He performed this trick to close the show at the "Like Magic" Presentation, attended by author.

This idea is even more reflexively foregrounded on the DVD menu screen, as the digital representation of the thaumatrope as a proto-cinematic device makes the illusion double: the notion that the viewer is even seeing an actual spinning object is also completely deceptive in the digitally reproduced media. And this likewise animates in a literal way, the difference between film and video.

Also featured on the DVD of *The Prestige*, perhaps even more suggestively, is the image of a spinning zoetrope in the center of the screen that accesses "The Art of *The Prestige*" special features of the disc. Emblematic of the early cinema for reasons not the least of which include Francis Ford Coppola's decision to name his production company after the device, the zoetrope also functions in a proto-cinematic way to produce the illusion of movement before a spectator gazing through slits in a spinning drum. On the reverse interior side of the drum, a series of still images are displayed in rapid succession (due to the spinning of the drum) and interrupted at precise intervals (via the opaque surface area between open slits) so as to give the illusion of movement. This is again a persistence of vision trick as the "intervals" are crucial to rest the eyes, which nevertheless tend to depreciate the blank space between images in the same way an efficient frame-rate will reduce the so-called "flicker effect" of projected films.

Again, thus, this visual allusion to the tricks in the film functions in the same operative way that traditional cinema does in creating its most basic illusion: objects (falsely) appear to be in motion. With this, Nolan seems to have at least partially abandoned the metaphorical "allegories of film" that seem so explicit in *Memento,* and replaces these with structural "allegories of the cinema," an important distinction here in comparing David James's and Garret Stewart's respective scholarly categories of allegorical reflexivity. The

foregrounding of a developing Polaroid may draw attention to the process of photochemical image-acquisition (an allegory for film), but by comparison, allegories of cinema are those that draw attention to the institutional practice of "writing with movement" and the varied forms of illusionism that the cinematic apparatus thereby actualizes. And this is the type of allegorical reflexivity captured here by Nolan, or perhaps, the uncredited producers and designers of the DVD features themselves.

Of course, the ocular illusions these technologies produce are also then in essence camera tricks, though clearly not in the mold that stage magicians mean when they denote the use of editing to disrupt the spatio-temporal integrity of the pro-filmic event as the essential infraction. Here, Jay and Weber's continued analogy between ancient optical illusions and modern filmmaking techniques – that the secret of the illusionism must be guarded for the audience's own sake – suffers a unique challenge: does it continue to hold up in a New New Hollywood that increasingly subsists on digital technologies of illusion? Delving further into the paratext, one can see that almost nowhere, beyond trade-specific industry publications, does the actuality of what the individual film professionals do on-set come to the fore.

For instance, DVD commentaries and behind-the-scenes documentaries might routinely feature surface discussions of idiosyncratic lighting or staging effects, but only in the pages of *American Cinematographer* can the actual drudgery of painstakingly selecting lenses – notably paragraphs from DP Wally Pfister on the difference between a Kodak 5218 and 5205 – be discussed in any detail whatsoever.[353] A similar (and just as alarming) erasure of industrial labor takes place when behind-the-scenes materials on Hollywood

[353] Holben, 67.

films now frequently photograph digital compositing processes and CGI in mid-engineered states, but never feature actual discussion of the computer code that is laboriously programmed by the engineers who cause these illusions to take shape. Many DVD savvy consumers might understand in theory how green-screen, for example, works, by way of interpreting its visual illusionistic result, but might be just as hard-pressed to explain how that result is achieved at the technological level.

"Man's reach exceeds his imagination," claims Angier in the prestige of his "*Real* Transported Man." If nothing else, this contains the veiled, but literal confession that Angier does not even understand how the machine works, but is still able to use it because he knows (or at least he thinks he knows) its *effect*. This is analogous to an increasingly ubiquitous condition in the Hollywood film industry by which often the supposed "creative" professionals must rely on the labor of entire special effects crews whose designs might be completely foreign to a director or screenwriter. And yet, counter-intuitively, Angier's ignorance also leads to *The Prestige's* self-conscious appeal to a type of virtuosity of suffering – discussed previously in Chapters One and Two – whenever he demonstrates his willingness to risk his life every night in order to achieve the illusion.[354] In the midst of Borden and Angier's closing argument about sacrifice, Borden prefigures the dedication of his own life-long con as the ultimate act of sacrifice, but Angier interjects "It took courage climbing into that machine every night, not knowing if I'd be the man in the box... or in the prestige." This is a claim he suggests is worthy of artistic respect, simply for the sheer

[354] It is worth noting here that logically speaking, the original Angier must be dead long before the climax of the film. It is revealed that on the first successful demonstration of the device, the Angier "in the box" shoots and kills the Angier in the prestige, while all subsequent performances of the trick end with the Angier "in the box" being the one who dies. Thus, it is tangential to the point whether the machine actually transports him or simply creates a copy, as the original Angier would have been killed off in any event long before Borden becomes involved at all.

amount of sacrifice it entails. But here, they are arguing at cross-purposes: as can be deduced, Borden's idea of sacrifice is contingent on 'suffering for the craft,' which includes both the destruction of his family, and by definition, his inability to ever get credit for the brilliance of his method. On the other hand, Angier's position is one of pure dedication to the audience, and his defense of this point in his final monologue taps into the film's meta-commentary on prestidigitation:

> You never understood why we did this. The audience *knows* the truth: the world is simple, miserable, solid all the way through. But if you could fool them, even for a second, then you could make them wonder. Then you got to see something very special. You really don't know do you? It was the look on their faces.

An essential paradox here envelops the film's reflexive appeal: the willingness of Angier and Borden to do what is necessary to achieve their illusions becomes both their best and worst attributes as creators of magic. The prestidigitorial product of their battles may be deceptive, illusory, and at times destructive, but the film does not argue that it is not necessary. For Nolan, the illusion is indeed necessary to the art form of cinema. The goal, rather, is to point a critical finger at the audience's undiscerning eye. The notion ultimately holds that audiences may be peripherally enthralled by the contemplation of how these illusions are achieved, but may also be utterly disappointed to find out. The unusual second-person shift in Cutter's closing narration – the last words of the film – aptly re-foregrounds this ongoing conjecture concerning the virtuosity of illusionism that is protected *for* the audience and *by* the audience: “Now you're looking for the secret. But you won't find it because, of course, you're not really looking. You don't really want to work it out. You want to be fooled.”

Allegories of Illusion at Center Stage

The most immediately comparable film to *The Prestige* in both subject matter and time of release is Neil Burger's *The Illusionist* (2006). Released in almost direct competition with Nolan's film,[355] *The Illusionist* also depicts a time just before the coming of the cinema, 1880s Austria-Hungary, and frames its narrative with a famous magician, "Eisenheim the Illusionist" (Edward Norton), performing of his greatest illusion. In this case, the film opens and closes with Eisenheim's performance of a particularly proto-cinematic illusion. Formally, referencing the silent cinema, the credits – which are presented over sepia-toned black & white iris-framed footage of Victorian streets – give way to Eisenheim on a bare stage (also edited with an iris-in transition). After surveying the audience Burger reveals a ghostly apparition forming beside the seated Eisenheim, before he is arrested for apparent necromancy. As is revealed, when the plot catches up to this point in the climax of the film, Eisenheim has been bringing the supposedly dead Grand Duchess Sophie (Jessica Biel), back to life onstage so that as a ghost she can accuse the Crown Prince of Austria (Rufus Sewell) of her murder.

The status of this illusion is unclear as it is never explained in the film how Eisenheim achieves it. Indeed, the proto-cinematic way in which this could hypothetically be achieved circa 1880 – such as with the Pepper's Ghost Apparatus – would have easily been detectible to the police who rush the stage and its surrounding and backstage areas to arrest Eisenheim. Yet, the police can detect nothing, and here the film seems to cheat a bit in the positing of either a method so sophisticated that it has no detectable mechanics or

[355] *The Illusionist* opened wide in the United States on September 1, 2006, less than two months prior to *The Prestige.* "*The Illusionist,*" The Internet Movie Database, last modified October 9, 2014, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0443543/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1.

hardware whatsoever, or that it is indeed completely supernatural. This is a potential violation of the ethics presented in *The Prestige* that posit that "the audience knows the truth, the world is simple" and that even Tesla's machine, as elusive and supernatural as it appears, would be hypothetically susceptible to mechanical inspection of how it operates as a scientific apparatus. Instead, *The Illusionist* seems to promote the antithesis of the prestidigitatorial premise by suggesting that the method is so exceedingly complicated that no one can figure out how it works no matter what happens.

Importantly, here Burger's film offers up illusions and illusionism as a B plot device; that is, almost completely secondary to the primary narrative focus on Eisenheim and Sophie's star-crossed love affair. Eisenheim's skills of deception are evidently used to frame the Crown Prince for the murder in another interesting analogue to Nolan's film. Thus, owed to the status of the film as a romance, Eisenheim's motivation for convincing people that the illusion is real is wrapped up in the need for he and Sophie to protect themselves from the persecutions of the Crown Prince (as well as to maintain the logical legibility of their charge of murder; if she is still alive, he cannot have killed her). Here, the metaphor of cinematic reflexivity collapses in a final montage that reveals in succession much of the deception, but posits many of these as simple plot points (rather than of structural clues embedded into the film's form): Sophie put a drug in the Crown Prince's drink, Eisenheim put fake blood on his sword, they both planted evidence against him, and so on. The final reveal also does not reveal the necromancy illusion, and thereby allows for a mitigated mystification to continue just like the film is allowed to end, with the reunification of the lovers, on an unambiguously happy note of romantic coupling triumphing over all adversity.

In comparison, Woody Allen's *Scoop* (2006), from the same year, also plays upon the

notion of intermixing stage magic and actual spiritualism. Here, the casting of Allen himself in the role of the magician Sid Waterman "The Great Splendini," is perhaps another Pasolini-esque gesture toward the free-indirect point-of-view, by which the film's director and the stage magician occupy the very same role in elucidating deceptive practices within the narrative. However, the majority of the film figures as a romantic mystery, whereby a journalism student (Scarlett Johansson) falls in love with the suspected killer (Hugh Jackman) – predating their later collaboration on *The Prestige* by several months – that she is investigating. Here, the magic, in the form of both the sleight-of-hand of Splendini, but also the supernatural emergence of a deceased reporter (Ian McShane) from Splendini's "Dematerializer," all seem secondary.

Pen Denshom's *Houdini* (1998) also arguably operates in the vein of combining a presentation of prestidigitation with spiritualism. The entire film – nominally a biopic – is framed by the death of Harry Houdini (Johnathon Schaech) and his subsequent return in spirit form during a séance held by his wife Bess (Stacey Edwards). Thus, *Houdini* goes even further in its treatment of supernatural elements as legitimate explanations: in essence, as with Angier's solution in *The Prestige*, the illusion is no illusion at all, and the film goes beyond Nolan's in casting its supernatural elements as containing no basis in science (as *The Prestige* seeks to do with the supposed great lost technological invention of Nikola Tesla). This essentially clouds the film's status as a biopic, especially when presenting elements from Houdini's life that prefigured his own skeptical mistrust of spiritualists: the death of his mother, which leads him on a skeptic's crusade to contact her again or expose any charlatans that he finds in his wake, and his documented interactions with noted spiritualist Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In essence, the film takes liberties in a potentially

problematic way when it presents supernatural occurrences as a part of the life of a noted historical skeptic.

As a more veiled subtext on illusion versus reality, Tim Burton's *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), based on the Washington Irving thriller, nevertheless likewise foregrounds a persistence of vision allegory that can be read in relation to this discussion of movie magic and reflexivity. Early in the film, Inspector Ichabod Crane (Johnny Depp) conspicuously demonstrates the effect of a thaumatrope illusion for one of the residents of Sleepy Hollow (Christina Ricci), who is reportedly being traumatized by a supernatural villain. Here, this seems to denote Crane's skepticism, and demonstrated penchant – via careful forensic investigation – for seeking out logically consistent and reasonably grounded theories of crimes: the prescribed notion that not everything is in reality as it may seem. It additionally draws reference to the cinematic illusion. Yet, as with the ghosts in *Houdini,* the "Headless Horseman" that Crane is brought in to investigate turns out to be demonstrably supernatural, and Crane must struggle to understand and defeat this cursed enemy. An additional parallel to the former film comes forth here, in the film's contemplation of a detective who, dedicated to the methods of ratiocination and rational thought, must come to believe in unexplainable things, as Conan Doyle, creator of the great gentleman-sleuth Sherlock Holmes, notoriously did.

Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang, as a Hollywood-on-Hollywood detective story, also interestingly begins its self-referential tale with the explicit invocation of diegetic magic tricks. Harry, it seems, wanted to be a magician as a child, and opens the film (in a flashback) attempting in his birthday party role as the "The Amazing Harold" to saw in half his future love interest Harmony (Michelle Monaghan) with a chain saw. When Harmony begins screaming in

reaction to the saw actually cutting her, several of the children's parents break-up the illusion. Pulling apart the apparatus, the adults find Harmony's legs safely tucked away with her proud smiling response "I'm going to be an actress." And here the film makes an explicit connection between stage illusions and the film world that Harmony subsequently tries to navigate. For his part, Harry also navigates several of these planes from child magician, to thief, to Hollywood actor, to private detective, always with a hyper-sensitivity to the conventions of storytelling. Particularly this evolves in regard to the forces of misdirection at play in works of detective fiction, such as the film of which Harry, as a character in that film, is self-aware.

Nolan's own *Inception* (2010) continues this trend in creating ever more formally complex metadiscourse on the construction of illusion and story worlds. In the film, a team of "extractors" – professional thieves who are paid to enter the dreams of their targets, by means of a technological apparatus, in order to discover and steal the targets' secrets – attempt to reverse this process by planting a new idea into the mind of the target instead. This, of course, contains a nominal ode to the processes of media propaganda. But where some have understood *Inception* as an intensely reflexive film on the basis of its foregrounding of how character, story, and setting construct meaning in the spectator's mind, the film actually goes much beyond this to the point of reflexivity *of* reflexivity. In a notable scene an argument between the two lead extractors Cobb (Leonardo Dicaprio) and Arthur (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) transpires around whether or not the team will still be able to plant their subversive notion in the target's head, even if they alert the target to the illusory process that is taking place. Cobb suggests that they can more successfully and efficiently accomplish their mission if they "reveal" the methods of inception to their target

by informing him that he is dreaming, a methodology that Arthur refers to as “dangerous” specifically because of the way it demystifies the illusion they are attempting to perpetrate. Yet, the team does indeed follow this path, and ultimately succeeds by enlisting the target (Cillian Murphy) to become complicit in his own indoctrination. Thus, *Inception* at its heart actually contains a self-reflexive nod to the very process by which a discourse on reflexivity is created and functions.

All this draws a final comparison to Priest's own treatment of the supernatural explanation for mystifying effects. In a sub-plot absent from the film, Priest's Borden initially becomes enraged by the fact that Angier has been operating as a spiritualist. This in fact leads to the inciting incident of the book, which greatly differs from the scene of Julia's drowning as written by the Nolans for the film. In the novel, Borden interferes with Angier's performance of a séance by exposing him as a fake in front of the people who were paying for his spiritual guidance, thus ruining his career. Up to this point in the book, Angier has not been a stage prestidigitator at all, but rather in Borden's eyes, a fraudulent con man. Thus, the novel, more so than the film, acts out the phenomenon referenced by Cook as paradigmatic of the nineteenth century magic's turn to the modern: the discursive battle between sleight-of-hand entertainment, presented as such, and tricks genuinely presented as supernatural in nature. In the revelation of Angier's solution to the “Real Transported Man,” Priest thus gives a veritable comeuppance to Borden (and his descendents) for not believing in something that he could not understand.

However, his puts the Nolans' adaptation of *The Prestige* into the rationalist's commandment that no explanation at all is often preferable to an unreasonable or unsatisfactory one. Indeed, here, Borden's solution to the illusory problem is not only the

natural one, but also the simple one, and thus the old- fashioned one. And when taken in explicit comparison to the supernatural one performed by Angier, it is also the only *real* one. That is to say, Borden's trick is the only version that actually is a trick that legitimately involves – as claimed – practical prestidigitation. Angier's blind embrace of new technologies, on the other hand, transforms the very ontology of his performance just as Nolan has argued the embrace of some new technologies and narrational practices by filmmakers in the twenty-first century has transformed the state of the cinematic apparatus. Throughout this puzzle film, Nolan has structurally dared the audience to recognize the difference between these two tricks just as he has pushed the film industry to recognize the crucial effectual distinctions among diverging methods of movie-making in the New New Hollywood. It is fitting that *The Prestige* concludes then, just as it begins, with its direct indictment of the audience. If "Are you watching closely?" has been the rhetorical query, then the implicit answer is, for the filmmakers at least, a resounding "no."

CONCLUSION

> One of the great pleasures of being a cameraman was that the people – the suits and the producers – well, they all think they can act, they all think they can write, they all think they can direct, but they knew they didn't know how to shoot. So if they really got after you, you could say "Here. Here's the meter. You do it!" And that would shut them up. But now... they're beginning to think they can shoot. It's not like it used to be.
>
> – Michael Chapman, A.S.C.

> I don't want to trade my oil paints for a set of crayons.
>
> – Wally Pfister, A.S.C.[356]

The New New Hollywood has been encapsulated by profound organizational and aesthetic concerns, and all of the filmmakers discussed in the preceding chapters have attempted to address these concerns in their own way. For literalists such as Jonze (via Kaufman) and Attenborough (with his team of screenwriters), the need to meta-commentate on film history and the current state of the industry has been significant enough to write these discussions directly into their films. Yet *Chaplin* and *Adaptation,* though both literally reflexive films by mode of signification, take their meta-critiques down largely different generic paths. For Attenborough, this entails venturing into the realm of the biopic – as he has done throughout his career. Exploring this evolving form, it becomes clear that the biographical film is relatively transhistorical in terms of its ability to shed light on industrial paradigms; despite some nominal thematic shifts in the choice of authors depicted and what they seem (by negation) to represent, the biopic, as Custen has pointed out, has never been a radical form and rather routinely serves as the best mode through

[356] Both quoted in the documentary film *Side by Side,* directed by Christopher Kenneally (Company Films 2012), Netflix streaming video (accessed March 12, 2014).

which Hollywood foremost crafts mythic histories. *Chaplin's* narrative-based industrial critique here operates symbolically and indirectly: one must contemplate the ways in which Chaplin is different (that is, greater) than contemporary filmmakers and why. Jonze and Kaufman's *Adaptation,* by comparison as a *film-à-clef*, or heavily fictionalized contemporary "true story," manages an anecdotal yet direct interrogation of contemporaneous industrial paradigms. However, both films demonstrate the limits of industrial reflexivity when married to the literal mode: *Chaplin* because it is *literally* about a previous period in Hollywood history, and *Adaptation* because it *literally* misrepresents the creative personnel involved in the filmmaking process.

Thus, what I have proposed is that the often elusive metaphorical mode of reflexivity is equally worthy of discussion in this vein. Without sustained analysis, few might even interpret the formal maneuvers of *Dracula* and *The English Patient* as reflexivity at all. Yet, where the goal of *industrial* reflexivity must logically be to elucidate some element or another of filmic practice that is usually mystified by the film industry, then what my analysis suggests is that conventional definitions must be realigned to include these more formal or structural metaphors. Indeed, "foregrounding" is often considered a reflexive act when a film camera is pictured onscreen; for Stam this can include distancing effects as basic as the jump cut, and James, for his part, adds structuralist effects such as a highlighted flicker or perforated film edge. To this, it is no great leap to recognize the visually excessive references to early cinema in Coppola's nostalgic remake, or the densely interstitial sound design (the aural element of cinema being routinely overlooked) of Minghella's adaptation.

Further, the siphoning of reflexivity into structural metaphors does not necessarily make this mode less direct: the Nolan brothers' prologue and epilogue to *The Prestige* may

route its reflexivity through the allegorical layer of signification, but it remains – in a near Brechtian sense – as "direct" an appeal to the audience to consider narrative conventions as any that I have explored. Consider the syntactic difference between narrational strategies in *Adaptation* (always first person singular – "*I'm* ouroboros," "*I've* written myself into *my* screenplay,") and *The Prestige* (opening and closing in second person – "Are *you* watching closely?" "*You* want to be fooled."). The point is especially emphasized when literal diegetic references are superseded by structural allusions to the cinema; the film cinematographically *illustrates* a contemporaneous convention that is to be critiqued rather than simply proposing a literal discussion *about* it. Here, even as ostensibly literal texts, Jonze's film and Attenborough's film both also operate in this manner. The proverbial 'show don't tell' principle is what transforms *Adaptation* from a story concerning a screenwriter's troubles into a motion picture that actually enacts a self-critical dialectic on the ethics involved in its own creation, and *Chaplin* from a tale about the past into a demonstration of past techniques.

In this light, it becomes almost axiomatic to suggest that formally self-reflexive films can only respond to current industrial precepts that are acting upon them in one way or another. Therefore, the importance of metadiscursive filmmaking in the New New Hollywood lies with *what* these films particularly reveal about the film industry of which they are a part. In regarding these case studies as symptomatic texts, several important revelations come forth. First, the films struggle with the (often nostalgic) notion of authorship. Through meta-textual mourning for the loss of the artisanal filmmaker, the New American *auteur*-intellectual, the creatively autonomous screenwriter, respectively, they indicate that theirs is a period of Hollywood in which the category of filmic author has been

destabilized by the various technological and infrastructural changes to the business that they formally encode into their films. In the New New Hollywood this often entailed the *perception* of temporary power shifts toward digitized below-the-line craftspeople: the computer engineer who degrades the "art" of the director's vision, the sound and picture editor who changes the story, or the digital colorist who wrests the "look" of a film from the control of the cinematographer.[357]

A second, related, and common concern among the audio-visual metadiscourses of these films is a rebuke to contemporaneous organizational regularity. One of the major industry-shaping changes to the Hollywood of the 1990s was a definitional shift in the terms "independent" (low budgeted, produced largely for a limited domestic audience, and no longer indicative of financial independence from major studios) versus "blockbuster" ("ultra-high-budget," instantly saturation-booked for a shorter period of time, and marketed primarily to overseas audiences). Four out of the five case studies that I have examined formally and paratextually defy both of these categorical designations. Only *Adaptation* – in terms of budget, marketing, critical press, and gross – fits the prototypical mold of a New New Hollywood independent film. What should be stressed here is that the industrial perception concerning who a film is made for and how much it costs, is almost directly correlated to how excessive its reflexivity can be. The more "independent" a film was, the more literally it could be about movie making. There is an obvious taste imperative here: independents were more likely, according to industry standards, to play mostly for

[357] In this, the status of the cinematographer has arguably borne the brunt of the fallout from digitization's realignment of authorship from both below and above-the-line, with directors as diverse as George Lucas, David, Fincher, and Robert Rodríguez commenting publicly (and apparently proudly) that one of the chief advantages of HD digital cameras and monitors is that they no longer have to trust their DPs. Quoted in *Side by Side*.

domestic aesthetes who could be presumed to appreciate more complex narrative structure and themes. Conversely, *Dracula, The English Patient,* and *The Prestige* all had budgets that would require a higher return than feasible exclusively from the support of critics and festival audiences, and thereby necessarily contain additional mainstream spectacles less explicitly contingent on introspective industry critique. Minghella's film in particular – barely crossing this threshold, but gaining a huge gross – almost perfectly encapsulates the burgeoning interstitial, and artistically significant, New New Hollywood form of the independent-blockbuster. *Chaplin* is the outlier, but it is important to remember that Attenborough went dramatically over budget by accident and in the midst of stalls to the production of his would-be miniseries.

At this point several through-lines come to bear on this project. I propose that the period from roughly 1990 to the mid-2000s harkened a historic change in the idea of what constitutes a filmmaker. The precise intermingling of particular technologies, paradigmatic precepts, and fundamental alterations to business practice permanently refined the term. And any study of this or other periods in Hollywood history should take account of this wider, more expansive definition: a filmmaker is someone who makes films, in all the possible complexities of what that "making" might entail. Perhaps the primary importance of these case studies is thus the way in which each highlights some contentious element in the making process. Here, the most crucial texts have been the ones that self-consciously wrestle with authorial shifts in positioning, as they are the ones that, in-so-doing, put to the test the vary limits of industrial reflexivity within its ever-evolving contexts. Ultimately, if sustainable reflexive practices have changed since the mid-2000s, then this is because the industry itself has likewise undergone a further transformation that must be explored.

After the New New Hollywood

Since I began work on this project, several prominent Hollywood-on-Hollywood films have been released to critical and commercial success – notably back-to-back Oscar winners in 2011 and 2012 (*The Artist* and *Argo*) prominently feature depictions of the movie business – and yet the U.S. film industry has also emerged from the New New Hollywood and entered into an even newer version still. As can be seen by a cursory examination of recent budgets and box office grosses (particularly comparing foreign and domestic returns), the New New Hollywood independent-blockbuster mentality has (for the most part) seemingly fallen by the way side since the mid-2000s. The divide between domestically acclaimed and internationally successful Hollywood films has arguably never been more severe than as it has become over the course of the last ten years. And the decentralization of industrial operations is such that often not only the above-the-line personnel and financing come from overseas (a trend in international co-productions significantly preceding the New New Hollywood), but now below-the-line work is also routinely outsourced to the best bidders regardless of location and working conditions. This particular phenomenon is relatively new and unique to recent Hollywood as it is largely contingent on far-reaching communications technologies that could not feasibly be utilized in regard to pre-production spec worlds and post-production technical processes until now.

Here, the prevalence of new media platforms supports screenwriting software and databases that can link several versions of (and annotations to) a spec script. This allows for potentially instantaneous comparative access at the executive producer level, which not only facilitates quicker turnaround times during the pre-production phase, but also causes

a greater conduciveness to the formatting and structuring of screenplays in regard to contemporaneous industrial precepts. It seems to go without question that potential screenwriters and script doctors can be hired and fired much more efficiently now than ever before.[358] An undoubtedly more evocative example of this decentralizing trend is the way in which post-production professionals can now in theory utilize central computer servers to perform such disparate tasks as color-timing, editing ADR, mixing soundtracks, and engineering visual effects, all on a master print from divergent locations without having to physically ship film reels to one another. This phenomenon is described by Tom McCarthy in his current role as head of post-production at Sony Pictures as significantly different from the way that tasks could be performed in previous years, even with the emerging digital technologies of the 1990s.[359]

In all of this, despite the supposed democratizing force of digitization – that is, the notion that digital tools can allow for expanded independent film production based on the fact that they are cheaper and more accessible – digital media has played a large part in transforming the industry in both radical and reactionary ways. The alarming rate of saturation of digital cinematography and exhibition is only the most obvious sign of this transition out of a period of firsts into one of lasts. Whereas the 1990s is encapsulated by various filmmakers' preliminary demonstrations of the financial viability of (in succession) digital sound, digital visual effects, digital editing and post-production collaboration, digital

---

[358] John Caldwell has done intriguing work on the precarious nature of so-called "Spec-worlds" in the Southern California-based entertainment industry. "Labor Relations and Industrial Practice in Contemporary Film and Television Production," (Humanities Collective workshop, University of California at Irvine, Irvine, CA, February 14, 2014). See also the discussion of "shadow production worlds" in Caldwell, "Breaking Ranks: Backdoor Workforces, Messy Workflows, and Craft Disaggregation," *Popular Communication* 8, no. 3, 2010.

[359] McCarthy, interviewed by author, December 7, 2012.

image acquisition, and ultimately digital projection, the 2000s was a decade characterized by an exponentially shrinking number of films and filmmakers *not* utilizing these techniques. In other words, in regard to the digitization of media, the New New Hollywood period is framed by irresistible paradigm shifts: it begins when the average filmmaker has limited access to digital technologies of representation and ends when the average filmmaker can ill afford not to utilize them. As Nolan says: "A transition starts with people offering a new choice, but it finishes with taking the old choice away."[360]

Here, the industrial re-embrace of 3-D effects in theaters is perhaps the most definitive way to mark the end of the New New Hollywood period and the beginning of a proverbial *post*-New New Hollywood, as this contemporary process both responds to a perceived crisis regarding fledgling attendance figures at the end of the twentieth century *and* is technologically incompatible with traditional 35mm film. In this particular vein, the New New Hollywood period could be said to end in 2006 with the premiere of the digital 3-D conversion of several sequences of Bryan Singer's *Superman Returns* (2006). Here, Warner Bros.'s industrially touted decision to utilize new digital technology to transform images from Singer's film – with his blessing and creative input – into something even more spectacular than what was previously attainable was only the first of several studio experiments in this evolving process. In 2009, James Cameron's *Avatar* served as the greatest progenitor yet for the widespread embrace of the RealD 3-D process, when it went on to gross an unprecedented $2 billion worldwide, largely from higher priced digital 3-D screenings.[361] Since then, the release of blockbuster films (of seemingly all types and

[360] Quoted in *Side by Side.*

[361] This phenomenon can best be seen by putting *Avatar* into comparative analysis with previous "highest

genres) in RealD 3-D has become pervasive as a way for Hollywood blockbusters to compete with non-theatrical new media forms. What is important to note, is that the RealD process – now the most popular and theatrically ubiquitous 3-D process in the world – functions through the rapid oscillation of "left" and "right" visual tracks over 140 times per second via the digital projection system, and therefore cannot be achieved through the analog projection of film.[362] Thus, the development of this stereoscopic process especially in conjunction with the re-emergence of the IMAX large format (as an industrial marketing strategy) seems deterministic in its function to prove that digitally projected movies are still worth seeing in a theatrical setting that continues to offer spectacular appeals unattainable in home entertainment.

Largely owing to factors like these, it is during this immediate period that usage of the digital cinema package (DCP) as the *preferred* method of motion picture distribution significantly expanded worldwide. Fueled largely by the initiatives of George Lucas in advance of his 1999 film *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace,* high-definition digital cinema projection was a veritable novelty for its first initial years of experimentation during the New New Hollywood period.[363] Yet, from just 31 functioning high-definition

---

grossing" films from Hollywood history. Unadjusted for inflation, *Avatar* stands as the highest grossing film domestically of all-time, but in terms of total amount of *tickets sold,* the film does not even break the top-ten, having sold less than half the total amount of tickets as reigning champion *Gone with the Wind* (1939). "All Time Box Office," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 20, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm?adjust_yr=1&p=.htm. *Avatar's* gross is thus generally attributable to the inflated price of tickets for specialty screenings of the film in 2009 and its subsequent re-release.

362 This is due to the fact that motion pictures shot in the digital 3-D process, actually contain sequences composed with two separate camera lenses, producing the "left" and "right" visuals that are virtually assembled by the digital cinema program at the point of exhibition to produce the stereoscopic illusion that the visuals are protruding from the screen when the spectator wears specially designed 3-D glasses.

363 A total of four high-definition digital cinema projectors were installed in Los Angeles and New York by Lucas so as to demonstrate the new technology to filmgoers. Charles S. Schwartz, ed., *Understanding Digital Cinema: A Professional Handbook* (Boston: Focal Press, 2005), 159.

digital screens in the world as late as 2001, digital cinema projection passed the 1,000 screen threshold in 2006, and has increased to ever larger percentages of the total amount of first-run movie theaters each year since.[364] As of 2013, this continued large scale conversion of traditional analog theaters to digital projection systems has resulted in over 80% of all first-run theaters in the world now screening motion pictures exclusively in DCP.[365] In acknowledgment of this industrial imperative, Paramount Pictures became the first major Hollywood studio to officially cease all distribution of motion pictures on 35mm film in North America as of the beginning of 2014.[366]

Yet, there will always be filmmakers who resist industry trends in apparent regard to the artistic virtuosity of older techniques. Just this year a consortium of powerful filmmakers including Quentin Tarantino, Judd Apatow, J.J. Abrams, and Christopher Nolan successfully negotiated an apparent deal between the major Hollywood studios and the Kodak Corporation to continue to manufacture an unspecified quota of 35mm film stock per year for use in major motion picture production.[367] For Apatow in particular, this move represents not so much an obsession with the supposed superiority of film, but rather an attempt to keep filmmakers' creative options open.[368] And thus the notion of industrial

---

364 "MPAA Entertainment Industry Market Statistics 2007," The Motion Picture Association of America report, accessed October 17, 2014, http://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/MPAA_US/M080925E.pdf.

365 "Theatrical Market Statistics 2013," The Motion Picture Association of America, accessed October 17, 2014, http://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2013_032514-v2.pdf.

366 Richard Verrier, "End of Film: Paramount First Studio to Stop Distributing Film Prints," *Los Angeles Times,* January 17, 2014.

367 Carolyn Giardina, "Christopher Nolan, J.J. Abrams win Studio Bailout Plan to Save Kodak Film," *Hollywood Reporter,* July 30, 2014.

368 Kevin Jagurnauth, "Quentin Tarantino, Christopher Nolan, Judd Apatow, and J.J. Abrams Team up to Save Film Stock," The Playlist, Indiewire, published July 30, 2014, accessed October 17, 2014, http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/quentin-tarantino-christopher-nolan-judd-apatow-jj-abrams-team-up-to-save-film-stock-20140730.

labor and power relations concerning potential authorship of motion pictures comes back to the fore. Whereas "independent" filmmakers were once in the best potential position to take advantage of digital technologies of representation and distribution in advance of larger industry protocols of professionalization, now this process of exploitation has arguably reversed: the horizontally-integrated entertainment industries' wide scale adoption of digitized methods is the most effective way to cut corporate overhead costs at the expense of industry jobs and professional positioning at the level of below-the-line filmmakers. Needless to say, only a select number of filmmakers – very much above-the-line – have thus far been able to avail themselves of what they may indeed consider digitally mechanized fiscal control over the creative processes of filmic expression. In this most recent period of Hollywood it often takes the likes of producer-directors with the professional statuses of Tarantino, Nolan, Abrams, and Apatow to usurp prevailing trends that for many become fiscal and technological requirements (one cannot even hypothetically elect to shoot on Kodak film if Kodak stops manufacturing film) specifically because the vast majority of filmmakers cannot afford to do so (in regard to actual finances, but also cultural capital).

A few conclusions can be drawn from this epilogue to the New New Hollywood, particularly in the form of evolving categories of reflexivity then and now. First, the basic typologies of literal and metaphorical reflexivity still exist, as do their concurrent narrative and formal problems of representation. Yet, what can be seen through a survey of reflexive films from this most recent period is that the specifics of what they are responding to – and how they *can* respond – is considerably altered in regard to the filmmakers' historically adjusted industrial positioning. What becomes clear, as I have sought to argue throughout

the dissertation, is that reflexivity is primarily useful when understood as a mode through which to make sense of historically-specific industrial conditions that elucidate how and why films can be made in Hollywood: how they work on the audience and the extent to which they are able to transform contemporaneous understandings of the cinematic apparatus.

The Ongoing Problem of Historicizing Film on Film

Perhaps the most deceptively reflexive film of the last few years has been Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011). Though literally reflexive, this reflexivity is deceptive because the film was marketed as a family oriented 3-D adventure film without allusion to the cinema. Instead, the film, following through on its advertised appeals, centers on a young boy – the eponymous Hugo (Asa Butterfield) – who bumbles around a train station in slapstick antics, eluding a cop, making friends with an elderly toy maker, and attempting to solve the mystery exuded by his deceased father's automaton robot. Here, the film's narrative reflexivity comes in the back door, because its ostensible focus on the boy proceeds for almost an hour before it is revealed that the man at the toy shop is in fact early cinema pioneer Georges Méliès. The message that Hugo's father left behind evidently entails an essential love of "the movies" – it is only revealed quite late in the film that Hugo and his father's shared passion was going to the cinema – as the automaton has been designed by Méliès himself.

Whereas Coppola's and Nolan's films respectively make metaphoric allusions to the work of early cinema illusionists, Scorsese narratively depicts the character of Méliès (Ben Kingsley) as a supporting player in his 3-D epic in an effort to reflect upon the director's work and more generally on the state of early cinema texts as taken for granted 'toys' of a

forgotten past. As Hugo and the rest of the world have apparently been unaware of who Méliès actually is, the plot of the film re-focuses on Hugo's attempt to help the old man receive his proper due as a great cinema director. Scorsese's widely known penchant for advocating for film preservation thus comes to the fore in the film's final act. "Time hasn't been kind to old movies," a Film Academy scholar literally says to Hugo before setting about to collaborate with the boy on a retrospective of Méliès's "restored" films, which is meant to introduce the diegetic audience (and conceivably Scorsese's actual audience) to the important work of the supposedly forgotten filmmaker. The entire film is thus formally revealed to be a metaphoric call to film preservation and restoration, and this can be specifically related to Scorsese's concerns about New New Hollywood digital convergence.

As Scorsese has elsewhere pointed out (ironically in regard to the volatile nature of nitrate film, which in the early period resulted in the loss of many motion pictures that were not properly maintained and stored), motion picture film remains the single best archival medium for audio-visual recordings even in the face of the seeming ubiquity of digital platforms of storage and playback.[369] As one film archivist suggests about the prevalent misapprehensions about the digital turn "You're shifting from a model focused on a physical object to data. And where the data lives will be constantly changing."[370] The point is that digital media are limited in terms of access and longevity in comparison to film, despite the apparent advantages in capacity and physical space; as the President of The

[369] *Side by Side,* 2012. In the documentary film, producer Keanu Reeves interviews a string of powerful filmmakers in the industry specifically asking their opinions on the transition from film to digital video: Danny Boyle, James Cameron, George Lucas, David Lynch, Robert Rodríguez, Steven Soderbergh, and the Wachowskis, among others, come down solidly on the side of the digital; while Christopher Nolan and Wally Pfister largely represent the dissenting opinion in their vociferous defense of film; and Scorsese for his part seems to be ambivalent, espousing the various advantages and disadvantages of both mediums.

[370] Alimurung, 2012.

American Society of Cinematographers points out: “Since the early 1950s, since the advent of commercial television, there have been eighty formats of video, to date. Eighty formats of video... and most of them cannot be played anymore, as the machines just simply don't exist.”[371] Here, the infamous examples of Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995) and *Toy Story 2* (1999) serve as the greatest testament to Hollywood's continued misguided confidence in the efficacy of digital storage of original motion pictures. While *Toy Story's* files were reportedly discovered in 2000 to have been up to 20% corrupted (making subsequent home video release prints difficult to create), its sequel was nearly lost in its entirety two years into the production phase when the Linux computer on which it was stored began deleting files:

> One afternoon, someone accidentally hit the delete key sequence on the drive. The movie started disappearing. First Woody's hat went. Then his boots. Then his body. Then entire scenes. Imagine the horror: 20 people's work for two years, erased in 20 seconds. Animators were able to reconstitute the missing elements purely by chance: Pixar's visual arts director had just had a baby, and she'd brought a copy of the movie — the only remaining copy — with her to work on at home.[372]

The irony of the preceding example is that the emergence of digital storage threatens to create a virtual second early cinema. The notion that a major motion picture produced as late as 1999 could become a “lost film” in spite of ubiquitous storage and archival solutions is alarming, and potentially a large part of Scorsese's concern.

An important caveat emerges with *Hugo's* meta-textual dissection of the early cinema period, as it breaks with the structural schematic put forward by earlier films (like *Chaplin* and *Dracula*) that have sought to depict this era: it does not attempt to formally approximate the artisanal films that become the subject of its narration. Arguably, this is

[371] Quoted in *Side by Side.*
[372] Ibid.

due in large part to a shift in representational precepts. This becomes clear early on in the film any time Scorsese racks focus between the deep space of the foreground and background in an apparent attempt to accentuate the dramatic effect of the digitized 3-D process; not only would RealD 3-D have been obviously inaccessible to the early cinema filmmaker, but even the film's comparatively simple deep focus effects would be anachronistic in this light, and more indicative of later cinematic innovations. The most conspicuous formal conundrum comes late in the film, however, with the visual presentation of the actual Méliès films. Here, this entails Kingsley, in character, standing onstage and presenting a montage of clips to the diegetic audience. Sometimes engulfing the screen, and sometimes framed by the diegetic proscenium stage curtains, a selection of Méliès's oeuvre plays out in the very same dynamic 3-D that encapsulates the entire film. Culminating on a famous shot of a rocket ship landing in the moon's eye – from *A Trip to the Moon* (1903) – the images seem to jump right off the stage over the heads of the diegetic audience just as they seem to jump right off the screen.

The tools and mandates of this post-New New Hollywood have thus directly eroded the ability of the film to consistently contain its own structural metaphors of cinematic practice. Scorsese implicitly does not see a contradiction here: as long as original film negatives exist to preserve the motion pictures, he certainly has less of a problem with digital distribution of prints and their digital projection than purists like Nolan or Tarantino:

> Even those of us still shooting on film finish in HD, and our movies are projected in HD. [Film] is cumbersome and imperfect and difficult to transport and prone to wear and decay... [Film is] still the best and only time-proven way to preserve movies. We have no assurance that digital information will last, but we know that film will, if

properly stored and cared for.[373]

Yet, it is hard to reconcile the two premises. Here, the director has apparently decided that the best way to (re)introduce audiences to the magic of Méliès is to digitally convert his films into contemporaneous 3-D. This makes any message about (original) version control and preservation of classic works of cinema relatively obtuse; within the audio-visual presentation of *Hugo* at least, Scorsese certainly does not maintain the Méliès films in their original states. Rather, by this point locked in to the prevailing currents of visual spectacle, he presents the twenty-first century Hollywood version of the artisanal films.

Furthermore, throughout Scorsese's laudable attempt to foreground the prescient need for motion picture restoration and sustainable archiving, is situated a re-writing of the early period of film history. Namely, this takes the form of the seemingly ludicrous suggestion that the First World War itself destroyed Méliès's career by eroding humanity's faith in escapism and fantasy full stop. In a montage that cross-cuts found footage of the War with Kingsley burning film sets and props, Méliès narrates "The world had no time for magic tricks and movie shows. The returning soldiers having seen so much reality, were bored by my films. Tastes had changed, but I had not changed with them." This incredible explanation is earlier supported in the film by the Film Academy professor, who claims to know of no possible explanation for why Méliès would have stopped making films except if he had been killed in the War. And thus, Scorsese glosses over a plethora of socio-historical factors connected to the shifting of motion picture industrial forms in the 1910s and 20s

[373] Quoted in David Lieberman, "UPDATE: Martin Scorsese Joins Tarantino, Apatow & Pals Backing Kodak Decision To Save Celluloid," Deadline Hollywood, published August 4, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://deadline.com/2014/08/kodak-continue-product-film-stock-movies-tv-812189/.

(chief among these the obvious ascendancy of Hollywood itself as an exporter of even more elaborate and expensive fantasy and escapism to the French market, and the concurrent dissolution of artisanal modes of filmmaking going into the classical period).

Once again the limit of literal reflexivity is encapsulated by the way its reflections on industry personnel and practices must be tempered by considerations of plot and character development that take precedence over these concerns, and indeed at times thereby promote, rather than dispel, mythologizing narratives. The fact that the film is surreptitious in its narrative reflexivity also suggests a general continued unease with the ability to market a major (blockbuster) motion picture in contemporary Hollywood as explicitly "about" cinema. Indeed, the film is not called "Georges," even if this title might have better suited Scorsese's purpose. Rather, *Hugo* succumbs to the paratextual need to market high concept entertainment – the exciting adventures and hijinks of a kid with a robot in thrilling 3-D – above all.

Much more explicitly operating in the biopic genre than *Hugo*, Sacha Gervasi's *Hitchcock* (2012) garnered much less critical and popular attention, and yet stands as another intriguing example of literal reflexivity at the level of mythic narrative. With a similar production history to that of *Chaplin* – it was reportedly meant for broadcast as a miniseries on the A&E Network prior to being re-written into the feature film form[374] – *Hitchcock's* marketing likewise fixates on the virtuosity of performance of a leading actor (Anthony Hopkins) mimicking the look and sound of his infamous subject. In this case, he is aided by heavy prosthetic make-up, but challenged by the presumption that audiences will remember the on-screen persona of Alfred Hitchcock from his propensity to feature himself

[374] Denise Martin, "A&E Looks Into '*Live,*'" *Variety,* July 13, 2005.

in the paratextual publicity for his films (and as an attention-grabbing bit player within them). Narratively similar to the Welles biographies, *Hitchcock* also features a story that centers on the making of just one of the legendary director's films, *Psycho* (1960), and the proverbial battle that had to be undertaken in order to get the classic film made.

Yet, different from previous biopics concerning singular talents, the film actually advances a narrative of collaboration, particularly in the form of the director's touted reliance upon his wife and creative partner Alma Reville (Helen Mirren). Rather than figure strictly as his muse, Alma is portrayed as an indispensible filmmaker in her own right, particularly when she actually takes over the set of the diegetic film after Hitchcock himself collapses. Nevertheless, the film's formal strategy – by which it historicizes the emergence of the new post-classical genre of the slasher horror film – importantly credits this work ultimately to Hitchcock's singularly creative vision (which is literalized through frequent intercutting between the narrative's main action and fantastical sequences that focalize Hitchcock's own macabre re-imagination of real life murders).

Allegories of Cinema Continue

Intriguing by comparison is *The Artist* – the film that defeated *Hugo* at the Academy Awards, if not at the box office – in the way that it narratively *and* structurally foregrounds Hollywood paradigm shifts. Indeed, unlike *Hugo,* Michel Hazanavicius's film seems positively obsessed with approximating the form of a silent era film as the mode by which to narrate the story of a silent film star (Jean Dujardin). This is foregrounded not only by the film's diegetic silence for the majority of its running time, and its black and white cinematography, but also by the formally conspicuous squareness of its old-time 1.33:1 aspect ratio (the standard ratio during most of the classical silent period). Here, the

filmmakers have not been content to simply allow the spherical lens of their camera to deterministically prevent the wider ratio that conventionally results from newer anamorphic processes. Rather, they have evidently considered the squareness of the frame to be of such importance to communicating the point of the film, that they also have attempted to head-off the potential stretching of this frame by disgruntled home video audiences, with their inclusion of an opening disclaimer on the DVD release of the film: "The following film is presented in its original 1.33:1 aspect ratio, as intended by the filmmakers."

In addition to this, the film opens with a carefully crafted silent era evoking title sequence that projects its credits through a series of lap dissolves onto a dramatically lit textured material background. In the classical period style, this includes touches such as a single shared diagonally receding title card for four of the film's cast members, as well as a single shared card for most of the below-the-line personnel, titles aligned screen left and connected via ellipses with the crew members names justified screen right. From here, the main portion of the film proceeds not only to duplicate the excessive makeup, halo-inducing lighting design, and at times histrionic acting styles of the silent era, but also (as in the films within films in *Chaplin* and *Dracula*) the jerkiness of silent images in respect to modern frame rates.

And yet all of these structural metaphors of anachronism are perhaps only possible because of *The Artist's* deceptively situated status as a French independent film, controlled by the American Weinstein Company primarily at the point of U.S. theatrical distribution and marketing. Here, it may seem a self-evident statement that a film produced largely outside the context of the Hollywood film industry may not be subject to the formal dictates

of that industry, however this critically neglects the importance of the Weinsteins' promotion of the film (as a legitimate part of the filmic paratext) in transforming it from a European independent film into a transnational Hollywood independent-blockbuster. Here, what can be charted in support of this premise is the dramatic percentage of the film's worldwide gross and critical reputation that accrued only subsequent to the Weinsteins' successful Oscar campaign.[375] Additionally, the film is formally coded as "American" with the plethora of Hollywood character actors who occupy some of the important supporting roles (John Goodman, James Cromwell, Penelope Ann Miller, Malcolm McDowell, Missy Pyle, Ed Lauter). And it can also be described as a "Hollywood" film in specifically geographic terms as the film shot on location in Los Angeles, California's famous studio back lots.

Indeed here *The Artist* is arguably able to espouse a more aggressively divergent formal paradigm than *Hugo*, specifically *because* of the interstitial space that it occupies as a work of complexly disentangled transnational cinema. Whereas *Hugo* was from the beginning beholden to the strictures of a big budget ($150 million) Paramount release, *The Artist's* by comparison modest financing ($15 million spread across eleven different credited independent production companies) allowed it the freedom to prove itself on the European festival circuit before being picked up by the Weinsteins and transformed into an American hit.[376] Similar to the case of *The English Patient,* much contemporaneous paratextual confusion seemed to abound regarding *The Artist's* nationality as either Hollywood outsider or insider. In this case, the film's "accent," like Dujardin's literal French

---

[375] "The Oscar Boost: Best Picture Nomination Effect," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 21, 2014, accessed October 21, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/oscar/bestpichist.htm?view=bymovie&p=.htm.

[376] For *Hugo*'s disputed number, see "Movie Projector: Breaking Dawn to Devour Three New Family Films," *Los Angeles Times,* November 2011; for *The Artist* see "*The Artist*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 21, 2014, accessed October 21, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=artist.htm.

accent, is masked by the silence of the diegetic soundtrack. Thus, the central irony may well be that *The Artist's* silent film structure is simultaneously its least marketable *and* most marketable aspect, in regard to American audiences' perceived intolerance for both silent and foreign language films, respectively.

Here, the film's narrative channels these allegories into the story of a battle for artistic integrity in the face of industrial demands: the main story problem concerns a film star, George Valentin (Dujardin), who is unwilling to abide by the burgeoning Hollywood mandate towards the adoption of synchronized sound. In response to his wife's question of why he refuses to "talk," Valentin replies (via the film's inter-titles on-screen): "I'm not a puppet, I'm an artist." Yet, after failed attempts to produce and direct his own silent films well into the 30s, Valentin is ultimately inclined to embrace the new musical genre as his only sustainable future. In the film's climactic scene, diegetic voices can suddenly be heard for the first time as the director (Goodman) asks if Valentin and his dance partner, and co-romantic lead, Peppy Miller (Berenice Bejo) can do an additional take, Valentin replies (for the first time via the soundtrack): "With pleasure." In-so-doing, Valentin succumbs audio-visually as well as narratively to the industrial precept about "talking." Thus, coming at the onset of arguably a whole new representational shift in Hollywood based on technological developments, Hazanavicius's literal analogy to the mitigated and reserved embrace of new technologies by film artists in the industry is rather explicit in its apparent message.

However, like the structurally reflexive films that came before it, *The Artist* also runs the risk of its allegories becoming enigmatic, especially when it delves into the modality of reflexive practice that foremost conveys individual film references rather than allusions to the cinematic apparatus. In this style of "self-reflexivity" made famous by Tarantino since

the early 1990s, allegories for contemporary cinematographic concerns are frequently routed through self-aware references to film fandom: the sampling of supposedly recognizable film scores from the past and the graphic duplication of shots from celebrated films. *The Artist* contains many such maneuvers that may or may not be spotted by the most discerning of film historians and *cinéastes*: a visual allusion to Welles's *Citizen Kane* when Valentin and his wife have a series of arguments at the breakfast table in an elliptical montage of story time, a graphic allusion to King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) when Valentin finds himself dominated by his modern environment, and most conspicuously the direct sampling of Bernard Hermann's legendary score to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) over the film's dramatic denouement.

For his part, Tarantino seems to be steering toward evermore complexly structural metaphors for his dissatisfaction with the technological mandates of the current Hollywood. Here, where Hazanavicous's film meditates on the silent period of Hollywood in comparison to the current period, Tarantino creates a structural homage to 1970s exploitation cinema with the "Grindhouse" film *Deathproof* (2008). Literally about – at the level of the narrative – a former classical era stuntman who terrorizes a group of women with his special "Deathproof" car, the film seems to prefigure the literal reflexive mode, even when positing actual stunt personnel in the film who indeed perform actual pro-filmic stunts. Yet, as with arguably all of Tarantino's films, *Deathproof* is also formally coded as a film from an earlier (for Tarantino "better") period. Shown in conjunction with Robert Rodgriguez's *Planet Terror*, the film poses as merely one part of a 70s double-bill, replete with "trailers" for other (fictional) films, and purposeful color-fading and scratches to the film that simulate overplayed reels. Here, the filmmaker's nostalgia for industrially

anachronistic exhibition formats is a continued motif. Most recently, the revealed poster for Tarantino's upcoming film *The Hateful Eight* (2015), promises that the film will be presented as a "Special Roadshow Engagement" in 70mm "Super CinemaScope," but has thus far not alluded to how this might be possible circa 2015, by which time scarcely any theaters in North America will be able to accommodate this scenario.

"The Movie Was Fake. The Mission Was Real."

Many of these notions come to the fore in Ben Affleck's 2012 Oscar winner *Argo.* The film tells the true story of the CIA's clandestine extraction of six Americans from Iran after the fall of the U.S. Embassy in 1979. Affleck himself anchors the cast in his starring role as Tony Mendez, a CIA agent who comes up with the idea of having the Americans pose as Canadian filmmakers, in order to secretly smuggle them out of the country. Toward this end, Mendez contacts a Hollywood make-up artist John Chambers (John Goodman) who, in conjunction with producer Lester Siegel (Alan Arkin), proceeds to set-up a "fake" movie production that will serve no other purpose than to bolster the escapees' cover story. After the collaborators set up an actual production company office and phone, legitimately acquire the rights to a science fiction script "*Argo: A Science Fantasy Adventure*," hold a public cold reading of the screenplay, work up storyboards that call for "Middle Eastern" settings, and secure a write-up in *Variety* about the supposed production, Mendez nefariously enters Iran and assists the Embassy workers with their perilous escape. In the film's stunning conclusion, the escapees are only able to succeed in their ruse by showing the storyboards to an airport army interrogator, who in turn calls the fake production company office phone number; when Chambers answers the phone from Hollywood and confirms the conspirators' story, they are allowed to board a plane out of the country to

their freedom. With this as its main narrative framework, *Argo* seems to go further in its celebration of the film industry than any of the other films thus far discussed in suggesting that sometimes Hollywood literally saves lives.

Nevertheless, several multivalent critical strands emerge in the film's self-critique. First, the film is narratively reflexive on industry marketing and pre-production strategies, even in a political suspense-thriller whose plot drifts far from the depiction of the actual shooting of a film. Here, Affleck relies on a similar iterative resonance to that which pervades *Adaptation*; Mendez's conversations with Hollywood business men are played for laughs in the way that they seem to self-critically disparage the already conventional assumptions about industry professionals. "So you want to come to Hollywood and act like a big shot...without actually doing anything? You'll fit right in," says Chambers on his initial meeting with Mendez. A similar sentiment pervades Mendez's first meeting with Siegel: "You want to set-up a movie in a week. You want to lie to Hollywood, a town where everybody lies for a living."

Second, the "Canadianness" of the escapees was important (in the real life event) only in as much as they had to not be U.S. Nationals; however, the plan (as presented in the film) assumes that the fake movie production must inherently be Hollywood-based. Here, the suggestion that the Iranian Government is evidently willing to allow a "Hollywood" film crew to work within the country's borders even as it decries and outlaws American citizens and their government is indicative of the extent to which *Argo* implicitly comments on the already well-recognized transnational status of Hollywood cinema. "Canada," it seems, is already subsumed as an ancillary wing of a larger North American film industry. Further, the portrayed willingness of Iranian officials to self-consciously participate in their own

Orientalization – as the filmmakers convey to them that they have chosen Iran as a location for its "exotic" nature in comparison to the West – is an indictment of the recognized audacity of Hollywood business interests. As Mendez explains of the advantage of his plan "We think everybody knows Hollywood people. Everybody knows they'd shoot in Stalingrad with Pol Pot directing if it would sell tickets."

The film also formally alludes to a resurgent transnational strategy whenever it graphically depicts the shards of the decaying local Southern California film industry, circa 1980, about to be revitalized by the New Hollywood initiatives. Notably this includes several aerial shots of the at-that-time destroyed "Hollywood" Sign intermingled with references to the recent success of *Star Wars* (1977), the film whose international fame the *Argo* team is attempting to exploit with their faked knock-off production. Here, the film operates as an interesting intertextual corollary to Affleck's earlier work in Allen Coulter's *Hollywoodland* (2006), which, as the title suggests, likewise criticizes a misguided mythologizing of the classical period. Fixating on the unsolved shooting death of actor George Reeves (played by Affleck), Coulter's film formally takes on the earlier period by intermixing sequences depicting the industrial ballyhoo surrounding TV's *Superman* with the self-destructive personal life of its troubled star and a cross-examination of those who exploited him.

Importantly within the plot of *Argo,* any time Siegel and Chambers are challenged concerning the validity of their contributions to the film industry, or to the CIA mission itself, they respond with the dialogue motif "Argo fuck yourself!" For these men, this becomes a cherished catch-phrase within the story in the way it seems to emblematize their abrasive position in Hollywood in opposition to the more celebrated 'creative'

professionals. Here the tagline from the movie's poster – "The Movie was Fake. The Mission was Real." – resonates with this meta-commentary on legitimizing the work of Hollywood professionals who often do not (or in this case, cannot) take credit for the contributions that actually make the business of Hollywood subsist. What plays out in the film's paratextual appeals here is an intriguing disregard for the supposed cultural or artistic importance of cinema texts. Rather the film and its promotional materials seem to champion the idea of respect for the filmmakers themselves regardless of considerations of taste for their work. In short, unlike the previous films that often prefigure the business professionals as villains (and entirely erase the craft-based professionals from their narratives), *Argo* valorizes the producer and make-up man as essential filmmakers. Indeed, these professionals are shown to be the ones whose Hollywood "fakery" is counter-intuitively the most "real" thing about the industry. The plight of Tony, Siegel, and Chambers (similar to that of the protagonists in *The Prestige*) is that they can never publicly take credit for their covert heroic endeavors. But of course the film text itself serves foremost as a corrective to this situation.

In a bit of Charlie Kaufmanesque structural irony, the film punctuates this reflexive framework in an early scene between Mendez and Chambers. Concerning the daunting task of training the American embassy workers to be able to successfully pose as filmmakers, the topic of authorial virtuosity implicitly comes to the fore. Mendez asks if he will be able to teach one of the escapees to pose as a director on only one day's notice. In an over-the-shoulder shot (with Affleck actually in the frame), Chambers exclaims to Mendez "You can teach a rhesus monkey to be a director in a day." The immediate reverse shot captures an exasperated expression on Mendez's face; here, Affleck's expression is less convincing as a

natural reaction on the part of the inexperienced Mendez, and more evocative of the director's own Pasolini-like free indirect point-of-view on the situation. Unlike the more elusive cinematic metaphors previously discussed, Affleck's star power (as full-time actor and sometime director) makes this meta-textual cinematic joke fairly explicit: Affleck frames himself on-screen just as one of his own actors has told him that the job of a film director is overrated.

Interestingly, Academy voters seem to have concurred in the film's formal and narrative devaluing of the director's contribution to Hollywood artistry, leaving Affleck off the final list of nominees for Best Director even as his film became the presumptive winner of the Best Picture prize well in advance of the awards ceremony. This, of course, is antithetical to the typical Hollywood rhetorical strategy (continuing into the most recent period, and almost annually reinforced by the Academy) of incessantly prefiguring a film's director as the primary creative force behind its perceived success or failure. Thus the controversial "snubbing" of Affleck was picked up by the trades and promoted as one of the main self-critical industrial narratives of the 2012-2013 season.[377]

Intriguingly, this snub also directly caused a second corollary "controversy" to envelop the Academy Awards ceremony that year. However, this one was considerably less self-serving for the industry. Because Affleck had virtually swept all of the industry's various "Best Director" awards in the lead-up to the Oscars, and yet failed to receive the Academy's nomination for the same, the outcome of the award was left uncharacteristically up-in-the-air until the moment it was revealed that Ang Lee had won for *Life of Pi* (2012). In

[377] See Scott Feinberg and Stephen Galloway, "How to Fix Oscar's Baffling Snub of Ben Affleck (Analysis)," *Hollywood Reporter,* January 16, 2013; and Bob Verini, "Last 10 Years Bring Surprises and Snubs," *Variety,* February 6, 2013.

regard to the widely perceived comparative statuses of the two films – *Argo,* as the artsy, political, domestically acclaimed indy-blockbuster ($44 million budget for a $232 million return)[378] versus *Life of Pi,* a transnational, special effects-driven, 3-D IMAX epic blockbuster ($120 million budget and amazing $609 million gross)[379] – this choice was arguably unconventional by Academy standards. The true controversy came when, in the course of his two minute acceptance speech, Lee thanked by name (in succession): God, the source novel's author, several executives at Fox, all of his associate producers, the film's lead actor, the entire nation of Taiwan, his wife, his sons, his agent, and his lawyer. Yet, he infamously failed to mention any of the special effects teams who were generally lauded in the industry as major factors in the financial success of the film.[380] This faux pas was undoubtedly exacerbated by the fact that not two hours earlier in the telecast, Lee's own visual effects supervisor, Bill Westenhofer, in accepting the award for Best Visual Effects, had his microphone unceremoniously cut-off just as he attempted to discuss the industrial maltreatment of visual effects artists in Hollywood: "Finally, I want to thank all the artists who worked on this film for over a year, including Rhythm & Hues. Sadly, Rhythm & Hues is suffering severe financial difficulties right now. I urge you all to remember——."[381] Thus, the actual Academy television broadcast and the subsequent fall-out in trade publications

---

[378] "*Argo*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 20, 2014, accessed October 21, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=argo.htm.

[379] "*Life of Pi*," Box Office Mojo, last modified October 21, 2014, accessed October 21, 2014, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lifeofpi.htm

[380] Lee did in fact start his speech by saying he would like to share the award with all 3,000 people who worked on the film. However, he went on to single out only the top above-the-line talent in this regard.

[381] Here, Westenhofer refers to a visual effects company "Rhythm & Hues," that was contracted to work on *Life of Pi,* but ultimately went into chapter 11 bankruptcy a few weeks before the Oscars after above-the-line delays on film productions (such as *Life of Pi*) caused the company to hemorrhage money beyond the point that its losses could be recouped. See Carolyn Giardina, "Revealing 'Rhythm & Hues: Life After Pi' Doc Exposes Grief, Anger, and Troubled Business," *Hollywood Reporter,* February 26, 2014.

demonstrated perhaps more loudly than any narrative feature film can, the ongoing misuse of (and misapprehension about) the work of below-the-line filmmakers in the exceedingly globalized Hollywood.

Going into the winter of 2014, once again some early front-runners for critical acclaim are at the forefront of these debates concerning authorship, technology, and nostalgia. Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014) is the most dramatic example of this trend toward the structural critique of contemporaneous Hollywood. The film follows a former movie star (Michael Keaton) who attempts to make a comeback on the Broadway stage by adapting, directing, and starring in his own version of a celebrated short story. The film's narrative self-reflexivity comes from the fact the actor's most famous role – in regard to which he has largely been typecast – was as the eponymous protagonist of a superhero movie from twenty years in the past: *Birdman.* Early paratextual discussion of the film has fixated on the notion that Iñárritu is making an obvious reference to Keaton's own career trajectory after starring twenty years ago in *Batman* (1989) and its sequel *Batman Returns* (1992).

Publicity for the film suggests immediately that this implies a metaphorical criticism of blockbuster Hollywood – particularly in regard to the post-New New Hollywood tendency toward the franchising of endlessly recycled high concept superhero films and their cross-over sequels – in the way that ambiguously defined visions of "The Birdman" appear in the *mise-en-scène*, haunting Keaton's character as he attempts to mount his more artistically radical show. Here, Iñárritu seems to structurally embed a complex critique within the film by presenting almost the entire plot via only a few disguised long takes (so that nearly the whole film appears to unfold in a single unedited shot). In mirroring the

diegetic actor's longing for an unadulterated theatrical form that will allow him to demonstrate his true talents, this strategy formally opposes the fast cutting of contemporary action movies, even when it includes such dramatic tropes as explosions and flying super heroes triumphantly traversing the New York skyline.

Yet, the film suggests that the ultimate joke may indeed be on the critics and cultural aesthetes, who are portrayed in the story as pretentious and unwilling to consider Thomson's talents for no other reason than *because* of his past reputation. The film's ironic denouement comes when the elitist Broadway critic who previously promised to close Thomson's show down with her negative review, completely reverses course after his failed attempt to commit suicide onstage is interpreted as "Super-realism." Likewise, predictions that some early reviews make concerning the possible comeback that the film may initiate for Keaton at this point in his career,[382] presage the possibility of the film's reflexivity becoming transtextually dialogistic with the contemporary Hollywood industry: *Birdman* may very well end up as the story of the comeback of a great actor that becomes, in the performance of that actor, itself his great comeback.

Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), on the other hand, nominally and temporarily raised film from the dead in advance of its November premiere. The film features a science fiction narrative concerning the first astronauts to travel through a wormhole to a distant side of the universe in search of a solution to a destructive problem on Earth. As such, it is replete with visual and narrative metaphors of ontological transformation and the spatio-temporal shrinking of the world in the face of advancing

[382] See Peter Debruge, "Michael Keaton Pulls Off a Startling Comeback in Alejandro G. Iñárritu's Blistering Showbiz Satire," *Variety,* August 27, 2014.

technological achievements; theoretical physicist Kip Thorne is credited in the film as both an executive producer and "scientific consultant," sending the paratextual message that this is a film concerned with the legitimate possibilities of general relativity and quantum gravity in regard to human perception. Nolan, for his part has stated – in a way that resonates with Kaufman's universal proclamations about *Adaptation* – that "The film is about human nature, what it means to be human. It sounds like a very grand statement, but I don't intend it to be..."[383]

Yet, *Interstellar* also stands (textually and paratextually) as a structural allegory for the state of the cinema at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Shooting a large portion of the film on 65mm IMAX cameras and constructing many practical sets and props for its elaborate space ships (rather than relying on an abundance of CGI and post production effects), the director has sought to keep formal and critical attention on the apparent artistic distinctions between film and digital processes. Toward this end, cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema reportedly rigged a specially designed IMAX camera to fit inside the nose of a jet,[384] so that spacecraft effects could be achieved in part using the legitimate aerobatic maneuvers of an actual aircraft in flight. Nolan and his team even front-projected outer space environments onto his actors in the pro-filmic space of the sound stage in an apparent ode to *2001: A Space Odyssey*.[385] In the finished film, Nolan employs colossal IMAX-sized close-ups of perspiration-drenched faces and dust-engulfed bookshelves in an apparent last-ditch effort to demonstrate the overwhelming dynamic range, tonal contrast,

---

[383] Quoted in Jeff Jensen, "This Week's Cover: Your Exclusive All-access pass to Christoper Nolan's *'Interstellar,'" Entertainment Weekly,* online edition, published October 15, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://popwatch.ew.com/2014/10/15/this-weeks-cover-your-exclusive-all-access-pass-to-christopher-nolans-interstellar/.

[384] Tom Shone, "Christopher Nolan: The Man Who Rebooted the Blockbuster," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2014.

[385] Mekado Murphy, "Below the Line: Shooting *Interstellar*," *New York Times*, December 3, 2014.

and richness of color exclusive to the photochemical process. And he has dramatically leveraged his position in Hollywood toward this end.

Owing to a deal personally worked out by Nolan and Paramount Pictures, the film opened in a conditional limited release before going wide: exhibitors who are willing (or able) to show the movie on film formats – anamorphic 35mm, 70mm, or 70mm IMAX – received *Interstellar* two days earlier than digital cinemas.[386] It is worth noting that this temporarily reverses the company-wide mandate from Paramount earlier in the year. *The Hollywood Reporter* estimates that this 'film only' initiative affects no more than 240 theaters total, with up to 41 IMAX screens, as theater owners across the country have found themselves heedless to make a switch *back* to film just for this event; only previous hold-outs against digital conversion may thus find a nominal reward in their resistance.[387] As a further testament to Nolan's struggle to redeem the clout of the New New Hollywood *auteur*-entrepreneur, the world famous TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood reportedly re-installed a 70mm IMAX projector specifically to accommodate this preferred screening format for *Interstellar,*[388] which everyone from Paul Thomas Anderson to the Vice Chairman of Paramount have viewed and recommended as the best way to see the film.[389] Yet, many

---

386 Pamela McClintock, "Why Theater Owners Aren't Happy about Christopher Nolan's 'Interstellar' Film Initiative," *Hollywood Reporter,* October 2, 2014.

387 Ibid.

388 Alex Billington, "TCL's Chinese Theatre IMAX Getting 70mm Projector for 'Interstellar,'" *Hollywood Reporter,* September 25, 2014.

389 Anderson quoted in Rodrigo Perez, "'Go See it in IMAX': Paul Thomas Anderson says 'Interstellar' is 'Beautiful,' Talks Shooting on Film and More," The Playlist, Indiewire, published October 6, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/go-see-it-in-imax-paul-thomas-anderson-says-interstellar-is-beautiful-talks-shooting-on-film-more-20141006. His full quote concerning Nolan's *Interstellar* is "Support this filmmaker. But don't fuck around, go see it in IMAX. Brave the line. Do it, bite the bullet."; Vice Chairman of Paramount Pictures Rob Moore is quoted in an official press release from the company: "Christopher Nolan's 'Interstellar' on Film November 5th, Two Days Before its Wide Release," Paramount Pictures, published October 1, 2014, accessed October 20, 2014, http://www.paramount.com/news-and-social-media/news-and-press-releases/christopher-nolan-s-

exhibitors in less advantageous positions have decried the maneuver by Nolan as financially detrimental to business. A few decades ago, when long theatrical runs could accumulate exhibition profits over time, this type of soft open for a film might not have been seen as controversial or unfair from the standpoint of many theater owners. However, in the New New Hollywood era and beyond, two days, for a theatrically released motion picture, is often a lifetime.

---

interstellar-film-november-5th-two. Moore is quoted as saying "To see Christopher Nolan's 'Interstellar' on the big screen is an unforgettable movie going experience. From IMAX to traditional film and digital projection, we are pleased that audiences will have the opportunity to see this awe inspiring film in a wide variety of formats and we are very excited to be making the film available 2-days early for moviegoers [to see it on film]."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Oral:

Burke, Michele, Greg Cannom, Tom C. McCarthy, Matthew W. Mungle, and David E. Stone. *Bram Stoker's Dracula* 20th Anniversary Screening Panel Discussion. Attended by author. November 15, 2012. Samuel Goldwyn Theater, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, California.

Jay, Ricky, Shane Mahan, and Michael Weber."Like Magic," Presentation and Panel Discussion. Attended by author. November 20, 2013. Samuel Goldwyn Theater, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, California.

McCarthy, Tom C. Interview by author. December 7, 2012. Los Angeles, California. Audiotape recording.

Wanamaker, Marc. Interview by author. February 27, 2014. Los Angeles, California. Audiotape recording.

Audiovisual:

"Bram Stoker's Dracula" (poster). "Love Never Dies." Digital reproduction. JPEG image. Cinemagraphe. Accessed November 27, 2012. http://www.cinemagraphe.com/_movies/bram-stoker-dracula/dracula-love-never-dies-poster.jpg

Bram Stoker's Dracula (unpublished shooting script with storyboards). October 13, 1991. Writer not credited on script; "Shots designed by Francis Ford Coppola, Michael Ballhaus, and Roman Coppola," "Chief Illustrator Peter Ramsay." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

"The English Patient" (one-sheet poster). "In love, there are no boundaries." Miramax Films 1996.8 x 10 in. color photographic print.Graphic Arts Collection.Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

"The English Patient" (one-sheet poster). "In memory, love lives forever." Miramax Films 1996.8 x 10 in. color photographic print. Graphic Arts Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

The English Patient (original theatrical trailer).Miramax Films 1996. Streaming Video. Daily Motion. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x132vzc_trailer-the-english-patient_music.

The English Patient (television/home video advertisement). Miramax Films 1997. Streaming Video. Internet Movie Database. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.imdb.com/video/imdb/vi561882649/.

"The Hateful Eight" (poster). The Weinstein Company 2015. JPEG image. Entertainment Weekly (Online). Accessed October 20, 2014. http://img2.timeinc.net/ew/i/2014/07/30/Tarantino-Hateful-Eight_535x731.jpg.

"Le Patient Anglais" (French language home video release cover art). "Récompensé Par 9 Oscars." Digital reproduction. JPEG image. Accessed March 2, 2014. http://ring.cdandlp.com/musicolor/photo_grande/114884005.jpg

"The Prestige" (one-sheet poster; International double-sided advance). "Are You Watching Closely?" / "Coming Soon." Buena Vista Pictures 2006.8 x 10 in. color photographic print.Graphic Arts Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

"The Prestige" (one-sheet poster; double-sided advance). "From the Director of 'Batman Begins' and 'Memento.'" Buena Vista Pictures 2006.8 x 10 in. color photographic print.Graphic Arts Collection.Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts &Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

The Prestige (original theatrical trailer). Buena Vista Pictures 2006. Streaming Video. Warner Bros. (UK Distributor). Accessed October 8, 2014. http://wwws.warnerbros.co.uk/theprestige/trailer.html?id=trailer&type=windows&speed=500000

Written:

Boyd, William. (Richard Attenborough's Film) *Charlie* (unpublished screenplay). April 1991. "A Screenplay by William Boyd," "Adapted by Tom Stoppard from a storyline by Diana Hawkins, based on 'My Autobiography' by Charles Chaplin and 'Chaplin – His Life and Art' by David Robinson." AMPAS (Unpublished). Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

---------. (Richard Attenborough's Film) *Charlie* (unpublished shooting script). September 1991. Screenplay William Boyd; Script Consultant William Goldman; "from a storyline by Diana Hawkins, based on 'My Autobiography' by Charles Chaplin and 'Chaplin – His Life and Art' by David Robinson." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

Chaplin, Charles. *My Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1964.

Hart, James V. *Dracula: The Untold Story* (unpublished screenplay). "Revised First Draft" September 29, 1990. "Screen adaptation by James V. Hart." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

Kaufman, Charlie and Donald Kaufman. *Adaptation.* ("for your consideration" Academy circulated screenplay). "BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY," "Screenplay by Charlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman." "Based on the book 'The Orchid Thief' by Susan Orlean." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts &Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

----------. *Adaptation.* (unpublished screenplay). White Draft November 21, 2000, Blue Revision March 9, 2001, Pink Revision February 20, 2002, Green Revision February 26, 2002. "byCharlie Kaufman and Donald Kaufman adapted from the book THE ORCHID THIEF by Susan Orlean." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting.* New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Minghella, Anthony. *The English Patient* (unpublished screenplay). Undated. "Screenplay by: Anthony Minghella." Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

----------. *The English Patient* (unpublished shooting script). "Revised Draft" August 28, 1995. "Screenplay by Anthony Minghella, based on the novel by Michael Ondaatje," "Producer Saul Zaentz; Director Anthony Minghella. Script Collection. Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

Nolan, Christopher and Jonathan Nolan. *The Prestige* (unpublished screenplay). White Revision November 3, 2005, Blue Revision November 30, 2005, Yellow Revision January 10, 2006. Script Collection, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, Los Angeles, CA.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*. Reissue. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1993.

Orlean, Susan. *The Orchid Thief*. New York: Random House, 1998.

Priest, Christopher.*The Prestige*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Robinson, David. *Chaplin – His Life and Art*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. World's Classics Edition. Oxford: Oxford university Press, 1983.

Secondary Sources

Articles:

Abramowitz, Rachel. "Neck Romance." *Premiere*, December 1992.

Alimurung, Genny. "Movie Studios are Forcing Hollywood to Abandon 35mm Film. But the Consequences of Going Digital are Vast and Troubling." *LA Weekly*, April 12th, 2012.

American Cinematographer, January 1993, cover.

"Announcement on Motion Picture Film Business of Fujifilm." Fujifilm Press Release. Published September 13, 2012. Accessed October 1, 2013. http://www.fujifilm.com/news/n120913.html.

Barron, Craig. "Making Modern Matte Shots—1992." *American Cinematographer*, December1992.

Bean, Henry. "Self-Made Heroes." *Sight & Sound*, March 2003.

"Best 100 British Films Full List." BBCNews. Last modified September 23, 1999. Accessed February 28, 2014. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/455170.stm

Biodrowski, Steve. "Coppola's Dracula" *Cinefanstatique*, October 1992.

----------. "Directing the Horror Epic." *Cinefantastique,* October 1992.

----------. "Dracula: The Untold Story." *Cinefanstatique*, October 1992.

----------. "Vampire Effects." *Cinefantastique*, October 1992.

Box Office Mojo, various charts, 1989-2014.

Caldwell, John Thornton. "Breaking Ranks: Backdoor Workforces, Messy Workflows, and Craft Disaggregation." *Popular Communication* 8, no. 3, 2010.

Clarke, Rachel. "The Power Behind the Flower." *Premiere*, December 2002.

Clark, Mike. "Year-End Top Ten." *USA Today*, 1994.

Connor, J.D. "The Projections: Allegories of Industrial Crisis in Neoclassical Hollywood." *Representations* 71, 48-76.

Crawford, Travis. *Filmmaker Magazine*, Online Edition. Accessed March 4, 2014. http://filmmakermagazine.com/archives/issues/fall2000/columns/tiff.php#.Uy2ctaJuq7t.

"Digital Cinema – Key Figures and Facts." Europa Distribution Meeting Report.June 23, 2006. Accessed October 18, 2014. http://www.europa-distribution.org/files/bruxelles/digital_cinema_figures.pdf.

"The Digital Transition: We're Almost Done!" The National Association of Theater Owners. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://natoonline.org/initiatives/cinema-technologies/.

Doherty, Thomas. "*Chaplin* (Review)." *Cineaste*, March 1993.

----------. "Reviving an Undead Career: Coppola Sucks the Life Out of Stoker's Hoary Classic." *Cinefantastique*, October 1992.

Dyer, Richard. "Dracula and Desire." *Sight & Sound*, January 1993.

Eaton, Michael. "McKee and Me," *Sight & Sound*, March 2003.

Ebert, "Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze: Twin Pleasures," RogerEbert.com, Published December 17, 2002. Accessed October 10, 2014. http://www.rogerebert.com/interviews/charlie-kaufman-and-spike-jonze-twin-pleasures.

Eisele, John C. "The Wild East: Deconstructing Genre in the Hollywood Eastern." *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 68-94.

Financial Times, select articles, 1983.

Fuller, Graham. "The Prestige (Review)." *Sight & Sound*, December 2006.

Goldfarb, Brad. "Meryl Streep." *Interview*, December 2002/January 2003.

Goldsmith, Jeff. "The Prestige: Q &A." *Creative Screenwriting Magazine*, Podcast, Friday, October 20th, 2006, accessed January 5, 2014. http://creativescreenwritingmagazine.blogspot.com/2006/10/prestige-qa.html.

Grant, Edmond. "Chaplin." *Films in Review* 44, no. 5/6 (May/June 1993): 192-193.

Greven, David. "Contemporary Hollywood Masculinity and the Double-Protagonist Film." *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (Summer, 2009): 22-43.

Griffin, John. "Oscar Embraces the Indies." *Montreal Gazette*, March 22, 1997.

The Guardian (London), select articles, 1996-2014.

Hart, Hugh. "Writer's Block." *American Cinematographer*, December 2002.

Hay, Stephen. "Attenborough's Gandhi." *The Public Historian* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 84-96.

Heuring, David. "Nykvist Continues Storied Career with Chaplin." *American Cinematographer,* January 1993.

Hilderbrand, Lucas. "Adaptation (Review)." *Film Quarterly* 58, n. 1 (Fall 2004): 36-43.

Holben, Jay. "Lords of Illusion." *American Cinematographer*, November 2006.

Hollywood Reporter, various, 1996-2014.

The Independent (London), select articles, 1997-2000.

Indiewire, select articles, 2014.

J.B. "Film in Brief: Adaptation." *Cinefantastique,* February/March 2003.

Jensen, "This Week's Cover: Your Exclusive All-access pass to Christoper Nolan's 'Interstellar,'" *Entertainment Weekly*, online edition. Published October 15, 2014. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://popwatch.ew.com/2014/10/15/this-weeks-cover-your-exclusive-all-access-pass-to-christopher-nolans-interstellar/.

Jones, Alan. "Movie Spotlight: Adaptation." *Film Review*, March 2003.

Jones, Charlotte. "Over 69 Per Cent of World Screens Now Upgraded to Digital Cinema in 2012." IHS Technology Market Insight Report. January 14, 2013. Accessed October 2, 2013. https://technology.ihs.com/419093/over-69-per-cent-of-world-screens-now-upgraded-to-digital-cinema-in-2012.

Jones, Kent and Nathanial Jones. "Hearts and Flowers." *Film Comment*, November/December 2002.

Karagosian, Michael. "Digital Cinema in 2010 – A Mid-Year Report." MKPE Consulting LLC. Report. Published June 2010. Accessed October 18, 2014. http://mkpe.com/publications/d-cinema/reports/June2010_report.php.

"Keeping up with the Jonze." *Film Review*, March 2003.

Kenny, Glenn. "Reviews: *Adaptation*." *Premiere*. January 2003.

Kermode, Mark. "*Chaplin*." *Sight & Sound*, June 1993.

Kiscock, John. "*Shakespeare* accused of unfair campaign," *Calgary Herald*, March 9, 1999.

Lacey, Liam. "Michael Ondaatje: In the Skin of a Filmmaker." *The Globe and Mail*, November 9, 1996.

Lee, Chris. "The Wachowskis' *'Cloud Atlas*' Wows Toronto International Film Festival." *The Daily Beast*. September 9, 2012. Accessed October 19, 2014. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/09/09/the-wachowskis-cloud-atlas-wows- toronto-international-film-festival.html.

Lieberman, David. "UPDATE: Martin Scorsese Joins Tarantino, Apatow & Pals Backing Kodak Decision To Save Celluloid," Deadline Hollywood. Published August 4, 2014. Accessed October 20, 2014. http://deadline.com/2014/08/kodak-continue-product-film-stock-movies-tv-812189/.

Los Angeles Times, various, 1987-2014.

Maland, Charles. "How Much Chaplin Appears in *Chaplin*? A Look at Attenborough's Screen Biography." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (January 1997): 49-50.

Magid, Ron. "Effects Add Bite to *Bram Stoker's Dracula*." *American Cinematographer*, December 1992.

Matloff, Jason. "Scene Stealer: Brian Cox hits a Homer in '*Troy*.'" Premiere, June 2004.

Meza, Aaron. "Spike Jonze." Interview, December 2002/January 2003.

"MPAA Entertainment Industry Market Statistics 2007," The Motion Picture Association of America Report. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.immagic.com/eLibrary/ARCHIVES/GENERAL/MPAA_US/M080925E.pdf.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*. 16. no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18.

Newman, Kim. "Bloodline." *Sight & Sound*, January 1993.

New York Daily News, select articles, 1987-1997.

New York Times, various, 1987-2009.

Persall, Steve. "Old Hollywood is Dead: RIP." *St. Petersburg Times*, March 2, 1997.

"Press Release." Bell Canada Enterprises. November 10, 2000. Accessed March 4, 2014. http://www.bce.ca/news-and-media/releases/show/bell-canada-and-toronto-international-film-festival-bring-film-to-the-internet.

Ressner, Jeffrey. "The Traditionalist." *Directors Guild of America Quartery*.Spring 2012, Online Edition. Accessed January 15, 2014. http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1202-Spring-2012/DGA-Interview-Christopher-Nolan.aspx.

Rizzo, Sergio. "(In)Fidelity Criticism and the Sexual Politics of *Adaptation*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October 2008): 299-314.

Romney, Jonathan. "*Chaplin*." *Sight & Sound*, January 1993.

Schruers, Fred. "The Magic Hour: Hugh Jackman and Christian Bale aim to keep you spellbound in Christopher Nolan's latest twisty tale, *The Prestige*." *Premiere*, November 2006.

Shewman, Den. "Nothing Up Their Sleeves: Christopher and Jonathan Nolan on the Art of Magic, Murder, and *The Prestige*." *Creative Screenwriting Magazine*, September/October 2006.

Shone, Tom. "An Affair to Remember." *Sunday Times*, March 16, 1997.

Sinclair, Iain "Invasion of the Blood" *Sight & Sound*, January 1993.

Smith, Evan. "Thread Structure: Rewriting the Hollywood Formula." *Journal of Film and Video*51, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1999-2000): 88-96.

Spelling, Ian. "Keeping up with the Jonze." *Film Review*, March 2003, 52.

Strauss, Bob. "Wing Men: Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese Mustered Howard Hughes-like Intensity to get *'The Aviator'* Off of the Ground." *Daily News of Los Angeles*, December 12, 2004.

Strivers, Cyndi. "Trampled." *Premiere*, January 1993, 65-70.

"Tarantino Declares the 'Death of Cinema' at Cannes." *Toronto Star*, May 23, 2014.

"Theatrical Market Statistics 2008." The Motion Picture Association of America Report. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.stop-runaway-production.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/2008-MPAA-Theatrical-Stats.pdf.

"Theatrical Market Statistics 2013." The Motion Picture Association of America Report. Accessed October 17, 2014. http://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/MPAA- Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2013_032514-v2.pdf.

"Tiger Moth Productions, Inc." Corporation Wiki. Accessed March 2, 2014. http://www.corporationwiki.com/California/Berkeley/tiger-moth-productions-inc/42667289.aspx.

"Tiger Moth Productions," Internet Movie Database. Accessed January 20, 2014. http://www.imdb.com/company/co0034657/?ref_=fn_al_co_1.

"The tours de force Oscar voters love." *Premiere*, October 1992.

Travers, Peter. "*The Prestige* (Review)." *Rolling Stone*, October 20, 2006.

Turner, George. "*Bram Stoker's Dracula*: A Happening Vampire." *American Cinematographer*, November 1992.

----------. "Dracula Meets the Son of Coppola." *American Cinematographer*, November 1992.

Variety, various, 1992-2014.

Whalen, Tom. "Romancing Film: Images of Dracula." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (April 1995): 99-101.

Books:

Anderson, Carolyn."Biographical Film." In *Handbook of American Film Genres,* ed. Wes D. Gehring, 331-35. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Austin, Thomas. "*'Bram Stoker's Dracula'*: Gone with the Wind Plus Fangs." In *Hollywood, Hype, and Audiences: Selling and Watching Popular Film in the 1990s*, 114-151. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

Balio, Tino. "A Major Presence in All of the World's Important Markets: The Globalization of Hollywood in the 1990s." In *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.*Edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith, 58-73. London: Routledge, 1998.

Barbour, Douglas. *Michael Ondaatje.* New York: Twain Publishers, 1993.

Beck, Jerry. *The Animated Movie Guide.*Chicago: A Capella Books, 2005.

Bingham, Dennis. *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre.*New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010.

Brinkmann, Ron. *The Art and Science of Digital Compositing.* 2nd Edition. Burlington: Morgan Kaufman Publishers, 2008.

Buckland, Warren, ed. *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema.* West-Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Caldwell, John Thornton. *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Child, Doreen Alexander. *Charlie Kaufman: Confessions of an Original Mind.* Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010.

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision: Sound On Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

Cook, James W. *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Custen, George F. *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Dzialo, Chris. "'Frustrated Time' Narration: The Screenplays of Charlie Kaufman." In *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema.* Edited by Warren Buckland, 107-128. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Elsaesser, Thomas. "Specularity and Engulfment: Francis Ford Coppola and *Bram Stoker's Dracula.*" In *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.*Edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith, 198-208. London: Routledge, 1998.

----------. "The Blockbuster: Everything Connects, but Not Everything Goes." In *The End of Cinema as We Know It.* Edited by Jon Lewis, 11-22. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Falsetto, Mario. *Anthony Minghella: Interviews.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013.

Feuer, Jane. "The Self-Reflexive Musical and the Myth of Entertainment." In *Film Genre Reader II.*Edited by Bary Keith Grant, 441-455. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

Gasher, Mike.*Hollywood North: The Feature Film Industry in British Columbia.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002).

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Hill, Derek. *Charlie Kaufman and Hollywood's Merry Band of Pranksters, Fabulists and Dreamers: An Excursion into the American New Wave.* Harpenden: Kamera Books, 2008.

----------. "There is No More Watching." *The Philosophy of Charlie Kaufman.*Edited by David LaRocca, 208-223. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.

Hsu, Hsuan. "Post-Nationalism and the Cinematic Apparatus in Minghella's Adaptation of Ondaatje's *The English Patient.*" In *Comparitive Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing,* edited by Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, 49-61. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005.

Jameson, Frederic. "Afterword: Adaptation as a Philosophical Problem." In *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity.* Edited by Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner, 215-234. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

James, David E. *Allegories of the Cinema: American Film in the Sixties.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Keating, Gina. *Netflixed: The Epic Battle for America's Eyeballs.* New York: Penguin, 2012.

Keil, Charlie. "'American Cinema' in the 1990s and Beyond: Whose Country's Filmmaking is it Anyway?" In *The End of Cinema as We Know It: American Film in the Nineties.* Edited by Jon Lewis, 53-60. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

King, Geoff. *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction.* London: I.B. Taurus, 2007.

Koppelman, Charles. *Behind the Seen: How Walter Murch Edited Cold Mountain Using Apple's Final Cut Pro and What This Means for Cinema.* Berkeley: New Riders, 2005.

Kroon, Richard W. *A/V A to Z: An Encylcopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment, and Other Audiovisual Terms.* Jefferson: McFarlund& Company, 2010.

Lewis, Jon. "Those Who Disagree Can Kiss Jack Valenti's Ass." In *The End of Cinema as We Know It.* Edited by Jon Lewis, 23-32. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Lin, Carolyn A. and David J. Atkin, ed. *Communication Technology and Social Change: Theory and Implications.* New York: Routledge, 2012.

Maltby, Richard. *Hollywood Cinema.* 2nd Edition. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.

----------. “Nobody Knows Everything: Post-classical Historiographies and Consolidated Entertainment.” In *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema.*Edited by Steve Neale and Murray Smith, 21-44. London: Routledge, 1998.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media.*Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001.

Miller, Toby, NitinGovil, John McMurria, and Richard Maxwell. *Global Hollywood.* London: British Film Institute, 2001.

Modleski, Tania. *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory.* New York: Methuen, 1988.

Murch, Walter. *In the Blink of an Eye: A Perspective on Film Editing.* 2nd ed. Beverly Hills: Silman-James Press, 2001.

Naficy, Hamid. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Nadel, Alan. “Mapping the Other: *The English Patient*, Colonial Rhetoric, and Cinematic Representation.” In *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspectives of Film,* edited by David Blakesly, 21-36. Carbondale: South Illinois University Press, 2003.

Naremore, James. “Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation.” In *Film Adaptation.* Edited by James Naremore. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000. 1-15.

Ondaatje, Michael. *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film.* London: Bloomsbury, 2002.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Heretical Empiricism.* Edited by Louise K Barnett. Translated by Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Perren, Alisa. *Indie, inc.: Miramax and the Transformation of Hollywood in the 1990s.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.

Prince, Stephen. *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012.

Phillips, Gene. “Fright Night: *Bram Stoker's Dracula*.” *Godfather: the Intimate Francis Ford Coppola.* Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 2004.

Phillips, Gene D. and Rodney Hill, eds. *Francis Ford Coppola Interviews.* Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004.

Ray, Robert. “The Field of 'Literature and Film.'” In *Film Adaptation.* Edited by James Naremore, 38-53. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Robinson, David. *Richard Attenborough.* London: British Film Institute, 2008.

Rothman, William. *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Schatz, Thomas, ed. *Hollywood: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Vol. I, Historical Dimensions: The Development of the American Film Industry.* New York: Routledge, 2004.

Scott, Allen J. "Hollywood and the World: The Geography of Motion-Picture Distribution and Marketing." In *The Hollywood Reader*. Edited by Toby Miller, 162-184. London: Routledge, 2009.

Sragow, Michael. "Godfatherhood," In *Francis Ford Coppola Interviews,* edited by Gene D. Phillips and Rodney Hill, 167-184. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Stam, Robert. "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation." In *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation.* Edited by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, 1-52. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

--------. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

Stewart, Garrett. *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photosynthesis.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Swartz, Charles S., ed. *Understanding Digital Cinema: A Professional Handbook.* Burlington: Focal Press, 2005.

Thomas, Browen. "'Piecing Together a Mirage': Adapting *The English Patient* for the Screen." In *The Classic Novel From Page to Screen.*Edited by Robert Giddings and Erica Sheen, 197-132. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Truffaut, François. "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema." In *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader.* Edited by Barry Keith Grant. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. 9-18.

----------. *Hitchcock.* Revised Edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984.

Williams, Alan, Ducan Calow and Andrew Lee. *Digital Media Contracts.*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Wyatt, Justin. *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*. Austin: University of Texas, 1994.

Young, Bob Jr. “Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle.” In *American Classic Screen Profiles,* edited by John C. Tibbetts and James M. Welsh, 3-17. Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010.

FILMOGRAPHY

Feature films:

Adaptation. Directed by Spike Jonze. Columbia/Propaganda Films, 2002. DVD. Columbia Tristar Home Entertaiment, 2003.

Aliens. Directed by James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox/Brandywine Productions, 1986. DVD. *Alien* Triple Pack. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2008.

Amadeus. Directed by Milos Forman. AMLF/The Saul Zaentz Company, 1984. VHS. Warner Home Video, 2001.

Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues. Directed by Adam McKay. Paramount Pictures/Apatow Productions/Gary Sanchez Productions, 2013. DVD. Paramount, 2014.

Apocalypse Now. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Zoetrope Studios, 1979. Blu-ray disc. Full Disclosure Edition. Lionsgate, 2010.

Argo. Directed by Ben Affleck. Warner Bros./GK Films/Smokehouse Pictures, 2012. 35mm film.

Argo. Directed by Ben Affleck. Warner Bros./GK Films/Smokehouse Pictures, 2012. DVD. Warner Bros. Home Entertainment Group, 2013.

Artist, The. Directed by Michel Hazanavicius. The Weinstein Company, et al., 2011. 35mm film.

Artist, The. Directed by Michel Hazanavicius. The Weinstein Company, et al., 2011. DVD. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012.

Avatar. Directed by James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox/Lightstorm Entertainment,2009. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2010.

Aviator, The. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Warner Bros./Miramax/Appian Way, 2004. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2005.

Baadasssss! Directed by Mario Van Peebles. Bad Aaas Cinema/MVP Films, 2003. DVD. Sony Pictures, 2004.

Babe, The. Directed by Universal Pictures/Finnegan/Pinchuk Productions/Waterhorse Productions, 1992. DVD. Universal Studios, 2003.

Batman. Directed by Tim Burton. Warner Bros./The Guber-Peters Company/Polygram Pictures, 1989. 35mm film.

Batman Begins. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros./Legendary/Syncopy, 2005. 35mm film.

Batman Returns. Directed by Tim Burton. Warner Bros./Polygram Pictures, 1992. 35mm film.

Beauty and the Beast. Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise. Walt Disney Pictures, 1991. DVD. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2010.

Being John Malkovich. Directed by Spike Jonze. Gramercy Pictures/Propaganda Films, 1999. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2012.

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance). Directed by Alejandro Gongález Iñárritu. New Regency/Worldview Entertainment, 2014. Digital Cinema Projection.

Birth of a Nation, The. Directed by D.W. Griffith. David W. Griffith Corporation/Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915. DVD. Image Entertainment, 1998.

Blair Witch Project, The. Directed by Daniel Myrick and Eduaro Sanchez. Haxan Films, 1999. VHS. Artisan Home Entertainment, 1999.

Bottle Rocket. Directed by Wes Anderson. Columbia Pictures/Gracie Films, 1996. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2008.

Bowfinger. Directed by Frank Oz. Imagine Entertainment, 1999. 35mm film.

Bram Stoker's Dracula. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope/Columbia Pictures. 35mm film.

Bram Stoker's Dracula. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. American Zoetrope/Columbia Pictures. DVD. Collector's Edition. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007.

Braveheart. Directed by Mel Gibson. Icon Productions/The Ladd Company. 35mm film.

Bride of Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale. Universal Pictures, 1935. DVD. *Frankenstein:* The Legacy Collection. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2004.

Bridge Too Far, A. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Joseph E. Levine Productions, 1977. DVD. M-G-M/U/A Home Entertainment, 1998.

Chaplin. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Carolco Pictures/Canal +, 1992. 35mm film.

Chaplin. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Carolco Pictures/Canal +, 1992. DVD. Lionsgate, 2008.

Chicago. Directed by Rob Marshall. Miramax Films, 2002. DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment/Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2003.

Circus, The. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/United Artists, 1928. DVD. The Chaplin Collection. Warner Home Video, 2004.

Citizen Kane. Directed by Orson Welles. RKO Radio Pictures/Mercury Productions, 1941. DVD. Turner Home Entertainment, 2001.

City Lights. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/United Artists, 1931. DVD. The Chaplin Collection. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Cloud Atlas. Directed by Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski, and Lanna Wachowski. Cloud Atlas Productions, et al., 2012. Warner Home Video, 2013.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind. Directed by George Clooney. Miramax Films/Mad Chance, 2002. DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2003.

Congo. Directed by Frank Marshall. Paramount Pictures/Kennedy/Marshall Company, 1995. 35mm film.

Contempt (*Le mépris*). Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Les Films Concordia/Rome Paris Films/Compagnia Cinematografica Champion, 1963. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2002.

Cradle Will Rock. Directed by Tim Robbins. Cradle Productions/Touchstone Pictures, 1999. DVD. Buena Vista Home Video/Mill Creek, 2000.

Crowd, The. Directed by King Vidor. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1928. VHS. Warner Home Video, 2000.

Cry Freedom. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Universal Pictures/Mable Arch Productions, 1987. DVD. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 1999.

Crying Game, The. Directed by Neil Jordan. Miramax Films/Palace Pictures/Channel Four Films, 1992. DVD. Lions Gate Home Entertainment, 2005.

Dances with Wolves. Directed by Kevin Costner. Tig Productions/Orion Pictures, 1990. DVD. Special Edition. M-G-M Home Entertainment, 2003.

Dark Knight, The. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros./Legendary/Syncopy, 2008. 35mm film.

Dark Knight Rises, The. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros./Legendary/Syncopy, 2012. Digital Cinema Projection.

Deathproof. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. The Weinstein Company/Dimension Films, 2007. DVD. The Weinstein Company, 2007.

Dick Tracy. Directed by Warren Beatty. Touchstone Pictures/Silver Screen Partners IV, 1990. DVD. Touchstone Home Video, 2002.

Die Hard 2: Die Harder. Directed by Renny Harlin. Twentieth Century Fox/Gordon Company/Silver Pictures, 1990. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007.

Dumb & Dumber. Directed by New Line Cinema/Motion Picture Company of America, 1994. DVD. New Line Home Video, 2006.

Ed Wood. Directed by Tim Burton. Touchstone Pictures, 1994. 35mm film.

Ed Wood. Directed by Tim Burton. Touchstone Pictures, 1994. DVD. Special Edition. Touchstone Home Entertainment, 2004.

English Patient, The. Directed by Anthony Minghella. Miramax/Tiger Moth, 1996. 35mm film.

English Patient, The. Directed by Anthony Minghella. Miramax/Tiger Moth, 1996. DVD. Miramax Collector's Edition. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind. Directed by Michel Gondry. Focus Features, 2004, DVD. Universal Studios Home Video, 2004.

Fall, The. Directed by Tarsem Singh. Roadside Attractions, 2006. 35mm film.

Fargo. Directed by Joel Coen. Polygram/Working Title/Gramercy Pictures, 1996. Blu-radisc. From the Minds of the Coen Brothers. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Inc./Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, LLC., 2011.

Following. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Next Wave Films/Syncopy, 1998. DVD. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 2001.

Forrest Gump. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. Paramount Pictures, 1994. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2006.

Frankenstein. Directed by James Whale. Universal Pictures, 1931. DVD. *Frankenstein:* The Legacy Collection. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2004.

Gandhi. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Columbia Pictures/International Film Investors, et al., 1982. DVD. Sony Pictures Entertainment, 2007.

Gangs of New York. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Miramax Films/Alberto Grimaldi Productions, 2002. DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2003.

Ghost. Directed by Jerry Zucker. Paramount Pictures, 1990. 35mm film.

Glengarry Glen Ross. Directed by James Foley. New Line Cinema/GGR/Zupnick Cinema Group II, 1992. DVD. Lions Gate, 2002.

Godfather, The. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures/Alfran Productions, 1972. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004.

Godfather, Part III, The. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. Paramount Pictures/Zoetrope Studios, 1974. DVD. Paramount Home Video, 2004.

Gods and Monsters. Directed by Bill Condon. Regent Entertainment/Lions Gate, 1998. DVD. Lions Gate, 2003.

Gold Diggers of 1933. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Warner Bros., 1933. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2006.

Gold Rush, The. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/United Artists, 1925. DVD. The Chaplin Collection. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Gone with the Wind. Directed by Victor Fleming, George Cukor, and Sam Wood. Selznick International Pictures/Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2009.

Great Dictator, The. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/United Artists, 1940. DVD. The Chaplin Collection. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Great Escape, The. Directed by John Sturges. The Mirisch Company/United Artists, 1963. VHS. M-G-M/U.A. Home Entertainment, 1996.

Grey Owl. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Largo Entertainment, et al., 1999. DVD. Lions Gate, 2011.

Hateful Eight, The. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. The Weinstein Company, 2015.

Henry & June. Directed by Philip Kaufman. Walrus & Associates, 1990. DVD. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 1999.

Hitchcock. Directed by Sacha Gervasi. Fox Searchlight Pictures, et al., 2012. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013.

Hoffa. Directed by Danny DeVito. Twentieth Century Fox/Canal +/Jersey Films, 1992. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2004.

Hollywoodland. Directed by Allen Coulter. Focus Features/Miramax Films, 2006. DVD. Focus Features, 2007.

Hook. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Amblin Entertainment/TriStar Pictures. 35mm film.

Houdini. Directed by Pen Denshom. Trilogy Entertainment Group, 1998, DVD. Warner Home Video, 2013.

Hugo. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Paramount Pictures, 2011. RealD 3-D Digital Cinema Projection.

Human Nature. Directed by Michel Gondry. Fine Line Feature/Studio Canal/Good Machine, 2001. DVD. New Line Home Video, 2004.

Illusionist, The. Directed by Neil Burger. Yari Group Releasing, 2006. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007.

Inception. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Warner Bros./Legendary/Syncopy, 2010. 35mm film.

In Love and War. Directed by Richard Attenborough. New Line Cinema/Dmitri Villard Productions, 1996. DVD. New Line Home Video, 1999.

Interstellar. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Paramount Pictures/Warner Bros./Syncopy, 2014. IMAX 70mm film.

Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles. Directed by Neil Jordan. Geffen Pictures, 1994. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Jaws. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Zanuck/Brown Productions/Universal Pictures, 1975. DVD. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2012.

Jules and Jim (*Jules et Jim*). Directed by François Truffaut. Les Films Du Carosse-Sedif. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2005.

Jurassic Park. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Amblin Entertainment/Universal Pictures, 1993. 35mm film.

Kid, The. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/First National, 1921. DVD. The Chaplin Collection. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Kill Bill: Vol 1. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Miramax/A Band Apart, 2003. DVD. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004.

Kill Bill: Vol 2. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Miramax/A Band Apart, 2004. DVD. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2004.

Killers, The. Directed by Robert Siodmak. Mark Hellinger Productions/Universal Pictures, 1946. DVD. Ernest Hemingway's *The Killers*. The Criterion Collection, 2003.

King Kong. Directed by Peter Jackson. Universal Pictures/Wingnut Films, 2005. 35mm film.

King's Speech, The. Directed by Tom Hooper. The Weinstein Company, 2010. 35mm film.

Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang. Directed by Shane Black. Warner Bros./Silver Pictures, 2005. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2006.

Lawrence of Arabia. Directed by David Lean. Horizon Pictures/Columbia Pictures, 1962. Restoration by Robert A. Harris and Jim Painten, 1990. DVD. Columbia/Tristar Home Entertainment, 2003.

Lethal Weapon. Directed by Richard Donner. Warner Bros./Silver Pictures, 1987. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2006.

Life of Pi. Directed by Ang Lee. Fox 2000 Pictures, et al., 2012. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2013.

Lion King, The. Directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff. Walt Disney Pictures, 1994. DVD. Platinum Edition. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2003.

Lonestar. Directed by John Sayles. Columbia Pictures/Castle Rock Entertainment/Rio Dulce, 1996. DVD. Warner Home Video, 1999.

Lord of the Rings, The: The Return of the King. Directed by Peter Jackson. New Line Cinema/WingNut Films, 2003. DVD. New Line Home Video, 2004.

Lord of the Rings, The: The Two Towers. Directed by Peter Jackson. New Line Cinema/WingNut Films, 2002. DVD. New Line Home Video, 2003.

Lorenzo's Oil. Directed by George Miller. Universal Pictures, 1992. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2010.

Lost Boys. Directed by Joel Schumacher. Warner Bros., 1987. DVD. Warner Home Video, 1998.

Malcolm X. Directed by Spike Lee. Largo International N.V./JVC Entertainment Networks/40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks, 1992. VHS. Warner Home Video, 1993.

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Directed by Kenneth Branagh. TriStar Pictures, 1994. DVD. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 2004.

Memento. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Newmarket Capital Group/Summit Entertainment, 2000. DVD. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 2002.

Mighty Joe Young. Directed by Ron Underwood. The Walt Disney Company, 1998. 35mm film.

Modern Times. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Charles Chaplin Productions/United Artists, 1936. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2010.

Moulin Rouge. Directed by Baz Luhrmann. Twentieth Century Fox/Bazmark Films, 2000. DVD. Baz Luhrmann's Red Curtain Trilogy. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2002.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? Directed by Joel Coen. Touchstone Pictures, et al., 2000. DVD. Touchstone Home Entertainment, 2001.

Oh! What a Lovely War. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Accord Productions, 1969. DVD. Paramount, 2006.

Once Upon a Time in Mexico. Directed by Robert Rodríguez. Columbia Pictures/Dimension Films/Troublemaker Studios, 2003. DVD. Columbia TriStar Home Video, 2004.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Directed by Milos Forman. Fantasy Films/United Artists, 1975. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2002.

Planet Terror. Directed by Robert Rodríguez. Dimension Films/The Weinstein Company, 2007. DVD. The Weinstein Company, 2007.

Plan 9 from Outer Space. Directed by Edward D. Wood, Jr. Reynolds Pictures, 1959. DVD. Image Entertainment, 2000.

The Player. Directed by Robert Altman. Fine Line Features, 1992. DVD. New Line Home Video. 2007.

Pleasantville. Directed by Gary Ross. New Line Cinema/Larger Than Life Productions, 1998. 35mm film.

Postino, Il. Directed by Michael Radford. Cecchi Gori Group/Miramax Films, 1994. DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2003.

The Prestige. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Newmarket/Touchstone/Syncopy, 2006.35mm film.

The Prestige. Directed by Christopher Nolan. Newmarket/Touchstone/Syncopy, 2006. DVD. Touchstone Home Video, 2007.

Psycho. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Shamley Productions/Paramount Pictures, 1960. VHS. Universal Studios Home Video, 1997.

Pulp Fiction. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Miramax Films/A Band Apart/Jersey Films, 1994. DVD. Miramax Home Entertainment, 2002.

Purple Rose of Cairo. Directed by Woody Allen. Orion Pictures, 1985. DVD. M-G-M Home Video, 2001.

RKO 281. Directed by Benjamin Ross. Scott Free Productions/HBO Pictures, 1999. DVD. Home Box Office Home Video, 2009.

Rushmore. Directed by Wes Anderson. American Empirical Pictures/Touchstone Pictures, 1998. DVD. The Criterion Collection, 2004.

Scoop. Directed by Woody Allen. Focus Features/Relativity Media, 2006. DVD. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006.

Shadowlands. Directed by Richard Attenborough. Price Entertainment/Spelling Films International/Shadowlands Productions, 1993. DVD. HBO Home Video, 1998.

Shakespeare in Love. Directed by John Madden. Miramax Films/Universal Pictures, 1998. DVD. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2011.

Sherlock Jr. Directed by Buster Keaton. Buster Keaton Productions/Metro Pictures,1924. DVD. Kino Video, 2001.

Shrek. Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jensen. DreamWorks SKG/Pacific Data Images, 2001. DVD. DreamWorks Home Entertainment, 2001.

Shrek 2. Directed by Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, and Conrad Vernon. DreamWorks SKG/Pacific Data Images, 2004. DreamWorks Home Entertainment, 2004.

Singin' in the Rain. Directed by Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1952. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2002.

Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow. Directed by Kerry Conran. Paramount Pictures, et al., 2004. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2005.

Sleepy Hollow. Directed by Tim Burton. Mandalay/Paramount Pictures, 1999. 35mm film.

Slumdog Millionaire. Directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan. Warner Bros./Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2008. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2009.

Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace. Directed by George Lucas. Lucasfilm/Twentieth Century Fox, 1999. 35mm film.

Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones. Directed by George Lucas. Lucasfilm/Twentieth Century Fox, 2002. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2005.

The Story of Louis Pasteur. Directed by William Dieterle. First National Productions, 1936. VHS. MGM Home Entertainment, 1994.

Stunt Man, The. Directed by Richard Rush. Twentieth Century Fox/Simon Productions, 1980. DVD. Severing Films, 2011.

Sunset Blvd. Directed by Billy Wilder. Paramount Pictures, 1950. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2006.

Superman Returns. Directed by Bryan Singer. Warner Bros./Legendary/Bad Hat Harry, 2006. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2006.

Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song. Directed by Melvin Van Peebles. Yeah, 1971. DVD. Xenon Entertainment Group, 2003.

Swimming with Sharks. Directed by George Huang. Keystone Films/Cineville, 1994. DVD. Lions Gate, 2005.

Synechdoche, New York. Directed by Charlie Kaufman. SKE/Sony Picture Classics, 2008. DVD. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009.

Talented Mr. Ripley, The. Directed by Anthony Minghella. Paramount Pictures/Miramax International, 1999. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2000.

Terminator, The. Directed by James Cameron. Pacific Western/Orion Pictures, 1984. DVD. Image Entertainment, 1997.

Terminator 2: Judgement Day. Directed by James Cameron. Carolco, 1991. DVD. Artisan Home Entertainment, 2003.

Titanic. Directed by James Cameron. Twentieth Century Fox/Paramount Pictures, 1997. 35mm film.

Touch of Evil. Directed by Orson Welles. Universal International Pictures, 1958. Restoration, 1998. DVD. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2000.

Toy Story. Directed by John Lasseter. Pixar Animation Studios/Walt Disney Pictures, 1995. DVD. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2005.

Toy Story 2. Directed by John Lasseter, Ash Brannon, and Lee Unkritch. Walt Disney Pictures/Pixar Animation Studios, 1999. DVD. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2010.

TRON. Directed by Steven Lisberger. Walt Disney Productions/Lisberger/Kushner, 1982. DVD. Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2002.

Truly Madly Deeply. Directed by Anthony Minghella. BBC/Lionhart/Winston, 1990. DVD. MGM Home Entertainment, 2001.

2001: A Space Odyssey. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. M-G-M/Stanley Kubrick Productions. 35mm film.

Vertigo. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Paramount Pictures, 1958. Restoration by Robert A. Harris and James C. Katz, 1996. 70mm film.

Waterworld. Directed by Kevin Reynolds. Universal Pictures/Gordon Company/Davis Entertainment, 1995. 35mm film.

Willow. Directed by Ron Howard. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Lucasfilm/Imagine Entertainment, 1988. VHS. RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Video, 1988.

Wolf Man, The. Directed by George Waggner. Universal Pictures, 1941. DVD. *The Wolf Man*: The Legacy Collection. Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2004.

Wolfman, The. Directed by Joe Johnston. Universal Pictures/Relativity Media, 2010. 35mm film.

Wolf of Wall Street, The. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Paramount Pictures/Red Granite/Appian Way, 2013. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2014.

X-Men: The Last Stand. Directed by Brett Ratner. Twentieth Century Fox, 2006. DVD. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2006.

Yankee Doodle Dandy. Directed by Michael Curtiz. Warner Bros., 1942. DVD. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Short films:

Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (*L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat*)*.* Directed by Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière. Lumière (Film Company), 1896. DVD. *The Movies Begin – A Treasure of Early Cinema*. Kino Video, 2002.

Camera. Directed by David Cronenberg. Toronto International Film Festival Commission, 2000. DVD. *Videodrome* Special Feature*.* The Criterion Collection, 2004.

Heart of the World, The. Directed by Guy Maddin. Toronto International Film Festival Commission, 2000. DVD. *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* Special Feature. Zeitgeist Video, 2002.

Immigrant, The. Directed by Charles Chaplin. Lone Star Corporation/Mutual Film, 1917. DVD. Chaplin: The Legend Lives On Collection. Madacy Home Video, 2004.

Line, The. Directed by Atom Egoyan. Toronto International Film Festival Commission, 2000.

Man with the Rubber Head, The (*L'homme à la tête en caoutchouc*). Directed by Georges Méliès. Star-Film, 1901. DVD. *Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913).* Flicker Alley, 2008.

Trip to the Moon, A (*Le voyage dans la lune*). Directed by Georges Méliès. Star-Film, 1902. DVD. *Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913).* Flicker Alley, 2008.

Vanishing Lady, The (*Escamotage d'une dame au théâtre Robert Houdin*). Directed by Georges Méliès. Théâtre Robert Houdin, 1896. DVD. *Georges Méliès: First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913).* Flicker Alley, 2008.

Documentaries:

Chaplin: Strolling Into the Sunset. Lionsgate, 2008. DVD. *Chaplin* Special Feature. Lionsgate, 2008.

Director's Notebook, The: The Cinematic Sleight-of-hand of Christopher Nolan. Directed by Mark Rance. Touchstone Entertainment, 2007. DVD. *The Prestige* Special Feature. Touchstone Home Entertainment, 2007.

Fahrenheit 9/11. Directed by Michael Moore. Miramax Films/Fellowship Adventure Group/Dog Eat Dog Films, 2004. DVD. Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment, 2004.

In-Camera: The Naïve Visual Effects of 'Bram Stoker's Dracula.' Directed by Kim Aubry. ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions, 2007. DVD. *Bram Stoker's Dracula* Special Feature. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007.

It's All True: Based on an Unfinished Film by Orson Welles. Directed by Richard Wilson, Myron Meisel, and Bill Krohn. Paramount Pictures/Les Films Balenciaga, 1993. DVD. Paramount Home Entertainment, 2004. (Original material directed by Orson Welles and Norman Foster, RKO Pictures, 1942).

Side by Side. Directed by Christopher Kenneally. Company Films, 2012. Streaming Video. Netflix. Accessed March 12, 2014.

Television series:

Batman. Aired from 1966 to 1968, on ABC. DVD. *Batman: The Complete Series.* Warner Home Video, 2014.

Dana Carvey Show, The. Aired 1996, on ABC. Co-written by Charlies Kaufman, et al. DVD. *The Dana Carvey Show: The Complete Series.* Shout! Factory, 2009.

Inspector Morse. Season 1, episode 1, "The Dead of Jericho." Directed by Alastair Reed. Screenplay by Anthony Minghella. Aired January 6, 1987, on ITV. DVD. *Inspector Morse Set One: The Dead of Jericho.* BFS Entertainment, 2011, disc 1.

Inspector Morse. Season 3, episode 3, "Deceived by Flight." Directed by Anthony Simmons. Screenplay by Anthony Minghella. Aired January 18, 1989, on ITV. DVD. *Inspector Morse – Deceived by Flight.* BFS Entertainment, 2002.

Inspector Morse. Season 4, episode 3, "Driven to Distraction." Directed by Sandy Johnson. Written by Anthony Minghella. Aired January 17, 1990, on ITV. DVD. *Inspector Morse-- Driven to Distraction.* BFS Entertainment, 2003.

Get a Life. Season 2, episode 6, "Prisoner of Love." Directed by David Mirkin. Written by Charlie Kaufman. Aired December 14, 1991, on FOX. DVD. *Get a Life: The Complete Series.* Shout! Factory, 2012, disc 5.

Get a Life. Season 2, episode 12, "1977 2000." Directed by David Mirkin. Written by Charlie Kaufman. Aired March 1, 1992, on FOX. DVD. *Get a Life: The Complete Series.* Shout! Factory, 2012, disc 6.

Oscars, The (85th Annual Academy Awards). Directed by Don Mischer. Hosted by Seth MacFarlane. Aired February 24, 2013, on ABC. Video Recording.

Seinfeld. Season 8, episode 17, "The English Patient." Directed by Andy Akerman. Aired March 13, 1997, on NBC. DVD. *Seinfeld: Season 8.* Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2012, disc 3.

69th Annual Academy Awards. Directed by Louis J. Horvitz and Shanda Sawyer. Hosted by Billy Crystal. Aired March 24, 1997, on ABC. Streaming Video. 69th Oscars Highlights.The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. Accessed March 1, 2014. http://www.oscars.org/videos-photos/69th-oscars-highlights-0.

APPENDIX
Industrial Chronology of the New New Hollywood

Note: "B" indicates business developments, "T" indicates technological milestones, and "I" indicates important factors in the changing notion of independent filmmaking.

1986

B For the first time in history the major studios gain a higher share of total revenues from home video (primarily rentals) than from the theatrical distribution of motion pictures (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 224). Most companies remain relatively hesitant about the retail sale of home video tapes directly to consumers with most home video priced-to-rent rather than priced-to-own.

1987

B Coca-Cola merges its subsidiaries Columbia Pictures and Tri-Star Pictures to make Columbia Pictures Entertainment (Maltby, 574).

B James Stewart and Ginger Rogers testify before Congress in an attempt to prevent the colorization of classic films (Maureen Dowd, "Film Stars Protest Coloring," *New York Times,* May 13, 1987).

T Cable television now reaches 50% of all American households (Penny Pagano, "Cable TV Official Sees 1987 as Watershed Year," *Los Angeles Times,* January 20, 1987).

1988

B The U.S. Congress passes the "National Film Preservation Act of 1988," authorizing the Library of Congress to select up to 25 "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant films" for preservation in a National Film Registry (Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/film/filmabou.html).

T Ron Howard's *Willow* pioneers a digital "morphing" effect, by which practical puppets are combined with computer-generated transitions so that different creatures morph into one another onscreen (Kroon, 428).

1989

B For the first time in history, all of the films in the year-end worldwide top ten have grossed more than $100 million at the box office. Never again, to date, will a film gross under $100 million and still finish in the top ten (Comparison of yearly Top Ten charts, Box Office Mojo).

B Sony acquires Columbia Pictures Entertainment and its subsidiary Tri-Star (King, 70).

1990

B Warner Communications and Time, Inc. complete a merger, forming the media and entertainment conglomerate Time Warner (King, 75).

B Matsushita Electric acquires MCA/Universal (King, 71).

T *Die Hard 2: Die Harder* is the first major studio release to utilize a digitally manipulated matte painting (Prince, 165).

T Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* becomes the first major Hollywood film to employ a fully digital soundtrack, the Kodak and Optical Sound Radiation Corp.'s CDS system (Chris Willman, "'Dick Tracy' Brings in Arresting New Cinema Sound System," *Los Angeles Times,* May 30, 1990).

B/I The long-standing MPAA rating of "X" is replaced by "NC-17," which is considered by many independent filmmakers as an important tool in connoting the artistic rendering of explicit material rather than simply pornography; the first film released with this rating is Philip Kaufman's *Henry and June* (1990) (Lewis, 24).

B/I Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* becomes one of the last legitimate "sleeper hits" in Hollywood history: accruing $424 million worldwide over the course of the next year in theaters, but with a slow initially limited release. The film generated accelerated returns based on a word-of-mouth campaign, never making it to #1 at the domestic box office, and never expanding beyond 1,600 screens in North America, but ultimately spending 25 consecutive weeks in the Top Ten ("Dances with Wolves," http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=weekend&id=danceswithwolves.htm). Maltby sees this phenomenon as becoming almost completely obsolete in the 1990s proliferation of short run saturation booking.

B The sale of video cassette recorders (VCRs) reaches 220 million units, as home video (sell-through) revenue steadily encroaches on the revenues of theatrical exhibition (Maltby, "Post-Classical Historiographies," 35).

1991

T First Academy Award presented for Best Visual Effects to a film making extensive use of computer-generated imagery (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*). James Cameron's film is the first to extensively utilize CG morphing effects shots to depict two of its main characters in an otherwise completely live action film (Jonathan Bing and Dade Hayes, "Back at the Helm," *Variety,* January 21, 2004).

B Last year to date in which, in total, major motion pictures gross more revenue through initial theatrical release than in subsequent home video sales (sell-through). In every subsequent year, the revenue gap between theatrical exhibition and home video widens, with home video becoming exponentially the more profitable of the two distribution methods (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 194).

1992

B For the first time studio revenue from sell-through VHS sales surpasses that of theatrical exhibition returns (Maltby, 194). This is suggestive of a reversal of industrial precepts from the 80s, in which the predominately studio-endorsed home video distribution strategy had been restricted to sales to retail rental outlets.

T/B First fully animated film to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Picture (Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*), lauded for, among other things, the experimental use of partially computer-generated visual environments for its animated characters (Bernard Weintraub, "'Bugsy' a Big Winner in Oscar Nominations Rife with Surprise," *New York Times,* February 20, 1992).

I Beginning with *The Crying Game* this year, Miramax Pictures garners at least one Academy Award nomination for Best Picture every single year for the next 10 consecutive years – the longest streak for any film studio since the 1940s – en-route to establishing a reputation as the premiere "independent" film studio of the New New Hollywood. This includes winning the Award on three occasions: *The English Patient* (1996), *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), and *Chicago* (2002) (Comparative analysis of yearly awards results, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences).

1993

B Domestic theatrical exhibition revenues drop to only 20% of the total revenue for the major studios (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 575).

B/I Miramax is purchased by The Walt Disney Company, but continues to operate as an "independent" film unit of the larger parent company (Perren, 70-71).

Cable company Viacom, Inc. acquires Paramount Communications (Maltby, 37).

B/T Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* becomes the highest grossing film of all-time domestically, extensively utilizing "photo-realistic" computer-generated effects, and becoming the first film ever to employ DTS sound in its exhibition (Andrew Hindes, "DTS F/X Out of This 'World,'" *Variety,* December 18, 1996).

1994

B For the first time in history overseas revenues for Hollywood films surpass the domestic total (Balio, 60).

I/B Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen form a partnership to create the production/distribution company Dreamworks SKG as an "independent" competitor to the larger studios.

B Setting a paradigmatic precedent, Disney's *The Lion King* grosses $80 million at the domestic box office, but gains an additional $220 million from its subsequent home video release (Elsaesser, "The Blockbuster," 11).

B Viacom purchases Blockbuster Entertainment, the leading home video retailer in the nation (Balio, 67).

I The Bravo Network launches the Independent Film Channel (Perren, 110).

1995

B Matsushita sells a majority stake in MCA/Universal to Seagram Beverages of Canada (King, 71).

B Time Warner acquires Turner Broadcasting, including its extensive library of films: the entire back catalog of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and its subsidiary United Artists (King, 75).

B Signaling the newly dominant trend toward super wide multiplex release (or saturation booking) of ultra-high-budget films, this year 153 motion pictures initially open in over 800 theaters each, and these films account for 95% of *all* domestic theatrical revenue (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 203).

B Kevin Reynolds's *Waterworld* makes headlines as potentially the highest budgeted movie of all-time with a reported total expenditure of over $200 million. The film is a colossal failure at the domestic box office but demonstrates the emerging effectiveness of ancillary markets when it actually recoups its losses internationally, and is thus labeled as a worldwide success (Maltby, 37).

T First feature-length film consisting entirely of computer-generated imagery (*Toy Story*) (Leonard Klady, "Review: Toy Story," *Variety,* November 19, 1995).

1996

B President Clinton signs into law the "Telecommunications Act of 1996," which as a primarily de-regulatory action, will allow for a wave of mergers and acquisitions to follow as individual companies can now legally combine holdings in the previously separate industries of cable, telephone, and film/television (Maltby, 576).

1997

B Total foreign box office receipts for the major studios are again roughly equal to the those of domestic returns ($6.821 billion and $6.877 billion respectively); this represents a major historical shift of the 1990s, as throughout the Classical Hollywood and New Hollywood periods, overseas revue remained around one-third of that of domestic revenue (Miller, 4-6).

B/I Lionsgate (now Lions Gate) forms as an independent film production company in Vancouver, British Columbia (Gasher, 110). The originally Canadian company will eventually become the largest independent film studio in Hollywood, when it re-locates a majority of its operations to Santa Monica, California.

T First Academy Award presented for Best Film Editing to a film edited entirely on a digital platform (Walter Murch for *The English Patient*) (Koppelman, 61).

T AMPAS retroactively honors the computer-generated special effects developed on *Tron* (1982), after having failed to acknowledge this achievement upon the film's initial release fifteen years earlier (Teresa Riordan, "Patents; Characters Can Make Their Own Decisions and Move More Gracefully," *New York Times,* September 10, 2001).

T James Cameron's *Titanic* becomes the first film to gross more than $1 Billion worldwide in its first theatrical run, becoming the highest grossing film of all-time ("Titanic," Box Office Mojo). Heavy use of computer-generated imagery.

1998

T HDTV debuts on the consumer market, and several television series begin broadcasting in high-definition (Joel Brinkley, "HDTV: High Definition, High in Price," *New York Times,* August 20, 1998).

1999

I/T *The Blair Witch Project* becomes the most profitable film by gross percentage of budget in history, after an intensive viral marketing campaign based on internet advertising rather than more traditional methods (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 576).

T/B Netflix begins offering a monthly subscription video rental service, delivering DVD videos to customers through the mail (Keating, 1). The Company will eventually offer on-demand digital streaming of films directly to subscribers' homes.

T First major motion picture electronically scanned in its entirety for the purpose of digital color correction (Gary Ross's *Pleasantville*) – now an industry standard. Digitized color timing combines previously separate post-production positions while eliminating some production-stage jobs from the industry (Prince, 73).

T High-definition digital projectors are installed at 4 Los Angeles and New York theaters to accompany the release of George Lucas's *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace,* in an effort by Lucas to demonstrate the effectiveness of digital projection (Swartz, 159-160).

2000

B Seagram (and by extension MCA/Universal) is bought out by French company Vivendi, which briefly re-brands itself as Vivendi Universal (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 577).

T First feature film electronically scanned in its entirety *despite* utilizing virtually no visual effects (Joel Coen and Ethan Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). Rather than treat the film photochemically, the Coen Brothers elect to tint their entire film with sepia tone via digital color correction, setting an industry standard for subsequent years (Prince, 73).

T 15 digital cinema screens exist in North America, 31 worldwide ("Digital Cinema – Key Figures and Facts," Europa Distribution).

2001

B Increased outsourcing leads to a 12% drop this year in overall film and television employment in the Southern California area, despite an increase in the number of films being produced (Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema,* 214).

T Robert Rodríguez's *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* becomes the first major feature film (not released until 2003) to be shot entirely on high-definition digital video (Sony 24fp). This, in an ode to artisanal authorship, enables Rodríguez to personally write, direct, photograph, edit, design, mix, score, and supervise the special effects for the film (David Rooney, "Review: 'Once Upon a Time in Mexico,'' *Variety,* August 28, 2003).

B AMPAS introduces the permanent category of Best Animated Feature Film to its Academy Awards, which is won by *Shrek* (Beck, 249).

2002

T George Lucas elects to shoot *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* entirely with HD digital cameras (the first to be widely released), demonstrating the blockbuster profitability of the emerging industry trend toward digitization of the production phase (Prince, 21).

T/B MovieLink, an online on-demand video service, is started via the collaboration of Sony, Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros., and others, marking the first time in which major studios embrace the legal download of contemporary Hollywood films on the internet as a sustainable distribution strategy (Williams, 16).

T 150 digital cinema screens now in operation worldwide ("MPAA Entertainment Industry Market Statistics 2007," The Motion Picture Association of America).

2003

B Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* becomes the last film to date – and only the second film in the last 20 years – to finish a calendar year as both the highest grossing film in the world *and* win the highest number of top prizes among domestic film awards. All subsequent winners of the Academy Award for Best Picture, for instance, have failed to break the year-end top ten at the box office (Comparative analysis based on year end Top Ten box office lists (Box Office Mojo) against listing of awards).

B For the first time, revenues from DVD rentals overtake that of VHS tapes (Lin, 18).

2004

B General Electric, parent company of the National Broadcasting Company and its affiliated properties, purchases a majority stake in Vivendi Universal Entertainment, creating the multi-media super conglomerate NBCUniversal (Meg James, "Comcast to Own All of Media Giant," *Los Angeles Times,* February 13, 2013).

T First live action film to shoot exclusively on green-screen stages; that is, to utilize neither sets nor location shooting, but exclusively computer-generated settings and props (Kerry Conran's *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*) (Brinkmann, 539-540).

B *Shrek 2* becomes the last film to date, and the only film of the last 20 years, to finish a calendar year as the highest grossing film in North America while gaining a majority of its revenue from its North American release; all subsequent highest grossing films make a majority of their grosses outside North America despite being American films (Comparative analysis of yearly Top Ten box office reports, Box Office Mojo).

T 300 digital cinema screens worldwide (MPAA 2007).

2005

B/I In a reported dispute over the distribution of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), Bob and Harvey Weinstein break off their deal with Disney, leaving Miramax to start The Weinstein Company (Perren 229).

T 800 digital cinema screens worldwide (MPAA 2007).

2006

T Nearly 3,000 digital cinema screens worldwide (MPAA 2007).

2008

T 8,000 digital cinema screens worldwide ("Theatrical Market Statistics 2008," The Motion Picture Association of America).

2009

T/B First Academy Award presented for Best Cinematography to a film shot almost entirely with digital cameras (Anthony Tod Mantle for *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008)) (*Side by Side* documentary film).

B In response to criticism about failing to nominate popular films (such as the previous year's *The Dark Knight*) for the Academy Award for Best Picture – and in the midst of lowering Nielson ratings for the Oscar telecast – AMPAS Board of Governors votes unanimously to double the number of Best Picture nominees from

5 to 10, reversing a 70 year standard (Tim Appelo, "Why Oscars' 10 Best Picture Nominees Experiment Failed and What Happens Now," *Hollywood Reporter,* June 17, 2011).

B/T James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) becomes the highest grossing film of all-time worldwide and popularizes digital 3D cinematography, presaging the re-emergence of stereoscopic exhibition for many subsequent blockbuster films ("All Time Worldwide Box Office Grosses," Box Office Mojo). Contemporary RealD stereoscopic exhibition requires digital projection.

T/B AMC Theaters announces a $300 Million deal with Sony to replace *all* of its 35mm film projectors nationwide with 4K digital projectors (Eric A. Taub, "AMC to Get Sony Digital Projectors," *New York Times*, March 29, 2009).

T 16,000 digital cinema screens worldwide (Karagosian, MKPE Consulting).

2010

B/I Disney sells Miramax Pictures to a consortium of holding companies and investment groups from the U.S. and Qatar (Alex Ben Block, "Ron Tutor Sells His Miramax Stake," *Hollywood Reporter,* January 21, 2013).

T 35,000 digital cinema screens worldwide ("Theatrical Market Statistics 2013," The Motion Picture Association of America).

2011

B Major U.S. Telecommunications and Cable Provider Comcast Corporation initiates a deal with GE, which over the course of the next three years will result in the complete takeover of NBCUniversal by Comcast (James, *Los Angeles Times*).

T/B Twentieth Century Fox issues a letter to theatrical exhibitors nationwide strongly recommending that they convert all theaters to digital projection, as the Studio plans to cease distributing motion pictures on 35mm film within two years (Pamela McClintock, "Cinema Con 2012: Fox Will Stop U.S. 35mm Film Within Two Years," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 24, 2012.).

B The Academy reverses its decision from two years prior, mandating a new voting system for Best Picture nominees that can yield anywhere from 6 to 10 nominees in any given year (Appelo, *Hollywood Reporter*).

2012

T/B Fujifilm issues a press release declaring that it will completely discontinue the manufacture of motion picture film within one year ("Announcement on Motion Picture Film Business of Fujifilm," Fujifilm).

I With an initial reported budget of $140 million, Tom Tykwer, Andy Wachowski, and Lana Wachowski's *Cloud Atlas* becomes the most expensive "independent" film of all-time (Lee, *Daily Beast*).

T Worldwide saturation of digital projection reaches 69% of all first-run theaters in operation, with over 89,000 digital cinema screens (Jones, IHS Technology Market Insight).

2013

T Worldwide saturation of digital projection surpasses 80% of all first-run theaters in operation: 112,000 digital cinema screens worldwide. As few as 22,000 operational 35mm projectors remain in the world (MPAA 2013).

2014

B/T Paramount Pictures becomes the first Hollywood studio to formally discontinue distribution of motion pictures on 35mm film in North America. *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* becomes the last Paramount film to be distributed on 35mm, and its next theatrical release, *The Wolf of Wall Street,* thus becomes the first ever Paramount film to be released exclusively on digital video in the United States (Verrier, *Los Angeles Times*). The sole exception to this to date is the Paramount co-production *Interstellar* (2014).

T As of May, saturation of digital cinema projection in the United States surpasses 94%: over 37,000 screens (out of a total of 40,000 in operation) converted to DCP, with the National Association of Theater Owners projecting that virtually *all* first-run exhibition of motion pictures on 35mm film in the U.S. will come to an end within one year ("The Digital Transition: We're Almost Done!" NATO).