WRITING CINEMA:

FILM IN THE NOVEL FROM WILSON TO COOVER

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ABSTRACT

Writing Cinema:
Film in the Novel from Wilson to Coover

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Film and fiction are the sister arts of the twentieth century. Like any family, their relationship has not always been a tranquil one, but no other combination of arts over the last century has inspired the amount of debate and dialogue that they have, both in and out of academia. Beginning with George Bluestone’s seminal Novels into Film (1957), academic involvement with film and fiction have primarily used two modes of comparative studies: adaptation and stylistics. The first compares a novel to its cinematic adaptation and the second compares a particular literary form with a cinematic technique. Although both approaches are helpful ways of understanding film and the novel, comparative studies foreground a reliance on the theorist’s ability to construct a set of similarities and differences between the two mediums. As an alternative, I propose that a careful examination of the literary representation of cinema
can produce several productive insights into the relationship between the two arts while avoiding the impressionistic pitfalls of comparative studies.

Although I organize this project historically, I do not rely heavily on historical analysis. Instead, I attempt to identify key moments or turning points in the history of writing-cinema and provide close-readings that ultimately come together to produce an overall narrative of the changing nature of film, film theory, and the way these changes are portrayed in the novel. First, I place my argument within historical image/text debates and contemporary discussions concerning cinema and the novel. Then, I trace the various means by which film and film theory are represented in the American novel, beginning with Henry Leon Wilson's *Merton of the Movies* (1919) and ending with Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000). I continue with two close readings of Robbe-Grillet’s *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and Robert Coover’s *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (2002), two works that use cinema as a means of defining and governing the novel’s universe while also allegorizing our own increasingly media-saturated culture. In the concluding chapter, I offer a cinematic response to my first four chapters by examining movies that ask the viewer to read on screen. Beginning with the intertitles of silent cinema and moving into diegetic images of text, I explore the commonly conceived function of text as a means of applying temporal order in cinema and suggest that even the earliest films to use text both subvert and challenge this role. Using Freud’s model of the “Mystic Writing Pad” as an model and Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento* (2000) as an example, I argue that these images of writing can repress as
much as they seem to reveal, ultimately challenging the supplemental function that text is often assigned.

As a whole, this dissertation provides a close reading of several artifacts that are linked by the manner in which cinema and literature represent one another. It offers a formal and even somewhat historical alternative to comparative studies in adaptation and stylistics, and although it is primarily grounded in American novels, it presents an excellent starting point for extending the investigation into world literature and cinematic representations of the novel.

All images and film stills in this project pass the four factor balancing test and are therefore covered under the Fair Use Guidelines described in the Copyright Act of 1976, 17 U.S.C. § 107
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I want to know what cinema does. If it caused no effect, however ornery or belated, cinema doesn’t do anything, and there is left only the question of what it is or, more exactly, what it fails to be. Cinema does something, and what it does matters. (Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* 2005)

I also want to know what cinema does. However, whereas Cubitt is interested in what cinema does on a screen, I am interested what cinema *does* in literature, what it is to “write-cinema,” that is, to put film into words, to narrativize film theory, or to use a cinematic world as the novel’s setting. It is a mode of writing that relies on a stated, self-conscious, and unquestionable connection with cinema while remaining firmly rooted in the text itself. I introduce the term for three reasons. First, it emphasizes the word “writing” and strengthens the idea that this project is primary a literary one. Second, it helps to link the wide range of works I cover. For example, novels such as Henry Leon Wilson’s *Merton of the Movies* (1919) and Robert Coover’s *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (2002) are historically and stylistically quite different, but they are linked by the fact that they both attempt to represent cinema inside their narratives. The third reason
I introduce the term is to distinguish my subject matter from the more common “cinematic writing,” a kind of stylistics that either mimics cinematic techniques or self-consciously anticipates its own transformation into a movie.

The term “writing-cinema” is introduced in the essay “Writing Images, Images of Writing” by Paula Geyh and Arkady Plotnitsky in their own attempt to explore the image/text relationships in the films of Peter Greenaway and the treated novels of Tom Phillips. They base their conception of writing-cinema on Derrida’s treatment of writing in “Signature Event Context,” where one may “attach writing, as a reconfigurative operator to other (conventionally conceived) denominations, writing included, and transform them” (198). However, where Geyh and Plotnitsky use the term to suggest a way that writing reconfigures cinema (a one-way process), I am proposing that it can work in both directions, allowing cinema to reconfigure writing as well. Therefore, writing-cinema is simply a way of encompassing a series of issues that involve the manner in which textual narratives represent cinema. If we could imagine a novel as a way of both creating and seeing the world, how might novels see cinema? Conversely, how might cinema see novels?

This chapter begins to answer these questions by placing my argument within the contexts that traditionally define film/literature discussions. First, I’ll offer a brief overview of various image/text debates, which are often used to expand discussions of film and literature. Then, I’ll review the major works and issues concerning the methods typically used to discuss film and literature: adaptation and cinematic stylistics. Finally,
I'll discuss the theoretical issues involving writing-cinema in greater depth and introduce the specific works that constitute the majority of this project.

Image/Text and the “Infinite Relation” of Seeing and Saying

Although a painting and a movie are drastically different objects, they are linked metonymically in several works involving film and the novel, perhaps due to the relatively short history of cinema as a viable art form. Since scholars lack an extensive history of the cinematic image, they often turn to the history of the image itself. Therefore, an understanding of the major concerns involved in image/text debates is important for understanding more contemporary discussions of cinema and the novel.

Many, if not all, of the arguments in image/text studies inevitably find themselves investigating the “infinite relation” that separates and defines the arts, a place where image and/or language “fails.” Foucault finds this space in his 1966 investigation of Diego Velazquez’ 1566 painting Las Meninas when he notes that his written explanation of the work can only be taken so far:

The relation of language to painting is an infinite relation. It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other’s terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by use of images, what we are saying (“Las Meninas” 9).

The “infinite relation” between what is seeable and what is sayable acts as a vortex in image/text comparisons. It creates a *mise-en-abyme* effect that results in the type of
reluctant acquiescence found in Keats' conclusion to his "Ode to a Grecian Urn," where questions asked to the image remain unanswered and all that is left ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty") are generalities and condolences.

However, Foucault continues by saying that this "infinite relation" can be a productive force as well, where one could see "incompatibility as a starting point" (9). The ambiguous space created by the inability of text and image to define and categorize completely provides a creative arena. For example, in the Magritte painting *La Trahison des Images*, the image of the pipe and the negating text, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe), both contradict and inform one another, forming a new space that is on the threshold of both. Magritte notes that "Between words and objects one can create new relations and specific characteristics of language and objects generally ignored in everyday life" (quoted in Foucault's "This Is Not a Pipe" 38). Magritte's use of the word "between" suggests a space that is neither image nor text, but rather the hole in the fabric of the work that connects the two together. Foucault (in his essay on Magritte) calls this "a gulf, which prevents us from being both the reader and the viewer at the

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1 This "gap" and its related forms manifests itself in multiple (and disparate) ways in critical theory. It is an empty space that is always approached but never crossed, and its very presence allows for the binary oppositions between image and text, latent and manifest, inside and outside. The concept has its roots in Plato's "ideal forms," which can be represented in the world and through art, but never grasped. Freud quietly hinted at the "gap" in a footnote to his *Interpretation of Dreams* when he stated that "[t]here is at least one spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable - a navel, as it were, that is the point of contact with the unknown" (143). However, where Freud saw the gap as the stopping point, later psychoanalysts such as Jacques Alain Miller saw it as the place to begin, stating "in every structure there is a lure, a place holder of the lack" (quoted in Žižek's *Looking Awry* 53). This "lack" points toward the Lacanian concept of the "real," which is also yet another "gap" since it can never be penetrated, only signified. One could even extend the concept into Iser's "gap" between text and meaning, which he simply called "indeterminacy." (*Prospecting*)
same time.” He goes on to show how Magritte restructures this gap in *La Trahison*, making it a “split and drifting space” where “strange bonds are knit” with “avalanches of images into the milieu of words and verbal lightning flashes that streak and shatter the drawings” (*This Is Not a Pipe* 36).

The infinite relation between image and text has both expanded and contracted in various eras. In some periods, the dominant discourse suggests that the space between image and text is superficial, while in other periods, critics assign more aesthetic significance to the distinctions. Early philosophy seemed to focus on the ideal value of figurative and textual arts, regarding their material differences as superficial. Plato equates (and ultimately dismisses) figural and textual arts by arguing that they are engaged in the shared activity of representing reality, as illustrated by the discussion of Socrates and Glaucon in Book X of *The Republic*. However, other early arguments shift the debate from the role of the arts to the activity of the arts, and in the process, they make the “gap” between them even smaller. The best example of this is provided by Simonides of Ceos (556 BC-469 BC), who noted that “Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens” (“Poetry is painting that speaks and painting is silent poetry”) (Thayer 12), which was adapted and transformed by Horace into “Ut pictura poesis,” (“As is

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2 Here, Socrates and Glaucon are discussing the creation of a community that does not allow for poets and painters. Glaucon asks why representation is detrimental, and Socrates replies that representation is doubly removed from reality; it is a representation of a representation. He goes on to explain that even a common object such as a bed is really “three beds”: the “ideal” bed (which is divine and unperceivable), the bed itself (which is a representation of the ideal bed), and the painter’s interpretation of the bed (Plato 69). Socrates states that this example shows how “representation and truth are a considerable distance apart” (70) and “nothing healthy or authentic can emerge from this relationship” (76).
painting so is poetry.”)(Ars Poetica). In Simonides’ phrase, the words “painting” and “poetry” rely on one another for their substance, making each art’s activity dependant on the activity of the other. In other words, Simonides does not say that poetry and painting are engaged in the same act. Instead, he states that painting is poetry and poetry is painting. The chiastic structure of the sentence resembles a mirror, establishing a relationship of dynamic convergence and compatibility.

In Kamilla Elliott’s 2003 treatment of film adaptation, Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate, she notes that in analogies such as these, “the words that describe one art primarily and literally describe the other secondarily and figuratively. They do this reciprocally, however, rather than hierarchically: each is the secondary and figurative modifier of the other” (210). Therefore, in this approach, the image fills the gaps left by the text and vice versa; where one retreats, the other moves forward and so on, creating a mobile totality.

It is this dynamic that forms the foundation for the “sister arts” tradition, a movement that found several supporters amongst the English Neo-classical poets of the

---

3 One of the problems of going back into ancient history to discuss the image/text debate is the fact that the written and oral enunciations of poetry (as an illustration of “text”) are often equated. For example, Elliott uses Simonides’ statement to illustrate a reciprocal relationship between the film and the novel, but it is quite clear from Simonides’ use of the words “silent” and “speaks” that Simonides is referring to the verbal enunciation of the word and not its inscribed presence on the page.

4 Simonides’ famous phrase is often presented without historical context, which is not surprising due to the fragmented nature of surviving material attributed directly to Simonides. There are no existing manuscripts by Simonides that use this phrase, the Greek historian Plutarch attributes the it to Simonides in Moralia, a collection of Plutarch’s orations. The first mention comes in an instructional section entitled “How a Young Man Ought to Hear Poems.” Although Plutarch calls it a “common phrase” here (without attribution), he later associates it with Simonides. For more, see the full text version available at the Online Library of Liberty.

5 She is speaking specifically of a similar phrase: “The painter is a poet to the eye, and a poet a painter to the ear” by Sir Richard Blakemore. (Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate 210)
late 17th and early 18th century. Jean Hagstrum, in his seminal book *The Sister Arts* (1951), notes that many of England's major writers, including John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Thomas Gray, followed Horace's harmonizing ideals. These writers also published critical works strengthening this relationship, such as Dryden's "Parallel Betwixt Poetry and Painting" (1695) and Du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphtca* (1695).

Modernist critic Cicely Davis writes in his 1935 article "Ut Pictura Poesis" that English artists in the early 18th century "asserted that the unity and harmony of nature appeared in the bonds between man's artistic creations" (159). What is important to note here is Davis' use of "between" (and even Dryden's "betwixt") because it dismisses any placement of "unity and harmony" *within* any one art form and instead locates them in the interrelationship of multiple forms, thus anticipating the "infinite relationship" championed by Foucault several decades later.

However, during the same century when the sister arts were flourishing, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing presented its first significant challenge when he proposed in his 1766 treatise *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* that the "sisters" should instead be considered "two just and friendly neighbors, neither of whom indeed is allowed to take unseemly liberties in the heart of the other's domain" (110). For Lessing, each art has essential and unique qualities, and art is at its best when it embraces these qualities. Therefore, the "sister arts" ideal of unity actually stunts works of arts from reaching their potential. In *Laocoon*, Lessing reduces this distinction to one very basic assertion: "succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist" (109). In Lessing's model, poems can create images, but the
speed at which the reader can experience the image hinders the kind of immediacy that Lessing associates with a visual work of art. After explaining how sight allows the viewer to put together the pieces of an object in space with “amazing rapidity,” Lessing asks

Suppose now that the poet should lead us in proper order from one part of the object to another; [...] how much time will he have consumed? The details, which the eye takes at a glance, he enumerates slowly one by one, and it often happens that, by the time he has brought us to the last, we have forgotten the first. (102)

It is important to note that Lessing is speaking of discourse-time, the time it takes to experience a painting or a poem rather than story-time, the progression of time implicated by the poem or painting. For him, this delineation enabled a heightened aesthetics of purity, for if painting was best able to work in space, then the poem is free to explore time without intrusion and vice versa.

History has transformed Lessing into the first “foundational” author of image/text studies. After Lessing, writers who discussed interart relations either paid homage to Lessing or established their severance. For example, over one hundred years later when Walter Pater begins his treatment of the Venetian painter Giorgione in “The School of Giorgione” (1877) he states,

Each art, therefore, having its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the imagination, its own special responsibilities to its material. One of the functions of aesthetic criticism is to
define these limitations; to estimate the degree in which a given work of art fulfils its responsibilities to its special material [...] To such a philosophy of the variations of the beautiful, Lessing’s analysis of the spheres of sculpture and poetry, in the Laocoon, was an important contribution. (136-137)

A century after Pater, W.J.T. Mitchell again raises questions of the relative values of image and text in his 1984 Iconology, and begins, as Pater does, by acknowledging Lessing. He states early in the work “It seems to me that Lessing, for instance, is absolutely right in so far as he regards poetry and painting as radically different modes of representation” (44).

Many of Mitchell’s claims can be applied to film studies and adaptation studies, but his own work stays squarely within the realm of poetry and painting. However, many authors saw the development of film as a way of expanding upon Lessing’s distinction. In 1932, when film theorist Rudolph Arnheim wished to explain why the development of talking films made him so “uneasy,” he wrote an essay entitled “A New Laocoön” where he argues, like Lessing, that keeping forms separate was the only way to ensure that they would reach their highest potential as an art. For Arnheim, the addition of sound was an impurity for the art of cinema. However, although Arnheim’s claim was shared by many film scholars when synchronized sound was first implemented, it also became clear that Lessing’s argument was being adapted to criticize all artistic evolution, considering the fact that “dialogue” isn’t typically considered a separate art form.
In 1957, George Bluestone produced a much stronger revision of Lessing’s work with his *Novels into Film*, the first major work to explore film adaptation as an art form. Like *Laocoön*, it became a “foundational” text that would be cited by almost every major writer discussing film and literature. In fact, the two make almost exactly the same argument. Whereas Lessing subtitled *Laocoön* “An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting,” Bluestone named his first chapter “The Limits of the Novel and the Limits of the Film,” showing that Bluestone is also concerned with establishing Lessing’s “friendly neighbor” model. Furthermore, at the core of each argument is a distinction between each art’s use of time and space. Lessing’s primary distinction is that “succession in time is the province of the poet, co-existence in space that of the artist” (109). Bluestone revises this only slightly to state that “the formative principle in the novel is time, the formative principle in the film is space” (61). Like Lessing, Bluestone states that if this distinction is understood, both arts will be able to achieve a higher level of aesthetic purity. However, Bluestone (also like Lessing) may claim artistic equality, but cannot help revealing a bias. He begins with a separate-but-equal argument, but then devotes the remainder of the work to close readings of novels and their adaptations that inevitably reveal the superiority of the novel over the film. Most every modern theorist to revisit Bluestone (including Aragay, Elliot, and Hutcheon) recognizes this as the work’s essential flaw, but this does not deter them from taking Bluestone as their starting point. Kamilla Elliott begins her 2004 *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* with the dedication “for George Bluestone, who started it all,” and then proceeds to methodologically pick apart his major premises. In the essay “Twelve Fallacies in
Contemporary Adaptation Theory,” Thomas Leitch notes that “Bluestone’s categorical and essentialist treatment of the relations between movies and the books they are based on neglects or begs many crucial questions, and more recent commentators, [...] in taking exception to Bluestone, have largely allowed him to frame the terms of the debate” (149). Therefore, by creating a firm division between arts, both Lessing and Bluestone have taken a place in their respective fields as venerable but erroneous. They are both the first work cited and the first work negated, and yet they still “frame the terms of the debate.” In the following section, I’ll trace a short history of reactions to Bluestone with the understanding that many of the issues raised in adaptation studies are similar to those raised in the study of the literary representation of cinema.

Film and Novel Comparisons: Adaptation

Although theorists have traditionally used painting and poetry as the source material for debates concerning the superiority of image or text, filmic adaptation has been the source for the way those same debates are held in popular culture.

The most common paragon debates occur after watching films based on novels, although these debates rarely end favorably for the film. “But I liked the book better” has become a cliché, and criticisms of film adaptations using words such as “infidelity,

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6 Leonardo Di Vinci uses the term paragone to connote the conflict that occurs when one art is made subordinate to another. However, it is more commonly associated with W.J.T. Mitchell’s book Iconology (1984). Here, Mitchell argues that paragonal struggle is not so much an aesthetic conflict as it is a political one.
betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration” (Stam, Introduction 3) reveal the moral nature (and therefore paragonal nature) of the conflict.

Despite these theoretical concerns, both novels and films appear to be linked inextricably by the adaptive process. Bluestone begins Novels into Film (1957) by arguing that this relationship is largely a financial one; early cinema benefited tremendously from the legitimacy associated with novels and that novels such as David Copperfield had enormous spikes in popularity after cinematic adaptations were released. This relationship continues to the present day, as is evidenced by the re-release of Homer’s Odyssey (ISBN 0140291032) with a film still from the movie O Brother Where Art Thou as its cover. Conversely, of the last 80 “Best Film” winners at the Academy Awards, 50 have been literary adaptations (Dirks).

However, Bluestone continues by arguing that the financial relationship seems to trick people into believing that there is a substantive relationship between the two forms. Ultimately, Bluestone states that the two are “as different from one another as ballet is from architecture” (5). Although this claim seems to create an impenetrable divide between forms that do appear to be more similar than ballet-and architecture, what most theorists find problematic is the way Novels into Film claims to support both forms equally but ultimately takes several steps to privilege the literary “original.” In the preface, Bluestone makes the somewhat haughty claim that “the film in recent years has become more and more insistent on its claim to recognition” (v), as if it were an irritating child. In her introduction to the 2005 collection of essays Books in Motion, Mireia Aragay notes that “as soon as Bluestone focuses on the ‘specific properties’ of each
medium, it becomes obvious that his discussion is underpinned by a continual belief in
the intrinsic superiority of literature” (13). A good example of this in Novels into Film
occurs in his close-reading of the 1939 film Wuthering Heights. After lamenting the
many deletions that had to occur to fit the story into a filmic framework, he challenges
the film’s additions and claims that some enact a “major revision of Emily Bronte’s
intentions” (100). Despite his claim that both film and novel are completely separate
media, the film is still required to be faithful to the novel, thus making it a flawed
effort from its inception.

A common meta-narrative of the twentieth century can explain Bluestone’s
privileging of literature: novels had become the most popular means of conveying
narrative, and film was viewed as a threat to this hierarchy. Establishing literature’s
superiority was a way of countering this threat, as can be seen in Virginia Woolf’s 1926
essay “The Cinema” where she responds to seeing the film Anna Karenina. Here’s she
notes that “the cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity and to this moment
largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim” (269). The “prey” is literature,
and film is pictured as parasitical. Nevertheless, her treatment is not entirely negative;
she states at points that movies have great potential to tell a purely visual story, but that
that literature is the best vehicle for profound thought and “All this, which is accessible
to words, and to words alone, the cinema must avoid” (270).

By the time Bluestone released Novels into Film (1957), the objections raised by
Woolf were losing strength. Film programs developed in universities, typically as a
branch of the school’s English department (Ray 121), and cinema itself had broken away
from its reliance on literary source material. A few major works were released on adaptation, several years apart from one another, including Robert Richardson’s Literature and Film (1969), and Morris Beja’s Film and Literature (1979), but both provided little more than an update to Bluestone’s Novels into Film. The real problem in adaptation studies after Bluestone was that it was a personal interest for many scholars, but it seemed to lack a significant debate. J. Dudley Andrews devoted a chapter to adaptation in his 1984 Concepts in Film Theory, but only to say that adaptation had little of interest to contribute to either film or literature studies. Robert Ray notes in his essay “Film and Literature” (2001) that most of what has been done in the field has been short essays that deal with a single film and novel and fail to address the topic as a whole or make any claims for its greater significance. In an excellent summary of the situation, Thomas Leitch notes that when he began working as an English scholar, he had avoided adaptation studies because he was “convinced that George Bluestone had said everything necessary on the subject years before” (Film Adaptation ix).

Fortunately, Leitch was convinced otherwise, and began to work on ways of studying adaptation without reducing it to the question of how the film compares to the book. In Film Adaptation and its Discontents (2005), Leitch focuses on the problems and processes of adapting a work for cinema rather than the similarities or differences between the media. In a 2007 conference presentation, Leitch suggested that another productive way to discuss adaptation is to consider it a genre in-itself, with its own recognizable characteristics (“Adaptation, the Genre”).
Leitch’s approach, which attempts to break the frame established by Bluestone, is shared by several contemporary authors, including Kamilla Elliot, Linda Hutcheon, Deborah Cartmell, and Mireia Aragay, all of whom are responsible for a drastic upsurge in the amount of material on adaptation published in the field in the twenty-first century. Compared to the sparse offerings that followed Bluestone, these authors have produced a book-length treatment of the subject almost every year, including James Naremore’s 2000 Film Adaptation (2000), Kamilla Elliott’s Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate (2003), Robert Stam’s A Companion to Literature and Film (2004), and more recently the Linda Hutcheon’s A Theory of Adaptation (2006) and the Thomas Leitch’s Film Adaptation and Its Discontents (2007). This upsurge in books about adaptation seems to be fueled by an academic community that is now more willing to consider multidisciplinary and intermedial subject matter. In response to this interest, conferences on adaptation (such as the Association of Literature on Screen Studies) are receiving international attention, and a new journal entitled Adaptation now being published by Oxford University Press.

Theoretically, many of the criticisms leveled at Bluestone can be characterized as post-structuralist responses to pre-structuralist theoretical models. Whereas Novels into Film is committed to the establishment of medium specificity in support of one of the primary goals of the New Critical methodology, post-structuralism is committed to unraveling the assumptions that make such claims possible. Bluestone adheres to a hierarchical model by positing a textual original and a filmic supplement and then judging that supplement based on its lack of fidelity to the original. Ultimately this
model requires a relationship that cannot allow the film to become its own work. Poststructuralist logic, exemplified by works by Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva, replaced the idea of a center, source, or original with a network of "traces" or "substitutions."

Although Derrida did not address adaptation directly, the implication of his deconstruction of the "original" is what allows for the contemporary criticisms of Bluestone's reliance on the novel as a source. In his seminal 1966 address at Johns Hopkins College, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida examines the "structurality of structure" using Claude Levi-Strauss' The Raw and the Cooked as a primary example. In this address, Derrida explains how Western metaphysics has always created its conceptual structures around a "center" (the source of a concept) in an attempt to develop a manageable, graspable totality. However, this "center," upon investigation, always reveals itself as perpetually elusive, slipping away the moment it is approached, and therefore we can only find its "trace" or its remainder. Derrida states, "The whole history of the concept of structure, before the rupture I spoke of, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center" (Writing and Difference 279). The "origin," which previously held a privileged position both "within the structure and outside it," now seemed at risk of losing any ontological status whatsoever.

Of course, Derrida isn't at all concerned with relatively minor issues such as adaptation. However, the implication of his "decentering" or even "center-obliterating" had a direct effect on the way that adaptation was conceived. For Bluestone, traditional
logic dictated that in the case of an adapted work, the novel served as the source and the film served as a copy. The film was then judged aesthetically by the level of its fidelity to that source. However, as Robert Ray points out in “Film and Literature,” “the film adaptation, in Derridean language, is not simply a faded imitation of a superior, authentic original: it is a ‘citation’ grafted into a new context and thereby inevitably refashioned” (127). To tie this argument to “Structure, Sign, and Play,” the novel functioned as the “center” of adaptation studies, and all concepts arose from it. No thought was given to the fact that the novel, by virtue of its own status as a work of art, was in many ways itself an “adaptation” of many other cultural products. Once that center was challenged, adaptation studies began to look for new ways to discuss the interrelations of multiple forms of narrative without privileging any one form.

Deconstruction gained support through the 1970s and 1980s, but adaptation studies didn’t fully integrate the “decentered” logic that Derrida and Ray describe until the beginning of the twenty-first century. When it did, a wide array of possibilities seemed to open, and a barrage of works on adaptation were released, all focusing on the ways in which the one-to-one model of “fidelity to an original” could be replaced by a model where the relationship between multiple works is foregrounded. Much like the rise of the sister arts tradition in the 18th century shifted the theoretical emphasis from the work itself to the relationship between mediums, the implementation of deconstructive logic in adaptation studies allowed for a shift from specific objects to dynamic relationships, or, as Barthes describes it in his 1970 essay, from works to texts.
Film and Novel Comparisons: Stylistics

Although adaptation studies raise several issues concerning to the relative merit of both arts and the distinctions between film and the novel, it is a somewhat tame debate that touches upon the same issues that one might expect when discussing a translation from one language to another. However, critical tempers seem to flare when matters of style arise, be it novels that use a “cinematic” style or films that have a “novelistic” style. Traditional approaches to narrative maintain that such transgressions are detrimental to the aesthetic value of both forms, while contemporary approaches argue that intermedial discourse is necessary and productive.\(^7\)

Stylistically, film found itself naturally linked with the novel when the cinematic technology evolved into the production of extended narratives. Critical works on early cinema sought to heighten the distance between cinema and theatrical and photographic arts, while strengthening the connection between cinema and literary arts. A good example of this comes from Sergei Eisenstein, one of the best-known early Russian filmmakers and film theorists.\(^8\) He espoused a purely cinematic language based on the concept of montage, but freely admitted that montage owed something to pre-cinematic literary techniques. In the 1942 essay “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today,” Eisenstein argues that the American filmmaker D.W. Griffith “arrived at montage through the

\(^7\) The term “intermedial” seems to be popular amongst German theorists. Werner Wolf defines it in his 1999 *The Musicalization of Fiction* when he states that intermediality is “a verifiable, or at least convincingly identifiable direct or indirect participation of two or more media in the signification of a human artifact” (1)

\(^8\) Eisenstein created multiple films that are still on most critics’ top 100 lists, including *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944). He also wrote on film technique, most famously producing multiple essays on montage theory.
method of parallel action, and he was led to the idea of parallel action by — Dickens!” (125). For Eisenstein, the novel provided a stylistic model, while also establishing “parents and pedigree” (136) to cinematic works.

Literary authors who sought a way to capitalize on film’s popularity sought out cinematic stylistics in their writing, only to receive fierce criticism from the literary elite who saw this act as a form of transgression. A good example of the somewhat acerbic treatments of cinematic style comes from Virginia Woolf’s “The Movie Novel,” which appeared in the Times Literary Supplement in 1918. In this work, Woolf criticizes Compton Mackenzie’s The Early Life and the Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett by claiming that Mackenzie gives the characters only surface-level treatments, arguing that “Mr. Mackenzie can see them [the characters] once, he can never see them twice, and, as in a cinema, one picture must follow another without stopping” (290). Woolf’s point of comparison is the “classical” novel Moll Flanders, where the author returns frequently to the psychological states of specific characters. By mounting her criticism in this fashion, Woolf is categorizing the “movie novel” in terms of its speed (its reluctance to dwell on internal states) and its surface-level treatments and its reliance on visuality. For Woolf, the ability of literature to convey mental states and invoke pathos in the reader is unique to the medium, echoing the time/space distinctions illustrated by Lessing.

What is particularly illuminating for a discussion of writing-cinema is Woolf’s criticism of a literary work that privileges surface over depth, the visual over the psychological. In the case of “The Movie Novel” Woolf argues that “we never care,” because we are never allowed inside the minds of the characters, thereby relegating the
style to a “low-art” status. However, on a stylistic level, this characteristic of “low-art”
writing becomes both a standard in American fiction in the 1930s and 1940s and later a
characteristic of a literary avant-garde movement in France. In Alain Robbe-Grillet’s
manifesto “For a New Novel” (1963), the author outlines the ways in which the novel
could be reinvented into a fresh and productive art form, including the complete
removal of the psychological element that Woolf elevates in “The Movie Novel.”
Therefore, in Robbe-Grillet’s view, one way to reinvent the novel is to emphasize the
very element that “high-art” writers have denounced, thus making the novel more
“filmic” in its reception. A good example of this sort of style is seen in Alain Robbe-
Grillet’s 1957 Jealousy, a novel that utilizes a first-person narrator who never uses the
word “I,” and describes events in the present tense in an almost completely unmotivated
manner. For example, the narrator states, “The bedroom window—the one nearest the
hallway—opens outward. The upper part of A...’s body is framed within it. She says
‘Hello’ in the playful tone of someone who has slept well and awakened in a good
mood” (55). The emotionless character of the description (which, in this case, describes
his wife) links the narrator to a machine, and therefore links the point of view to that of a
notes that Robbe-Grillet’s purpose is to “establish a novel on the surface” (25). He
provides this example: whereas a traditional narrative would state, “So-and-so’s dinner

9 The most frequently cited treatment of American objective style is Claude-Edmunde Magny’s
1972 work The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic of Fiction Between the Two Wars.
He states that the American style of the early twentieth century is dominated by minimalism and
objectivity, “borrowed by the novel from the film” (39).
was ready: some ham,” Robbe-Grillet would say, “On the kitchen table there were three thick slices of ham laid across a white plate” (14). In this manner, Robbe-Grillet illustrates the “objective” quality of “cinematic” style by moving the viewer to focus on spatial concerns (like the ham on the plate) rather than temporal ones (the story interwoven in “so-and-so’s dinner”). For this reason, Bruce Morrisette states in his 1958 essay “Surfaces and Structures in Robbe-Grillet’s Novels,” that “the art of Robbe-Grillet [...] is as ideally suited to film as to narrative” (10).

This objective style also relies on a kind of temporality that links it to cinema. Film, which is characterized by movement, requires a level of immediacy, a mechanically progressing discourse-time that allows the projector to control a level of temporality that is controlled by the reader when experiencing a novel.10 In Robbe-Grillet’s introduction to his ciné-roman *Last Year at Marienbad* (1962), he supports this model of filmic time when he states that “by its nature, what we see on the screen is in the act of happening, we are given the gesture itself, not an account of it” (12). When literary works (such as Robbe-Grillet’s) maintain a level of immediacy and do not halt the textual flow with detailed psychological descriptions, they connote a “cinema effect,” the illusion of experience without mediation (“the gesture itself, not an account of it”). Therefore, it is not just the highly visual novel that suggests cinematic style, but also a novel with cinematic temporality, an emphasis on immediacy over the psychological atemporality that is often considered unique to literature.

10 Edward Murray in his 1972 work *The Cinematic Imagination* states that “[a]ny discussion of the correlation between fiction and film will necessarily include a consideration of the ways in which the dimension of time is handled” (26).
As I've suggested earlier, my concern with cinematic stylistics is that it is typically the result an impressionistic reading of the work. We can certainly experience Robbe-Grillet’s Jealousy as if it were a film, but there is never any mention of cinema in the work. Charles Eidsvik notes how problematic it can be to speculate what structures in literature constitute cinematic stylistics when he states,

In recent articles and in M.L.A. Symposia, I have heard just about every important writer, from Shakespeare to Hardy, Conrad, and Flaubert, called “cinematic.” Obviously, critics have become filmgoers, and have developed a cinematic way of reading stories. There is nothing wrong with critics reading stories as if they were movies; one of the nicer epistemological features of written literature is that you can read it any way you want to. But that is not the same thing as claiming that the “cinematic” is a definable property in the stories read, and it is an entirely different thing than claiming that film has influenced writing in demonstrable ways. The latter, of course, is the more dangerous claim. As Bruce Morrissette pointed out in an article on Robbe-Grillet, cinematic precedents for even the most intentionally-cinematic written literature are almost never unique. (119)

Steven Kellman agrees in “The Cinematic Novel,” when he notes that “[s]everal generations of critics have taken it for granted that ut cinema poesis, literature is instructively analogous to film” (468). In other words, if a critic looks hard enough for the “cinematic,” in a text, she’ll find it.
What makes my approach distinct from the one critiqued by Eidsvik and Kellman is the nature of the works I am examining. One does not have to look carefully for cinema in these novels; it is stated, obvious, self-conscious, and often suggested in the titles themselves: *Merton of the Movies*, *Flicker*, *The Moviegoer*, and so on. I do not examine works that use cinematic stylistics as a stand-alone practice (the kind we see in *Jealousy*), but I do look very carefully at the way language is used when representing a film. Through these close readings, a set of shared practices emerges, characteristics that help to link the wide range of approaches that I have labeled writing-cinema.

**Three Characteristics of Writing-Cinema**

Thus far, I've covered three major categories of comparison (the image/text debate, adaptation, and stylistics) in an attempt to establish a critical context for the rest of the work. This dissertation proposes that a way to study film and literature while avoiding some of the pitfalls of these comparisons is to ask how each art represents, portrays, or even *speaks to* the other art. To the best of my knowledge, Gabriel Moses is the only author to address these questions in a book-length argument. His 1995 work *The Nickel Was for the Movies: Film in the Novel From Pirandello to Puig* argues that “the film novel” should be its own unique genre, consisting of novels that “intersect with the peculiarities of film” (xix) in multiple ways. Although “imitation of form” is one of these ways (what this chapter has characterized as “cinematic” style), there are several others, including the appropriation of film theory and the presentation of a
world that has been shifted irrevocably by the advent of film. Steven Kellman notes in his review of Moses' work that

The advent of cinema has transformed the ecology of culture, shifting the niche that the novel occupies, forcing it into unprecedented competition, symbiosis, and subservience. Novels of the twentieth century are different from novels of the nineteenth century, not least because they had to adapt to an environment dominated by films as principal narrative medium, even as paradigms of consciousness. (921)

Moses' effort is similar to my own in that he is attempting to escape the "inescapably debatable speculations as to which medium is influencing which" (xix) by examining works that depict film, both as an art and as the zeitgeist of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Spanning the twentieth century with works such as Luigi Pirandello's Shoot!: The Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio, Cinematograph Operator, a series of Hollywood novels, and Nabokov's Laughter in the Dark. Moses argues that the film novel is more than a work that uses film as a setting or contains a depiction of a cinematic apparatus; instead it is a novel in which "film is at the center and in which the epistemological and existential repercussions of this new twentieth-century medium are explored through narrative" (99). Moses' most persuasive example is his final reading of Manuel Puig's Kiss of the Spider Woman, where the protagonist Molina tells stories from films to a prisoner named Valentin by acting them out. Molina's film dialogues become the

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11 Nabokov had stated that he attempted to write Laughter in the Dark "as if it were a film" (Wylie).
“proper” dialogues of the book; he speaks only through words and scenes that have appeared in screen, suggesting the level at which filmic “reality” and everyday reality are interwoven. Moses states that “these films [the ones Molina is acting out] work as whole narrative entities (intertextual, intramedial) within the body of the novel,” making the work “a new stage in the articulation of film discourse (and discourse of the apparatus) into story” (259). Kiss of the Spider Woman is not set on a film lot (as many of Moses’ other choices are) nor does it engage in the literary techniques that are often associated with the term “cinematic” (immediacy, surface-level descriptions). Instead, it takes film’s place in culture as its subject. Moses states that “Rather than finding, as one did in earlier examples of the film novel, a discourse straining to suggest the cinematic apparatus, this novel presents films to us as such...just films. We as readers thus also come to share in the full range of film-theory issues with the characters, as opposed to ‘watching them’” (259).

Moses and I begin with a similar goal: the examination of the way that film is represented within the novel. We differ immediately in the works we choose to read, but more importantly, we differ in our conclusions. Moses concludes that a throughout the twentieth century, a hybrid product is produced, a genre in itself, where cinema and the novel so interwoven that the reading experience is more like watching a film. I conclude differently, and suggest that the works I have chosen cannot be characterized by a single filmic experience, but rather by a shared set of literary practices. Again, I’m interested in what cinema does inside a textual narrative, the formal practices that authors use to represent cinema. Although many acts exist that are unique to a specific
novel, there are some characteristics that can be seen in multiple works, and these are
the threads that tie my project together.

The first characteristic is a response to Moses' argument that cinema has become
so prevalent in our culture that "film novels" self-consciously attempt to blur the
distinctions between the two mediums. My research suggests that novels that represent
cinema often foreground their status as literary objects, frequently insinuating that the
text remains after the represented film has disappeared. At the same time, many of the
novels I cover share a deep fascination with the cinematic image, at times devoting
entire chapters to describing single films. Therefore, a certain tension exists in many of
these works between maintaining their "literariness" and seeking new forms of
expression in cinema. Characters in these works are often obsessed with cinema, but
this obsession often leads to negative consequences. It is a struggle between a deep
interest in the cinematic image and a fear of it, or, as W.J.T. Mitchell calls it, a tension
between iconophobia and iconophilia. Although every chapter covers works that reveal
this tension to some extent, it is especially prevalent in my work with Robert Coover's
The Adventures of Lucky Pierre, which tells the story of a character who is both
constituted by cinematic images (he exists only on screen) while also being consumed by
them.

A second characteristic that I have found in my work with novels that contain
films is an emphasis on film's essential strangeness. Characters within these novels
frequently attribute cinema with magical or ritualistic properties. They experience
"something" upon viewing a film, but it is eerily outside of the limits of their reality.
Throughout this work, I call this attribution a "fetishization of cinema," the process by which cinema is made magical. It is important to note that I do not use fetishization with the sexual implications of Freud\textsuperscript{12}, nor do I refer to Marx’s treatment of the fetish in Capital where “the mystical character of commodities does not originate [...] in their use-value” (82). I’m more interested in invoking the image of the primitive fetish, the man-made object that is given supernatural powers, an act typically associated with “non-civilized” cultures.

As a visual illustration, consider the 1938 Clark Gable film Too Hot to Handle, where Gable frightens a tribe of natives by projecting film scenes into their village, or the 1971 Dennis Hopper film The Last Movie where Peruvian natives seek to ritualistically reenact a film that was being shot in their town, believing that it was all real. These filmic representations suggest an inability of the primitive self to distinguish between film and reality. The civilized self now knows that film is an illusion, but the characters in the novels I discuss are often challenged in this respect; film seems real, often so real that they become obsessed, believing it is more than celluloid being projected on a screen. Film magic then represents a return of a repressed knowledge, an ancient fear that was dismissed but now brought back into consciousness, the circumstances that induce a reaction that Freud labels “the uncanny.” Therefore, the fetishization of cinema and Freud’s concept of the uncanny are linked, a connection I explore in more depth in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{12} See Freud’s Three Essays on Sexuality (1905) for a psychoanalytic account of the fetish.
The third characteristic is the idea of “representational friction,” a term I borrow from James Heffernan’s treatment of classical ekphrasis in the book Museum of Words. According to Heffernan, representational friction occurs when the limits of one form of representation are foregrounded by an effort to reproduce another form of representation. For example, when Erich von Stroheim attempted to perfectly transform the novel McTeague into a film (Greed) without cutting anything, the final product was ten hours long (Sandburg 251), and there is some evidence that Stroheim was reluctant to reduce it to this length. Conversely, placing a film within a novel encounters similar representational boundaries. Since film and literature are different in terms of their materiality and their means of reception, placing film inside the novel can only be accomplished metaphorically. The novel in its traditional form can connote cinematic representation, but the closest it can come to cinematic movement is through the movement of its pages, like the old-fashioned flip-book.

When considering film and fiction, this problem has been explored under two labels, mimesis and ekphrasis. Mimesis is defined as “the representation or imitation of the real world in (a work of) art, literature, etc.” (Oxford English Dictionary). It is complicated in modern and postmodern times by Keith Cohen’s idea that film is an essential part of the zeitgeist of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, making the

13 Carl Sandburg notes in his short history of the film that twelve people saw Greed in its entirety and the studio burned the cut footage to recover the silver nitrate. It is available now in a greatly reduced two-hour version.

14 An exception is the electronically mediated novel, which can literally contain a film inside it. There have been some attempts to create these kind of hybrids, including Brian Kim Stefans’s “The Dreamlife of Letters” and the digital fictions of Andy Campbell.
“real world” a space that is always mediated, always behind a screen or series of screens. Moses describes fictional (written) scenes as “film-mimetic” (101) when they don’t imitate an actual film, but instead imitate a world that is altered by a filmic consciousness. An example in contemporary fiction is Robert Coover’s The Adventures of Lucky Pierre, where the known world, the diegesis of the novel, is an inescapable series of films; it reads as both an exaggeration (an absurd reality) and a mimesis of a changed reality, the result of a cinematic consciousness. Fiction that contains film often plays upon the highly mimetic qualities of documentaries and surveillance videos, because they seem to come closer to Benjamin’s “permeation of reality” (234) and Joel Black’s “kernel truths” (The Reality Effect 9), both of which suggest that film can contain an actual (unmediated) reproduction of a fact. For example, Mark Danielewski’s House of Leaves explains the uncanny feeling is caused by the videos’ “ability to convince us that everything really happened” (6).

The second term, ekphrasis, is slightly more specific. It is a literary device characterized by the process of one art (typically poetry) to explore another (typically a visual work). It can exist as a small piece (such as the description of Achilles’ shield in Homer’s Iliad) or the core of the work (Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn”). Due to the variety of ways in which text can respond to an image, the definition of ekphrasis has varied depending on the goals of the theorist. Murray Krieger narrowly defines

17The most comprehensive treatment of “reality as cinema” is Neal Gabler’s (1998) Life: The Movie, How Entertainment Conquered Reality, where the author argues that the ubiquity of celebrity scandals, reality television, and entertainment news has made “life itself an entertainment medium” (6).
ekphrasis as “the attempted imitation in words of an object of the plastic arts, primarily painting or sculpture” (4). W.J.T. Mitchell removes the term “imitation” (due, perhaps, to its Aristotelian and mimetic connotations) and expands the term’s range by defining it as “the verbal representation of visual representation” (Picture Theory 152). James Heffernan in Museum of Words changes this only slightly when he defines it as “the literary representation of visual art” (1). Claus Cluver expands the term to encompass music and the performing arts when he states that ekphrasis is “the verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a non-verbal sign system” (“Quotation, Enargeia, and Ekphrasis” 36). Although arguments could be made for each, there are several points of commonality. First, they all involve both a written work and a non-written work. Second, the visual work may be historically first, but the written work is privileged; it offers, in a sense, the final word. Therefore, ekphrasis is always an act of appropriation and is “intensely paragonal” (Heffernan 1) in the way it reveals conflicts the *paragonal* conflict between image and text.

Although ekphrasis has been wrested from its reliance on poetry and painting many times, it is rarely used when discussing fiction and cinema. However, there are advantages to using it instead of mimesis. First, mimesis is an imitation of reality, which

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16 Mitchell’s real addition to the field of ekphrasis is not in his definition so much as it is in his related concepts. In his essay “Ekphrasis and the Other” he states that the experience of ekphrasis can be divided into three areas: ekphrastic indifference, ekphrastic hope, and ekphrastic fear. He uses these distinctions to show that ekphrasis functions by a certain tension: the desire to have the verbal truly represent the visual and the fear that this act is actually possible. For example, If Keats’ “Ode” actually made the Urn truly visible to the reader, the poem would be ruined; its success rests upon an unobtainable goal.
necessarily forces an investigation of the nature of reality itself.\textsuperscript{17} Ekphrasis, on the other hand, is an imitation, representation, or response to a work of art. Therefore, considering film inside the novel as an act of ekphrasis asks the reader to consider film’s properties as a work of art as well as the tension that occurs when the author attempts to represent this art in a textual form. Heffernan notes that ekphrasis speaks not only about works of art but also to and for them. In so doing, it stages — within the theater of language itself — a revolution of the image against the word, and particularly the word of Lessing, who decreed that the duty of pictures was to be silent and beautiful (like a woman), leaving expression to poetry (7).

As Heffernan’s example shows, literary “representation” of a visual art (ekphrasis) goes far beyond description, mimesis, or imagery. Instead, it constitutes a dialogue between the two arts, giving a voice to the visual while remaining firmly rooted in the text.

However, in Heffernan’s example, the source of representational friction is the idea that the visual work is “silent and beautiful (like a woman).” Cinema is not at all silent; even in the time prior to synchronized sound, multiple techniques were used to give cinema an audible component. Therefore, it doesn’t need a text to speak for it. However, unlike the still paintings that Heffernan is describing, cinema relies on movement, and any attempt to put cinema into words, to orthographically capture it, must account for the fact that it is characterized by a continuous succession of images.

As I noted earlier, Bluestone argued that it could not be done, that “language, consisting

\textsuperscript{17} For a full treatment of mimesis and fiction, see Erich Auerbach’s \textit{Mimesis}.
as it does of bounded, discrete units, cannot satisfactorily represent the unbounded and continuous" (55). It is an argument which echoes Lessing’s claim that the poet cannot adequately represent an object in space, and both would appear to make the act of writing-cinema impossible.

One solution to this problem would be to argue that cinema is not, as we might first perceive, “unbounded and continuous.” If it were not, then even language in its “bounded and discrete units” could satisfactorily represent it. Roland Barthes argues this very point in his 1977 essay “The Third Meaning” when he suggests that the true meaning of cinema can only be gleaned from examining individual frames. He states, “The filmic, very paradoxically, cannot be grasped in the film ‘in situation,’ ‘in movement,’ ‘in its natural state,’ but only in that major artifact, the still” (65). For Barthes, even though films are perceived in motion, they can’t be analyzed as such. By stopping the film and examining one small slice, Barthes believes he can determine a “third meaning” or a “residual meaning, what is left over when all other meaning has been explained.” This “residual” meaning appears difficult for Barthes to explain in words, but it appears to resemble the “punctum” he finds in examinations of photography, which he describes as the “accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). The difference is that the punctum is always frozen in an instant (the photograph), whereas the film still maintains the trace (what Barthes calls the “diegetic horizon” (66)) of the narrative from which it was removed.

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18 Barthes encounters the same problem that Foucault does in “Las Meninas,” in that words seem to fail when they are most needed.
Laura Mulvey, who cemented her place in film theory history with her 1973 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” also finds that the best way to examine cinema is through halting its motion, a process she explores in her 2006 Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image. In this work, Mulvey examines the technology available in home theatres (VCR and DVD) that allows the viewer to pause, rewind, fast-forward, and zoom in on the moving image, which provides, according to Mulvey, a new means of achieving cinematic pleasure. For the “possessive spectator” (the cinephile), control over the film allows for the viewer to “hold on to, to possess, the previously elusive image” (161), while for the “pensive spectator” (the academic) the same control allows for increased attention to “the presence of reality, of death, the detail overlooked by its photographer and visible to its viewer” (182). Both Mulvey and Barthes acknowledge cinema’s reliance on movement, but ultimately find that more is to be learned from cinema when that motion is halted.

The counterargument to Barthes and Mulvey is best illustrated through the work of Gilles Deleuze, who borrows the movement philosophies of Henri Bergson (particularly Bergson’s 1896 Matter and Memory) and applies them to cinema. For Bergson (and therefore Deleuze), movement “in so much as it is a passage from rest to rest, is absolutely indivisible” (Matter and Memory 188). It cannot be broken into constitutive parts, nor given a definitive temporal beginning or end. In the 1986 book Cinema I, Deleuze applies Bergson’s conception of movement to cinema and labels it the “movement-image.” This movement-image, which Deleuze subsequently breaks into smaller categories, provides a means of talking about durée (indivisible or concrete time).
as it relates to the movement on the screen. In this fashion, Deleuze can speak of cinematic blocks of movement without halting or spatializing that same movement. In Cinema I, Deleuze labels several different times of movement-images, such as perception images, affection images, and action images, all of which speak of film only in terms of blocks of movement. For Deleuze, movement-images remove the idea that the frame is the building block of the film and present a “point of view on the whole of the film, a way of grasping this whole” (Cinema I 61). Although the specifics of Deleuze’s argument (the various types of movement) don’t apply directly to this work, his general approach does; for in the 700+ pages Deleuze devotes to cinema, not once does he exemplify his ideas with a film still. In his structure, freezing the image is to negate what makes that image filmic.

If we are to favor Deleuze over Barthes and Mulvey and accept Bluestone’s idea that text is “bounded and discrete” then the act of representing cinema in words does a kind of violence to the nature of the cinematic image; it attempts to capture, freeze, and essentialize and art that is defined by its motion. However, as I’ve argued here, writing-cinema is not accurately characterized by its ability to perfectly represent a cinematic experience, but instead by the representational friction that occurs when text attempts to do what it knows is impossible. Writing-cinema foregrounds the lure of the visual and

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19 In the 1905 book Time and Free Will, Bergson compares durée to a melody. We can break down the melody into various notes, but it is always experienced as an indivisible whole, with each of the notes “melting, so to speak, into one another” (100).

20 The perception-image is most frequently aligned with a point-of-view shot, the affection-image is characterized as a close up (especially of a face), and the action image is aligned with an “unmotivated” camera, one that captures the (typically American) mode of moving from situation to action to situation and so on.
the ephemeral, and derives its aesthetic from this pursuit. Even the titles themselves, such as The Book of Illusions and House of Leaves emphasize an essential instability, the failure of language that ironically becomes the text’s greatest success.

A helpful visual example of this representational friction as a productive force can be seen in the “text shark” of Hall’s The Raw Shark Texts. (See Figure 1). Although this dissertation doesn’t explore Hall, his example is instructive.

Figure 1: Three pages from Hall’s The Raw Shark Texts.

The shark (which is made up of words) can be animated by flipping the pages in rapid motion. However, when the shark moves, the text is no longer legible; it moves too quickly. When the words are legible, the shark is no longer moving. Therefore, we can either read or see motion, but doing both is nearly impossible. Again, we are brought back to the dilemma posed by Bluestone in Novels into Film, where he argues that words are essentially bounded units, unable to represent the “unbounded and continuous” (55) representational mode of cinema. However, every major work examined in this dissertation attempts in some way to do just that, to connote that very
form of motion, or, at the very least, to call attention to representational friction entailed in trying to cross the gap between the discrete text and cinematic movement.

In conclusion, although all the works covered in this dissertation are linked by the act of putting cinema into words, I also identify a series of commonalities that link works in various chapters together. Although these characteristics may not exist in every novel or film, they are present in multiple texts, crossing historical and cultural boundaries and transforming this project into a network of linked ideas. The first is a tension between iconophobia and iconophilia, a fear of the image and an attraction towards it. The second is a fetishization of cinema, where the movie represented inside the novel takes on magical qualities. The final characteristic is representational friction, a way of characterizing the various means by which text accommodates for the fact that it is representing another form of representation. There are other characteristics as well, such as the allegorization of cinema and the foregrounding of authorial presence, but since these characteristics are shared amongst a smaller subset of works, I'll explore them in more detail in the individual chapters.

Writing-Cinema

I've divided this work into five chapters, all of which focus on key moments in the history of representing cinema with language. This chapter, the introduction, attempts to place my approach within a historical context and to define the key elements of my argument. Chapter two traces a history of the representation of film in the American novel. In this chapter, I argue that film theorists in the early twentieth century
assign cinema magical and ritualistic characteristics, while novelists during the same period downplay and dismiss these attributes. Conversely, as the century came to a close, film theory shifted to a more rationalist, cognitivist approach, while novels that represent cinema often emphasized the "magical" qualities of film that were more typical of early film theory. I begin with the treatment of film in three modernist works, Wilson’s *Merton of the Movies* (1919), West’s *The Day of the Locust* (1936), and Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* (1961), arguing that film functions as a literary tool (a theme, a setting, and a metaphor), but is not given the status of an artistic object. However, as film became more pervasive in American culture and its status as an aesthetic object became accepted, novels began to turn to cinema as a unique aesthetic form. I use three books to exemplify this: Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions* (2002), Mark Danielowski’s *House of Leaves* (2000), and Theodore Rozak’s *Flicker* (1999).

In the third chapter, I do a close examination of a literary oddity, Alain Robbe-Grillet’s novel *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). Although the majority of my argument focuses on the manner in which Robbe-Grillet challenges the typically "supplementary" nature of the screenplay, the work acts as a symbolic turning point in the narrative as a whole. It signifies an overall change in the way that literature treats cinema and anticipates the way in which cinema would become increasingly more accepted inside literary works. This acceptance is displayed in the following chapter, where I look at two of Robert Coover’s film fictions, *A Night at the Movies* (1987), and *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (2002). Here, I argue that just as Merton had explored the emergence of silent cinema “from the inside” in Henry Leon Wilson’s *Merton of the Movies* (1919),
Robert Coover narrates using characters *inside* films to both eulogize nostalgic cinema and to allegorize our contemporary post-cinematic condition. Although both works represent two of the most direct literary investments in cinema, the very nature of their representations and their focus on the changing materiality of cinema questions how cinema will be treated by literature in the future.

In the final chapter, I offer a filmic response to my first four chapters. Here, I look at the way that writing appears in film, where the viewer is asked to read on screen. I begin with an examination of the intertitle in silent cinema and then move to diegetic images of text, arguing that even after cinema’s shift to synchronized sound made intertitles seemingly obsolete, these diegetic images continue to perform many of the intertitle’s roles. Then, using Freud’s concept of the “Mystic Writing Pad,” as a model and Christopher Nolan’s film *Memento* (2000) as an example, I show how filmed images of text can repress as much as they reveal, challenging the supplementary role typically assigned to text in movies.

Ultimately, this project is an investigation of what cinema *does* (to borrow Cubitt’s phrase) when placed inside text. It provides a formal and even somewhat historical alternative to comparative studies in adaptation and stylistics, and although it is primarily grounded in American novels, it presents an excellent starting point for extending the investigation into world literature and cinematic representations of the novel.
CHAPTER 2

FILM IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL:
FROM SILENT TO DIGITAL

In his 2000 novel *House of Leaves*, Mark Danielewski tells the story of a photographer/filmmaker named Will Navidson who discovers a very odd fact about his new home: It is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. At first it is only a matter of a few inches, but as the story progresses, a door appears in the middle of the house, and the mysterious space grows drastically, if not infinitely. Navidson, who has made his living capturing images, cannot resist exploring the space, despite the fact that it never stops growing, changing, and eerily growling. To document his explorations, Navidson videotapes his trips into the house and ultimately compiles the results into a film called *The Navidson Record*, a film that multiple people talk about, but no one has ever seen. 

Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is a written account of this film, an exploration of an impossible house, where the representatives of safety, security, and familiarity have become unsafe, insecure, and unfamiliar. It is the story of a house that has become "un-house-like" (*un-heimliche, uncanny*), its troubling representation on film, and its final transformation into a book.
The chain of signification in *House of Leaves* that connects the filmed representation of the house, the written record of the film, and the uncanny effect that both seem to produce provides a conceptual model for linking the novel, film, and the unsettling effects that occur when the postmodern novel takes film as its subject. In the early twentieth century, novels often attempted to negate film's mystery, portraying film as a gimmick, a toy, a metaphor for the commoditization of the American dream. There are hints in these works that film has a strange effect on its viewers, but this effect was countered by a literary foregrounding of the overall falseness of the cinematic endeavor, emphasizing the very real, greedy, and deceptive characters that were behind the creation of the cinematic illusion.

As the century progressed and film gained not only academic legitimacy but also mass appeal, fiction began to embrace film, and the way it was portrayed shifted. Whereas cinema was once portrayed in the novel as a mechanical oddity, a mass form of entertainment that attracted dubious characters, it was transformed in the novel into a form of representation with its own unique aesthetic qualities. This chapter attempts to display this transition from film's portrayal in early American fiction to its place at the heart of several novels of the last twentieth and early twenty-first century. Since many of these works are related directly to film theory, I'll begin by providing a brief outline of film's formalist efforts to establish itself as a unique art and the way that this ultimately relates to Freud's concept of the uncanny. Then, I'll use Henry Wilson's *Merton of the Movies* (1919) and Nathaniel West's *Day of the Locust* (1936) to show how modern literary works took film as their subject without treating film itself as art, denying the
essential strangeness that separated it from reality. To illustrate the transition between modernism and postmodernism, I’ll provide a reading of Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer* (1961), a work that reveals the increasing acceptance of cinema as an art form and its potential for refashioning traditional conceptions of time and space. I’ll conclude with a close examination of three postmodern works that fully release the potential suggested by Percy, works that take film as an aesthetic object, “wondering” at its mysteries through cinematic ekphrasis and fetishizing both cinematic production and reception. These works are Theodore Roszak’s *Flicker* (1991), Paul Auster’s *Book of Illusions* (2002), and Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000). By tracing film in the novel from its early incarnations in modernist fiction to its contemporary role in postmodern narrative, I’ll show that the novel’s treatment of film has always relied, in one form or another, on a kind of cinematic iconophobia, a fear and a fascination with cinema’s uncertainty, its hypnotic allure, and its unique ability to link the strange and the familiar.

**What Is Cinema?**

All novels are dynamic parts of the history in which they are produced, and so novels that take film as their subject have always played a defining role, shaping and being shaped by the prevalent attitudes towards cinema. One of the most important factors in this defining act is the progression of film theory, which was also involved in asking some of the same basic questions. However, when André Bazin titled his two-volume collection of film essays *What Is Cinema?* in 1967, it was clear that over 50 years
of film study hadn’t come to consensus on this (seemingly) basic question. In fact, the act of defining what cinema is and what cinema does has troubled theorists since cinema’s inception. Because this chapter deals with a literary attempt to respond, it is important to give an overview of the attempts that film theorists have made to define their newly developed art, which can be loosely grouped into two opposing philosophies: one of difference from reality, the other of verisimilitude.

Early approaches to cinema frequently emphasized difference, the critical components that make film distinct from other arts and distinct from reality. Hugo Munsterberg’s The Photoplay: A Psychological Study (1916) is one of the first major works devoted to this task, and Munsterberg establishes a practice that will be followed by many subsequent works: he identifies and discusses components of film that are not found in any other art form and then uses a synecdochical logic to argue that since the components are unique the film itself must also be unique.

Munsterberg’s primary goal is to explain how cinema is distinct from theatre. He covers several points, including the nature of acting before the camera, provided by the shots such as the close-up, and the complete freedom that film embodies: “Every dream becomes real, uncanny ghosts appear from nothing and return to nothing, mermaids swim through the waves and little Elves climb out of the Easter lilies” (35). His overreaching argument is psychological: film is unique because of the way it bypasses objective reality and presents the viewer with a more accurate picture of how a person perceives and remembers:
The photoplay can show in intertwined scenes everything which our mind embraces. Events in three or four or five regions of the world can be woven together into one complex action. Finally we saw that every shade of feeling and emotion which fills the spectator's mind can mold the scenes in the photoplay until they appear the embodiment of our feelings. In every one of these aspects the photoplay succeeds in doing what the drama of the theater does not attempt. (173)

Notably, film is a unique object in Munsterberg's schema not because it has an inherent artistic or mystical quality but rather because it is structured in such a way as to produce an involuntary reaction in the viewer. The mind of that viewer acts as a kind of second projector that transforms the existing images of the film into a product that then seems to speak directly back to the viewer, as if the film could speak directly to the individual. Although this credits film with a unique ability, it also domesticates it, explaining the emotional effects of cinema with the tools of early twentieth century rationalist psychology. When "uncanny ghosts appear from nothing and return to nothing" (35) and the viewer is taken aback, it is not because cinema itself produces this effect, but instead that cinema enables and encourages the viewer to project their own fears upon the screen; the mind "molds" the images "until they appear the embodiment of our feelings" (173).

French theorists of the 1920s such as Louis Delluc and Jean Epstein suggested that the critical element that separated cinema from all other arts could not be explained
through film's mechanical features; instead it rested on the *photogénie*, the ability of the camera to transform reality into something extraordinary, wondrous, and unreal.

In the 1924 essay "On Certain Characteristics of the *Photogénie*," Jean Epstein defines the concept somewhat cryptically as the "aspect of things, beings, and souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction" (52). For the purposes of this investigation, there are two important points raised by Epstein's definition. First, Epstein states that the very act of representation alters (enhances) the object. This premise rejects Munsterberg's argument that the transformative act in cinema takes place in the mind of the viewer and situates it inside the filmed image. This act amounts to "making strange" of reality, the process of taking something that was once known and making it different. In Mary Anne Doane's examination of the close-up, she characterizes Epstein's *photogénie* as "the invocation of an otherwise unknown dimension, a radically defamiliarized alterity" ("The Close-Up" 89).

The concept of art as a means of defamiliarization was popular in the 1920s in both literary and cinematic circles (especially Shklovski and the Russian Formalists), but the second element of his definition, the use of "moral character," is somewhat more perplexing. Epstein uses the term "moral character" in several essays when explaining his use of *photogénie*, but he hardly seems interested in ethical concerns associated with traditional morality. Rather, it seems that Epstein uses the phrase "moral character" to refer to the crucial qualities that define the human being, the primitive, the human "core." In a later essay, the 1925 "For a New Avant-Garde," Epstein provides some
clarifying adjectives when he states that the object "reveals anew its moral character, its human and living expression [emphasis mine] when reproduced cinematically" (29).

However, if the enhancement of the "moral character" (the "human and living expression") is essential to the photogénie, and the photogénie is essential for cinema, then all filmed objects, "things, beings, and souls," both animate and inanimate are attributed with a kind of life. Here, the true mystification and ritualization of the cinema takes place. Near the end of "On Certain Characteristics of the Photogénie" Epstein states that

I would even go so far as to say that the cinema is polytheistic and theogonic.

Those lives it creates, by summoning objects out of the shadows of indifference into the light of dramatic concern have little in common with human life. These lives are like the lives in charms and amulets, the ominous, tabooed objects of certain primitive religions. (54-55)

Therefore, in Epstein's vision, cinema endows all objects with life in a ritualistic matter; it calls forth from the dead ("the shadow of indifference") and reveals something of the human condition prior to modern civilization (thus, "little in common with human life"). Epstein concludes this thought by stating: "To things and Beings in their most frigid semblance, the cinema thus grants the greatest gift unto death: life" (55). It is here that Epstein establishes his clearest separation from the rational forces of theorists like Munsterberg; cinema is distinguished as an art form not because of what cinema is (a mechanical form that encourages our imagination) but because of what cinema does: animating a lifeless world and making it strange again. In the 1999 book Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic, Rachel O. Moore states,
Within the isolation and secrecy of the cinema, a new intimacy was established with a world that was, in many ways, its double and, in this and other ways its negation. Although one can only speculate as to the reasons why early theorists consistently turned to the primitive when faced with such an awesome double — especially when compelled to name the source of film’s power — the fact that this turn is fundamental to cinema’s theoretical legacy demands attention. (14)

Moore’s statement omits the fact that many theorists, such as the aforementioned Hugo Munsterberg, turned to science when “faced with such an awesome double,” but her essential point is correct: people were driven in one fashion or another to “name the source of film’s power”; Munsterberg tamed that power, made it known. Epstein unleashed it, made it mystical.

Throughout Savage Theory, Moore argues that mystification was essential to the discourse of early film theory. In the course of her argument, she cites Walter Benjamin as a supporter of the “primal communication” of cinema, yet Benjamin’s most influential essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1938), reveals that he was at best ambivalent about the topic. In this essay, Benjamin, like many others, engages in the act of distinguishing film from theatre and painting, and, like Munsterberg, Benjamin determines that film can “overcome” the outer world and pierce reality. He notes that while “the painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web” (233). However, Benjamin’s work also suggests that there are interpretative perils associated with reading too much into this act:

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In the words of Severin-Mars: “What art has been granted a dream more poetical and more real at the same time! Approached in this fashion the film might represent an incomparable means of expression. Only the most high-minded persons, in the most perfect and mysterious moments of their lives, should be allowed to enter its ambience.” Alexandre Arnoux concludes his fantasy about the silent film with the question: “Do not all the bold descriptions we have given amount to the definition of prayer?” It is instructive to note how their desire to class the film among the “arts” forces these theoreticians to read ritual elements into it — with a striking lack of discretion. (227)

In these two examples, Benjamin is accommodating and cautious, exploratory and guarded. He gives film a special privilege (penetrating reality), but then notes that most theorists who have acknowledged this ability have “read ritual elements into it” in an effort to place it amongst the arts. In this way, he stands between the rationalism of Munsterberg and the mysticism of Epstein, foregrounding the dynamic that then extends into the entire history of early film theory between film’s ability to pierce reality and its essential distinction from reality.

Since literary scholars were also engaged in the act of adapting their arts to the changing concerns of modernity, they tended to have similar concerns, especially in the “formalist” period of the 1910s and 1920s. One of the more prominent manifestos for these “defining” efforts was Viktor Shklovsky’s 1917 “Art as Technique,” an essay that
outlined the Russian formalist approach to literature. Much like those film theorists, Shklovsky’s literary theories are based on the relationship between art and reality, and the familiar and unfamiliar. In “Art as Technique,” Shklovsky notes that the familiar (which he calls “the habitual”) “devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (12). The familiar removes the strange or the uncomfortable from life itself, allowing one to live without truly experiencing it. Art, according to Shklovsky, exists to “defamiliarize” life, to make it perceivable again, “to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (13). Shklovsky summarizes this process with the term ostranenie, which translates into “making strange,” and it bears a striking resemblance to the photogénie that Epstein would popularize with cinema in the early 1920s.

Ultimately, there seems to be a shared effort in both literary and cinematic circles to define what exactly made one form of expression both artistic (linked with all art) and unique (distinct from other arts). In both film and literature, it is instructive to note that the proposed solutions always revolved around the essential strangeness of the medium, be it literature’s ability to defamiliarize the ordinary (ostranenie), or cinema’s ability to

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21 There were two major literary groups in Moscow after the 1917 revolution that were investigating formalist techniques: The Moscow Literary Circle and Opayaz. Shklovsky was the leader of the Opayaz group. In “The Theory of the ‘Formal Method’” Boris Eichenbaum credits Shklovsky with many of the group’s major ideas. Ewa Thompson in supports this when she states that “Shklovsky [...] is generally recognized as the spiritus novens behind the creation of the Opayaz and the Formalist publications” (26).
transform reality into the photogénie. Their specificity and their aesthetic came from the fact that they are related to reality, but also somehow removed from it.

Not surprisingly, Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny" was also released during the period when debates over ostranenie and photogénie were taking place, and the subject was nothing other than the eerie effect of finding the strange in the familiar. In this essay, Freud notes that the one treatment he can find on the uncanny, a 1906 article by Jentsch, seems to oversimplify the concept, linking it to an "intellectual uncertainty." Freud then attempts to show that the uncanny is not simply fear of the unfamiliar, but instead a return of something that was repressed, something that was once known and forgotten that reappears in a modern situation. Using examples from his travels, from fiction, and from his patients, Freud proposes that the uncanny is not a fear of the unknown, but rather "that class of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). There is a dynamic relationship between the two extremes that accounts for the effect, as the uncanny is not the unknown, or the completely mysterious. As Nicholas Royle states in his book The Uncanny, it is "not simply an experience of strangeness or alienation. It is a particular commingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar arising in a familiar context" (1). In cinema, by virtue of its dialectical relationship with both reality (the familiar) and fantasy, the mysterious is inextricably linked to the concept. Writing on film (writing-cinema) enhances this relationship, calling attention
not only to cinema’s uncanny nature but the “synaesthetic shudder” that is produced when film is represented in text. Royle goes so far as to say,

To write on film is to engage with the irreducible strangeness of the extra. Given its uncanny early history or prehistory in phantasmagoria and magic lantern shows, given its essential spectrality, duplicity, and eerie ‘ontology’ (to recall André Bazin’s terminology) as the animation of what is at once ‘hallucination’ and ‘fact’ (p. 16), film might be felt to call for a kind of writing akin to spirit photography (81).

Royle’s account provides not only a justification for using Freud’s treatment of the uncanny as a way of characterizing the development of cinema and literature but also for its connection with the act of representing cinema in literature.

That noted, it is important to recognize the uncertainty inherent in the concept itself; Freud himself notes in “The Uncanny” that it is difficult to state exactly what produces an uncanny effect or even to come to a consensus about what causes it. Furthermore, the work itself seems to produce a kind of uncanny experience, performatively acting out what it is trying to explicate. As Hélène Cixous notes in her 1976 “Fiction and its Phantoms: a Reading of Freud’s Das Unheimliche,”

Freud’s text may strike us to be less a discourse than a strange theoretical novel.

There is something “savage” in the Unheimliche, a breath or a provocative air

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The term “synaesthetic shudder” was coined by Gavriel Moses in his book The Nickel Was for the Movies (1995). It suggests that writing on film can create an effect on the reader that mimics the effect of watching a film. However, it produces an unsettling, even uncanny effect, due to the fact that the filmic effect is produced by a textual mode of inscription.
which at times catches the novelist himself off guard, overtaking him and
restraining him. Freud and the object of his desire (i.e. the truth about the
*Unheimliche*) are fired by reciprocal inspiration. (525)

I’m thrilled by Cixous’ use of “savage” when describing Freud; it suggests an effect that
occurs to the reader at the base level, at the core of their self, much like Epstein’s
portrayal of the *photogénie* experience. Furthermore, it suggests that representing the
uncanny is always double; when the effect is represented it is simultaneously produced.

Despite the enormous combined cultural force of Shklovsky’s formalism,
Epstein’s *photogénie*, and Freud’s uncanny, the novels that begin my investigation
(*Merton of the Movies* and *Day of the Locust*) stood in opposition. They were far more
interested in making the strange familiar again, making reason triumph over
irrationality. In fact, these novels treated cinema with a theoretical slant that was much
more closely aligned with the realism and cognitivism that dominated film theory in the
latter half of the twentieth century. This theory is seen most prominently in the 1967
collection of essays with which I introduced this section: *What is Cinema?* by André
Bazin. Although Bazin’s essays cover many of film theory’s basic questions, namely the
way that cinema is different from other arts, its most famous argument is Bazin’s
rejection of the “separation from reality” that had characterized film theory for the first
half of the century. As an alternative, Bazin argues that reality is essential to the
filmmaker’s effort, and that cinema naturally progresses closer to a perfect
representation of reality, a concept he called “total cinema.” In an attempt to separate
cinema from photography in the 1960 essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”
Bazin states that "cinema is objectivity in time. The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber [...] Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were" (14).\(^3\) Statements such as these illustrate how Bazin saw cinema's relationship with reality is its core component, not the way that it was distinct from reality.

Bazin's decidedly less mystical approach anticipated the cognitivist theories that became popular in the late 1990s. Cognitivism, as defined by one Noel Carroll, is an approach that is defined primarily by its practice of taking exception to psychoanalysis, looking for answers to psychoanalytic concerns "in terms of cognitive and rational processes rather than irrational or unconscious ones" (62). In many ways, early novels about cinema (such as Merton and Locust) follow a decidedly more cognitivist path, demystifying cinema, revealing it for what it is rather than what it appears to be. However, novels that represent cinema in the later half of the twentieth century tend to revert to the mysticism, separation from reality, and overall "strangeness" that characterized early film theory.

The remainder of this chapter traces how this transition can be seen in novels that represent cinema, the literary shift from a portrayal of what film is (its mechanical source) to what film does (its ultimate lack of a source). Yet even though this chapter exemplifies a difference in cinema's representation, I'll argue that an underlying

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\(^3\) Although Bazin doesn't explore the idea of "the image of their duration" in depth in this essay, it is notably similar to the "movement-image" that is introduced by Bergson in his 1895 *Matter and Memory* and explicated by Gilles Deleuze in his 1983 *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*. 52
iconophobia is crucial to both the early and late treatments of cinema, the difference being the manner in which this fear is utilized. In the early novels, fear of cinema's hypnotic power, willing audiences, and transgression of "reality" shape the "cautionary" nature of narrative. In later novels, the same fears are exploited; but in these examples, they act as a lure and a mystery, and instead of attempting to explain it, they explore it.

Writing the Film Industry: The Initial Period

Merton Gill, a dreamy, idealistic shopkeeper in rural America, is the hero of Henry Leon Wilson's 1919 novel Merton of the Movies. As the year suggests, the films in Merton are set in the silent era, and as the title suggests, Merton passes his time watching movies, reading movie magazines, and waiting for movies to arrive at the local train station. When the film canisters arrive, Merton caresses them "with a reverent hand" (45). The connection between the film container and the semi-religious experience it produces for Merton is an early example of the literary fetishization of cinema; he makes the film canisters a ritualized object. However, the power Merton gives to cinema is counteracted by the descriptions of Merton's character. He's idealistic and romantic but notably detached from common perceptions of the world. Most of the other characters in the story consider him crazy. Merton is described from the very beginning of the novel as a protagonist who has blurred the distinctions between film and reality, and therefore does no more to extol the virtues of cinema than Don Quixote did to extol the virtues of knighthood.
In fact, Merton is a modernist revision of the Quixote story. Just as Quixote read books of chivalry until he “lost his wits entirely” (17), Merton reads film magazines obsessively and is said to be close to the point of “seeing some moving pictures that no one else can” (53). Both are crazed by fantasy and positioned between absurdity and idealism, which they illustrate by venturing from their comfortable homes and entering a world that is defined more by their imagination than what is actually there; Quixote leaves his village to wander as a knight errant, while Merton saves his money and travels to Hollywood in an attempt to act in films. They both venture into a world that they shape with their fantasies, and both are punished for it. In a series of lectures on Don Quixote, Vladimir Nabokov says that the work “remains a crude old book full of peculiarly Spanish cruelty, pitiless cruelty that baits an old man who plays like a child into his dotage” (xviii). In many ways, Merton retains this cruelty, for Merton is “played” by Hollywood in the same fashion: he is placed in a physical comedy, told it is a serious film (Merton is funny precisely because he does not try to be funny), and then publicly humiliated with the film is released. His idealism and dreams of fame lead only to his embarrassment. In this manner, all of Merton’s glorifications of cinema produce a negative effect; his “reverent” touch of the film canisters is portrayed as the act of a simpleton who, like Quixote, cannot see the reality behind the fantasy.
For most critics, Merton of the Movies represents the first of the "Hollywood novels."24 This subgenre of American fiction quickly established its own mythic structure, where an idealist tries to find fame in Hollywood, only to have that idealism met with corruption and greed. The protagonist is typically subsumed by these negative forces and then meets a tragic end. Oddly, this plot is followed to a certain extent by almost every work in the genre; Catherine See, in her influential dissertation on Hollywood novels, notes that this mythic structure is so pervasive that "even the most ambitious or original Hollywood novel cannot escape" it (10). Therefore, the Hollywood novel isn’t characterized merely by a setting; it is also a shared narrative progression that combines Hollywood (as a location), film production, and the loss of idealism. Typically, tragedy is a necessity in these works. Tod Hackett from Day of the Locust goes insane, Monroe Stahr from The Love of the Last Tycoon dies in a plane crash, and Sammy Glick of Budd Schulberg’s What Makes Sammy Run? is forced to marry a woman who promises to be unfaithful to him.

However, Merton of the Movies is somewhat exceptional in that it does end well for the protagonist. Merton loses all his money, is nearly starved to death as he lives on abandoned film sets while waiting for work as an extra, and is publicly shamed by a film producer who finds it funny to make Merton believe that he is acting in a drama when he is, in fact, acting in a comedy. However, at the end, Merton has steady

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24 Chip Rhodes calls it the first Hollywood novel of any "enduring appeal" ("Raymond Chandler" 95); Bruce Chipman notes that it is the "most important to consider in a developmental context" (18); and Springer calls it "the most influential" (65) Hollywood novel.
employment in the movies, marries an actress, and fulfills his dream of appearing in a film magazine. His stubbornness and idealism ultimately help him in the end.

Historically, Merton's positive ending could be explained by the fact that the novel falls into what John Schultheiss calls the “initial period” of film industry/writer relations (1919-1922), where studios made legitimate efforts to “shift the thrust of silent screen artistry from the movie personality to the well-written story” (13). According to Schultheiss, early studio owners, such as Samuel Goldwyn, had made substantial efforts to give writers artistic freedom in hopes that it would raise the status of film to an art form. He goes on to say that writers willing to embrace the differences of the new medium found themselves “intoxicated by the freedom of screen style” (15). Merton of the Movies, which was published in 1922, would have fallen at the very end of Schultheiss’ period, but also notably before what he calls the “second coming,” which contained many of the better known (and more critical of Hollywood) writers like West, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. This helps to explain why Hollywood in Merton is treated with a certain (although not total) degree of acceptance.

Furthermore, in 1919, Hollywood as a geographic location is still isolated, surrounded by desert and essentially “separate” from the rest of the country. When Merton arrives in Hollywood he sees “vacant lots” “lack[ing] beauty” (44). In Wilson's

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25 In fact, most film historians state that Hollywood owes its early success to its remoteness. When film was first developed in America (1897) Edison attempted to retain control of the filmmaking industry by suing any other filmmakers for patent infringement. Since Edison was centered in New York City, filmmakers in the east were forced to pay. However, many found that they could escape these costs by producing films on the opposite end of the country in Hollywood, effectively staying “out of reach” of Edison and his litigation. For more on the development of Hollywood, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s Film History, 39-40.
portrayal of the area, only the studio itself stands out, and Merton gazes at it from outside for ten days, theorizing that behind “this fence is secreted a microcosmos, a world in little, where one may encounter strange races of people in their native dress and behold, by walking a block, cities actually apart by league upon league of the earth’s surface and separated by centuries of time” (44). As Hollywood developed (and Hollywood novels developed), the studio and the city would become difficult to distinguish, a fact that writers like Nathaniel West would use to symbolize the viral quality of Hollywood, the manner in which it encroaches upon the rest of America, which once saw it as distant and exotic.

However, in 1919, when Merton was published, Hollywood still retained a level of innocence, which Merton personifies. He is the kind of fop who became a cliché in the silent films of Keaton and Chaplin, a character who is always pitting his ideal view of reality against the rest of the world with humorous results. It is an innocence that is commonly associated with film of the silent era, before the rupture that occurred when synchronized sound was developed. This innocence spares Hollywood some of the criticism that it receives in later Hollywood novels, but it still does not allow for any real exploration of film as an art. When Merton does revel in an aspect of cinematic artistry, it is ultimately a dismissive act inside the novel because Merton has been developed as a character that falsely believes in cinematic illusions. The plot is devoted to debunking these illusions, showing how “film magic” is really just mechanical trickery. In Chapter

26 For a treatment of film “purity” associated with silent cinema, see Sergei Eisenstein’s 1928 “Statement on Sound” and Rudolph Arheim’s “The New Laocoon.”
Ten, appropriately titled "Of Shattered Illusions," Merton discovers that his fantasy actress, Beulah Baxter, does not in fact do her own stunts, despite her claims to the contrary in film magazines. The text states, "Merton Gill had been dazed by these revelations, by the swift and utter destruction of his loftiest ideal" (124). In the process of destroying Merton's ideals, the book is destroying any "magic" that Merton has associated with cinema, and on a larger scale, it is acting out the victory of modernity and technology over the irrational.

This dismissal of film magic or film art is assisted by the minimal attention Merton gives to film itself. Although Merton describes himself as an avid moviegoer, his descriptions of the films he watches are always quick summaries of self-consciously trivial film plots. This is notable because the reels of film are almost holy to Merton (as evidenced by the way he caresses the film canisters "with reverence" whereas the film itself (as it is projected on the screen described within the story) is predictable and almost not worth mentioning. When describing The Hazards of Hortense (a melodramatic serial featuring the woman Merton idolizes), Merton uses quick summaries like "The door was pushed open and there stood Ralph Murdock, her fiancé. There was a quick embrace and words of cheer from Ralph. They must go on" (27). Despite Merton's love of film, the narrative provides minimal commentary from his point of view, and almost no description of the film's formal characteristics. Instead, the

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27 The Hazards of Hortense is most likely a parody of the Hazards of Helen, one of the longest silent films to be released in serial format. For more, see Silent Movies by Peter Kobel.
reader is given only enough to establish the film’s basic formula. The rest, the book seems to assume, is simple enough to imagine.

This is not to say that the films in Merton are unimportant, only that they are not treated as aesthetic objects with unique formal qualities. In most of the films described, much more attention is given to describing the viewer’s reactions. When the audience belts out “gales of stupid laughter” (217) during the movie that Merton believed was serious, he is so devastated that he prepares to leave Hollywood, even when starvation and near-death could not inspire him to do so earlier. It is not the film itself that causes Merton’s fantasies to be dispelled, as Merton believes throughout the viewing that his serious film was simply edited poorly. It is only the audience reaction that allows him to see how his friends have tricked him and how his dream of playing in a serious film has been crushed by his role in a low-level comedy. After Merton leaves the film with the audience patting him on the back and exalting his comic genius, the narrator suggests that the event was devastating to Merton on a spiritual level; “It was all over for Merton Gill. The golden bowl was broken, the silver cord was loosed” (220).²⁸ It is a moment that corresponds with Quixote’s regained sanity, when he says that he now sees the “folly and the fraud” (429) of the books of chivalry.

To conclude, Merton of the Movies sets the stage for the Hollywood novel, a genre that continues into the twenty-first century with only minimal changes to its

²⁸ In Ecclesiastes (12:6) of the King James Bible, the text likens the rupture of the Golden Bowl to death. “Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”
essential structure. Like the Hollywood novels that would follow, Merton is devoted to
dissolving some of the myths and fantasy that surround film and the filmmaking
process, revealing what film is (reels of celluloid and the industry that produces them)
rather than what film does (the nature of its art and its effect on viewers). However, unlike
many Hollywood novels, Merton is positioned historically in a time when cinema didn’t
present a great threat to literature’s hold on popular narrative, allowing for Merton’s
gentle indictment of film to contain elements of acceptance and even mild reverence.

Writing the Film Industry: The Second Coming

John Schultheiss’ 1971 essay “The ‘Eastern’ Writer in Hollywood” describes two
waves of writers that came to Hollywood, those of the “initial period” (1919-1922) and
those of the “second coming” (after the 1927 addition of synchronized sound).
According to Schultheiss, the first wave of “literary” writers (like Henry Leon Wilson)
weren’t remarkably happy with Hollywood, but they were given considerable freedom
and an opportunity to earn a living by writing (17). The second wave, on the other hand,
“prompted volumes of derisive literature excoriating the Hollywood ‘system,’ deploring
the movies’ treatment of the writer, and denouncing the writer’s prostitution of his
artistic values” (19). Therefore, while the first group of writers was somewhat
ambivalent about the experience, the second group, which contained well-known
figures such as Nathaniel West, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Budd Schulberg, was decidedly
more negative in their portrayal of Hollywood and the film industry.
A common meta-narrative of twentieth century fiction explains this negativity toward cinema as a means of retaining the literature-over-film hierarchy that was popular during cinema’s early years: Literature is serious art; film is entertainment. However, there is another reason that is equally as viable. Rather than portraying film negatively to establish the representational dominance of text over image, authors found that film was well-suited to serve as a means of satirizing American culture. Film producers who made films as quickly as possible, movie sets that collapsed in the wind, narcissistic actors, and writers who turned literary classics into melodramas were all easy targets. It isn’t difficult to see these portrayals as metaphors for larger concerns in America; attacking them became a way of criticizing the kinds of moral shortcomings that have always been popular targets of the novel as a form. For example, satirizing film industry moguls is equivalent to attacking greed itself, while parodying film stars and starlets ultimately criticized vanity and self-centeredness. The film industry provided a microcosm where greed, industry, and art became interwoven in the same space, creating an easy target for satirical writing.

In this manner, writers found a way to profit from their perceived loss (the ways that they were mistreated by the Hollywood industry). Since writers like West and Fitzgerald were employed in Hollywood, they could criticize the industry while collecting a paycheck from it. In the 2005 book Writers Like Me: Fitzgerald, West, Parker, Schulberg, and Hollywood, Tom Cerasulo states that “Hollywood provided the financial, creative, and social resources these authors each needed during a complex moment in American cultural life” (2). Therefore, although writers may have been
waging an ideological battle with cinema for dominance over popular narrative, they
were also finding that their target provided ample fodder for social criticism.

Although the 1919 *Merton of the Movies* provided the foundation for this
criticism, Nathaniel West’s 1939 *The Day of the Locust* is a novel that is much more
typical of the Hollywood novels that appeared throughout the first half of the twentieth
century. While *Merton* is comic and even somewhat sympathetic to Hollywood, *The*
Day of the Locust is a dark satire that takes the death of idealism as its primary theme.
Three major characters and several minor characters come to Hollywood in *Locust* in
search of promised fortune, only to find that the city itself is as false as the films it
produces.

The protagonist, Tod Hackett, is a set artist who is brought to Hollywood by a
talent scout. There, he falls in love with a young starlet named Faye Greener, an actress
unburdened by talent but blessed with the ability to make men fall in love with her.
Faye seems to like Tod, but she is unimpressed with his financial status, so she marries
the enigmatic Homer Simpson, a lumbering oaf of a man. The text describes Simpson as
if he is being viewed from afar: “Someone watching him go about his little cottage might
have thought him sleep-walking or partially blind” (65). Simpson is also desperately in
love with Faye, who appeases him for his financial support while she openly cavorts
with younger and more able suitors. In this manner, Faye personifies the unobtainable
object of Tod and Homer’s fantasies, and their failure to win her affections mimics their
own larger failure to find success in Hollywood. The story itself is essentially episodic,
placing Tod, Homer, and Faye in situations where they encounter stereotypical (and
exaggerated) Hollywood denizens: a dwarf, an ex-vaudeville clown, a screenwriter, and a cowboy, all of whom either fail at achieving their dreams or have given up on dreams altogether. In the end, Faye leaves Homer, and a possible star sighting during a film opening starts a riot. In the confusion, the simple and now heart-broken Homer Simpson kills a would-be child-star with his bare hands. Tod, who is overwhelmed by the madness that surrounds him, finishes the story in the back of a police car, wailing in harmony with the siren.

The first point of comparison between Merton of the Movies and The Day of the Locust concerns the level of severity with which Hollywood is depicted. As I noted earlier, Merton criticizes many of the same targets that Locust does: the falsity of Hollywood, the illusion of the American dream, and the greed and vanity of the film industry. However, Merton is laced with humor and pathos, while Locust is almost a naturalist work in terms of its severity and determinism. Everyone fails in Locust, and at the end, the microcosm of Hollywood is the center of a full-scale riot caused by a false celebrity sighting. Tod summarizes his failure (and our culture’s failure) in the works most famous meditation, delivered when he stumbles upon a dumping ground for used film props and sets:

He thought of Javier’s ‘Sargasso Sea.’ Just as that imaginary body of water was a history of civilization in the form of a marine junkyard, the studio lot was one in the form of a dream dump. A Sargasso of the imagination! And the dump grew continually, for there wasn’t a dream afloat somewhere which wouldn’t sooner or later turn up on it. (128)
At one level, this is certainly an assault on the false promises of Hollywood and the film industry. On a broader scale, it is a statement about the American dream as a concept; the “dream dump” wasn’t just Hollywood, it was all of America. By the end of the 1930s, the Hollywood studio wasn’t a desolate, remote place anymore; it had seeped into the entire country. John Springer notes in Hollywood Fictions: The Dream Factory in American Popular Literature (2000) that the studio had extended far beyond its physical walls, becoming “a metaphoric landscape of American life littered with the unkept promises of mass culture” (442). It had spread with the tremendous growth of the film industry into an entire city, and then symbolically through the entire country by means of film distribution. When Merton arrives in Hollywood in Merton of the Movies, he sees “vacant lots [...] lack[ing] beauty” (44). However, in West’s description of Hollywood, the houses (off the set) appear to be part of the set: “only dynamite would be of any use against the Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor cottages, and every possible combination of these styles that lined the slopes of the canyon” (23). Bruce Chipman supports this idea in his 1999 Into America’s Dream-Dump: A Postmodern Study of the Hollywood Novel when he argues that exposing this trend is part of the ideology of the Hollywood novel. Hollywood, according to Chipman, is no longer a geographic location with fixed boundaries, but rather a kind of cultural space that is a symbol of American as a whole. “We have merged,” he states, “with the image we have beheld on the movie-screen; America has become Hollywood and the cycle is complete” (200). In other words, in West’s portrayal and ultimately in the Hollywood novel as a genre, the
film industry no longer has boundaries; the city has become a studio, and the studio has become a country.

Whether the "dream dump" is considered a specific critique of Hollywood disillusionment, a large-scale critique of the death of the American dream, or both, the narratives of West and Wilson most frequently address the techné of film metonymically by addressing the art (or lack thereof) in the film industry. There are short scenes in Locust where a specific film is viewed, which, at a certain level, acknowledge film as its own art. However, compared to the detailed descriptions of the film industry characters (studio executives, writers, actresses, etc.) and the film industry space (studio lots and the Hollywood landscape), the time devoted to actual film watching is minimal.

When Tod first goes to see Faye's film, he offers a quick synopsis: "It was about an American drummer who gets lost in the seraglio of a Damascus merchant and has a lot of fun with the female inmates" (34). As with Merton's description of The Hazards of Hortense, only a very superficial description is offered. In the most detailed movie-watching scene in the book, Tod sees a pornographic silent film with other film industry characters entitled Le Predicament de Marie. The synopsis, which loosely parallels Faye Greener's story, is somewhat longer than Tod's previous one-sentence synopsis, but still skims the surface like a beginner’s book report. The description even skips a section ("after some low comedy with the father's beard and some soup" (45)) only to continue (once again) with a predictably comic plot of accidents and coincidences.

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29 I'm using the term "metonymy" to illustrate a connection that occurs via proximity. The film industry and the film as it is projected on the screen are two very different signifieds, and yet when someone says, "This is a book about film" it could refer to either one.
Furthermore, the film they are watching is downplayed by its absurd viewing situation: all the film industry figures in the novel have traveled to a brothel that is run by a former silent film star (yet another failed celebrity). However, they either can’t afford the girls or are uninterested in them, so they are given the low-budget alternative, a cheap pornographic film that breaks mid-reel. The viewers themselves have become the audiences that they must dread; they are compared to “a rowdy audience in the days of the nickelodeon” (44), stomping their feet and chanting before the film begins. When the film breaks before the film’s narrative concludes, the viewers begin a “mock riot” (46) in protest, foreshadowing the large-scale riot that will occur later in the work. There is a fair amount of irony in the fact that the film given the greatest amount of attention in *Locust* is shown in a brothel by an ex-silent film actress to a group of film industry insiders who are stomping and shouting; all of which suggest that film has been reduced to its lowest level, a nickelodeon-type amusement in a brothel shown to customers too poor to buy the brothel’s services. The act of viewing becomes a critique on how the characters substitute “schlock” cinema for artistic cinema and filmed sex for real sex, thus making the viewing situation much more telling than the film itself.

Despite the novel’s overall contempt for Hollywood and its minimal treatment of film’s *techné*, several writers have attempted to link *Day of the Locust* with cinematic artistry. In Blake Allmendinger’s 1988 article “The Death of a Mute Mythology: From Silent Movies to the Talkies in *The Day of the Locust*,” the author notes that “It is now commonplace, in the criticism of the novel, to accept the cinematic sequence of the work and its use of the visual image, and to say that the novel has a film-like quality of its
own" (108). In 1993, Richard Keller Simon supported this idea in his article “Between Capra and Adorno: West’s Day of the Locust and the Movies of the 1930s” when he states that “The Day of the Locust is a Hollywood movie in novel form” (513). West makes stylistic choices that support these kinds of readings; the chapters are short, set in one place (like a film’s scene), and use objective descriptions that suggest mechanical representation. Furthermore, Locust’s plot is structured in manner that self-consciously anticipates its cinematic adaptation (released in 1975). However, when the novel represents a cinematic experience, the descriptions are short, dismissive, and uninterested in the aesthetic or formal characteristics of cinema, as is common in most Hollywood novels.

With the Hollywood Antitrust Case of 1948 and the subsequent end of Hollywood’s “golden age,” the literary attention given to the business of making films began to fade. In their place, we see a shift towards the acceptance of film as a viable art form, and it is no surprise that the next major work to be invested in cinema, Walker Percy’s The Moviegoer (1961), mentions Hollywood only in passing.

From Production to Reception in Walker Percy’s The Moviegoer

Although academic writing on film started around the time that feature films were developed (1915), film studies was not legitimized in academia until the late 1950s. Since literature departments in universities had long held the responsibility of analyzing narrative forms, film studies was placed inside these departments, where it was treated as a welcome but ultimately subordinate method of conveying a story. In the early
1960s, film departments and film study programs began as branches of these literature departments, and although they took cinema as their object of study, their primary means of doing so was from a literary perspective.

Other changes in regard to cinema were occurring as well in the middle of the twentieth century. Soldiers returning from World War II in the 1940s had gained both exposure to European ideas and a means of pursuing higher education through the GI bill, the idea of an auteur (a filmmaker raised to the status of a literary author) was gaining international acceptance, and “art-house cinemas” were beginning to appear across America. Therefore, it is no coincidence that during the early 1960s, literary works began to appear that acknowledged the art-status of film as well. Whereas Hollywood novels looked for the “real” beneath the cinematic illusion, these new works began to explore the cinematic effect and experimented with the ways that its lure could be translated into a literary narrative. This literary acceptance of cinema is foregrounded in Walker Percy’s 1961 The Moviegoer, a novel that follows the life of a young man who finds his most fulfilling moments at the movie theatre. Although the title is slightly misleading, considering the relatively small amount of narrative actually devoted to movies, The Moviegoer shows that the rise of film as an art (and an area of academic study) has a literary counterpart, a work that assigns film an art-object status by using it as a philosophical tool rather than a means of satire. The Moviegoer removes cinema

30 Other American works contemporary with The Moviegoer that the represent cinema as something more than an industry include Thomas Pynchon’s Crying of Lot 49 (1966) and Larry McMurtry’s The Last Picture Show (1966). I consider The Moviegoer representative of the shift that all three works reveal.
from Hollywood and repositions it in theatres, focusing on the mysteries of reception rather than the industry of production.

The Moviegoer is the story of Binx Bolling, a stockbroker from a wealthy family in New Orleans. It is not a particularly plot-driven novel; Binx falls in love with his distant cousin (Kate), travels with her to Chicago, and ultimately marries her. However, the actions in the plot function more as a vehicle for extended philosophical discussions revolving around basic questions of meaning and existence. Binx himself is somewhat empty (a slightly more sympathetic version of Camus' Meursault in The Stranger) but receives some satisfaction from basic material pursuits, chasing secretaries, and going to movies. However, when the story begins, Binx states, "Things have suddenly changed. My peaceful existence in Gentilly has been complicated. This morning, for the first time in years, there occurred to me the possibility of a search" (10). This "search" is a loosely defined concept for Binx, a quest for significance that will somehow rid him of his existential gloom. Binx toys with the ineffable nature of his idea when he chides the reader: "What is the nature of the search? You ask. Really it is very simple, at least for a fellow like me; so simple that it is easily overlooked. The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life" (13).31

31 Binx's critique of "everydayness" echoes Victor Shklovsky's concerns in his 1917 "Art as Technique," where he states that "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known." Although this link is a part of a large chain of signification, it is yet another connection between early formalist efforts in literature and the development of cinema's portrayal in literature.
In *The Moviegoer*, cinema acts as a metaphor for Binx’s inability to connect to a reality that he can see but not feel. Binx states that “The movies are onto the search, but they screw it up. The search always ends in despair” (13). In David Mazzotta’s critique of the book, he states, “Binx maintains a certain detachment. He is a moviegoer. He observes, he perceives, he reacts, but he does not wholeheartedly participate. He feels, somewhat arrogantly, that the people of the world live lives of a passionless despair whereas he yearns to find a zeal for the world around him” (n.p.). In this model, the movie screen presents a filmic lure (an object that creates a desire to enter the film-world) while also acting as a barrier, emphasizing Binx’s sense of separation from “actual” experience.

However, film also acts as a source for philosophical conclusions. Instead of seeking answers in religion or family, Binx looks to the movies. He states that he is interested in various “phenomenon of moviegoing,” the effects of cinema on a viewer (or, using my theme, *what cinema does* to a viewer). A good example of such a phenomenon is what Binx calls “certification.”

Nowadays, when a person lives somewhere, in a neighborhood, the place is not certified for him. More than likely he will live there sadly and the emptiness which is inside him will expand until it evacuates the entire neighborhood. But if he sees a movie which shows his very neighborhood, it becomes possible for him to live, for a time at least, as a person who is Somewhere and not Anywhere. (63)

Whereas Wilson’s Merton fetishizes film’s materiality, touching the film canisters with a “reverent hand,” Binx fetishizes cinematic artistry, what film does on a screen, by giving
it the ability to given ontological significance to a space. Both Merton and Binx assign
film magical properties, but the target of this attribution is different. In so doing, The
Moviegoer transforms cinema from a diversion (as it is portrayed in Wilson and West)
into a tool for ontological inquiry, a way of remaking the world.

Historically, this shift to the philosophy of film (particularly film reception) and
away from film production could also be explained by the 1948 Supreme Court ruling
that declared that the major Hollywood studios (The “Big 5”) had established a
monopoly and would be forced to give up their control of theatres. By the time The
Moviegoer was released in 1961, theatres were separated from the studios that had
previously controlled them, allowing for Binx to focus on theatres without considering
the film industry. The decision dismantled the geographical center (the Hollywood
studio) that allowed Merton and Tod to spend significant periods of time wandering
through the various “worlds” inside the studio lot, comparing the fragile surfaces of the
sets to an overall sense of falsehood in America. With this microcosm now “de-entered,”
the ontological center of film (the “source” of its power over viewers) could be moved
from the studio to the theatre. When Merton first sees the film studio in Wilson’s novel,
it is in the middle of the desert, surrounded by “vacant lots [...] lack[ing] beauty” (44).
When Binx Bolling first visits a theatre in The Moviegoer, it is also surrounded by vacant
lots; the narrator states that “It was evident someone had miscalculated, for the suburb
had quit growing and here was the theatre, a pink stucco cube, sitting out in a field all
by itself” (4). The studio in isolation has been replaced by the theatre in isolation; the
“heart” of cinema has shifted from production to reception and from a center
(Hollywood) to a decentralized network of theatres. Here, Bruce Chipman’s prophecy that “America has become Hollywood” (*Into America’s Dream-Dump* 200) is seen in progress. The novel’s reliance on cinema and its placement in New Orleans shows that film no longer relies on Hollywood for its identity. In fact, the word Hollywood appears only once in the entire work, and even that is a passing mention (16).

This “decentering” of cinema involves the theatre, which was almost never mentioned in the Hollywood novels but which gains an increased significance in *The Moviegoer*. Most of Binx’s philosophical inquiries result not from the film industry or from a particular film, but rather from the act of viewing. In Lewis Lawson’s “The Dream Screen in *The Moviegoer*,” the author notes that “it is the image of the movie theater, rather than the memory of a specific movie, which offers the more evocative impression.” Just as Hollywood (and the studio lot) acted as a microcosm for Wilson and West’s protagonists, the theatre provides Binx with an inner microcosm, a literalization of his own mental space. However, even though the theatre offers an escape from the “everyday” he resents, he is also cautious of the theatre’s power, a feeling he reveals when he states, “Before I see a movie it is necessary for me to learn something about the theatre or the people who operate it, to touch base before going inside […] If I did not talk to the theatre owner or the ticket seller, I should be lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking” (74-75). This fear of becoming “lost” in the image as it replaces reality is indicative of Mitchell’s “iconophobia” (*Iconology* 113), but it is not represented here as the same fear that Wilson and West portray; instead, it is an alluring fear, an invitation or a promise of something fantastic inside the space of the theatre.
Binx grounds himself geographically and temporally in the reality of the theatre precisely because he is so completely convinced of film's potential to compete with reality once inside. Compared to the earlier depictions of a more carnivalesque manner of experiencing film, *The Moviegoer* shows that film has a newfound ability to affect the viewer in a profound way.

In addition to fetishizing cinematic space, Binx also fetishizes film's ability to portray time. Whereas typical moviegoers visit the theatre to see new films, almost every film Binx sees in the novel is one that he has seen before. For him, moviegoing is not about experiencing the new so much as it is about re-experiencing the familiar, and thereby breaking away from the linear progression of time. He states that seeing films a second time is a way of experiencing a "time segment which has lapsed in order that it, the lapsed time, can be savored of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle" (80). In West and Wilson's representations of cinematic screenings, the "events" were all that mattered; the narrator reports the film by recounting them in succession, mimicking the linear progression of images on film reel. Here, Binx is offering an alternative approach, one that speaks to the increased acceptance of cinema as an art form and to cinema's altered role in literature as an object of psychological (rather than physical) perception. For Binx, events are "adulterations," impurities, objects that "clog time" by forcing a false heterogeneity and prohibiting direct experience. Although it isn't mentioned directly, Binx is illustrating one of Henri Bergson's major claims from *Time and Free Will* (1913): Time as it is "typically" considered is a mathematical construct, a false time that imposes order on an unordered
world. Real time, that which can “be savored of itself” is indivisible and free of imposed markers. It is, according to Bergson, “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live” (100).32

In this fashion, the cinema’s ability to call attention to the “real” time of Bergson serves as a the novels only successful completion of Binx’s “search,” his quest to escape the everyday and find some sort of purpose. Much of the force of the novel derives from the fact that Binx can’t seem to find the answers he needs in traditional sources such as family and religion, a problem that is enhanced by the fact that Binx is part of an old, southern family, where maintaining traditional values also maintained the family members’ sense of purpose. However, these values no longer function for Binx, and so he replaces them with film. At one point in the novel Binx states that a movie theatre was the first place he “discovered place and time, tasted it like okra” (75). It is a telling admission, because it synesthetically links a metaphysical experience with both moviegoing and a familiar taste: okra, a plant that is a fundamental part of many Cajun dishes. As a member of a southern family in New Orleans, okra would have been part of many of Binx’s meals. It is suggestive not only of his family’s heritage, but also the comfort that the past provides, both of which are now replaced by the moviegoing experience:

32 Although Bergson created the foundation for conceiving of “pure-time” in relation to film in his 1895 Matter and Memory and other theoretical treatises followed, The Moviegoer is one of the earliest depictions of this idea within the scope of a novel. Gilles Deleuze would later rework this idea into the “time-image,” the subject of his 1985 work Cinema 2.
The fact is I am quite happy in a movie, even a bad movie. Other people, so I have read, treasure memorable moments in their lives. The time one climbed the Parthenon at sunrise, the summer night one met a lonely girl in Central Park and achieved with her a sweet and natural relationship [...] what I remember is the time John Wayne killed three men with a carbine as he was falling to the dusty street in Stagecoach and the time the kitten found Orson Wells in the doorway in The Third Man. (12-13)

The means by which heritage and experience are supplanted by cinema in The Moviegoer makes a statement not only about American values, but also about the heightened power of cinema. When Merton from Merton of the Movies looked for real-life answers in cinema, his friends and family considered him crazy, and the novel ultimately reveals that his friends and family were correct. Binx, on the other hand, is educated, intelligent, and financially secure. His search for real-life answers in cinema seems to result from his family's failure to provide those answers, and his quest is legitimized in part by the fact that the movies do seem to provide him with solutions that can't be found elsewhere.

In this fashion, The Moviegoer marks a shift in the way that literature treats cinema, and it anticipates many of the philosophical treatments that would become characteristic of postmodern fiction. Although film is still described in The Moviegoer with surface-level synopses, the experience of watching a film has started to raise philosophical questions, unlike the film diversions of Wilson and West (which ultimately attested to film's pure entertainment/economic value). For Percy's
protagonist, film provides a means of remodeling the world where the “constants” of space, time, history, and meaning are reinvented. Ultimately, Binx finds no answers to his search; he acknowledges that “I know nothing and there is nothing to do but fall prey to desire. Nothing remains but desire, and desire comes howling down Elysian Fields like a mistral. My search has been abandoned” (228). However, his choice to use film as a part of this search instead of religion, family, and American dreams of financial success shows that literature adapted to the changing role (and aesthetic/philosophical value) of film and became interested in exploring its artistic/philosophical value (what it does) rather than its materiality.

Writing Twenty-First Century Cinema

Multiple works in the later half of the twentieth century continue the transformation represented by The Moviegoer. Two nearly forgotten works, Barry Malzberg’s experimental novel Screen (1969) and MacDonald Harris’ novel Screenplay (1982) portray characters that chose to live in cinematic fantasies rather than the real world. Novels with longer critical lifespans also followed The Moviegoer, including Don DeLillo’s Americana (1971), Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow (1974), both of which base part of their aesthetic on a blurred distinction between cinema and reality.33

Although all of these works are worth of substantial critical treatment, many of the characteristics suggested within their narratives regarding cinematic representation

33 There are several articles that comment on Pynchon’s connection to film in his novels, most notably Berressem’s “Gravity’s Rainbow: Text as Film—Film as Text” and Mathijs’ “Reel to Real: Film History in Pynchon’s Vineland.”
are brought to the foreground in three novels that were released near the beginning of
Book of Illusions, and Mark Danielewski’s (2000) House of Leaves. These works use
filmmakers, filmmaking, and the cinematic experience as the core of their aesthetic.
They extol the mysticism of the moving image, celebrate the filmmaker as artist, and act
as fictional works of film theory, questioning and debating the nature of cinema itself.
What is particularly fascinating about their approach is the film theory they all choose to
use, for rather than use the film theory of the late twentieth century, which is dominated
by historical and cognitive models, these works explicitly borrow from early twentieth
century film theory, the “magical” attributes that early film theorists claimed made film
a unique art form. Early film theory wondered at the strange and unsettling something
that rests just beneath the surface of the film — and so do these novels.

“A Charm, a Magic, Something Demonic” in Roszak’s Flicker.

Jonathan Gates, the protagonist of Theodore Roszak’s Flicker, is a film student
who becomes obsessed with this exact form of cinematic instability. He notes early in the
story that he has an “exquisite memory” of a scene from a Renoir film, which he later
discovers did not exist at all. He asks

Was it some form of benign hallucination? Perhaps it is, after all, a composite
creation pieced together from all the naively romantic images I bring away from
those years, the memory of a love story I never saw, and yet of all the love stories
I once wanted movies to tell me. (21)

Gates is quick at this point in the story to dismiss this memory as the product of his imagination, but as the story progresses, this basic assumption is challenged. Through his studies, Gates becomes obsessed with a mysterious early filmmaker named Max Castle, an artist who “assisted” in almost every major cinematic landmark, from the 1919 Cabinet of Dr. Caligari to the 1941 Maltese Falcon. Every clue that Gates follows to learn more about Castle leads him to more obscure locations, including an orphanage called “The Orphans of the Storm” (named after the 1921 Griffith film) where orphans are taught how to make films, and an uncharted island where the missing Max Castle is found at the end of the story, imprisoned but alive.

As Gates digs deeper into Castle’s history, finding many of his “lost” films, Gates learns of Castle’s unique ability to use subliminal messages in his films and his connection with an even larger conspiracy that is devoted to using these messages to end life on earth. Castle’s subliminal techniques and the “uncut” films that Gates discovers in his search challenge the initial assumption that “exquisite memory” of cinema was truly the product of his imagination. Perhaps, the book suggests, film is (and has always been) more than it seems.

Therefore, the real mystery of the work isn’t the quest for Castle or his films, but rather the question of what makes film affect its viewers, why it hypnotizes and entrances. Gates’ teacher and occasional lover throughout his quest is the art critic
Claire, who instructs him through a series of lectures in bed. Gates summarizes this education as follows:

A major part of what Claire taught me about film I learned in bed — and I don’t mean in relaxed, postcoital conversation, but in active process. [...] When, in the act of love, she began to murmur a stream-of-consciousness lecture on Russian Formalism in my ear, I felt I should pause and take respectful note. But no. With a pelvic shove and a slap to my buttocks, she bullied me on, almost angrily. (36)

The reference to Russian Formalism (although somewhat comic) is telling in this passage. In true Bildungsroman fashion, Gates is developing his own unique identity through Claire’s sexual tutelage. Simultaneously, he is experiencing artistic development, as “Russian Formalism” refers to the attempts of writers and filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein to define cinema’s unique properties and make it distinct, thus “giving birth” to a new art form. In this manner, sexual procreation (Claire and Gates) and filmic procreation (the birth of film as an art) are linked in this one act.

The result is a life. It isn’t a human life, but it is something that is perceived as “living,” a product that is haunted by a force that escapes capture. This is the essential mystery of Flicker, the presence or imaginary presence of a life underneath the surface of the screen, a sense of the uncanny. Claire summarizes this idea when she tells Gates,

They have a life, more real than our so-called real lives. They have a power. I knew that power went deep. It wasn’t just the stories of the stars or camera angles or anything like that. Something underneath that, something that connects [...] I was ready to believe that there was something uncanny [emphasis mine]
about movies, a charm, a magic, something demonic. They capture the attention
so fiercely, they eat you alive. Movies aren’t just movies. (502)

Claire’s statement is indicative of the manner in which many postmodern novels that
use cinema anthropomorphize cinema and fetishize its value, assigning it mystical
properties much like early film theory did. When Claire gives film a “life more real than
our so-called real lives,” she is speaking with the same kind of transcendence that
Vachal Lindsay uses in the conclusion to his 1915 Art of the Moving Picture: “It [film]
has come, this new weapon of men, and by faith and a study of the signs we proclaim
that it will go on and on in immemorial wonder” (187). Both Claire’s remark and
Lindsay’s conclusion suggest that the ephemerality of film actually enhances the aura of
the work, the “something underneath” cinema’s surface that continues after the film
itself has decayed. It is instructive to note that for Claire, the mystery of film is both a
“charm” and “demonic,” both beautiful and horrifying. It is a duality that contributes to
her choice of the term “uncanny,” along with the attribution of a life “more real than our
own,” which echoes Freud’s own phrasing in “The Uncanny” when he paraphrases
Jentsch. “A particularly favorable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created
when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an
inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (138).34

34 It is difficult to determine whether Freud completely agrees with Jentsch on this point. Freud
definitively rejects the idea that the uncanny is the result of “intellectual uncertainty,” but then
proceeds to use Jentsch’s connection between animate and inanimate in his reading of Hoffman’s
“The Sandman.”
The use of the “lost” film is directly linked to the creation of this effect. If the filmic image was as stable as paintings in Auden’s “Musée Des Beaux Arts,” Gates might have been able to peruse them with the same academic detachment. However, cinema in Flicker refuses to be captured in the same fashion; in the act of perpetually fleeing, it perpetually invites chase. Gates becomes obsessed with the work of Max Castle precisely because what he finds always suggests something more, a lost original, a hidden set of images, “something underneath” (as Claire says) that acts as a lure to pull viewers inward. Many of the “lost” films that Gates finds are scraps: small, barely visible cuts that were discarded and shelved, and inevitably disintegrate after a single viewing. When Gates finally finds Max Castle at the end of the story, Castle is engaged in piecing together his masterwork, a bricolage of scraps, “Practice film, outtakes from editing classes, the most worthless kind of refuse, an insult to the taste” (560). However, Castle’s skill is how he pieces together the scraps, and when Gates sees the film, he is awestruck. However, like his first “exquisite memory” of cinema, this film can only be relived in his mind because it, too, dissolves upon first viewing. “breaking, spilling away in pieces after the only viewing it would ever have” (578).

Castle’s great masterwork may disintegrate in Gates’ hands, but the description, in the form of detailed ekphrastic passages, remains. The book serves as a manner of retaining what is now lost. Whereas most early treatments of cinema were content to provide a condensed plot summary of film, Roszak provides a much more explicit representational model, explaining not only the action on the screen but its effect on the viewers. In Flicker, the experience is represented in a drastically different way; rather
than offering a summary, the text describes the films explicitly. When Gates watches Castle’s film *Shadows over Sing Sing*, an entire paragraph is devoted to the last 16 seconds. Gates states,

The screen goes black. For the next several seconds, the blackness holds; the eye remains fixed upon it. Why? An unseen vortex fills the unlighted screen; it begins to swirl dimly through our awareness, sucking the mind down and down. On the surface it looks like nothing more than scratches on the film, flickers of light, but the effect is hypnotic. One feels the experience of descent physically in the deep gut, falling, falling...(243)

Gates is describing the same uncanny sense of “something underneath” that Claire describes as “a charm, a magic, something demonic” (502). Even Gates asks, “Why?” questioning his own inability to turn away from a screen that he knows is only black; he senses the “vortex” pulling him closer, but recognizes that it is “unseen,” and imperceptible to the eye, “nothing more than scratches on the film.” Again, as the unsettling effect of film is emphasized and its uncertainty is exploited, film is given a kind of hypnotic power over the viewer (Gates) that is then relayed to the reader.

In this fashion, cinematic ekphrasis in *Flicker* inverts the structure of traditional ekphrasis. In the standard ekphrastic poem, the speaker in the text treats the art-object with a veneration reserved for objects that will outlast us. In Keats’ “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” the speaker says to the image, “When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain.” In this way, the art-object both pre-dates and post-dates the speaker. However, in the ekphrastic passages in *Flicker*, the art-object has no chance of
remaining; it is an image that has already been destroyed by the time the words are inscribed. Text is a necessary but always inadequate supplement for the art-object. In the aforementioned example, the scene that Gates describes had an unsettling effect on its viewers and was therefore “crudely lopped off” (244) and discarded. Where the art-object is the foundation in Keats’ “Ode,” the text itself becomes foundational in Flicker, because the art-objects are constantly dissolving, decaying, or being discarded.

The resulting literary product is a work that establishes itself paradoxically as an artifact of a product that has questionable ontological status. At the end of Flicker, Gates is trapped on an uncharted island with the filmmaker he had been seeking, and he states that he is going to write his story down, beginning with the same words that begin Flicker. The novel itself then becomes the “found” object, which has inexplicably made it from the uncharted island to the reader’s hands. Roszak plays with this sense of an artifact when he creates an appendix at the end of “lost” text, stating that “fortunately, this lost literary footage survived among his [Gates’] notes” (592). The appendix is full of bizarre textual ephemera, such as transcripts of interviews and documents found among “tattered papers and urine-soaked clothing” (601). Although it contributes in a minor way to Gates’ overall narrative, the appendix primarily serves as a means of ascribing a fictional authority to the book/document itself.35

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35 This technique of establishing authority appears frequently throughout the history of the novel. A good early example is Cervantes’ Don Quixote, a work that begins by explaining that the work the reader has in her hands was purchased in a market and translated from Arabic. By establishing a history of the text, an authenticity is also established.
Ironically, the book *Flicker* was also quickly “lost,” only to be “found” by a film. *Flicker* was published in 1991 and quickly went out of print. However, in 2005, the successful director Darren Aronofsky (*Pi* and *Requiem for a Dream*) announced that he was teaming up with screenwriter Jim Uhls (*Fight Club*) to turn *Flicker* into a film. The then out-of-print book was re-released in paperback with a cover that emphasized its “soon to be released” status and a back cover that featured reviews by major newspapers (*USA Today*) and writers (Bret Easton Ellis). In this manner, the book about lost films was itself lost and then found by a film.

Lost Films and a Found Filmmaker in Auster’s *Book of Illusions*

Although over a decade separates *Flicker* (1991) from Paul Auster’s (2002) *Book of Illusions*, the works are remarkably similar. Both works involve an academic protagonist who develops a fascination with a cult filmmaker, both protagonists ultimately meet the object of their fascination, and both figures view films that are destroyed after their viewing. Furthermore, the text in both *Flicker* and *The Book of Illusions* acts as fictional “documents” that describe films and filmmakers that no longer exist.

*Book of Illusions* begins with David Zimmer, a professor of comparative literature who becomes a drunken recluse after the tragic death of his family. One night while watching television, he finds a silent comedy by the Keatonesque Hector Mann, and the film makes him laugh for the first time in months. In an effort to regain some control of his life, Zimmer then sets out to learn more about Mann, digging for his “lost
films” in university libraries and ultimately writing a book about him. In the process, Zimmer uncovers a mystery concerning Mann’s life, for one day at the height of Mann’s popularity, he simply disappeared. In true film noir style, a mysterious woman named Alma Grund appears at Zimmer’s house on a stormy evening, retells Mann’s story, and then tells Zimmer that Mann is still alive and still making films on a ranch in New Mexico. Mann, who is now on his deathbed, asks for Zimmer to come and see his final films, which he has asked his wife to destroy 24 hours after his death. Grund, who is writing a biography on Mann, persuades Zimmer (at gunpoint) to satisfy the dying filmmaker’s wishes.

Zimmer concedes, meets the object of his fascination, is allowed to see one of Mann’s final 14 unreleased films, and then is asked to leave as the films are all burned when Mann dies. Mann’s wife also burns Grund’s biography, causing Grund to kill Mann’s wife and then take her own life. In the end, as in the beginning, there is only Zimmer and his book. The films, now lost, are romanticized and elevated (iconophilia), but the representational object that remains is the textual account. Therefore, in terms of representational power, the image is privileged, but in terms of longevity, the text is privileged. Nevertheless, these differences don’t enact a paragonal struggle in the text so

36 In contrast to its tragic elements, The Book of Illusions is also a hyperbolic academic fantasy, the dream of discovering an untouched topic and an epic mystery behind it. Zimmer’s book about Hector Mann begins the chain of events that cause the dark and lovely Alma Grund to show up at his house in film noir style, gun in hand, forcing him to travel with her to meet Mann himself. At the end of the story, Zimmer participates in discussion panels as the sole authority on Mann, even giving his blessing to the Hector Mann society.
much as they enable a representational experiment, a textual attempt to explain the
artistry of an form that rejects orthographic capture.

Both The Book of Illusions and Flicker make extended arguments concerning the
artistic status of film. However, where as Flicker is primarily invested in the aesthetics
of the cinematic experience, The Book of Illusions puts more emphasis on the artistic
credibility of the filmmaker, the pre-auteur theory “invisible hand” that avoided
“signature” styles. In the Hollywood novels of Wilson, West, and many others,
m filmmaking were portrayed as shady and self-serving characters, willing to sacrifice art
for profit. In The Moviegoer, the figure role filmmaker is mostly ignored. However, in
Flicker, we see a change in this portrayal. Max Castle is described as a forgotten genius,
a man that is literally banished for his devotion to art over economics and politics, but
most of the emphasis in the novel is still on the cinematic experience. In The Book of
Illusions, the filmmaker as artist is extolled more than the films he produces. For
example, when Hector Mann (the filmmaker) reveals that all his films will be destroyed
upon his death, Zimmer is awestruck by his lack of ego:

He would make movies that would never be shown to audiences, make movies
for the pure pleasure of making movies. It was an act of breathtaking nihilism,
and yet he’s stuck to the bargain ever since. Imagine knowing that you’re good at
something, so good that the world would be in awe of you if they could see your
work, and then keeping yourself a secret from the world (207).

This sort of “breathtaking nihilism,” is nothing new for Zimmer; his major contribution
to the academia is a book about authors who give up their art after writing successful
novels. The revelation for Zimmer (and for novels that represent cinema) is that cinematic artists are capable of the same astonishing devotion to their art.

Interestingly, Zimmer elevates the role of the filmmaker in The Book of Illusions, but (unlike The Moviegoer and Flicker) does not mystify the cinematic experience. For Roszak, film is filled with occult, ritual elements, hidden from the average viewer but always insidiously present. The films that Auster describes within Book of Illusions are notably less mystical; they are artistic, thoughtful, and heightened by their ephemerality, but they are also mostly what they seem. No demonic forces rest underneath. Nevertheless, of all the works covered in this chapter, Book of Illusions is the one work that spends the most time describing specific films. The second chapter of the work describes in depth many of the filmic works of Hector Mann, and a later section of the work devotes 26 pages to describing the 41-minute film The Inner Life of Martin Frost (the final Mann film that Zimmer gets to see).[^7] Auster states in an interview,

> What intrigued me about The Book of Illusions was that I had set up a story in which I had to use both kinds of writing in the same book. It was an immense challenge, and I must say that describing Hector’s films, especially the silent films in chapter two, took a great deal of work. All the visual information had to be there, the physical details of the action — so that the reader could “see” what was happening — but at the same time, the prose had to move along at a quick pace.

[^7]: The Inner Life of Martin Frost is also the title of a 1946 “lost” film created by Hector Spelling.
pace, in order to mimic the experience of watching a film, which is rushing past
you at twenty-four frames per second (Auster “Interview”).

Auster, in his attempt to “mimic the experience of watching a film,” does not
impose the ritual significance found in Flicker, but Zimmer’s description does highlight
the film’s connection to the narrative web that links Zimmer, Mann, film, writing, and
the inevitability of loss together. For example, in Zimmer’s first impressions of the film,
he finds that it is nothing special. In fact, he states that it “was filled with such deadpan
realism, such attention to the particulars of everyday life, that I failed to perceive the
magic embedded in the heart of the story” (242). Adding to this familiarity is the fact
that the film was shot on Mann’s ranch, where Zimmer had been staying since he
arrived. It is not an “other world” like that of Flicker, but instead a place that was known
and familiar. Unable to enter the fictional universe, he states, “The House in the film was
Hector and Frieda’s House; the garden was their garden; the road was their road” (243).
However, it is exactly that familiarity which gives Zimmer his first uncanny response:

The immediacy of the landscape disconcerted me [...] until the film began to play
out on the screen in front of me, all of those things [the items around the ranch]
had been real. Now, in the black-and-white images of Charlie Grund’s camera,
they had turned into the elements of a fictional world. I was supposed to read

38 Auster’s use of the word “see” in this paragraph is suggestive of two other famous examples.
The first comes from Joseph Conrad’s introduction to the 1897 Nigger of the Narcissus where he
states, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you
hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see.” In 1913, filmmaker D.W. Griffith
made almost the same statement in a summation of his creative process: “The task I am trying to
achieve is above all to make you see” (quoted in Bluestone i). Both of these quotes are frequently
cited in novel/film discussions.
them as shadows, but my mind was slow to make the adjustment. Again and again, I saw them as they were, not as they were meant to be (243).

Zimmer is describing a transition from the human eye to the camera eye; the film itself does nothing to change the familiar setting, and yet it is changed nonetheless by means of the camera’s mediation. Zimmer’s “disconcerted” feeling is the result of this transition, the familiar becoming something other. Zimmer does not say the word “uncanny” in his reaction, but it is certainly not coincidental that in a review of Book of Illusions in The New Statesman, Toby Mundy states, “True horror, Freud once remarked, comes not from the unknown, but from the familiar made strange: Auster is good at exposing the terrors latent in the everyday, even if he still struggles to convey human passion” (n.p.).

It is also possible that something of this uncanny feeling comes from the eerie connections between the major film in the novel (The Inner Life of Martin Frost) and the circumstances in which Zimmer sees it. Zimmer follows a strange woman across the country to meet an eccentric “lost” filmmaker who then shows him a film that represents Zimmer’s own personal dilemma, only to burn the film the next day. Furthermore, if the film is “disconcerting” to Zimmer because of its remediation of the familiar, it is equally as disconcerting to the reader, who is experiencing a story through multiple levels of mediation: Auster is narrating Zimmer, who is narrating a film that is being narrated by
the film’s protagonist Martin Frost. Not surprisingly, Frost is a writer, like Zimmer and Auster.\textsuperscript{39}

Martin Frost has just finished his last book and journeys to a cabin to begin a new one. However, when Frost arrives, he finds a strangely beautiful philosophy student named Claire is there as well.\textsuperscript{40} The two agree that they can share the space; she studies in one room and he researches in the next. Quickly, the two fall in love, but Claire is still shrouded in mystery. First, when the owners of the cabin contact Zimmer, they seem to know nothing about her. Furthermore, Claire is intimately familiar with Frost’s work, including his \textit{Travels in the Scriptorium}. However, the truly strange characteristic of Claire is the fact that the more Frost writes, the sicker Claire gets. At some point, Frost realizes that Claire is linked to his own creativity, a muse, and in an attempt to keep her alive, Frost burns all the writing he has done. Claire dramatically proclaims that “it’s not allowed” but Frost is adamant: “Thirty-seven pages for your life, Claire. It’s the best bargain I’ve ever made” (268). Once the book is burned, the two embrace, Claire asks “What on earth are we going to do?” and the film ends without resolving the question.

In interviews, Auster states that Claire is a muse, the product of Frost’s imagination, and Zimmer (who is watching the story) comes to the same conclusion:

“She was a spirit, a figure born of the man’s imagination, an ephemeral being sent to

\textsuperscript{39}I say “not surprisingly” because Auster is quite fond of using writers as characters in his works, especially if they are linked back to him. In his famous “City of Glass” the protagonist Daniel Quinn meets a writer named Paul Auster, who is finishing a paper on Don Quixote (D.Q. like Daniel Quinn). In this story, Martin Frost has written a book called \textit{Travels in the Scriptorium}, a book that Auster would later publish in 2007. For more on postmodern authors as characters, see A. Fokkema’s “The Author: Postmodernism’s Stock Character.”

\textsuperscript{40} Although no documentation supports it in interviews, there are multiple similarities between Auster’s Claire (the philosophy student) and Roszak’s Claire (the film scholar).
become his muse” (243). However, it is possible to stretch this interpretation and say that Claire is a metaphor for film as well; she exists only within the filmic universe that Zimmer is narrating, and she is characterized by her rapid decay (her immediate and progressive sickness) much like film itself. In the film, descriptions of Claire’s ephemerality are frequent:

No moment in the story captures that sense of fullness and life better than this one. For a few seconds, Claire is turned into something indestructible, an embodiment of pure human radiance. Then the picture begins to dissolve, breaking apart against a background of solid blackness, and although Claire’s laughter goes on for several more beats, it begins to break apart as well — fading into a series of echoes, disjointed breaths, of ever more distant reverberations (261).

Most importantly, she comes to Frost as an inspiration, a way of finding himself again, just as Zimmer states that the films of Hector Mann “unexpectedly walked into my life” (9) and gave him a reason to write again.

The paradox imposed at the end of The Inner Life, when Frost burns his book in an effort to save Claire, is one of the essential paradoxes of the work, returning to the idea that both film and text are flawed artifacts. Mann speculates, “If someone makes a movie and no one sees it, does the movie exist or not” (207)? In both Flicker and The Book of Illusions, the textual record of the films is all that exists; the films are lost, burned, or faded beyond recognition. Yet the textual record itself is hopelessly flawed, incapable of capturing the filmic object or even authoritatively positing the film’s
existence at all. The fictional authors of Flicker and The Book of Illusions are driven by a desire to capture what they've seen, to hold on, make the ephemeral permanent through writing. Yet each word written by Frost in Auster's fictional film makes the ephemeral object fade even more. It is a cycle of pursuit and evasion, desire and loss. By burning the book, Martin finds a way to break from this cycle, doing what Claire says is “not allowed” and paradoxically holding on to the ephemeral by ceasing his pursuit of it. Before we learn if he is successful in his endeavor, the shot changes to an outside view of the cabin in complete stillness, where “everything is still. No wind is blowing; no air rushing through the branches; not a single leaf moves” (269). The absence of movement suggests that destroying the text (inside a film that is also to be destroyed) allows Frost and Claire to become unstuck from time, free from the confines of the story-world. Claire states near the end of the film (quoting Kant): “Things which we see are not by themselves what we see...so that, if we drop our subject or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish” (264).

Viewed in this manner, the film within the novel is about letting go of the stories that try to capture what is perpetually elusive. This idea spirals into the outer levels of the narrative as well; the film itself is burned after Zimmer watches it, and after Zimmer leaves, all of the people at Mann's ranch (including Mann himself) are dead as well. Zimmer is left with nothing but his written account of the story, which he decides to suppress, stating, “Who would have believed such a story if I tried to tell it? I had no proof, no evidence to support my case [...] the only thing I could have shown anyone
was my pathetic little collection of notes” (316). In his 2006 article “Carrying the Burden of Representation,” Jim Peacock notes that Zimmer’s (and Auster’s) account is shaped by its responsibility to tell a story that film cannot. The novel “carries the burden of representation” because it has to tell the story; all other means of capturing the narrative have succumbed to their characteristic impermanence. From the very first word of The Book of Illusions, the film has already been destroyed, making the book as much a requiem as it is a document. Zimmer is left with nothing, just as in the beginning, but the tragedy that had turned him into a recluse no longer haunted him, and he was able to speak about the deaths and burned films at the ranch with a quiet detachment, as if he, like Frost and Claire, had also found a way out of the endless cycle of desire.

As I’ve noted throughout, there are several telling similarities between Book of Illusions and Flicker, including an interest in lost films, eccentric filmmakers, and thoughtful, beautiful women named Claire. However, there is a final similarity as well. Flicker was out of print almost as soon as it was published, only to be reborn when a successful director and filmmaker decided to turn it into a film. The Book of Illusions did well commercially, but it did very little critically. To date, only one major article about it has been published in an American academic journal. However, early in 2007,

41 Like Roszak’s Flicker, Zimmer reveals at the end that he is beginning a book that tells his story, which then becomes the book the reader has in her hand.
Auster wrote and directed the film *The Inner Life of Martin Frost*, starring David Thewlis (of *Harry Potter* fame). As of January 2008, it has not been released in America, but if it is successful, more critical attention for *Book of Illusions* is likely to follow.

Mark Danielewski's Un-House of Leaves

Like Gates from *Flicker* and Zimmer from *The Book of Illusions*, Will Navidson in the book *House of Leaves* (2000) is compelled to record his own story. However, where Gates and Zimmer make their tale into a written record, Navidson creates a film. Navidson is an award-winning photographer who has been away from his family for some time, and so when he returns and they move into a new house, Navidson decides to set up cameras in all the rooms of the house to record his reentry into family life. He intends this film to be a pleasant memory of getting to know his family again, but when strange things start happening in the house, the film becomes a haunting testament to a series of impossible occurrences. One day, in an attempt to survey his new home, Navidson discovers that his house is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Although this is strange, it isn’t particularly troubling until a door appears in the middle of the house that leads to a small hallway. Every time the hallway is explored, it gets larger, and by the end of the work, Navidson, his brother Tom, and hired adventurers are spending days exploring the seemingly endless labyrinth that extends from the hallway door, each time carrying a camera to record the exploration.

The result of these explorations are compiled into a single film called the *Navidson Record*, which is so “real” and so disturbing that most of its viewers don’t
know whether it is an elaborate hoax or an actual record of a supernatural house that almost destroys a family. In the beginning of *House of Leaves*, the author states,

"Though many continue to devote substantial time and energy to the antinomies of fact or fiction, representation or artifice, document or prank, as of late the more interesting material dwells on the interpretation of events within the film. This direction seems promising, even if the house itself, like Melville's behemoth, remains resistant to summation." (3)

However, the task of interpreting the film is complicated by the fact that no one has actually seen it. Those who are pressed to reveal their sources ultimately admit to having merely heard about the film from unnamed sources. In fact, the only record of the film is a loose collection of scraps, drawings, and notes, pieced together by a blind man named Zampano. When Zampano dies, a young man named Johnny Truant inherits the scraps of paper, becomes obsessed with the story they tell, and ultimately begins to edit them, adding in details of his own life, which seems to be strangely affected by the events in Zampano's papers. The effect that the papers have on Johnny doesn't seem to be altered by the fact that he recognizes the lie at its core:

"As I fast discovered, Zampano's entire project is about a film that doesn't exist. You can look, as I have, but no matter how long you search, you will never find the Navidson Record in theatres or video stores. Furthermore, most of what's said by famous people has been made up. I've tried contacting all of them. Those

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43 The name also appears in the 1954 film *La Strada* by Fellini.
that took the time to respond said they never heard of Will Navidson let alone
Zampano. (xix)

Therefore, House of Leaves is a story about a lost film, but it is also the story of the odd
written account of the film and the way that written representation is altered by the man
who inherits it. It is a book about a book about a film about a house that is bigger on the
inside than it is on the outside.

This complicated plot is further confused by a number of formal experiments,
much in the manner of Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (1759) and Vladimir
Nabokov’s Pale Fire (1962). Different fonts are used to convey different speakers; the
word “house” is always printed in the color blue; competing narratives interrupt one
another without alerting the reader; some pages are blank or have only one word; other
pages are blocks of seemingly random text. Like Pale Fire, there is a fictional “source
text,” and a serious of extended footnotes commenting upon this source. In Pale Fire,
the source text is a poem; in House of Leaves, the source text is a written account of a
film. The footnotes in each work are extensive, often overwhelming the fictional source,
and in House of Leaves, the authority associated with footnotes is constantly challenged.
Footnotes cite other footnotes, cite clearly preposterous sources, and often compete with
the primary narrative. House of Leaves is a book with 750 pages and 450 footnotes, in
addition to an appendix at the end with a collection of drawings and textual ephemera.
It is a book that mimics the labyrinths it describes, and it becomes apparent early in the
work that the word “leaves” in the title is a playful reference to the pages themselves.
These critical footnotes anticipate the manner in which the book acts as a theoretical
lure, a mystery and collection of paradoxes that seems irresistible to critics of postmodern literature.  

Many of the critical works focus on the formal elements of *House of Leaves*, its unique structure and narrative that alternate between playful and horrific. These formal elements play an important role in the manner in which film is represented, for where authors like Roszak and Auster used standard paragraphs to present films, Danielewski attempts to utilize experimental structures that mimic (to an extent) the way the eye moves when watching a film. We see this technique throughout the work, but it is nicely exemplified in a section that is described as “Exploration #5,” where Navidson makes his final exploration of the house carrying his video camera. The exploration is described as if it is being watched through the lens of that equipment, making it even more surreal:

On the twelfth day or thirteenth day (it is very difficult to tell which) after sleeping for what Navidson estimates must have been well over 18 hours, he sets off again down the hallway. Soon the walls and doorways recede and vanish, then the ceiling lifts until it too is completely out of sight “direction no longer matters” (433-4).

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44 By self-consciously offering itself as a puzzle, critics and theorists quickly presented their own interpretations of the work. Whereas *Flicker* currently has no critical pieces written about it, and only one critical work currently exists that is devoted to *The Book of Illusions*, articles on *The House of Leaves* have been published frequently since its 2000 release. A search for “House of Leaves” in the Modern Language Association Bibliography produces eight articles specific to the work and several other articles that mention it.

45 Two excellent articles on the formal qualities of *House of Leaves* are Martin Brick’s 2004 “Blueprint(s): Rubric for a Deconstructed Age in *House of Leaves*” and Will Slocombe’s 2005 “This is not for You: Nihilism and the House that Jacques Built.” Both rely heavily on the connection between postmodernism stylistics and architecture.
This scene is described in concrete structure, with the words "is completely out of sight" doubling and moving in both an ascending and descending pattern. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2: Concrete text that mimics a filmed scene.

The doubling literalizes the path the eyes would take if the scene were in fact being watched. As the ceiling raises and the floor sinks simultaneously, the words "is completely out of sight" both simultaneously rise and fall. Much of the rest of the chapter-length description of the film takes place on blank pages with a small paragraph on the bottom (one to two sentences), which allows the reader to comprehend and turn the page quickly, mimicking the motion of a film still progressing. In an interview with Larry McCaffrey entitled "Haunted House," Danielewski comments upon his use of
concrete structure to tie language to cinematic motion; he describes how a rope snaps within one of the explorations, and in the text, the word "snaps" is divided over three pages. He states, "In looking over the pages more carefully they'll probably soon notice the way that these three pages incorporate both cinematic and thematic ideas. They'll discover for themselves how the breaking rope is visually represented in the way the word 'snaps' comes apart — a simple literalization" ("Haunted House" 122).

Like Roszak and Auster, the representation of film becomes a formal element of the work itself. However, Danielewski’s formal experiments and choice of subject matter lead to two questions: 1. Why film? In a work that self-consciously highlights the materiality of its text, placing a film at its core seems antithetical. Furthermore, why digital video? When Auster and Roszak took film as their subject, they chose films from the early days of cinema. These films, which are recorded on unstable material, blurred by decay, and shrouded in a kind of occult secrecy, hide more than they reveal, and in so doing allow the text to exploit film’s underlining mysteries. However, The Navidson Record, which is a “home recording” that forms the foundation for the narrative in House of Leaves, is a digital recording, shot on Hi-8. The digital image (as opposed to photochemical film) is characterized by its scratch-free surface, its obscene clarity that hides nothing. In a work that is structured around mystery, digital cinema seems ill-suited to act as an appropriate metaphor. The answer, it seems, lies on the bottom of a giant staircase.
Down the Grand Staircase

As the space inside the house grows, one of the explorations reveals a giant staircase that seems to spiral downward infinitely. After walking down it for seven hours, the explorers drop a flare that “does not illuminate or sound a bottom” (86). The staircase is not the center of the house, nor does it arrive at the center, but it is the closest any of the characters get to an origin. All the rooms within the mysterious space stem from the staircase, and the more the staircase is explored, the larger it gets. Film, as a medium, functions much the same way within *House of Leaves*. It is not an origin or even a means of finding an origin, but it is the medium that is at the innermost narrative level. Like the staircase in the center of the house, film is the book’s center.

In one of the first major theoretical responses to *House of Leaves*, Katherine Hayles proposes an explanation. In her 2002 article “Saving the Subject: Remediation in *House of Leaves*,” Hayles suggests that deconstructive theory and the writing techniques that it has evoked have surpassed the “average” reader:

Is it possible to save the subject now that it has been imploded by Jean Baudrillard, deconstructed by Jacques Derrida, and pronounced dead by Fredric Jameson, only to be revived as a schizophrenic? (Not to mention its re-creation as an infinitely malleable information pattern by biomedical practices like the Visible Human Project.) For writers who hope to make a living from their work, the problem with such high-tech and high-theory exercises is that the majority of mainstream, nonacademic readers continue to believe they possess coherent subjectivities (779).
Hayles continues by stating that the remediation of film within *House of Leaves* provides a way to maintain postmodern subversion while still providing readers with a stable subject.

By “remediation,” Hayles is referring to Bolter and Grusin’s concept, in which “what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (15). In other words, remediation is when one medium represents another; in this case, a textual experiment (*House of Leaves*) refashions film and represents it through text. Film, according to Hayles, has the potential to unify disparate narratives in a manner that people in modern culture understand simply because we live in a culture that is media saturated. Johnny Truant, Zampano, and Navidson are all essentially unrelated (they are on different narrative levels), but they are unified by the fact that they are recorded (“mediated”), and even though this recording is specious for multiple reasons, there is a contemporary acceptance of the ontological status of the recorded object. It is not unlike the power that Binx Bolling gives to film in *The Moviegoer*, when he states that filming a space transforms it from an “anywhere” into a “somewhere” (68). Hayles’ adaptation of the idea is that film transforms an “anyone” into a “someone.” This concept is also informed by Bazin’s 1967 treatment of the cinema and reality when he states, “If film is to fulfill itself aesthetically

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46 Although the connection is somewhat tenuous, Bolter and Grusin’s idea that the old returns to haunt the new in the development of all media echoes Freud’s treatment of the uncanny: “This uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated” (“The Uncanny” 125).
we need to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked” (What is Cinema? 48). Hayles is arguing that in contemporary culture, we do believe in that reality despite our knowledge to the contrary, and that belief provides a form of “depth” or “substance” that is concurrently perceived as missing from postmodern literature. In other words, film “saves the subject” in House of Leaves by providing a form of coherence that is acceptable to modern readers/viewers because of their acceptance of the coherency of cinema.

Paradoxically, this use of film gives the “center” of the house a kind of presence despite textual assurances that it is nothing but a void. As I noted earlier, film is the innermost narrative level; all other narrative modes stem from it, linking film to the house’s spiral staircase and the void to which it leads. Hayles notes that

The absence at the center of this space is not merely nothing. It is so commanding and absolute that it paradoxically becomes an especially intense kind of presence, violent in its impossibility and impossible to ignore. Navidson, insisting that his documentary should be taken literally, is quoted by Zampanò as saying: “And if one day you find yourself passing by that house, don’t stop, don’t slow down, just keep going. There’s nothing there. Beware” (4). Only if we read “nothing” as a substantive does this passage make sense, a negation converted into the looming threat of something (788).

Film contributes to this paradoxical creation of substantive space within the void. Due to film’s dual ontological status (both there and not there) the emptiness at the heart of the house is attributed with an “intense kind of presence.” The characters, despite their
questionable status, are also attributed with this same kind of presence. The reader knows they are false even in the world of the novel, but their filmic status allows them to inhabit a space in which this negative ontology is inconsequential.

To enhance this effect, the novel contains an entire section of reactions to the film. Johnny Truant tells the reader in the introduction that the famous reactions to the film are false (xix), but the bulk of responses give the film a kind of validity. Derrida, at an Artaud exhibit, reacts to the film by providing a discourse on the “other” (361); Camille Paglia asks why only men enter the hallway (357); David Copperfield calls the house “a riddle” while making the Statue of Liberty disappear (364); and Stephen King states, “You didn’t make this up, did you? […] I’d like to see this house” (363). Several other responses are listed from various professions (doctors, architects, etc.) and their response is always determined by their backgrounds. The self-conscious humor and implausibility of actually obtaining these interviews assures their lack of validity, but even though the reader knows they are false, the collective responses posit a different kind of presence, as if will and memory could create something out of nothing, giving the film an eerie but perceptible materiality.

In 2005, Mark B. Hansen generated a partial response to Hayles in his essay “The Digital Topography of Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves.” Whereas Hayles focuses on the means by which film provides a paradoxical yet perceivable “substance” to the characters in House of Leaves, Hansen argues that the remediation of film actually serves to deny the ability of text to recreate experience. In short, for Hayles, film posits a
coherent subject, while for Hansen, the text always falls short of representing its filmic counterpart, highlighting the essential void at the center of the work.

To make this argument, Hansen states that the house, which is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside, is an impossible object. Nevertheless, House of Leaves is filled with attempts to mediate it, through film, photography, and writing. All of these forms of inscription fail; the film is nonexistent, the words that describe the film are of dubious origin, and “the effort to document or otherwise make sense of this physically impossible object generates a series of mediations which quite literally stand in for the void of referentiality at the novel’s core” (599). Hansen sees this substitution as a much larger sign of our culture’s continued quest to mediate existence while constantly being faced with the impossibility of ever actually capturing an event: “In an age marked by the massive proliferation of (primarily audiovisual) apparatuses for capturing events of all sorts, from the most trivial to the most monumental, House of Leaves asserts the nongeneralizability (or nonrepeatability) of experience” (606). Hansen’s suggestion that our recording technologies have failed is supported quite directly by Zampano’s first words about the Navidson record:

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, “authenticity” still remains the word most likely to stir a debate. In fact, this leading obsession — to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes — invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth (3).
For Zampano, “the advent of digital technology” is presented as a historical marker, a change from photochemical to digital that promised increased verisimilitude (an “unimpeachable hold on the truth”) but ultimately proved no more reliable. Hansen’s “Digital Topology” extends this argument into the act of representation as an activity in the digital age, but ultimately arrives at the same conclusion: all of the attempts to capture experience exactly through inscription ultimately become a stronger reminder of the inability of any media to give substance to the void. In the narrative, the house explorers travel down the spiral staircase for seven hours, reporting afterward “the experience is beyond the power of any Hi-8 or 35mm camera” (86). For Zampano and Hansen, it is no surprise that the flare they dropped from the spiral staircase never hit bottom.

The Digital Uncanny

Although Flicker, The Book of Illusions, and House of Leaves are essentially contemporary works, House of Leaves is the only work to emphasize digital recording and viewing technologies. Whereas Roszak and Auster look back to early films, Danielewski uses Hi-8 cameras and a surveillance method not unlike the form popularized by MTV’s Real World. Throughout this chapter, I’ve argued that all three postmodern novels share a series of similar characteristics; they all use cinema as a way of experimenting with narrative and representation; they all treat film as an aesthetic object (rather than an industry); and all three engage in a fetishization of cinema that is not unlike that of early film theorists. Part of this fetishization, I maintain, is a
representation of the uncanny effect that cinema has on its viewers. Film is never “just film” in these works; it plays with a unique kind of discomfort that results from the mix of the strange and the familiar. In Flicker and The Book of Illusions, the uncanny stems from the novel’s utilization of early films, which are fragile, ephemeral, and (due to damaged surfaces) seem to hide more than they reveal. When Claire in Flicker says that films “have a life, more real than our so-called real lives” (502), it is in part due to early photochemical cinema’s reliance on organic materials that decay in a way not unlike living organisms.

However, it is slightly more difficult imagining Claire’s statement in relation to digital cinema. Ultimately, digital cinema lacks the romance and nostalgia of early films; it can be reduced to a long series of ones and zeros, it no longer requires a reel, and it has extraordinary potential for longevity. Furthermore, whereas early film created visual mystery through the scratches, burns, and vignettes that obscure more than they reveal, digital cinema reveals everything and hides nothing. Digital video, despite all its visual similarities to its predecessor, isn’t film at all; it is completely different in terms of materiality. It can be reduced quite literally to a series of numbers, it lacks frames, it is easily reproducible, and it has an ability to portray both the foreground and the background with inhuman precision. It is a flawless, perfect, and ultimately lifeless image. Nevertheless, of all the works covered in this chapter, House of Leaves is the work that is most frequently linked with the uncanny, both by the author and external scholars.
In fact, House of Leaves contains several academic descriptions of the uncanny, most of which are found in the footnotes:

What took place amounts to a strange spatial violation which has already been described in a number of ways — namely surprising, unsettling, disturbing, but most of all uncanny. In German the word for “uncanny” is “unheimlich” which Heidegger in his book “Sein und Zeit” thought worthy of some consideration:

[...] In anxiety one feels uncanny. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to the expression: the “nothing and nowhere.” But here “uncanniness” also means “not-being-at-home.” [das Nicht-zuhause-sein]. (24)

In a fictional interview with Harold Bloom, the uncanny is brought up again, this time as a specific reaction to The Navidson Record. Bloom states that he will react to the film, but first, he’d like to read from his book The Anxiety of Influence:

The unheimlich, or “unhomely” as the “uncanny,” is perceived wherever we are reminded of our inner tendency to yield to obsessive patterns of action.

Overruling the pleasure principle, the daemonic in oneself yields to a “repetition compulsion.” [...] Freud [...] maintains that “every emotional affect, whatever its quality, is transformed by repression into morbid anxiety.” Among cases of anxiety, Freud finds the class of the uncanny, “in which the anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which recurs.” But this “unhomely” might as well be called “the homely,” he observes, “for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has
been estranged only by the process of repression. You see emptiness here is the
purported familiar and your house is endlessly familiar, endlessly repetitive.

Hallways, corridors, rooms, over and over again. [...] A lifeless, objectless,
soulless place. Godless too.” (359)

It is difficult to determine whether these additions to the novel anticipate scholarly
applications of the uncanny or invite it, but it is noteworthy that most every critical
approach to the work at least mentions the term. Furthermore, Nele Bemong’s 2003
article “Exploration # 6: The Uncanny in Mark Z. Danielewski’s House of Leaves” in
Image and Text goes so far as to devote an entire article to the topic.

However, what has yet to be discussed in House of Leaves is a consideration of
the uncanny and digital cinema, which at first appear to be contradictory terms. The
uncanny depends on the obscured presence of something mysterious in the familiar,
while digital cinema is characterized by the sort of clarity that allows nothing to hide.
Therefore, the presence of the uncanny in House of Leaves (as suggested by its own self-
referential content and the scholarly work it inspires) must be somewhat different in
nature — a digital uncanny.

The idea of “the digital uncanny” has its origins in the work of Japanese
roboticist Masahiro Mori, who found that people were fascinated by his robot’s
similarity to humans until that similarity became too close. At that point, people
suffered inexplicable discomfort, as if they were seeing the living dead. In a 1970 article,
Mori coined this term “the uncanny valley” and although it receives little attention from
theorists in the humanities, it is a popular topic amongst animators and game designers.
Almost three decades after Mori’s article, Cathy Waldby published another article about bodies and animation entitled “The Visible Human Project and the Digital Uncanny.” Although Waldby introduces her topic with a small treatise on cinema’s digitalization of human experience, her specific interest is a medical experiment that uses a digitized human body for study. In the act of replicating a human with such extreme verisimilitude, the digitized form projects an “aura of the uncanny. The subjective and mythical significance of death which is so profoundly repressed in medicine’s understandings of the body returns to ghost the medical presentation of the project” (11).

Both Mori and Waldby rely on a connection between animation and the human body to justify their use of the uncanny, relying on Jentsch’s premise that the uncanny is often linked to “intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one” (“The Uncanny” 138). In House of Leaves, close descriptions of bodies are conspicuously absent, as if the camera eye is never capable of zooming in. However, there are long descriptions of the body of the house and the way that relates to the bodies that inhabit it. Not only does it seem to be “alive” in classic haunted house fashion, but Zampano notes,

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47 Waldby begins, “No domain of experience, no matter how personal or particular, seems immune to translation into data. This is a favorite theme of contemporary cinema, which has dealt recently with the digitalization of memory (Johnny Mnemonic) or personality (Virtuosity) or personal sensory experience (Strange Days) and of civil identity (The Net). These examples are only the most recent attempts in public culture to make sense of, speculate about, and narrativize the open-ended, unpredictable capacities of digital technologies to render heterogeneous domains of phenomena into their own binary terms”(1).
Some critics believe that the house's mutations reflect the psychology of anyone who enters it [...] Ruby Dahl, in her stupendous study of space, calls the house on Ash Tree Lane "a solipsistic heightener," arguing that "the house, the halls, and the rooms all become the self-collapsing, expanding, tilting, closing, but always in perfect relation to the mental state of the individual" (165).

In this approach, the house (an object typically considered inanimate) acts as an extension of the living who dwell in it, blurring any distinctions between animate and inanimate. Perhaps even more importantly, just as the extreme verisimilitude of the digital representation of the body in Waldby's article causes the uncanny effect, the digital video at the innermost narrative level of the story is the primary representation of the house, making the text of *House of Leaves* doubly-uncanny.°° It is an unsettling tale of a house that comes alive, made more unsettling by the digital record of the event. The digital video, by the nature of its materiality, promises to "capture" the house perfectly, *as it is* (what Hansen calls "orthographic capture"), but those who see it can't make any sense of it. On the next narrative level up, those who read the jumbled narrative that loosely links the film, the mysterious annotations of Johnny Truant, and the other assorted ephemera are even more at a loss to find solid footing in the text.

Readers' reviews of the work attest to this unsettling effect, but like many other reactions to the work, the text anticipates this response. In the series of fictional

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48 The connection between digital cinema and the idea of the doubly-uncanny is introduced in Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second*. She argues that if early cinema produced an uncanny effect by bringing the dead back to life, digital cinema doubles this effect by bringing cinema back to life.
interviews that document supposed reactions to the film, the interviewees' ultimate discomfort is revealed. Hunter S. Thompson states that "it's, well...one thing in two words: fucked up...very fucked up [...] I broke things because of it, plates, a small jade figurine of a penguin. A glass bullfrog. I was so upset I even threw my friend's fishtank at their china cabinet" (363). Stanley Kubrick states, "I remain soberly impressed and disturbed. I even had a dream about your house. If I didn't know better I'd say you weren't a filmmaker at all. I'd say the whole thing really happened" (363). Harold Bloom provides the final word, stating, "Unheimliche — of course" (364).

Conclusion — The Man Who Sees It Must Be Careful

In 1936, an article appeared in the New York Herald Tribune with the headline: "Films Are Treated as Real Art by Lecturer at Metropolitan." It is a humorous reminder of the manner in which film fought for legitimacy despite its mass appeal. Even in 1936, forty years after its inception, film was treated with initial skepticism and distrust, especially from intellectuals who saw its potentially dangerous mix of hypnotizing images and willing audiences. Early literary responses to cinema were in many ways a simple reaction to this fear. This is not a new phenomenon by any means; every new technology is treated with some initial uncertainty, even if the technology is an art form. In Book X of The Republic, we find that poetry, as one of art's first new technologies, was initially banned from Plato's ideal state. Socrates is clear about the reason: "We are, at all events, aware that such poetry mustn't be taken seriously as a serious thing laying

49 The "lecturer" to which this article refers was the famous art historian Erwin Panofsky.
hold of truth, but that the man who hears it must be careful, fearing for the regime in
himself, and must hold what we have said about poetry” (54). Book X is as cautionary
as it is philosophical: “the man who hears it must be careful” because there is a lure to
the “imitative” arts that ultimately pulls people from ideal values (justice, virtue).
Merton from Merton of the Movies provides a modern example; Merton is lured by an
imitative reality (film), forgets the unchanging reality of his role as a shopkeeper, and
suffers greatly. In this fashion, Socrates’ warning could be applied directly to the literary
representation of new visual technologies with only a slight alteration: “the man who
sees it must be careful.”

Oddly enough, even after film gained cultural acceptance in the mid and late
twentieth century and was portrayed as such in novels, these novels still rely on the
same basic fear. In fact, while the cautionary elements in Merton and Locust are only
implied, the warnings in the postmodern film novels are explicit: Claire tells Gates in
Flicker that films contain “a charm, a magic, something demonic” (502) and the first
sentence in House of Leaves is the haunting phrase: “This is not for you.” The critical
difference between these warnings and the cautionary elements of the earlier novels is
their inverse effect: rather than discouraging involvement, “This is not for you” is an
extraordinary enticement; it mystifies the book and its filmic core, luring the reader
inward with the promise of forbidden knowledge.

50 The connection between poetry, technology, and its ultimate dismissal from the Republic was
first suggested to me by Dr. Megan Becker-Leckrone.
51 The force of this warning is enhanced by the fact that there are no other words on the page.
Therefore, the fear of cinema in the twentieth century American novel doesn’t disappear at any point; it is simply refashioned. At first, novels that take film as their subject exploit this fear by pushing cinema away, making it an industry and not an art. Later novels shift to pulling cinema in, mystifying it, exploiting its uncanny effects. The first approach says there is nothing of which to be afraid (reason will triumph over irrationality); the second says that there is much to fear (reason has failed us). The results are drastically different, but the core of each work is linked to the essential mistrust of the cinematic image, a cinematic iconophobia, a fear not unlike the one Socrates suggests when poetry is barred from the Republic.
CHAPTER 3

WRITING THE CAMERA:

LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD AS LITERATURE

Alain Resnais' film Last Year at Marienbad (L'Année Dernière à Marienbad) was released in France in 1961 and won the highest prize at the Venice Film Festival that same year. Its initial success was credited to the extraordinary camerawork of Sacha Vierny (who later filmed with Luis Buñuel and Peter Greenaway) and the oneiric restructuring of time that invites multiple interpretations. Like other films by Alain Resnais (such as Hiroshima, Mon Amour), Marienbad has maintained a certain level of popularity in the United States amongst cinéphiles. In 1999, nearly 40 years after its release, Fox Lorber released a DVD version of the film, and in January 2008 Rialto Pictures reissued the film and began to show it in various art-house theatres in New York and Los Angeles.

Its longevity relies, at least in part, on its somewhat impenetrable nature. Its fragmented scenes, repeating dialogues, and haunting music all seem to suggest a profound meaning without ever stating what exactly that meaning is or could be. At its core, Marienbad is the story of three people, two men (called X and M) and a beautiful
woman (called A) who all meet in an ornate château. X, the narrator, tells A that they had met before “last year at Marienbad” and that he has now come to take her away with him. A (the character) dismisses him initially, stating that she has no memory of their romance, but the presence of M (who appears to be her partner) seems to be influencing this decision. X continues to chase her, and eventually she gives in, allowing X’s memories to become her own. In the end, X and A leave the château, disappearing into the night, while M watches, powerless to stop them.

There is little more that can be said with any level of certainty. Although X is trying to convince A of their shared memory, the three characters, X, A, and M, seem to exist only in the context of the château. Their conversations are often more lyrical than explanatory, and many of their dialogues are repeated in multiple settings. In this manner, the characters and the scenes self-consciously ask to be transformed into symbols. In the 1961 trailer to the film, the narrator reads Robbe-Grillet’s introduction to the text: “Is he a seducer or a madman? Or has he confused two faces? What really happened last year? That is up to you, the audience, to decide.” The challenge put to the viewer appears a bit self-serving, but it nevertheless characterizes the vast majority of criticism the film inspires. The “gaps” in Marienbad invite critics to develop an explicative structure, a model that would take the collage of often disparate images and allow them to make sense. Richard M. Blumenberg writes in his 1972 article “Ten Years

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52 In the film, the characters’ names are never provided. The letter designations (A, X, and M) exist only in Robbe-Grillet’s text.
53 The theatrical trailer is currently available at: http://www.filmforum.org/films/Marienbadtrailer.html#
After *Marienbad* that "conjectures about 'meaning' in *Last Year at Marienbad* seem as redundant as the graphs and charts people have designed to 'explain' the film. Having made such graphs and charts myself, I do not wish to burden the field with further graphic explication" (40). However, Blumenberg promises to avoid a "graphic" explanation, not a formal one, and so he proceeds from his initial disavowal to produce conjunctures such as, "In a formal sense [...] *Marienbad* is about death" (41).

Those critics who did not attempt to determine *Marienbad*’s underlying structure often suggest a purely aesthetic view of the work, a rejection of interpretation in favor of visual poetics. Jacques Brunis, in his 1962 interpretation of the film, states that "I still enjoy being haunted by this film as I never was by any film; I still hope to see it many times and preserve its polyvalent ambiguities. They are the ambiguities of life itself" (153). In a 1962 article in *The New Left Review*, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith states, "*Marienbad* is pure cinema, the cinema of the image stripped of all emotional and intellectual content" (147). American critic Susan Sontag agrees in her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation" when she states, "What matters in *Marienbad* is the pure, untranslatable immediacy of some of its images, and its rigorous if narrow solutions to certain problems of cinematic form" (9). After the DVD release in America, positive reviews continued to be produced. Roger Ebert, a champion of mainstream American cinema, acknowledges that the film may be difficult for some, but that he "was not prepared for was the voluptuous quality of *Marienbad*, its command of tone and mood, its hypnotic way of drawing us into its puzzle, its austere visual beauty" ("Last Year" n.p.).
However, explicatory and aesthetic criticism is only part of **Marienbad**’s legacy. In many ways **Marienbad** is a film that is indicative of American stereotypes of French cinema; the acting is dramatic, the pace incredibly slow, and several critics consider the presentation to be overly formalistic and pretentious. In 1962, just after the film was released in America, Norman Hollis stated that “in the cocktail arena, where, in the last analysis (and analysis is last), the most direct and honest film criticism goes on, reactions varied from outrage to boredom; the stimulus, however, was invariably the same: bafflement” (“Film, Metafilm, and Un-Film” 407). Although “outrage and boredom” might not be **Marienbad**’s preferred legacy, it is one of the reasons the film persists in American culture. Its haughty presentation and its rejection of plot lend it to satire and parody. A nice contemporary example of this is the British rock band Blur’s 1994 parody of/homage to the film in their video for “To the End,” where the band members are portrayed as **Marienbad**’s main characters.54 Even though the video’s treatment of **Marienbad** isn’t completely positive, the video’s playful take on **Marienbad**’s “art-house” nature shows that the film still has a recognizable place in contemporary culture.

All of the aforementioned praise and parody completely ignore **Last Year at Marienbad**’s lesser-known doppelgänger: the novel **Last Year at Marienbad** by Alain Robbe-Grillet. This hybrid screenplay-novel, which was published in 1961 alongside the film, attempts to describe the film scene by scene in exhaustive detail, explaining each

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54 The full video is available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvClPpWfo7Y. Despite its use of humor, it also does an impressive job capturing some of **Marienbad**’s complex shots and scenes.
camera movement, each sound, and each word said. Alongside the textual
descriptions, there are photo stills from the film. The use of long descriptions and
inserted images isn’t particularly radical in itself; published screenplays with images
have a long history in France. However, there are multiple facets of Robbe-Grillet’s
Marienbad that make it difficult to characterize, including Robbe-Grillet’s status as a
literary author, the text’s formal ambiguities, the text’s relationship to the film, and the
unique manner in which the film images are positioned in the text. Robbe-Grillet’s
Marienbad inherits characteristics from the screenplay, the novel, the novelization, and
even the film souvenir, yet it rejects any one of these classifications.

Put simply, this chapter looks formally at the text Last Year at Marienbad, with
an emphasis on its literary nature. I am concerned with Alain Resnais’ film only insofar
as the film performs a literary function within the text. Other works that have looked at
Robbe-Grillet’s Last Year at Marienbad as a text tend to exemplify the way the work
transitioned from a screenplay to a film, but this chapter explains how a text can inform
a film, be shaped by a film, and utilize a film while still retaining its own identity as a
literary artifact.

To argue this point, I’ll begin by explaining how the status of French cinema and
literature in 1950s and 1960s France positioned Robbe-Grillet between two forces
competing for control of authorship: that of the auteur and that of the literary author.

55 In the introduction to Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet notes that, in essence, the work is a “shot by
shot description of the film I saw in my mind” (9). Taken literally, this admission turns the work
into a “notational novelization,” a work that derives from a film, albeit a film that only exists in
Robbe-Grillet’s head.
Then, I’ll look at the unique manner in which Robbe-Grillet’s text alters the form of his *nouveau roman* to accommodate for cinematic conventions such as the presence of a camera and the soundtrack. Finally, I’ll examine the mutually informing nature of the film and the text and the “total work” that is created by their dynamic relationship. At each step it will be my contention that the text self-consciously reaffirms its literary identity and the authority of the literary author and in so doing rejects both the dominant logic of French *auteur* theory and the “supplemental” status often assigned to screenplays and novelizations.

**Taking Back the Camera-Pen**

In 1948, French film theorist Alexandre Astruc wrote “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-stylo,” which became one of the most important documents for the *auteur* movement in 1950s and early 1960s France. In this manifesto for the autonomy of the filmmaker, Astruc states, “Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The filmmaker-author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen” (22). Therefore, the *auteur* is not only a director who is raised to the level of a literary author, but also a director who has taken over the

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56 In addition to Astruc’s article, two other pieces serve as “foundations” of the *auteur* movement. The first is Francois Truffaut’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* article “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema,” which attacked the “Tradition of Quality” that dominated French cinema (films based on classic literature) and suggested that *auteurs* who both write and direct are able to free themselves from this tradition. However, Truffaut’s article was not so much a manifesto of auteur theory as it was a criticism of the existing system of screenwriters in French cinema (Staples 2). It was Bazin’s “De la Politique des Auteurs” that gave the theory shape. Here, Bazin argues that auteur theory consists of “choosing in the artistic creation the personal factor as a criterion of reference, then postulating its permanence and even its progress from one work to the following” (*Cahiers du Cinéma* 70, April 1957).
traditional role of the screenwriter. The concept of a caméra-stylo (camera-pen) offers filmmakers an extraordinary amount of freedom; it removes the hours of planning that go into each detail of a shot and replaces them with a camera that is as free flowing and unpredictable as the writer's pen. Jean-Luc Godard exemplifies this in his 1960 film Breathless (À Bout de Souffle) and his 1964 Band of Outsiders (Bande à Part) where no formal scripts were used. Loose notes were sometimes handed to the actors the day of shooting, but there was no time for the actors or the crew to plan; the scenes were “written” as they were shot with the camera. (Dawson n.p.)

Godard's style, which combines improvisation, realism, and a penchant for long takes, is characteristic of the style of filmmaking called the “new wave” (la nouvelle vague). It was a style that rejected the reliance on montage that characterized popular French cinema; it also refused to adapt classic novels into film. Interestingly, the figures most frequently associated with the “new wave,” Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and François Truffaut, had all written for the influential Cahiers du Cinéma journal in the 1950s and then turned from critical writing to filmmaking (Marie 2). The auteur theory allowed them to continue writing, but their subject was transformed into their tool for inscription.

A parallel movement to the French new wave was also finding ways to challenge traditional filmmaking and the nature of an author during the same period. This movement was alternately called the Rive Gauche (Left Bank) movement, “literary new wave,” or the “author’s cinema” (“cinéma des auteurs”) (Van Wert 3), and it contained several well-known writers and filmmakers including Alain Robbe-Grillet, Alain
Resnais, Chris Marker, and Marguerite Duras. This group rejected the new wave’s use of realism, long takes, and improvisation, replacing them with montage, surreal images, and an exploitation of cinema’s ability to mix the past, present, and future. The Left Bank artists argued (much like Hugo Munsterberg did in 1916) that cinema is about presenting the “complexities of thought and its mechanisms” (Resnais) and not about representing reality. Most importantly, they had a decidedly stronger belief in the literary author. They, too, followed a camera-pen aesthetic, but they reversed the meaning given to it by Astruc and the new wave filmmakers; instead of turning the director into an author via the camera-pen, the Left Bank artists turned the director into a means of realizing the vision of the author.

Some reports of the director/author relationship in the Left Bank group portray it as one of essential harmony, with no one artist taking a dominant role. Marguerite Duras, who also collaborated with Resnais, states in her introduction to Hiroshima Mon Amour that the feedback she received from Resnais and G. Jarlot (the film’s literary advisor) was always “lucid, demanding, and productive” (7). Robbe-Grillet notes in his introduction to Marienbad that in his first meeting with Resnais, “we agreed about everything” (9). Later, when Resnais suggested changes to the script, Robbe-Grillet states that these changes “always followed my own intention, as if I made notations on my own text” (9).

However, there are many suggestions that the literary aspect of Marienbad was privileged. In The Erotic Dream Machine, Fragola and Smith note that Robbe-Grillet only agreed to the collaboration with Resnais so long as Resnais promised to film the
work exactly as Robbe-Grillet wrote it (26). Furthermore, the text of Marienbad is so explicit that it leaves very little to the director’s imagination; every camera movement, every sound, and every action is described with a precision that is unheard of in screenwriting. Robbe-Grillet describes the text as “a shot-by-shot description of the film as I saw it in my mind” (Marienbad 9). In this fashion, Robbe-Grillet takes the exact opposite approach to Godard’s last-minute scripts and improvised scenes; he takes control of the story, flooding it with detail and thereby dictating exactly what freedoms Resnais may utilize in the text’s transformation into cinema. The pen, which was taken by the auteur, is taken back.

However, the question of whether “authorship” is taken back is as well is not quite as clear. As Foucault argues in his 1970 essay “What Is an Author?” the act of writing a text doesn’t necessarily imply “author” status, nor does everything an author writes qualify for the “work” of an author. As an example, Foucault states that Nietzsche’s books and manuscripts certainly count as the “works” of an author, but it is more difficult to say the same of the words Nietzsche may have scribbled down haphazardly, “the notation of a meeting, or of an address, or a laundry list” (207).

In order to clarify the ambiguities of authorship and subvert the denial of authorial power posited in Barthes’ 1967 “Death of the Author,” Foucault argues that the author is actually a “function” in our culture, one that comes “into being” as the result of a series of discursive practices. This is not a return to the more pedestrian concept of authorship that gives the author of a work the final say in its meaning, but rather the idea that the author is a product rather than a person; a cultural entity that is not inside
the book (like a character) nor outside (a real person) somewhere in the “scission” between the two:

Everyone knows that, in a novel offered as a narrator’s account, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers exactly to the writer or to the moment in which he writes but, rather, to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and distance (215).

Here, Foucault is proposing that the distance between the implied author (which he calls the “alter ego”) and the actual author “varies” even as a reader is experiencing the work. This potential for fluctuation suggests that varying degrees of the author function are possible; authors could have a heightened author function in texts that foreground authorial presence (e.g. metafictional texts where the author is a character) and a lesser degree of the author function in texts where their presence is not as pronounced. It is a helpful distinction for understanding the difference between Robbe-Grillet’s status as an author in regards to his “literary” fictions and his diminished author status in regards to Last Year at Marienbad.

In the purely literary arena, Robbe-Grillet is often considered a writer’s writer; Bruce Morrissette begins his essay “Surfaces and Structures in Robbe-Grillet’s Novels” (1965) by stating that “the rising curve of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s literary star continues its dazzling ascent” (1). Morrissette’s choice of the word “star” is fitting because Robbe-
Grillet has maintained a kind of literary celebrity, what Foucault calls the “paradoxical singularity of the author’s name” (210). There may be many people with the last name Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, but there is only one Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, just as there is only one Robbe-Grillet. His author status stems from a combination of literary and critical work. In his novels, he wrote with extreme attention to the surfaces of objects, rejecting the psychological descriptions that were typical of both classic literature and modernist novels. His critical essays were compiled into the 1963 literary manifesto For a New Novel. In these essays, Robbe-Grillet outlines “several obsolete notions” such as the novel’s emphasis on psychological descriptions and its privileging of content over form. The success of these critical works led him to be considered the “leader” of the nouveau roman (new novel) movement.57 His “objective literature,” such as the 1957 Jealousy and 1959 Into the Labyrinth, became examples of the movement that he had defined. These works, along with many of Robbe-Grillet’s other novels, are frequently characterized as fictions that require the reader to engage in a more active role of making meaning, a trend that Roland Barthes would cite as a reason for nullifying the author entirely in “The Death of the Author.” However, in the case of Robbe-Grillet, the act of using a book to reject everything that a book should do ultimately turns the reader’s eye to the author that caused this shift. Therefore, the

57 The nouveau roman is a form of writing that challenges what Robbe-Grillet sees as “several obsolete notions” (25) in the novel, including character (27), story (29), commitment (to political and social ends) (34), and the separation of form and content (41). In many ways, he was reacting against both classical realism and the more radical realism followed by the Cahiers du Cinéma group by arguing that novels do not need to mirror an agreed upon social reality (Fragola and Smith 2). He states that all of these norms “tended to impose the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, un-equivocal, entirely decipherable universe” (“On Several Obsolete Notions” 32).
"literary author" as a concept may have been in jeopardy in post World War II France, but Robbe-Grillet maintained a singular presence. He had heightened his “author function” by developing a unique fictional style, a larger set of theoretical guidelines that justified that style, and a group of artists that adhered to these guidelines.

However, when Robbe-Grillet wrote Last Year at Marienbad as a work that was intended to be transformed into film, he entered into a form of inscription that typically views writing as a supplement to the filmic product. Within the Left Bank group and the *nouveau roman* movement, Robbe-Grillet’s author function was maintained, since this group valued the collaborative effort between writers and filmmakers. Outside of the group, the author-nullifying characteristics of the screenwriting genre overcame the Left Bank aesthetics. In the book *Novel and Film* (1985), Bruce Morrissette notes that critics allowed for Robbe-Grillet’s author status to be upheld in his novels, but not in his works written specifically for film. Morrissette cites Claude Ollier, a contemporary of Robbe-Grillet, as saying, “For *Marienbad*, Robbe-Grillet, imagining in terms of the cinema, wrote his first *nonliterary* [emphasis mine] texts” (22). The idea that an author could produce a book that is “nonliterary” speaks to the manner in which changing a work’s intent (from something written as a novel to something written for film) is linked to a reduced author function. In Foucault’s model, Ollier is stating that *Marienbad* allows Robbe-Grillet a form of ownership, but does not allow him to act as an author. Outside of *Marienbad* and his other film work, Robbe-Grillet was undoubtedly an author, a literary “star” who rejected many of the boundaries that defined traditional literature. However, when he transgressed the boundaries between mediums, writing *Marienbad*...
for film rather than writing for literature, his role as Marienbad’s author was transferred to Alain Resnais.

Many French critics of the early 1960s agreed with Ollier’s assertion, and typically privileged Alain Resnais while downplaying Robbe-Grillet. Foundational essays on Marienbad, such as Jacques Brunis’ 1962 “Every Year at Marienbad” and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith’s psychoanalytic response in the New Left Review (1962) used Resnais’ film as the sole source of their investigations, following the logic that the Robbe-Grillet’s novel was essentially a blueprint for Resnais’ fully formed art object. In another example, Normand Holland in his 1962 “Film, Metafilm, and Un-film” makes the bold statement that “Marienbad is pure; it could not be anything other than a film, not even a New Novel in the style of The Voyeur” (412).

Contemporary criticism has frequently shown the same preference. In the book Understanding Alain Robbe-Grillet (2000), Roch Charles Smith notes that he was “fascinated, almost hypnotized” by seeing Last Year at Marienbad. However, when choosing works to discuss in his comprehensive review of Robbe-Grillet, Smith states the ciné romans “derive their significance from their connections with the actual films and so are left undiscussed” (2). In another 2000 release, the British Film Institute’s (BFI) companion to Marienbad, Jean Louis Leutrat acknowledges the importance of Robbe-Grillet’s contribution to the work, but dismisses his role in the final product, stating, “The strength of Marienbad lies in its having been imagined by Resnais” (27).

Therefore, using Robbe-Grillet as an example, writing for cinema reveals a limit in textual production, a space that swallows the author and the “literariness” of the
work. It is relegated to a permanent supplemental status that not even established literary figures could escape. As Nathaniel Kohn notes in his 1999 article “Disappearing Authors,” writing for cinema is a practice where “individual authorship is neither privileged nor valued” (443) since the final result is the product of so many contributors. Furthermore, the works themselves are prone to disappear after the film is produced, again the result of an emphasis on the filmic product. Jacqueline Viswanathan asks in her article “Ciné-romans: Le Livre du Film”:

What happens to the scenario after the film is made? Almost always, it disappears, buried in the studio warehouses. Sometimes, it is preserved in collections of movie houses or private individuals. It seems designed for a restricted group of readers for whom it is the diagram of a film to come. (13)

Therefore, writing for film entails a kind of double disappearance; not only does the author sink into the list of contributors, but the work itself is typically treated only as scaffolding for the filmic product. Once the film is completed, the scaffolding is no longer valuable.

Perhaps Robbe-Grillet’s choice to write for the screen was a way of experimenting with this sort of disappearance, negating the author in the same way that

58 A good American counterpart is William Faulkner, who wrote or co-wrote several screenplays for Howard Hawks, including noir classics such as To Have and Have Not (1944) and The Big Sleep (1946). Despite the extraordinary longevity of these films, Faulkner’s fame rests on his novels.

59 Translation mine. The original is as follows: “Qu’advient-il du scénario après le tournage du film? Presque toujours, il disparaît, enterré dans les archives des maisons de production. Par chance, il est parfois conservé dans des collections de cinémathèques ou de particuliers. Sa fonction le destine en effet à un groupe restreint de lecteurs pour qui il est l’épurer un film à venir.”
he had negated other crucial elements of the novel in his *nouveaux romans*. Perhaps he even predicted the “death of the author” that Roland Barthes would popularize five years after *Marienbad* was released. However, most of the evidence points toward a contrary explanation. Robbe-Grillet was interested in experimenting with various forms, including cinema, but he anticipates the manner in which writing for cinema ultimately destroys the status of the author. Yet, the formal experiments that characterize Robbe-Grillet’s *Last Year at Marienbad* all function as a means of retaining literary and individual authorship in a form that is characterized by its rejection of these functions.

In the following section, I’ll explain how the novel’s framing, form, and emphasis on authorial control all work toward reaffirming the author and his literary product despite the cultural and critical inclination to treat the text as subordinate to the film.

**Recovering the Author in the Ciné-Roman**

*Last Year at Marienbad* has inspired multiple critical treatments in English and French, but almost all of them are devoted to the film. However, there are scattered treatments of Robbe-Grillet’s text as a literary object, including the 1964 article “Alain Robbe-Grillet and the ‘Cinematographic Style’” by Jean V. Alter. In this piece, Alter rejects the traditional emphasis on the filmic status of *Marienbad* and states,

> It was unquestionably Robbe-Grillet the writer who has created *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*. In his first hybrid composition, the element “novel” seems still to prevail over the cinematic character, and at least suffices to grant to the combination the autonomy of an independent work. (363-4)
The use of the term "novel" in this quote refers to the manner in which Robbe-Grillet's *Marienbad* was originally published with the subtitle *ciné-roman* or film novel. Although the decision to label the work a "film-novel" seems somewhat insignificant, it is the first of many steps that Robbe-Grillet takes to reaffirm his status as an author. Typically, works written in France with the sole intent of outlining a film are given the label "scenarios" (screenplays), and although they were much less regimented than their American counterparts, they played the same basic role: provide a dialogue for the characters and a loose outline for the film, which could be changed by the director. By changing the name of his textual product, Robbe-Grillet changes the frame of the work as well. He may have combined the two media into a mutually informing term, but the word "novel" is still present, and it reinforces the idea that the text is the product of a novelist.

The term *ciné-roman* has a kind of pliancy in French culture; it is used in multiple related but ultimately discrete ways. Historically, the term came into being in France in the 1920s and 1930s as a way of designating a screenplay with illustrations. These early publications were cheaply produced, quickly distributed, and had a low literary status, like the pulp fiction that became popular in early twentieth century America (Baetens). Therefore, when the Left Bank artists began to include the term in their work, it was a way of refashioning a popular form into a literary object. It also had few clearly

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60 I was fortunate enough to have a small email correspondence with Jan Baetens, the only author so far to write extensively about novelization. In our discussion of the *ciné-roman*, Baetens notes that "the traditional form of *ciné-roman* is the typical 96 pages, illustrated novelization, printed on bad paper, published by 'popular' publishing companies of the 20s and the 30s; it had a very low status, and was really the pulp fiction of the day."
established boundaries, which allowed for a considerable amount of experimentation. When Chris Marker released his film *La Jetée* in 1962, he subtitled it a *photo-roman* (a photo-novel). It was an appropriate label because it consists almost entirely of still photographs. In 1966, he followed up the film with a book version, a collection of the photographs and the subtitles that was subtitled a *ciné-roman*. Marker’s *ciné-roman* has little in common with the *ciné-romans* of early twentieth century France, nor does it resemble the *ciné-romans* of Robbe-Grillet. In fact, the term seems to be applied at the will of the critic or the author so long as the work has text and images from a film.61 It is instructive to note that Marguerite Duras is frequently cited as an important figure in the creation of the *ciné-roman* with her 1961 *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and 1975 *Nathalie Granger*. However, when Grove Press released *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, they subtitled it “a screenplay.”

Robbe-Grillet offers no explanation of the *ciné-roman* in his introduction to *Marienbad*, but in the introduction to his next work, *L’immortelle*, he states that the *ciné-roman*

   can be regarded as an exact description of the film, a detailed analysis of an audio-visual whole that is too complex and too rapid to be studied very easily during actual projection. But the cine-novel can also be read, by someone who has not seen the film, in the same way as a musical score (5-6).

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61 Baetens notes that the term *ciné-roman* is “deeply polysemic, it refers to many different types of writing and published movie adaptations.” He also states that Robbe-Grillet’s *ciné-roman* is “certainly not the canonical version” (Correspondence February 13, 2007).
There are two important points raised in this short description. First, the ciné-roman permits the reader to study the film academically, a way to pause it and examine its intricacies in a pre-DVD era. It was an idea that coincided with several concurrent movements in France in the 1950s and early 1960s: an intense interest in film and film study (cinephilia), the development of film departments in universities, and the development of the Cinémathèque Française, France’s first large-scale film archive.\textsuperscript{62} Increased interest in published screenplays coincided with an overarching interest in preserving France’s cinematic products.

The second point Robbe-Grillet makes in his definition is seemingly antithetical to the argument presented in this section. If the ciné-roman is like a musical score, Robbe-Grillet is establishing a subordinate role for the text; it goes alongside the film but it does not replace it. Of course, without the score there could be no music, but Robbe-Grillet is speaking here specifically towards reception, suggesting that someone could easily appreciate the music without reading the score and therefore implying that someone could appreciate the film without reading the script. He supports this idea with the first lines of the introduction: “This book makes no claim to be a self-contained work. The work is the film, as seen and heard in a cinema” (5). However, \textit{L’immortelle} was created under a different set of circumstances than \textit{Marienbad}. First of all, Robbe-Grillet wrote \textit{L’immortelle} with the intent of directing it. It was not a collaborative effort between an

\textsuperscript{62} For more on the Cinémathèque, see the documentary \textit{Henri Langlois: The Phantom of the Cinémathèque} (2005) Dir: Jacques Richard.
established author and an established director as Marienbad was. Since L’immortelle was Robbe-Grillet’s directorial debut, he had a vested interest in promoting the film over the novel. Therefore, stating that “the work is the film” does not necessarily characterize all instances of the ciné-roman.

Robbe-Grillet’s tone toward his ciné-roman and the film is notably different in his introduction to Marienbad. He is careful to note that Marienbad’s text is published exactly how it was written. No changes were made to the script to accommodate for changes made by Resnais, a choice that he justifies by stating, “The text is published under my signature alone” (15). He also explains that he had simply handed the text to Resnais to make the film while he left the country to make L’immortelle, reaffirming his lack of involvement with film shooting. By publishing the text in its original form, the text draws attention not only to Robbe-Grillet’s strong control over the shape of the film but also discrepancies that occur when Resnais finds a way around Robbe-Grillet’s explicit instructions. Robbe-Grillet is careful to note at the end of his introduction that he doesn’t wish to “dissociate [himself] from Alain Resnais’ mediations” (15). However, the use of “novel” in the title, Marienbad’s status as a published “original,” and Robbe-Grillet’s foregrounded control over the work suggest that while Robbe-Grillet may not have wanted to “dissociate” himself from the film, he did take several measures that reinforce his author status and permit his text to be treated with a some degree of self-sufficiency.
Writing the Camera

Once Robbe-Grillet’s Marienbad is wrested from its reliance on Resnais’ film, it can be evaluated as a text. However, it is a particularly difficult text to characterize; it is too literary to be easily labeled a screenplay or novelization, too reliant on the cinematic apparatus to be a traditional novel or a nouveau roman. For those who do attempt to place it within a genre, it is most commonly associated with a screenplay. However, a quick glance through its pages shows that it has obvious formal differences: Whereas screenplays are typically sparse and dialogue intensive, with only fragmented descriptions of setting, time, and (at times) camera angles, Marienbad describes each scene, each sound, and each camera position, taking the work out of the director’s hands, in as much as this is possible. Whereas screenplays are dialogue intensive, Marienbad is description intensive. A side-by-side comparison of Hiroshima Mon Amour (subtitled a “screenplay”) and Marienbad shows this distinction quite clearly:
On the left, Hiroshima Mon Amour demonstrates a more traditionally conceived screenplay; it is almost all dialogue, although a few directions are dotted here and there.

On the right, Marienbad displays an entire page of description with only one line of dialogue. The description of the scene is alternately literary ("talking in a polite, faintly ironic voice that can still pass for that of someone eager to do a favor") and technical ("a reverse angle showing X exactly from behind and A half-turning"). The screenplay (as exemplified by Hiroshima) has a decidedly more meek appearance, it is minimal and sparse, with nothing that even resembles a complete paragraph. In so doing, the screenplay highlights its pliability, its desire and willingness to be shaped by someone.
other than the author. Marienbad is decidedly more fierce and therein calls for a
different response; its detailed descriptions suggest that very little has not been
preplanned by the author. By the sheer bulk of its text, Marienbad establishes a
novelistic authority and in so doing rejects the screenplay's malleability; it "looks" more
like a novel, and so altering it becomes a challenge to the author's control.

However, despite Marienbad's visual distinctions from the screenplay, it has
several elements that make it difficult to characterize it as a novel, at least as the novel is
traditionally conceived. The most obvious difference is its reliance on images, a point
that will be discussed later in this chapter. However, its textual component is also quite
different from the traditional novel and even Robbe-Grillet's experimental nouveaux
romans. Marienbad is not so much a story as it is the description of a film telling a story.
Technical descriptions of camera movement are as common as scene descriptions,
making it part manual, part narrative. For many authors, making technical instructions
"literary" would be an impossible task, akin to turning an instruction manual into a
novel; however, for Robbe-Grillet, this absence of emotional invocation actually suits his
distinct style of writing.

Prior to Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet established his own unique literary identity by
utilizing a style of the "surface," descriptions that utilized extreme objectivity. Bruce
Morrissette notes in "Surfaces and Structures" that

the art of Robbe-Grillet, with its objectification of mental images, its use of
psychic chronology, its development of 'objectal' sequences or series related
formally and functionally to plot and to the implicit psychology of characters, its
refusal to engage in logical discourse or analytical commentary, is as ideally suited to film as to narrative. (10)

Although there is no doubt that Morrissette is correct in aligning the “objective” eye of Robbe-Grillet and the camera-eye, the connection prior to Marienbad was a helpful but debatable comparison; Jealousy is related to cinema only because the connection is a convenient one, as “objective” style existed long before the development of cinema. However, Marienbad, with its direct connection with film and the technology of filmmaking, solidifies this connection. Robbe-Grillet is writing “cinematically” not only because his objectivity resembles the mechanical nature of the cinematic apparatus, but more importantly because he is speaking both to and of a film. One might say that Marienbad is the fulfillment of a kind of cinematic wish for Robbe-Grillet brought to fruition, but Marienbad does more than realize the aims of the nouveau roman style; it goes beyond them. Jean V. Alter notes this in “Robbe-Grillet and the Cinematographic Style,” when she states that “Marienbad as a scenario presents a stylistic character which is unprecedented in Robbe-Grillet’s novels” (364). His characteristic extreme attention to surfaces mixes with the technical requirements of cinema and the result is a work that is not just another nouveau roman, but instead a hybrid form, one that imposes the literary aesthetics of the nouveau roman on the traditionally “nonliterary” screenplay.

Textually, the primary difference between Marienbad and Robbe-Grillet’s previous novel is the manner in which the text accommodates the camera. Although both Marienbad and the nouveaux romans focus on surfaces, the direct presentation of what is seen in Marienbad is frequently replaced by a description of what the camera
sees. In both forms, this is slightly unsettling. In *Jealousy* that narration suggests a first-person perspective (that of a jealous husband), but the word “I” is never used. Instead, phrasing like “the eye” is substituted: “once the eye is accustomed to the darkness, a paler form can be seen outlined against the wall of the house: Franck’s white shirt. His forearms are lying on the elbow rests. The upper part of his body is leaning back in the chair” (48-49). Using “the eye” as the subject that sees rather than “I” suggests a kind of mechanical intervention (like a camera-eye) but ultimately, it reflects a cold and unmotivated human being acting as narrator, and not a machine. In *Marienbad*, the human is removed and replaced with a story-capturing technology; “the eye” is placed with “the camera.” The style is similar: cold, detached, and unmotivated, but now the camera’s presence is emphasized: “M takes several steps towards them, that is, towards the camera, but stops at a certain distance, still watches them, seems to change his mind before walking off to one side. M has disappeared, but the angle of the shot remains the same” (108). Both the quote from *Jealousy* and the one from *Marienbad* adhere to Robbe-Grillet’s extreme attention to surfaces, but the inclusion of the camera in the second example calls attention to an “other,” a mechanical presence that is paradoxically both part of story world and the object that is recording it.

By including such detailed descriptions of camera movement and position, the text problematizes the means by which readers are permitted to enter the story. Some critics claim that reading screenplays allows the act of reading to transform into a pseudo-viewing situation, as if the pages were a screen where the story was being played out. Miguel Mota notes that “the screenplay, in its very form, positions the
reader figuratively behind the camera, situating us as simultaneously reading and viewing subjects” (217-18). There are moments when the process Mota describes seems to occur in Marienbad, when the text encourages a kind of “looking through” rather than a “looking at.” But the constant use of technical instructions frequently stunts the text’s immersive qualities. For example, in one scene, X approaches A and states that the first time they saw each other was in Fredricksbad. It is a fairly emotional scene; A is either confused or purposefully deceitful, but the suggestion of their prior meeting triggers a small but noticeable alteration in A’s facial expression. Instead of describing these psychological occurrences, the text “shows” the story through the camera-as-character:

A remains motionless, showing her full face, as the camera moves towards her, very slowly and steadily. A’s features, which had expressed a certain tension at the sound of a distant pistol shot, have afterwards (immediately, gradually) become perfectly calm again. The camera movement ends with a close-up of her face, which is quite smooth (it seems merely beautiful, absent, “varnished”). This stationary image continues for a certain time while X’s voice, off-screen, continues describing the garden and A’s pose against the balustrade. Then A’s face moves slightly, her head bows a little and a smile appears on her mouth and in her eyes. (51)

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(See Mota, Miguel. “Derek Jarman’s Caravaggio: The Screenplay as Book.” Criticism 47.2 (2006): 215-31. Mota is discussing a modern published screenplay that has many similar features to Robbe-Grillet’s ciné-romans.)
The long, flowing narrative invites a kind of immersion; her “merely beautiful, absent, varnished” face is inviting precisely because it offers no hint of the “truth” that rests behind her denial of knowing X. However, the presence of the camera is somewhat jarring; it seems disturbingly intrusive in this intimate moment. It approaches her “very slowly and steadily” like a motivated man, but unlike the typical point-of-view shot used in movies, there is no way for the reader to suture himself into that view; the text uses the word “camera” so often that it is impossible to forget or even look through, only looked at. The camera is there, acting almost like a character in the scene, but never disappearing into the scene.

This puts the reader in a space with two seemingly incompatible viewing possibilities: at one end, the reader is acutely aware of the camera, and is therefore pushed out a narrative level back from the level of the diegesis. The constant explication of technical requirements transforms other scenes into a “how-to” manual at points:

X and A are seen full face in the foreground, and M farther back, also facing the camera. On the image, M should be distinctly closer to A than to X (it is a question of apparent distance, on the screen). But the shot is not stationary: it oscillates, from the moment it appears. (138)

The reader is no more immersed in this description than she would be in a set of instructions. In this fashion, *Marienbad* contradicts Mota’s claim that screenplays “position the reader figuratively behind the camera” and instead suggest that the reader is positioned figuratively behind the film set, watching the entire production as it is made.
On the other hand, as this scene shows, the camera is often portrayed as a part of the diegesis, a pseudo-character that is active in the scene it is recording. The characters don’t react to the camera (they don’t move out of its way), but there is a great deal of attention given to its apparent autonomous nature, its sense of intent, and its human-like manner of stumbling upon some characters and sneaking up on others. In the aforementioned scene, the camera slinks up to A while she “remains motionless,” capturing what appears to be subtle changes, small private movements that are hidden in public life. A turns from a “certain tension” to “perfect calm” and then to a “smile.” There is a sense created by the slowly approaching camera that the viewer has caught A unaware, that we are seeing her unguarded emotions — a pre-ego moment of inner-honesty — a sense that is heightened by the descriptions of her face as “smooth” and “absent.” Interestingly, the camera’s presence enables an increased sense of humanity that wasn’t visible in earlier Robbe-Grillet works: no characters in Jealousy or Into the Labyrinth were ever described as “absent, varnished”; they were simply there, as if they were part of the landscape. A is freed from this fierce objectivity, portrayed as one human might describe another, an act that is paradoxically enabled by the presence of the mechanical inside the world of the living.

In this fashion, the camera is depicted as more alive than many of the work’s characters; it flows freely (seemingly aimlessly) in diegetic space while the characters are frequently depicted as being trapped. In the aforementioned scene, the camera approaches while “A remains motionless,” as if she requires camera presence in order to
come alive. In another example, as the reader is learning about the strange house and the people who inhabit it, the text states,

Finally a dark salon is seen, really dark this time, where a light (vague at first, but gradually becoming distinct as the camera draws closer) is emanating [...] The faces are seen in profile or in three-quarters from behind, lit from the front by the light coming from the stage. All the bodies are quite motionless, the faces set, the eyes fixed. (22)

When the camera finds the people, they are inanimate, their "faces set" and "eyes fixed.” It is only when the camera chooses a focal point that the characters begin to move.

Again, the camera is surveying and seeing, and the characters are discovered as still as statues, found dead and brought to life by the mechanical presence. Performatively, this “empowerment” of the camera in Marienbad enacts one of the fundamental distinctions between the Left Bank artists and the new wave filmmakers. Consider the scene in Godard’s 1960 film Breathless where Michele and Patricia are lying in a hotel room talking. They talk, casually, for over 20 minutes about nothing in particular despite the fact that the police are currently hunting Michele for murder. The camera appears to be invisible and unmotivated, capturing them in a talk that does little to further the film’s plot. This kind of camera work and dialogue is characteristic of the new wave’s emphasis on capturing reality with the long take, letting the camera roll and life unfold before it.

64 Jean Louis Leutrat argues that this creates a sense of purgatory or hell, where the camera is free to roam, but the characters are stationary, emotionless, and “doubtless long since dead” (29).
The Left Bank artists, as exemplified by Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais, were much more invested in revealing the way that reality can be constructed, represented, and manipulated in its filmic representation. The ultimate goal of this effort was to construct an image of a deeper reality that bypasses the outer world and offers a window to the inner self. The result is that the camera reveals more than any human narrator had in Robbe-Grillet's earlier fiction. In the introduction to Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet states,

The story told will seem the most realistic, the truest, the one that best corresponds to his daily and emotional life, as soon as he agrees to abandon ready-made ideas, psychological analysis, more or less clumsy systems of interpretation which machine-made fiction or films grind out for him ad nauseam (14).

The irony of his statement is that the "machine" he criticizes in this statement is the same machine that posits the most humanity, if not all life in Marienbad. The representation of the camera in Marienbad doesn't capture reality so much as it enables and allows it, a logic that suggests that when the camera is gone, so are the characters.65

However, the ciné-roman remains. Robbe-Grillet has taken the primary tool of the cinema, the camera, and aestheticized it, made it literary. Marienbad transforms the screenplay from a work where the camera is an unspoken but assumed presence into a

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65 Robbe-Grillet states in his treatment of Marienbad in For a New Novel that "This man, this woman, begin existing only when they appear on screen the first time; before that they are nothing; and, once the projection is over, they are again nothing. Their existence lasts only as long as the film lasts. There can be no reality outside the images we see, the words we hear" (152).
work where the camera acts within the text as both a character and a means of giving characters life. In so doing, Marienbad can be seen as not only a hybrid work but also a hybrid story-world where technology and humanity are seamlessly integrated, a place where the only means of becoming animated is through mechanical intervention. Most importantly, the text and only the text produces this effect; in the film, the viewer is always seeing through the camera, while in the text, the reader is seeing through it and looking at it.

The Literary Soundtrack

In addition to Marienbad's representation of the camera, there are other stylistic choices that contribute to its unique status as a literary object as well, many of which involve the work's effort to translate a cinematic experience into language. As Chapter Two argues, cinema certainly influenced the aesthetic choices of novelists in the twentieth century, but Marienbad is one of the earliest attempts to fully represent filmic narrative conventions in a literary form, and this effort becomes its primary aesthetic. The film Last Year at Marienbad is about M, A, and X, their relationships, and the significance those relationships suggest. The book Last Year at Marienbad, with its mix of flowing text and abrupt technical descriptions, is about the act of representing this film inside a literary work.

Typically, literary approximations of cinematic immediacy and cinematic space are the most common ways of connoting a cinematic experience inside a novel. However, the visual component of the cinematic experience is only one track of a multi-
tracked medium. The soundtrack, an element that is equally important to the cinematic effect, has been a part of cinema since the beginning of narrative films, but it is by nature self-effacing. Like the screenplay, the soundtrack is also typically viewed as a filmic supplement, a work that derives its art status from the film that contains it. However, as Mark Russell notes in the book Film Music: A Neglected Art, “Music has a way of bypassing the human’s normal, rational defense mechanisms. When used properly, music can help to build the drama in a scene to a far greater degree of intensity than any of the other cinematic arts” (222). However, if the cinematic image is elusive to the novelist, then film music is doubly elusive; it is typically behind the scenes, a background that slips in and out of conscious perception and typically acts to enhance the cinematic image rather than calling attention to itself.

Many of Robbe-Grillet’s visual descriptions are accompanied by a description of music, sound, or notable silence. In an article entitled “Facing the Music in Scripts,” Douglas W. Gallez notes that

screenplays are also revelations of the sensitivity of writers to musical values. Some writers are indeed musically aware and specify their intentions; others leave such details to their collaborators in production. Robbe-Grillet is particularly clear about his wishes for music, for example. He conceives not only the kind of music for Marienbad — traditionally romantic, and fragmentary serial music — but also its level of intensity and the way it enters and leaves the sound complex. (59)
The use of sound has several important effects. First, since it separates *Marienbad* from traditional screenplays that treat music as something outside of the screenplay's reach, it is yet another way that Robbe-Grillet reaffirms his work's unique identity. Second, it establishes an "original" intention, transforming the music that eventually appears in the film into the realization of Robbe-Grillet's vision, not the product of another creator. Furthermore, by representing cinema's audio elements alongside its visual elements, *Marienbad* approaches the elusive cinematic experience to a much higher degree; it becomes a multi-dimensional representation of the filmic universe rather than a flat description of what is on the screen. Whereas literary treatments of cinema often want to make the reader see, *Marienbad* asks the reader to see and hear. Finally, sound in *Marienbad" defamiliarizes" the film screenplay, making it radical by calling attention to what is typically left unsaid. It is an act not unlike the manner in which avant-garde films often use discordant music or sounds to call attention to the typically hidden presence of sound in film, bringing the background to the foreground, making the familiar film form strange again.66

Robbe-Grillet begins *Marienbad* by providing a detailed description of the music that accompanies the credits:

Opening with a romantic, passionate, violent burst of music, the kind used at the end of films with powerfully emotional climaxes (a large orchestra of strings, woodwinds, brasses, etc.), the credits are initially of a classical type: the names in

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66 For example, in Godard's 1966 *Weekend*, the music often grows so loud that it covers the character's dialogue. It also has anticipation building crescendos when no corresponding dramatic event is present.
fairly simple letters, black against a grey background, or white against a grey background; the names or groups of names are framed with simple lines. These frames follow each other at a normal, even rather slow, rhythm. (17)

It is not surprising that Robbe-Grillet begins his literary narrative before the film narrative itself begins. By describing the opening credits, the text territorializes even the cinematic paratext, highlighting the idea that the film, from the instant it begins, is subject to the text’s control, down to the color of the words and the background used to credit the cast and crew.

More importantly, the opening text describes multiple facets of the opening music. It depicts the tone ("romantic, passionate, violent"), the reception (a "burst"), the means of production ("a large orchestra"), and the referential nature ("the kind used at the end of films"). As with the other forms of description Robbe-Grillet uses, a level of authority is established by the mere act of describing what is typically left to others to decide. However, there is a stylistic choice made by using this particular kind of music that also helps to maintain textual authority. The music that Robbe-Grillet describes ("the kind used at the end of films") wrests the music from the temporal progression of the film itself; the film starts with a visual that is typical of a beginning (credits) and music that is typical of an ending. In fact, not only is it "ending" music, it is music that

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67 The parenthetical note, "a large orchestra of strings, woodwinds, brasses, etc.," is another example of a stylistic choice that characterizes Marzenbad: the suggestion or clarification that does not describe the film directly, but instead acts as a kind of aside, an explanation whispered in Resnais’ ear, separated from the instructions by parenthesis. See the section in this chapter entitled “The Novel Writes Back” for a more detailed examination of this author-director communication inside the text.
occurs during a “powerfully emotional climax,” highlighting the fact that it is disconnected from the beginning, eerily out of place. Thematically, it quickly establishes that something is strange about the world Marienbad depicts, that it doesn’t adhere to common conceptions of reality. It also helps to enhance the idea that Marienbad is an endless cycle, a set of characters and events that exist only within the course of the narrative, who are reborn each time the narrative begins. Hence, the beginning is also the ending.

The use of sound and the disconnect between sound and the image functions as a literary stylization as well. Musical scores are commonly accepted as part of the cinematic universe; they don’t detract from even extremely “realistic” feature films and, in fact, the absence of a musical score would most likely be somewhat unsettling to a viewer. However, the musical soundtrack is not typically part of the novelistic universe. Robbe-Grillet’s Jealousy and Into the Labyrinth have diegetic sound (“the sound of a glass being put down on the little table can be heard” (Jealousy 44), but that sound is typically linked with a visual referent — the glass hits the table and a sound is made. Marienbad is replete with descriptions of non-diegetic sounds that are playing as the actions take place. At times these sounds are musical; at other times it is a description of an off-screen narrator. Such sourceless sounds would be out of place even in the experimental nouveau roman. They would rupture the novel’s ontological boundaries. However, they are common in the cinematic universe and for this reason, writing for film allows Robbe-Grillet to accomplish something that was not possible in his
traditional novels, the literary appropriation of cinema’s sound conventions, a “literary soundtrack,” music that accompanies the narrative but is not a part of the story-world.

In many ways, music exists in the story-world in Marienbad just as the camera does, an outer presence that is personified, transformed into an invisible character with an independent will. However, whereas the camera acts as a unifying element in the story, weaving through it, tying its disparate sections together, sound acts to defamiliarize, to enhance the work’s essential randomness, its underlying cacophony. Music is first described as “romantic, passionate, violent” (17), but as the story progresses “the music returns, imperceptibly; it is no longer the romantic strain of the beginning; it consists, on the contrary, of scattered notes or a brief series of notes; it is uncertain, broken up, and somehow anxious” (32). The independent nature of the music is established by the fact that the emotions it projects, “romantic, passionate, violent,” don’t harmonize with the actions or emotions of the characters. The “violent” music is being played over the slow progression of the opening credits, and then again later “the music becomes more violent” (118), while the shot shifts from a still shot of a statue to a shot of people playing cards. Music is the schizophrenic wandering the chateau; it fades in and out at will, and it is personified at various points as “insistent” (33), “irritating” (129), and “pompous [...] at the same time passionate” (78).

The result of its frequent depiction and rich characterization is the sense of music existing in the text, but not in harmony with it. Whereas the soundtrack in mainstream cinema tends to accompany the images, Robbe-Grillet’s depiction of music and sound is typically rooted in separating the image from the sound. As Jean Alter notes,
“Marienbad splits this unity into two diverging planes, a visual plane and a sound plane, which may coincide but often do not” (364). Examples of Alter’s diverging planes are frequent throughout the text. Human voices are often depicted as indiscernible: “snatches of phrases are heard, their sources unrevealed” (32), and music is always cacophonous. When describing a garden scene, the text states, “During these stationary shots music is heard, muted at first, then more clearly, consisting of discontinuous notes (piano, percussion, or classical instruments), with many gaps, silences of varying length (as in certain serial compositions)” (45). Later in the work, as the characters pass an orchestra: “The Orchestra begins to play. The piece it is playing has already served as an accompaniment for certain scenes of the film since the beginning: serial music consisting of notes separated by silences, an apparent discontinuity of notes and unrelated chords” (96). The term “discontinuity” is present in both quotes, and it foregrounds the effect that the descriptions have; the story is unified as a novel and as a film, but in the narrative levels below those boundaries, the chain of cause and effect has been broken. Characters repeat the same scenes, say the same lines, slide into photographic memories and then slide out of them, all without any organizing structure other than the boundaries of the film within the novel. The music, as a constant reminder of randomness and discontinuity, serves as a modernized version of the Greek chorus,

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68 Robbe-Grillet suggests throughout the work that he’d like to make the sound even more complex, but he’s not sure if it could be accomplished. At one point, he breaks his authoritative mode and states, “Something is gradually happening on the soundtrack which makes it strange, then obviously distorted, and then the words become hard to follow. (Could this be two identical sound tracks run off at gradually differing speeds? Or else two sound tracks starting at different speeds, one of which being at first very faint, and only gradually disturbing the principle track?)” (68).
retelling in a universal language what the characters themselves cannot understand about their circumstances.

By using sound in this manner, Robbe-Grillet does what both the film screenplay and the novel typically do not: a literary representation of a second track that is linked to but not present in the story’s universe. Not only does this add another representative layer in the story, making Marienbad even more narratologically dense, it also enhances the play of discordant elements in the work, paradoxically harmonizing with the plot’s collection of incompatible but co-existing narratives and further destabilizing the loose unity offered by the camera.

**The Robbe-Grillet – Resnais Correspondence**

By looking at the literary adaptations of the camera and the soundtrack, I’ve argued that Marienbad often seems to pierce the filmic universe, offering a privileged view that is unlike the traditional screenplay or novel. Interestingly, one of the unexpected views the work gives is a look at the author himself, because at many points in the novel, there is a voice (presumably Robbe-Grillet) that speaks directly to the filmmaker, giving him choices, offering suggestions, using phrasing that suggests a common and deep understanding of the story. Perceived in this way, Robbe-Grillet’s Marienbad could be read as a long conversation between Robbe-Grillet and Resnais. Of course, Resnais cannot answer directly in the course of the text, but his film always offers a direct response.
For the most part, it is more of a set of instructions than a conversation. Robbe-Grillet says to film the scene in a particular way and offers no alternatives. However, there are small gaps in Robbe-Grillet's imperative voice that offer a privileged view of the collaborative process; Robbe-Grillet gives up the authorial control he works so hard to establish. In these instances, Robbe-Grillet is purposefully vague, offering suggestions and possibilities, but ultimately relinquishing control to Resnais. Again, since my focus is on the text itself, I'm not terribly interested in the difference between the book and the movie. What is pertinent is the fact that part of the stylistic distinction between *Marienbad*, screenplays, and Robbe-Grillet's own *nouveau roman* is the frequent interruptions of hesitance and uncertainty in the author's direction.

Whereas the general tone of the work is dominated by fragmented orders more typical of a screenplay — "Abrupt change of shot" (138), "Transition dissolve" (140), and "Sudden change of shot" (146) — there are a number of times when the author merely suggests, using terms such as "perhaps," "might," and "generally." For example, A is described as "staring at her hand, perhaps, half-extended in front of her in a gesture which might produce for an instance that of a statue seen in the park (and her housecoat, too, might suggest such a thing)" (134). Other examples are replete throughout the text: "A brief shot may be woven into this sequence" (44), "the lighting has probably brightened" (113), and "the camera gradually moves back and if possible, higher [emphasis mine]" (128).

The very controlling work sometimes throws its hands into the air and becomes timid, at times asking questions, at other times even asking for help. For example, in the
following scene, Robbe-Grillet seems unsure about this idea and proposes that Resnais may have “other ideas”:

A must always look vague, even turning away from the group where she appears, staring elsewhere, smiling absently sometimes, but always beautiful, graceful. When A is in the image the shot lasts a trifle longer. [...] Unless the director has other ideas for enlivening this rather somber sequence, it might be embellished (made both less tiresome and more endurable) by a violent noise at each change of shot: the detonation of the pistol accompanied by the sound of the bullet’s percussion against the iron sheet. (70)

Here, the text points to its own perceived problem: it is “somber,” and requires some sort of supplementation in order to make it “less tiresome and more endurable.” The generalship that had previously dominated the text transforms into a kind of humility; he is admitting a certain flaw (it is “tiresome”) and saying that it “might” be fixed in a certain way. Resnais, who now has a loophole in the agreement that bound him to Robbe-Grillet’s every word, provides a filmic response by deleting the scene that Robbe-Grillet suggests and significantly altering the one that follows.

Typically, a screenplay is written by an author and purchased by a production company, who then assigns a director. This process of production means that there is financial motivation for writing a screenplay in a manner that is distinctly impersonal, thus appealing to the widest possible audience. *Marienbad* separates itself from this tradition in that it was, from the beginning, envisioned as the product of two artists who knew one another, allowing the typically impersonal text of the screenplay to be
replaced by a more intimate language. In the scene transcribed above, the text states that A should always look "vague" and that the shot should last "a trifle longer" when she is visible. These stylistic choices suggest a communication of "sense," a shared concept between Robbe-Grillet and Resnais concerning the nature of the overall work, and they are present throughout: an orchestra is described as "pompous and a little formal, and at the same time passionate, although slow" (78), and a waltz "like faraway music in a garden suddenly growing louder with a gust of wind" (85). These kinds of descriptions call upon subtle distinctions (what does music sound like in a gust of wind?) and are therefore open to a high degree of interpretation, but they are used confidently and without clarification. In his introduction to Marienbad, Robbe-Grillet notes that "we [he and Resnais] agreed about everything" [author's italics] (9), and "Resnais understood perfectly what I wanted to do" (9). Both of these statements suggest that the two artists shared an internal understanding, a shared vision that would allow for terms like "trifle," and "vague" to be used confidently without additional clarification.

Nevertheless, the shared sense of what the final product would be did not always appear in the filmic product. Robbe-Grillet begins the ciné-roman with a description of "end of film" music, which Resnais effectively translates onto the screen. However, Robbe-Grillet continues by stating that the music "stops completely" (18) and shifts into the sound of the speaking voice alone. Resnais does not adhere to this indication and instead adds the sound of an organ, which serves as the background music to much of the remaining film. Leutrat notes that "It is obvious that the writer and director didn't understand the word 'music,' as used in cinema, in exactly the same way." Leutrat
quotes Robbe-Grillet as saying that "I had described music to set one's teeth on edge. Instead of this beautiful, captivating continuity, I was after a structure of absences and shocks" (25). Fortunately, this failure to agree and the way the text reveals that failure (two visions of sound taking up the same narratological space) adds a certain density to Last Year at Marienbad. Instead of revealing an interart failure, Marienbad reveals the means by which one work, unified under a single title, can encompass multiple, incompatible spaces, multiple stories with distinct trajectories. The disturbing organ music of Resnais and the "absences and shocks" of Robbe-Grillet coexist in the realm of the work as a whole, enabling what Jean Alter calls the "thickness of the novelistic universe" (364) or what I would characterize as the "thickness of Marienbad's universe."

Film Stills and the Third Author

One of the first arguments I make in this chapter is that Marienbad is different from the screenplay and the novel because on a very basic level, it simply looks different. A selected page at random will show that screenplays are not as dense as Marienbad, and novels are not as replete with technical instruction. However, the most glaring difference between the novel and literary forms has yet to be discussed: the extensive use of images from the film. The images are a critical part of what characterizes Marienbad as a ciné-roman, and like many other aspects of the book, they play a complicated role in the interpretative process. In fact, none of the critical works in this chapter even mentions the role of film images with the novel. There are good reasons for this (which I'll explain

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later), but it is still my contention that the placement of the film images inside the text enacts a dialogue between the text and the film within the space of the book itself, revealing the dynamics of convergence and separation that then add yet another layer onto this already dense work.

One work I’ve cited frequently is Jean Alter’s 1964 “Alain Robbe-Grillet and the ‘Cinematographic Style’” as it is one of the few works to treat Marienbad as a text without considering Resnais’ film. However, in Alter’s detailed analysis, no mention of the images in the book is provided. The most likely explanation is that although the images are an important part of the English and French version of Marienbad, they are an afterthought, the addition of an editor hired by the publishing company. There is no indication that Robbe-Grillet or Resnais had anything to do with their selection or their placement.

Nevertheless, they are present, and as I noted earlier, while ciné-romans vary greatly throughout history, they are joined in all cases by the co-existence of text and images from the film. In fact, both the original 1961 Éditions de Minuit version of L’Année Dernière à Marienbad and the 1962 Grove Press English translation prominently display the fact that they contain images from the film. The French version advertises 48 photos, while the English translation advertises “over 140.” However, the French version contains high-quality still photographs with captions, while the Grove Press edition has low-quality, grainy frame enlargements without captions. Apparently, American tastes preferred 140 bad photographs to 48 good ones. That said, the Grove
edition is somewhat more evocative in its placement and selection of images, so it will be used as the primary source of my observations.

Although the issues involving authorship are complicated enough with the interplay between Robbe-Grillet, Resnais, auteur theory, and author-consuming screenplay, a third contributor has to be introduced: art critic and author Robert Hughes, the photo editor selected by Grove to place images from the film into the text. On the cover page of the 1962 Grove Press edition, four names are listed: the director, the author, the translator, and Hughes, who also edited the images for Grove’s release of Hiroshima Mon Amour. Although his role doesn’t change the text, I’ll argue here that his choices dramatically alter the way the text is received.

Unlike the images in the French version of Mauvaise, the images in the Grove edition are unlabeled. This unassociated status allows the images a greater degree of mobility in the text, a freedom that Hughes utilizes frequently. Even if the reader doesn’t look at their content, it is difficult to ignore their sheer size, and in many cases the images leave little or no room for the text. (See Figure 4.)
At first, this act seems essentially harmless; Hughes isn’t changing the text itself, just the way it looks on the page. However, as pages 162-3 (Figure 4) show, the number of images on the page drastically increases the speed in which the page can be read. Page 163 reads very quickly, because there is only a small amount of text, while the prior set of pages (160-161) read more slowly because they contain only one image. Therefore, by altering the space around the text, Hughes alters the speed of the text’s reception. Since some pages have no images, some pages are all images, and no one logic seems to dictate the image placement other than a relative proximity, the reader’s pace fluctuates with the same essential randomness, mimicking the apparent randomness of the story itself.
Furthermore, the associations implied by the image placement also change the text. Again, the images themselves do not initially appear to alter the text at all; Robbe-Grillet describes a scene and a corresponding image is presented. For example, when the text introduces an ACTRESS, the image of a theatre actress is presented (24). However, in this simple act of placement, the story takes on its dual character; it becomes difficult if not impossible to read the description without acknowledging its filmic double. The ACTRESS, who may have been envisioned as anyone in the reader’s mind, is given an identity, an image, and a cinematic existence outside the space of the text. Whenever ACTRESS is written, that image will be invoked. As this happens multiple times throughout the text, the reading process itself is changed. There is no need to imagine X, M, or A — they all have clearly associated photos. There is also no need to imagine the house or the garden where the story takes place. In many cases, the image’s manner of denying the imagination reaffirms the film’s status as a final product and relegates the text to supplemental status.

However, there are several instances where the film still and the text are disconnected; their relationship of reference or proximity is dissolved and they latch on to other points of signification. The image is “cut off” so to speak, from both textual explicator and filmic context. This shift occurs when Hughes places the film still in the text in a manner that suggests a contradiction between both narratives. For example, when viewing page 97 there are three images visible: one of the garden on page 96, and the other two at the bottom of 97 (taking up two-thirds of the page). The first image on
ensemble that is as decorative, and rather unclassical. The conductor raises his baton. X turns to look at A, who is watching the orchestra. The orchestra begins to play.

The piece it is playing has already served as an accompaniment for certain scenes of the film since the beginning; serial music consisting of notes separated by silences, an apparent discontinuity of notes and unrelated chords. But at the same time the music is fastest, disturbing and for the spectator who is not interested in contemporary music it must be both irritating and somehow continually unresolved.

The orchestra ensemble matters little. It must, none the less, use only instruments of classical music, and as much as possible those of remarkable appearance: open grand piano, harp, kettledrums, contrabassoon, slide trombone, etc.

The camera moves forward, thus eliminating A and X from the field of vision. It does not remain for long on the orchestra, whose picturesque aspect it will moreover avoid; and the shot changes, on a powerful cymbal crash. The piece comes to an end on the following shot.

The garden, reproduction of the images seen during its first appearance in the film, lateral movement of the camera showing a whole series of paths, lawns, ponds, balustrades, clipped shrubbery, statues.

But the scene is no longer empty; standing here and there, motionless as statues (but straight, arms held alongside bodies, without eccentric attitudes) are people, isolated or in couples;

if possible, there is sunlight, and the shadows of these characters are clearly visible. (Otherwise, can artificial shadows be painted for them on the ground?)

The camera does not stop moving at any one character, but continues straight and steadily. At a particular moment, it reveals, almost in the foreground, X and A. They had previously been concealed by a statue: They are standing, in a vague (extremely vague) holding place. They are not close to each other. X, his hand extended toward A, is caressing her face with his fingertips, outlining her lips and cheeks. They are both serious, their heads perfectly straight, X is very calm. A slightly troubled. She murmurs:

A: Please ... let me alone.

Figure 5: Images contradicting the text and images without accompanying text.

The text above the image states that "they are not close to each other; X, his hand extended toward A, is caressing her face [emphasis mine] with his fingertips" (97). It is a small difference, but large enough for Robbe-Grillet to comment upon it in his introduction to the book. Therefore, the image suggests that the film alters the text, as
most films do when they adapt the text. However, this does not truly answer what happens in the scene. If I were to say that the image is correct, it is because I am privileging the film image as the final (and more accurate) representation of the story. However, I could just as easily come to the opposite conclusion, using the logic that the book is the original and “truer” form. Both paths are laid out before the reader, and if that reader can reject the urge to posit either the film or the text as the “original,” the scene of Robbe-Grillet and the scene of Resnais now converse with one another. Both agree that X and A were present, but Robbe-Grillet paints a careful, hesitant act of touch, whereas the image shows an aggressive and sexual encounter. Reading from top to bottom, one encounters the text first and the image second, placing the image in a kind of “revisionary” role, revealing the specific means of the director’s artistic license. However, without a caption, the surrounding text itself becomes a caption, “speaking” to the still as if it were an explanation. Furthermore, when read using the double logic of narrative that allows us to read both forward and backward, or reading the passage for the second time, the text (word + image) becomes a space of simultaneous and indeterminate events. It is not “either X was aggressive or not,” because doing so privileges one medium over the other. Instead, it is that X is both aggressive and passive, both distant and close, multiple narratives to merge into one space, a product of all three sites of meaning (the text, film, and the film still) converging and departing.

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It is possible that this is scene about which Robbe-Grillet notes (in his introduction), “Here a caress I saw as less explicit” (10).
The image at the bottom of page 97 further complicates the text/still relationship. There is no mention of musicians on this page, but the bottom image clearly depicts two men playing instruments. On the next page, 98, there is a description of a full orchestra in the garden, which suggests that Resnais replaced Robbe-Grillet's orchestra with two musicians, but by the time this is read, the musicians are no longer visible. The difference between the descriptive text and the filmic revision calls upon the same sort of duality associated with the first image on page 97, but the more complicated issue is the fact that by the time the textual signifier is visible, the image it refers to has disappeared. Page 98, which is all text, could have fit the image of the musicians, but Hughes chose to keep it on a page where it wasn't mentioned. As it exists on page 97, it is a freely floating image with no direct textual associations; the reader could remember it when she gets to 98, but it is more likely that the image will be processed as part of the other images on page 97, disassociated with its referring text and reassociated with the image of the garden, the image of X and A, and the text that describes their embrace. Or, it simply presents itself as a seemingly random element, an image that clearly belongs to the story, but is also clearly removed.

Ultimately, the frequent dissociations become a puzzle in themselves, and piecing together the text and images becomes a process not unlike the one acting out in the diegesis; the indeterminate space created by conflicts between moving image, still image, and text parallels those of X, A, and M. In the story, the primary concern is a conflict over the past: X says that he and A had met before, and that during their affair she had agreed to meet him a year later and leave with him. A, on the other hand, seems
to have no recollection of this, until X’s relentless persuasion slowly convinces her that X’s version of the past is, in fact, her own. Therefore, the conflict within the narrative is a struggle for history; if A and X met last year, why would A be so reluctant to admit it? If A and X didn’t meet last year, why is X so adamant about it, despite A’s denials? While reading the text and image (one where X and A are tentative, careful, the other where X is aggressive and A is afraid) the reader is caught, performatively, in this space of conflict. X’s reading of the text is definitive; he states that is what happened and it can be no other way. A’s reading is multiple, fluid, placing herself both within her own history and X’s history with no way of determining one from the other. In the same way, the reader of their story is torn between these two choices: a fixed path through the narrative or a winding path through a coexisting set of possibilities.

**Deleuze and Marienbad**

The complex relationship between the text, the film, and the intermediary film stills suggest that **Marienbad** could be conceived of as three related artistic objects: **Last Year at Marienbad**, the text by Robbe-Grillet, **Last Year at Marienbad**, the film by Resnais, and **Last Year at Marienbad**, the synthesis of the two, a “total work” that derives its aesthetic from the inability of any one means of representation to form a complete narrative.\(^\text{70}\) This “total work” is somewhat more elusive than the film or the

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\(^\text{70}\) “Total Work” is a phrase that Van Wert uses to describe the ciné-romans. He is borrowing it from Richard Wagner, who in his 1849 essay “Art-Work of the Future” states that the highest possible art requires a synthesis of multiple arts. Wagner calls this synthesis a “Gesamtkunstwerk.”
novel, and it is difficult to point at both forms at once and argue something informative can be derived from the way they fit together. However, this is exactly what Gilles Deleuze attempts to do in his book *Cinema II*, a work that attempts to show the way the representation of time changed in post-war cinema. In this final section, I’ll examine the way that Deleuze approaches the “total work” of *Marienbad* in order to elucidate his own vision of temporality.

Deleuze wrote two major works on the cinema: *Cinema I: The Movement Image* and *Cinema II: The Time Image*. Together, these works form an alternative taxonomy of cinematic images in the twentieth century. Rather than categorize the various elements that make up established filmic genres (Western, SciFi, etc), Deleuze attempts to isolate the characteristics of cinematic blocks of movement (cinematic shots) and classify them as a specific type of image. Before World War II, he argues that these images are predominantly involved with capturing movement (movement-images), which he then breaks into a series of subsets: the perception-image, the action-image, the affection-image, and so on. The perception image is literally an image of perception, closely related to a point-of-view shot (64). Accordingly, the affection-image is an image of affection (the close-up, the reaction shot (65)), and the action-image is an image of action (the progression of situation to action to altered situation (142)). By identifying various image types, Deleuze is able to characterize cinematic works by their reliance or avoidance of a particular image type.

There are other, less substantial image types that Deleuze develops that I do not mention here, such as the “impulse-image” and the “relation-image.” Deleuze spends the majority of his work on the three images I have defined here.
However, Deleuze notes at the end of *Cinema I* that after World War II, the action-image that had been characteristic of most mainstream cinema (especially American cinema) experienced a crisis: “The war and its consequences, the unsteadiness of the ‘American Dream’ in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities [...] and] the influence on the cinema of new modes of narrative with which literature had experimented” all led to a cinematic turn, a rejection of linear filmmaking. He continues by saying that “people continue to make SAS and ASA [action-image] films: the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of cinema no longer does” (206). In response to this crisis, Deleuze argues that cinema developed a means of moving away from the use of movement-images and replaced them with time-images, cinematic shots and scenes that allow the viewer to see an image of time itself. Thus, *Cinema II* is devoted to exploring these time-images, showing how cinema is capable of moving beyond an indirect presentation of time (time through movement) and presenting a direct image of time, typically through irrational cuts and non-linear constructions.

It is important to note that the encyclopedic *Cinema I & II* may use cinema, but they are not properly about cinema. They are philosophical treatments of movement (*Cinema I*) and time (*Cinema II*) that use cinema as examples. Therefore, Deleuze isn’t obligated to use the exemplification that is typical of literary or film studies. Deleuze’s study of *Marienbad* is somewhat more nebulous precisely because *Marienbad* (in general) is a means of elucidating his larger considerations, not his primary object of inquiry. That said, Deleuze was fascinated by *Marienbad* and cites it in his work more
frequently than any other film. He saw it as an example *par excellence* of the way that post-World War II cinema could present direct images of time. What is particularly striking about Deleuze’s treatment of *Marienbad* is that it is the only work he examines in detail where he gives equal treatment to both the filmmaker and the author; in essence, Deleuze links his conception of the time-image with the “total work” of *Marienbad*. In fact, Deleuze argues that *Marienbad* provides such an excellent example of his concept precisely because the collaborative space of the work presents his time-image in a more profound manner than films that do not rely so heavily on a literary counterpart. The “total work” is thereby linked to what Deleuze calls a “complete” time-image.

The foundation of his argument is that both co-creators present different, but equally profound, depictions of the time-image. Deleuze states that “Robbe-Grillet himself suggests that the difference between himself and Resnais must ultimately be sought at the level of time” (104). However, when the action-image broke down and disappeared (post-World War II), time as a concept had to be rebuilt or destroyed entirely. Both Resnais and Robbe-Grillet engaged in this rebuilding process, but each, he argues, did it differently. Resnais reconstructs time by creating an “architecture of time” (104) with “sheets of virtual past” (105). In other words, Resnais constructs a theoretical model where time in the film has a shape, where alternative (and often contradicting) histories are placed on top of one another, semi-transparent like the “sheets” of a notebook. On the other hand, Robbe-Grillet creates a “structure stripped of time” (104), a timeless space, an ahistorical zone. Both present alternative ways of perceiving time.
(which is typically considered a linear progression), and the interweaving of the two
creates an exponentially stronger time-image. Spencer Shaw summarizes Deleuze’s
argument by stating that

Deleuze needs the friction resulting from Resnais’ film contribution and Robbe-
Grillet’s literary foundation to bring out the essence of these time-images in
*Marienbad*. For Deleuze the difference between Robbe-Grillet’s literary input
and Resnais’ imagery lies not primarily over indiscernibility and the way the
imaginary and real confound each other, but rather over the phenomenological
emphasis on the temporal dimension, with each expressing opposed conceptions
of time that interrelate to become the direct signs of time itself. (276)

The difficulty in justifying Deleuze’s argument and Shaw’s summation derives from the
lack of examples provided by both authors. Paraphrased, Deleuze is stating that Robbe-
Grillet, by foregrounding immediacy and simultaneity, creates a stream of always-
present moments, while Resnais, delving into the space of oneiric moving images,
creates coexisting and indeterminable “sheets of past” where characters move
seamlessly from one layer to another. However, the two are interwoven so tightly that it
is difficult to determine each artist’s unique contribution to the creation of time-images.

Deleuze answers this question by drawing parallels from the text, comparing A to
Resnais (always moving through the past) and X to Robbe-Grillet (perpetually present).
However, he fails to cite specific instances from the text that support his theory. Without
a textual/filmic example, it is an argument that swerves dangerously to one of
intentionality.
Rodowick attempts a functional example when he closely examines the nature of the narrative voice in the work. He states that “sound — the spoken récit — rather than action preserves a sense of apparent continuity across otherwise discontinuous images” (107). He is referring primarily to the narrator’s voice, which occurs in a manner that is at times parallel and at other times disjointed from the filmic images. For example, Marienbad begins with a rolling, repetitive voice (X’s voice, but still ghostly, removed, and disconnected), which states, “Once again — I walk on, once again down these corridors, through these halls, these galleries” (17). The voice, at once attached to X and simultaneously extradiegetic, fades in and out of the diegesis, speaking as if everything has happened before (“once again”) and will, in fact, happen again. Whereas the indeterminacy of the events (such as X and A’s embrace in the courtyard) prohibits a reader from establishing any fixed position in time (or any distinction between a recreated time or an obliterated time) the narration, despite its equally indeterminate status, is at least a constant in the work. It starts Marienbad, ends Marienbad, and flows in and out of the plot. In this manner, it speaks both to the plot and of it, always foregrounding both its “presentness” and its status as eternally returning.

Rodowick links the spoken words in the film with Robbe-Grillet’s text, because the link between the printed word and the narrator’s voice is nearly seamless. The words on the page are the words that are heard, establishing a one-to-one relationship between text and dialogue that cannot be said of the text-moving image relationship. Every word of dialogue in the ciné-roman is placed in the film, in the exact order in which it was printed. Therefore, by considering the direct relationship between the text
on the page, the dialogue, and the "forever presentness" of the narrator's voice, a link is established between the "peaks of deactualized present" and Robbe-Grillet's text. 72

These "peaks," according to Deleuze, are different than the multi-layered "sheets of past" of Resnais. These "sheets of past" are multiple and incommensurable possible durées. However, isolating this "architecture of time" and attributing it to Resnais is problematic due to the means by which Resnais and Robbe-Grillet are so closely interwoven. For example, in the scene where A looks at a photographic image that transforms into a filmic image (p. 126, see above), A is moved from one moment of time into another. At one point she is looking at an image of the past (stagnant), and at the next she is that image (moving). During both of these shots, X is describing the scene from another point in time. This narration, which is indeterminate but essentially consistent, foregrounds the image's lack of foundation. The images are freely flowing, building upon one another, contrasting one another and the narration. 73 They form "undecidable alternatives" (Rodowick 100) with no means of authentication and no means of establishing chronological order. Compare this to a work like Citizen Kane, where "a point in the present determined the launching pad for a leap to a layer of the past, [but] in the work of Resnais these centers disappear" (Rodowick 100). Therefore, whereas text (in the form of the narrator) assumes a position closer to "always present"

72 Rodowick notes that "deactualized" in this case means that "a represented event must no longer be confused with the space serving as its location nor be considered a present that passes" (100). In other words, it is a "pure" present, removed from a chronological, progressive model of time.

73 In the same scene, A is shown laughing, but X's voice says, "No, you weren't laughing" (127). Neither the narrator nor the image can be labeled "true," but the narration, through its repetitive presence, establishes a "ground" that the images do not.
in *Marienbad*, the associated images in the film form a network of incommensurable pasts. Both, according to Deleuze, are equally valid means of directly portraying time.

The problem raised by attributing features of the time-image to Robbe-Grillet and Resnais is that it divides the work as a whole. In fact, the illogical cuts and "incommensurable blocks of time" in *Marienbad* could be associated equally with Robbe-Grillet, and Resnais does play a role in the creation of the "always-present" that the film portrays. Perhaps this is why Rodowick speaks of both modes of the time-image in *Marienbad* without closely associating those modes to Resnais or Robbe-Grillet. Both are woven into the fabric of the work in a manner that can be seen and/or sensed (the forever-present of the narrative voice, the impossible times of A's memories) but neither can be ultimately attributed to one of the artists.

In the 1962 article "Every Year at *Marienbad,*" Jacques Brunis states that the work "has now produced an amount of critical literature, which, collected in volume, would easily outweigh the script and dialogue" (122). Robbe-Grillet's *ciné-roman Last Year at Marienbad*, which was released alongside the film, is typically relegated to a supplemental status and untouched critically, due to the cultural conditions that allow films to subsume their screenplays. However, the *ciné-roman Marienbad* seems to reject this relationship, not only due to its historical circumstances, but also because of the way it alters the screenplay/film relationship. Instead of offering a rough "blueprint" of the film, it offers an extraordinarily detailed narrative of the film, turning cinematic conventions such as the camera and soundtrack into literary objects. Viewed this way, the film is not an end-product, but instead a tool that Robbe-Grillet uses to give his own
work a literary status. The third-party inclusion of film stills adds yet another layer to this intermedial work, calling attention to the internal *paragone* and helping to foreground *Marienbad*'s composite status. Here, in this indeterminate space of multiple and conflicting meanings, the *ciné-roman* shows how it is defined not only by the film, but by the work that is created when the two mediums are considered together, the "total work" that is neither film nor text nor filmic product but rather a dynamic combination of these three forces acting concurrently.
CHAPTER 4

WRITING POST-CINEMA:
ESCAPING THE SCREEN IN ROBERT COOVER’S FILM FICTIONS

Although authors throughout the twentieth century have found multiple ways to use cinema as a textual device, Robert Coover may be the one author who has done so most overtly. In a 1979 interview with Larry McCaffery, Coover states,

I work with language because paper is cheaper than film stock. Also, it is easier to work with a committee of one. But storytelling doesn’t have to be done with words on a printed page, or even with spoken words: we all learned that as kids at our Saturday morning religious experience in the local ten-cent cinemas.

Probably, if I had absolute freedom to do what I want, I’d prefer film.

Both his 1987 collection of short stories, A Night at the Movies, and his 2002 novel, The Adventures of Lucky Pierre, Director’s Cut, appear to be a partial fulfillment of Coover’s wish; they speak both of and through cinema, so that wherever the plot may lead, the works are ultimately about cinema itself. In A Night at the Movies, the stories take place within various genres of film (Westerns, romances, etc.), while The Adventures of Lucky Pierre takes place in Cinecity, a world defined by cinematic conventions that owes its
existence to the fact that it is being filmed. Characters do not go to the movies in these
two works; they are made of movies.

However, Coover’s “Saturday morning religious experience” is notably lacking
from the cinematic worlds that the novels present. Unlike the novels in chapter two that
fetishized cinema, such as Roszak’s Flicker and Auster’s Book of Illusions, Coover’s
characters are either hopelessly lost in cinema or defined by their repeated and
unsuccessful attempts to escape their cinematic existence. The question this portrayal
raises is why Coover would claim, “If I had absolute freedom to do what I want, I’d
prefer film” and then represent film as an inescapable and unbearable prison. In this
chapter, I’ll trace the links in Robert Coover’s narratives to the transformations in
cinema that started with the airing of movies on television and ended with our current
post-cinematic state. First, I’ll briefly outline the cultural transformations in mainstream
cinema that led to the death of the single theatre and the birth of TV movies and
multiplexes. Then, I’ll show how Coover’s A Night at the Movies reacted to this
transition by idealizing classic cinema while simultaneously parodying our attempts to
return to it. I’ll follow this with a discussion of post-cinema, a term that denotes a return
to the instabilities of early cinema teamed with the advancement toward new visual
possibilities, and then conclude with an investigation of the manner in which The
Adventures of Lucky Pierre uses a character to embody the issues surrounding post-
cinematic viewing.
The Cinematic Diaspora

In the last chapter, I argued that Robbe-Grillet embraces the potential of high art cinema in *Last Year at Marienbad* and finds in it a means of stretching the boundaries of his own literary efforts. However, the art of cinema in the 1960s that Robbe-Grillet uses as his subject was essentially a discrete activity, relegated to small theatres and small audiences. It was an art that was walled off, not only by its essential inaccessibility to mainstream audiences, but also by the technological limitations of its medium: a dark theatre, a mechanical projector, and long reels of film. Therefore, Robbe-Grillet may have found in cinema a means of expanding the possibilities of narrative, of exploring time and space in new ways, but they ultimately were susceptible to the same limitations as the kind of cinema he took as his subject; it was locked in dark rooms and removed from the world, and so was his text.

Mainstream cinema, on the other hand, was much more pervasive in everyday life. Although it was also subject to some of the same technical limitations as those of high-art cinema, it wasn't nearly as constrained. During the same time that *Marienbad* was released (1961) in France, two major developments helped to link mainstream cinema with everyday life in American culture. The first occurred when NBC began their *Saturday Night at the Movies* series, allowing viewers to see previously run films from major Hollywood studios without leaving their homes (Butler 31). The second event occurred two years later in 1963 when the first American Multi-Cinema (AMC)
“mall multiplex” opened in Kansas City (Haines 87). Although other multiplex cinemas (buildings with multiple theatres) had been in existence prior to 1963, AMC was the first chain with ambitions of putting up multi-theatre complexes across the country in shopping centers. These two events signaled the beginning of cinema’s transformation from a single-headed creature to a two-headed one; the first channeled into every home with a television, while the other transformed the cinema into another “commodity experience” (Friedberg 115) that went along with going to the mall.

Works like Munsterberg’s The Photoplay (1916), Epstein’s “On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie,” (1924), Arnheim’s Film as Art (1932), and even André Bazin’s What Is Cinema? (1967) were all unified by one overriding theme: establishing film as art while separating it from related arts. However, these theorists have always faced the difficult task of characterizing an art that continues to morph and expand with developing technologies. Arnheim had attempted in Film as Art to argue a point that must have seemed elementary at the time: Film technologies record reality, but they are an art only insomuch as they differ from reality. He then proceeded to list the critical components of cinema that made it distinct from reality, features such as “the projection of solids upon a plane surface,” “the framing of the image,” and the “absence of inputs from the other senses.” It was not nearly as radical as the avant-garde invocations of photogénie or even the aura of Walter Benjamin, but it was, as J. Dudley Andrew notes, “a decisively brilliant approach” (The Major Film Theories 28).

This relationship between shopping and cinema is the subject of Anne Friedberg’s 1993 Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern. In this work, she compares the 19th century flâneur to the modern viewer of films in shopping malls.
These criteria worked for the classic movie theatre, but they simply weren't designed to accommodate for television's remediation of movies. The image was no longer projected, the screen size varied dramatically from viewer to viewer, and the closed theatre was replaced by a distraction-filled living room. Films that would have met Arnheim's criteria in their original presentation no longer fit any of them once television remediated them into an extended television program, and the medium specificity arguments that had dominated film theory for decades were again problematized by the rapid expansion of visual technology. *Casablanca* would have qualified as "film" using Arnheim's criteria, but what did it become when it was reduced to a tiny screen, edited using "pan and scan" techniques, and then broken apart by commercials? Once movies were played on television, they more resembled the television programs and "made for TV" movies than they did the films that were airing in the theatres.

As television gained more access to films, multiplex cinemas continued to grow. AMC built the first four-screen theatre in 1966 and then the first six-screen theatre in 1969. As shopping malls continued to grow, from over 7,000 in 1963 to over 22,000 by 1980 (Corbett 26), the mall theatres and theatres connected to shopping centers grew as well. For AMC, this growth culminated in the first "megaplex" in 1995, a theatre with 24 screens ("Our History"). Initially, these movie theatres attempted to compete with television by continuing the tradition of the "movie palace" and opulent theme park that outdid any possible arrangement a viewer might have at home. However, this was an effort that would not last. Kevin Corbett notes in his history of theatres that the quality
actually decreased in proportion to the number of cinemas that arose in the 1970s and
1980s. He states,

There was no glamour associated with these “shoebox” theatres, so named as
much for their drab interiors as for their size. We hold little nostalgia for
multiplexes, perhaps because of their ubiquity in many towns and small cities
and perhaps because they were simply not “attractive” (or intended to be),
culturally or otherwise (26).

Corbett attributes this mediocrity to the theatres simply giving up in their efforts
to outdo cinema. But whatever the motivation may be, the ubiquitous but lackluster
theatres serve as a fitting symbol for the condition of mainstream cinema in the 1970s
and 1980s. It was in every mall in every city, but it lacked the architecture, interior
design, and cultural status that had made theatres an important part of the community.
Television enhanced this overall feeling; television movies were in every household, but
they were edited and broken apart in so many ways that they seemed to have only a
vague resemblance to their cinematic counterpart. This is the cinematic landscape in
which we find Robert Coover’s 1987 collection of short stories A Night at the Movies, or
You Must Remember This.

As Time Goes By

The song “As Time Goes By” from the film Casablanca begins “This day and age
we’re living in gives cause for apprehension, with speed and new invention and things
like fourth dimension.” However, the song argues, you must remember that there are
some things that never change, such as a kiss or a lover’s sigh. Coover’s *A Night at the Movies, or, You Must Remember This* (1987), which references this song in its subtitle and in its most important short story, is framed with this idealistic idea. “Speed and new invention” may be becoming increasingly more predominant in our culture, but there are fundamentally unchanging ideal experiences, such as the nostalgic night at the movies. Coover’s collection sarcastically proposes to mimic this experience by framing the a series of short stories within a mock-historical viewing situation. At the outermost layer, this frame is established by the title itself, which suggests the nostalgia and idealism of the classic moviegoing experience during cinema’s “Golden Age” in the 1930s and 1940s. The framing title helps to unify the various short stories into a single collection, obscuring the fact that they were all published separately throughout the 1980s. Yet, despite their separate publication, the framing title and the stories’ shared use of cinema allow the work to function as a cohesive narrative, not quite a novel, but not quite a simple collection of short stories, either. This effort is aided by another frame, a “program,” which frames the traditional table of contents as a list of the evening’s films. (See Figure 6.)
The "program" establishes the more frequently acknowledged frame of the work:

Coover is setting his stories inside "classic" film genres, each with its own expectations. Following the theme of the song "As Time Goes By," Coover is suggesting that these classic genres remain as fundamentally ideal forms, unalterable links to a better time in the past. Yet at the same time, he is establishing the frame for the parodies that follow, for each of the expectations established by the genres are broken by Coover's stories.

The "ADVENTURE!" film tells the story of a villain who constantly outwits the sheriff; the "COMEDY!" places Charlie Chaplin inside a haunted house where nothing is funny; and the story under "Previews of Coming Attractions" details a series of films that become animated and kill the projectionist. In each case, the parody enacted depends on
the reader’s understanding of the unwritten rules of film genre. Since we do understand the irony of making a Western where the villain always outwits the hero without any sort of textual explanation, *A Night at the Movies* becomes a testament to the way that film genres have become ingrained in our lives.

Typically, popular criticism of *A Night at the Movies* falls into two broad categories, both of which take a reductive stance. The first is the complaint that the heavily foregrounded metafictionality of the work nullifies its potential for meaningful narrative. As Fred Pfeil notes in the *Washington Post*, “The verbal surfaces of Coover’s prose are throughout the collection as richly worded and deftly syncopated as ever [yet], before I finished *A Night at the Movies*, I had come to feel numb and immobilized” (x.09). The second mode of criticism treats the work as comedy, suggesting that Coover is playing with our genre expectations and thus allowing readers to laugh at themselves. Edmund White says in *The New York Times Book Review* that Coover

isn’t merely recycling old movie plots or drawing on the glamorous atmosphere of Hollywood. Rather, what he’s doing is enlarging his literary technique by forcing it to assimilate cinematic conventions and to approximate filmic style. To say so perhaps makes the book sound stiff, but *A Night at the Movies* is as vivacious and entertaining as it is one hundred percent American (15).

White’s appeal to American patriotism along with the use of adjectives like “vivacious and entertaining” suggest that the book is being read as thoughtful yet harmless fun. Although White covers the content of the various stories in his review, he is constantly pulled away from Coover’s themes and drawn toward the idealized “night at the
movies” and the playful manner in which Coover challenges the established genres. This is not entirely a misreading; Coover’s work foregrounds its status as a parody by bombarding the reader with various frames and “signs” in the text that read, “One Moment While the Operator Changes Reels” (115) and “Ladies and Gentlemen may safely visit this Theatre as no Offensive Films are Ever Shown Here” (n.p.). As a parody, A Night at the Movies falls into the tradition of parodies such as Cervantes’ Don Quixote or Fielding’s Shamela, where readers perceive that the criticism presented by the book exists at a safe distance.

However, unlike “classic” parodies, Coover’s work was published during the same time that parody as a form was being challenged by the critical position that parody had become too prevalent, that literature had lost its ability to effectively derive new meaning from imitating other styles. The most popular spokesman for this idea is Fredrick Jameson, who published the essay “Postmodernism, or, The Logic of Late Capitalism,” (1984) during the same time that Coover’s stories were being published in various journals and magazines. Jameson called excessive parody “pastiche,” a kind of “blank parody” devoid of any significance. Jameson states that in this age of pastiche, parody finds itself without a vocation. It has lived; and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, and speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter (17).
In Jameson’s model, pastiche became a symptom of the postmodern cultural condition rather than a mode of critique, and parody was negated, reduced to a sign of the times. To illustrate this idea with examples, Jameson argues that “parody found a fertile area in the idiosyncrasies of the moderns” (16), such as Faulkner, Lawrence, and Stevens, but that postmodern architecture, film, and literature had all started to engage in a “random cannibalization of all the styles of the past” (18). Although Jameson does not specifically indict Coover, *A Night at the Movies* is good example of the kind of historical treatment that Jameson attacks, where the plot embraces history, but history itself appears to lack any value and only exists to rip apart.

Two years after *A Night at the Movies* was release, Linda Hutcheon offered response to Jameson in the form of a revisionary model of parody in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). In this work, Hutcheon notes that parody, as Jameson defines it, is “value-free, decorative, [and] de-historicized” (94). This is a view that has negated contemporary efforts to revise and re-imagine history. Yet this position fails, in Hutcheon’s view, to account for the multiple ways in which postmodern authors are recognizing history and the process of representation in a meaningful way, acknowledging them while simultaneously producing a valid critique. As an alternative to Jameson, Hutcheon proposes that parody is

a contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of representations of history [...] both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation — in any medium” (91-4).
Citing Umberto Eco’s parody of texts such as Potacki’s *Manuscrit Trouvé à Saragosse* and the short stories of Borges in *The Name of Rose* as an example, Hutcheon argues that parody is not simply “academic play” or “some infinite regress into textuality” (91); instead, it provides a way of examining a network of references and revisions while also calling attention to a specific artifact and the ways that the author’s work is notably different. This is not to say that “academic play” or “some infinite regress into textuality” can’t also exist in parody, only that these seemingly empty techniques don’t negate a work’s potential for meaningful critique.

Hutcheon’s model of parody allows for a much more in-depth approach to all of Coover’s stories in *A Night at the Movies*, but it is especially helpful in the analysis of the final story, “You Must Remember This.” This story, which is the only story in the collection to mention an existing film, parodies a “missing” scene from the 1942 film *Casablanca*. In the film as we know it, the former lovers Rick and Ilsa meet, and after a heated argument Ilsa draws a gun in an effort to get the paperwork she needs to get her husband out of the country. Rick, however, calls her bluff, telling her to “go ahead and shoot, you’d be doing me a favor.” Beaten, Ilsa lowers the gun, and the two embrace. The camera moves over to show an airport beacon and fades out, only to fade back on the same beacon some time later, when Rick asks, “And then?” What exactly happens in this ellipsis is never revealed, although it appears to be part of an early cinematic convention that implies “an unseen scene of lovemaking” (Black 36) that would be impossible to show due to cinematic standards and the restrictions of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association of America.
Coover takes this gap as the point from which his story takes shape; the limits of genre (what cannot be done within a genre) become a space of creation. Coover’s text follows Rick and Ilsa’s reunion in the same series of steps: they meet, they talk, Ilsa pulls her gun, and Rick calls her bluff. However, in Coover’s story, the scene doesn’t fade, and after Rick says, “Here’s lookin’ at you, kid,” the two attack each other with extraordinary sexual ferocity that is depicted for nearly 20 pages as Rick and Ilsa run through a virtual Kama Sutra of positions described in the kind of detail so extreme that it is simultaneously exciting and absurd. Terms like “ambrosial pudding” and “rippling haunches” abound, as the story becomes a parody not only of the film but also of the romance novel and the pornographic novel.

By using a literary genre to break the established rules of multiple filmic and literary genres, the text calls attention to play between the multiple forms of narrative, exemplifying Hutcheon’s claim that parody is “both deconstructively critical and constructively creative, paradoxically making us aware of both the limits and the powers of representation — in any medium [emphasis mine]” (91). The awareness of “the powers of representation” in this story stems from the more conventional argument that cinematic adaptations do a kind of violence to the literary work from which they are adapted. Despite the extreme popularity of films adapted from novels, they have historically been subject to the double-sided complaint of being both too long and simultaneously missing critical material from the novel. Coover’s reversal in “You Must Remember This” proposes that a literary adaptation can enact the same kind of violence,
perhaps to an even greater extent. Read in this fashion, the forbidden sex scene becomes a sign of literature and film’s impossible romance as well.

Many critical works that examine “You Must Remember This” tend to be caught up in the somewhat sacrilegious act of placing of sex in classic cinema. Katherine Hume in “The Metaphysics of Bondage” asks, “Does the multi-orgasmic encounter between Rick and Ilsa, described in throbbing detail, make Coover’s story a parody of Casablanca or an exposé of the Hollywood morality code of the era?” (831). But the more challenging questions are raised after the sex is over. When this happens, Coover shows Rick and Ilsa in a kind of postcoital disgust, as the magic of sex fades into reality and the two can’t seem to remember what they had initially found so appealing. In this manner, multiple frames are broken at once. Not only has the story transformed classic film to pornography, but now the pornographic frame is broken as well. As Joel Black notes in his book The Reality Effect, Coover “shows them [Rick and Ilsa] coming back to reality — something conventional pornography, with its denial of postcoital existence, cannot show” (46). It is at this point that Rick seems to sense that he has escaped his cinematic trajectory, broken out of the script. When he goes downstairs to the café, he finds the rest of the film’s cast has frozen, as if time has stopped. Convinced that his sex with Ilsa is the reason why the world has stopped around them, he attempts to reverse the scene, asking Ilsa to try again, to “go back where you came in, see — the letters of transit and all that. Maybe we made some kinda mistake, I dunno, like when I put my hands on your jugs or something” (185). But as Rick struggles to reenter the filmic world, Ilsa doesn’t want the film to start again, perhaps because it means that she will leave with
her husband. Rick continues to say, “And then?” (Rick says, “And then?” in the film when the ellipsis ends), but Ilsa refuses to say the correct words or simply can’t remember. Rick pleads, “C’mon, kid, can you hear me? Remember all those people downstairs! They’re depending on us! Just think it: If you think it, you’ll do it! And then — ?” Ilsa simply replies, “I luff you,” and these are the last words she speaks. It is a moment of pathos in the story that Rick fails to acknowledge; he continues to repeat “And then” and the story ends without telling the reader what has happened to either character. They may, in fact, rejoin the filmic trajectory, but at this point, the dialogue and the ending confusion suggest that they have been irrevocably removed from the script that defined them, lost in what Brian Evenson calls a filmic “netherworld” (Understanding 205).

Of course, the violence is double. In the story-world, the plot has been altered irreparably; Rick and Ilsa can’t regain their place in the film’s original trajectory despite Rick’s best efforts to rewind their own scene and relive it. Outside of the story-world, the film Casablanca is also altered irreparably for the reader by the act of reading Coover’s revision. The collection of “A Night at the Movies” is framed to give the impression of returning to a former glory, reliving a classic moment, but in both the story-world and the reader’s world, this frame foregrounds the fact that there is no way to return to the way it was.

In Walker Percy’s The Moviegoer (1961), written over 20 years before A Night at the Movies was published, the protagonist (Binx Bolling) fetishizes the theatre space by stating that seeing films a second time is a way of experiencing a “time segment which
has lapsed in order that it, the lapsed time, can be savored of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle” (80). For Binx, the space of the theatre is closed off from the outside world and allows time to exist in its pure, uncluttered state. When the movie plays that he has previously seen, he believes that a historical moment can be wrested from the events that delineate and spatialize it thus allowing it to be relived again. It is how he escapes from the void of his everyday life.

Binx’s argument is exactly the same as Coover’s framing scenario; the space of the classic theatre is presented in A Night at the Movies as a way to escape the drab theatres and television screens of the 1980s. It could take Coover’s implied reader out of the current state of cinema and return them to an idealized time.

The practice that Binx establishes in The Moviegoer assumes a kind of cinema that is no longer available to the modern viewer. Cinema in 1961 was just beginning its dispersal into television and multiplexes and still retained some sense of unity, both from it reliance on theatres and the strict regulations imposed upon it. Cinema when A Night at the Movies was written had broken apart; standards had become relaxed, and cinema existed in televisions and mall multiplexes instead of the classic theatre that Binx describes. The contemporary viewer, traveling back, brings contemporary cinema with them, seeing the nostalgic films as they were projected doubly; one with the film itself, the other with the film’s contemporary associations. In “You Must Remember This,” the classic characters of the 1940s and modern pornography are superimposed, and the result is not time that “can be savored of itself and without the usual adulteration of events that clog time like peanuts in brittle” (Percy 80), but instead a representation of
time that is so clogged that it is impossible to separate the eras. Elaine Kendall of the LA Times explains this juxtaposition in her review of the story: “The essence [of the film] will still exist, but not as you saw it first in youth and innocence; not even as you’d see it now through a haze of sentiment. From this moment on you’ll look through the picture to its core, the skull beneath the smiling face. You’ll be a changed person, still laughing and crying at the movies, but at different times and places” (n.p.). Again, the use of phrases like “from this moment on” suggest a kind of irreversible damage, a loss of innocence that can’t be recovered.

Joel Black makes this point more specific to “You Must Remember This” when he notes that “the verbal description of Rick and Ilse’s lovemaking is so graphic that it could conceivably create an indelible visual impression in a reader’s mind, making it impossible to ever have an ‘innocent’ viewing of the film again” (40). However, Black’s comment ties loss of innocence to the graphic nature of the revision, as if the sexual content were the corrupting factor. It is an approach that does not account for the revisions taking place throughout the collection where sexuality is not always employed as a means of parody. Instead, the text makes it clear any narrative revision, once followed by the reader, indelibly alters the parodied text. The extreme nature of the revision in Coover’s tale simply foregrounds this process.

Furthermore, both Black and Kendall suggest a kind of textual intrusion on the reader’s world, without acknowledging that the very act of reading the story is a testament to the reader’s desire to impose her fantasies upon the text. In Kendall’s review of the text, she states, “You’ll look through the picture to its core, the skull
beneath the smiling face” (n.p.), but the skull is there precisely because the reader placed it there, and the proposed sexuality that occurs in the film’s ellipsis is there for the same reason. It is a textual enactment of contemporary reader fantasy; sex occurs not because the text has imposed it, robbing the viewer of innocence, but rather because the reader wanted it. The fact that the film hides physicality behind an ellipsis enhances this wish, literally asking readers to look into the void and project their own fantasies upon it. The resulting sex is hyperbolic, grotesque, and absurdly complicated, as if the viewer’s fantasy were amalgamated into a single act, a sexual hodgepodge that results from every wish but satisfies none of them.

Yet despite the drastic nature of the story’s alterations, the crumpling of classic cinema, pornography, and existential despair, critics such as Edmund White still characterize the work nostalgically as a “long, exhilarating evening at an old-fashioned movie palace” (15). Lorna Sage of The Observer follows White’s approach by characterizing A Night at the Movies as “Vintage Hollywood nostalgia, pure and potent, unsullied and safe, like sex in some back row of the cinema of the mind” (n.p.). Sage idealizes the work’s attempt to return to a classical viewing situation, while ignoring or avoiding the fact that Rick and Ilsa’s sex scene, along with the majority of the stories in the book, attacks the “Vintage Hollywood nostalgia” she celebrates. As I noted earlier, White and Sage’s responses could be attributed to the fact that parody is often read at a distance, negating its critical value. However, both critics’ privileging of the nostalgic frame over the themes contained within the work acknowledges the paradoxical manner in which parody often celebrates the subject it is revising. This enacts a desire; multiple
frames are presented in hopes of creating a kind of time-machine ready to take the reader back to an nostalgic viewing situation. This effort is undertaken in parody, but it doesn’t stop readers from investing in the fantasy, hence Sage’s “Vintage Hollywood nostalgia.” Furthermore, the disastrous results of the effort don’t seem to negate this fantasy; in fact, they enhance it. The repeated efforts throughout a Night at the Movies to go back and fulfill a fantasy that is doomed to failure strengthen the idealism associated with the wish itself.

In this fashion, Coover’s parody “both confirms and subverts the power of representations of history” (Hutcheon 94). It confirms them by creating an environment in which the ideals of the classic moviegoing experience still exist, acknowledging the inherent value of these fantasies, but subverts them by showing the ultimate instability of any narrative, including film. Of course Rick and Ilse have sex when they are revisited; no narrative is a time capsule. But Coover’s parody of this expectation doesn’t negate the strength of the ideal; it enforces it. At the end, we are left with the beginning: “You Must Remember This.” You must remember that cinema is not only the film as it exists on a screen, but the experience of seeing films and in the way this event is preserved and altered in memory. It was a “Saturday morning religious experience” (Coover, interview) that was fading from the modern landscape, replaced by televisions, multiplexes, and shoebox theatres in malls. What Coover doesn’t acknowledge and couldn’t know is that he published his collection on the verge of even more drastic changes in film, a shift toward digital cinema and specialized viewing tools that is often
characterized as “post-cinema.” It is a topic that would pull him back into the film world in his 2002 book *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre: Director’s Cut.*

**Post-Cinema and the Death of Film**

In 1992, five years after Coover released *A Night at the Movies,* Pacific Bell and Sony Entertainment sent the film *Bugsy* digitally from Culver City to a studio in Anaheim via a telephone line (Cousins 341). In November 2000, just two years before Coover would release *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre,* the movie *Bounce* was literally bounced off a satellite and transmitted to the AMC Empire theatre in New York. During a press conference, executives from Miramax, Disney, Boeing, and AMC theatres posed for a picture (Figure 7) as they placed film canisters in a trash can labeled “obsolete.”

![Figure 7: Film canisters symbolically discarded. (Usai *Death of Cinema* 104)](image_url)
As the picture suggests, the studios were heralding the fact that cinema was transforming again. What was once inscribed on celluloid reels could now be produced in a digital format, and even though when projected on a screen it looked much like film, the digital image had nothing to do with its celluloid associate other than a shared purpose. Unlike the change from cinema to television or from home palace to mall theatre, this was a transformation that promised a series of advantages: Movies could be recorded digitally at a lower cost, edited digitally with much more precision, exhibited digitally with much greater image and sound quality, and archived indefinitely without degradation. As Rob Sabin notes in his article “Taking Film out of Films” in the September 5, 1999 issue of The New York Times, “The introduction of the compact disk in 1982 spelled the end of the phonograph [...] now it looks as if the motion picture camera and projector, loosely based on his [Edison’s] kinetograph and kinetoscope of the late 1880s are about to bite the dust as well” (12). Sabin is primarily responding to the work of filmmaker George Lucas, who shot Star Wars I on traditional film but exhibited it digitally, and then returned to both record and exhibit Star Wars II entirely digitally. By using digital tools and extolling their virtues to the press, Lucas became the unofficial spokesman for the three-part digital process (recording, editing, exhibiting) that is commonly referred to as “digital cinema.” In a 2000 article in The New York Times Lucas is cited as saying, “I love film, but it’s a 19th-century invention. The century of film has passed. We are in the digital age now, and trying to hold on to an old-fashioned technology that’s cumbersome and expensive — you just can’t do it” (1).
At the same time, the home cinema revolution was beginning. As I noted earlier, television had aired studio films since the 1960s, but they were greatly diminished by their transformation from the cinema screen to the small television screen. As video technology improved, so did the potential for larger screen sizes and better sound systems that matched and many ways surpassed the theatre experience being offered by shoebox movie theatres. Furthermore, specialized viewing and recording technologies also became available, such as the VCR (first sold by Sony in 1971) and the DVD in the mid 1990s, which enabled a form of control that wasn’t possible in movie theatres. Most notably for the purposes of this project, the theatre had always attempted to offer a cinematic memory, the experience of going to the movies. Television had brought the films home, but not the experience. When home theatres arrived, the movie theatre experience was transported to the living room, and customized viewing technologies allowed the spectator to exceed what the theatre could offer. Furthermore, like the landscape paintings of the 19th century, home theatres became a way of framing a symbol of wealth and placing it within the domestic sphere. As Barbara Klinger notes in Beyond the Multiplex:

Public discourses on home theater define its machines of reproduction as possessing special qualities that bestow “titles of cultural nobility” on the viewers who use them. The aesthetic associated with these machines relies on privilege as a key term of its appeal: it is defined by particularly attentive viewing sensibilities and heightened sensory experiences, by domestic
surroundings that exude class and "good taste," and by pervasive equations of technology itself with art. (15)

While theatres were focusing on sheer number, home theatres became a means of displaying cultural status.

These two developments, the invention of digital cinema and the increased availability of home viewing technologies, are the crucial characteristics of a filmic period that has been labeled "post-cinema." This is a term that is often associated with virtual reality, mobile viewing apparatuses, computer-based visual technologies, and gallery exhibits that display films, but the core of the idea rests in the dominance of the digital image and the spectator's newfound control over that image. Theoretically, it finds its greatest ally in the work of André Bazin, who posited a theory of "total cinema," an all-encompassing experience, "a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time" (21). It is the idea that representation will always work toward a form in which no distinction can be made between the representation and reality itself. For Bazin, developments like color and sound were symptoms of this desire, leading proponents of post-cinema technologies to cite digital cinema as simply another step in his ideal progression.

For most spectators, the movement toward "total cinema" isn't particularly problematic; digital cinemas have soared in popularity in the last two years, and home
theatres have become common even in middle-class homes. However, there has been a notable amount of academic criticism linking post-cinema viewing conditions to the “death of cinema.” This is not a new argument by any means; even cinema’s founders, the Lumière Brothers, had given up on cinema and declared it “an invention without any future” (Smil 269). But what stands out in these articles is the manner in which they attribute a kind of “life” to cinema in a way that mimics what Coover had performatively spelled out in A Night at the Movies: The experience of cinema is like a loved one that has died and our current technologies seem poor substitutes for the remembered experience. Godfrey Cheshire wrote in his 1997 “The Death of Film/The Decay of Cinema”:

If you have a child who is a toddler now, the chances are excellent that you will one day have to explain what film was, and how different theaters were before digital projection brought live TV, interactivity, and a dazzling array of other novelties into them. (1)

Cheshire’s prophecy exaggerates a bit for the sake of effect, but the link he establishes between visiting a theatre and visiting a grave (both with child in hand) is indicative of the many writers who began to write on the same subject within a few years of the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The most frequently cited presentation of this idea comes from Susan Sontag, who published “The Decay of Cinema” in the February 25, 1996 issue of The New York

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75 According to DCinema Today (http://www.dcinematoday.com/dc/pr.aspx?newsID=912), there are now over 5,000 theatres in America that use digital projectors. Also, according to Barbara Klinger in Beyond the Multiplex, home theatres were in 30% of the nation’s homes in 2004.
Times. Here, grieving the end of cinema becomes a vehicle for idealizing its nostalgic ideal:

No amount of mourning will revive the vanished rituals — erotic, ruminative — of the darkened theater. The reduction of cinema to assaulting images, and the unprincipled manipulation of images (faster and faster cutting) to make them more attention grabbing, has produced a disincarnated, lightweight cinema that doesn’t demand anyone’s full attention. (60)

Her use of “mourning” links cinema’s contemporary condition to the death or near death of a loved one, a process made more difficult by the constant reminder of its digital offspring, a reduced life that is as “assaultive” and “unprincipled” as a child. It functions as a ghost would, a “disincarnated” force that acts as an essentially empty (“lightweight”) reminder of a former self rather than the incarnation of the next phase of cinema’s development.76

Four years after Sontag’s article, film preservationist Paulo Usai once again anthropomorphizes cinema into a kind of life, which, like the one Sontag describes, is also fading. In the book The Death of Cinema: History, Cultural Memory, and the Digital Dark Age, Usai notes that his role as a film preservationist is “very much like a physician who has accepted the inevitability of death even while he fights for a patient’s life” (105). However, while Sontag presents a kind of obituary, Usai argues that this

76 In Death 24x a Second, Laura Mulvey states, “Digital technology allows a spectator to still a film in a way that evokes the ghostly presence of the individual celluloid frame. Technically, this is an anachronism. It is only due to an imaginative association with film’s archaic structure that the materiality of celluloid comes to mind” (26).
death is part of cinema’s core aesthetic. Photochemical film will always decay when it is watched, and film must be watched to be art; therefore the art of film is “the art of destroying moving images” (7). The true destruction of film as an art comes when we try to shift film into a medium that does not decay, i.e. a digital one. Usai’s paradox is that destroying the art (watching the film) allows it to continue as an art, while preserving the art in an indestructible medium will ultimately be the art’s final demise.

Sontag and Usai are making drastically different claims, linked by a shared metaphor. They envision cinema as a patient dying (or dead) before them and thereby provide a means of characterizing a common apprehension in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.77 Despite the fact that cinema has always been challenged and disrupted by competing technologies, the collective creation of cinema’s dying body was only brought to light en masse once digital cinema threatened to completely overwhelm film itself and replace it with digital copies. In the following section, I argue that Robert Coover’s 2002 follow-up to A Night at the Movies gives this dying body a name: Lucky Pierre, an aging star trapped between memories of a golden age and his own disappearing digital reality.

The Adventures of Lucky Pierre

As a drained, old man wanders a slush-ridden street, a bus drives by and miraculously manages to hit him directly in the genitals. The sign on the bus reads, “The

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77 In an article about filmmaker Peter Greenaway in the British newspaper The Independent, the headline reads “Greenaway announces the death of cinema — and blames the remote-control zapper” (http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article3043729.ece).
Adventures of Lucky Pierre." It is an effective means of establishing the mix of pathos and physical comedy that will shape the next 400 pages of Coover’s novel. Like “You Must Remember This,” Coover’s The Adventures of Lucky Pierre parodies an actual film, a 1960 soft-core pornographic film by B-movie directors Herschell Gordon Lewis and David Friedman. The film, which stars Billy Falbo, the Jerry Lewis of soft-core pornography, enacts a series of vignettes where the protagonist (according to the trailer) is “always in the middle of girls...and gags.” In each of the vignettes, Pierre has a job that allows him, and the viewer, to see a series of naked women; in one vignette he’s a photographer, in another a psychiatrist, a painter, a photographer, and so on. However, while the view seems to thrill Pierre to the point of madness in each vignette, his attempts to touch the women are always foiled. In “The Photographer’s Apprentice,” he is asked to take pictures of naked women, but every time he opens the shutter, they disappear. Therefore, his status as “lucky” is questionable; he is presented with multiple fantasies, but has no means of actualizing them.

Coover’s Lucky Pierre appears to take up Lewis and Friedman’s story many years later. Lucky Pierre (L.P.) is old now, “a living legend, maybe the last of his kind” (4), but still involved in acting as a pornographic star. His home is the mysterious city, Cinecity, a story-world that is governed by the conventions of cinema.78 However, unlike other media-dependent worlds such as Pleasantville from the 1998 film of the same name, or Seahaven from the 1998 film The Truman Show, Cinecity is in a state of

78 The name is a play on cinema-city, sin-city, and Cinecittà, the studio where Fellini did most of his work.

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ruin. It is always cold, sex is as impersonal as Huxley’s London, suicides rain down like static, and pornography has engulfed all other filmic genres. Although Lucky Pierre is aged, he is the city’s highest regarded celebrity, but more as an icon of the city’s former glory than as a serious performer. The mayor of Cinecity states that she would give him the key to the city, but “he is the key to the city” (87). Nevertheless, this status brings him little joy. When the story begins, we find him cold, aging, and insecure, looking for a way out of the films that define his life. However, it is an impossible wish; Lucky Pierre is “not so much a character as a flickering simulacrum inside a movie, a shadowy projection of light, a filmic will-o’-the-wisp” (14). He is defined by cinema and therefore has no way of leaving it. As Renko Heuer notes in “Pierre, the Lucky Avatar,” “Lucky Pierre might be the key, but nevertheless he has no key that enables him to leave Cinecity” (37).

Furthermore, unlike the completely unobtainable women of Lewis and Freidman’s film, Coover’s L.P. has the exact opposite problem. He is rarely not having sex — and it occurs so frequently that his various encounters blend together for him. The reader follows Pierre through nine chapters (called “reels,” mimicking the vignettes of Lewis’ film) in which L.P. bounces uncontrollably from one pornographic film to the next, because in the world of Lucky Pierre, “fuckfilms...have outlasted all other genres” (31). Therefore, for over 400 pages, the reader follows L.P. through a textual labyrinth as his jumps from one sex scene to the next, having sex with his directors (22), with random women (9), with hitchhikers, with strangers, with robots (11), and with farm animals...
Each of these “reels” (chapters) is guided by a different female director who takes the name of a muse. However, while traditional muses inspired, these muses work to keep Pierre ensconced in film, and while he thinks of escape, they think of ways to trick him back into the film. The tragedy and frustration of the work stems from the fact that every time L.P. escapes, he finds himself inside another film. In the end, after 400 pages of being “in the middle of girls...and gags,” Lucky Pierre is still trying to escape and still failing miserably. The work ends mid-sentence and mid-orgasm.

Popular responses to Lucky Pierre tend to focus on the inevitable question of significance. While splicing Casablanca with pornography is received as an act of high-minded parody (“vivacious and entertaining as it is one hundred percent American” (White 15)), splicing pornography into an already pornographic film seems excessive, a parody of a parody starring a character who foregrounds his own status as a simulacrum.80 A Night at the Movies is thrilling, “like sex in some back row of the cinema of the mind” (Sage n.p.), while Lucky Pierre is “technically impressive” (McLaughlin 138) but ultimately “leaves fun at about the 900th pirouette” (Smokler RV-4).

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79 Lucky Pierre, despite all of its bold portrayals of sex with robots and interspecies sex, never mentions homosexuality. It is an act that forms a boundary in the work, perhaps even the boundary of Cinecity, considering the fact that L.P. is the only male figure who is given anything more than a passing mention. All other characters are women.

80 Furthermore as a parody of pornography it also engages in parodying other titles, such as Lust in the Funhouse (297), a spin-off of John Barth’s famous short story. Susan Sontag in Styles of Radical Will notes that the novel Candy attempts to parody pornography and can therefore claim that it is a “spoof” rather than an actual work of pornography, a claim that could be applied to Lucky Pierre as well. However, Sontag continues, “A parody of pornography, so far as it has any real competence, is still pornography” (51).
Smokler seems to hit upon a basic distinction. It is "fun" for a reader to enter the story-world in *A Night at the Movies* and make classic movie stars have meaningless sex and it doesn’t really matter what “pair” they are; one could imagine doing it to Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy with the same glee. However, it isn’t nearly as much fun to suggest that the movies are, in fact, controlling us. Lucky Pierre, “our hero” (4), is a pawn in his own story from beginning to end, from the moment the bus runs over his genitalia to the end where he cuts off mid-orgasm. He's a tool of cinema rather than an actor within it. When one of L.P.’s directors wants him to love her willingly, another laughs and replies, “Who? L.P.? He has no free will” (213). When his directors rewind the footage, L.P. literally rewinds as well: The first time, he walks into his office and attempts to jump over a desk, catching his foot. He screams, “What-the-fuck-is-t-h-a-t-t-h-httahtskucufemttahw!” (92), but instead of stumbling, he is suddenly thrown backward as Clara (his director) rewinds the film and reshoots the scene. As it rewinds, his motions go in reverse, and he is heard saying, “-G-N-I-O-D-g-n-i-hhttahtskucufemttahw!” (93). The scene plays a second time, but Clara rewinds the footage again, this time backing L.P. up so far that he falls down the elevator shaft where he had arrived. The scenes are enacted as slapstick comedy reminiscent of early cinema, but they are made somehow tragic by the way the film always gets the best of L.P., throwing him down elevator shafts, drowning him in bathtubs, and ultimately dismantling him completely. Like Merton, in Wilson's *Merton of the Movies*, L.P.’s serious role (his life) is being played out as a comedy and the effect is unsettling.
A similar sort of unsettling feeling is created by the faux city L.P. inhabits, Cinecity, which seems to be less of a fantasy than an exaggerated version of our own "spectacle-obsessed entertainment culture" (Blythe 14). It's a hyperbole, a cautionary reminder that this dystopia will be the world in the not-so-distant future. Due to the contemporary pervasiveness of home theatres and immersive cinematic environments that have moved cinematic space into daily life, it also seems oddly familiar to the contemporary reader. The "film tins and beer cans" (5), both now only hollow containers, line Cinecity's cold streets and show that it is neither complete reality nor complete fantasy but instead an intrusion of cinema upon reality, a world altered by film, thus reversing the intrusion of the viewer into cinematic space in A Night at the Movies.

There is nothing "vivacious and entertaining" (White 15) about being presented with the idea that digital cinema has taken over the "life" of film and it will soon come for us. Nor is it "like sex in some back row of the cinema" (Sage n.p.) to have this message presented in a way that performatively mirrors our visual culture's privileging of technology over content ("pirouettes" over plot) by emphasizing its own textual technology. However, Lucky Pierre does exactly what the very earliest literary treatments of cinema did when faced with an unknown technology: it places a character on the inside. When silent cinema began to impinge upon middle American values, Henry Leon Wilson developed Merton, a kind of literary explorer who not only explored the Hollywood studios but lived in them, vowing to die rather than leave, hiding out in old sets while exposing the "reality" beneath the illusion of Hollywood.
When digital cinema posed a new kind of technological threat to the familiar and parody-ready photochemical cinema, Coover’s Lucky Pierre was released. Considering the fact that Coover actually started work on Lucky Pierre in 1970 only to complete it in 2002, the character is quite literally the product of an earlier time thrust into a new technology. Like Merton, L.P. reveals cinema from the inside, and also like Merton, L.P. is caught in a comedy that he finds utterly serious. The major distinction is that Merton finds a way out, allowing reason to triumph, while L.P. is subsumed by the medium, unable to ever really escape.

Lucky Pierre of the Movies

Both Merton of the Movies (1919) and The Adventures of Lucky Pierre begin in media res, with the character already inside a movie. It is a framing method that calls attention to the cinematic image’s preexisting intrusion upon reality, the iconophobic idea that the image could somehow overwhelm reality. In every other work I discuss in chapter two, characters go to the movies; they leave their known realities, enter a cinematic space, and then return to their world. Going to the movies is a sign of control, a means of asserting power over narrative; being caught in the movies enacts a lack of control, a reason to fear the images. Since Merton and Lucky Pierre are the works that engage most directly with the new technology (silent film and digital cinema), it is no surprise that they are the ones that begin with the intrusion of that technology.

For example, there is a certain distance between the movie (Casablanca) and the viewer in “You Must Remember This.” The book doesn’t frame the movie-itself, but
rather the theatre-going experience that contains the movie. Lucky Pierre is notably
different. It still makes the viewer aware that the experience is a movie, but the
presentation hides the frame, as if the implied screen could cover the reader’s entire
range of vision. It is “immersive,” to an extreme, and like Bazin’s “total cinema,” it
seems to eliminate the distinctions between a movie world and a real world. For
example, while “You Must Remember This” begins by mentioning the film leader
(“black leader dark”), the reader is lulled into Lucky Pierre musically:

(Cantus.) In the darkness, softly. A whisper becoming a tone, the echo of a tone.
Doleful, a soft incipient lament blowing in the night like a wind, like the echo of
a wind, a plainsong wafting distantly through the windy chambers of the night,
wafting unisonously through the spaced chambers of the bitter night, alas, the
solitary city, she that was full of people, thus a distant and hollow epiphenomenon laced
with sibilants bewailing the solitary city. (1)
The opening word, “cantus,” is a Latin word for “a song or melody, especially
ecclesiastical melody” (OED). Rather than establishing a visual landscape typical of
cinematic ekphrasis (“It was dark in Rick’s apartment”), Lucky Pierre establishes a
musical landscape, a space that is carved out by sound. Its Latin origin helps link the
work to classical narrative (Greek tragedy), and its relationship to religious
(ecclesiastical) music (combined with the later use of the word “plainsong,” which is
also indicative of music performed in churches) gives it a spatial dimension; just as song
fills the open space of a church, this music fills the open spaces of the Cinecity.
However, this isn’t a joyful creation of space; its “doleful,” moving through the “bitter
night” and “bewailing the solitary city.” Coover’s language is lyrical, laced with archaic words (“plainsong” and “sibilants”)\(^81\) and foreign words (“epiodion,” which is Greek for “funeral song”). Although the framing tools (substituting “Reel” for chapter) establish this space as a movie, it also seems to appear like any other fictional space. Therefore, the essential dilemma posited by Lucky Pierre from the very beginning is that if cinema has become interwoven with reality, cinema itself becomes a superfluous term, impossible to separate from any other type of representation. This act establishes Lucky Pierre’s fundamental trope: separating filmed space and real space is impossible, thus making the world of Lucky Pierre both at once, completely mediated and completely real.

However, when the reader is introduced to L.P., this “completely real” world seems to be on the verge of ruin. As a city that is defined by film, the digital transformation is an apocalypse; computer viruses are destroying the city’s infrastructure, gangs are attacking theatres, and the city is burning “old film archives to ease the fuel shortage” (17). In response, the directors who make each “reel” (chapter) use digital cameras instead of analog ones: Cecilia is reported to be “struggling to catch the action on handheld digital video” (64); Cassie is “absorbed now by her weird experiments in digital uncertainty” (127); and Calliope promises to fix L.P. at the end with a “digital airbrush” (402).\(^82\) L.P., forever the product of their transformations, goes

\(^{81}\) The OED defines a sibilant as “A speech-sound having a hissing effect; a sound of the nature of s” and a plainsong as “Music developed for the unaccompanied unison singing of Christian liturgies.”

\(^{82}\) There are countless other references to digital filming, editing, and projecting, including Cecilia’s “digital clipboard” (70), Connie’s “digital camera” (228), and Catherine’s “digital stop-motion camera” (332), which she uses for animation.
along because he has no choice. However, his memories seem to suggest the transition from silent to sound served him well, as did black and white to color. But this change from analog to digital is turning his life into a seemingly random series of movie scenes, all of which are completely out of his control.

Some of these movies are the product of his many directors, others are the product of his memories, and still others are due to a “plot bot,” a computer that generates random plot sequences and turns them into films. For his directors, the potential of digital cinema is an exciting and necessary change, an evolution to the next step in art. But for L.P., it is confusing and disheartening. He’s always lost, befuddled by the lack of “plotline with its so-called developments” just as the reader is. When he wakes up yet again in an unknown place, the baffled L.P. asks with a degree of pathos, “What’s happening? Why have I got this long beard? What film is this?” His director answers, “It’s not a film, Pete, it’s real life” (323). Of course, she’s filming him as she says this. The humor of L.P.’s frequently absurd predicaments is tainted by a palpable sadness, a desire to be whole again, be part of an organic art form rather than an ahistorical digital world. In this manner, Usai’s metaphor of a dying patient (The Death of Cinema) seems an apt characterization for L.P.; his memories challenge an inevitable transformation. Like a patient holding on to life, he holds on to earlier movies, making the text not only a sign of the changing nature of cinema but a requiem of its former beauty.83

83 Coover makes a similar point in the short story “Charlie in the House of Rue” from ANM. In this story, a comic character (representing Charlie Chaplin) goes through a series of situations
These earlier movies, in idealized form, provided a kind of stability, the same sort of stability that allowed Coover to parody them so effectively in A Night at the Movies. However, along with the change in form came a change in theory. For example, Reel Three’s director Cissy states,

[T]here’s no more past, no more future, all those patently false assumptions we used to cling to about time and memory, all those old gimmicks we used to use to simulate continuity — the medium shot followed by the close-up, the mystique of moral decisions, the plotline with its so-called developments, the unacknowledged back projection — we’re past all that now, L.P. (117)

Cissy’s claim that “we’re past all that now” echoes George Lucas’ claim that “I love film, but it’s a 19th-century invention. The century of film has passed. We are in the digital age now, and trying to hold on to an old-fashioned technology that’s cumbersome and expensive — you just can’t do it” (“The Movies’ Digital Future”). Since film is being discarded, so are all of its conventions, including continuity editing, faux drama, immersion, and linear plot. What is left is an anti-film, an object that shares nothing with its celluloid predecessor.

In Lucky Pierre, this anti-film is literalized as pornography. Its rejection of classical plot, structure, and subject matter makes it a kind of pre-established anti-genre.

As Peter Lehman notes, “Hardcore pornography is devoted to virtually nothing but the indicative of early physical comedy, but is ultimately left hanging onto a dead woman, dangling in the air. The humor of silent comedy is transformed into a kind of existential gloom; Charlie, the sign of positivity in the face of adversity, is left stranded, “with a look of anguish and bewilderment, as though to ask: What kind of place is this? Who took the light anyway? And why is everybody laughing?” (111).
fade of the classical cinema; it is a form which shows in explicit detail what was
unthinkable under the Hays Code, and is still forbidden in Hollywood cinema”
(“Oshima” 19). Pornography has a natural alliance with digital cinema, a technology
that allows for inexpensive production, easy (and online) distribution, and an ability to
“show everything” with an eerie clarity that is often classified as the “porn look.” Quite
literally it is a “naked” image.

As I argued earlier, pornography is a crucial part of “You Must Remember This,”
but in a much different way: “You Must Remember This” allowed for a pornographic
fantasy brought on by the implied readers, while sex in Lucky Pierre is always at the
will of the directors or the films they make. Enacting Slavoj Žižek’s claim that cinema
“doesn’t give you what you desire, it tells you how to desire” (Pervert’s Guide), L.P. is
hopelessly lost in the trajectory of the pornographic films he is making. Sex means little
to him; in fact it adds to his ultimate confusion. The text states, “In the silent classic The
Master’s Piece, he has just dipped his prick in a pot of crimson paint and is approaching
a virgin canvas when he realizes that what he is walking on is a high diving board and
below him is a pool with naked leg-kicking water sprites swimming in seductive
formation” (32). Sex, silent cinema, a synchronized dance reminiscent of Busby
Berkeley, and surrealism/absurdity are all superimposed into a scene that is
pornographic, cinematic, literary, comical, but above all bizarre.

In an example that characterizes much of the novel’s progress, Reel One finds
L.P. in a bathtub having sex with his first director Cecilia, only to start drowning: “He’s
lost his bearings, he can’t see, the water’s in his eyes and nose and mouth and there’s
nothing to grab hold of — HELP!" (22).® When he wakes up, he is on an isle of nymphs who "slap and stroke the body, trying to bring it to life again [...] kissing the gaping mouth, blowing in the ears and nostrils" (24). Then a commercial occurs (26) and it is revealed that L.P. is watching the scene rather than actually living it; it was one of L.P.'s earlier films. Fantasy is still part of the pornography in Lucky Pierre, but it is fantasy that is controlled by an undifferentiated mix of movies as they are being filmed (L.P. in the tub) and L.P.'s cinematic memories.

In Cinecity, pornography is the only kind of film. There are pornographic comedies, histories, and children's movies; nothing exists without it. A few scattered protestors remain, holding signs that say "Save the Genres!" and "Special effects are dead!" (63), but like the sex between Rick and Ilsa in "You Must Remember This," pornography carries along with it an irreversibility. There is no going back to more innocent times. In this way, pornography and Cinecity are linked; they are both hyperbolic consequences of our unchecked desires. Paul Giles says Lucky Pierre presents "pornography as the epitome of an absurd human condition, an inverted state of transcendence, where characters are reduced ascetically to abstract shapes and lusty contortions" (15). In the same fashion, Cinecity is the epitome of the mass desire to integrate cinema into all private and public spaces, a home theatre multiplied by millions of homes. The dystopian message of Cinecity and its sole production of

84 This is the first of many drowning episodes. Drowning, which is a literalization of the metaphor of immersion (which literally means "plunging into water or other liquid, and transf. into other things" (Oxford English Dictionary)) helps to strengthen the sense of L.P. as being completely immersed in his medium.
pornography is that once the forbidden nature of the desire is removed, that same desire is negated and the result is grotesque. Franklin Melendez explores this in “Video Pornography, Video Pleasure, and the Return of the Sublime” when he notes that in postmodern theory, pornographic viewership has emerged as a central category, providing the model for a new, historically specific construction of pleasure: one that is purely visual and given over entirely to the consumption or commodity images. However, precisely because it realizes postmodern logic, pornographic viewership also betrays postmodernism’s greatest anxiety, or at least a crucial point of ambivalence, namely, the displacement of the real by the simulacral. (401)

As I noted earlier, this displacement of the real by the image (which I labeled iconophobia) is a central concern of literary works that use cinema as a subject. It is particularly important for novels that treat cinema as a new technology because it establishes the hypothetical consequences of allowing the technology to go unchecked. By building a fictional world where pornography has taken over all other genres, it calls upon postmodernism’s “greatest anxiety,” and post-cinema’s greatest wish, the representation that overcomes reality.
Chaining the Theatres

Even in the days of silent films, cinema could create an immersive effect, pulling the viewer into its world. But it wasn’t until the creation of the home theatre that the highly immersive world of traditional movie theatres began to coexist with the viewer’s private space. At the same time, the technology that enabled the home theatre pressed outward, and screens began to appear more frequently in public spaces such as restaurants, airplanes, and art galleries. In this fashion, the cinema experience was moved out of the theatres, into the home, and then into the “anyplace-whatevers” that make up life in a suburban setting. Susan Sontag comments in “The Decay of Cinema” that

images now appear in any size and on a variety of surfaces: on a screen in a theater, on disco walls and on megascreens hanging above sports arenas. The sheer ubiquity of moving images has steadily undermined the standards people once had both for cinema as art and for cinema as popular entertainment. (1)

Cinecity is now a place that is full of these screens as well. Theatres still exist, everywhere, in fact, but their glowing marquees are contrasted by their status as desolate, ruined spaces. One theatre that L.P. attends has strict guidelines that “force” the enjoyment of the film, including “heavy penalties for leaving the theatre before the program is concluded” (80) and strict prohibitions on “booing and whistling” (80). In

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85 At the end of what is commonly considered the first narrative film, The Great Train Robbery, the villain (who was already killed earlier in the film) raises his gun and fires it at the camera, making it look likes he’s firing at the audience. It is a similar trope to the one used in “How it Feels to be Run Over”, a film I cover in chapter five.
Reel Five, L.P. walks through Cinecity at night looking for one of his own films, only to find that the marquees are glowing over theatres that have been closed forever. One is “closed and padlocked” (198) while another “has heavy rusting chains across its double doors as if closed for centuries” (199). When L.P. finally does find a theatre, it has been converted into a “sales barn” where a vendor uses the movie screen to display the items he is selling. Finally, L.P. finds a movie theatre that is showing an actual film, but even though this is “more venerable than the Frivoli,” it is still “looking tattered and abandoned” (216). At the very end of the novel, the city has a film festival for L.P., where all the movie houses in town are uprooted and moved into one area, where “they look more naked somehow, their skins raw” (364). Theatres, like L.P. himself, serve as a reminder of cinema’s former self, and so throughout Cinecity, they are either discarded or converted, ironically turning the town defined by cinema into a theatrical wasteland.

The emphasis placed on the decay of theatres stems from the contemporary ritual significance placed on them, traditionally in retrospect. Susan Sontag calls theatres “temples,” and notes that “no amount of mourning will revive the vanished rituals — erotic, ruminative — of the darkened theater” (2). Coover himself gives them religious

86 Other abandoned movie theatres dot the landscape of Cinecity, including the theatre L.P. sees across the street from his house, which “looks to have been shut down for decades” (216), a theatre in Reel 7 that has become “a nest of suspected terrorists” (286), and a series of theatres in which “people flock to [the theaters,] apparently hoping to get blown up. It’s a kind of lovers’ jerk-and-die suicide thing” (289). The final theatre, which is the scene of L.P.’s “final” film fest, is more like a house from Poe or Borges, with a series of dark underground passages that lead all over the city (382).

87 Sontag’s argument loss of the sacred in art is much like the one Walter Benjamin attributes to the loss of “aura” ancient art in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” However, there are two important differences. First, in Benjamin’s model, it is the reproducibility of arts such as film and photography that are responsible for the loss of
significance when he compares his moviegoing to a “Saturday morning religious experience” (Coover interview), while Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer* has to speak to the theatre employees or else risk being “lost, cut loose metaphysically speaking” (74-75).

However, as the loss of theatres explicates, the logic of digital cinema or Bazin’s “total cinema” is that the screen replaces the theatre. The image no longer takes over the space built for it; it takes over any space. The implied problem is not the kinds of images these screens project, but the manner in which they serve to de-ritualize space, turning areas of solace into areas of distraction, areas of ritual into centers of entertainment.

The de-ritualization of space is acted out in *Lucky Pierre* from the very beginning, when the “Cantus” (1) or religious melody opens the window upon the dystopia of Cinecity itself rather than a church. It is an idea that is enacted again in Reel 5, when L.P. marries his director Constance in a church called the “High Church of the Hardcore” (217). Like every place in Cinecity except the theatres, the church has a giant screen behind the altar as well as a giant screen outside so that people can watch the ceremony. As the vows are read in the ceremony, L.P.’s pornographic movies play, and at one point, the marrying couple is asked “to kneel so as not to block the view” (219). There is a comedy in play of course, but it only thinly veils the simultaneous transformation of both actual religious space (the church) and metaphorical religious space (the theatre) into a hedonistic space of entertainment where even the bride and the

artistic aura: “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (221). Second, Benjamin is notably more emotionally removed than Sontag. Whereas Sontag attempts to invoke pathos, Benjamin is more interested in noting a historical shift and citing its possible political implications.
groom are guilty of blocking the view. Furthermore, the scene transforms the memory and the recording of that memory (the typical wedding video) into a spectacle rather than a reminder. L.P. doesn’t get married so much as he makes a movie about getting married, although, again, it’s impossible to tell the difference. What can be said is that the effort didn’t create a memory, it created a movie, and in so doing, he shows that L.P. is no longer capable of creating memories anymore. He can only rely on the ones of his past.

When Godfrey Cheshire writes, “If you have a child who is a toddler now, the chances are excellent that you will one day have to explain what film was” (1), it becomes clear that the dialogue about the death of cinema is also about the fight to retain a memory of cinema. Sontag’s article “The Decay of Cinema” spends less time explaining the “decay” than it does reviewing her memories of cinema, even restructuring historical events as if she remembered them:

Everything in cinema begins with that moment, 100 years ago, when the train pulled into the station. People took movies into themselves, just as the public cried out with excitement and actually ducked, as the train seemed to move toward them. (1)

Even though the myth of people fleeing from early films has been dispelled by most film theorists and historians (Gunning “Cinema of Astonishment”), Sontag holds on to the idea as if she remembered it, as if she were there, revealing a strong desire to both maintain and idealize the memory of film. In many ways, this desire to hold on to what appears to be slipping is a stronger indication of the post-cinematic age than even digital
cinema or the transformations in reception. It is the latent desire that hides under the
"death of cinema" critiques.

Interestingly, these challenges to memory occur in the context of a digital
medium that promises perfect memory, a space that is virtually limitless, easily
reproducible, and without any natural form of decay. However, as critics such as Usai
argue, capturing everything about the image is different than capturing the memory.
Memory, like film, relies on its decay. This is why L.P., an animated version of analog
cinema in the post-cinema age, is plagued by his inability to distinguish his memories
from his present state. Early in Reel One, as L.P. struggles through one of his many
drowning episodes, the text states, "He cannot even remember two minutes ago, much
less a lifetime" (23). At another point, he sees the projection of himself in his palm, and
in that projection, his character is going to be hit by a train. This projection merges into
his consciousness, and he dives out of the way just as the train is about to hit him.
However, as he recovers, he can't seem to remember how he got there in the first place.
The text states that "He can't remember. A complete blank. Or black" (160). Other
examples are replete throughout the text. In one dream L.P. "can't even remember light
and color" (159), and a scene in which L.P. is being tortured, he "cannot even remember
who, before Badboy, he was" (283).

In the final "Reel," all the directors stage a giant tribute to the films of Lucky
Pierre. Every theatre in town is uprooted, and screens are placed everywhere to show
his films. Of course, they all now seem foreign to L.P., a screen memory rather than an
actual one. He states, "Retrospectives, memorials, relics...it's over, isn't it" (367). And it
is. His memory has been replaced by technical reproduction and his identity is inseparable from all the films that are playing simultaneously at the fest. As one last hurrah, he begins having sex with the final director. He claims it is the best sex he's ever had, “it's never been as good as this, and he is being completely carried out of himself” (405) and just as the climax is impending, the text reads, “'Now!' she cries suddenly,” and the story ends. Like the Lucky Pierre of the 1960 Lewis and Friedman film, satisfaction is denied at the crucial moment.

At the end of Merton of the Movies, Merton has landed a paying job in Hollywood and has realized the folly of his fantasies about filmmaking. He now watches film from the outside, a wiser man. At the end of Lucky Pierre, L.P. has been subsumed by the image. The narrative ends mid-sentence because there is nothing left of him to allow the story to continue. The endings are exact opposites, but the beginnings were the same: both were characters inside a new technology, Merton through fantasy, L.P. by necessity, both swept up by filmic narratives. The middles were also essentially the same; they both got lost in the technology, Merton in the studio lot and L.P. in film’s new digital makeup. The difference in their endings ultimately tells the story of literature’s relationship to cinema; either cinema is pushed away, made subject to reason, and controlled from the outside, or it’s allowed inside, freed from reason, fetishized, and granted the ability to take control of the text.

Several articles were published near the dawn of the twenty-first century that always contained two parts: cinema is, and cinema was. For the first, notes Godfrey Cheshire: “Prognosis: Sudden death [...] a medium that has been ubiquitous in the
twentieth century basically won’t exist beyond the first few years of the twenty-first” (1).

For the second, the narrative follows Sontag: “Cinema was an art unlike any other: quintessentially modern; distinctively accessible; poetic and mysterious and erotic and moral — all at the same time” (1). In most every case, citing cinema’s death became a way of ritualizing its past glory, of paying homage to a dying form. Coover’s 1987 A Night at the Movies and his 2002 Adventures of Lucky Pierre engage in a similar argument, but without the binary oppositions that made the “death of cinema” articles rhetorically charged. Cinema certainly was part of Coover’s “Sunday morning religious experience” but that doesn’t make it so sacred that Rick and Ilsa could stop and have sex for a few days, and cinema is enacting a drastic and consequential transformation in the nature of the image, but that doesn’t imply that film hasn’t been enacting these kinds of changes since its inception. Since the works seem to deny the polarity required of a manifesto or an impassioned letter to the Times, they call attention back to the words themselves, not only the act of writing-cinema, but more importantly the act of using the changes in cinema to change writing as well, transforming writing through a transforming cinema.
CHAPTER 5

THE CINEMA WRITES BACK

Thus far, this project has traced the ways in which film and film theory can be represented within the novel. In this final chapter, I'm going to propose that the representation of text within film can serve as an informative counterpart, a way of rethinking the film/literature relationship from film's perspective. Just as I sought to reveal how the representation of film within the novel has often provided writers with a means of pressing the limits of textual signification, I will show how the representation of text in cinema has consistently allowed filmmakers to expand their own representational limits. To begin, I'll discuss the intertitle of silent cinema and the multiple ways in which it functions as more than an "unpleasant but necessary" means of supplementing the silent image. Then I'll move to one of the ways in which the intertitle manifested itself in cinema after synchronized sound, the diegetic image of writing. These images, I argue, performed many of the intertitle's roles long after the classically shaped intertitles were considered technologically unnecessary. To show how these images of writing continue to function in contemporary cinema, I'll look closely at the manner in which text appears in Christopher Nolan's Memento (2000). First, I'll show how the film's text helps to shape a non-linear narrative, again calling on
one of the classical functions of on-screen writing. Then, using the model of inscription and memory Freud outlines in the essay “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’” (1925), I’ll argue that the images of writing in Memento also serve to challenge the authority once given to the text, acting to repress rather than reveal.

Almost every movie asks a viewer to read, even if it is only in the title and the credits. However, in the formative years of narrative cinema, movies depended on the audience’s ability to read intertitles, cards with inscribed words that were filmed and spliced into the sequence of images. In a pre-synchronized sound era, intertitles provided a story-telling mechanism that allowed for narrative structures that were difficult if not impossible to reproduce in a purely visual manner. They conveyed dialogue, signaled scene changes and time shifts, identified characters, and commented upon the film. Furthermore, since they could be effectively cut from the film and replaced with another intertitle without disturbing the visual narrative, film editors could replace intertitles in one language with intertitles in another language, allowing for universal distribution possibilities that became much more difficult in post-silent era films. Nevertheless, the invention of synchronized sound, typically associated with the 1927 film The Jazz Singer, quickly put an end to the intertitle’s popularity, and by the mid-1930s they were practically nonexistent. Audible dialogue was now possible, and narrators could be used to convey plot, time, and explanation without halting the visual

See David Clandfield. Canadian Film. Here, he notes that “in the period of silent films translated versions were easy to provide: intertitles often appeared in both French and English consecutively during the same projection” pg 58.
flow of images. Like a bad dream or a primitive belief, intertitles were met with reason, replaced by a superior technology, and relegated to film's history.

However, like all things repressed, intertitles and their manifestations in related forms continue to find their way out of the filmic unconscious and into the surface. At times, the reemergence of the intertitle is self-conscious nostalgia, such as the postmodern silent experiments of Guy Maddin. More often, the intertitle and its functionality are revealed in mutations of its classic form, such as direct inscriptions in the celluloid in early cinema, the images of handwritten notes that began in silent films but became replete in cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, and the tattoos in Nolan's Memento. The progression of the intertitle's manifestations is the subject of this chapter.

Oh, Mother Will Be Pleased

Before exploring the intertitle's modern appearances, it is worthwhile to consider its history and the problems it both solved and created. Most film history texts cite the forty-second Cecil Hepworth film "How it Feels to be Run Over" (1900) as one of the first known examples of an intertitle. Playing upon the fear and fascination with twentieth century technological advancements, the film portrays a horse and carriage which drives past the stationary camera, causing a cloud of dust. Then, behind it, a car comes down the same road towards the camera and therefore towards the audience. When the car "hits" the camera, the screen goes blank, followed by question marks, exclamation points and a rapidly displayed series of stills that reads "Oh! Mother will be pleased." This text is not technically an intertitle in the strict sense, as it appears to be
inscribed directly into the film. Nevertheless, it anticipates the filmed cards that will
follow by showing how text can be inserted into the stream of images. What seems
initially problematic is the fact that it is not at all clear why a mother would be pleased
at having anyone hit by a car. Most likely, the message is sarcastic; the mother
represents the cautionary voice that warns against the speed of technology (both the car
and cinema). The effects of not listening are revealed. This reading is assisted by the
visual style of the text, which is seems to suggest a child’s mode of writing rather than
the more authoritative style that would later become a staple of the intertitle. (See
Figure 8)

![Image of intertitles](image)

Figure 8. The intertitles that end the film “How it Feels to be Run Over” (1900).

Interestingly, this early example of an intertitle does not use text to supplement oral
dialogue, order the narrative, or do any of the other classical functions of text in film.
Typically, text in film is considered a clarifying tool, a way of ordering a temporal
representation, but in this case the text is initially emotive, using question marks and
exclamation points to portray the effects of getting hit by a car, linking the end of a sentence to the end of the implied viewer's life. The words that follow are more perplexing than clarifying. Although one might imagine the phrase as a dry form of sarcasm, there is nothing to demand this reading, and in a modern context these words seem more aptly suited for a David Lynch film than a comedy. The effect, which was aimed at astonishing early cinematic audiences for the purposes of entertainment, now seems eerie and disturbing, a strange mix of childish innocence and death. However, as I argue throughout this chapter, this mystifying feature of intertitles, that which refuses to clarify or supplement the moving image, is as important to the history of on-screen writing as the more traditionally conceived intertitle.

In any form, the presence of text in a movie poses a problem, especially for the theorists looking for ways to distinguish cinema from other arts. Text asks the viewer to read, an activity typically considered the domain of literature. It also suggests that moving images alone weren't enough to tell a story, requiring a textual supplement. Therefore, films that attempted to establish their own artistic purity often separated themselves from the novel and mainstream cinema by foregrounding the absence of intertitles. Vachel Lindsay, in his groundbreaking book *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), notes that "the ideal film has no words printed on it at all, but is one unbroken sheet of photography" (10). It is a statement that is echoed by early filmmaker F.W. Murnau, who stated in the 1928 essay "Films of the Future" that "The silent film will remain and develop into its perfect form, a film without a single written line" (27). Several films attempted this feat, including Murnau's own *Last Laugh* and James Sibley
Watson's 1928 *Fall of the House of Usher*, but the limitations of purely visual storytelling become painfully evident in these works; they are difficult to follow, and long visual sequences are required to show what could be replaced with a word or two. The most successful attempt was Dziga Vertov’s 1929 experimental documentary *Man with a Movie Camera*, where the second intertitle paradoxically boasts that it is “a film without intertitles.” However, it is successful precisely because it attempts to show how the camera manipulates reality, not how a linear chain of events is conveyed. Therefore, even though many shared the text-free aesthetic ideal, the products of this aesthetic never gained mass appeal.

On the other hand, other early filmmakers and theorists (especially in Russia) saw numerous benefits to the use of intertitles. For early filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, the use of text provided an “immediately political” functionality (Hillier 76), perhaps because of the visual nature of text in Russian social constructivist political propaganda. This propaganda, typically in the form of posters or flyers, altered the shape of words to convey urgency, making them intense incitements for social change. Although Eisenstein does not use the typography typical of these posters, there is something of that same urgency in his intertitles. For example, at the end of his film *Battleship Potemkin*, a fleet of government ships moves to attack a ship that is inciting revolution, only to join the revolutionary crew at the last moment. In the tense moment when the audience isn’t sure whether a fight will ensue, the ship’s flags are raised, and when a crewman reads them, the intertitle triumphantly reads, “Brothers!” The printed word “brothers,” when placed in a critical moment in the film and followed with an
exclamation point, mimics the voice of a social constructivist propaganda poster. It is both diegetic (the dialogue) and extradiagnostic, a call to arms, allowing the film to take on the voice of an agitator. In a spirit more befitting of capitalism, American film directors found that intertitles provided a means of advertising their own involvement in the film. Studios quickly discovered that the director’s name or the name of the studio could be placed on an intertitle without hindering the title’s effectiveness, and by the early 1910s, branded intertitles were common practice. In the intertitles to Griffith’s 1915 Birth of a Nation, every intertitle read: “Griffith” on the top left and the top right, as well as “DG” at the bottom, meaning that every intertitle was an opportunity to simultaneously advance the plot and self-promote. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9. An intertitle from Birth of a Nation.

The 1997 film Starship Troopers uses text in the same fashion but in a much more overt manner, parodying nationalist propaganda.

Russian politics during Sergei Eisenstein’s early career would not allow for the kind of branding that American films flaunted. In fact, Eisenstein was often pressured to leave his name off the credits of his films in order to encourage the idea that no one person was responsible for their production.
Notably, as plots grew more complex and intertitles became more ingrained into the film itself, this practice actually decreased, allowing for intertitles to flow more naturally with their visual accompaniment.

Kamilla Elliott argues in her 2000 article “Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars” that a common metanarrative of film history is that “intertitles constituted a temporary crutch while film fumbled towards its manifest destiny” (15). They were an unpleasant necessity. However, if this were the case, then all films would have developed into less textually dependent works. This, says Elliott, is not so, as (in the majority of films) “intertitles grew longer and more frequent during the late silent period” (15). In other words, silent film aesthetic may have valued less text, but in practice, text became increasingly useful for filmmakers and film audiences, as a few short words in an intertitle could easily replace a large amount of visual explanation. For films such as Griffith’s 1916 film Intolerance, which tells four stories in four different time periods, the intertitle was an essential means of sorting out the visual data and placing it into a narrative that could be appreciated by popular audiences. Elliott notes that even though a “‘picture is worth a thousand words’ [...] an intertitle is worth a thousand feet of film” (Rethinking the Film/Novel Debate 88).

Debates over the value of intertitles may seem superfluous after the development of synchronized sound in film. An actual voice does what the “dialogue” intertitle only suggested, and voice-over narration does what the narrative intertitle did with less intrusion. Many film purists argued that synchronized sound would have a negative
effect on the art, but even the filmmakers that did protest eventually gave in to making “talking” films.\(^91\)

However, as the examples of Eisenstein and Griffith show, intertitles performed certain functions that synchronized sound could not replicate. They speak to the viewer from outside the diegesis, and although the intertitles provide the words, the viewer must provide the voice. It is this power that allows the intertitle to persevere, to show up in films despite their status as conventions of an outdated technology. Sean Cubitt agrees in his essay “Preliminaries for a Taxonomy and Rhetoric of On-Screen Writing” where he attempts to develop a language for speaking about on-screen writing. He states, “You might expect that, with sound, the intertitle would have disappeared: far from it. Even the advent of recorded dialog could not loosen the grip on the written word” (60).\(^92\)

This “grip” is most familiar to modern viewers in the openings to films, where intertitles are often used to establish a back-story, a setting, and narrative authority. For example, the intertitle that begins the 1941 Howard Hawks film The Maltese Falcon (see Figure 10) establishes the history of the object that will be the subject of the story. Its role is nearly identical to the intertitle that begins the 1919 Victor Fleming film When the

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\(^91\) The two most well-known protests to sound in film are Rudolph Arnheim’s “The New Laocoon,” and Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov’s “Statement on Sound.”

\(^92\) In “Preliminaries,” Sean Cubitt surveys many of the different types of on-screen writing, with an emphasis in non-diegetic text (text outside of the story-world) including titles and credits. However, as Cubitt admits with the world “preliminary,” it does not provide an in-depth treatment of any one type of on-screen writing, nor does it cover diegetic writing (words within the story-world). Nevertheless, Cubitt is one of the few authors to give a serious academic treatment of on-screen writing, which he calls “the most critically underrepresented of film codes” (60). For my own attempt at a preliminary taxonomy, see: http://anaudiafilms.com/textinfilm.htm
Clouds Roll By. Both establish a back-story and position the reader within the story as it begins.

Figure 10: On the left, an intertitle from the 1941 (sound film) The Maltese Falcon. On the right, an intertitle from the 1919 film When the Clouds Roll By.

Both examples use text that is subscripted over an existing image. The image and typeface of the text help to establish the “tone” of the film and also help to ease the transition from text to film-world. A modern example is the introduction to the 1977 film Star Wars, where the opening text sails into space like the spacecraft that inhabit the story-world.

Often, introductory intertitles establish a kind of literary legitimacy by making their opening appear to be a book. This is a practice that has continued throughout the history of film, from the earliest silents to contemporary mainstream films. For example, when the 1928 Carl Dreyer film The Passion of Joan of Arc begins, an ancient book is opened to show that the story is being told accurately from an ancient script. The intertitle before the images explains that the library at the Chamber des Députés holds the records of Joan of Arc’s trial, that both the questions and the answers were transcribed.
exactly and that “in reading it, we discover the real Joan.” The implication is that the film that follows is a visual rendition of the trial as it is recorded in this original manuscript. Ironically, Casper Tybjerg notes in his commentary to the film that the manuscript presented in the film isn’t, in fact, the manuscript from the Chamber des Députés at all, but instead a copy that resides elsewhere. Furthermore, the image doesn’t rest long enough to give the viewer a chance to read or examine it; presenting its existence is enough.

This is a pattern that is followed by many films even after sound technology was well established, especially in adaptations. It wasn’t necessary to allow the viewer to read the book, only to show that the book existed, thus borrowing the novel’s legitimacy. Films such as Oliver Twist (1933), Little Women (1933), and The Man in the Iron Mask (1939) all used books in their openings. In 1944, when Robert Stevenson released his version of Jane Eyre, the credits are placed on turning pages that fade into the book itself opening into the film-world.93 (See Figure 11.)

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93 I learned much of what I know about books in film from Carol Dole’s Sept. 2007 talk on “The Book as Image in Film Adaptations of the Thirties and Forties” It was presented at the Annual Conference for the Association of Literature on Screen Studies.
Although such overt calls to textual authority faded as the film industry gained confidence in its ability to produce sources, the book-intertitle is still used in contemporary film, including films like the 2001 film *The Royal Tenenbaums* and the 2004 animated film *Shrek*, which begins with a book of fairy tales. Therefore, there is an authority, legitimacy, or sense of a story-world that is enacted by a shot of a book that has not been completely replaced by voice-over narration or other conventions.

Furthermore, the printed word also has a unique ability to allow the film to speak as if were directly addressing the viewer. It is a process that is enacted when the intertitle offers text as if it were a dialogue card, but fails to establish an actual speaker. Without a referent, the words appear as if the film itself were speaking to the audience through the text. For example the 1919 Griffith film *Broken Blossoms* is a tragedy in which a brutal father beats a young girl (Lucy). As Lucy lies dying at the end, an intertitle reads, “Dying, she gives her last little smile to the world that has been so unkind.” Since the viewer is well aware that she is dying, the intertitle does not reveal
anything unknown, nor does it help to establish time or identity. In fact, it isn’t technically necessary to the viewer’s comprehension of the scene at all. It is a problematic voice in the film because it is notably human, as is evidenced by its emotional plea, but it does not represent the dialogue of any character in the film. Therefore, it has a human voice but no body from which that voice could emanate. Like the omniscient narrator of a novel, it appears to see everything from outside of the story-world, at times telling the story, at other times commenting on it. Just as the omniscient narrator of the novel isn’t necessarily tied to the author or a character and is simply considered the “voice” of the novel, this type of intertitle could be considered the voice of the film, a “filmic consciousness” that reveals itself through textual commentary.

The idea of an intertitle as the “voice of the film” is strengthened by the manner in which the text has a kind of authority that the image itself might not. In the scene, the text makes sure the film produces the desired emotion by telling the viewer how to feel, just in case the power of the image was not enough. There is no guessing whether Lucy’s death was tragic or not, because “her last little smile to the world that has been so unkind” leaves little doubt. The intertitle has no voice other than the one the viewer provides while reading it, making it appear to speak to the viewer in a God-like, all-knowing voice of authority. The post-silent era feature that comes closest to this role of the intertitle is the “expert commentary” that is often available on contemporary DVDs where a scholar speaks about the film as the film is playing. Although the two are not exactly parallel, both have a means of speaking to the viewer directly during the film itself. However, unlike the intertitle, the DVD commentary has a voice that can be linked
to an actual person, meaning that the intertitle itself provides a function that synchronized sound conventions cannot replicate exactly.

The two unique abilities of text in film covered so far (back-story and the voice of the film) are notably distinct from the film's world. Like the chapter titles in a novel, they frame the narrative from the outside. However, when filmmakers such as F.W. Murnau and Robert Wiene began to adopt the cinematic aesthetic that viewed text as an intrusion, they experimented with ways of making the text appear as if it was part of the diegesis. A good example is the 1920 film The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari by Robert Wiene. In this film, each of the intertitles seems to be native to the film rather than external to it. First, the intertitles and the images work like parts of a sentence. An image or text begins and the subsequent image or text helps to continue the thought. The ellipses at the end of the intertitles help to increase this sense of continuous movement. Note this sequence from the beginning of the film, where the protagonist is beginning to tell the story of how he met Dr. Caligari. (See Figure 12.)

Figure 12: A Series from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

The first frame is a dialogue intertitle that ends with two dashes, leading the viewer into the subject of the text: the town. The shot then flashes to the speaker and another
intertitle, "him—", which leads the viewer to the initial shot of Dr. Caligari. The intitiles are visually structured to flow into the image that follows it, and the ellipsis after the last word in the text suggest that the image naturally follows, as if it were an adjective. The painter of the intitiles in Caligari, Hermann Warm, was also responsible for the sets (Patalas 26), which is why the typography, the tinting, and the angular design behind the words all work to mimic the structure of the subsequent image, as if the words and the images were part of the same story-world. These intitiles perform the same function as a "classic" intitile (they order and clarify the stream of visual images) and yet they are distinct because they attempt minimize the distraction of the jump from text to story world.

As I noted earlier, this presentation of the intitile appears to be a reaction to a film aesthetic that viewed text as a necessary but distracting narrative aid. Attempts to do away with text entirely were rarely successful, but movies that utilized too much text failed to exemplify the medium specificity that film directors and theorists valued. An alternative approach to solving this problem appeared in the form of the filmed image of text, where the words actually do exist inside the film world. For example, note these two filmed images from Alfred Hitchcock’s silent film The Ring (1927), a film released the same year that synchronized sound technology was successfully used in a major cinematic release (The Jazz Singer).
Hitchcock, who worked as an intertitle writer early in his film career, used the filmed image of writing in many of his early silents. By placing the writing within the film world, it allowed for clarification and temporal ordering but did not require the viewer to leave the story world. In fact, the viewer is typically drawn-in by images of reading because they are asked to read alongside the character. Although Hitchcock still primarily relied on traditional intertitles, almost all of his silent works have at least two filmed images of writing, as can be seen in films such as The Pleasure Garden (1925), The Lodger (1927) and The Ring (1927). This manner of representing text never replaced the non-diegetic intertitles of text in silent cinema, but it did continue after traditional intertitles had essentially disappeared. Films such as Fritz Lang’s first “talkie” M (1931), Michael Curtiz’ Casablanca (1942), and Hitchcock’s own Spellbound (1945), all utilize filmed images of writing.

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94 Images of all of Hitchcock’s intertitles are available at http://www.hitchcockwiki.com/hitchcock/wiki/Intertitle
It is a means of representation that carries over into contemporary cinema as well. Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) uses diegetic writing in many forms, including filmed documents, writing on photographs, and tattoos. However, where as early images of writing had primarily acted as a means of temporally structuring a stream of visual images, the film *Memento* uses this same device to question the structuring ability of text, challenging the authority of the word within filmic narrative. This challenge then speaks to the concerns of the film as a whole, including memory, authority, trauma, and history.

**Memento**

In Christopher Nolan's 2000 film *Memento*, the protagonist Leonard Shelby is struck in the head during an assault that left his wife dead and his short-term memory destroyed. Driven by fragmented memories of his wife, he vows to get revenge on the killers, but without the ability to form new memories, Leonard resorts to writing down everything that he has to remember on scraps of paper and Polaroid pictures. These fragments then serve as his short-term memory. To mimic the confusion caused by Leonard's condition, the film is structured as a series of analepses, which are arranged in reverse chronological order. Using Seymour Chatman's distinction between discourse-time (the time it takes to read or watch) and story-time (the time within the narrative) (*Story and Discourse* 62), we can say that the chronological beginning of discourse-time in *Memento* is the chronological end of story-time. The two times approach each other.
from opposite ends and pass, so that the end of discourse-time marks the beginning of story-time.\textsuperscript{95}

Structuring the film in this fashion has an immersive effect; the viewer is often just as confused as Leonard is, looking for ways to find structure without a structuring past. However, the viewer has advantages that Leonard does not, including the ability to piece together the past through memory, and the ability to see Leonard’s story multiple times.\textsuperscript{96} Bruce Isaacs notes in \textit{New Punk Cinema} that “While the narrative of \textit{Memento} is all but impenetrable on a first viewing, repeated viewings illuminate a simple plot: Leonard is searching for his wife’s murderer but is disadvantaged by his condition. He relies on notes, Polaroid photographs, tattoos, and other inscriptions of the truth in lieu of the truth itself, which, even if he were to discover it, he would soon forget” (134).

Unlike text in films that is often caught “in passing,” (street signs, billboards, etc.) the camera in \textit{Memento} often freezes on the text, either as it is being read or as it is being written (see the stills below). Typically, it takes up the entire screen with only minimal distractions. Although I have argued that filmed images of text continued far

\textsuperscript{95} Since the philosophy of Deleuze has appeared in several chapters, it is important to note that an analysis of \textit{Memento}’s temporality is well served by Deleuze’s concept of the time-image. For a treatment of this, see Lyons’ “Vengeance, the Powers of the False, and the Time-Image in Christopher Nolan’s \textit{Memento}.”

\textsuperscript{96} The “multiple viewings” requirement seems to be uniquely post-cinematic, although it can be seen in the earlier examples of cinema. For example, at the end of \textit{The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari}, we learn that the protagonist is in an asylum (a fact we learn about Leonard as well), and with that knowledge, repeat viewings of the film are altered to question the narrator’s reliability. For more on repeat viewings, see Karl Kroeber’s \textit{Make Believe in Film and Fiction: Visual vs. Verbal Storytelling}. 
beyond the silent era, *Memento* is distinct because of the amount of reading it requires, approaching the level that was required in silent films.

In most examples of intertitles and filmed images of text, the text seeks to arrange and order the narrative. Although exceptions do occur, such as the intertitles of "How it Feels to be Run Over," text is typically used as a structuring tool. This can be as complicated as the back-story of the *Maltese Falcon* (see Figure 9) or as simple as the intertitles that name the days of the week in the 1995 film *Se7en*. In each instance, the text establishes an authority that (since it is "bodiless") is difficult to contradict. Initially, *Memento* is a film that seems to deny the viewer the kind of order that traditional films offer. Diran Lyons notes that it "takes a narrative that once transpired in a straightforward manner, cut[s] all the scenes into discrete parts, and splice[s] them back together once again in reverse order" (128). The single most prevalent element that assists in assembling this "simple plot" in chronological order is the presence of text. At times, this text has metaphorical significance, and other times it is banal, but it frequently serves to signal the end of one scene and the beginning of another, adding a chronological temporality to an otherwise confusing structure. Chisholm notes in "Reading Intertitles" that intertitles often "link the various component episodes" of a story with simple phrases like "the next day" or "later." The text in *Memento* is not nearly this direct, but its linking effect is the same. For example, note the two stills below (Figure 14).
These stills are practically identical, including the position of the thumb as it holds the Polaroid and the scribbled note. However, they are from two different consecutive flashbacks in the film. The first flashback ends with the text at 16:33, and the second flashback begins with the same text at 25:12. In discourse-time, still one comes before still two, but in story-time, still two comes first. The tool that assists in this troubling arrangement is the presence of text, helping the viewer to convert story-time into a more digestible chronological structure by placing this “intertitle” at the end of one flashback and at the beginning of another. Furthermore, in both cases, the Polaroid and the text suggest a past that the viewer has not seen and Leonard cannot remember, but its very presence suggests that something did happen, a time when Leonard met Natalie, took her picture, wrote the note, and so on.

There are several other instances of text stringing together flashbacks. For example, note these three shots of the text on Natalie’s photo:
This series shows how chronological time can be reconstructed through the development of a textual artifact. In the first still, Leonard is looking at the completed text; in the second still he is writing it; and in the third, he is scribbling out the text that is then presented as a "blot" in the two preceding stills. Of course, this is greatly removed from the intertitles that simply read "later" or "the next day" in early cinema (Chisholm 138), but the ordering effect is remarkably similar. The text conveys a temporal order that would be difficult if not impossible to relay without a textual aid.\(^7\)

In addition to the ability of the expository intertitle to order the filmic, the intertitle also allows for an uncanny "bodiless" commentary on the film itself. Just as the "voice" of the intertitle in *Broken Blossoms* spoke about the film itself, the text in *Memento*, in the form of tattoos and notes, performs a similar function. For example, one of Leonard's tattoos simply states, "consider your sources." Unlike the other tattoos, which summarize events or "facts" (the most prevalent reads, "John G raped and killed my wife"), this phrase doesn't paraphrase an event in the past, nor does it show how...

\(^7\) There are many filmic (non-textual) codes to signify a temporal change, but significantly less that allow for temporal ordering. Lap dissolves imply that time has passed, and "ripple" fades suggest that the scene is moving into the past. However, without using some sort of text (even as minimal as a date) it is difficult for a series of *durées* to convey their own temporal order. When they choose not to, as in *Last Year at Marienbad*, the viewer is led to believe that the notion of chronological time in the story-world does not exist.
Leonard is, in fact, rewriting the past. Instead, it presents a guideline on how to organize the past, a rule for gathering information that is valid. However, the tattoo becomes a statement upon the film itself when the information Leonard gathers and tattoos on himself becomes a “source” itself. Leonard is never able to “consider the source” of any of his artifacts because the words themselves become a source the instant he falls asleep and wakes up without any memory of creating them. The viewer, unlike Leonard, has a privileged view of seeing many of the notes and tattoos being created. For Leonard, each time he sees the notes and tattoos, it is as if a different hand created them. In other words, in the diegesis, the words are sourceless; they speak to Leonard as if they were a different voice, a voice that he can only assume is his own. In this fashion (similar to the “bodiless” voice of the intertitle), the text speaks to Leonard from the unknown, and yet he trusts this text, just as the viewer trusts the traditional intertitle. Both establish authority merely through their textual presence.

Since the viewer is reading along with Leonard, trapped (for the most part) in a world defined by his subjective experiences, the text speaks to the viewer as well. “Consider your sources” reminds the viewer that what is being seen, read, and heard are mediated through Leonard, who is a thoroughly unreliable narrator. It also reinforces the fact that there are multiple instances in the film where Leonard’s tattoos (and other texts) are manipulated by Natalie and Teddy, meaning that even if the text physically originated from him, it could have actually originated from any number of

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98 In college classes that introduce library resources, this message above all others is highlighted due to students’ habit of looking for the fastest information, rather than information that has been validated.
sources. Like the "commentary" intertitle in silent films, it has ambiguous points of origin, and it speaks both to the film (warning Leonard) and of the film (warning the viewer) about the complications associated with establishing a narrative.

Like the traditional intertitle, it is not only the content of text in Memento that functions like an intertitle; it is also the form. As the example from The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari shows (Figure 11), the way words were shaped in intertities helped establish the tone and rhythm of the film. Text in Memento also helps to perform this function. The best example of this is the recurring phrase "Remember Sammy Jenkis," which is tattooed on Leonard’s hand. It is a unique textual piece in the film for several reasons. First, it appears at regular intervals throughout the film, as Leonard is constantly checking it. Second, it is Leonard’s only uncovered tattoo. Third, it is the only tattoo that is inscribed in cursive; all the others are printed in capital letters. Its status as "outside" of the guidelines followed by the other tattoos calls attention to its importance. (See Figure 16.)

Figure 16: Two shots of the “Remember Sammy Jenkis” tattoo, one from the beginning of the film (10:36), another from the end (1:49:54).
The words appear on screen for an extended duration six times throughout the film (6:31, 10:36, 20:56, 1:19:54, 1:22:04, and 1:49:54) and “in passing” at multiple other instances. The text is echoed by both voice-over narration, in which Leonard reads the words as he sees them, and in multiple points throughout the film where the phrase is used in conversations. In essence, the phrase acts as a kind of chorus, always bringing Leonard and the viewer back to this particular act, which is ultimately revealed to be the memory of his former life. In addition to the contextual significance, the text provides the film with a point of fixity from which the film can venture in multiple directions. Since the “Remember Sammy Jenkis” tattoo is always followed by a different filmic narrative, it takes on an anaphoric quality, using repetition as both an anchor and a launching point, not unlike phrases such as “I’m with you in Rockland” from Howl. In Ginsburg’s beat manifesto, the text embarks on various lines of flight from the single repeated phrase; in Memento, visual streams are launched from the repeated line. Both “endings” carry the syntactic rhythm the repeated line establishes.

Challenging Textual Authority

In early cinema, the intertitle typically had a fixed shape, a fix method of placement, and a limited set of uses. Even as it was changed by filmmakers like Wiene and Hitchcock, it still acted as an element of order, using text to structure the more freely flowing visuals. Although the use of text in Memento functions in many instances in a similar fashion, assembling a discontinuous stream of images, it also performs in ways that are notably different than its ancestor. In fact, the text in Memento often
functions in a way that challenges the ordering and structuring tendencies of text. It uses text that subverts the traditional reading process and it forces a "dual reading" (reading as text and reading as image) that ultimately problematizes the authority that the intertitle once established.

A good example of this challenge is the tattoo across Leonard’s chest that reads, “John G. raped and murdered my wife” (Figure 17), which is held on-screen at multiple points throughout the work.

![Figure 17: Two shots of the tattoo that is written across Leonard’s chest backwards.](image)

This tattoo functions in some ways like the “narrative summary” intertitle, explaining in a brief line what ultimately takes a significant amount of time to reveal visually. Also, like a traditional intertitle, the text (by virtue of being text) establishes an authoritative voice, an effect that is aided by the severity of the act of tattooing. In an essay entitled “Factualizing the Tattoo: Actualizing Personal History Through Memory in Christopher Nolan’s Memento,” Christopher Williams notes that “they [the tattoos] seem to be given viability on the basis of his decision to inscribe them on his body. This notion, somewhat akin to the biblical precedent that the truth is inscribed on the heart, gives the ‘facts’ a permanence that Leonard’s other notes and photographs lack” (n.p.).
However, the tattoo also functions in a manner that is beyond the scope of the traditional intertitle. First of all, the text is written backward, a method of inscription that makes reading difficult, but not impossible. The backward structure allows for two unique functions. First, since the story itself is told in fragments that are linked in reverse chronological order (essentially, told “backward”), this mode of writing becomes performative as well as constative; the backward narrative summary mimics that backward structure of the narrative as a whole. Second, the text’s shape allows it to be (mostly) illegible until Leonard looks in a mirror (both shots in Figure 17 are mirror shots) and when it becomes legible, all other text (the other tattoos on his body) becomes essentially illegible. This process calls the viewer’s attention to the necessity of a mediating device to read the text. The mirror becomes the “screen” on which the words are displayed, foregrounding the fact that all the words being read by the viewer also require a screen. In this process, the screen loses any illusion of transparency; it is not a window into Leonard’s world, but rather a necessary element in the process of seeing and reading.

This emphasis on the relationship between surface and script is suggestive of “screen thinking,” a mode of reading developed by Anne-Marie Christin (1195) in L’image Ecrite and supported by Jan Baetens in “Screen Narratives” and “Illustrations, Images, and Anti-Illustrations” (appears in Hock’s Eloquent Images 179-200). In this

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99 There is a connection between the mirror scene in Memento and the mirrors that are placed in classic works of art such as Velasquez’ Las Meninas, Van Eyck’s Arnolfini Wedding and Metsys’ The Money Changer and his Wife. In each case, the mirror reveals something that would be impossible to see from a single perspective, thus calling attention to the act of seeing and the invisibility that always accompanies the visual act.
theory, "there is no longer any fundamental dichotomy of screen and sign. Instead of defining the screen as the surface (2-D or 3-D), Christin makes a plea for the simultaneous emergence and mutual shaping of both elements. Without a screen, no sign is even imaginable” (Baetens “Screen Narratives” 4). By calling attention to the screen, Baetens picks apart the subservient role of the surface, making the blackboard as viable as the chalked image inscribed upon it, or in this case, the movie screen as viable as the images projected upon it.

As text, the tattoo is read through a syntactic pattern of decoding (left to right), but as an image, the text must be read as part of a network of other images, including the other tattoos, the shirt, the skin, and the surface. In this fashion, the tattoo as text and the tattoo as image become mutually informing, as the emotions associated with the jagged and aggressively formed lettering is linked to the horror associated with the assault of Leonard’s wife. Also, by viewing the tattoo as image, the viewer can see how its textual attempt to establish a chain of events is subverted by the singular temporality of the space in which the words are inscribed. Leonard’s body is a collage of “facts” with few hints as to what order should be used in order to read them in series. Therefore, as text, the tattoo attempts to establish order, but as an image among many others on a screen, this effort is negated.

Furthermore, the viewer sees that the text is only visible during the diegetic act of reading. When the viewer reads the “John G.” tattoo, she is able to do so only because the characters are also reading. This duality is emphasized in the second still of Figure 17 where Natalie looks into the mirror to read the tattoo just as Leonard does. As they
read, so does the viewer, and in so doing, the image calls attention to the fact that reading on-screen is much different than reading on a page. On paper, the words are present for as long as one wishes to stare at them, but as Sean Cubitt notes, “on-screen writing is as ephemeral as speech” (“Preliminaries,” 60). The film, not the viewer, establishes the time allowed for reading and the pace at which the text can be read. Since authority is linked with permanence, Leonard’s tattoos assume a kind of viability, like commandments written in stone. However, without contemporary viewing technologies like the DVD or the VCR, the act of reading these tattoos becomes a race against the will of the camera, and the fact that characters are often portrayed in the act of reading through a screen (the mirror) enhances this effect. Therefore, Memento places the perceived permanence and authority of the written word on a perpetually mobile surface and thereby becomes a challenge to the manner in which the written word stakes its authoritative claims. It enacts Christin and Baetens’ concept of “screen thinking” by showing how the surface restructures the inscription.100

Memento and the Scene of Writing

Traditional intertitles presented themselves as finished products, a completed “voice” emanating from the film itself. Memento, on the other hand, often shows the act

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100 This challenge to textual authority extends throughout the film. Whereas the intertitle spoke assertively to the viewer, establishing order, the “John G.” tattoo and the conditions required for its viewing show how text can challenge this order as well. As the film progresses, the content of this tattoo is challenged; there are clues in the form of flashbacks that suggest that Leonard’s wife wasn’t really murdered. Another tattoo reads “John or James G” suggesting that the killer’s name may or may not actually be “John,” but only a name that starts with a “J.” Furthermore, there are multiple instances of other people influencing Leonard’s “facts,” and at the end of the film, Leonard purposefully alters the facts to maintain his own illusion of selfhood.
of inscription, linking the printed word to a creator. Not only is the viewer “reading” the notes, Polaroids, and tattoos, the viewer is also seeing them being created. However, as this chapter has attempted to display, even the simplest phrases in Memento are profoundly weighted with meaning, due to the conditions under which the words are inscribed. Leonard is attempting to mimic memory by technical means, making visible an act (the creation of memories) that is generally internal and invisible.

In 1925, the same year that Hitchcock was experimenting with filmed images of text in The Pleasure Garden (and only two years before The Ring), Sigmund Freud published “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad,” an attempt to use inscription as a model for explaining memory and the unconscious. Hitchcock wanted to use writing to impose a natural structure upon a stream of visual images, while Freud was attempting to show how writing provides a means of understanding the structure of memory. As I have attempted to show thus far, Hitchcock’s technique helps to explain Memento’s use of text as an ordering tool as well as the way that Memento separates itself from this tradition. Freud’s model allows us to consider the implications of Memento’s use of text as it relates the film’s larger themes of memory and repression.

In “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad,” Freud begins by suggesting several technological means of supplementing memory. His initial method is a piece of paper, but he finds that it fills up quickly, and he is “obliged to bring another sheet into use” (207). In attempting to find a surface that never fills, he suggests a piece of slate, which, when written on with chalk, allows for easy erasure. However, he misses the permanence of the paper, since once the board is erased, nothing remains of the words.
His solution is the “Mystic Writing Pad,” a child’s toy that has two layers, an outermost celluloid layer, and a waxed paper, which both rest on a wax slab. One may make impressions on the celluloid surface, and then erase them by separating the two layers. However, some impression of the inscription remains in the wax slab. For Freud, this was a model for the way that sensory impressions could be received by the “perceptual apparatus” and then retained in the unconscious even after it is erased from conscious memory.

At a surface level, both Freud and Leonard appear to be engaged in a similar activity, using inscription to mimic memory. However, they appear to differ in their perceptions of how writing and memory relate. For Freud, the writing apparatus is a supplement, a mnemonic device that helps to recall an existing memory. Leonard, on the other hand, due to his trauma, believes he has nothing to supplement. The writing does not help him recall existing memories; it constitutes the only traces of the past that he can possess. However, from the flashbacks (which show Leonard in an institution and Leonard’s wife surviving the attack) and Teddy’s revelation at the end, the viewer knows that Leonard is capable of having memories and is, in fact, choosing to repress them. Therefore, writing is not a supplement to memory (Freud) or a textual replacement of memory; it is a form of repression. Writing becomes the way in which memories are kept from rising to the surface.

Although repression is a concept that is considered in almost all of Freud’s works, especially in The Interpretation of Dreams and Beyond the Pleasure Principle, the “Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad” chooses not to explore the ways that repression
can be analyzed through the consideration of the writing/memory apparatus. However, in the essay “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” Derrida is able to extend Freud’s final analogy to consider repression when he examines Freud’s “third analogy.” Here, Freud notes that “the writing vanished every time the close contact is broken between the paper which receives the stimulus and the wax slab that receives the impression” (212). Freud is suggesting that his model works backward as well, the wax slab (the unconscious) shaping the inscriptions that appear on the outermost layer (the perceptual layer). Derrida calls this one of the “most interesting” analogies, perhaps because of the “backward” model that Freud is suggesting. Rather than depicting the writing/memory model as an act of inscription that goes only one way (starting at the top layer, through the middle layer, and into the slab), Freud is suggesting that the material inscribed on the wax slab (the repressed unconscious) travels the other way as well. On the pad, the new inscription cannot exist without contacting the slab, and, by analogy, new perceptions cannot be made without being informed by the unconscious. For Derrida, this motion of written inscription “from within to the outside” (“Freud” 227) challenges conceptions of the secondary nature of inscription, since the writing is “supplement[ing] perception before perception even appears to itself” (224). In other words, writing is occurring before the act it appears to be supplementing.

However, Freud only considers the breach that allows for the path between the layers to be created. The stylus presses against the top layer, moving through the second layer and into the wax slab, forming not only an impression, but a dark area where that impression is made. This is where Freud’s investigation in the “Note” stops. Derrida
continues by showing that what makes that inscription possible is the repression of all other points of contact. He states that “writing is unthinkable without repression. The condition for writing is that there be neither a permanent contact nor an absolute break between strata: the vigilance and failure of censorship” (226). In this example “permanent contact” between the layers would cause a completely black screen, while an “absolute break” would result in a total lack of writing. Therefore, writing depends on the absence of these conditions. and ironically, the act of holding back expression (repression) becomes the key element in expression.

Freud’s model of memory and Derrida’s extension of it allow for a reconsideration of Leonard’s use of writing. If writing in the logocentric model (Freud’s model) is a supplement to memory, then the writing in Memento must be a way of aiding an existing memory. Leonard, in the act of repressing painful memories, believes that there are no memories to supplement. The text (in his conscious mind) functions not as a supplement, but as a replacement, an idea that he supports when he argues for the fallibility of memory:

Memory’s not perfect. It’s not even that good. Ask the police; eyewitness testimony is unreliable. The cops don’t catch a killer by sitting around remembering stuff. They collect facts, make notes, draw conclusions. Facts, not

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101 Derrida’s model most certainly influenced Anne-Marie Christin’s “Screen Thinking,” which considers that “screens hide as much as they reveal” (Baetens “Screen Narratives” 3); they can only allow for signs to be present by hiding other signs.

102 Derrida continues his “extension” of Freud’s model by explaining that the machine has begun “to resemble memory more closely” (228). In other words, for Freud the apparatus is a tool for analogy, hence always retaining its status as a supplement. For Derrida, the machine (and the consideration of more complicated machines) challenges the dichotomy of human/machine; it transforms from a model of memory to the act of memory itself.
memories: that's how you investigate. I know, it's what I used to do. Memory can change the shape of a room or the color of a car. It's an interpretation, not a record. Memories can be changed or distorted and they're irrelevant if you have the facts.

However, as the film unravels, the viewer sees that writing becomes progressively less about "having the facts" than it is about repressing facts. At the end of the film, Leonard learns that his quest to kill "John G." ended a year ago, and that he simply doesn't remember it. Faced with the horror of losing his only purpose in life (finding his wife's murderer), he purposefully alters one of his tattoos to read the license plate number of his friend Teddy, knowing that Teddy will then become the object of his hunt and allow him to continue with his revenge. Therefore, when Leonard tattoos the license plate number as "Fact 6," he is actually repressing the fact that he no longer has anyone to hunt.

Other tattoos reveal similar repressive techniques. As noted earlier, the tattoo "Remember Sammy Jenkis" appears multiple times throughout the work, and it often serves to "ground" Leonard by reminding him of another person who had lost his short-term memory. The Sammy Jenkis of Leonard's memory was unable to get by and was ultimately institutionalized. Leonard wants to "remember" him to prevent the same thing from happening to him. However, during one of Leonard's flashbacks (see Figure 18), we see Sammy in an institution and then a quick cut to Leonard sitting in the same place.
The brief glimpse of Leonard suggests that he is, in fact, capable of making short-term memories. He has repressed them by replacing his past with the story of Sammy Jenkis. Therefore, his textual reminder to "Remember Sammy Jenkis" is not a way of holding on to fact so much as it is repressing fact, substituting another story for one that is too traumatic to remember.

In this act, Leonard moves one step beyond Derrida's interpretation of Freud. For Derrida, "writing is unthinkable without repression" ("Freud" 226). In other words, writing requires repression. For Leonard, writing is repression. The act of inscription is transformed from the impressions on the writing pad to the strata that constitute the pad itself, holding back the markings on the wax slate of the unconscious.

Considering the model that Memento provides, the images of text that serve as ordering techniques in classic intertitles and Hitchcockian images of writing reveal themselves to be quite different. By leading the viewer down a path where the text does not reveal a story so much as it reveals the repression of that same story, the movie reveals that the text is not a supplement to the image at all. It appears to impose

103 Dr. Brian Crawford pointed this out in a meeting in his office, April 28, 2007.
temporal order but does not; it appears to clarify but ultimately only leads to more questions. Like the very first intertitles and their bizarre commentary on the film of a car accident ("Oh, mother will be pleased") the text in Memento does not completely serve nor completely subvert the images of the film, but instead acts as means of expanding the film’s representational boundaries.

This process becomes even more apparent when the act of writing is depicted alongside the act of redaction. Redaction is the act of crossing out material so that no trace of its structure remains. In the traditional use of the word “writing,” redaction is a kind of anti-writing. However, the way in which Memento depicts redaction allows it to become a form of writing in itself. A good example of this is the scene when Teddy tells Leonard to write “do not trust her” on Natalie’s photograph. Leonard is suspicious of the request, but agrees to it anyway; the camera holds on the Polaroid while he writes it. However, his writing style is notably different. When he writes on Polaroids and on his skin he prints in uppercase letters, and he writes slowly and definitively. The style itself speaks to its own authority. In this case, when he writes “do not trust her,” he scribbles it in a cursive script, and in this way the act of writing challenges the content of this writing. When Teddy leaves, Leonard is left with two competing pieces of writing: the words on Teddy’s picture that say (in authoritative print) “do not believe his lies” and the words on Natalie’s picture that read “do not trust her.” Placing the two together,

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104 The exception to this is the tattoo that reads, “Remember Sammy Jenkis,” which is also written in cursive. Since Sammy Jenkis is most likely a product of Leonard’s imagination, one could argue that (like the example listed here) the cursive style signifies distrust in the content of the message. This is ironic because of all the tattoos, this is the one that Leonard trusts the most, and it is the only one he doesn’t keep hidden.

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Leonard evaluates the validity of each statement and crosses out the words “do not trust her.” The words are then illegible, but the scribble lines still remain as a trace of a text that was once there. (See Figure 15.) Its presence as a violently crossed-out line adds depth to the existing text, since the viewer knows (while Leonard does not) that the words underneath the covering negate the words that are visible. As Wolfgang Iser notes in his treatment of Becket, “If a negation can no longer be viewed in terms of any given frame of reference, it explodes into a multiplicity of possibilities” (“The Pattern of Negativity” 141). Again, the viewer does not experience this “multiplicity of possibilities,” but Leonard does; every glance at the text that contains the redaction requires Leonard to repress those possibilities and choose the option that allows him to continue his fantasy life.

In a certain sense, the redaction of text on the Polaroid is similar to erased inscriptions on Freud’s “Mystic Writing Pad” — the words are no longer visible, but a permanent trace remains. The text “do not trust her” is always present even if it cannot be seen. A more subtle and evocative example of redaction is seen in Leonard’s police reports. (See Figure 19.)

105 Leonard’s choice of one text over another has several possible explanations. First, it could be that the choice helps to maintain Leonard’s fantasy of hunting his wife’s killer. However, it could be that the strong lettering of the “Don’t believe his lies” note overpowers the much less forcefully written “do not trust her.” For a performative example of how text asserts control simply by the fashion it is written, see Johanna Drucker’s “Linguistic Authority and the Visual Text” in Figuring the Word.
These pages show a police report that Leonard has annotated, although large amounts of text have been crossed out, and are therefore legible only in pieces. Furthermore, the report reads “MISSING PAGES: 14-17, 19, 23,” suggesting that full sections have disappeared. At first, it may appear that the report was edited by the police in order to protect private information. However, in the final scene of the film Teddy suggests that Leonard is actually erasing the text himself. The dialogue reads:

TEDDY: Look at your police file. It was complete when I gave it to you. Who took the 12 pages out?

LEONARD: You, probably.

TEDDY: No. You took them out.

LEONARD: Why would I do that?

TEDDY: To set yourself a puzzle you won’t ever solve.

If Teddy is telling the truth, then destroying text is how Leonard creates a new narrative. His process is not unlike Tom Phillips’ *A Humument*, where the author covers the text of an existing novel (*A Human Document*) leaving only shards of uncovered text that
then combine to form a new work. However, unlike A Humument, the covered text in Memento is privileged by its own removal, because the facts that are covered are most likely the “real” facts concerning the case. Therefore, reading in Memento depends on redaction. It is both present and shielding, revealing and repressive. Although it never reveals the text underneath, the presence of that text is felt, and that presence changes the meaning of the legible text alongside it.

Just as early intertitles and images of film established order to the pure stream of visuals in silent film, the text also structures Memento, adding organization to its seemingly disparate pieces. Conversely, the truly remarkable use of text in Memento occurs when the text simultaneously subverts those same structuring impulses, challenging the same textual authority it presents and calling attention to the surface upon which the text is inscribed. In so doing, Memento performatively enacts Leonard’s own dilemma: to believe the text and have a purpose, or to recognize its instability and be left with nothing.
CONCLUSION

Michelangelo's most frequently cited theory of sculpture is the idea that a work of art pre-exists inside a solid block of stone, and the sculptor's essential role is to make it visible by doing away with all the superfluous material that surrounds it. In this work, I have used close readings on specific textual artifacts as a way of carving a final project, and my discarded material far outweighs what remains. As a result, most of my work focuses on single works and particular historical circumstances, avoiding the creation of too many all-encompassing claims that would force the texts to fit inside a narrow frame. Nevertheless, whereas Lucky Pierre can end mid-sentence, I cannot, and so I offer this final section as an attempt to offer some general conclusions and prospects for further study.

When describing this project to colleagues, most know authors like Robbe-Grillet, Auster, and Coover, but are not familiar with Last Year at Marienbad, The Book of Illusions, or The Adventures of Lucky Pierre. Judging from this anecdotal evidence alone, we could say that the direct representation of cinema within a literary work tends to relegate that work to an author's list of "minor" publications. I suspect that at least part of the reason for this demoted status is the idea that a detailed representation of a cinematic experience inside a novel attributes a certain hybridity to the work. When the representational differences are emphasized (an act I have labeled "representational
friction”), these novels begin to resemble other literary hybrids, such as graphic novels and French photonovels (photoromans). Although postmodern literary theory champions liberation from the aesthetics of organic unity, the “experimental,” or “minor” status of the major works I cover seems to suggest that this aesthetic is still soundly in place.106

Of course, some works I cover in this dissertation are successful in both popular and academic markets. West’s The Day of the Locust and Percy’s The Moviegoer both appear on Time Magazine’s “All Time 100 Novels.” However, as I argued earlier, The Day of the Locust utilizes the industry of cinema, while dismissing its aesthetic possibilities. What makes it a successful work is not its involvement with movies as they are seen in theatres, but rather its treatment of industry, illusions, and American ideals. Percy’s The Moviegoer certainly is invested in the act of seeing movies, but this act is primarily metaphorical throughout the work. The protagonist’s statements concerning cinema are profound, but the number of pages devoted specifically to cinema in any form are actually quite low.

Therefore, the most successful affinity between film and literature in commercial and academic terms is still cinematic adaptation. This does not negate the value of my project; in fact, it suggests an interesting conclusion. Literature may look to cinema as an experimental form of expanding the perceived limits of its representational mode, but the works that are produced are received as just that, experiments. The same can be said

106 By the “aesthetics of organic unity,” I am referring to Aristotle’s stance in Poetics where a successful plot would “thus resemble a living organism in all its unity, and produce the pleasure proper to it” (256). A modern example of the same principle is described in several of Cleanth Brook’s close readings in The Well-Wrought Urn.
of cinema. Cinema can adapt a narrative from literature, but when it borrows too heavily from literature’s primary means of representation, the word, the cinematic work becomes an experiment and is shown in galleries rather than theatres.

Perhaps the most successful novels that reveal a serious interest in cinematic representation are Thomas Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Both use characters from the film industry and both make a self-conscious statement concerning the cinematic nature of reality. Oedipa Mass in *Lot 49* famously writes, “Shall I project a world?” (64) when she questions how she can distinguish between the clues she is finding and the clues she is creating. *Gravity’s Rainbow* ends with a rocket falling on a movie theatre, suggesting that this is where the entire story as been enacted. Despite the popularity of these works and the possibility that they could serve as successful examples of the integration of cinema in the novel, I mention both works only in passing, primarily because cinematic representation is so deeply interwoven in the text. My project focuses on a proclaimed and undeniable connection with cinema, text that states “this is a film and here is what is happening.” Pynchon works in layers of representation that seem to prohibit this kind of delineation. The lines between cinema and text are blurred in *Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*: so much so that speaking about cinema in these works involves the sort of impressionistic speculations that drove me from adaptation studies.

Nevertheless, Pynchon’s novels anticipate the future of writing-cinema. The works I cover rely on the idea that cinema is its own mode of representation, distinct from all others. However, as multiple authors suggest, cinema is now so heterogeneous,
it is difficult, if not impossible, to say exactly what characterizes it and no other art. As Rosalind Krauss notes in her 2000 essay “A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition”: “Television and video seem Hydra-headed, existing in endlessly diverse forms, spaces and temporalities for which no single instance seems to provide a formal unity for the whole” (31). Cinema is one of the heads of Krauss’ monster, but as her comment suggests, it is not even one of the larger ones; photochemical film and cinematic materiality have been (or soon will be) subsumed by television and video. This shift explains why works like Flicker and Book of Illusions find cinema at its most artistic and mysterious when it is old and lost, dying like a patient on a table. There, in the past, as a body revived for a moment only to disappear completely, the perceived lines between cinema and other forms are more definitive. It was an object difficult to define, but an object nonetheless.

Film in its current state lacks this object-status. In its photochemical form, it was reducible to organic compounds, but in its digital form, it is reducible to a series of numbers. Therefore, writing-cinema must also face its own kind of dispersal, where the representation of a film is indistinguishable from the representation of a television show, a video, or a digital projection. Writing-cinema becomes just plain writing.

Again, I do not see this change negatively. Writers such as Douglas Coupland, Don DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace all utilize multiple forms of visual representation including cinema, television, and multimedia, but do not base their aesthetic on a clear difference between their text and these representational forms. The works I cover emphasize the distinct nature of cinema (even in its dying form), while the
aforementioned works emphasize the absence of this distinction by seamlessly integrating these various modes of representation into their texts.

Therefore, this project looks at both the beginning of writing-cinema and anticipates its conclusion. A loosely structured meta-narrative could begin with characters leaving their safe lives to be a part of the movies (Merton and Locust), lead into characters existing in cinema (Marienbad), and conclude with characters lost in the ruins of cinema (Lucky Pierre and House of Leaves), who are fading as fast as photochemical film. This is not to say that there won't be any works in the future that engage with cinema as directly, only that the majority of literary efforts involving cinema will most likely utilize the kind of integration championed by Pynchon.

Furthermore, this project cannot claim to serve as the final word on the topic of representing cinema. I derive this work's major observations from a specific selection of novels and films and since there are several works that I did not cover, there is certainly more to be said on the topic. First, I focus heavily on American works, but a parallel project could be done that focuses on texts from Britain. Such a project could begin with Rudyard Kipling's story "Mrs. Bathurst" (1904), which by most accounts is the very first literary work to deal explicitly with cinema, and end with Adam Thorpe's Still (1995), a long novel about a director's efforts to make a film about the entire 20th century. Furthermore, the project could be extended to cover works of world literature. Two works in particular, Blaise Cendrars' French novel La Fin du monde filmée par l'Ange N.-D. (1919) and Tanguy Viel's Cinéma are cited in discussions of literary representations of
cinema, but neither work is currently available in translation, making them relatively unknown to English speaking audiences.

A third suggestion for further study is an extension of the themes raised in chapter five, where movies represent text. Intertitles and filmed images of text are only one of many possible areas of exploration in this topic. More work could be done in the representation of the novel as an absorptive technique, the experimental use of superimposed text including subtitles, and the use of text in film that is designed for exhibits rather than theatres. Placing such a study alongside a treatment of cinema in literature would provide a balanced alternative to historical treatments of cinematic adaptation.

Film theorist Sean Cubitt begins his book *The Cinema Effect* (2005) with the simple phrase “I want to know what cinema does” (1). I also want to know what cinema does, but whereas Cubitt is interested in cinema as it exists on a screen, I am interested in how cinema is manifested in literature and how the two forms of representation reconfigure one another within the theatre of the written word. Although this work fails (intentionally perhaps) to derive a significant meta-narrative that valorizes this collection of “minor” works or calls for renewed attention to them, it does succeed at explicating the peculiarities associated with specific intersections of film and text across a wide range of literary artifacts and historical moments. What does cinema do in these instances and what is done to it? In the very best examples, novels portray cinema as perpetually uncapturable, always moving past the logic of formal language and speaking more closely to the language of dreams and the unconscious. Moving images
such as these are impossible to place into words; they refuse orthographic confinement, and yet the novel tries nonetheless, reshaping its words, its presentation of time, and the substance of its universe to move a step closer to the always fleeing object. The text in these works fails, as all language does, to perfectly align the signifier and the signified, and yet the tension created by trying to represent this particular impossibility creates an effect, at times uncanny, at other times immersive, and at its very best, a mix of the two: the thrilling possibility that text can escape its assigned limits and perfectly align with the boundless and continuous.
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