

Reel Consequences: Chasing the Trace, Leaving it Behind

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## **Acknowledgements**

Acknowledgements and thanks to my committee.

## **Dedication**

This thesis, as a whole, is dedicated to my mother. A small thank you for all the constant, unwavering support she's given me. Chapter 2, however, is dedicated to Noah. He and I will always know why.

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*Introduction*

*“Ecstasy is really not part of the scene we can do on celluloid.”<sup>1</sup>*

In early 2012, I spoke at a book signing put on by the San Francisco Historical Society at the Presidio. I was speaking on a panel of other authors, each of whom had contributed work to an anthology on cinephilic pilgrimages and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*: a book exploring secular pilgrimages to the San Francisco filming sites of Hitchcock’s 1958 production. I arrived early and watched the auditorium fill: every seat was taken, and every book was sold. After the speeches and readings were over, audience members lined up to have their books signed. As I was autographing one man’s copy, he asked me to do my best Jimmy Stewart impression. Another asked me to tell the personal love story connected to *Vertigo* I had alluded to in my earlier remarks. But most just wanted to talk to me, to talk to anyone who was of a common mind really, about their own experiences of pilgrimage: they wanted someone to care about their *Vertigo* story. And they, like me, were shocked to find so many others like themselves who did.

A woman who introduced herself as Darlene told me of an annual ritual in which she dresses as Madeleine and stands by the Bay at Fort Point: recreating what is arguably the most iconic scene of the entire film. After telling me about this complex yearly ceremony she holds only for herself (the ritual had, at one time, included an annual frustration: directing her husband’s half-hearted performance as Scottie, but she said it was dropped after he confessed an inability to “pretend he’d never seen me nude before,” for a recreation of the rescue from the Bay), she leaned in close to me and said, “but I do

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<sup>1</sup> Orson Welles, interview by David Frost, *The David Frost Show*, June 4, 1970.

it late at night; I don't want anyone to think I'm nuts." She laughed, thanked me for signing her book, and walked away. Most stories went this way. They were very personal, unique, and carried varying degrees of pride or embarrassment. Though there were those stories which expressed neither, and instead simply conveyed a yearning: to convert long-held, yet-to-be-enacted wishes into creative performance alongside the ghosts of *Vertigo*.

Long-defined as an investigation into "the love of film," cinephilia studies have examined such performativity as that which Darlene related to me. The desire to interact with a beloved film, feeling the provocation to action of any kind, is what cinephilia scholar Paul Willemen calls the craving for "more." In his 1994 essay, "Through the Glass Darkly," Willemen identifies specific moments in film which spark this motivation or enthusiasm for more—more interaction with a film than viewing in a darkened theater allows. He examines those moments which spur us to "writerly" action in particular. The term "writerly" reading as not only literal, as in the act of putting pen to paper or fingers to keys, but as Barthean—as intertextual. The "writerly text," as described in Barthes' *S/Z*, is "ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages."<sup>2</sup> Willemen thereby labels filmic moments which allow for writerly action, which allow for subjective interpretation, creation, and action, as "privileged": "These are moments which, when encountered in a

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.



film, spark something which then produce[s] the energy and the desire to write.”<sup>3</sup>

While there is no need to argue with the assertion that film can encourage the creative potential of its spectators, Willemen’s narrow and indefinite measure of the “moment” begs a question: why is this possibility, this privilege, this creative potential, limited to specific moments? What could be a claim of intertextuality at work between filmic texts and their spectators is complicated and confused by the tethering of that potential to specific “moments.” But that tethering is indicative of Willemen’s indelure to the history and present state of cinephilia studies. In particular, Willemen’s “more” created in “moments,” is wholly bound up in the relationship between film and reality that determines how cinephilia studies analyze and express the broad “love of film” with which it has been defined.

Throughout its long and complex history, cinephilia studies have sought to identify not only *what* movies spectators enjoy, but *why* they enjoy them.<sup>4</sup> And in the effort to answer such questions—to determine why some films are more enjoyed than others—cinephilia scholars defined the fundamental nature of the medium and consequently evaluated the respective quality of films on the degree to which they effectively reflected that nature. From the large bank of potential attributes (e.g. motion, speed, haptic qualities, etc.) with which the medium could be defined, cinephilia isolated the relationship of the screen image to reality as truly defining the “essence” of the medium.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Willemen, “Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered,” in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), 235.

<sup>4</sup> Cinephilia can also refer to the social practices and circumstances of audiences viewing films together, though I am not addressing that particular incarnation of cinephilia here.

This relationship to reality that film has, as its re-presentation, has also been described by reference to semiotics as “indexical.”

The indexical classification of film derives from the complex semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce who defines the indexical sign by its “being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object.”<sup>5</sup> It has, as Tom Gunning summarizes in 2010, “an actual existential connection to its referent.”<sup>6</sup> This conception of the index was first introduced to film studies by Peter Wollen in his 1972 essay “The Semiology of the Cinema” which married the aesthetic writings of André Bazin with Peirce’s philosophy.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Wollen heavily cites Bazin’s canonical “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” essay, lingering on its descriptions of film as an “automatic process,” a “taking of an impression,” a “moulding,” and Bazin’s many other references to various manifestations of the broad concept of the automatic imprint.<sup>8</sup> It is with this emphasis on imprinting seen in Bazin’s text that Wollen supports his argument for an existential link between the photographed object and the projected film, between reality and its filmed image, and hence, also supports his argument that film is indexical.

Although Wollen goes on to repeatedly state that film is not an index alone, but “almost equal amalgam of the symbolic, the iconic and the indexical,” and that it would be “quite misleading to validate one [semiotic] dimension of the cinema unilaterally at the expense of all others,” the attribution of the label “index” to the unique form of the

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism,” in *Peirce on Signs*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991), 251.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Gunning, “Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 255.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Wollen, “The Semiology of the Cinema,” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 171-185

<sup>8</sup> André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” *What Is Cinema? vol. 1*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: UC Press, 2005), 9-16.

analogue medium of film assured its future as the primary semiotic terminology with which to refer to film.<sup>9</sup> While the symbol and the icon are both present in film, they do not define live-action photography itself. Wollen characterizes the symbol as at work in a “film language” of the cinema (referencing the work of Christian Metz), and the icon as at work in the opposite of the index: the destruction of “the existential bond between the natural world and the final image,” and the creation of “completely artificial realm[s],” as seen in directors like Von Sternberg or Fritz Lang.<sup>10</sup> While there are legitimate claims to be made for both the symbol and the icon in relation to film, they are signs concerned with the diegetic, with the worlds presented on the screen; the index here is put forth as defining the ontology of the medium itself and is therefore taken up not only to legitimize film (which had originally struggled to justify itself by comparison to the iconic painting), but to define its quintessence.

Armed with Wollen’s indexically defined “fundamental essence” of the filmic medium, cinephilia studies—aiming to evaluate the respective value of film productions—began to identify moments on film which supposedly made the indexical nature of the medium most apparent. By emphasizing film’s relationship to reality (i.e. the profilmic), cinephilia defined, identified, and searched for moments at which the real seemed to pierce the screen and surge forth toward the spectator. Terming these “cinephiliac moments,” Christian Keathley’s now standard cinephilia text explains this concept when he states that the ontology of film is indexical, that indexicality allows for access to the real, and when reality bursts through the screen—that is the “magic” of the

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<sup>9</sup> Wollen, “Semiology,” 184.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

cinema: “The cinephiliac moment is the site where this prior presence, this fleeting experience of the real, is felt most intensely or magically....[it] can be described as the sudden eruption of the real (or the indexical).”<sup>11</sup> These moments of “intensity,” of “magical” experience, these are also Willemen’s moments of “more,” the place from which his writerly creative motivation emanates.

While the present work agrees with Willemen’s original assertion that film can generate a creative productivity, and not just a writerly or intertextual one, the above summarized theoretical basis on which Willemen and the whole of the cinephilia canon rely to justify how that creativity comes about, is flawed. Reliant as it is on Wollen’s original reading of Bazin and Peirce, if the “indexical argument” is invalidated, if its magically inspiring eruptions of the real disappear, the generative element necessary for creative production is lost as well. The present work attempts to not lose the proverbial baby with the bathwater, or creative motivation with the index, by first questioning the theoretical soundness of the indexical argument and subsequently relocating the extra-diegetic creative productivity of film.

To accomplish this work, I begin in Chapter 1 by presenting an overview of historical and contemporary use of the index in film studies, examining how the appropriation of this concept constitutes a misreading of Peirce’s original writings, as well as Bazin’s, and I conclude by redefining—or devaluing the concept of defining—the ontology of the medium, semiotic or otherwise. Defending the value of the indexical in

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<sup>11</sup> Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2006), 37-8. Keathley’s use of the altered spelling of “cinephiliac” over “cinephilic” is intentional and intended to convey the cinematic obsession of the cinephile as pathological. Citing Willemen’s use of the term as well, Keathley says the choice is “because of the former’s [cinephiliac’s] overtones of necrophilia.” Keathley, *Cinephilia*, 38.

photography and film has been the focus of much recent discussion in the field of media studies and film criticism, including full-length critical works by Dudley Andrew, Laura Mulvey, and D.N. Rodowick. In part, these works of indexical defense were, declaredly, precipitated by the rise of digital film as *the* new standard production medium—usurping the previous dominance of celluloid film stock. The digital, by supposedly altering the relationship between the filmed image and the object(s) represented on screen through its addition of an intermediary of binary digitality, has been accused of being “non-indexical” and therefore of creating a crisis of the image in which the image on-screen has no existential relationship to a photographed reality. The transcendent magic available to analogue film through the index, through the cinephilic moment’s presumed quality of preserving or reanimating a lost object, has (in recent scholarship) been supposed to dissipate when images are digitized. The digital has therefore, in effect, been accused of killing the magic of cinephilia, and hence of the cinema itself.

While analyzing the comparative value of digital film is not, in fact, the ultimate objective of “Reel Consequences,” to defend it against an illogical attack that has persisted for more than a decade is, nevertheless, one of the valuable results of my work in this chapter. But rather than focusing on the digital or the indexical in the chapters that follow, I use my early dissection and devaluing of the indexical argument, a dissection of the present state of cinephilia studies, to examine the repercussions on the related practices of spectators and fans. The weight of this work is intended to be on cinephilic and fan performativity: the index is what has been, and this work is concerned with what is, and what is to come. Therefore, in the chapters that follow, I move beyond the current

debates of cinephilia studies to the creative practices of spectators: those generated by the experience of film, those practices that show a desire for “more.” In doing so, I not only prove the failure of the applied indexical argument through spectator practices generated by that argument, but present and examine spectator practices that acknowledge the limitations of the indexical classification of film and source their desire for “more” outside of the index—expressing their love of film via practices exclusive of a search for the indexical argument’s magical real.

This work begins in Chapter 2 with the examination of a particular spectator practice intended to satisfy the motivation, enthusiasm, the desire for more, created by the cinema; with each subsequent chapter following this same analytical structure. Chapter 2 thus investigates the practice of cinephilic pilgrimage connected to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958)—the practice that began this introduction. I have made reference in the above to cinephilia because it has been one of the greatest proponents of the indexical definition of the medium, and because it has, through its emphasis on the real, encouraged spectators to pursue this idea of “more”: more interaction with a film than simply viewing it in a darkened theater allows. And to a certain extent, that encouragement, that spurring to action, is laudable. Go, create! Leave the theater and explore the world around you! That is one of the fundamental messages of cinephilia, and one I find it difficult to oppose. Yet, I here find myself in that exact position. Why? Because cinephilia is defined by a permanently frustrated longing as a result of its marrying of indexicality to creative production. Once the most important aspect, the “essence” of film, is defined by its relationship to reality, the creative interventions go in

one direction: toward that reality.

Emphasizing film as trace, or an automatic imprint, or a death mask, etc., the creative interventions that cinephilia suggests are not satisfying but exacerbating and inevitably futile searches for a reality that does not exist, or lamentations on that “reality’s” inaccessibility. Such is the lot of the cinephilic pilgrimage: a quest to attain the profilmic in order to prolong, expand, or contain the intensity once felt before the screen. In chapter 2, I examine this practice connected to *Vertigo*—a film that has long been the subject of cinephilic obsession. I argue that disappointment is the inevitable result of such searches for the referent the index promises as the source of cinematic magic.

Following Chapter 2, with its devaluing of the applied indexical argument and the search for profilmic traces it engenders, Chapter 3 begins an examination into spectator practices that accept—or are indifferent to—a quest for the profilmic via the index; this acceptance and movement beyond the index defines the remainder of my investigations. Once you leave behind the idea of somehow finding a deeper connection to the film you love through its profilmic traces, an entire world of possibilities opens up: possibilities for satisfying that original desire for “more,” while nevertheless accepting film-as-film—not film as the representation of a profilmic reality that can be found and accessed to satisfy the desire for a *more* magical experience than film viewing allows.

The third chapter therefore progresses beyond the index to the practice of writing fan fiction. This body of literature, currently classified as part of the “derivative” or “appropriative” literary genre, has in media theory also been referred to as “archontic” literature: a term borrowed from Jacques Derrida’s definition of the archive, which

Abigail Derecho summarizes as: “ever expanding and never completely closed.”<sup>12</sup>

Derecho continues, “Derrida claims that any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents. No archive is ever final, complete, closed. . . . Derrida names the internal drive of an archive to continually expand: calling it the ‘archontic principle.’”<sup>13</sup> To have the condition of the archive, to be described as archontic, is to be open, to be forever capable of expansion. Fan fiction has consistently labeled film with this ability to expand, thereby proffering a potential methodology for satisfying the spectator’s desire for more: while fan fiction writers do not seek the profilmic, they do seek greater ownership of the original text through its expansion and revision. Fan fiction is born not only out of a fascination with a particular media production, but out of a desire to blur the boundaries of ownership. Because “every addition to an archive [necessarily] alters the entire archive,” writing fan fiction allows the spectator to attain a level of authority, a sense of ownership, over both the derivative *and* original work by actualizing what the (fan fiction) author sees as unexplored potentialities in the original text.<sup>14</sup> While I argue that the archontic, derivative, and appropriative labels long ascribed to fan fiction are not precise enough to define the specifics of its operation, eventually replacing these earlier terms with the label “transformative,” it is nevertheless the alteration to ownership created by this literary practice that provides a satisfaction the cinephilic pilgrimage conducted in search of the profilmic is wholly incapable of delivering. My cinephilic pilgrimage to the sites of

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<sup>12</sup> Abigail Derecho, “Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction,” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), 61.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



*Vertigo* is revisited briefly here, exclusive of the index, with the aim of relabeling and redeeming such a practice through fan fiction as transformative performance—providing satisfaction by way of its alterations to ownership.

Fan fiction or pilgrimage aimed at transforming film texts in order to gain greater ownership or authority over the originary text as part of the spectatorial desire to intensify, deepen, or extend the experience of film viewing, however, remain problematic. By engaging with the inherent intertextuality of all texts in order to attempt the transformation of one specific text with the intention of somehow effecting a change in ownership, the spectator is still necessarily recognizing and working with (and within) the original media product in terms of the disproportionate power relationship a closed production creates: the fan fiction writer, or transformative creator, may always be implicated in a film, but their inability to fundamentally alter the original product will result in an inevitable disappointment. No matter how much fan fiction about, for example, a sexual relationship between Spock/Kirk that is written (and there has been a lot), the original media product maintains dominance—a fan fiction author's ownership is at best fleeting, exclusively confined to the individual author and their fan fiction community, and ultimately frustrating in a way similar to the cinephilic pilgrimage.

Chapter 4 therefore focuses on those spectator practices that not only acknowledge an inability to reach the profilmic, but an inability to gain complete possession of it via transformativity as well. These practices acknowledge the dominance of the production—engaging with film and its limitations in a wholly celebratory way. By doing so this fourth and final chapter returns to the cinephilia that began this project, but this time with

an eye to the history of celebratory social practices that defined it prior to the eventual dominance of the indexical argument. Chapter 4 will trace the history of social cinephilia from the early 1900s, through the 1970s participatory theater practices of “cult films” like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, to the current nationwide market for festivals held in commemoration of films like *The Big Lebowski*, among others. This final chapter will argue that the practices of celebratory viewing and community creation defining social cinephilia satisfy the original desire for “more” that began this work. It provides the satisfaction the theoretical work of cinephilia studies has long strived to attain, but from which it has veered so far. Social cinephilia will also avoid the concomitant disappointment that so many of the other attempts to satisfy this desire have resulted in.

The sum total of this work, the evolution of its chapters, will show not only the lengths to which spectators (including theorists) have gone to engage with the films they love, but how those efforts to extend spectatorship beyond the boundaries of the theater can result in frustration as well as satisfaction.

*Indexicality, the Trace, and Medium Specificity*

*Chapter 1*

*I tried to explain the concept of filmic indexicality to my mother once. She said, “You really think you can watch a film and just because of the way that film is made, you can feel closer to the things that the movie camera once photographed? Get out of here.”*

In 2009, the journal *Framework* published a special issue dedicated to cinephilia. Contributors were asked to answer the question: “What is being fought for by today’s cinephilia(s)?”<sup>15</sup> Many of the printed responses use the word “today” to reflect on how contemporary cinephilia is distinct from the cinephilias that have preceded it. The contributions divide the history of cinephilia into eras, listing one incarnation after another, each dying back to give way to something new. A French-born “classical cinephilia” is unvaryingly identified as the original, and is also unanimously declared dead. Jonathan Buchsbaum and Elena Gorfinkel’s jointly written introduction references Antoine de Baecque’s assertion from the 2003 publication, *La Cinéphilie*: “classical cinephilia died in 1968, following the failure of cinema to film the political events of that year.”<sup>16</sup> The *Cahiers du cinéma* and its “politique des auteurs” are declared dead with the events of ‘68 as well. It is the passing of what Ken Eisenstein’s essay later in the same issue calls, “the golden age of cinephilia (French film culture of the 1950s).”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Buchsbaum and Elena Gorfinkel, “Introduction,” *Framework* 50, nos. 1 & 2 (2009): 176.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Ken Eisenstein, “They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons,” *Framework* 50, nos. 1 & 2 (2009): 183.

Lucas Hilderbrand demarcates the next era as beginning in the 1970s with the introduction of VHS reproduction tapes: the first major technological change to film viewing since synchronized sound.<sup>18</sup> Video facilitated remarkably easier access to films, and exploded the home market for videotapes. Video created the pleasure of owning movies, of being “a collector.” It allowed us to bask in cinephilic excesses under the privacy of our own roofs. The eponymously named robot of *Wall-E* (2008) makes perhaps the best argument for video as a cinephile’s medium. Hilderbrand notes this example as well:

In *Wall-E*, a robot cleaning up the messes of a post-human Earth cherishes a centuries-old videotape of *Hello Dolly!* and plays Michael Crawford’s musical numbers each night. A movie has filled this little robot, like so many of us cinephiles, with romantic fantasies. Wall-E loves his videotape because its content makes him feel full of love even though he’s alone.<sup>19</sup>

But this radical technological watershed that allowed for such indulgent collection also carried with it repercussions. It was asked whether trade-offs in accessibility were worth “the aesthetic damage done by VHS releases that pan-and-scan, crop, or uncrop theatrical aspect ratios,” as Charles Tashiro notes in his 1991 work, “Videophilia.”<sup>20</sup>

There was no denying the lower quality of video, the joy many cinephiles got from collecting, or that video represented a radical change in viewing patterns. But the introduction of video presented another issue that would eventually supersede all others

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<sup>18</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand, “Cinematic Promiscuity: Cinephilia after Videophilia,” *Framework* 50, nos. 1 & 2 (2009): 214.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Tashiro, “Videophilia,” *Film Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1991): 7.

for its dominance within film studies scholarship. Video created a crisis of the image. Video was different from film: a different medium. It was a reproduction of a reproduction of reality (or at least the profilmic scenario). The introduction of video, therefore, prompted debates not only about the joys of home versus theatrical viewing, of video quality, and of individual ownership, but about differences between mediums. The difference between video and filmic mediums stimulated questions about video and film's respective ontologies. Was video taking spectators one step further away from reality? To what extent did that make video a unique and *fundamentally* different medium? And should spectators embrace the video medium with its difference? In other words, with this technological change came an epistemological change, or it at least drew "attention to an epistemological difference," as Buchsbaum and Gorfinkel note.<sup>21</sup> The '70s saw "the aesthetic and political pendulum" swing to a "cinophilic meditation on the cinema's relation to reality," according to Laura Mulvey.<sup>22</sup>

In truth, the meditation on cinema's relation to reality, the crisis of the image that home video technologies brought to the fore in the 1970s, is not exclusive to the introduction of that technology, or even that decade. Questions about the relationship between cinema and reality have been in circulation since cinema's inception, and the answers to those questions continue to be fought over today—particularly with the increasing use of digital technologies as standard filming mediums. It really is *the* question of film theory: what is reality's relationship to the cinema?

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<sup>21</sup> Buchsbaum and Gorfinkel, "Introduction," 177.

<sup>22</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Some Reflections on the Cinephilia Question," *Framework* 50, nos. 1 & 2, 193.

Mulvey's assertion of an epistemological pendulum swing in cinephilia studies, coinciding with the 1970s, however, remains fairly accurate. While questions about the relationship between cinema and reality were around long before her demarcated start of a new era, much of the discussion that continues today around digital technologies—the digital sparking the cinema/reality debate for similar reasons to those that began the debates surrounding video technologies—is defined by the theoretical work of the '70s. In fact, since 1972, the discussion about cinema's relation to reality has been overwhelmingly defined by one theoretical work in particular: Peter Wollen's essay, "The Semiology of the Cinema." While offering no direct commentary on video or digital technologies, Wollen's essay has nevertheless been upheld as a treatise on the respective crises of the image precipitated by those technologies. "Semiology" is an examination of the relationship between the cinema and reality, or more specifically, between the filmic medium and reality. By offering an answer to the question, "what defines the relationship between reality and film," it has altered the way cinephiles understand film, and more importantly, their relationship to it.

The original purpose of Wollen's essay, however, is stated quite differently. The work is framed as a response to what Wollen says is the manner in which film language and grammar have developed: spontaneously, and without grounding in the "established discipline of linguistics."<sup>23</sup> As such, the "Semiology" essay purports to transition film's relationship with the structures of language from "loose metaphor" to scientific application. In other words, it's not enough to say the cinema is *like* a language.<sup>24</sup> If the

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<sup>23</sup> Wollen, "Semiology," 171.

<sup>24</sup> A clear criticism of Christian Metz.

cinema is proven to *be* a language, the structural principles of linguistics must subsequently be applied with rigor to cinematic analysis.

By taking this road into the science of signs, Wollen injects himself into preeminent linguistic debates of the time: is semiology a branch of linguistics, or the other way around; and under which heading does cinema belong? Wollen's contemporaries, Christian Metz and Roland Barthes, had already attempted to answer both of these questions in the years preceding Wollen's essay—Metz in *Film Language* and Barthes in *The Fashion System*—but with divergent results.<sup>25</sup> In 1968, Metz declared “The cinema is language,” but was only able to prove his statement obliquely by reference to the linguistic paradigms of narrative film: “It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories.”<sup>26</sup> While Metz also spends a significant portion of his essay discussing how montage is semiotic, his hypothesis that the cinema itself (not just its narrative feature) *is* a language, rather than being just *like* one, remains unproven. An attempted proof of the cinema-as-language hypothesis, beyond narrativity, is begun with the definition of cinematic images as “natural signs” (i.e. signs we don't need a code to understand—as we normally require with socially institutionalized languages), but this idea that images are understood outside of a language code is never satisfactorily demonstrated. Metz is unable to develop a more comprehensive explanation beyond simply stating that we as viewers understand the images of the cinema through

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<sup>25</sup> Given the publication date of Wollen's essay, he must have been reading Metz untranslated from the original French, or employing his own translator, as the first English translation of Metz was unpublished until Oxford's original 1974 edition—two years after the publication of Wollen's “Semiology” essay.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Metz, “The Cinema: Language or Language System,” in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 47.

“induction.”<sup>27</sup> What exactly “induction” is, or how it functions, remains a mystery—as does the classification of cinema as a codeless language of natural signs.

Barthes, on the other hand, rather than abiding by Saussure’s (and Metz’s by conformity) original assertion that “linguistics is only a part of the general science of semiology,” suggested in the forward to *The Fashion System* that the hierarchical ordering of the two should be inverted.<sup>28</sup> “Is there any system of objects, a system of some magnitude, which can dispense with articulated language? Is not speech the inevitable relay of any signifying order?...Perhaps we must invert Saussure’s formulation and assert that semiology is a part of linguistics.”<sup>29</sup> And this is indeed how Barthes’ structural analyses of the cinema proceed from the 1967 publication of *The Fashion System* onward. However, the question of the “natural sign,” first developed by Saussure, and later confusing Metz, reemerges in Barthes’ subsequent analyses as both a problem for his everything-is-language formulation, and as the beauty of photography and the cinema.

A “natural sign,” according to Saussure, was a sign which did not meet the “ideal of the semiological process,” which was to be arbitrary.<sup>30</sup> In other words, while semiology was the hierarchical top of the sign-system pyramid, the arbitrary relationship between signifier and the signified that defined linguistics (a sub-system of signs under the aegis of semiology) was nevertheless the standard of the entire system. The part

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Matthew Ward and Richard Howard (Berkeley: UC Press, 1990), xi.

<sup>30</sup> Saussure, *Course*, 68.



defined the whole. The natural sign violated this ideal: it was defined not by arbitrary relation or convention, but by direct physical or causal relation—the natural sign is motivated.

By the late '70s and '80s, Barthes had clearly realized the importance of the natural sign, as it can be seen underlying both his conception of “the third meaning” in *Image, Music, Text*, and his heartbreaking eulogy to photography (and to his own mother) in the formulation of the *punctum* in *Camera Lucida*. Yet, this later work never readdressed either the third meaning or the *punctum* back to his earlier published opinions on semiology, linguistics, or cinema’s place within those sign systems. Nonetheless, Barthes’ *Camera* is essentially a 119-page treatise on the natural sign and the beauty of its direct relation to “the thing itself.” The overwhelmingly mournful tone of the entire work seems influenced not only by the author’s loss of his mother, but by an inability to express how the *punctum* functions as a sign within a linguistic system. It instead becomes a return to the “primitive, without culture”; and the idea of a sign existing outside of a language community, outside of a society, runs wholly counter to Saussure.<sup>31</sup> Even when Barthes attempts to categorize the idea of a photograph as a sort of “pure deictic language,” a language which proves directly, as in “here it is!” or “that!,” he expresses disappointment.<sup>32</sup> As if any quantifying of the photograph under the terms of any language creates too great a boundary between sign and the thing itself. But rather than admitting that signs may exist outside of linguistics, he invents the *punctum*. The *punctum* is defined as “this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an

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<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

arrow, and pierces.”<sup>33</sup> It is the “prick,” the “wound,” the “disturbing” of the overt content of the photograph: it is the profilmic reality of the original scene surging forth. Yet, as this neologism is not considered outside of linguistics, the photograph gets categorized as a sort of frustrating signless sign—the photograph becomes the thing itself, while simultaneously (as a sign) keeping us from the thing itself (like the arbitrary, unmotivated nature of linguistics). Barthes, it seems, is so committed to the idea of nothing occurring outside the aegis of language, that when he finds something that does, he struggles to reconcile it with his previous formulations of semiotic and linguistic systems.

Such is the importance of Wollen’s essay. While Saussure undercut the value of the motivated “natural” sign by subordinating it under the governance of the unmotivated arbitrary signs of linguistics, Metz conflated the narrative language of the cinema and the cinema as natural sign into an ultimately untenable concept of uncoded language. And though Barthes seemed to understand the value, and in particular the emotional value, of the natural sign, he did so only through conceptions that stand in for the natural sign (e.g. the third meaning, *punctum*), and his work never reconciles these concepts with larger systems of linguistics or semiotics. Wollen attempts to solve these issues by reference to two scholars in particular: Charles Sanders Peirce and André Bazin.

Rather than applying the work of Saussure, Wollen chooses to refer back to the work of Peirce, one of Saussure’s contemporaries. The great distinction between the two in their work on the science of signs lies in Peirce’s creation of three classes of signs: icons, indices, and symbols. First presented at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in his 1867 paper entitled “On a New List of Categories,” Peirce more

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 26.

succinctly defines this trichotomy of signs in the later “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmatism.” According to Peirce, a sign is an icon “by partaking in the characters of the object.”<sup>34</sup> The relationship between signifier and signified is not defined by Saussure’s arbitrary ideal, but instead by likeness. Thomas Sebok describes Peirce’s signifier/signified relationship for the icon as defined by a “topological similarity.”<sup>35</sup> Examples of the icon would therefore be: paintings, diagrams, a subway map. A sign is a symbol “by more or less approximate certainty that it will be interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a habit....symbols rest exclusively on habits.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, this class of signs corresponds to Saussure’s arbitrary, unmotivated signs. An example here would be something as simple as using the word “rabbit” to talk about a rabbit. There is no causal or natural relationship or resemblance between signifier and signified. Finally, a sign is an index “by being really and in its individual existence connected with the individual object.”<sup>37</sup> This is arguably Peirce’s most complex sign class. Wollen rephrases Peirce as: “An index is a sign by virtue of an existential bond between itself and its object.”<sup>38</sup> Some of the index examples given by Peirce include: a weathercock, a barometer, a sundial, a pulse-rate monitor—each signifier having a distinct physical connection to its signified.

The index is, essentially, evidence of Peirce independently arriving at a unique version of the natural sign—a sign we don’t need a preexistent code to understand—but a

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism,” in *Peirce on Signs*, ed. James Hoopes. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991), 251.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas A. Sebok, *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 28.

<sup>36</sup> Peirce, “Prolegomena,” 251.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Wollen, “Semiology,” 174.

version which solves the problems Saussure, Metz, and Barthes struggled with. It is a version of the natural sign given priority, not subordinated as inferior to language, not requiring a mysterious “induction” to understand, and considered within a semiotic system. Wollen classifies film under Peirce’s index, and as a result, uses his science (of signs) to support an already extant body of film theory—one which had already been using the existential relationship between film and its filmed object(s) to describe an explosion of emotional value for the spectator.

To classify the medium of film as an index, Wollen begins by using Peirce’s own classification of photographs (the base unit of analogue film) as indexical signs:

Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection.<sup>39</sup>

Wollen links this photograph-as-index classification to the remarkably similar (but independently arrived at) aesthetic of the cinema developed by André Bazin, writer and co-founder of *Cahiers du Cinema*. In 1945, Bazin published the essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” an essay that reaches, in more accessible language, a similar conclusion to Peirce’s on photography—but for film.

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 2, eds. C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, and A. Burks (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1931), 281, quoted in Wollen, “Semiology,” 123-24.

Rather than semiotics, Bazin took his influence from spirituality, linking the Catholic philosophy and writings of Emmanuel Mounier with the aesthetics of film. The objective was to found an aesthetic with meaning. And, for Bazin, meaning and beauty could not be found in an aesthetic which did not connect to reality in a fundamental way. In other words, thought about through Peirce's tripartite classification, film contains elements of the symbol, icon, and the index. However, if film is defined by the symbol and/or icon alone, it remains untethered to reality. These are signs which, by definition, are always referring to other signs, and others, and still others—in an infinite chain of referentiality. By comparison, the index offers a termination, an endgame, in its existential link to reality. And though no evidence exists of Bazin having had a familiarity with Peirce, and Bazin himself never mentions Peirce or the term “index,” Bazin arrives at a similar conclusion for film to Peirce's on photography, and uses that conclusion to support an aesthetic. That conclusion being: film has an existential connection to reality; film aesthetics should seek to reveal and glorify this reality by giving it primacy over the iconic or symbolic values of the image.

The “Ontology” essay overflows with what can only be described as alternative formulations, or synonyms, of the index. Describing the photographic basis of film, Bazin states that “only a photographic lens can give us the kind of image of the object that is capable of satisfying the deep need man has to substitute for it something more than a mere approximation, a kind of decal or transfer.”<sup>40</sup> He recognizes, and is clearly excited by, the idea of an endgame: a lack of referentiality, an escape hatch from signification into the real. He is even more direct only a page earlier, stating: “for the first time,

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<sup>40</sup> Bazin, “Ontology,” 13.

between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent.”<sup>41</sup> Value is found in the “purity” of the image, in an existential relationship just barely interrupted by intermediary agents (i.e. the camera). The “impassive lens” becomes the stripper of symbolic and iconic value, emphasizing only the reality, the presence of the photographed object itself: “Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love.”<sup>42</sup>

Bazin’s essay may be both beautiful and convincing, but its formulation of film’s existential relationship to reality is not based on the same scientific semiotic precision as Peirce’s formulation of the index. Instead of science, Bazin reaches his conclusions by reference to analogy, religion, and art history. In order to emphasize the importance of the existential connection between film and its filmed object, analogies are drawn between film and a “phenomenon in nature,” “a flower,” “a snowflake,” “a fingerprint,” an “embalming [of] the dead,” “death masks,” and “molding.”<sup>43</sup> The need for this existential connection is bolstered by a spiritual need to connect to an objective world beyond the “dust and grime” of subjectivity.<sup>44</sup> And from the early embalming practices of the “religion of ancient Egypt,” through the history of Western painting up to the present, Bazin emphasizes “a basic psychological need” to preserve “life by a representation of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 13, 15, 9, 12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 15.

life.”<sup>45</sup> Wollen’s combination, therefore, of Bazin and Peirce, of filmic ontology and the index, allows him to give an almost scientific legitimacy to Bazin’s aesthetics, and thereby create a purportedly objective explanation of what cinema is and how to best express its “fundamental nature” aesthetically. In other words, the combination becomes a sort of semiotic determinism: if film is X, it should be shot to best lay bare X.

VHS tapes, with their aesthetic limitations, and status as a reproduction-twice-removed were, perhaps obviously, not lauded by this argument. It has been argued that they could not best lay bare reality, but could only insert another barrier between it and the spectator—effectively defeating the fundamental nature of the filmic medium, even if making it more accessible. It is interesting how film theory today finds itself in this same conversation, yet again. The crisis of the medium precipitated by the introduction of video technologies that led to a preoccupation with semiotic investigations into the relation between film and reality, has become a contemporary preoccupation—dominating the landscape of film theory for the past decade. Today’s scholarly preoccupation with the semiology of the cinema shares with Wollen an objective for defining film’s “fundamental essence” according to its indexical semiotic classification. However, whereas Wollen’s semiotic classification of film was functioning within a larger aesthetic project (the criticism of new video technologies being only a secondary byproduct not applied by Wollen himself), the semiotic classification of film today functions within an alternate larger project directly linked to medium advocacy.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

Much like the introduction of video technologies, the shift from analogue to digital that occurred in the 1990s became a hotly debated topic at the same time. Prominent filmmakers, critics, and scholars came out in favor, or against, the emerging technology. Filmmaker George Lucas lauded its arrival. At a Comdex keynote address in 1999, he was brought out by then Sony CEO Nobuyuki Idei to talk about their newly developed high-definition movie camera. “This is it,” he said. “This is the revolution, and I’m in the middle of it. It’s a great time to be alive.”<sup>46</sup> But not all filmmakers shared Lucas’ opinion, and some revolted against the popularized technology. The *Dogme 95* movement, pioneered by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg in 1995, encouraged a total rejection of digital technologies, in favor of continued use of physical film stock. After distributing a pamphlet manifesto at the 1998 London Film Festival, the ninth item on the list of ten rules adopted by the *Dogme 95* movement was declared: “The film format must be Academy 35mm.”<sup>47</sup> The members of the movement wished to take a “vow of chastity,” in order to keep cinema “pure.”<sup>48</sup> Their manifesto also showed an adherence, or at least a clear indebtedness to many aesthetic tenets advocated by Bazin. The available manipulations digital media could provide ran counter to both their chaste values—technically and aesthetically.

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<sup>46</sup> Martyn Williams, “Sony Pops Some Surprises: CEO Idei shows dazzling new prototypes—and issues a warning to PC makers,” *PCWorld*, November 16, 1999, [http://www.pcworld.com/article/13815/sony\\_pops\\_some\\_surprises.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/13815/sony_pops_some_surprises.html).

<sup>47</sup> Evamaria Trischak, “Dogme 95: The Vow of Chastity (abridged),” *Cinetext: Film and Philosophy*, January 15, 1999, [http://cinetext.philo.at/reports/dogme\\_ct.html](http://cinetext.philo.at/reports/dogme_ct.html).

<sup>48</sup> This concept of “purity” or “pure cinema” is not to be confused with the French avant-garde “Cinema pur” movement of the ‘20s and ‘30s, Alfred Hitchcock’s frequent references to a desire to create “pure cinema,” or the Russian montage techniques (Kuleshov in particular) which are thought to be the origin of the phrase.



Less than a month after Lucas began publically linking himself with digital media corporations, and shamelessly promoting their products, film critic Roger Ebert critically derided not only digital film, but Lucas as well. Ebert said companies like Texas Instruments, creator of one of the original digital projection systems, have “the backing of propeller-head George Lucas, who dreams of making movies entirely on computers and essentially wants to show them on theater-sized monitors.”<sup>49</sup> Ebert goes on to say,

Hollywood has not spent a dime, for example, to research the intriguing question, do film and digital create different brain states? Some theoreticians believe that film creates reverie, video creates hypnosis; wouldn't it be ironic if digital audiences found they were missing an ineffable part of the moviegoing experience?<sup>50</sup>

He concludes his article by accusing Hollywood of forgetting the value of its history, and abiding only by fleeting trends, and “the next big thing”: “At the end of its first century, it [Hollywood] shouldn't be so cheerful about throwing out everything that ‘film’ means. And it should get over its infatuation with the ‘digital’ buzzword.”<sup>51</sup>

While Ebert's comments on the “ineffable part of the moviegoing experience” that may be at stake in the digital v. analogue debate suggests at least a familiarity with the indexical classification of film, if not a direct allusion to it, scholars were slower to produce full-length responses to the conflict over emergent digital technology. But they eventually brought the indexical classification of film to the forefront of the argument. In

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<sup>49</sup> Roger Ebert, “Start the Revolution Without Digital,” *Chicago Sun Times*, December 12, 1999, <http://rogerbert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19991212/COMMENTARY/212010335/1023>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

2001 Lev Manovich responded with his polemical book *The Language of New Media*, which includes the almost self-contained chapter, titled “What Is Cinema?,” and its sub-heading: “Digital Cinema and the History of the Moving Image”—the former an obvious allusion to Bazin, the latter an indication of Manovich’s strategy to deride the indexical argument in order to promote an embrace of the digital. Manovich arrives at his down-with-the-index/up-with-digitality contention by attempting to create a revised history of the cinema: one which follows a historical trajectory from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present in order to “subordinate the photographic and the cinematic to the painterly and the graphic.”<sup>52</sup> Manovich creates a genealogy for contemporary digital cinema as grounded in earlier animation practices, eventually subsuming live-action cinema under the aegis of animation when he states: “*Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its periphery, only in the end to become one particular case of animation.*”<sup>53</sup> His tone is such that this sentence translates to the definition of analogue cinema as one particular *aberration* on the greater animation timeline. Thus, digital cinema becomes the return of the repressed: with the emergence of digitality the true nature of the cinema has returned; finally we can get past that analogue nonsense.

In effect, Manovich accepts the indexical classification of analogue film as one that is ultimately irreconcilable with digitality and thereby champions the digital through a redefinition of cinema according to its iconic and graphic properties—picking and choosing from cinematic history to support this contention. And it is this supposed incompatibility between indexicality and digitality that founds many of the other

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<sup>52</sup> Lev Manovich, “Digital Cinema and the History of the Moving Image,” in *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 294.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 298. Manovich’s italics.

scholarly responses to the analogue v. digital fight that follow. In other words, this early polarization of cinematic technologies on semiotic grounds becomes the standard methodology by which to campaign for your chosen cinematic candidate: define the fundamental essence of the medium, support that medium and condemn the other.

Mary Ann Doane does as much in her beautifully written text, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. After identifying cinephilia as a theoretical perspective/practice aligning itself with a photographically-based cinema and that photographically-based cinema's inscription of contingency—its ability to capture “a split-second [of] meaninglessness” that may be interpreted uniquely by the viewer—Doane points to this contingency as being part and parcel to the resurgence of ontology, and indexicality in particular, in contemporary film theory.<sup>54</sup> Contingency becomes her term, her interpretation of what cinephilia values in its definition of film as indexical. It is the “process whereby history leaves its mark on the film”; “the lure of contingency is that it seems to offer a way out....It proffers itself as an escape from systematicity—both that of a tightly regulated classical system and that of its vaguely oppressive abstract analysis.”<sup>55</sup> Indexicality is contingency, in that Doane's definition of contingency allows for something to escape analysis—the contingent is the “real” in Keathley's earlier defined “cinephiliac moment.”<sup>56</sup> And Doane levies this contingent indexical ontology against the digital: “One doesn't—and can't—love the televisual or the digital in quite

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<sup>54</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), 228.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> “The cinephiliac moment is the site where this prior presence, this fleeting experience of the real, is felt most intensely or magically....[it] can be described as the sudden eruption of the real (or the indexical).” Keathley, *Cinephilia*, 37-38.

the same way.”<sup>57</sup> It is this fundamental difference which finally results in Doane expertly identifying the nostalgic, almost elegiac tone taken by the pro-indexical arguments of contemporary film theory: “It is the intense and privileged relation to contingency, assured by photographic indexicality in the abstract, which can be loved again, this time as lost.”<sup>58</sup> By defining indexicality as both the grounds of the analogue v. digital battle, and as a condition of film to-be-mourning, she not only defines the fundamental essence of analogue film, championing that medium at the expense of digitality, but identifies both the pessimistic tone of those scholars placing themselves on the side of the indexical/analogue, and the inevitability of eventual digital dominance. Doane thus conforms to the standard terms of the debate while also meta-critically pointing out the defining features of her own side of that same debate: in the analogue v. digital battle, the rhetoric of the analogue is defined by strong nostalgic calls to remembrance, reminders of what cinema is, what it should be. But its tone is also tempered by acquiescence to loss and unavoidable defeat—the inescapable result purported to be the so-called “death of the cinema.”<sup>59</sup>

This particular formulation of the “death of the cinema” should more accurately be referenced as only *a* death of the cinema, as death has had a fair number of incarnations within film theory. From Godard’s 1967 “End of Cinema” proclamation at the close of *Week End*, to Paolo Cherchi Usai’s 2005 recognition that all cinema, as a

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<sup>57</sup> Doane, *Emergence*, 228.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>59</sup> A reference to Susan Sontag’s 1996 *New York Times* article announcing the “death of the cinema,” and cinephilia in particular, while condemning in the “decadence” of contemporary commercial filmmaking practices—which have since been linked to the digital. “The Decay of Cinema,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-cinema.html>.

result of its nearly immediate and constant material degradation, is always already dying.<sup>60</sup> The most recent “death” of the cinema, as alluded to by Doane, is not uninformed of its predecessors. According to Michael Witt in his 1999 article, “The Death(s) of Cinema According to Godard,” Godard’s 1967 “end,” likely the most highly referenced of all the “ends,” calls for an end to cinema as a “purveyor of sanitized bourgeois myths and clichés”—a revolutionary suggestion mobilized around the events of May ‘68.<sup>61</sup> Stefan Jovanovic, in his chronology of the “ending(s) of cinema” notes the adoption by Godard of the critical alternative asserted by Roger Boussinot’s 1961 leftist manifesto, *Le Cinéma est mort, vive le cinéma*, that went as far as to suggest a liquidation of “commercial cinema.”<sup>62</sup> It is this indictment of commercial cinema in particular that seems to have informed the recent-most incarnation of death, so to speak.

In 1996, the *New York Times* published what has since become a landmark work on the digital/analogue divide. Susan Sontag’s “The Decay of Cinema” rang the death knells of the cinema, and a particular kind of cinephilia—that which embraced the indexical definition of analogue film as the source of its “magic.” Though Sontag never explicitly employs the term “digital,” given the growing predominance of digital technologies at the time of the article’s publication, the growing debate over indexicality and non-indexicality, and the linking of indexicality with the cinephilia she mourns, her article nevertheless supports an anti-digital reading. It also supports a linking of digitality with commercialism—Boussinot’s object of derision.

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<sup>60</sup> The “end of cinema” is declared on the ending title cards of *Week End* at the close of the film.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Witt, “The Death(s) of Cinema According to Godard,” *Screen* 40, no. 3 (1999), 333.

<sup>62</sup> Stefan Jovanovic, “The Ending(s) of Cinema: Notes on the Recurrent Demise of the Seventh Art, Part 1,” *Offscreen*, April 30, 2003. [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/death\\_cinema.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/death_cinema.html).

“The Decay of Cinema” begins with the accusation that film has become purely “commercial” and “decadent,” that it has lost what was wonderful about it: its “poetic and mysterious” qualities, its ability to be “both the book of art and the book of life.”<sup>63</sup> To locate the cause of this loss, Sontag returns to the now-defunct Realist v. Formalist debate that once pitted the Lumière brothers (Auguste Marie Louis and Louis Jean) against Georges Méliès. The opposition between these early filmmakers was respectively defined as reality v. fantasy, unmanipulated recording v. creative artifice. While the obsolete opposition has been proven inaccurate, what Sontag takes from it is her definition of the true value of the cinema: “Cinema began in wonder, the wonder that reality can be transcribed with such immediacy. All of cinema is an attempt to perpetuate and to reinvent that sense of wonder.”<sup>64</sup>

According to Sontag, what is wonderful is the “physical presence of the image,” the “larger-than-you image.” What isn’t? “The unprincipled manipulation of images,” their alteration into “a disincarnated, lightweight cinema.”<sup>65</sup> The distinction here is between physicality and disembodiment; something that is heavy with presence, and something light with absence; an unmanipulated image or an over-manipulated image—all characterizations applicable to the indexical/analogue v. iconic/digitality debate. While it may go unspoken, Sontag is the predecessor of today’s latest cinematic death—the crisis of the image, and the crisis of the medium.

In 2006, Laura Mulvey makes death and the crisis of the moving image more explicit topics in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. In the first chapter

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<sup>63</sup> Sontag, “Decay.”

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

of her text, titled “Passing Time,” Mulvey provides a concise overview of cinema’s relationship with indexicality. And the classification of film-as-index infers for her a privileged relationship between film and its profilmic event. As Mulvey states, “Although a photograph may have other properties, the physical link between an object caught by a lens and the image left by rays of light on film is the material basis for its privileged relation to reality.”<sup>66</sup> Mulvey uses this particular ability of film-as-index to “make art out of the footprint” to situate film as also having a privileged relationship to the past.<sup>67</sup> And film is thus described as “time fossilized,” as “a trace of the past that persists into the present.”<sup>68</sup> It is this preservation and reanimation of past time that can be accomplished through film’s materiality which leads to the psychoanalytic discussion of “the uncanny” that informs the rest of this chapter, and remains the overriding concern of the text as a whole.

By appropriating Freudian terminology to film and film’s relationship to the past, Mulvey identifies and evaluates the emotions film is capable of conjuring for spectators. In particular, the text emphasizes the indexical nature of analogue film as anxiety-producing because its *present* existential relationship to a *prior* time creates a sense of the uncanny: “the photograph as index almost literally ‘haunts’ the blurred boundary between life and death.” It is both past and present simultaneously: creating anxiety for the spectator, forcing them to confront the “difficulty of understanding passing time” and

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<sup>66</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

death—but productively.<sup>69</sup> Mulvey views the confrontation with death as definitively productive, as enabling exchange between life and death: “It is the photograph as index, located as it is in an ‘embalmed’ moment, that enables these exchanges across the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, reality and magic, and between life and death”<sup>70</sup>

It is this productivity, this creation of the uncanny, this confrontation between life and death, movement and stillness, that Mulvey values in the indexical nature of film; it is also what she laments as lost in the digital. “Passing Time” identifies in the transition to digital from celluloid a greater technical ability to freeze the image into “the stop of death,” magnifying the anxiety produced by the life/death confrontation. As it further blurs the “boundaries between the living and the non-living,” a blurring Mulvey finds psychoanalytically productive, the inference may be that she values the digital above celluloid.<sup>71</sup> However, as the stilled image is never a “true” stilled image, or photographic frame, and hence an indexical image, she instead assesses the digital as wanting in the later chapter, “The Index and the Uncanny: Life and Death in the Photograph”:

New moving image technologies, the electronic and the digital, paradoxically allow an easy return to the hidden stillness of the film frame. This stillness is, of course, an illusion. It is not the actual frame, as stilled for the twenty-fourth of a second in front of the actual lens; it is not the chemically produced image of celluloid.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 66.



In the confrontation between movement and stillness and the indexical nature of celluloid, there lies a psychoanalytically productive confrontation with death. By aligning that death with only the indexicality of analogue film, Mulvey adds a second death to the text: the death of the cinema brought on by digitality. *Death 24x a Second* conforms to the rhetoric of the analogue/digital debate, even if through a psychoanalytic lens. Mulvey draws a causal link between indexicality and death; she then argues that death is fundamentally necessary to film's "magic"; and on those grounds ultimately supports one medium and condemns another. Why indexicality is deemed important may be slightly different for Mulvey, but the basic terms of the medium advocacy argument have yet to change by the time of this 2006 publication, ten years after Sontag's "Decay": define the medium, and support analogue or digital on those grounds.

In 2007, D.N. Rodowick continues this trend of asserting and defining the "ontological distinctiveness of analogical and digital processes."<sup>73</sup> However, by documenting the extremely complex operations of digital filming machinery, and comparing them to chemical analogue processes, Rodowick arrives at a conclusion wholly distinct from those of his predecessors. He goes as far as to assert, in his discussion of digitality that "At first glance, digital devices raise no specific difficulties around the logic of indexicality. 'Caused' by light reflected from its subject, a digital photograph would seem to be a no less powerful index of a past event than film."<sup>74</sup> He even goes as far as to state that "Digital photographs certainly function as indexical

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<sup>73</sup> D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007), 113.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

signs.”<sup>75</sup> But Rodowick’s wording here can be deceptive at first. The distinction, as Rodowick goes on to point out, is between functioning with the “logic” of indexicality and actually being ontologically indexical:

Both kinds of photography produce convincing representations as a result of their quality of counterfactual dependence, wherein any change in the referent is reflected as a corresponding change in the image, and in both cases this quality relies on the logic of indexicality. But they may also be qualitatively distinguished according to the types of causation involved in the acquisition of images and by ascertaining whether the causal relations between inputs and outputs are continuous or discontinuous. Here (analogical) *transcription* should be distinguished from (digital) *conversion* or *calculation*.<sup>76</sup>

While digital “film” continues to think with the logic of indexicality, continues to strive “to be perceptually indistinguishable from a previous medium, namely, the photographic,” and continues to value the perceptual realism and spatial semblance that define analogue photography, its capture process is nevertheless fundamentally different.<sup>77</sup> The digital does not transcribe using light and silver, as film stock does—it represents. And it represents not through Peirce’s “icon,” as has previously been suggested, but instead represents symbolically: “In digital capture, the indexical link to physical reality is weakened, because light must be converted into an abstract symbolic structure independent of and discontinuous with physical space and time. . . . the spatial link of physical causality is broken as well as the temporal continuity of the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Rodowick’s emphasis.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 110.

transformation.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, the digits, the binary digital information that light is transformed into before being transformed back into an image we can recognize as real—that symbolic notation fundamentally breaks the indexical isomorphism between the referent and its image. Indexicality requires “that inputs and outputs are continuous.”<sup>79</sup> Rodowick’s only legitimate reason for assessing the digital-indexical link as “weakened” rather than fundamentally absent is because of its continued adherence to the logic of the index, not because of any actual ontological indexicality.

Though Rodowick differed from his predecessors by arguing for a symbolic rather than iconic ontology of the digital, Rodowick still conforms to the rhetorical terms of the ongoing analogue v. digital debate. He defines the mediums, and based on those definitions, values one over the other. The analogue, again, comes out on top in *Virtual Life*, but the digital is afforded some credit—some hope. The analogue first gets the nostalgic, elegiac treatment, as Rodowick points out that 35mm film is becoming an artisanal rather than standard shooting medium:

The turn to 35mm as art object, and art practice’s complex investigations of the phenomenology of the viewing experience in moving-image media, could also express a countervailing desire—that is, the yearning for duration and uninterrupted time, for perceptual depth, and for a sensuous connection to physical reality in a universe dominated by simulation and information saturation.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 158.

The romantic idea of “yearning” for “sensuous connection,” compared to the domination of “simulation”: the vocabulary associated with each side is stark in contrast. The text seems to attempt a seduction of its readers, to persuade each of us to fall in love with the analogue as a beautiful reality beaten down by the domineering digital. Love and sensuousness are placed in opposition to the much less seductive and oppressive, “information saturation” which (based on the logic of this opposition) exists only unconnected to reality.

The romance of the analogue saturates *Virtual Life*. The indexical image provides “contingent encounters preserved spatially against the ineluctable flow of passing time all but unnoticed or forgotten if not for the photographer’s decisive and fortuitous act of recording.”<sup>81</sup> The promise here is no less than the preservation of past time, a dam against the inevitability of death. Whereas the digital is only a promiscuous teenager:

In the past thirty years at least, the ethic of straight photography has become decentered or displaced. That there is no longer photography but rather lens-based practice exemplifies a new promiscuity in the creation of images. The increasing availability of electronic images and the ability of the computer to simulate many different kinds of devices and interfaces has unhooked the lens from specific apparatuses, such as the film camera, and transformed it into just another input device.<sup>82</sup>

The film camera loses its uniqueness. The digital has transformed it into “just another input.” Where is the romance in that?

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 151. Note the use of the “contingent” here, further supporting my earlier reading of Doane’s contingency-as-indexicality.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 151.

Given the binary opposition Rodowick creates between the analogue and the digital, it is perhaps surprising that he nevertheless sets aside a bit of hope for digitality. That unexpected hope is located in the same binary opposition he created to align analogue film with indexicality and physical reality, so as to romantically and nostalgically privilege it over digitality. Within that binary he gives to digitality the imagination: “In a previous era of cinematic creation, the physical world both inspired and resisted the imagination; in the age of digital synthesis, physical reality has entirely yielded to the imagination...[it] has eroded one kind of cinephilia while promoting another: *le rat de cinémathèque*, a pursuer of imaginary experiences.”<sup>83</sup> But this hopefulness seated in the imaginary possibilities of the digital remains tempered by the as yet undetermined way for the digital to be thought of exclusive of the logic of the index: “the conceptual criteria of perceptual realism, which are restricted to qualities of spatial semblance are of limited use in ...point[ing] the way to uncovering or creating new powers of digital imaging.”<sup>84</sup> Rodowick seems to be saying that until the digital begins to think exclusive of the logic of indexicality, the analogue v. digital debate will continue on its long-standard terms. And because of the digital’s inability to create the same indexical isomorphism of analogue film, digitality will always be judged as wanting in the binary comparison.

The most recent work on the debate supports this contention, but regresses to the less optimistic anti-digital rhetoric that preceded Rodowick. Dudley Andrew’s 2010 *What Cinema Is!*, the title of which purports the work to be an answer to Bazin’s *What is*

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 110.

*Cinema?* question, returns to the work of Bazin. It also returns to the work of the other *Cahiers* writers, and “the *Cahiers* axiom” in particular to support the subordination of the digital to the analogue. The axiom states: “the cinema has a fundamental rapport with reality and that the real is not what is represented—and that’s final.”<sup>85</sup> According to Andrew, putting one’s faith in the digital therefore infers you have lost faith in the world around you to provide any further revelations; the world has been discovered; there are no more revelatory experiences to be had here.

The films some of us most care about—and consider central to the enterprise of cinema *in toto*—have a mission quite other than lying or agitating: they aim to discover, to encounter, to confront, and to reveal. If anything is endangered by the newly digitalized audiovisual culture, it is a taste for the encounters such voyages of discovery can bring about. Apparently, many today feel that the world and the humans who inhabit it have been sufficiently discovered, that no new revelations await, at least not in a medium dominated by entertainment and advertising.<sup>86</sup>

The fundamental assertion of this work is that cinema must have an indexical relation to physical reality—something he views as profoundly absent in the digital: “And so let’s say this: that in whatever manifestation or period, *real* cinema has a relation to the real.”<sup>87</sup> On the basis of his conclusion that the digital misses this relation, he excludes it from even being defined as cinema. It is Rodowick’s “lens-based practice,” rather than cinema. Though Andrew seems to take a broad step back from the optimism Rodowick affords digitality. Instead, he is aggressively defensive, “hurling” his use of the *Cahiers*

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<sup>85</sup> Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv. My emphasis.

axiom at digitality: “[Serge] Daney hurled this axiom in the face of the so-called ‘Cinéma du Look’ of the 1980s...I throw it against an overconfident discourse of the digital.”<sup>88</sup>

The text is part of a “defensive action” in good company with “the Dogme 95 filmmakers” intending “to hold the wavering line against an onslaught of a swaggering post-filmic cinema that boasts of concocting images and manipulating both them and audiences at will.”<sup>89</sup> Andrew’s rhetoric is passionately intense, and even though it is one of the recent-most iterations of the analogue v. digital debate, it still conforms to the long-ago defined rhetorical lines of the argument. Andrew’s objective is clearly to defend the indexical value of analogue cinema—its physical relation to reality—at the expense of digitality.

While the above brief historical summation of the digital v. analogue debate may appear to be decidedly pro-indexical, with the exception of the pro-digital work of Manovich, there is another thread of the argument to be reckoned with. That thread does not necessarily link itself to Manovich or position itself as an advocate of the digital, but rather it questions the terms of the debate wholesale by questioning Wollen’s original reading of Bazin and Peirce, and by extension, all the other theorists that can be subsumed under the heading of the “indexical argument.”

Daniel Morgan’s 2006 rereading of Wollen, and the Peircean indexicality he attributed to Bazin’s aesthetic (as put forth in the “Ontology” essay), arguably stands as one of the strongest questionings in film theory of the indexical argument’s foundations

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

in film theory. Morgan begins his essay in staunch opposition to Wollen and the equation of any indexicality with Bazin or filmic ontology by noting the missing element in Bazin's work: any mention of the index. Bazin himself never invoked the term "index," but his reference to the nature of film as determined by its relationship to the profilmic event which it captures as being "after the fashion of a fingerprint" has (in part) led to Bazin being labeled as one of the pioneers of the "*index argument*."<sup>90</sup> It is this indexical ontology of film that is then thought to inform Bazin's aesthetics: "Bazin argues for a necessary and determinate relation between the ontology of the photographic image and the realism of film."<sup>91</sup> A film is thus "realist," according to the standard reading of Bazin, "insofar as it comes closest to or bears fidelity to our perceptual experience of reality."<sup>92</sup>

But Morgan rereads Bazinian ontology as more extreme than the indexical argument that appropriated him as its vanguard; film for Bazin is less about this notion of a "direct, causal, and existential bond between sign and object" as created by its reference to an antecedent reality mechanically reproduced, and more about an equivalence between the photograph and its object through a "transfer of reality from the thing to its reproduction" in the photographic image: making the photographic image "the object itself" rather than "a decal or approximate tracing."<sup>93</sup> By saying "photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for

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<sup>90</sup> Bazin, "Ontology," 15. And, Daniel Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics," in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau (New York: Routledge, 2010), 106. His emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, *ibid.*, 107, and Bazin, "Ontology," 14.



it,” Bazin thus argues for photography as defined by a presence rather than an absence. Bazin is denying an “ontological distinction between image and object.”<sup>94</sup>

Claiming that the photograph *is* the thing itself is an idea it’s difficult not to feel skeptical about, as Morgan notes when he applies this logic to an extension of the fingerprint metaphor Bazin originally employed in the “Ontology” essay: “no one argues that a footprint *is* a foot or that the barometer *is* the air pressure.”<sup>95</sup> It is also through the proliferation and diversity of the other metaphors Bazin employs to describe the relation between the object and the photograph that Morgan judges Bazin’s account of filmic ontology as indeterminate—certainly not definitive enough to support the indexical argument that has appropriated it. Bazin offers the photograph as: mummy, death mask, fingerprint, substitute, and equivalent, without unifying them in any significant way, much less explaining their contradictions. Bazin’s metaphor “proliferation signals an unwillingness or inability to give a clear, positive account of the ontology of the photographic image.”<sup>96</sup>

While Morgan is clearly criticizing Bazin here, as well as Wollen, he also recognizes the fundamental reason for Bazin’s failure as rooted in what Stanley Cavell called “ontological restlessness”: “We [like Bazin] don’t know how to think of the connection between a photograph and what it is a photograph of.”<sup>97</sup> According to Morgan, Bazin is attempting to suggest “an ontology that is stronger than the index argument allows”: a way to account for the photograph as more than a representation or

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 15, and Morgan, “Rethinking Bazin,” 108.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., and Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflection on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1979), 16-17.

re-presenting.<sup>98</sup> This accounting is further complicated by Bazin's amendment to his photograph-equals-object statement, when he says that "the image is the object itself, but freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it."<sup>99</sup> The object a photograph presents is thus characterized as "outside (historical) time altogether" and consequently *not* absolutely identical to its past presence before the camera.<sup>100</sup>

It is here, as Bazin offers a differentiation between the object and the image-object photography removes from time, that the emotion that has profoundly weighed down the "Ontology" essay from its start seems to find its source. It is in this temporally displaced object of the photograph that Bazin locates his love of film, recalling the earlier quotation: "Only the impassive lens, stripping its object of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently my love."<sup>101</sup> By allowing us to consider the objects in a photograph differently, as removed from time, we are able to form relations to those objects that are different from those formed with objects in the world, according to Bazin.

Morgan ends the heft of his discussion of the "Ontology" essay here as he moves toward a rethinking of Bazin's aesthetics in relation to this new understanding of his ontology. Yet, ending at this point, as he only begins to discuss the affect-heavy nature of the essay, leaves some fundamental questions raised regarding the implications of a refigured Bazanian ontology unanswered. In the analogue v. digital argument the object

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<sup>98</sup> Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 109.

<sup>99</sup> Bazin, "Ontology," 14.

<sup>100</sup> Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 109.

<sup>101</sup> Bazin, "Ontology," 15.

of spectatorial love has historically been determined by reference to the indexical argument: the “love of film” has historically been characterized as born from its allowing of the spectator to recapture a past moment via their experience of the referent. The index is the seat of the romance found in Rodowick’s essay, it is the object of cinephilia’s “very specific kind of love”—the cinephilia Sontag heralds the decay of at the dawn of the digital.<sup>102</sup> To take the film image completely out of time obviously complicates the romance of the index.

Film historian Tom Gunning takes a somewhat similar critical tack to Morgan only a year after the publication of the “Rethinking Bazin” essay, when he calls for a reevaluation of film-as-index. He takes up where Morgan left off in the attack on Wollen’s equation of the index with Bazin’s ontology. For if Morgan’s reading is correct and Bazin is indeed claiming that “photography actually contributes something to the order of natural creation,” Gunning completes the logic of the argument: if photography creates something unique, then Bazin “denies the photograph the chief characteristic of a sign, that of supplying a substitute for a referent.”<sup>103</sup> If we use Bazin’s “Ontology” as the ultimate arbiter on Peircean indexicality, as Wollen does, not only is film not an index, it isn’t even a sign.

Gunning essentially untangles the Bazin/Peirce conflation that began with Wollen, and consequently evaluates film’s indexical ontology exclusive of Bazin’s filmic ontology. The result of which, for Gunning, is a questioning of the film-as-index on

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<sup>102</sup> Sontag, “Decay.”

<sup>103</sup> Gunning, “Moving Away,” 257.

temporal grounds—the concept of the index in film studies having largely been used to reference a “trace” left by a *past* action. Peirce, in the “Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism,” does not in fact restrict the definition of the index to the signification of a past event only. But his use in that essay of the footprint as the primary example illustrating the definition of the index—“That footprint that Robinson Crusoe found in the sand, and which has been stamped in the granite of fame, was an Index to him that some creature was on his island”—has historically been taken up by film studies and used to support an argument for “the identification of the photographic index with the pastness of the trace.”<sup>104</sup>

In other writings Peirce also cites indices as “signs based on direct physical connection between the sign and its referents,” such as the weather vane and the sundial: both items which “perform their references *simultaneously* to the action of their referents,” rather than following them.<sup>105</sup> Gunning proposes this more complete reading of the index as sign be used to depose the dominant but deficient equation of the index with pastness so prevalent in the standard application of the indexical sign to film theory in order to reach two ends: 1) to call for other scholars to continue from this beginning and reevaluate the application of Peirce’s complex semiotics to film, as he proves the dominant application of the index to be wanting, but also admits to lacking the philosophical command necessary to complete the task himself; 2) to propose a reevaluation of new media which have, when discussed in indexical terms, been set apart

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<sup>104</sup> Peirce, “Prolegomena,” 252, and Gunning, “Moving Away,” 255.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, for other examples of indices with direct physical connection, see: Charles Sanders Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955). And, Gunning, “Moving Away,” 255. My emphasis.

from analogue film technologies as somehow lacking for being without the ability to retain the existential trace of a *past* action—they are downgraded and labeled with the disparaging “nonindexical.”

So while Morgan eliminates the indexical argument by making the photographic image both existentially unique from its referent, and by placing the photographic image outside of time altogether in his re-reading of Wollen, Bazin, and Peirce, Gunning drops Wollen’s Bazin-Peirce conflation altogether but retains the idea of the index as pertinent to film, even overtly stating that he has “no doubt that Peirce’s concept has relevance for film,” though Gunning nevertheless advocates for a reevaluation of its application to film.<sup>106</sup> Yet, while he does not appear to recognize it—out of modesty or humility, or perhaps just inadvertency—Gunning accomplishes his own goal. After dropping Wollen’s Bazin-Peirce conflation, and debunking the dominant definition of the index as a trace of a specifically past event, Gunning retains the index to inform the convincing genealogical argument that follows. Rather than abolishing discussion of the index altogether, Gunning simply demotes it, contextualizing it within a greater understanding not of filmic *ontology*, but a *genealogy* of film as it moves all the time further toward the digital: he asserts that “the index may not be the best way, and certainly not the only way to approach the issue of cinematic realism.”<sup>107</sup> By which he means not only the style identified as realist, but also the particular relationship between film and reality that has historically been invoked (heavily through Wollen) in support of a realist aesthetic as the “proper” use of the medium by arguing that it reflects its “fundamental nature.”

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 256.

What Gunning argues for is not an alternative to the index, not a replacement of the index with the icon or the symbol as Manovich does, but the eradication of the concept of a fundamental essence, or ontology of film, altogether. The uniqueness of film, in both the dominant contemporary incarnations of the medium (celluloid and digital), cannot be defined by one aspect of its nature alone. In other words, in determining the ontology of film, why is photographic indexicality privileged rather than motion, color, sound, or editing—each of which are employed uniquely in the cinema? How can an ontology be determined if the object under investigation is so multifarious that no one of its unique aspects can account for the totality of its being or operation? The answer is simple, but nonetheless disarming considering the quantity of film theory it refutes: it cannot be. Identifying one aspect of the medium as its essence (e.g. its analogue reproduction of the profilmic), and consequently determining the medium to be wholly defined by that essence (e.g. its indexicality, as indexicality was thought prior to Gunning and Morgan), is as essentialist as an advocacy for a “best use” of the cinema based on such a determined essence (e.g. supporting a particular aesthetic as exemplifying the indexical). The ontological must, therefore, give way to the genealogical.

The definition of the ontology of film as indexical, as based on its photographic qualities, represents only a point on the longer timeline of film theory. In the 1920s and ‘30s this ontology was defined by editing and rhythms of movement. In his polemical *Film Form*, Sergei Eisenstein identified “the nerve of film” as a dialectical montage, stating that, “to determine the essence of montage is to solve the problem of film as

such.”<sup>108</sup> In 1918, the poet Louis Aragon declared the cinema to be “the art of movement and light,” while also calling for these elements to be film’s “purity.”<sup>109</sup> In 1925, describing French Impressionist film, Germaine Dulac declared cinema to be fundamentally defined by this art of movement as well: “the duration of the images, their contrasts and harmonies assume a role of prime importance.”<sup>110</sup> Obviously these few theorists and filmmakers only represent a fraction of the theory written on movement as defining the quintessence of film, but they are nevertheless representative of the fact that pre-war, movement was to ontology what indexicality became in the post-war.

The upheaval of production practices and studio systems during and following the war, together with the influential 1945 publication date of Bazin’s “Ontology” (its originally slated publication date in ’43 was pushed to ‘45 as a result of the editorial offices of *Confluences* being raided during the Occupation), influenced the post-war dominance of an indexical ontology. Followed in 1951 by Bazin’s founding of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, one of the most influential journals in film history, similar viewpoints on filmic ontology proliferated through its more famous contributors like Truffaut, Godard, and Daney. Nor was the indexical ontology limited to Bazin or the *Cahiers* writers. In 1960, after listing some of the “nonphotographic elements” of film, Siegfried Kracauer in *Theory of Film* declared “photography, especially instantaneous

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<sup>108</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form [The Dialectical Approach to Film Form],” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 28.

<sup>109</sup> Louis Aragon, “On Decor,” in *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume I: 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 168.

<sup>110</sup> Germaine Dulac, “Aesthetics, Obstacles, Integral *Cinégraphie*,” in *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume I: 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 394.

photography” as having “a legitimate claim to top priority among these elements [of film]” in a determination of “the decisive factor in establishing film content.”<sup>111</sup>

However, this pre-/post-war distinction is in no way intended to infer that the idea of filmic ontology as indexical was not in circulation prior to Bazin’s “Ontology.” In 1924, in the era thought to be dominated by dialectical montage theory, Béla Balázs, through a treatise on the importance of the gestural, emphasized the proper use of film to be a re-production of reality, characterizing cinematography as that which “brings us closer to the individual cells of life.”<sup>112</sup> This argument amounts to a medium-based “best practice,” an essentialism in which Balázs also locates the seat of our love of film: “such [realistic] observation contains an element of tenderness, and I should like to call it the *naturalism* of love.”<sup>113</sup> I emphasize the term “naturalism” here to reinforce Balázs’ equation of the “natural” automatic capture of the profilmic by the camera with a realist film practice as a proper use of the medium. Malcolm Turvey’s more recent reclassification of Balázs as part of a newly defined “Revelationist” tradition determines the indexical to be the fundamental nature of film as well, in addition to declaring a “proper” use of indexical film to result in the greatest emotional impact for the spectator through the deeper contemplation of reality it encourages. In fact, Balázs specifically opposes cinema to “word culture” (Peirce’s symbolic sign), classifying language and sound as “secondary qualities” of the cinema, qualities keeping us from the revelatory

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<sup>111</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), 27.

<sup>112</sup> Béla Balázs, “Visible Man, or The Culture of Film,” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau (New York: Routledge, 2010), 75. My emphasis.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.



capacity of the cinema. Turvey summarizes Balázs as such: symbols are “secondary qualities,” whereas “the cinema is able to reveal what is hidden by such secondary qualities, namely, reality as it really is.”<sup>114</sup>

Balázs’ work undermines a strict pre-war/formalist, post-war/realist division by exhibiting elements of an indexical ontology often invoked to support a realist aesthetic as present prior to Bazin’s “Ontology” essay. Nor is Balázs the only aberration. The writings of Jean Epstein’s from the 1920s can be considered similarly aligned. In “The Senses I (b),” Epstein not only states that cinema has a proper use, but that its use is based on its fundamental nature as an automatic medium: cinema has “its own road...[and] this unexpected discovery of a subject that is an object without conscience [the camera]...must be put to use.”<sup>115</sup> Epstein then closes the essay by lapsing into the poetic, characterizing the resultant cinema as “supernatural,” and responsible for the creation of an atmosphere “heavy with love.”<sup>116</sup> Though Epstein and Balázs are only two examples, their advocacy for a “best use” practice of film reflecting its indexicality at a time dominated by a movement-based ontology, speaks to the multifarious nature of film: its inability to be defined by one particular essence. The constant overlapping and intertwining of these alternative ontologies thus negates the idea of the ontology altogether and creates a genealogical “braid,” as Gunning calls it: “My view of cinema as a braid made of various aspects rather than a unified essence with firm boundaries would

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<sup>114</sup> Malcolm Turvey, “Balázs: Realist or Modernist?” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau (New York: Routledge, 2010), 82. For greater discussion on the Revelationist tradition see Turvey’s more recent writing on the subject in: *Doubting Vision: Film and the Revelationist Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008).

<sup>115</sup> Jean Epstein, “The Senses I (b),” in *French Film Theory and Criticism, Volume I: 1907-1929*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 245.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

seem to offer a further argument against the essentialist approach of classical film theory.”<sup>117</sup>

Through the abandonment of a singular ontology in favor of a genealogy, the repercussions for digital filmmaking are those of inclusion and possibility. The digital thus becomes simply another point on the timeline of film history—though not like that which Manovich develops. It is one that marks a return to both earlier graphic technologies (e.g. Muybridge’s Zoopraxiscope, the animated films of Len Lye, animation in general) and a movement-based filmmaking practice (e.g. the Thaumatrope, dialectical montage, some French Impressionist filmmaking strategies).<sup>118</sup> One can even read a Bazinian ontology of the image here as well when viewed through the lenses of Morgan and Gunning’s rereadings (and not the dominant indexical/past trace reading): the projected digital image is existentially unique from its original profilmic referent (for digital film whose images originate in live-action capture), and wholly outside of time; the binary digits that comprise digital cinema don’t age; their storage facilities may decay (i.e. hard drives), but the digits themselves are timeless and can transcend their hardware. The digital thus isn’t just thinking with the logic of the index, nor is the index the ultimate arbiter of cinematic value; considered within a genealogy of the cinema, the analogue and the digital are simply subsequent incarnations of the cinema. The digital is not an aberration or an iteration of one particular ontology.

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<sup>117</sup> Gunning, “Moving Away,” 260.

<sup>118</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of digital compositing as an extension of cell animation techniques see: Lev Manovich, “Digital Cinema and the Moving Image,” in *The Film Theory Reader: Debates and Arguments*, ed. Marc Furstenau (New York: Routledge, 2010), 245-254.

The demonstrated resistance to the digital as a valuable and worthy cinematic technology is nevertheless understandable. Though couched in theoretical discussions of technological transition, history, ontology, and essentialist practices, the complaints of many of the pro-indexical theorists can be reduced to one fundamental concern: love. Their antagonism toward the digital is, at its heart, based in part on a desire to continue experiencing the filmic love whose death Sontag declared 15 years ago—a filmic love that has been fundamentally tied to a past-trace understanding of the index and analogue film. It is the romance of Rodowick, the love of Doane, Andrew, Barthes, Ebert, Mulvey, Keathley, Epstein, Sontag, Bazin (as appropriated by Wollen), and Balázs. While there are distinctions between each of these theorists, the romance and love of the index connects them all. There is something magical, wonderful, seductive even about the indexical argument—about the possibility of being able to transcend time and space all while sitting still on a theatre seat. Regardless of Morgan’s or Gunning’s or my own evaluation and refutation of the indexical argument, what cannot be refuted is its romance. When I first read Wollen’s argument years ago, I was wholly seduced by it, and fought against the more logically convincing arguments suggesting I give it up. The promise of the index, that film is a fundamentally transcendent medium allowing us to touch, once again, time, space, and objects already past—how could one not be seduced by that promise?

Succumbing to the seduction of the index, however, has had practical repercussions for today’s cinephiles and fans. Alongside the long-standing critical obsession with the index, fan practices have developed based on the logic of the past-

trace indexical argument that now remain instantiated. Without revision, these practices will not bring the satisfaction and joy they promise, but only disappointment and frustration. Chapter 2 will explore one of the most prominent of these fan practices—“cinophilic pilgrimage”—investigating its methodologies, intended and actual outcomes, and potential revision. The cinophilic pilgrimage, a secular quest to attain the profilmic in order to achieve at the filming site the intensity once felt before the screen, will be examined using Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* as a case study—a film that has long been the subject of cinophilic obsession. I argue that disappointment is the inevitable result of such searches for the referent the index promises as the source of cinematic magic—as disappointment is the result of all fan practices engendered by the indexical argument.

*The Frustration of Reality/Illusion:*

*Searching for Vertigo on the Cinephilic Pilgrimage*

*Chapter 2*

*After I wrote the first draft of this chapter, I showed it to my partner whose photography also appears below. As a native Californian and as someone I've known for the past decade, he had volunteered to help me navigate the Bay Area film sites of Hitchcock's Vertigo during my research. I thought he might feel satisfied to read what he had helped me create, to read about some of the places we had visited together. "So, what did you think?" I asked him. (I was excited: proud of my first critical accomplishment, the first essay I was going to have published.) He smiled and said, "Geez, I didn't realize you had such a terrible time."*

I have lost track of the number of times I've seen *Vertigo*. I know the dialogue by heart. I've read every piece of scholarship on the film I've been able to lay my hands on. I even have a fair Jimmy Stewart impression—though those that have heard it would likely describe it with less generosity. Yet, I was first introduced to the film fewer than five years ago; so immediate, so complete, is the hold *Vertigo* takes on you. This broadly termed "hold" of the film, the inability of the spectator to be loosed from its grasp, drove me to make the cinephilic pilgrimage to *Vertigo*'s San Francisco in the summer of 2010 and walk the sites where Hitchcock shot what has been called his "tortured valentine to the city."<sup>119</sup> I wanted to get closer to the film, inside it so as to finally be united with this loved object, or alternatively, to deconstruct its hold on me: make a logical investigation of it so as to dispel its possession of me, and be released. What I found was not relieving, but exacerbating. Running across the lawn of the Mission San Juan Bautista, looking into

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<sup>119</sup> Jeff Kraft and Aaron Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog: Alfred Hitchcock's San Francisco* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2002), 73.

the bay below the Golden Gate Bridge at Fort Point, walking beside the Palace of Fine Arts—each experience revealed an uncanny wonder in which reality and filmic illusion touch, but never fully. Something remains inaccessible, missing. The places of *Vertigo* present themselves as iterations of Fitzgerald’s “valley of ashes”: the sites are filled with the filmic dead, heavy with the traces of the screen past, or the cinematic never-was, yet their present remains separable from that history—the sites are full...but somehow empty.<sup>120</sup>

This experience of on-site disappointment marks a confrontation with the applied concept of film as a past-trace indexical sign. Mary Ann Doane summarizes this concept when she writes of the film-as-index that it: “acts as a temporal trace and has an existential relation to its object,” like the footprint or the weathercock.<sup>121</sup> As documented in the previous chapter, this past-trace understanding of the index constitutes a misreading of both Bazin and Peirce, and film itself. Its frequent assumption, use, and defense by scholars has fed the persistent and inaccurate contemporary disparaging of digital cinema with the “non-indexical” label. Yet, while Chapter 1 discredited the index-as-trace, and filmic ontology *in toto*, these misinterpreted forms of the index and filmic ontology have consequences beyond the theoretical, as they also form the foundation for applied indexical practices of fandom and cinephilia. So that when the cinephilic pilgrim goes in search of the object beyond the sign—the foot that made the print—he or she finds only disappointment and amplified longing for that which is not there.

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<sup>120</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 68.

<sup>121</sup> Doane, *Emergence*, 69.

Douglas A. Cunningham describes his own experiences with *Vertigo* and the cinephilic pilgrimage, theorizing the pilgrimage to the places toward which the indexical sign points as the expression of a frustrating desire “born of love for the diegetic world of the film, loss (the apparent absence of that diegetic world within the realm of the real) and a longing to occupy/influence a space-time somewhere between the index and its referent.”<sup>122</sup> While ultimately Cunningham proposes a solution to this frustration, prior to locating, evaluating, or determining the possibility of an escape route from the valley of cinematic ashes Hitchcock’s San Francisco presents to the pilgrim, Cunningham’s statement about the progressive states of love, loss, and longing puts forth more immediate questions: Why is *Vertigo* an object of cinephilic love? And, given the absence of the diegesis in the realm of the real, what is the engagement with the film cinephiles truly long for?

The scholarship written on *Vertigo* provides a clue as to why this film in particular has inspired such cinephilic devotion. Within much of *Vertigo* scholarship lays a persistent investigatory thread that considers the film as a meditation on the conflict between reality and illusion. In an extensive 1963 interview with director Alfred Hitchcock, Peter Bogdanovich describes *Vertigo* not only as “perhaps his most complex” film but also as the film that “delved more deeply than any picture made in recent years into the conflicts between illusion and reality.”<sup>123</sup> When Bogdanovich asks Hitchcock directly whether “*Vertigo* [is] about the conflict between illusion and reality,” the director

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<sup>122</sup> Douglas A. Cunningham, “‘It’s all there, it’s no dream’: *Vertigo* and the Redemptive Pleasures of the Cinephilic Pilgrimage,” *Screen* 49, no. 2 (2008): 124.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Bogdanovich, *The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963), 6.

replies with an enthusiastically affirmative, “Oh, yes.”<sup>124</sup> Robin Wood’s 1965 investigation of Hitchcock’s *oeuvre* elaborates on what defines that “conflict” by characterizing the world *Vertigo* presents as “a quicksand, unstable, constantly shifting, into which we may sink at any step in any direction, illusion and reality constantly ambiguous, even interchangeable.”<sup>125</sup> This conception of *Vertigo* as a film that blurs the line between illusion and reality is not exclusive to these analyses which are more contemporary to the film’s 1958 release. Nearly forty years later, David Sterritt’s 1993 investigation makes evident the persistence of this approach to *Vertigo* in Hitchcock scholarship as he states, “*Vertigo* represents one of Hitchcock’s deepest penetrations into [the duality of] reality-illusion.”<sup>126</sup> This view is again put forth in 1999 as Paula Marantz Cohen also explains that the film “works to confuse the boundaries of the real and the dream image.”<sup>127</sup> Though these limited examples obviously do not constitute an exhaustive list of the vast quantity of Hitchcock scholarship considering *Vertigo* from this thematic perspective, they are nevertheless indicative of the persistent dominance of this approach to its analysis.

Similarly dominant within analyses of the reality-illusion boundary violation is a tendency to investigate this conflict as a strictly diegetic thematic, with the attempts of John “Scottie” Ferguson (James Stewart) to resurrect Madeleine in Judy (both roles played by Kim Novak) as the clearest evidence of its expression. However, the reality-

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 38. Of course, given the director’s penchant for subtle sarcasm, without an audio recording or clarifying remark about Hitchcock’s intonation by Bogdanovich it is difficult to know exactly the spirit in which this response was intended.

<sup>125</sup> Robin Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited: Revised Edition* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 123-24.

<sup>126</sup> David Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 83.

<sup>127</sup> Paula Marantz Cohen, “Hitchcock’s Revised American Vision: *The Wrong Man* and *Vertigo*,” in *Hitchcock’s America*, ed. Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 166.



illusion conflict can be extended to an extra-diegetic analysis of cinephilic pilgrimage by considering Scottie as a spectatorial surrogate in the film and figuring his quest as analogous to our own. His desire to blur the lines between illusion and reality, past and present, mirror those of cinephilic pilgrims as they seek out the traces the film has left on the landscape of the City by the Bay. In making this leap from diegetic to extra-diegetic through the shared goals of Scottie and the pilgrim, the question of how *Vertigo* captivates the spectator can be answered—its “hold” given a definition. That which has enraptured scholars and critics for decades is also what seduces the spectator into becoming the cinephilic pilgrim: the desire for a conflation of reality and illusion, the collapsing of the temporal division immanent in film as the present trace of a past event.

The inevitable byproduct of this internal-to-external extension of the reality-illusion conflict is also a questioning of the fundamental boundaries of spectatorship, an address of Cunningham’s loss and longing issue: How close to a film can spectators really get? How close to it do spectators desire to be? How is that closeness accomplished? And what remains beyond a spectator’s reach? Answers to these questions, of course, have long been imagined in academia and beyond, as they involve essential components of film theory: the ontology of the moving image, spectatorial desire for the screen. The 1920s saw the Impressionist filmmakers address the reciprocal relation between spectator closeness and emotional engagement, including Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, and Louis Delluc, through the theories of *photogénie*. According to *photogénie*, the cinema made reality strange to spectators, alienated it from us, created distance and unfamiliarity so as to strike “the spectator with the unexpectedness of the

evident, and [arouse] an aesthetic emotion, a sense of infallible wonderment and pleasure.”<sup>128</sup> Much later, in the psychoanalytic and semiotic film theories prominent in the 1970s, a foregrounding of the relative proximity of the spectator to the diegesis can be found as well. Most famously, Christian Metz’s “The Imaginary Signifier,” Jean Louis Baudry’s “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” and Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”: each meditates on the subject position of the spectator—a position of relative closeness or detachment. While these historical examples point to the persistent prominence of the concerns addressed by cinephilia throughout the history of film theory, they never address all the questions generated by Cunningham’s loss and longing at once—but the concept of the cinephilic pilgrimage does.

The ritual pilgrimatic journey of the cinephile, the individual “enraptured by the magic of moving images,” to the profilmic sites of *Vertigo* is born not only from the love of film most often used to describe the nature of cinephilia, but also from a desire to somehow move beyond the confines of theatrical appreciations.<sup>129</sup> The wish is to violate the restrictive boundary the screen presents and enter the physical and affective world projected on screen—to unite with the loved object he/she finds within. It is the practical extension of the indexical argument: if the magic of cinema resides within the existential connection between the film and its referent, capturing the referent wholesale, removing

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<sup>128</sup> Jean Epstein, “Photogénie and the Imponderable,” in *French Film Theory and Criticism, Vol. II: 1929-1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 188.

<sup>129</sup> Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2005), 11. For greater discussion on definitions and conceptions of cinephilia, its evolution in film criticism and spectator practice, see: Keathley, *Cinephilia*.

the one boundary between ourselves and the source of cinematic magic, would be like putting out one's hand and touching the face of (the cinematic) god.

The impossibility of ever reaching these diegetic spaces in physical reality is, however, as inevitable as the disappointment such failure engenders. Cunningham proposes writerly acts of personal phenomenological creation at the profilmic sites of *Vertigo* as the way of negotiating these limitations on pilgrimage, of overcoming “the disillusionment engendered by the realities of those places” and redeeming the real from under the weight of the illusion.<sup>130</sup> But such acts, which propose to write over the loss inherent in the site ignore the site's retention of the ineffable place-based trace of the diegesis—the traces of *Vertigo* on the landscape that persist. The obvious traces of the cinematic past in the contemporary states of these sites reignite the nagging desire for transcendence into the screen illusion promised by the indexical argument—a desire that cannot be extinguished with the projection of new experience onto the reality of the site. The site operates as a palimpsest in which the previous moments inscribed on its façade can never be fully erased. If a conflation of reality and illusion—the attainment of the referent—is the ultimate desire of the cinephile, only through spectatorial identification with Scottie can this transcendence be (somewhat) attained, and even then only temporarily, through his recreation of Madeleine in Judy, as he recoups the past in the present.

This chapter extends the many investigations of the reality-illusion conflict that precede it by examining how that conflict can be brought to bear on the extra-diegetic

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<sup>130</sup> Cunningham, “‘It’s all there, it’s no dream,’” 126.

filming sites of the cinephilic pilgrimage. In doing so, I will show that the spatiotemporal differences of the site cannot be overcome to reconnect with the diegesis—the referent promised by the index. Nor can the place-based traces of the diegesis be escaped (or overwritten) to alleviate the longing this failure to reconnect produces. This double failure indicates not only the practical failure of the applied indexical argument in fandom and cinephilic rituals, but also the need for an alteration of the expectations of the pilgrim at the site and in the theater. The profilmic site will eventually become a place of homage, mourning, and celebration, while subjective identification with Scottie as a spectatorial surrogate in *Vertigo* will remain the only way to experience diegetic recovery—refiguring *Vertigo* as a metacritique: a meditation on spectatorship itself.

Prior to an examination of the extra-diegetic repercussions of the reality/illusion conflation, a reassessment of how this blurred distinction functions when confined to the world of the film is necessary. It is made most apparent through an examination of its two-act structure.<sup>131</sup> The first act of the film documents the initial manifestation of Scottie's vertigo, his first meeting with Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), and the presentation of the premise for his tailing of Gavin's wife, Madeleine (or the woman Elster leads Scottie to believe is Madeleine), up through Scottie's mental breakdown following the "death" of Madeleine. Throughout this first act, Scottie regards Gavin's appraisal of Madeleine's behavior with ardent skepticism. From Gavin's initial explanation of his concern for Madeleine as rooted in her potential possession by a ghost, to his agreement with the jury ruling her death a suicide "committed while of unsound mind," Scottie

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<sup>131</sup> Hitchcock's brief comments on the film in his interviews with Truffaut support this structural division as the director himself states, "the story is divided up into two parts." See: François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 243.

remains unconvinced. At their first meeting in Gavin's office in the Mission District, Scottie goes so far as to not only express his doubt but to suggest Gavin and Madeleine may both be suffering from an undiagnosed medical issue for believing possession possible.<sup>132</sup>

GAVIN: Scottie, do you believe that someone out of the past, someone dead, can enter and take possession of a living being?

SCOTTIE: No.

GAVIN: If I told you that I believe this has happened to my wife, what would you say?

SCOTTIE: Well, I'd say take her to the nearest psychiatrist or psychologist or neurologist or psycho-, or maybe just the plain family doctor. I'd have him check on you, too.

From this point forward Scottie focuses on attempting to disprove not only Gavin's professed belief that Carlotta Valdes has possessed Madeleine, but also on the more general basis of that belief: the possibility that the spirit of an individual whose physicality is confined to the past by death, that something immaterial and immortal, can invade a living being, can impinge upon reality. His confusion by this premise, and subsequent focus on disproving the conditions of its possibility, demonstrates Gavin's neutralization of Scottie's investigative capacities. Gavin misdirects Scottie's attention away from the Elsters' marriage and toward the reality-illusion conflict—effectively rendering Scottie only a reliable witness rather than a legal threat. He is so consumed

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<sup>132</sup> Kraft and Leventhal note that the area identified by Scottie as "a Mission address," couldn't have been in the Mission District at all. The Mission is not on the water, and Elster's office features a view of the San Francisco shipyards. See: Kraft and Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog*, 82.

with this implausibility of a past/present manifesting in Carlotta/Madeleine, with finding “the key” to “put it together” and “explain it away,” that he is rendered powerless as a criminal detective in this first act—wholly controlled by Gavin’s plan. Even the structure of Scottie’s speech patterns evinces his position as reactive rather than directive or leading. The question-and-answer dialogue pattern in which Scottie queries Madeleine while she provides leading clues, persists throughout their interactions in the first half of the film—perhaps most notably in the scene filmed along the coast at Point Lobos.<sup>133</sup>

SCOTTIE: What do you remember?

MADELEINE: There’s a room, and I sit there alone. Always alone.

SCOTTIE: What else?

MADELEINE: A grave.

SCOTTIE: Where?

MADELEINE: I don’t know. It’s an open grave and I...I stand by the gravestone, looking down into it. It’s my grave.

SCOTTIE: But how do you know?

MADELEINE: I know.

SCOTTIE: But is there a name on the gravestone?

MADELEINE: No. No, it’s new, and clean, and waiting.

SCOTTIE: Well, what else?

Considering Hitchcock’s adherence to “pure cinema,” it may seem antithetical to use dialogue to support the assertion that Scottie is neutralized as an investigative force by

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<sup>133</sup> For an additional paradigmatic example of this dialogue style, see Madeleine and Scottie’s visit to the redwood forest at Big Basin State Park prior to this scene.

the overlapping confusion of the boundaries between reality and illusion, but it is precisely because of this adherence, that the dialogue becomes all the more weighted.<sup>134</sup> That Scottie's speech is designed as an endless string of interrogatories, that it is dependent rather than independent of Madeleine's answers, reveals his overwhelming confusion. He is so puzzled by Madeleine's affliction that he fails not only to persuade her of the impossibility of its premise but, more importantly, to see the murder plot beneath.

Scottie's restriction from criminal suspicion and consignment to the boundaries of inquiry evinced by his dialogue style is indicative of his having fallen for the murderer's own MacGuffin. While Hitchcock identified his "best MacGuffin, and by that I mean the emptiest, the most nonexistent, and the most absurd" as the non-specific "government secrets" used in *North by Northwest* (1959), that misdirection was the director's not the villain's; the microfilm was never intended by Phillip Vandamm (James Mason) to distract Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) from the "real" concern of the picture.<sup>135</sup> Though Hitchcock's use of a ghost as a MacGuffin in *Vertigo* could perhaps be argued as truly the most literally "nonexistent," attributing it to Gavin-as-director within the diegesis

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<sup>134</sup> When asked by Bogdanovich to define "pure cinema," Hitchcock describes it as "complementary pieces of film put together, like notes of music make a melody." It is using "montage to create ideas...to create violence and emotions." Bogdanovich, *The Cinema of Alfred Hitchcock*, 4. This emphasis on the ability of imagery to convey meaning has frequently been attributed to Hitchcock's beginnings in silent film, though it became a benchmark of his technical style and filmmaking philosophy throughout his career—perhaps most remarkably, as biographer Donald Spoto notes, during "A wordless, twelve-minute 124-shot sequence" in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956). Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 249. *Vertigo*, too, demonstrates this masterful use of imagery and exemplifies the tenets of "pure cinema," perhaps most obviously during the nearly 15-minute long sequence with almost no dialogue during which Scottie first tails Madeleine. Words without significance, meaningless or unnecessary dialogue: these stand opposed to the most fundamental of Hitchcock's filmmaking strategies. As Hitchcock tells Truffaut, "When we tell a story in cinema, we should resort to dialogue only when it's impossible to do otherwise." Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 61.

<sup>135</sup> Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 139.

ranks it as absolutely the most impressive internal MacGuffin there is. Assigning such internal correlates for the extra-diegetic position of director and MacGuffin implies Scottie's character also correlates with an extra-diegetic role: the position of the spectator—a diegetic spectator—to the production Gavin has directed. And throughout the film Scottie is indeed placed in this spectatorial position, a position made evident not only through his dialogue style and position in relation to the internal MacGuffin, but also through Hitchcock's use of subjective camera. Laura Mulvey's 1975 comments on this identification process characterize Scottie's position not only as analogous to that of the spectator, but also as the link binding the spectator to Scottie as a surrogate:

“Hitchcock's skillful use of identification processes and liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw the spectators deeply into his position, making them share his uneasy gaze.”<sup>136</sup> Marian E. Keane, however, refutes this proposed spectator identification with Scottie in her critique of Mulvey's reading in 1986 by putting forth Judy's flashback sequence as the moment establishing “a deep bond between her [Judy] and the camera that is not broken for the remainder of the film.”<sup>137</sup> As this is the moment at which the murder plot is revealed to the spectator, as well as the first moment at which the audience has more story information than Scottie, Keane proposes this enlightenment of the spectator as both distancing from Scottie and as the basis of audience identification with Judy. However, while Keane's analysis may correctly single out this moment as one which relegates Scottie to a marginalized position of unknowing, an analysis of spectator identification based on story revelation, founded

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<sup>136</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 15.

<sup>137</sup> Marian E. Keane, “A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock and *Vertigo*,” in *A Hitchcock Reader*, ed. Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1986), 235.



on Judy's knowledge as commensurate to the spectator's own, does not account for cinephilic desire. Because of Scottie's already established position as a cinephilic-like pilgrim questing to recoup that which is lost, a journey representative of the cinephile's parallel attempts to access the diegesis through its traces that remain on the landscape, spectator identification remains with him. Cinephiles crave the experience of utter elation promised by the potential satisfaction of his desire to transcend the boundaries of reality and resurrect Madeleine enough to continue the identification, despite an awareness of its falsity. So while Keane later accurately characterizes the "remainder of the film [as] a study of her [Judy's] love for Stewart/Scottie and of his attachment to her," it is Mulvey's assertion that "identification with the image seen" is in part responsible for the scopophilic pleasure we take in viewing the film that determines our continued identification with Scottie.<sup>138</sup>

Within the context of the diegesis however, one of the elements contributing to our identification with Scottie also determines the eventual unraveling of the murder plot beneath the reality-illusion conflation that undermines Scottie's investigatory capacities in the first act. Gavin's reality-illusion MacGuffin may be impressive from an analytical perspective, yet in another sense, it is also that "impressiveness"—by which I mean its deep effect on Scottie—that is its ruin. Prior to Madeleine's death Scottie focuses wholly on disproving Madeleine's possession. Elster's direction of Judy's Madeleine/Carlotta is in fact so effective during the first act that they jointly render ambiguous the boundaries between reality and illusion for Scottie to such a degree that the resulting confusion: first

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<sup>138</sup> Keane, "A Closer Look at Scopophilia," 235. And, Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 10.

contributes to his eventual breakdown, and subsequently also determines his objective in the second half of the film as a reversal of his objective in the first. No longer will he be bent on proving the clear separation of reality and illusion as he earlier did in his attempts to explain away Madeleine's Carlotta trances. No longer will he attempt to prove the illusion false; he will instead be actively attempting to merge illusion with reality. In "A free replay (notes on *Vertigo*)," Chris Marker takes this view to its furthest extreme when he describes the second half of the film as complete fantasy, a dream from the bedside of a still institutionalized Scottie.<sup>139</sup> Regardless of the degree to which spectators are led "even further away from the appearance of realism," though, whether Scottie attempts to revive a past moment in the present, or the fantasy of the past has completely eclipsed his reality, both readings of the film grant the dominance of fantasy.<sup>140</sup> Gavin's MacGuffin is so convincing it founds Scottie's obsessions in the second act of the film. His false story is the impetus for Scottie's specific determination to regain possession of Madeleine—whether in his mind or outside it—through her recreation in Judy, which will later stand as the symptomatic expression of his more general determination to evade reality and resurrect the dead—a reversal of his original perspective on the reality-illusion distinction.

This thematic reversal is mirrored in Scottie's reverse use of the physical landmarks of the film. In the first act, Scottie attempts to use landmarks to prove to Madeleine the impenetrability of reality, of *her* reality, of her rootedness in the present, and thereby undermine the authority of Carlotta and her inevitable fate. As Jonathan

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<sup>139</sup> Chris Marker, "A free replay (notes on *Vertigo*)," in *Projections 4½*, ed. John Boorman and Walter Donohue (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

<sup>140</sup> Marker, "A free replay (notes on *Vertigo*)," 126.

Freedman notes, Scottie believes “that in discovering the actual scenes or events the dream work veils and represents, ‘Madeleine’ will be cured of her mental distress, purged of her psychic traumas.”<sup>141</sup> Most notable as a scene of such attempted discovery is Scottie’s drive out to the Plaza Stables at the Mission San Juan Bautista with Madeleine following her frightened, early-morning arrival at his apartment. It is after she retells her dream, “*the dream*” that has been her recurring nightmare with its encroaching threat of “darkness,” that he is finally able to formulate a combative strategy against its threatening interpenetration of reality and illusion. He promises, “Oh, you’re going to be all right now, Madeleine. Don’t you see? You’ve given me something to work on now. I’m going to take you down there to that Mission, this afternoon. And when you see it, you’ll remember when you saw it before, and it’ll finish your dream. It’ll destroy it. I promise you.” Scottie now has “to work on” his new assertion that her dreams are the expression of a variation on Freud’s theorization of dreams as containing memory traces, or residue from past experience.<sup>142</sup> Scottie’s claim to Madeleine that “You’ve been there before. You’ve seen it” becomes the twice-repeated mantra that drives him to confront her dreamed “old whitewashed Spanish church” with the reality of the Mission San Juan Bautista.

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<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Freedman, “From *Spellbound* to *Vertigo*: Alfred Hitchcock and Therapeutic Culture in America,” in *Hitchcock’s America*, ed. Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 92.

<sup>142</sup> Although the time frame from which such “day residue” can be derived is restricted to “the previous day” in its explication in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Scottie is nevertheless relying on a comparable analysis of Madeleine’s dream without the accompanying temporal restriction on the source of those memory traces. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1998), 197.

The introduction of the Mission follows a typically Hitchcockian progression of scale.<sup>143</sup> A slow left-to-right pan across the church exterior, its corridor of adobe arches, and the inner courtyard, ends on the livery stable before dissolving into a downward tilting shot of that same building from a closer distance of framing.<sup>144</sup> The camera then comes to focus on Scottie and Madeleine in extreme long-shot before cutting to a closer long-shot framing and cutting one final time to end on a medium-shot of Scottie and Madeleine as he continues what he believes is the therapeutic confrontation that will save her mind. From beside her seated position in the wagon he pleads with her to remember: “And it’s all real. It’s not merely as it was 100 years ago, or a year ago, or six months ago, or whenever it was you were here to see it. Now, Madeleine, think of when you were here.” He even tries to ply her with physical touch, placing a firm grip around her elbow. Showing the larger grounds of the Mission before turning to these, Scottie’s persistent exhortations inside the specific confines of the livery stable not only serve as indicators of the importance of the reality of the site to the argument he delivers there—its importance to his memory trace rationale—but they are also indicative of the scale of what he is up against. From Scottie’s limited perspective, he is just one man attempting to use a psychological rationalization (Madeleine’s trances as a confusion of her remembrance of things past) to combat what has been proposed as a *true* transcendence

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<sup>143</sup> While Truffaut notes the “dramatic force in your [Hitchcock’s] way of going from the smallest to the greatest,” Hitchcock also frequently reversed this scalar progression as in the opening mountain landscape of *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), the sweeping shot of the Thames marking the beginning of *Frenzy* (1972), or Johnnie’s ascension up the stairs in *Suspicion* (1941) ending with the extreme close-up of the illuminated glass of milk. Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 147.

<sup>144</sup> A nearly identical slow panning shot is repeated following Madeleine’s fall from the tower prior to the jury ruling of her death as a suicide, and the same greatest-to-smallest progression of framing is employed as the camera transitions from the exterior of the building to the interior of the room in which the jury is convened.

of time (the full material realization of remembrance in the present, not just its recollection in the mind), the power of the past, and a fated inevitability.

Madeleine's ability to resurrect the dead, to embody in her person what so many long for—an ability to restore the past rather than simply acknowledge its memory, to surpass its image and representation with real material existence—more than dwarfs Scottie's positivist attempts to prove false that possibility. Symbolic correlates of this vast power differential can be seen in earlier moments of the film, as well—moments in which Scottie, or his desire for Madeleine, is pitted against a similarly overwhelming environment. As during his rescue of Madeleine from the waters of San Francisco Bay following her jump and their later romantic embrace in front of the rough tide of the ocean at Point Lobos. This interpretation of the ocean as comparably vast is noted by Wood as well: "...the sea is older still, beating eternally against the rocks, eroding, wearing down; and it is against such sea associations that the two embrace on the cliff edge, a tiny precarious moment placed against eternity."<sup>145</sup> To read this moment metaphorically requires but a short step beyond Wood's comments. But the clearest symbolic descriptor of this power differential and its effect comes in the form of Scottie's vertigo when its superficiality (i.e., Scottie vs. environments featuring elevated heights) is interpreted as a metaphor for the painful impossibility and overwhelming desire that characterize his conflict with the past—as it has previously (and correctly) been read—and also as the guiding principle of the film in its entirety.<sup>146</sup> This disproportionate degree

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<sup>145</sup> Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, 116.

<sup>146</sup> Spoto reads the conflicting aversion and desire of Scottie's vertigo: "The vertigo has logically become his own attraction toward death as release, and death as union with Madeleine," while Marker's later comments clearly assert the metaphorical value of Scottie's vertigo: "'You're my second chance!' cries

of difference contributes to how consumed by the reality-illusion conflation Scottie has become by the time he forces Madeleine to confront a tangible physical reality in the stable, how desiring of a logical explanation he is as he pushes Madeleine to search for the memory of the Mission he supposes she must have converted into an illusion or into the dream. The cinephilic pilgrim's attempts to negotiate the traces embedded in the original shooting sites parallel Scottie's failure in this scalar confrontation. Just as Scottie tries here (and will later try at Ernie's with Judy), the pilgrim too makes attempts to redeem the reality of the site to him/herself, to dissipate the illusion. I tried to facilitate such redemption for myself, to accept the failure of the applied indexical argument. I tried to accept the failure of my search for the referent as the source of cinematic magic, accept the absence of the illusion, by admitting that the view of the Golden Gate Bridge at Fort Point is not only obscured by fog but now also somewhat obscured with fences erected by Homeland Security (Figure 2.1); that the bench once facing Carlotta's portrait now faces an adjacent wall in the Palace of the Legion of Honor; that no high bell tower exists up which to run at the Mission San Juan Bautista; that Madeline's gray horse has been subject to age, its fragile coat (of paint) now peeling rather readily. Yet unlike Scottie's desire (at this moment in the film) to prove the dominance of the real, I found

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Scottie as he drags Judy up to the stairs of the tower. No one now wants to interpret these words in their superficial sense, meaning his vertigo has been conquered. It's about reliving a moment lost in the past, about bringing it back to life only to lose it again." Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, 288. And, Marker, "A free replay (notes of *Vertigo*)," 129. In addition, Wood interprets the precipitating trigger of Scottie's vertigo, his witness of death and suspension from the gutter at the close of the opening chase sequence, as the film's guiding principle: Scottie's vertigo arises from "the tension between the desire to fall and the dread of falling—an idea it is worth bearing in mind in relation to the whole of the film." Wood sees Scottie wanting to be near death (that which is past) and yet still feel afraid of it: "The effect is of having him, throughout the film, metaphorically suspended over a great abyss," Wood, *Hitchcock's Films Revisited*, 110-111. Sterritt echoes Wood's vertigo-as-principal-metaphor analysis: "...the idea of suspension [is introduced] beginning with Scottie's literal suspension over the urban abyss. Scottie will soon be seen living in a state of suspension....Metaphorically, his position at the end of the first scene gives birth to this situation." Sterritt, *The Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, 85.

all these admissions of difference, acknowledgements of discontinuity, both frustrating and disappointing. Cunningham proposes these disparities not as



*Figure 2.1 Contemporary View of Fort Point*

failures, but as the

attraction itself.<sup>147</sup> He advances the entrance of difference into the site as a gate of admittance through which the cinephile can reanimate the profilmic site by achieving “the genuinely spiritual experience” that he identifies as the demarcation between tourist and pilgrim.<sup>148</sup>

Cunningham summarizes and coalesces the work of Dean MacCannell, Jill Dubish, and Michael Winkelman, in his declaration of the goal of the pilgrim through a proffered definition of the distinction between tourist and pilgrim: “Whereas the tourist hopes to overcome the psychic, physical and spatiotemporal ruptures caused by modernization, the pilgrim seeks to achieve a sense of wholeness and/or healing (physical, mental or spiritual) through a spiritual journey to a revered site.”<sup>149</sup> In search of

<sup>147</sup> Cunningham, “It’s all there, it’s no dream,” 135.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 135. Here Cunningham paraphrases ideas in Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1999), 12-13. He also paraphrases ideas from: Jill Dubish and Michael Winkelman, *Pilgrimage and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), xxvii.

this wholeness and/or healing, rather than wallowing in the disappointment engendered by the discontinuities at the site between reality and illusion, the pilgrim sets to honoring the space, “for he not only journeys to a place art has inspired in him, he also uses that opportunity to make a creative statement of his own, one that will both figuratively and literally perpetuate further appreciation of the work of art (if by no one else, then at least by himself).”<sup>150</sup> The pilgrim thus receives his satisfaction through creation and honors the original artistic spirit of the site by making it new again, by “creatively reframing the space.”<sup>151</sup>

Of the several creative reframings Cunningham suggests, I attempted photography, reenactment, and as this chapter attests, a critical intervention. Attempting to accept the reality of the site as distinct from its appearance on the screen by instead focusing on a carrying on of the creative spirit it represents, I inserted myself into a creative experience of the new. With Bernard Herrmann’s score cued up on an iPod, I mirrored Madeline’s contemplative stare into the Bay, but a few feet down from its original location; I sat at the now-moved bench at the Palace of the Legion of Honor before an altogether different portrait; I took a run at the doors of the Mission San Juan Bautista without the pretension of them leading to any tower; and I patted the gray horse—part of whose mane came off on my hand—as Scottie once did. But just as Scottie fails to redeem reality to Madeleine in the Plaza Stables, and later at Ernie’s, so, too, did I fail. Both failures result from the power differential indicating the dominance of the illusion. While Cunningham may have identified the most realistic way of dealing

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<sup>150</sup> Cunningham, “It’s all there, it’s no dream,” 132.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.



with the contemporary states of *Vertigo*'s profilmic sites, his discussion is focused on active creation at the site rather than on a desire for the diegesis created by 40 years of scholarship perpetuating the indexical argument—the former not truly an address of the latter; the latter persists regardless of the former, incited on by the former, and at times seemingly in spite of the former. This is not to propose an equation of the pilgrim with Cunningham's tourist, but instead to propose that these are not mutually exclusive categories; their overlap, however, may spring from distinct motivations. While the tourist may simply be motivated to “see the sites,” happy to be able to snap a few pictures of the places that once appeared in such-and-such film, his or her need for a one-to-one correlation between reality and screen is not as pressing, not as looked-for, not as necessary, not the motivation upon which his or her travels or search were founded. The cinephilic pilgrim, however, seeks out the one-to-one, the precise adherence of reality to the screen illusion, not only because of a potentially greater previous attention to and engagement with the film (as the term cinephile implies), but because of what such reality-illusion correspondence represents in cinephilic/indexical discourse: the possibility of transcendence.

Yet, both reality and illusion fall short of a complete coup of the other: neither can the pilgrim access the full filmic illusion, nor a reality wholly divorced from that illusion; they cannot engage the mimetic traces of *Vertigo* alone, nor can they purge those traces from the site. Just as Scottie cannot save Madeleine from her own purported fascination with an illusion of the past. Though Scottie argues vehemently on the side of reality, as the murder plot intersects with the reality-illusion conflict personified by Carlotta's

purported possession of Madeleine and invasion into her dream world, he must necessarily fail. No matter how convincing or unconvincing Scottie's explanations for the conflict are deemed, he must fail: not only because of the weight the "dominance of illusion" now carries as a central theme of the film, but also—and more immediately—because the real Madeleine is scheduled to be thrown from the Mission bell tower.

Following Madeleine's "suicide" and Scottie's subsequent breakdown and institutionalization, the second act of the film proves the failure of reality not to be confined to the first, initiating the continued siding with illusion that will develop beginning with a long, slow pan across the cityscape of San Francisco. This meditatively paced shot, which spans more than 180 degrees of landscape, not only reflects the important role physical landmarks play in Scottie's exhortations to prove the dominance of reality over illusion in the first act, but also the reverse role they will play in the second. For their 2002 book *Footsteps in the Fog: Alfred Hitchcock's San Francisco*, Jeff Kraft and Aaron Leventhal consulted the extensive studio records of *Vertigo* at the Margaret Herrick Library to determine that "this shot was taken from the top of Twin Peaks, on Twin Peaks Boulevard at the top of Market Street. Being the highest point in San Francisco, it has sweeping, unobstructed views of the city."<sup>152</sup> Considering how imbued with ghostly possession the city locations once occupied by Madeleine will become in the second half of the film as Scottie searches for traces of Madeleine, it's curious that Hitchcock did not here also make use of either the fog filters in use at other moments of the film as an indicator of ghostly possession, or the natural fog that rolls in

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<sup>152</sup> Kraft and Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog*, 149.

off the bay under which Kraft and Leventhal note that “the city seems to disappear...and visibility on Twin Peaks is reduced to almost zero.”<sup>153</sup> However, rather than regarding this shot as one with unrealized potential, the decision not to use either a fog filter or natural fog can be interpreted as a decision in favor of transitional suspense. Using a soft effect would have connoted ghostliness or a dreamlike quality, and thus would have foreshadowed too much, would have over-revealed the use of landmarks-as-haunted that occurs in the second half of the film.<sup>154</sup> Much like Truffaut’s comments on Hitchcock’s camera technique during their discussion of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock consummately avoids “technique [that] *precedes* the action instead of *accompanying* it,” and this point in *Vertigo* is no exception—it maintains his rule that “the camera should never anticipate what’s about to follow.”<sup>155</sup> Thus we are left in suspense, the importance of the physical landmarks of the city of San Francisco established; how those landmarks will be used, however, and by whom, is left as yet undisclosed.

This suspense is partly satisfied following the transitional pan of the cityscape.

After the pan dissolves into Scottie’s return to the Brocklebank Apartments, Madeleine’s former residence, his fleeting mistaken identity of another woman for Madeleine initiates

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<sup>153</sup> The use of filters in *Vertigo* is perhaps most notable following Judy’s emergence from the bathroom in her room at the Empire Hotel. Shot with a fog filter, her emergence marks the reveal of her “new” appearance to Scottie—her complete transformation back into Madeleine—and the appearance for Scottie of a ghost. *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>154</sup> In his interviews with Truffaut, Hitchcock defines the use of these soft effects as intended to achieve such connotations in *Vertigo* specifically: “At the beginning of the picture, when James Stewart follows Madeleine to the cemetery, we gave her a dreamlike, mysterious quality by shooting through a fog filter. That gave us a green effect, like fog over the bright sunshine. Then, later on, when Stewart first meets Judy, I decided to make her live at the Empire Hotel in Post Street [it’s actually on Sutter Street] because it has a green neon sign flashing continually outside the window. So when the girl emerges from the bathroom, that green light gives her the same subtle, ghostlike quality. After focusing on Stewart, who’s staring at her, we go back to the girl, but now we slip that soft effect away to indicate that Stewart’s come back to reality.” Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 244-45.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

the beginning of the second act of the film as his wandering pilgrimage: a ghost hunt through the landmarks he previously visited while following her. The pilgrimage, broadly defined within the literary tradition by Philip Edwards in 2005, “is a journey, expected to be long and arduous, to a sacred place or a shrine, where the pilgrim hopes by a rite of communion to obtain spiritual benefit or divine assistance, or forgiveness, or a physical cure.”<sup>156</sup> Cunningham’s later overview of the concept of pilgrimage, noting sacred journeys ranging from religious quests to sci-fi convention excursions, extends the pilgrimage to extra-narrative, extra-diegetic seeking born of the cinephile’s sense of love, loss, and longing.<sup>157</sup> For Scottie, as both a character within the diegesis and as a spectatorial surrogate, his journey stands as an intersection between both these definitions. He has experienced the love, the loss, and the longing, but because of his position as a character within the screen illusion, he can do what the spectator cannot: occupy a spatiotemporal position removed from the desired referent, and still recoup the lost love absolutely.

Though intending to assuage a longing analogous to that which we feel for the diegetic world of the film (as a result of the indexical argument’s infiltration into spectator practice with its assertion that the magic of the cinema lies with the capture of the referent), the methodology by which Scottie attempts to satisfy that desire corresponds to the internal, inner-narrative definition given by Edwards. The journey to the places now revered by Scottie for the traces of Madeleine they hold is potentially curative in both the spiritual and physical sense if he can determine the rite of

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<sup>156</sup> Philip Edwards, *Pilgrimage and Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 5.

<sup>157</sup> Cunningham, “It’s all there, it’s no dream,” 124.

communion in order to effect his desired result: the restoration of the past. And my use of the broader noun “past” rather than just “Madeleine” as an individual is here both deliberate and significant in distinguishing Scottie’s intended pilgrimatic purpose and the rite, or the means, to achieve those desired ends. Does he desire the resurrection of Madeleine in the present, or the resurrection of both Madeleine and the past in which she was once alive? Keane singles out Madeleine alone as the object whose resurrection is desired: “He [Scottie] will not be satisfied until the ghost is made flesh, until he has created a living woman out of the dead one.”<sup>158</sup> Kraft and Leventhal describe his journey as a search for the individual, as well: “After his release from the hospital, Scottie is shown wandering morosely around San Francisco: at the Brocklebank, Ernie’s, the Palace of the Legion of Honor, and Podesta Baldocchi, trying to conjure Madeleine back to life.”<sup>159</sup> But this emphasis on the pursuit in search of the individual accounts for only the partial cause of Scottie’s breakdown, an emphasis I propose to shift through a reality/illusion-focused reading of the dream sequence precipitating the breakdown and its subsequent repercussions on Scottie’s post-institutionalization pursuits.

In the dream sequence designed by John Ferren, Scottie’s falls prove important to understanding his second-act goal as the resurrection of Madeleine *and* the past more generally. First, he falls into the blackened darkness of Carlotta’s grave, and then he falls from the same bell tower off which he believes Madeleine to have jumped earlier. These subconscious events are symptoms that a sort of assimilation has occurred in Scottie in which the fears of the now-deceased “Madeleine” have become his own. She, too, feared

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<sup>158</sup> Keane, “A Closer Look at Scopophilia,” 236.

<sup>159</sup> Kraft and Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog*, 150.

“falling into Carlotta’s grave,” not only in her dream, in *the* dream, in which she describes how a similar “darkness closed in and I was alone in the dark, being pulled into the darkness, and I fought to wake up,” but quite literally, as well—falling from the tower to her death is a fall ending in the grave. Figuratively, if read as a metaphor, “falling into Carlotta’s grave” is her fear of falling to her death both *like* Carlotta (from the tower) and *as* Carlotta (in that she has been “possessed” by her ghost). Because Scottie believes Madeleine to have had these fears; because her death represents the complete fruition of those fears and therefore the complete violation of reality by illusion—an interpenetration Scottie believed impossible—his understanding of reality is left unbalanced following her death. What he thought was the impenetrable boundary dividing reality and illusion, the demarcation that may now more specifically be referred to as separating the present and the past, was crossed by Madeleine’s figurative fall into Carlotta’s grave and the literal fall into her own, breaking the backbone of Scottie’s conception of the present and precipitating his own nightmare of falling to his death—falling prey to the past. As Freedman notes, “the dream does indeed quite literally become Scottie’s,” following Madeleine’s death; “it passes directly into his own oneiric life” to become the symptom of her death’s validation for him of the present as violable.<sup>160</sup> His dream and subsequent breakdown are indicative of this complete undermining of what was his reverse conception of reality, a conception that had compartmentalized the material past and present. Yet ironically, once he is recovered enough to leave the hospital, this same new belief in the possibility of an interpenetrating past and present also characterizes his

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<sup>160</sup> Freedman, “From *Spellbound* to *Vertigo*,” 92.

attempts to escape the mortality he so fears. He will pursue the recreation of the past as the key to his own immortality.

While Scottie pursues Madeleine, he also attempts to recapture her by recreating her in Judy; this desire to evade the passage of time, to evade death, has always been and will always be Scottie's overriding concern. The fear of death was always already present prior to not only Madeleine's death, but even to her introduction, as part of Scottie's vertigo. Madeleine did not create the simultaneous attraction to and fear of death that characterizes his vertigo; she only alters his response to it. Prior to her introduction he dealt with it logically, much as he explained her possession with a psychological rationalization, attempting to manage his affliction through cognitive-behavioral exercises (much like the progressive exposure therapy he attempts in Midge's apartment: gradually climbing up a step ladder in an effort to systematically desensitize himself to his fear). Yet once Madeleine dies, a death that stands as proof for him of the triumph of an illusion over reality, the victory of an irrationality, he can no longer justify a reality defense against his vertiginous fears. Because her death proves that the past and the present can be blurred, Scottie abandons his attempts to cure his affliction, instead refocusing his efforts on removing only the element of fear from his vertigo while embracing the attraction to death and to the past, dedicating himself through Judy/Madeleine to obtaining the past, to reanimating it—making it (and himself) immortal. Madeleine is thus revealed as only the love object. I use the term “object” here because Scottie falls in love with the idea she represents rather than with Madeleine as an individual. She becomes an object-conduit through which he can access an idea. This use

of Madeleine-as-intermediary creates a triangular relationship between Scottie and his past. Madeleine becomes a transacted object, a dowry owed to marry Scottie's past to his present. Madeleine is being transacted in order to form a relationship between the exchange partners of Scottie and the past, making her an object-conduit rather than a partner to their link. Only her transcendence of reality attracts him, even from the beginning. She represents more than reality, more than the ordinary worldliness of Midge, and her death convinces him to embrace the idea she represents as the ultimate cure for the fear underlying his vertigo.<sup>161</sup> If he can resurrect her, if he can just bring her back, he can also get back what she represents. The required "rite of communion" to restore the past is the recreation of Madeleine herself.

While not the ultimate goal of his journey, Scottie's pursuit of the rite, the object-conduit, becomes the ostensible motivation for the journey he takes to locations once occupied by Madeleine. A "complete" Madeleine is never found, however; instead, each successive stop holds only traces of the original—and frustration. Following Scottie's stop at the Brocklebank Apartments, Hitchcock's use of subjective camera from Scottie's perspective shows Scottie confusing yet another woman for Madeleine during a visit to Ernie's. After his entrance and seating at the bar he turns toward the dining room as the camera closes in on his growing look of shock: eyes widening, mouth falling agape. We then join Scottie's gaze as the camera cuts to Novak-as-Madeleine rising from a table in the other room, but we return to the previous shot of Scottie just as her face falls under a

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<sup>161</sup> Midge-as-analogue to an unsatisfying reality is best evinced in her attempts to compete with Madeleine as Scottie's love object. Inserting her face into a parody of Carlotta's portrait reveals, as Wood notes, her "down-to-earth normality and her inadequacy," and Scottie "resents the attempt to shatter the dream." Wood, *Hitchcock's Film Revisited*, 116.



convenient shadow. A cut back to Scottie's view of this "Madeleine" shows her emerging from the shadow, and as her face again comes into view we see she is no longer Novak but another look-a-like—another *doppelgänger*. The final shot inside Ernie's is of Scottie as he tries to recompose himself: closing his mouth, looking down and away from this cipher in disappointment before looking back one last time, perhaps to reaffirm her falsity, then finally ordering a drink to calm himself. Wholly analogous to the experience of the extra-diegetic pilgrimage of the cinephile, the place-based traces of the film found at contemporary site visits to the Mission Dolores, Fort Point, or any of *Vertigo's* San Francisco, produce this same peak and valley of emotion. The landscape that remains accurate to the film, those elements that time has yet to efface, these cue the expectation to find Madeleine running into the church and up the bell tower, or dropping petals into the Bay; these traces cue the initial elation felt at a site visit. They make the pilgrim believe in the magic promised by cinephilia and the indexical argument. But upon discovering that the height up which to run is missing from the bell tower, and that no Madeleine stands trance-like before the Golden Gate Bridge, a failure to enter the diegesis is made painfully evident. The attempt to supplant visual spectatorship with a bodily, kinetic mimicry, fails. The hopeful pursuit of a greater magic than theatrical viewing can produce, achieved by chasing the referent, only disheartens. Like Scottie, the pilgrim finds only a *doppelgänger* of their own, and the inadequacy of reality is as disappointing for them as for him. Yet while the pilgrim's successive site visits must find some way to accept this divergence of the profilmic site from the diegesis, Scottie's continued search yields only a progressive confusion of illusion and reality with the

sighting of another double in the gallery at the Palace of the Legion of Honor. This time he is shown right next to his mistaken object, standing just inches from this not-Madeleine's seated position in front of the picture of Carlotta before which he had once watched Madeleine sit. His increased proximity to this woman, this not-Madeleine who affirms the existence of a place-based trace of Madeleine while denying her real solidity, indicates how Scottie is not only continuing to confuse Madeleine with these doubles but how this confusion is growing in intensity: needing to be nearly on top of this particular double before being able to distinguish her as inauthentic. As his desire increases with each of these subsequent frustrations his confusion increases proportionately, and until he can complete the pilgrimatic rite he will not be granted the psychophysical relief that will come with its achievement.

Only once does Scottie's determination to satisfy the requirements of his quest falter. Prior to beginning his attempts to recreate Madeleine in Judy, to recreate the lost love-object in the present, to prove the possibility of time's transcendence, death's evasion, and finally, the possibility that he, too, can one day escape his own death, his own mortality—the fundamental fear of which is ultimately responsible for his vertigo—Scottie first makes a brief effort at acceptance. He endeavors to accept Madeleine's loss by attempting an act of phenomenological creation to assuage his longing. While phenomenology does not have a history of dominance in film studies, it has, as Daniel Frampton notes in his study on the relationship between philosophical traditions and film, “almost exclusively been brought in to help clarify questions of filmgoer experience and

interpretation.”<sup>162</sup> Such a focus on the spectator seems self-evident considering that, for phenomenology, the subject and object are indivisible. It is the “describing [of] the mingling of consciousness with the world,” as Merleau-Ponty asserts in “The Film and the New Psychology.”<sup>163</sup> And it is this “mingling,” the interaction between the “things-in-themselves” and the lived experience of human consciousness that gives us access to the world. The direction of subjective attention at its environs, an object, or its intention of anything, is its origin. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the creative effect of the subject’s attention toward its object, or what becomes termed the “intentionality” of consciousness. It is “the active constitution of a new object which makes explicit and articulate what was until then presented as no more than an indeterminate horizon.”<sup>164</sup>

By taking Judy to the sacred space of Ernie’s, Scottie attempts such a creative spectatorly act of directed intentionality not simply to apprehend the world around him, but rather to attempt an overwriting of the past with the experience of the new in the present. By writing himself and Judy into the dining space once occupied by Gavin and Madeleine, he hopes to redeem the real, to purge the mnemonic traces of the past with the

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<sup>162</sup> As Frank P. Tomasulo notes, phenomenology had an “enormous impact on the French film theory of the 1960s and 1970s, including the work of André Bazin, Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour, Jean-Louis Baudry, and others, [though] few screen scholars are aware of this tradition today.” “Phenomenology: Philosophy and Media Theory—An Introduction,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 12, no. 3 (1990): 3. However, Tomasulo’s own work stands to represent the strong, if small, remaining interest in phenomenological film theory, as it prefaces an entire special issue of the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* dedicated to phenomenology and media studies. Similarly Allan Casebier (1991), Spencer Shaw (2008), Malin Wahlberg (2008), and perhaps most notably Vivian Sobchack with her contribution of *The Address of the Eye* in 1992, have all published book-length studies on film and phenomenology since Tomasulo’s comments were made. And, Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>163</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology,” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern, 1964), 59.

<sup>164</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 31.

active constitution of a new experience in the present. Much as Elster placed Scottie in a spectatorial position before, an analogous relationship can here again be drawn between the spectator and Scottie; his pilgrimage parallels the cinephilic pilgrimage, continuing *Vertigo* as a meta-discourse about spectatorship. It is the diegetic execution of Cunningham's proffered creative intentionality of phenomenology as the redemptive solution to that problem that has always plagued the cinema: the cinephile's inevitable disappointment with his/her pilgrimage to film locations—a dissatisfaction born from the predestined inability of the spectator to reconcile diegesis to reality, to achieve a climactic transcendence of space and time to reunite, for *Vertigo*, with Hitchcock's San Francisco. Yet while Scottie's and Cunningham's proffered solutions of the phenomenological "personal creative act" are optimistic, they attribute creative agency with the capacity to write over the past to the degree that it can efface what Barthes identifies as that overwhelming sense of loss one feels knowing that what exists on film, or in the past, is irretrievably lost.<sup>165</sup> Scottie's own phenomenological attempt to move beyond the cinephilic-like obsession he harbors, which has up until his dinner at Ernie's attempted to utilize "real spaces as 'portals' through which to once again access, personally experience, and even occupy the past," shows such longing is not so easily put aside.<sup>166</sup> His sighting of another grey-suited *doppelgänger* over dinner immediately engenders the abandonment of this strategy whose success could have led to the acceptance of Madeleine's loss, the mollification of Scottie's longing, and the leaving

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<sup>165</sup> Cunningham, "It's all there, it's no dream," 133. Also, in his 1980 treatise on photography, Roland Barthes asserts the photograph as "the living image of a dead thing." Ironically, Barthes identifies this "distortion between certainty and oblivion" as "vertigo." Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 79 and 85.

<sup>166</sup> Cunningham, "It's all there, it's no dream," 126.

behind of his desire to “empower film to be life itself.”<sup>167</sup> The appearance of the double causes Scottie to move beyond the confines of those places to/at which he either once followed Madeleine, visited with her, or learned she purportedly visited.<sup>168</sup> The appearance of the double is, in other words, the catalyst for a move away from the healing potential of phenomenological creation.

This abandonment of mourning and the eventual acceptance phenomenological creation suggests is indicative of Scottie’s inability to escape the Bergsonian conception of *durée*, or duration. “The dynamic movement of passing yet continuous time,” duration is “the conservation of the past in the present.”<sup>169</sup> A.R. Lacey summarizes this conception of time as one in which moments “interpenetrate and are never completely independent.”<sup>170</sup> In his two volume study on the cinema, Deleuze declares the importance of the Bergsonian conception of *durée* to the idea of cinematic time in particular; asserting the impossibility of the instant, the present being always a contraction of the past, always augmenting the present, “corresponding to deeper and deeper layers of reality” through the preservation and calling forth of the virtual past into the actual present.<sup>171</sup> Such a conception of cinematic time figures the passage of time as the cumulative progression of qualitative change: each successive moment influencing that

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>168</sup> Never shown in the movie, Madeleine’s alleged visit to the Portals of the Past monument in Golden Gate Park is only referenced by Elster in his first meeting with Scottie. He relates how he watched as she “sat by the lake, staring across the water at the pillars that stand on the far shore. You know, Portals of the Past.”

<sup>169</sup> Donald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 12. Also, Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), 23, quoted in Bogue, *Deleuze*, 15.

<sup>170</sup> A.R. Lacey, *Bergson* (London: Routledge, 1989), 22.

<sup>171</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 67.

which follows—a collective process without end or escape to the singular isolable instant.

Because Scottie is unable to accept a qualitatively evolving present, yet is equally unable to escape the past inherent in *durée*, “an experience” for him being “always influenced by all previous experiences,” the landmarks marking Scottie’s past interactions with Madeleine become overdetermined when he returns to them with Judy—traces of the past resulting in multiple near-Madeleines from different times existing alongside each other in the present: here both the gray-suited *doppelgänger* and Judy.<sup>172</sup> With multiple near-Madeleines confusing his efforts at an act of phenomenological creation, Scottie resumes his pilgrimage to recoup a singular object-conduit with the capacity to unlock the past, to provide, in other words, an escape hatch from *durée*. Be it an individual, a location, or an object, he needs someone, someplace, or something that has already proven its transcendent ability. And so Madeleine alone remains the key to a “second chance” at moments already past. To recapture that which he truly desires, he must transform Judy into Madeleine. Unsurprisingly then, at their later stop in front of Gump’s to buy a flower, he can only talk of getting to Ransohoff’s Department Store to buy the clothing that will begin her physical transformation.

Once all the elements of Judy’s physical transformation are complete and she emerges from the bathroom in her apartment, her appearance mirrors that of the Madeleine Scottie once knew, and the green light in which she is bathed indicates that Scottie sees his love-object reincarnated, as if she were a ghost resurrected from the dead;

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<sup>172</sup> Lacey, *Bergson*, 22.

with this Judy/Madeleine he has completed the rite of communion and now holds in his possession the object-conduit to bring the past back to life. During the much-celebrated 360-degree shot that circles their subsequent embrace, Madeleine emerges as the definitive object-conduit; through her the past literally becomes the present for Scottie as he is transported back to the Plaza Stables. Then, and only then, does Scottie seem truly satisfied. As he becomes aware of the change in backdrop, Scottie's embrace of this Madeleine markedly alters with both profound intensity and passion: embracing her as he once embraced his first Madeleine not only because that is whom he believes to be in his arms, but also because he is embracing his love of time's transcendence and the immortality he has finally attained. He has not completed a creative act, a writerly act with this Madeleine, but a *re*-creation with which the past speeds forward, revived out of the dust of time into his possession. It is a resurrection rather than an original moment invented through the active constitution of intentionality. Scottie has done what so many cinephiles remain incapable of doing. He has brought the past back to life, recreated Gavin's actress and the "diegesis" in which she once existed, breathed life into a trace rather than written over or beside it. He literally holds in his arms the want the indexical argument has long evoked, and continues to evoke, as a spectator's desire, but eternally fails to offer.

Perhaps because of Scottie's spectatorial position and his transcendence of the spatiotemporal constraints the cinephilic pilgrim cannot defy, "no other film has inspired such a flow of pilgrims to its locations" as *Vertigo* has.<sup>173</sup> Spectators see themselves in

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<sup>173</sup> Charles Barr, *Vertigo* (BFI: London, 2002), 12.

Scottie; he is “an everyman for audiences to relate to,” and as the pilgrim’s surrogate in the film he performs that which the indexical argument has convinced pilgrims that they desire, that which they are incapable of performing on their own.<sup>174</sup> He finds a way to evade time’s qualitative progression, *durée*, to recede into the past, traveling back through its traces as portals in the present, having achieved the communal rite, to attain his spiritual satisfaction. It is only through a viewing of the film and projection of oneself into Scottie that the pilgrim can, at least for a time, attain such a transcendent reunion with the diegesis as Scottie embraces the resuscitated past with a like passion: his past substituting for the diegesis, the indexical referent, as a craved end. Though Scottie’s defiance of spatiotemporal boundaries also eventually fails once Gavin’s murder plot and Judy’s role in it as Madeleine are revealed, the provision of even such temporary satisfaction contributes to the cinephilic obsession with the film.

As long as the desire of cinephiles to resurrect the diegesis at the site is ranked with Scottie’s own to resurrect Madeleine and the past, as long as the indexical argument continues to hold sway over cinephilic practices and an understanding of the relation between reality and filmic illusion, the objective of site visits like Cunningham’s proposed acts of phenomenological creation will fail just as Scottie failed at Ernie’s. While pilgrims can complete the mission he proposes, “to recapture the writerly potential inherent in the fleeting space of psychophysical correspondence through a personal creative act at the profilmic site,” such practices are executed mournfully as long as the indexical argument dominates an understanding of film and its relation to reality;

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 36.



phenomenological creation may pay tribute to the artistic spirit of the site or work, but it is not an address of diegetic desire.<sup>175</sup> Cunningham's proffer of phenomenological performance does, however, present a certain ontological satisfaction to the pilgrim given more recent analyses of filmic ontology. In *The Virtual Life of Film*, D.N. Rodowick proffers the "entropic decay" of the material basis of film as defining the watching of film by difference: each viewing is always a variant not only of its referent, but of the viewing which preceded it, and that which will follow.<sup>176</sup> Because watching film thus becomes a "spectatorship of death," as "all performances are variants on this original act," and because "each repetition is also a difference," an opinion shared by Paolo Cherchi Usai, Cunningham's phenomenological engagement in which the suggested film-spectator interfaces are multifarious and always repetitions with difference, thus comes nearest to reflecting the nature of film itself.<sup>177</sup> Yet, despite this impressive correlation, this formulation of spectator engagement remains one grounded in a definitive, singular filmic ontology—the relationship between film and its referent. Until such a formulation is dismissed *in toto*, and that dismissal is integrated into spectator practice to unseat those extant practices founded on the indexical argument, desire for the referent as the source of cinematic magic remains. And Scottie's inability to escape the place-based traces of Madeleine remains synonymous with the cinephilic pilgrim's inability to escape the remaining traces of the film they find in the landscape. Cindy Bernard's "Ask the Dust: *Vertigo* (1958/1990)" photo, with its duplication of Hitchcock's framing of San Francisco

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<sup>175</sup> Cunningham, "It's all there, it's no dream," 133.

<sup>176</sup> Rodowick, *Virtual Life*, 20.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 20.

Bay from Fort Point, captures both these traces and the frustration of the pilgrimage site's reality (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). The ostensible elements of the scenario are there, but as Dan Auiler states, "the results are haunting—the locations are recaptured not as we know them, but like ghost landscapes, without actors or the context of a theater to animate them."<sup>178</sup> Bernard, like cinephilic pilgrims, captures only a reduction of the Bay to the disincarnated bay: a finding of the archetype when what is sought after is the individual. The missing element: that intangible *élan vital* that animates the diegetic narrative.

What does this mean for *Vertigo* pilgrims? How do we characterize our confrontation with the traces that remain on the film's original shooting locations? As



Figure 2.2 Still frame of original shot at Fort Point and Madeline by the bay.

long as we accept the indexical argument as true, as long as we apply it through fan and cinephilic practice, as long as we put our faith in it and allow ourselves to be sped away with its

sweeping romantic rhetoric of magical connection to the referent, the desire to reconnect, to resurrect, any one or composite number of different viewings is too great and overwhelms any attempt to overwrite the sites and locations of the film and the traces

<sup>178</sup> Dan Auiler, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 185.

retained there—impeding the potential of phenomenological creation to satisfy that spectatorial desire for “more.” We cannot, like Scottie, simply pursue those traces with even greater fervor to eventually gain entry into the diegesis. Instead, until we let go of the index, and the idea of a singular filmic ontology on the whole, the sites of *Vertigo*, from those that bear more of the trace to those whose ostensible relationship to the film has disappeared almost completely, can be nothing more for us than sites of collective bereavement.<sup>179</sup> The film site becomes the gravesite: a place where mourning cannot rewrite longing as fulfillment, but where “the performance of remembrance is



Figure 2.3 “Ask the Dust: *Vertigo* (1958/1990)”

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<sup>179</sup> Many of the original sites of *Vertigo*’s San Francisco have undergone drastic changes: Ernie’s has closed, the “McKittrick Hotel,” which was the Portman Mansion in actuality, was torn down, and the view of the skyline behind the Dewey Monument is now more crowded and obscured. For a more in-depth investigation into the contemporary condition of *Vertigo*’s sites, see Kraft and Leventhal, *Footsteps in the Fog*, 73-165.

encouraged” to assuage loss and pay tribute to love.<sup>180</sup> Within the context of the index, reenactments such as Cunningham’s run to the Mission San Juan Bautista chapel doors can only pay tribute to the profilmic site while acknowledging such acts are negotiations of a disappointing trace, not the referent itself, or erasures of its remains.<sup>181</sup> I performed my own run at the Mission San Juan Bautista, though through a different set of doors located along the corridor of adobe arches, to honor not only *Vertigo*, but the creative spirit that birthed it (Figure 2.4). The doors I ran at, however, were locked and shut; they



Figure 2.4 Author at Mission San Juan Bautista Doors

presented a clear physical and metaphorical limit to how far my reenactment could go—how close I could get to satisfying my desire for the referent that the romantic rhetoric of the indexical argument had ingrained in me. For

myself, and for the pilgrim in general, the spaces of *Vertigo* may still exist, but can only “truly” exist on film; the past cannot be resurrected except temporarily through our recognition of Scottie as a spectatorial surrogate—his pilgrimatic quest mirroring our own. Unreachable in physical reality, accessible only in the darkened theater or through anamnesis, until the indexical argument is purged from cinephilic and fan practices, film

<sup>180</sup> Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou, *The Secret Cemetery* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 105.

<sup>181</sup> Cunningham, “It’s all there, it’s no dream,” 140.

sites must be accepted as traumatic losses of an unreal filmic space and time—a loss refiguring the profilmic sites of *Vertigo* as places of mourning.

*Chapter 3*

*“The work is in a dialectical relationship to the notion of originality. Originality was always something I was thinking about, but there’s also the idea of ownership and property. Lawrence Weiner has this nice quote about wanting to make art that makes us think about our relationship to the material world. That’s something that I feel very close to. It’s not that I’m trying to deny that people own things. That isn’t even the point. The point is that people want to own things, which is more interesting to me. What does it mean to own something, and stranger still, what does it mean to own an image?”<sup>182</sup>*

The air of mourning that closed chapter 2 as the defining characteristic of the cinephilic pilgrimage, and fan practices inspired by the index in general, seems to violate the spirit of the cinema. Perhaps it sounds trite, or too obvious to ever bother putting on paper, but going to the movies is a thrill. It’s a genuinely astounding experience. And while my own pilgrimage to the sites of *Vertigo* was at times marked by frustration and disappointment engendered by my own misguided adherence to the indexical argument—there was something else there. A feeling of excitement, disbelief, pleasure. I brought my partner with me on my *Vertigo* research trip to San Francisco, and we attempted a few reenactments together at the shooting sites. He chased me across the grass at the Mission San Juan Bautista, and picked me up at Fort Point as I pretended to be unconsciously dragged from the water. He managed a much better impression of a befuddled Stewart than I ever will, and together we distracted the security guards in the Palace of the Legion of Honor long enough to snap a few pictures of me on Madeline’s now-relocated bench. Ever since that trip two years ago, *Vertigo* has remained special to us both. After I had an

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<sup>182</sup> Sherrie Levine, interview by Jeanne Siegel, “After Sherrie Levine,” *ARTS Magazine* 59 (1985), 141.

abbreviated form of the previous chapter published in a book on *Vertigo* and proudly presented the final copy to him, I found myself saying, “You changed the way I think about this movie.” He smiled and replied, “Yes, it’s not really about loving just the movie anymore, is it.”

The change in my thinking about *Vertigo* was the result of the reenactments we performed, and the pleasure found in them. Not just the movie was loved anymore, but our alteration, appropriation, derivation: the fact that we had made it our own. And this making-our-own, this ownership borne of derivation from *Vertigo* happened organically as the index failed. As we attempted to capture the magic of the referent through Douglas A. Cunningham’s suggested performance, performance-with-difference necessarily asserted itself. While I was looking for the magic of the past trace to emerge, alteration and personal ownership began insinuating themselves as alternative satisfactions. The original desire for “more” articulated by Paul Willemen that was identified at the beginning of this work does not disappear once the indexical argument and its application to the cinephilic pilgrimage are dismissed. Instead, it stands as an enduring characteristic of fandom and cinephilia. The desire for “more” must, therefore, be untethered, separated from the index. It can no longer be solely obsessed with accessing a profilmic reality that cannot be reached. Nor can it be bound to the indefinite measure of the moment that the index limited it to through its assertion that more could only be found by following down the rabbit hole, chasing after the magical surging forth of the real.

Leaving the index behind, however, doesn’t mean redefining Willemen’s “more,” but only redefining how to satisfy the craving it represents. The desire for “more”

remains a desire to engage with cinema beyond theatrical viewing with the intention of somehow achieving a greater level of intimacy with a chosen media product. The index positioned itself as *the* way to satisfy this desire. New methodologies should retain the creative potential of Willemsen's "writerly" satisfaction, but without limiting the exercise of that potential to the chase of a profilmic reality that is always already inaccessible. Though, whether an exercise of creativity motivated by film viewership can be satisfying depends on the objective of each specific creative act.

The applied indexical argument has a long history of attempting to make creative acts satisfying by promising transcendence into the profilmic as an end-product. As proven in the previous chapter, transcendence is not, however, one of the satisfactions available to cinephiles, as much as they (myself included) wish it were. What the applied indexical argument does succeed at though, after its failings are made apparent, is in suggesting alternative creative acts, with accordingly alternative objectives, that are intended to fulfill the same desire for more that the index was incapable of satisfying. Those alternative exercises of creativity motivated by film viewership that present themselves organically as the indexically-defined objectives of the cinephilic pilgrimage fail, are defined by personal appropriation and derivation—as in the performance-with-difference I created at the sites of *Vertigo*. The goal of derivative or appropriative acts is to achieve ownership. This is perhaps why it arises as a natural alternative. Like the index, ownership offers entry into film.

The previous chapter notes Cunningham's suggestion of derivative or appropriative performance as a source of potential satisfaction for *Vertigo* pilgrims at the



filming site. The present chapter is not intended to reiterate the conclusions already reached by Cunningham. But, as I note in chapter 2, his optimistic emphasis on new creation does not address or confront the relationship between the new and the old. In particular, Cunningham does not address the remaining traces of *Vertigo* on the landscape, how they must be negotiated, or how they influence his encouraged creative production. And as I concluded at the close of chapter 2, as long as one adheres to the indexical argument, the past trace overwhelms the potential of new creation. How then, should the same creative production be evaluated after the index? How should the interaction between old and new be assessed? If the objective is not to reach magical transcendence through the referent, can appropriation and derivation successfully offer satisfaction through ownership? And how does that satisfaction function?

In this chapter, in an effort to examine the value of creative production to fans in search of “more” after the index, I investigate whether the personal ownership or authority that results from derivative or appropriative creative acts, can in fact satisfy the desire for more. I do so not by way of the cinephilic pilgrimage, but by way of another fan practice: the practice of writing fan fiction. Long considered to be part of the “derivative” or “appropriative” genre of literature that stretches as far back as Greek and Roman oral myth traditions, the idea that derivative writing effects ownership and authority, and that such alterations in ownership can function as the means for satisfying the writer—that idea has been around since theorization of fan fiction began.

The earliest published academic work on fan fiction came out of the 1980s feminist pornography debates, and centered on the writing of “slash”: fan fiction texts positing a same-sex relationship, usually based on perceived homoerotic subtext within a given narrative. Written at the height of the MacKinnonite anti-pornography movement, Joanna Russ’ “Pornography by Women, for Women, with Love,” and Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diane Veith’s “Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and *Star Trek* Zines,” both suggest that the writing of slash represents a taking back of control. Russ’ text, part of a larger work on the cultural forces working against her coming out, and on feminist desire and pornography in general, writes in “Pornography by Women” on Kirk/Spock (abbreviated as “K/S” in the terminology common to media fandom) slash fiction. In other words, she examines why women are the most predominant authors, readers, and editors, of male/male paired (abbreviated as “M/M pairings”) homoerotic slash fiction based on perceived homoerotic subtext between Captain James T. Kirk and Commander Spock from the original *Star Trek* series (1966-69). The critical move in this essay is in Russ’ deconstruction of a pairing that ostensibly appears as M/M, but is in fact a human/alien pairing—Spock being part Vulcan, rather than human like Kirk. Spock’s “alienness is a way of ‘coding’ into the K/S fantasies that their subject is not a homosexual love affair between two men, but love and sex as women want them.”<sup>183</sup> Russ goes on to detail the important vacillation of “traditionally” masculine and feminine traits between Kirk and Spock:

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<sup>183</sup> Joanna Russ, “Pornography by women, for women, with love,” in *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts: Feminist Essays* (Trumansburg: Crossing Press, 1985), 83.

Neither has to give up ‘his’ work in the world; both have adventure *and* love; telepathy provides lifelong commitment and the means of making such a union unbreakable and extremely intimate; and while both partners are ‘masculine’ in the sense of being active in the world, they provide tenderness and nurturance for each other in a very ‘feminine’ way.<sup>184</sup>

K/S slash fiction authors do not even seem to understand the details of gay male sexuality, as both Russ, and later Constance Penley in 1994, note. There are what Russ terms “betraying details” to be found in most all female-authored K/S slash. There are multiple orgasms, descriptions of anal intercourse clearly thought with the logic of vaginal penetration, and erections described with the logic of vaginal lubrication accompanying female arousal. Penley notes the simple ease with which authors could consult books and outside sources to avoid these inaccuracies, concluding that such a simple solution must be evidence of the stories not really being about homosexuality at all:

Since it would not be difficult to do a minimum amount of research or reading on male physiology and gay male sex (and the fans, in fact, do so, consulting books like *The Joy of Gay Sex* and gay beefcake magazines), this inaccuracy suggests that women writing the stories do not want Kirk and Spock to be homosexual....one finds no depiction of gay subculture, no awareness of being derogated, no friends or family, absolutely no gay friends, and no gay politics.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>185</sup> Constance Penley, “Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Culture” in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1994), 313.

Perhaps inevitably then, K.A. Laity, writing on Russ' work in 2010, asks: "Why use male characters then?"<sup>186</sup> Why write M/M slash when what you really want to write is a template for heterosexual pairings (commonly abbreviated as "het")? Using Lamb and Veith for support, she writes: "Russ agrees with [one of] Lamb and Veith's conclusion[s] on K/S slash] that no one 'can imagine a man and a woman having the same multiplex, worthy, androgynous relationship, or the same completely intimate commitment.'" <sup>187</sup> Envisioning "that kind of relationship with *human* males" still seems fraught today, especially, as Laity notes, given the overwhelming dominance of "paranormal romance" as the preeminent film genre (e.g. the *Twilight* series, *Avatar*, *City of Angels*, *Hellboy*, *The Lake House*, the *Underworld* series, etc.).<sup>188</sup>

While the ultimate conclusions reached by Lamb and Veith (that K/S fan fiction writers were trying to rewrite a romance along less sexist lines), and Russ (that K/S writers were writing slash to produce better pornography than is usually available to women) differ, what remains constant across both early academic works on fan fiction is that K/S slash written by women is what Constance Penley describes as "one of the most radical and intriguing female appropriations of a popular culture product."<sup>189</sup> And though fan fiction theorization began here with these specific investigations into slash written by women, radical and intriguing appropriation is what comes to define most fan fiction theorization. Henry Jenkins' subsequent early nineties publication of *Textual Poachers*,

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<sup>186</sup> K.A. Laity, "Joanna Russ on Slash Fiction," *Teach me Tonight: Musings on Romance Fiction from an Academic Perspective*, January 24, 2010, <http://teachmetonight.blogspot.com/2010/01/guest-post-k-laity-on-joanna-russ-on.html>.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Constance Penley, "Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Culture" in *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1994), 309.

perhaps the most influential study of fan fiction to date, springboards from the theoretical base laid by Lamb, Veith, and Russ' slash theorizations, comprehensively theorizing the entire field by defining fan fiction through Michel De Certeau's 1984 notion of "poaching," defining fans as "active producers" and "manipulators of meanings."<sup>190</sup> Jenkins models fans "as readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests, as spectators who transform the experience of watching...into a rich and complex participatory culture."<sup>191</sup>

Within the study of popular culture, the concept of poaching is described as a strategy of resistance. It is an "active" audience theory, one that allows the individual consumer to evade or escape what John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture* describes as the dominant culture industries that "control the places and commodities that constitute the parameters of everyday life."<sup>192</sup> Fiske's theorization is also clearly indebted to De Certeau, who:

characterized such active reading as 'poaching,' an impertinent raid on the literary preserve that takes away only those things that are useful or pleasurable to the reader: 'Far from being writers...readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.'<sup>193</sup>

The alternative, passively ingesting media content, consuming narratives without indulging, exercising, or implanting our own meanings within the text, condemns

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<sup>190</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1989), 32.

<sup>193</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 24.

consumers to the meanings created exclusively by the dominant voices of cultural authority producing that media. Consumers are thereby condemned “to subjection,” according to De Certeau, “because they are always going to be guilty of infidelity [to themselves].”<sup>194</sup>

Jenkins’ appropriation of De Certeau to fan fiction, “emphasiz[ing] the process of making meaning and the fluidity of popular interpretation,”<sup>195</sup> lays the foundation for the almost two decades of fan fiction studies that have followed. From Jenkins forward, academic approaches to fan fiction have worked to dispel popular characterizations of fans as psychopathic fanatics, developmentally immature adult children, and as readers/spectators who embrace media products with “dubious aesthetic merit” rather than those accepted as valuable within the canon of dominant aesthetic logic.<sup>196</sup> Instead, thanks to Jenkins, over the course of the last twenty years, fans have become rogues, challengers, activists, rebels, and creative thinkers, all working simultaneously within and against that dominant aesthetic logic via their fannish activities. All the while acknowledging, experiencing, and enjoying what Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse in 2006 describe as “the unanalyzable, unexplainable, and often unspeakable excess of pleasure that fans experience.”<sup>197</sup>

In fact, by the late ‘90s, some fan practices and activities become accepted as valuable interpretive gestures: those to even be taken advantage of and encouraged. Fiske

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<sup>194</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 171.

<sup>195</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 34.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>197</sup> Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2006), 22.

notes the growing positive industry response to fandom, and works of fan fiction, as early as 1992: “The industry takes seriously letters from fans who try to participate in and thus influence the production of the text or its distribution.”<sup>198</sup> The industry had also recognized burgeoning fan cultures and fan-created products as valuable commercial interests: “For the industries fans are an additional market that not only buys ‘spin-off products, often in huge quantities, but also provides valuable free feedback on market trends and preferences.”<sup>199</sup> Such alteration to what had previously been a predominantly antagonistic relationship between fans and those who controlled the entertainment products to which media fandom was devoted, marks a reversal of the fan/industry relationship paradigm indicated by ‘80s slash theorization and Jenkins’ early ‘90s work. This is a reversal of what is known in audience theory as the “incorporation/resistance” paradigm—originally detailed in Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst’s 1998 work, *Audiences*. Abercrombie and Longhurst define the earlier incorporation/resistance paradigm by “whether audience members are incorporated into the dominant ideology by their participation in media activity, or whether, to the contrary, they are resistant to that incorporation.”<sup>200</sup> K/S slash, for example, would represent a resistance. However, as media advertising strategies, fans, and media itself, began to do what Eva Luers describes as “outgrow[ing] the ideas of traditional audience research” that Jenkins, ‘80s slash theorization, and the incorporation/resistance model represent, Abercrombie and

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<sup>198</sup> John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 41.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>200</sup> Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 15.

Longhurst suggest a replacement paradigm.<sup>201</sup> Described as a “spectacle/performance” paradigm, it puts forth “a more positive view of consumption, which is seen no longer as a more or less enforced product of a capitalist economy but as a set of choices made by consumers anxious to construct an identity. This new model of the consumer is isomorphic with the new model of the active audience.”<sup>202</sup>

The spectacle/performance model fundamentally alters previously-held ideas about the relationship between media producers and their audiences. Resistance and incorporation are no longer the driving social forces behind audience fannish activities. Instead, as Luers states, “spectacle and narcissism are the driving forces.”<sup>203</sup> To understand this new conception of the audience experience however, one must first understand Abercrombie and Longhurst’s concept of the “diffused audience”—an audience theory tailored specifically for a media-infused contemporary society. The essential feature of the diffused audience is its ubiquitous nature: in contemporary society everyone is an audience all the time. Media are so pervasive that being an audience is a constitutive quality of everyday life. You wake up to a radio, listen to an ipod on your way to work, face a computer at your job, watch television or movies in your leisure time. For active members of contemporary society in industrialized countries, media and performance are inescapable. As a result, the concept of “audience” is diffused, as Sonia Livingstone describes in 2003: it is “embedded or fused with all aspects of daily life; characterized by routine and casual inattention and yet always present—as in the way the

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<sup>201</sup> Eva Luers, *Web 2.0 and Audience Research: An Analysis Focusing on the Concept of Involvement* (Norderstedt: Druck und Bindung, 2007), 13.

<sup>202</sup> Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences*, 32-33.

<sup>203</sup> Luers, *Web 2.0*, 13.



‘always on’ internet connection which multi-tasks with working from home, watching television, shopping online, participating in chat rooms or fan cultures.’<sup>204</sup>

After accepting audiences as active participants in a contemporary culture as media-saturated as the “diffused audience” theory infers, the spectacle/performance paradigm must replace the more antagonistic and divided media/spectator relationship theorized by the incorporation/resistance paradigm. In the spectacle/performance paradigm, everyday life and media are viewed as interwoven. The world becomes constructed as “spectacle” and the individuals populating the world become its “performers.” Abercrombie and Longhurst view these performers in the world spectacle as particularly narcissistic—though not in the traditional sense of having excessive self-love. Instead, they assert that “narcissism is the treatment of the self as spectacle,” everyone always imagining themselves as “performing for an imagined audience.”<sup>205</sup> Narcissists, according to Abercrombie and Longhurst are people acting “as though they are being looked at, as if they are at the center of the attention of a real or imaginary audience.”<sup>206</sup> And as this narcissistic performance becomes a critical facilitator of self-identity construction, the world “spectacle” (now a mediascape as much as a landscape) in which the self is performed continuously informs in a reflexive way the creation of the self. Not only, therefore, does the spectacle/performance paradigm fuel a desire, for example, of the constant public visibility and feedback facilitated by social media, but it also promotes a “greater interaction and discussion of media events,” as Alison Wilde

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<sup>204</sup> Sonia Livingstone, “Media audiences, Interpreters and Users,” *LSE Research Online*, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2654>.

<sup>205</sup> Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences*, 95.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

states in 2010.<sup>207</sup> Wilde goes on to state that, “this novel form of performativity, facilitated by mass communications [through which media and everyday life are interwoven], results in the virtual elimination of cultural distance between performers and audience.”<sup>208</sup>

The spectacle/performance paradigm, coupled with the theory of a diffused audience, certainly stands as a legitimate explanation for why spectators desire “more,” why it is that they desire greater and greater interaction with specific media products: self-interest. If the “spectacle” constitutes us and we “performers” reciprocally constitute it, and the mediascape flows into this neverending feedback loop, all of which facilitate a selfish need for identity construction and recognition, then it is not only understandable that media are a constant topic of conversation, but also quite understandably objects to be desired. Yet, while Abercrombie and Longhurst’s development of the spectacle/performance paradigm marks a significant advancement in audience theory, in truth, the poaching made use of by early K/S slash theorists, and later modeled by Jenkins, is not mutually exclusive to the defining narcissism of spectacle/performance, or the theory of a diffused audience. While incorporation/resistance emphasizes the disenfranchisement consumers can be made to feel by media products, their fannish activities also center on the self-interested desire for identity construction. The writing of K/S slash, for example, is not just about bucking the system, or about being antagonistic to a dominant aesthetic logic. It is about the desire, by women, for media they feel reflects their interests, their identity. Without it, they felt the need to make (through slash)

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<sup>207</sup> Alison Wilde, “Spectacle, Performance, and the Re-Presentation of Disability and Impairment,” *Review of Disability Studies* 6, no. 3 (2010): 37.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

their own media product—they constituted their own spectacle. That slash product then becomes part of the world spectacle, part of the mediascape that facilitates identity construction for slash authors, and readers. Therefore, while Abercrombie and Longhurst, and any of the subsequent audience theorists continuing their work, do not recognize the permeability between their audience paradigms, that permeability is certain, as self-interest must be recognized as constitutive of any audience paradigm. If anything, the incorporation/resistance paradigm stands only as a subheading under the larger narcissistic umbrella of spectacle/performance.

However, fan fiction's classification as a textual practice fundamentally defined by its subversive qualities, by its first-order concern being its location within an incorporation/resistance paradigm, continues. Perhaps the most interesting recent work to make this argument is Abigail Derecho's 2006 essay, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction." Derecho argues for a reclassification of fan fiction, citing its fundamentally subversive and resistant nature, relocating it from the "derivative" or "appropriative" genre of literature into a new genre she labels "archontic": a term taken from the adjectival form of Jacques Derrida's 1994 definition of the "archive." Her motivation for this reclassification derives from the connotation she believes the adjectives "derivative" and "appropriative" announce. Those adjectives are: "property, ownership, and hierarchy."<sup>209</sup> These terms, argues Derecho, indicate "a poor imitation or even a corruption of an original, pure work."<sup>210</sup> In addition, they signify "a ranking... according to quality... classif[ying] the secondary text as the

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<sup>209</sup> Derecho, "Archontic Literature," 64.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

lesser one.”<sup>211</sup> In other words, the labeling terms currently in use for fan fiction throw “into question the originality, creativity, and legality of that genre,” a description Derecho does not see as appropriate or accurate for fan fiction.<sup>212</sup> “Archontic,” her proposed replacement for “appropriative” and “derivative,” does not, in her opinion, connote these same issues of ownership, relativity, or qualitative deficiency. The word archontic, she states,

...is not laden with references to property rights or judgments about the relative merits of the antecedent and descendant works. A literature that is archontic is a literature composed of texts that are archival in nature and that are impelled by the same archontic principle: that tendency toward enlargement and accretion that all archives possess. Archontic texts are not delimited properties with definite borders that can be transgressed. So all texts that build on a previously existing text are not lesser than the source text, and they do not violate the boundaries of the source text; rather, they only add to that text’s archive, becoming part of the archive and expanding it.<sup>213</sup>

While Derecho’s reclassification of fan fiction and appropriation of Derridian terminology stand to offer significant value to the ongoing theorization of fan fiction, surprisingly, as her argument evolves it becomes clear that the essay’s objective is not to evaluate what new an archontic classification can tell us about how fan fiction functions. The objective is instead to use the derivative-to-archontic reclassification, the elimination

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

of judgments of comparative merits, and the abolition of connotations of ownership, hierarchy, and property, to bolster an earlier argument: Henry Jenkins' decades-old classification of fan fiction as functioning within an incorporation/resistance paradigm. Picking-and-choosing from the history of the now-termed "archontic literature" to support her argument, Derecho "present[s] a slightly different, more limited history, one that emphasizes the way that archontic writing has often been used as a technique of social, political, or cultural critique in the hands of what John Fiske (1992), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, calls 'the culture of the subordinate,'"<sup>214</sup> eventually returning to the 1980s theorization of slash that emphasized the "poaching" mechanisms of fan fiction, and aligned with an incorporation/resistance paradigm as well. Derecho crafts this redefinition, which is actually an earlier definition, of fan fiction "as a resistant artistic practice," encouraging its use in "copyright violation," to "reclaim viewers rights" and a general fighting against "corporate control."<sup>215</sup> Near the close of the essay, Derecho offers what is the strongest statement of her position, the strongest statement of how she intends to apply her new archontic classification: "I believe the larger philosophical import of this type of writing [archontic writing] is that it undermines conventional notions of authority, boundaries, and property. In other words, archontic literature is inherently, structurally, a literature of the subordinate."<sup>216</sup>

Though an archontic reclassification holds much potential value for fan fiction, that value is squandered by Derecho's essay, as its argument structure—proffering a

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 71 and 72.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 72.

definition of the archontic, and applying it to an abbreviated history in order to reach a supposition about the present state of fan fiction—results in only a regression back to old classifications, evaluations, and conclusions. The emphasis on the distinction between the replaced “derivative” and “appropriative,” and the “archontic” replacement, revolves wholly around issues of ownership, authority, and property—the archontic apparently offering an abolition of the ownership and second-rate status inherent in the former genre terms. The problem, however, is that derivative, appropriative, and the archontic are not so easily reduced. Using Derrida’s complex description of the archive to abolish ownership, undermine corporate control, and praise viewers rights, leaves the complexities of the archontic, and their potential value for fan fiction, incompletely examined. Nor are the terms derivative and appropriative so facile that they may be reduced and dismissed on the basis of negative or subordinate value connotations believed to be inherent in their definitions. The full import of derivative, appropriative, and archontic terminology and classifications must be evaluated more completely, particularly in relation to the more accurate spectacle/performance audience paradigm, in order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of how fan fiction functions, how fannish activities that engage with media products in a similar way function, and what the satisfactions such fannish activities can offer are.

In order to make way for the archontic, one of Derecho’s first critical moves is to dismiss “derivative” and “appropriative” as inappropriate classificatory terms for fan fiction on the basis of their negative connotations. And her objection has a basis in the historical origins, or rather the scholarly responses to the historical origins, of the

derivative/appropriative genre (what I will refer to as the “D/A genre” from this point on). Most scholars now trace the origins of the broader D/A genre as far back as the epic poems of Homer and the ancient Greek and Roman oral myth traditions—any oral tradition being necessarily derivative, dependent on each individual’s independent transmission of shared cultural material. Yet the Homeric poems underwent, and defeated, an accusation similar to that levied by Derecho—that being derivative was necessarily bad, necessarily carried with it a negative connotation. Classical scholar Milman Parry, in his early 1900s study of Homeric poems, revealed the existence of “formula” in the poems, in what has long been considered some of the most crucial work on oral traditions to date. A formula, in the context of the oral tradition, is defined by Parry as, “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea. The essential part of the idea is that which remains after one has counted out everything in the expression which is purely for the sake of style.”<sup>217</sup> In other words, if you need to express an essential idea like “he said to him” or “the next day” or “later that night,” there are regularly employed expressions in Homeric verse that convey those meanings while also serving a measure (so to speak) of metrical usefulness.

The presence of formula in the ancestral tradition of all D/A literature, and their discovery by Parry, were not well received. While formulas did offer an explanation for commonalities found among Homeric poems, they simultaneously inferred a lack of originality in singers; performances thought to be improvisational compositions were

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<sup>217</sup> Milman Parry, “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making. I. Homer and Homeric Style (HS),” in *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), 272.

now repetitions crafted specifically to be easily memorized by their performers. Parry's work, and creation of what was to become known later as oral-formulaic theory, also spurred accusations that he had turned the Homeric poems into the analogical equivalent of pre-fabricated homes: ready-made parts stitched together by individual contractors, with the intention of creating a relatively uniform product. Some scholars were so infuriated with Parry's findings and conclusions they went as far as to refuse even an acknowledgment of his work. As Frederick M. Combellack notes in 1959, "A number of Analysts on the continent have insulted him [Parry] by ignoring his work completely and writing as though it did not exist—and for many of them it quite probably did not."<sup>218</sup> Such refusal was, however, borne of the disappointment and frustration which arose from the tearing down of what had long been thought of as Homer's genius—his extraordinary creative and improvisational power. As Henry Theodore Wade-Gery states in 1952,

The most important assault made on Homer's creativeness in recent years is the work of Milman Parry, who may be called the Darwin of Homeric studies. As Darwin seemed to many to have removed the finger of God from the creation of the world and of man, so Milman Parry has seemed to some to remove the creative poet from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>219</sup>

Despite the negative reaction contemporary to Parry's published findings, Parry's findings have not, of course, lessened the value of the Homeric poems to readers or scholars in the long-term. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are now classified "oral poems,"

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<sup>218</sup> Frederick M. Combellack, "Milman Parry and Homeric Artistry," *Comparative Literature* 11, no. 3, (Summer 1959), 194.

<sup>219</sup> Theodore Wade-Gery, *The Poet of the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1952), 38-9.



rooted in the traditions of improvised oral performance—which includes the presence and use of formula. While the discovery of the formula can help explain the presence of repetitions and inconsistencies in the Homeric texts, as the use of formula occasionally created confusion particularly with epithet-noun phrases, their existence should not alter a value judgment of the poems, and should not be used as grounds on which to fault them. It would be wholly inaccurate to state that the whole of *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey* are just combinations of formula, stock phrases, or metrical and thematic conventions. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi commented in 2010 on Milman Parry and the oral tradition which Parry’s discovery of the formula altered; Al-Tamimi states, “The work can still be appreciated, as it traditionally was, for variation and originality even when we acknowledge that the author was...an oral composer.”<sup>220</sup> In other words, the presence of formula, stock phrases, thematic conventions, appropriated content—none of these alter the merit of the work; valuable original content was still being produced.

Perhaps then, the inevitable follow-up question is: how much appropriated content does there have to be before we do consider the work inferior, or not a unique work in its own right? Is there a mathematical formula? A proportion of new work to appropriated work that determines whether the work in question has value? Or is without value? Or unoriginal? This question can be complicated, of course, by subjective opinion, but it is also a question United States copyright law has long dwelled on, even more since the age of the internet has made piracy and copyright issues of never-ending, always escalating, legal concern.

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<sup>220</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “What Does it Mean to Say that *The Iliad* is an Oral Poem?” *New English Review* (November 2010). [http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/firm/75333/sec\\_id/75333](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/firm/75333/sec_id/75333).

In 1841, the landmark case of *Folsom v. Marsh* was the first to limit the use of copyright over what is now termed “fair use,” as later put forth in the United States Copyright Act of 1976 (more colloquially known as “Title 17”). In brief, the 1841 case decided by Justice Joseph Story concerned two works about President George Washington: one accused of being derivative of the other. The case sought to determine whether Reverend Charles W. Upham’s 1840 work *The Life of George Washington: First President of the United States* had fairly used the private letters of George Washington and other content it had copied from Jared Sparks’ much longer, and earlier published, multivolume series suitably titled *The Writings of George Washington: Life of Washington* (published in 1839). It was found that 353 pages from Sparks’ 6,763-page work were copied by Upham’s 866-page work. Justice Story ruled as follows, with “A.” representing Upham:

Where A. published a “Life of Washington,” containing 866 pages, of which 353 pages were copied from Sparks’s “Life and Writings of Washington,” 64 pages being official letters and documents, and 255 pages being private letters of Washington, originally published by Mr. Sparks, under a contract with the owners of the original papers of Washington—It was held, that the work by A. was an invasion of the copyright of Mr. Sparks.<sup>221</sup>

Justice Story’s ruling goes on to detail what is fair use of another work, versus what is simply “piracy”:

...no one can doubt, that a reviewer may fairly cite largely from the original work, if his design be really and truly to use the passages for the purposes of fair and

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<sup>221</sup> *Folsom v. Marsh*, 9 F.Cas. 342, 100 (1841).

reasonable criticism. On the other hand, it is as clear, that if he thus cites the more important parts of the work, with a view, not to criticize, but to supersede the use of the original work, and substitute the review for it, such a use will be deemed in law a piracy....So it has been decided, that a fair and *bona fide* abridgment of an original work, is not a piracy of the copyright of the author. But then, what constitutes a fair and *bona fide* abridgment, in the sense of the law, is one of the most difficult points, under particular circumstances, which can well arise for judicial discussion....There must be real, substantial condensation of the materials, and intellectual labor and judgment bestowed thereon; and not merely the facile use of the scissors; or extracts of the essential parts, constituting the chief value of the original work.<sup>222</sup>

What Story ruled to be one of the fundamental factors determining whether one work's use of another work was fair, and what is then later appropriated of the *Folsom v. Marsh* case law into the statute law United States Copyright Act of 1976, is the input of real, substantial intellectual labor—what has since come to be known as “transformation.”

The basic standard in a determination of whether a work is original, according to current United States copyright law, is based on the question of “transformation.” If a work is deemed “transformative” rather than “derivative” it constitutes fair use: fair appropriation of an object or work for the purposes of advancing new knowledge or an original idea. If a work is deemed “derivative,” on the other hand, and in the legal sense as opposed to the literary sense discussed earlier, it is not fairly using another source, and therefore illegal. Legally derivative content consists only of the copyright-protected

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<sup>222</sup> 9 F.Cas. 342, 106-107 (1841).

elements taken from the original work into the new work. Washington's letters, as used by Upham for example, were deemed derivative. Whereas Andy Warhol's use of the Campbell's brand soup can in his silk-screen paintings has been deemed fair use. While copyright law is much more complicated than the above infers, it is this aspect of the law emphasizing transformation within which there is value for the theorization of fan fiction. Being determined to be derivative, in the legal sense, has a definitively negative connotation; a legally derivative work amounts to a stolen work. Yet, if the term derivative, as used by the D/A genre, is examined within the context of literary and art history, the negative connotations fall away, and derivative seems instead to actually indicate transformativity.

Since the epic poems of Homer and other world oral traditions, artistic derivation and appropriation have aided in the creation of significant artistic movements and individual works of art. Pablo Picasso appropriated newspaper clippings into his works of synthetic cubism in the early 1900s. 1912's *The Scallop Shell (Notre Avenir est dans l'air)* (Figure 3.1) appropriated the cover image of a brochure advocating for the improvement of French aviation in order to question the future of France (Figure 3.2).<sup>223</sup> Picasso's ironic appropriation turned the hopeful advocacy of "Our Future is in Air!" to the more pessimistic "Our Future is [up] in [the] Air."

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<sup>223</sup> Left image taken from: William Stanley Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 229. Right image from: Beatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Jouer sur l'espace pour maîtriser le temps: La géopolitique des avant-gardes européennes (1900-1914)," *Espacetemps.net: The Journal* (2006), <http://es.pacestemps.net/document2118.html>.

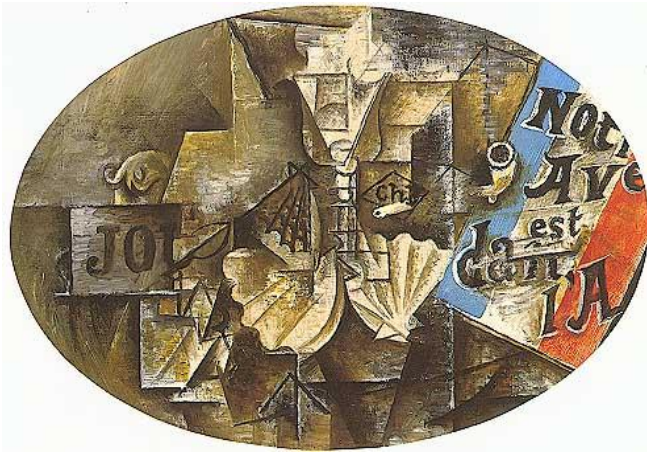


Figure 3.1 – *The Scallop Shell*



Figure 3.2 – 1912 French brochure

As Rosalind Krauss notes, “the actual red-white-and-blue *tricolore* pamphlet that Picasso depicted in this cubist still life had been issued originally to promote the development of aviation for military use. Thus the pamphlet ‘means’ French nationalism.”<sup>224</sup> And the “JOU” seen in mid-center on the opposite side of the canvas can be interpreted as shorthand not only for “jouer” but “jou” and perhaps most interestingly, as Donald Kuspit notes in 2008, “jouet,” meaning “toy” or “laughing-stock.”<sup>225</sup>

In the same decade Picasso and Georges Braque were creating collage, Marcel Duchamp was producing readymades like *Fountain* (1917), a “found object” sculpture of a urinal signed “R. Mutt 1917.” Commenting on the work in the short-lived Dada-journal *The Blind Man*, an anonymous editorial titled “The Richard Mutt Case” defends the work based on its appropriation and transformation of the found object: “*Whether Mr. Mutt*

<sup>224</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “In the Name of Picasso,” *October* 16 (Spring 1981), 13.

<sup>225</sup> Donald Kuspit, *A Critical History of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Art* (Stony Brook: SUNY, 2008).

*with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.*”<sup>226</sup> Duchamp

continued his found object art work, creating readymades throughout the rest of the decade and into the next: *Bicycle Wheel* (1913)—a bicycle wheel mounted on a wooden stool, *Comb* (1916)—a steel dog grooming comb, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919)—a reproduction of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* on which Duchamp drew a goatee and a



*Figure 3.3 – Oppenheim’s Object*

moustache. Such appropriation and

transformation was not exclusive to Duchamp’s work or the Dada movement with which he is so often associated. The Surrealist movement continued the found object art tradition in the ‘20s and ‘30s, with associated artists like Man Ray and Méret Oppenheim. In the 1937 essay “The Crisis of the Object,” author André Breton, often referred to as the “founder of Surrealism,” wrote of a desire to re-enchant the human mind with objects through their estrangement, or defamiliarization. The objective was to remove the cultural conventions that had been overlaid upon and bred into the object: surrealist objects “...are of a kind calculated primarily to raise the interdict resulting from the stultifying proliferation of those objects that impinge on our senses every day and attempt

<sup>226</sup> Henri-Pierre Roche, Beatrice Wood, and Marcel Duchamp, ed., “The Richard Mutt Case,” *The Blind Man* 2 (1917): 5, <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/blindman/2/05.html>.

to persuade us that anything that might exist independently of these mundane objects must be illusory.”<sup>227</sup> The application of such “defamiliarization” techniques produced works like Oppenheim’s 1936 *Object*—voted by visitors to the 1936-37 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition (New York, MOMA) to be “the quintessential Surrealist object.”<sup>228</sup> Made up of a fur-covered teacup, saucer, and spoon, Oppenheim’s sculpture confronts and encourages a rethinking of the traditional domestic connotations of the tea set (Figure 3.3).

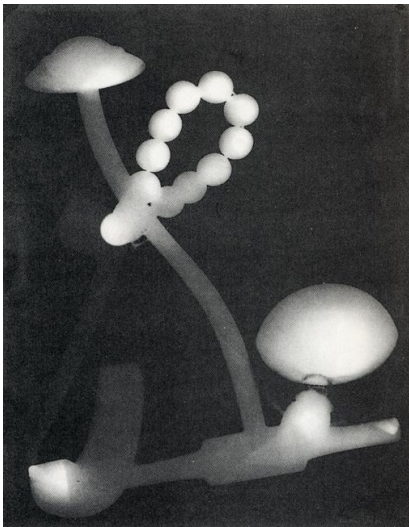


Figure 3.4 – Man Ray, *untitled rayograph, 1928*

The transformativity of derivation and appropriation in Surrealist art practices is not exclusive to sculpture. Man Ray’s use of solarization techniques to make photograms (which he called “rayographs”) created negative images by arranging objects on photographic paper, and then exposing them to light without ever engaging the help of a traditional camera.

While the creation of a thought-provoking juxtaposition is often the result, the technique also confronts Breton’s crisis. While making use of a different medium, Man Ray produces an effect similar to that produced by Oppenheim’s work: a confrontation with and alteration to the values we ascribe to objects and images—simultaneously re-making everyday

<sup>227</sup> André Breton, “The Crisis of the Object” quoted in Briony Fer, David Batchelor, and Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), 223.

<sup>228</sup> While *Object* is the official title of Oppenheim’s piece as listed by the MOMA that houses it in New York City, it has also long been referenced by the following subtitles: *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, *Fur Breakfast*, *Breakfast in Fur*, and *The Lunch in Fur*—this last title given by Breton himself. And, Whitney Chadwick, “Méret Oppenheim,” *MOMA*, [http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist\\_id=4416](http://www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=4416).

common objects into uncommonly beautiful ones. Yet even if the Surrealist philosophical emphasis in the rayographs is the same as in Oppenheim's work, Man Ray's photograms, as a result of their negative images, appear more haunting, calling greater attention to what is absent: we are literally left with the impression of an object, which is no object at all (Figure 3.4). Figuratively, the rayographs thereby seem to produce a series of difficult, potentially unanswerable questions: when we think of objects, do we really think of objects in and of themselves? Or are we always thinking of the values and connotations which have been culturally and personally, perhaps unconsciously, ascribed to objects? What does it mean to think of an object in and of itself? Can it be done, and if so, of what does it consist? Commenting on one of the rayographs, curator of the Man Ray collection at the New York MOMA John Szarkowski notes the importance of the haunting absent-yet-present objects and images, getting as close as one could possibly hope to get to answering any of the questions raised by the rayographs; he states, "the picture is a visual invention: an image without a real-life model to which we can compare it. . . . it discloses a reality all the more precious because it is otherwise invisible."<sup>229</sup> In other words, recognizing and disrupting the connotations and values we willingly or unwillingly ascribe to objects may be the greatest success of the rayographs, as their capture of that invisible reality—not that of the material object—is the only one that truly exists.

The '30s also saw transformative appropriation in film. Joseph Cornell's 1936 short experimental film *Rose Hobart* was composed almost entirely of found-footage from George Melford's jungle B-movie *East of Borneo* (1931). The film was re-edited

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<sup>229</sup> John Szarkowski, "Man Ray: Rayograph," *MOMA*, [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=46405](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=46405).



down to an approximately 19-20 minute length, projected through blue glass, and accompanied by Nestor Amaral's "Forte Allegre" and "Belem Bayonne" from the record *Holiday in Brazil*, which Cornell found at a Manhattan junk store.<sup>230</sup> Yet Cornell does not even represent the first filmic use of found footage. In the early 1900s, Frederick S. Armitage, filmmaker and inventor of the Biograph, used pre-existing footage to make composite-image films (sometimes referred to as collage filmmaking) as in his *Davy Jones' Locker* (1903), *Neptune's Daughters* (1903), and *A Nymph of the Waves* (1903). But, as Bruce Charles Posner notes in 2001's *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941*,

A more exact predecessor to Cornell's method of montage is found in the Edison Manufacturing Company's *European Rest Cure* (1904). Director Edwin S. Porter edited footage from earlier travel and 'panoramic' views together with new narrative materials shot by Porter's crew. The synthesis depicts a world traveler's adventures and comic mishaps. In this manner, Porter was able to recycle film footage much like Cornell.<sup>231</sup>

In fact, the editing techniques found in *Rose Hobart* and other Cornell films more closely resemble those found in the Edison Company films than those in the Armitage films. But the *European Rest Cure* appropriated footage to spoof the travelogue. It took, as Charles Musser notes in 1991, "a 'documentary' genre and reworked it as a comedy 'feature'" in order to poke fun "at the romantic aura of travel perpetuated by exhibitors who were

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<sup>230</sup> Brian L. Frye, "Rose Hobart," *Senses of Cinema* 17 (November 2001), <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2001/cte/q/hobart/> (March 1, 2012).

<sup>231</sup> Bruce Charles Posner, *Unseen Cinema: Early American Avant-Garde Film 1893-1941* (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 2001), 86.

themselves often beholden to railroad and shipping companies.”<sup>232</sup> Cornell’s *Rose* does not function as a satire, but instead edits *East* into a dream of its star: Rose Hobart. The re-edited footage is divested of the narrative continuity that existed in its original, instead emphasizing spatial continuities: Rose’s extending arm, for example, creating the only discernable continuity for one sequence. In 2010, Daniel Eagan wrote of Cornell’s appropriation of the *East* footage that its stripping of narrative content transforms the footage, “turning an improbable jungle melodrama into a story of thwarted desire...the ‘story’ became whatever viewers thought about the people and settings they were seeing on the screen.”<sup>233</sup>

Cornell simply records, as Christian Keathley notes, “the way in which Cornell himself watched the 1931 Hollywood potboiler *East of Borneo*, fascinated and distracted as he was by its B-grade star.”<sup>234</sup> A fact that leads author Jonathan Lethem to the supposition that this, “makes Cornell a sort of father to computer-enabled fan-creator reworkings of Hollywood product, like the version of George Lucas’s *The Phantom Menace* from which the noxious Jar Jar Binks character was purged [*The Phantom Edit*]; both incorporate a viewer’s subjective preferences into a revision of a filmmaker’s work.”<sup>235</sup> The lineage that ties Cornell’s work in *Rose Hobart* to Mike J. Nichols’ work in *The Phantom Edit*, and as Lethem suggests, to all fan-creator reworkings, is not defined by the characteristics Derecho ascribes to the D/A genre. The appropriation, the

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<sup>232</sup> Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 285-86.

<sup>233</sup> Daniel Eagan, *America’s Film Legacy: The Authoritative Guide to the Landmark Movies in the National Film Registry*, (New York: Continuum, 2010), 255.

<sup>234</sup> Keathley, *Cinephilia*, 67.

<sup>235</sup> Jonathan Lethem, “The Ecstasy of Influence: A Plagiarism,” in *Cutting Across Media: Appropriation Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law*, ed. Kembrew McLeod and Rudolf Kuenzli (Durham: Duke UP, 2011), 320.

reworking of the old into the new is here, as in fan fiction, as in this entire very abbreviated and limited history of derivative art, not wholly about subversion, the undermining of authority, or rebellious copyright infringement. It would be inaccurate to define the genre by these characteristics, or if accurate, would result in a dramatic reduction to those works thought of as D/A. How D/A instead defines itself, based on its content, is by transformativity. The motivations, objectives, or intentions of that transformativity may differ on a work-by-work basis, but the overarching concern is to transform.

Therefore, Derecho's dropping of the D/A genre classification, or rather, dropping "derivative" and "appropriative" as terms to describe what fan fiction is doing is appropriate and useful for the ongoing theorization of fan fiction, but not for the reasons laid out in the "Archontic Literature" essay. Rather, avoiding "derivative" as a descriptor in fan fiction theorization is useful because competing definitions between the law and the literary D/A genre classification obscure what is actually meant by "derivative," and thereby obscure what is meant by labeling a work as included within the D/A genre. What it seems to have meant historically in the theorization and practice of literature and art to be derivative seems to stand closer to the concept of "transformativity" than to Derecho's interpretation of the term which stands much closer to the legal interpretation of what it means to be derivative.

Yet, ignoring classificatory terminology for a moment, what Derecho wishes to abolish in renaming the D/A genre is ownership, hierarchy, property, illegality, and judgments of comparative merit—some terms which remain potentially important and

useful to the theorization of what can now be termed the transformative genre. In particular, the interrelated issues of ownership, hierarchy, and property Derecho wishes to purge from the genre still stand to offer valuable insights into the transformativity of fan fiction, how it satisfies that earlier identified “desire for more” experienced by fans and cinephiles, and how that desire functions when considered within the revised spectacle/performance paradigm.

Despite a seeming lack of connection between Jorge Luis Borges and media fandom, Borges’ 1939 short story “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*” lends one potential explanation for how ownership, hierarchy, and property can play a role in satisfying fan desire for greater interaction with a chosen media product, through transformativity. “Pierre” is written in the form of a literary review about the fictional Pierre Menard, a non-existent 20<sup>th</sup>-century French poet who attempts not to translate, rewrite, or reprint Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, but to immerse himself so deeply in the text that he recreates it exactly, line-for-line. Menard wishes not to copy or rework, “his aim was never to produce a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable ambition was to produce pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes.”<sup>236</sup> Often brought up in discussions of reader-response theory, which the text of “Pierre” can be read as a parable for in its emphasis on the reader’s role in creating the meaning and experience of a literary work, the text has been evoked by theorists such as Blanchot, Genette, Jauss,

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<sup>236</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,” *Ficciones*, trans. Emecé Editores (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 49.

Deleuze, and Danto, to name a few, as “the paradigm of a new definition of meaning that is not fixed, ready-made, and author-oriented, but transient, ever-changing, and reader oriented.”<sup>237</sup> But this is not simply a proto-post-modernist story emphasizing the active reader as a constituent factor in the text’s creation, or its coming-into-being. When read in concert with Borges later short essay, “The Flowers of Coleridge,” the idea of unseating authorial power returns, but that power vacuum is not filled with the reader, but rather an “eternal author.”

In Samuel Coleridge’s 1895 *Anima Poetae: From the Unpublished Note-books of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Coleridge states: “If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke—Aye! And what then?”<sup>238</sup> That temporal transcendence presented narratively by Coleridge represents Borges’ later idea of an eternal author, as presented in the “Flowers” essay. After quoting the same Coleridge lines quoted above, Borges states, “Twenty years earlier Shelley expressed the opinion that all the poems of the past, present, and future were episodes or fragments of a single infinite poem, written by all the poets on earth.”<sup>239</sup> Borges re-raises the question of Shelley and of Coleridge, deposing the author, overthrowing the concept of unique ideas in favor of “ancient ideas,” tossing out not the literal flower from Coleridge’s poem, but his authorial creation as a unique figurative “flower,” replacing it with “celestial

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<sup>237</sup> Jorge Luis Castillo, “Pierre Menard and the School of the Sceptics,” *Hispanic Review* 71, no. 3 (Summer 2003), 415.

<sup>238</sup> Ernest Hartley Coleridge, ed., *Anima Poetae: From the Unpublished Note-books of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: William Heinemann, 1895), 282.

<sup>239</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “Flower of Coleridge,” in *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 10.

flowers”—the symbolic representation of what seems to be intertextuality. Going on to discuss H.G. Wells and Henry James, Borges states:

Quite probably Wells was not acquainted with Coleridge’s text; Henry James knew and admired the text of Wells. If the doctrine that *all authors are one* is valid, such facts are insignificant. Strictly speaking, it is not necessary to go that far; the pantheist who declares that the plurality of authors is illusory finds unexpected support in the classicist, to whom that plurality matters but little. For classical minds the literature is the essential thing, not the individuals.<sup>240</sup>

While Borges initially vacillates between what is eternal, or hierarchically more eternally important—the work or the author—by the close of the essay, the work is what stands as “the essential thing.”

Borges is certainly neither the first nor the last to argue that all texts are open and inherently intertextual—each work building upon and drawing from the whole of literary history that precedes it. In 1980, Julia Kristeva argued for the intertextuality of all texts in “Word, Dialogue and Novel”: “any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”<sup>241</sup> Kristeva’s usage of the term “intertextuality” represents an attempt to reconcile Ferdinand de Saussure’s system of semiotic signs with Mikhail Bakhtin’s “dialogism.” To do so, Kristeva orients texts in terms of two axes. The horizontal connects the author and the reader; the vertical connects the text under scrutiny to other texts. And it is the usage of shared codes that

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 12. My italics.

<sup>241</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 37.

unite these two axes—all texts depending on prior codes. As Daniel Chandler notes in 2002,

Kristeva declared that ‘every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it.’ She argued that rather than confining our attention to the structure of the text we should study its ‘structuration’ (how the structure came into being)...sitting it ‘within the totality of previous or synchronic texts’ of which it was a *transformation*.<sup>242</sup>

Language and its structure are such that their powers exceed the individual control of one unique author or text. They influence to the degree that they determine subjectivity. If we are to abide by Kristeva’s intertextual interpretation of texts then, individualism and authorship fade away, leaving only the system of language, a system pre-dating the individual speaker/writer.

Roland Barthes too takes up this gauntlet of intertextuality in the ‘70s and ‘80s, declaring that:

Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, *cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences*; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae

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<sup>242</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 197. My italics.

whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks.<sup>243</sup>

Barthes emphasizes the unconscious and automatic nature of intertextuality, inferring that it is not about simple allusion or reference, but about the structure of language itself and its ability to shape every utterance, every text—always already before the individual act of speaking or writing begins. Taken to its furthest ends, the concept of intertextuality seems to terminate in the earlier work of Borges and his eternal author. The individual author is de-privileged, as is the individual text: what remains is the eternal author—language itself. Equating language with the eternal author also clarifies Borges' final emphasis on the text in the "Flowers" essay within the context of the eternal author discussion.

As intertextuality clearly problematizes the status of the author, what then is the role of each individual author? Can we wholly unseat the likes of Shakespeare, Faulkner, Hemingway, or the expertly written texts of the theorists cited above? What is the status of Kristeva and Barthes as authors? The answer given by the post-structuralists was to re-create the author as an orchestrator, an arranger, a constructor, a textual engineer rather than a textual originator. Barthes went as far in his text *S/Z* (1970) to deconstruct Balzac's *Sarrasine*, a novella from 1830, in order to prove it as a commixture of voices (or codes), not evidence of one original authorial voice:

The grouping of codes, as they enter into the work, into the movement of the reading, constitute a braid (text, fabric, braid: the same thing); each thread, each

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<sup>243</sup> Roland Barthes, "Theory of the text," *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), 39. My italics.



code, is a voice; these braided—or braiding—voices form the writing: when it is alone the voice does no labor, transforms nothing; it expresses; but as soon as the hand intervenes to gather and intertwine the inert threads, there is labor, there is transformation.<sup>244</sup>

The implications being that: 1) the code replaces the concept of an individualized author in possession of some inborn wellspring of creative invention; he/she is instead a manipulator of codes; 2) the metaphor of the braid still reflects the value of the author's work; unbraided the voices/codes express nothing; the author inputs the labor of braiding; the author is the transformer.

Applied to fan fiction, the universal condition of intertextuality that every text possesses seems to have the effect of de-vilifying fan fiction authors by altering the boundaries of ownership. If it can be argued that each iteration, each revision or incident of play with a given media product is part of the eternality of authorship and intertextuality, then each fan fiction author, as a re-braider of codes who engages with the eternal author (language), becomes a co-author. They gain some sense of ownership not only over the original media product which it seeks to transform, but if this argument is taken to its furthest ends, the fan fiction author (or textual engineer), simply by engaging in language use, gains some ownership over all of literary history. As Barthes' writing of *S/Z* allows him a level of ownership over *Sarrasine*, as my reenactment of scenes from *Vertigo* allow me a level of ownership over Hitchcock's original, as the instance of any language use allows one to gain and share ownership with any other use of language. The author of *The Phantom Menace* is a transformer, just as much as the creator of *The*

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<sup>244</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 160.

*Phantom Edit* is a transformer—the playing field is to some extent leveled. While this universality, co-authorship, and co-ownership may provide some insights into a theorization of fan fiction, in part by suggesting ownership as a potential source of satisfaction for fan fiction authors, its destabilization of the idea of an original unique individual author in order to raise up language as the ultimate and only one true author—therein also lies the problem with the application of theories of intertextuality to explain the pleasures of fan fiction.

Borges, Kristeva, and Barthes, argue (in different ways) for the inherent intertextuality of all texts—their openness, their combination and transformation of language formula and codes. Yet it is precisely in this breadth, this address of *all* language, that the specifics of fan fiction remain unaddressed. Fan fiction generates particular questions about “the specific relation between new versions and the originary versions of texts,” as Derecho states.<sup>245</sup> While it may be true that all texts are intertextual, all simultaneously containing and existing within each other, when a work explicitly announces itself as a variation of another work, the theories of intertextuality leave unaddressed that conscious and conspicuous quotation.

What does address fan fiction, however, has been hinted at since the beginning of this chapter: creating a connective thread between each theory, each literary or art work, each legal case, each genre. In my revised performances of *Vertigo*, in the K/S slash of the ‘80s, in Abercrombie and Longhurst’s revised audience paradigm, in the appropriative art and film of the early 1900s, in Borges’ intertextual eternal author, even in Derecho’s use of the archontic—while no one of these theories stand as a fully realized

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<sup>245</sup> Derecho, “Archontic Literature,” 65.

theorization of fan fiction, they all suggest (whether consciously or not) the potential of ownership to be the satisfaction provided by its writing. I argue and present fan fiction as part of the larger, now-termed transformative genre. And while some of fan fiction, K/S slash for instance, may intend to emphasize its subversive elements or engage with the incorporation/resistance paradigm, the overarching concern of all fan fiction seems to be a narcissistic one. The all encompassing emphasis is on performance that aids, reflects, or contributes support for identity construction or an identity construct. Re-writing or re-working a chosen media product is to fuel media-influenced identity construction through transformative alterations that necessarily result in concomitant alterations to media ownership. To transform is to integrate the media product into one's own spectacle through performance, and it is in the transformation that an alteration in ownership also occurs, offering the satisfaction of fan fiction.

I would be lying if I said I didn't feel a certain level of ownership over *Vertigo* after performing reenactments of its scenes, and after writing essays on its content and production. It is a part of me; I (in part) define myself through it. I desired more interaction with it, a greater intimacy, and I satisfied that desire by transforming it, making it my own through transformation, and thereby integrating it into my own narcissistic identity construction. Without the sense of ownership, however, integration into the self would be impossible. Transformation provides an alteration specifically to ownership that fuels this narcissistic end of self-integration. This is also how fan fiction satisfies the desire for "more." Fan fiction satisfies by allowing the author to become so much intimately closer with a chosen work that its boundaries of ownership are altered;

the satisfaction of “more” by fan fiction is so complete that it performs nothing less than an integration into the self-concept. Andy Warhol, perhaps one of the most famous visual appropriation artists, was notorious for identifying himself with his art, as much as for his alterations of pop culture products. In a 1966 interview with *The East Village Other*, he said: “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am.”<sup>246</sup> Defining himself through his art, art that was transformative in nature, transformation that specifically denotes the input of enough independent intellectual labor so as to fundamentally alter the original object, and thereby making it anew: with all the preceding being accepted as true, the ownership of the art object is Warhol’s, and ownership in this context therefore aids in his identity construction.

In the “Archontic” essay, Derecho does not comment on the relationship between fan fiction and identity construction, or the relationship between either of the two and ownership. The only motivation she sees as answering the question “why do we write fan fiction?” is one that fits into the incorporation/resistance paradigm, one that is always fighting against something or someone else. The essay defines fan fiction through Derrida’s conception of the archive, re-classifying fan fiction as archontic on these combative grounds. Archontic literature, and the history of archontic literature, are for Derecho the history of “a medium of political and social protest.”<sup>247</sup> While within the confines of the abbreviated history presented in the essay, this may appear as accurate,

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<sup>246</sup> Of course, as Warhol was notorious for making declarative statements in one interview and then contradicting them in another, the validity of his statements must be taken in that context. Andy Warhol, interview by Gretchen Berg, “Andy Warhol: My True Story,” in *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962-1987*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Avalon, 2004), 90.

<sup>247</sup> Derecho, “Archontic Literature,” 67.

when the camera lens zooms back, so to speak, and the works of fan fiction that seem to exemplify the incorporation/resistance paradigm fall into the larger all-encompassing history of transformative literature as a genre defined by a spectacle/performance paradigm, Derecho's interpretation of the archontic falls apart, supporting a less polarized definition—one emphasizing shared ownership through fan-created activity.

Derecho paraphrases Derrida's 1995 work, *Archive Fever*, when she writes:

“Derrida claims that any and every archive remains forever open to new entries, new artifacts, new contents. No archive is ever final, complete, closed.”<sup>248</sup> It is through this openness, this emphasis on accretion, that Derecho reads the adjectival form of Derrida's archive (the “archontic”) as unifying: denouncing authority, property, ownership, and hierarchy. Unity, however, is not by definition inherently antagonistic to ownership. Unity is not dispossession, nor is it the repudiation of proprietorship. While Derecho's emphasis on unity is an appropriate and accurate reading of Derrida's essay, drawing a causal line between Derrida, unity, and the denunciation of ownership, is not. Derrida's essay, which is a meditation on the nature and function of archives rather than an investigation into the specifics of fan fiction and its functioning, places great emphasis on the concept of unity, or rather, the removal of heterogeneity, as part of the “archontic principle”: the principle that determines how archives behave, how their structure and contents effect the way they accrete.

*Archive Fever* begins not with a direct discussion of the archive, but rather a discussion of the nature of the archive reached via the etymology of the term “archive.” Reaching as far back as the Greek term “*arkhe*,” which refers to both the “*commencement*

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 64.

and the *commandment*,” the essay demonstrates how the term “archive” references the principles of nature and history (“where things commence”), as well as the principles of the law and authority (“where men and gods command”).<sup>249</sup> Taken together, Derrida argues that these principles create the archive as both a place of physical authority, and of authoritative rule. Origin and law co-exist in the *arkhe*, as in the archive. The archive, as a body that is both “nomological” (of the science of the law) and “topological” (of the place of the law), it is therefore both physically and authoritatively present. And it consequently becomes a “locus from where power is exercised,” according to Nayia Yiakoumaki in her 2002 essay on archiving theory and practice.<sup>250</sup> This nomo-topological structure, the place of origins and law, is how Derrida describes the archetypal archive. Access and contents are regulated, and in part the contents regulate the archive itself—as the archive may contain the legal documents determining who has access to the archive, and what it is they may access.

It is in addition to this proffered binary definition of the archive that Derrida puts forth a third constituent of archival function, muddying the waters of those already proffered functions in the process: consignation. “[The] archontic function is not solely topo-nomological. It does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority. The archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of

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<sup>249</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>250</sup> Nayia Yiakoumaki, “In An Archive Fever,” *Art-omma* 10 (Spring 2002), [http://www.art-omma.org/NEW/issue10/text/theory/10\\_In%20an%20Archive%20Fever%20by%20N%20Yiakoumaki.html](http://www.art-omma.org/NEW/issue10/text/theory/10_In%20an%20Archive%20Fever%20by%20N%20Yiakoumaki.html).

classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation*.<sup>251</sup> While consignation has a number of definitions, Derrida clarifies by submitting the following definition:

*Consignation* aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity, or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.<sup>252</sup>

This is not an archival function that Derrida traces or attributes to the etymological definitions of the archive, or that he grounds in other evidence. He simply states that the topo-nomological conditions of the archive “must be paired” with those of consignation. The inference being that this is not necessarily the elemental condition of the archive, but that of an ideal archive. And the ideal archive aims for: unity, a removal of heterogeneity, partitions, and dissociation.

Application of this idea to fan fiction requires that fan fiction be proven to be an archive, be proven as archontic. If Derrida’s topo-nomological definition is applied, fan fiction seems to fail in meeting the necessary requirements. As much fan fiction is now housed only in the ether of the internet, there is no place, nor any laws governing its accessibility. While the physical publication of fan fiction existed at one time, as media fandom is most commonly traced back to the pages of Hugo Gernsback’s 1920’s science

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<sup>251</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 10.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* (1926), the writing of fan fiction is now dominated by internet publication.<sup>253</sup> There are hundreds if not thousands of blogs, privately-maintained web addresses, fan fiction forums, zines, and self-proclaimed fan fiction “archives” housing the majority of fan fiction texts. And while some fan fiction sites could legitimately be defined as archives (e.g. the extremely popular LiveJournal.com, or the aptly named ArchiveOfOurOwn.org), Derecho’s attribution of the term “archontic” to fan fiction is not made in relation to a larger physically housed or digitally maintained archive. It is instead, the nature of fan fiction itself, as a genre, by virtue of its creation necessarily relating to a preexisting text (literary, or otherwise), upon which Derecho finds her archontic labeling. The consignation is what is emphasized by Derecho, as she highlights the importance of every text being forever “open to new entries,” never “final, complete, closed.”<sup>254</sup> She states: “The archontic principle is that drive within an archive that seeks to always produce more archive, to enlarge itself. The archontic principle never allows the archive to remain stable or still, but wills it to add to its own stores.”<sup>255</sup> Modified to its adjectival form, Derecho turns the archive into the archontic, simultaneously turning archontic into a genre: the genre of fan fiction. This rhetorical move is founded, as discussed above, on the differences Derecho identifies between the D/A genre (property, hierarchy, and ownership), and the newly formed archontic genre (interplay between texts, unity, openness, and constant motivation for growth). However, defining the genre by an “internal drive...to continually expand,” infers the fan fiction

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<sup>253</sup> Francesca Coppa, “A Brief History of Media Fandom,” in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson: McFarland & Co, 2006), 41-59.

<sup>254</sup> Derecho, “Archontic Literature,” 64.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.



itself is that which is expanding, when in actuality, it is any text whatsoever—any text transformed into something new.<sup>256</sup> Any text can be archontic if fans will it to be so. The tendency toward enlargement and accretion then, seems to belong much more to text in general, to the intertextual relationship at the core of literature, film, or other media, rather than to the conscious and conspicuous quotation of fan fiction in particular. The archontic could be applied fairly in this way, not as a genre, but as a broad attribute of the nature of intertextuality, of language itself. It is within this revised context that the already tenuous argument which forms the crux of Derecho's essay falls apart. The original equation of fan fiction with the adjectival archive whose unity stands as an abolition of ownership; the logic of this argument is broken not once (with the failure of fan fiction to be proven as archontic), but twice, (as unity remains untethered to the eradication of ownership).

The inherent archontic qualities of language remain intact. Even if they cannot define a genre, they allow the transformative genre to exist, as part of that intertextual eternal author that is language. To define the specific conscious and conspicuous allusion, reference, or quotation of fan fiction, however, only the transformative genre coupled with the spectacle/performance audience paradigm properly classify and account for the motivations of fan fiction; only they properly point to alterations in ownership, not ownership's elimination, as paramount in accounting for the desire to write fan fiction. It can be reasoned that the unity argued for by Derrida as characteristic of the archive is, however, still part of how the transformative genre functions to satisfy the desire for more via ownership. Fan fiction, as it necessarily holds a relationship to the original

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

media product it seeks to transform, does in fact through that link, that elemental bond, encourage a dissolution of separations between original work and transformative work. It emphasizes codetermination, equality, and the creation of shared ownership through transformation. Such increases in unity, driven by alterations in ownership, define why we write fan fiction.

## Chapter 4

*Steve Lafreniere: “You weren’t in Douglas Crimp’s ‘Pictures’ exhibition, but a lot of people seem to think you were, maybe because of your later association with Helene Winer, who was at Artists Space before starting Metro Pictures. Did you feel a kinship to the artists in the ‘Pictures’ show?”*

*Richard Prince: “I’ve never said this before, but Doug Crimp actually asked me to be in that show. I read his essay and told him it was for shit, that it sounded like Roland Barthes. We haven’t spoken since.”<sup>257</sup>*

The previous chapter argued that fan fiction, through its transformation of a given media product, creates an attendant alteration of ownership with the end product being the narcissistic incorporation of that media product into the self-construct—thereby satisfying the original desire for “more.” In other words, transformative fan practices attempt to take advantage of the link between the original and the transformative work, and through this elemental bond, through this intrinsic unity, attempt to possess and incorporate into the self not only their own transformative work, but the original work via that transformative work.

So that if I were to reenact scenes from *Pulp Fiction* (1994), for example, my



*Figure 4.1 – The author at Mt. Shasta, filming site of Preminger’s Anatomy of a Murder (1959).*

<sup>257</sup> Steve Lafreniere, “Richard Prince talks to Steve Lafreniere,” *Artforum* 41, no. 7 (2003), 70.

performance-with-difference (which any new performance would necessarily be) would by definition allow me to share possession of the original *Pulp Fiction* production. The previous chapter concludes this to be the ultimate motivation behind not only fan fiction, but most transformative fan practices: ownership aimed at self-incorporation.

The previous chapter did not, however, consider the issue of comparative value, or at least only did so obliquely. As the seemingly comic Richard Prince quotation opening this chapter infers, comparative value is always at issue when discussing appropriation. It is one thing to appropriate the work of another and transform it to the degree that it becomes your own intellectual property. It is another to justify your transformative work as having added something so valuable to the canon of the original work that claiming part ownership of it can be rationalized—even if only to yourself.

Consider the following two examples. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* functions as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Rhys appropriates Brontë's characters to create a back-story for Rochester's first wife, known in *Eyre* as Bertha. By definition, this is transformative literature. Transformative literature that it could be argued is also fan fiction. It is also, as a reimagining of Brontë's madwoman in the attic, a beautiful work of post-colonial fiction that has literary value not just in its own right, but has literary value for the continued study of *Eyre*—it has fundamentally altered interpretations of *Eyre*. By comparison, I once visited the "Mt. Shasta" restaurant in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where Otto Preminger filmed *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) in order to reenact scenes from the film (Figure 4.1). I dressed up as Laura Manion, and a friend of mine dressed as Paul Biegler. We ate there and at the end of the meal he stood up feigning

anger and comically warned me, as Biegler (originally played by Jimmy Stewart), to stay away from “men, juke joints, booze, and pinball machines,” quoting the original movie in what is now a very quiet, very modest roadside restaurant. We felt absolutely absurd, but I still feel a certain connection to *Anatomy*. The question being: as a result of my transformative reenactment, can I claim the same level of ownership over *Anatomy* as Rhys could hypothetically claim over *Eyre*? Can either of us ever really have possession over any more than those parts of the original which we’ve integrated into our transformative works? And even if either of us were to recreate (with necessary difference) the original, could I claim dominion over it? If I were to do as Gus Van Sant did with his near shot-for-shot remake of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* in 1999, and reenact from start to finish the whole of *Anatomy*, could I integrate it into myself as wholly my own?

While the comparative artistic value of Rhys’ and my respective transformative works seems quite obvious—Rhys’ *Sargasso* being a beautiful work of fiction, my reenactment being neither beautiful, accurate, or particularly well-executed—in both cases the relationship between the original appropriated work and the transformative work plays as equal. My reenactment, both at the time and in memory, is always functioning in relation to Preminger’s *Anatomy*. Just as *Sargasso* must always be read in relation to *Eyre*. There is always a double-voice, or potentially multiple voices, apparent in a transformative work. That is the inescapable consequence when the past is turned into what David Evans calls “malleable raw material.”<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> David Evans, “Seven Types of Appropriation,” in *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. David Evans (London & Cambridge: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2009), 12.

The conspicuous quotation in Douglas Gordan's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) cannot be thought exclusive of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), as Gordan's work consists entirely of a projection of the original production slowed down to two frames per second, resulting in a new running time of 24 hours. Nor can Martin Arnold's *Passage à l'acte* (1993), which expands a few seconds of Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) into an extremely powerful narrative of repressed family tension, be thought exclusive of the original it appropriates—even though its use by Arnold is indeed transformative. Each work is always thought in relation to its predecessor. And while these two artworks do not necessarily fall under the aegis of fan-created works, and comparative relation for many transformative works forms fundamental and intended consequences for the interpretations of those works, the comparative relation both Gordan and Arnold's films illustrate and emphasize in their conspicuous quotation highlights an important question for fan fiction, creative reenactments, or any other transformative art form intending to affect or satisfy a desire to get closer to a chosen media product: does the comparative relation created by the appropriation inherent in transformative fan works alter the ability of those transformative fan works to provide satisfaction? In other words, does comparative relation interrupt the process outlined in chapter 3?

This question is, in part, a return to the paradigm of chapter 2, and the disappointment engendered by the index-inspired cinephilic pilgrimages closing that chapter. In chapter 2 it was argued that if pilgrimages are always performed relative to the promises of the indexical argument, they necessarily fail. If the conflation of reality and illusion is the expectation, frustration is all you will find. It's not that the filming sites

have no redeeming features, and for *Vertigo* in particular many of the old filming sites retain a very clear correlation to the sites as they once appeared on the screen. It's that the reality doesn't match our expectation to transcend space and time—it doesn't match the promise of the indexical argument. Transformative fan works present a similar frustration created by their innate comparative relation.

Chapter 3 argued that fan fiction “necessarily holds a relationship to the original media product it seeks to transform,” and through that relationship “encourage[s] a dissolution of separations between original work and transformative work. It emphasizes codetermination, equality, and the creation of shared ownership through transformation.” This is *why* spectators write fan fiction: for the potential to gain ownership over the beloved media product, to then potentially reach the consequential incorporation of that media product into the self as a way to satisfy the original desire for “more.” My own writings and reenactments have been attempts to gain ownership and achieve self-incorporation of the media products I love, but these experiences have also led me to question the theoretical and practical potential of fan fiction and transformative works to actually take spectators *that* far: to ownership and self-incorporation. Despite the satisfactions transformative works can provide, I have never felt as though I controlled the media product I desired more than it still controlled itself and me. And my language in chapter 3 reflects this. I write of transformative works as allowing the achievement of “some” sense of ownership, “some” leveling of the playing field between original and fan works. The provision of “some” satisfaction, in a sense, haunts chapter 3, and haunts fan fiction. Therefore, I argue that while the potential to achieve ownership and self-

incorporation remains the ultimate goal for transformative fan works, it cannot be achieved. Transformative fan works can offer *some* satisfaction, but not all. It is the comparative relation between original and transformative work necessary to the process that also sabotages the process.

What then is left for fans, for cinephiles and fans? If I continue to yearn for more interaction with *Vertigo*, how do I get it? If I crave more than to watch *Casablanca* (1942), what do I do? Do I take the partial satisfactions of transformative works? Accepting them as limited, but better than nothing? Maybe. But there is an avenue this collection of chapters has yet to explore, one that returns to the cinephilia that preoccupies chapter one, as the birth place of the indexical argument. Historically, there was something pushed aside as the index gained greater and greater dominance in film theory. Something, therefore, that also remained and remains unconnected to, uncontaminated by the problems and frustrations of the theoretical and applied indexical argument. Something that does not even stand in league with the index, as transformative works of fan fiction do by attempting to work within the same construct as index-inspired activities. Transformative fan works, as well as applied indexical activities, are always striving to violate the media product: pierce it, take it apart, get inside it, own it, hold it, recreate it. This “something” from which the indexical-occupied part of cinephilia diverged was also hinted at briefly in the introduction to this work. What has remained unexplored is social cinephilia: movie-watching experienced as a social act. Therefore, this fourth and final chapter undertakes a historical examination of movie-going as a social act in order to investigate social interaction and community creation as the



ultimate, and least frustrating, satisfaction of the desire for “more.” To do so I will return to the cinephilia that began this work, and gave us the index, but this time with an eye to movie-going practices that emphasize social interaction and community creation, from the early years of film viewership to the present.

In 1998, author Kevin J. Corbett undertook a sociological study of movie-watching, publishing his findings in “Empty Seats: The Missing History of Movie Watching.” One of his interviewees, perhaps unaware of the profundity of his statement, recognized and articulated what he believed to be the value of communal movie-watching: “[Movie-watching] is a precious moment, and the fact is you want to be [there] together, and these moments are important—intimate moments—and these days it seems to be harder and harder for people to realize that it’s so simple to share that way...I mean your eyes are wide open together, you know.”<sup>259</sup> While this participant in Corbett’s study, who went by the pseudonym “Mickey,” was referring specifically to how couples “use movie-watching as a relationship-development tool,” his insights apply on a larger scale.<sup>260</sup> Communities of film enthusiasts who come together to watch films have been prevalent since the first film society formed in 1907, gaining momentum into the 1910s and the era of the nickelodeon, then becoming a real force in the 1920s when silent film viewership became a mass phenomenon and big business.

The history I will present below, will be one of distinctive individual or group experiences of the movies at different times and in different places—giving particular attention to those times and places during and at which the social aspects of film viewing

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<sup>259</sup> Kevin J. Corbett, “Empty Seats: The Missing History of Movie-Watching,” *Journal of Film and Video* 50, no. 2 (1998-1999), 43.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

created something unique, perhaps indelible, for spectators. I will look at social clubs watching films together, the first dedicated film societies, and how those shared experiences affected the practice of viewing film. My objective is not to arrive at an overarching claim about each time or place, but only to show that social interaction and community creation remain not only the most durable type of cinematic pleasure, when one goes searching for “more,” as well as the least problematic in its theoretical apparatus. There is no promise of magical transcendence to a different space and time. There is no complicated manipulation of the beloved media product so as to affect a change in ownership, or self-integration. There is only you, the screen, and the sharing of that staggering experience of the movies with the other “wonderful people out there in the dark.”<sup>261</sup>

Beginning an investigation of communal spectatorship in early film history is perhaps to incorrectly suggest that movie theaters have been in existence as a place to view moving pictures together since the invention of the movies. In truth, the viewing of moving images had been a form of entertainment already popular for generations by the time the theater arrived in the late 1800s. Since the 17<sup>th</sup>



*Figure 4.2 – An early demonstration of the phenakistiscope disc at the Museum of the History of Sciences, Ghent University.*

<sup>261</sup> *Sunset Boulevard*, DVD, directed by Billy Wilder (1950; Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2002).

century magic lanterns employing glass slides could be spun to create the illusion of moving images; in the mid-1800s the phenakistiscope disc (Figure 4.2), a more sophisticated version of the earlier thaumatrope, was invented and could be spun to create the illusion of movement through the “persistence of vision” (a supposed phenomenon of optics in which an image on the retina is thought to ‘persist’ for 1/25<sup>th</sup> of a second—thus an image frame-rate-per-second of higher than 16 fps is thereby thought to keep viewers from seeing the distinct images on the disc, only their movement).<sup>262</sup> The zoetrope, or “wheel of life” took advantage of the same optical principles as the phenakistiscope later in the century; and by the late 1800s, Eadweard Muybridge created the zoopraxiscope, lecturing with it around the Bay Area of California, beginning in 1879 on animal locomotion—it was essentially a modified magic lantern.<sup>263</sup>

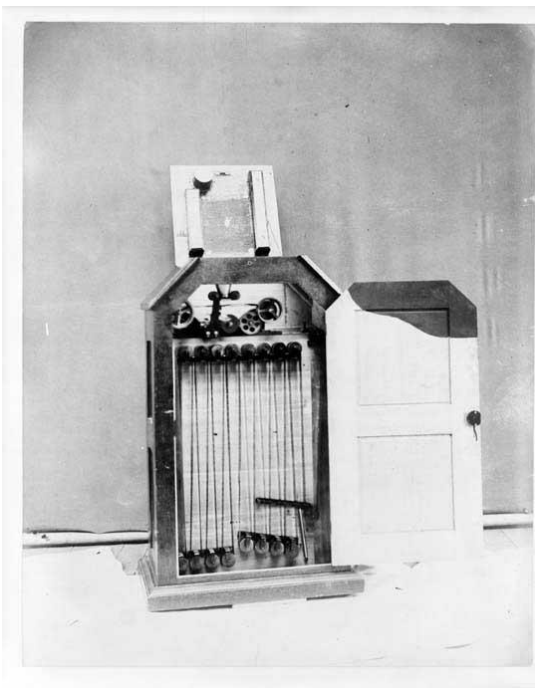
These early cinematic apparatuses demonstrate an ongoing interest in the viewing of moving images, and the development of moving image technology. However, while noticeable improvements occurred in the time period between the fixed glass slides of the magic lantern that could only project and (sometimes) spin images around a room, and the zoopraxiscope which not only projected, but projected rapidly enough to create the illusion of movement in images, all these early cinematic technologies shared similar problems. The magic lantern could spin its projections, but could not create the illusion of

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<sup>262</sup> While the conception of “persistence of vision” continues to appear in accounts of early film technologies, it was in fact proven false in 1912 by Max Wertheimer who replaced it with the more accurate “phi phenomenon” which details the limitations of the eye causing us to perceive visual information, constant movement, even when it is not there. While I would like to replace, and would like to advocate for the replacement field-wide of the reference to the “persistence of vision” with the “phi phenomenon,” consistent misuse of the “persistence” concept has instantiated it in film studies as *the* way to describe early cinematic technology, despite its inaccuracy.

<sup>263</sup> Peter E. Palmquist and Thomas R. Kailbourn, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 413.

its individual images moving.<sup>264</sup> The thaumatrope created the illusion of image movement, but could only mesh two images together; and the phenakistiscope could also only manage a small number of images on its relatively small disc. The zoetrope and the zoopraxiscope both managed to project, but couldn't handle more than a short series of images, as both required the images of a continuous series to be contained on one single rotating disc. Most problems with early cinematic technologies, if measured against the scale of eventual public theatrical projection, involved: ability to project, and image quantity. By 1888, however, Thomas Edison had filed caveat 110 with the United States



*Figure 4.3 – Image of an open Kinetoscope at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.*

patent office “relating to an improvement in photography,” safeguarding the idea that would eventually become, by 1891, the Kinetoscope.

Originally described on October 8, 1888, (and eventually filed 9 days later on October 17, 1888) in the ornate hand-written script of the patent caveat, the Kinetoscope (Figure 4.3) is described as “an instrument which does for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear. Which is the recording and

<sup>264</sup> Toward the end of the popularity of magic lanterns, the illusion of movement was occasionally created through the use of two glass slides, one sliding on top of the other. Of particular popularity was the illusion of a boat moving on a sea. The slide containing the image of a boat was made to move atop a fixed slide containing a backdrop of a body of water. The effect was of a boat riding the undulating waves of the ocean.

reproduction of things in motion, and in such a form as to be both cheap, practical, and convenient.”<sup>265</sup> While a patent caveat was only a “preliminary application in which the inventor made claims to one or more potential inventions without presenting the detail required in a formal application,” a system that was done away with in United States patent law by 1910, Edison clearly aimed to resolve the issues that had plagued his predecessors by combining the illusion of movement with image quantity and an ability to project or reproduce images for an audience.<sup>266</sup> To describe in the caveat the operation of what eventually becomes the Kinetoscope, Edison uses the example of an opera being captured on film: “This apparatus I call a Kinetoscope ‘moving view.’ In the first production of the actual motions that is to say of a continuous Opera the instrument may be called a Kinetograph but its subsequent reproduction for which it will be of most use to the public it is properly called a Kinetoscope.”<sup>267</sup> Curiously enough, even though the “talkies,” films with synchronized sound, do not appear until 1927’s *The Jazz Singer*, Edison’s original caveat is already filled with the hopes of creating a film with synchronous sound:

By gearing or connecting the Kinetograph by a positive mechanical movement, a continuous record of all motion is taken down on the Kinetograph and a continuous record of all sounds are taken down by the phonograph and by

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<sup>265</sup> Thomas Alva Edison, 1888, “Caveat relating to an Improvement in Photography,” US Patent Case 110, filed October 17, 1888, 1.

<sup>266</sup> “American Patent System,” *The Thomas Edison Papers*, <http://edison.rutgers.edu/paulpats.htm>.

<sup>267</sup> Edison, “Caveat,” 2. While I cannot be sure whether Edison was simply in a hurry or if his lack of punctuation was the consequence of poor grammar, given the fading of the Edison papers, and the papers contained in the caveat files in particular, most of which are only accessible digitally or on microfilm (the originally being too fragile to be handled by the public), I would guess that this lack of punctuation stems from the age of the papers. They are digitally accessible through “The Thomas Edison Papers” archive at Rutgers University, but even in this enhanced form they remain difficult to read.

substituting the photograph recording devices on the Kinetograph for a Microscope stand...it becomes a Kinetoscope and by insertion of the listening tubes of the phonograph into the ear the illusion is complete and we may see and hear a whole opera as perfectly as if actually present although the actual performance may have taken place years before.<sup>268</sup>

According to the Library of Congress, “a prototype for the Kinetoscope was finally shown to a convention of the National Federation of Women’s Clubs” on May 20, 1891.<sup>269</sup> The 19mm film was a 6-foot loop of Edison’s assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson (who has historically been given much of the credit for the creative and innovative development of the Kinetoscope) bowing, smiling, and taking off his hat in greeting. The film was appropriately titled *Dickson Greeting*.<sup>270</sup> According to a reporter for *The Sun* present to chronicle the event,

The surprised and pleased club women saw a small pine box standing on the floor. There were some wheels and belts near the box, and a workman who had them in charge. In the top of the box was a hole perhaps an inch in diameter. As they looked through this hole they saw the picture of a man. It was a most marvelous picture. It bowed and smiled and waved its hands and took off its hat

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>269</sup> “History of Edison Motion Pictures: Origins of Motion Pictures—the Kinetoscope,” *Inventing Entertainment*, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edmvhist.html>. The title of the “National Federation of Women’s Clubs,” however, is incorrect. After contacting the associate director of the Federation’s resource center, I was informed that early newspapers and documentation often got the name wrong, due to the newness of the organization. The correct title of the association was (and remains) the “General Federation of Women’s Clubs.” Ashley Carver, e-mail message to author, May 17, 2012.

<sup>270</sup> Though this film is often incorrectly credited as the first motion picture made in the U.S., it was in fact the second. Dickson had completed one film prior to this: *Dickson’s Monkeyshines No. 1*. *Dickson Greeting*, however, remains the first publically exhibited film in the U.S.

with the most perfect naturalness and grace. Every motion was perfect. There was not a hitch or a jerk. No wonder Edison chuckled at the effect he produced with his Kinetograph.<sup>271</sup>

There are, surprisingly, no interviews in *The Sun* article with any of the 147 women present that day. No attempt to gauge reactions, no notations of what the women said to each other following their individual turns looking through the small Kinetoscope viewfinder. Perhaps they were awed into silence by being in the workshop of “The Wizard of Menlo Park,” or perhaps they shared their reactions and opinions privately with each other, and the reporter only thought to document his own—which are the only reactions and opinions to appear in the article. With no other reporters present, no other external press accounts on record, I contacted the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) in hopes of locating internal archival documentation of this moment. However, according to Ashley Carver, current Assistant Director of the Membership and Women’s Resource Center at the GFWC, this historical gap has been a continual source of frustration for the GFWC. As Carver states, “there is very little mention of this experience in the GFWC records.”<sup>272</sup> The GFWC published an internal article on the viewing in 2009, and the moment is also mentioned in Jane Cunningham Croly’s *The History of the Women’s Club Movement in America* (1898), but neither can give any more than a declaration that the moment occurred.<sup>273</sup> Croly mentions only the potential of

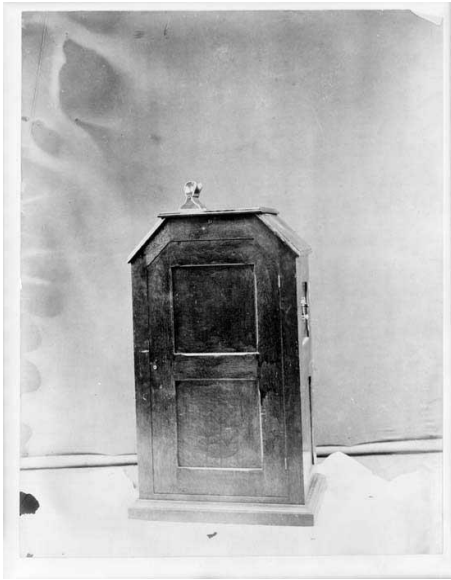
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<sup>271</sup> “The Kinetograph: Edison’s Latest and Most Surprising Device,” *The Sun*, May 20, 1891. While the device is still referred to here, and in other early newspapers, as the “Kinetograph,” Edison’s eventual name for the large pine box with the viewfinder was “Kinetoscope,” which is reflected in the wording of the original patent caveat.

<sup>272</sup> Ashley Carver, e-mail message to author, May 17, 2012.

<sup>273</sup> This moment is also mentioned in Charles Musser’s fantastic history: *Thomas A. Edison and His Kinetographic Motion Pictures and The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley:

the viewing occurring later in a day full of Club activities, documenting it as part of a



*Figure 4.4 – The closed Kinetoscope, with its viewfinder visible. Library of Congress, Washington D.C.*

luncheon toast at the home of Mrs. Edison, Thomas Edison's wife: "The last toast was 'Our Hostess and Host,' responded to by Mrs. Edison, who excused her husband, but invited the ladies to visit his 'workshop.'"<sup>274</sup> While this dearth of information will forever remain a source of frustration for those interested in what might have been said in that laboratory among the women lucky enough to be present at the first public film exhibition, what we do know is that by design the Kinetoscope provided

a fundamentally individual viewing experience with its 1 inch viewfinder (Figure 4.4), as did the machines featured in the subsequent Kinetoscope Parlours that sprang up first in New York City in October 1894, and eventually arrived abroad in London by December of the same year. The mechanical inability to experience film together, prevented by the design of the Kinetoscope, perhaps consequently inhibited viewers from sharing the experience with others, initiating and developing film communities—effectively preventing group film spectatorship, and all its concomitant benefits, from emerging.

It wasn't until the following year, in 1895, that communal spectatorship begins, as screen projection is practically simultaneously developed (and attempted to be patented)

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UC Press, 1994). However, no additional reports of the GFWC women's reactions are made available by Musser's text.

<sup>274</sup> Jane Cunningham Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement in America* (New York: H.G. Allen, 1898), 132.



by Auguste and Louis Lumière with the Cinématographe in France, Maximillian Skladanowsky with his Bioscop (also called Bioskop) in Germany, Birt Acres and the Kineopticon in England, and Major Woodville Latham with what he called a “Projecting Kinetoscope” in the United States. However, the Lumière brothers, by filing French patent 245,032 for the Cinématographe—a compact instrument that could be used as not only a camera, but a projector and printer as well, using 35mm film and perforated sides pulling the film into place for exposure—are the first to create and patent a viable apparatus for projecting movies, and the prototype for the future form of movie projection and communal theatrical viewing.

An improved version of the Lumière Cinématographe reached the United States by 1896. Invented and developed by C. Francis Jenkins and Thomas Armat, they called their projection device the “Phantoscope.” After a disagreement caused Jenkins and Armat to go their separate ways, Armat sold the rights for the Phantoscope to the Kinetoscope Company controlled by Edison. Having purchased the rights, The Edison Manufacturing Company put Edison’s by now very profitable name on the device, and repackaged it as the Vitascope: making it the first commercially successful projector in the United States. Soon after, the first storefront theater—the first commercial space in the U.S. wholly dedicated to the large screen projection of motion pictures—was established: Vitascope Hall in New Orleans, Louisiana opened on July 26, 1896.<sup>275</sup> On

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<sup>275</sup> There is only one competing claim to this title: Edisonia Parlors and Vitascope Hall in Buffalo, NY. The Buffalo, NY space founds its claim on the construction of their building. Constructed from the ground up specifically for the exhibition of movies, rather than taking an already extant space and reappropriating it for a cinema as the New Orleans location did, it claims rights to the “first cinema” title.

the 31<sup>st</sup> of that month they advertised in *The Daily Picayune* to come “See Niagara Falls and Shooting the Chutes” for 10 cents.<sup>276</sup>

As the architectural concept of the movie theater spread, together with it came communal viewing, and a desire to watch films together in the company of other like-minded cinema lovers. And by 1907, the theater inspired the creation of the first documented film society. The society began in France with an advertisement. The bimonthly *Phono Gazette*, an early French journal published beginning in April 1905 which originally declared its subject as “issues involving the phonograph,” by October of that same year, as a result of the ever increasing interest in moving pictures, became the *Phono Ciné-Gazette*: “the magazine of talking machines and cinematographs.” Edmond Benoit-Lévy, a Frenchman residing in Paris at the time, was its editor, as well as legal counsel for *Pathé Frères*—the company that had already held the Lumière brothers’ Cinématographe patents since 1902, in addition to growing production, distribution, and exhibition facilities (by 1909 they owned more than 200 movie theaters internationally, and now, under the shortened name *Pathé!*, the company remains in business, self-reporting businesses worth \$824 million euros in 2010).<sup>277</sup> Two years later, in the April 15, 1907 issue, Benoit-Lévy advertised the creation of what he called “Le Ciné-Club” (Figure 4.5).

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<sup>276</sup> “Vitascope Hall,” *The Daily Picayune*, July 26, 1896.

<sup>277</sup> “*Pathé*, au premier rang du cinéma européen,” *Pathé!*, [www.pathe.com/site/core.php?page=1.1.2.1&PHPESSID=758719ca8c34851bdae6e6cce4b633ab](http://www.pathe.com/site/core.php?page=1.1.2.1&PHPESSID=758719ca8c34851bdae6e6cce4b633ab).

The mission of the club was to be devoted to “working for the development and progress of all issues related to the Cinématographe.”<sup>278</sup> And though given the seemingly informal name of “club,” the social organization had a constitution, legal counsel, legislation, and its own rooms in the Boulevard Montmartre next to the Théâtre des Variétés. According to the

*Phono-Ciné Gazette*’s account, membership included access to the rooms and other benefits:

1. A large room for cinematographic projections.
2. A library of all cinematographic work.
3. A collection of all cinematographic newspapers.
4. A collection of all cinematographic patents.
5. A collection of all cinematographic catalogs.
6. A permanent exhibition of any object or product related to, or that may interest, the Cinématographe and its allied industries.
7. A board showing each day all requests and offers cinematographic:

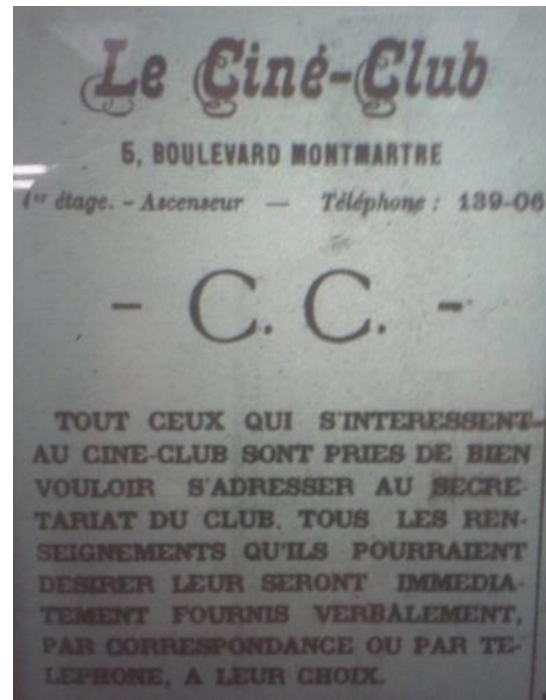


Figure 4.5 The original advertisement for *Le Ciné-Club*.

<sup>278</sup> Edmond Benoit-Lévy “Le Ciné-Club,” *Phono-Ciné Gazette: Revue du Phonographe et du Cinématographe*, 15 April, 1907, 145. My translation.

- a. Purchase, sale, lease, exchange of new or used equipment.
  - b. Offers and requests for jobs.
  - c. Offers and requests for cinematographic productions.
8. A subscription to the official newsletter of the Ciné-Club.
9. A permanent card permitting entry into any show, exhibition, competition, and congress organized by the Ciné-Club.<sup>279</sup>

All of these features combined to allow the club to promise, in its next issue on May 1, 1907, the finding of “pleasure and profit” through membership.<sup>280</sup> In a separate article in the same May 1<sup>st</sup> issue, Benoit-Lévy is elected vice-president of the club. Second only to Charles Dussaud, who was elected president. Dussaud was also a *Pathé Frères* associate, related to François (Franz) Dussaud (*Pathé*’s chief engineer), and related to the Dussaud company—one of the companies formed to distribute *Pathé*’s films, which later “held a distribution monopoly for *Pathé* films in nine districts of northern France as well as in Switzerland.”<sup>281</sup> By the next issue, on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May that same year, the Ciné-Club has an entire 4 pages of what is already a relatively small journal, devoted to the outlining of its administration, purpose and composition, admissions policies, monetary contributions, general assemblies, and interior regulation. The combination of Benoit-Lévy and Dussaud’s involvement, and by association the involvement of *Pathé*, together with the lush Paris headquarters and extensive provisions, required monetary contribution for membership, and the highly organized regulatory system governing the club—the hope

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> “L’assemblée Générale du Ciné-Club,” *Phono-Ciné Gazette: Revue du Phonographe et du Cinématographe*, 1 May, 1907, 170. My translation.

<sup>281</sup> Roland Cosandey, “Dussaud, Francois,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (New York: Routledge, 2005), 280.

seems to have been for a large regulated organization of wealthy or well-connected Cinématographe lovers.

Some major French film histories, however, have ignored, or omitted, the contribution of Benoit-Lévy and his creation of not only the word, but the idea of the ciné-club. This absence is most notably felt in the widely-used Richard Abel multi-volume *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology* (despite extensive discussion of the French ciné-club movement), as well as in Abel's later *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896-1914* (despite discussing Benoit-Lévy extensively). Oddly enough, Jean-Jacques Meusy's 1996 contribution of "Qui était Edmond Benoit-Lévy?" to *Les Vingt Premières Années du Cinéma Français*, directly points out the absence of Benoit-Lévy from most histories of French Cinema, but then fails to mention all his contributions—including Le Ciné-Club: "judging by the limited place he occupies in film history, he played only a minor role....[but] Benoit-Lévy was one of the men who understood very early on how the cinema needed to develop to become a major attraction and prosperous industry."<sup>282</sup> However, one notable later work does recognize Benoit-Lévy's creation of Le Ciné-Club. In 2000, Yann Darré's *Histoire Sociale du Cinéma Français* gives Benoit-Lévy all the credit for not only the formation of the specific "Le Ciné-Club" in 1907, but for the concept and appellation of such an organization in general. Benoit-Lévy, Darré states, "invented the word and the idea of the film club."<sup>283</sup> But Darré also notes, that this first film club fails, is eventually disbanded: he [Benoit-

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<sup>282</sup> J.J. Meusy, "Qui était Edmond Benoit-Lévy?" in *Les Vingt Premières Années du Cinéma Français: Actes du Colloque International de la Sorbonne Nouvelle—4,5 et 6 Novembre 1993* (Paris: Editions de l'AFRHC, 1995), 115. My translation.

<sup>283</sup> Yann Darré, *Histoire Sociale du Cinéma Français* (Paris: La Découverte, 2000), 17. My translation.

Lévy] may have invented the word and idea of the film club, “but [he] failed to make it exist.”<sup>284</sup> And indeed the May 15<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Phono Ciné-Gazette* is the final time the club is mentioned in the journal—which later ceased publication, its last issue released before the end of the year.

Given the burgeoning economy of the cinema in the early 1900s, particularly in France, and its growing cultural popularity, the obvious question must be asked: why did this first film club fail? No history formulates or proffers a theory as to why the failure occurred, or why its original formation seems to be held in separation from the 1920s ciné-club movement (a question raised by Abel’s exclusion of Le Ciné-Club from his otherwise well-researched histories). However, the closure of the *Phono Ciné-Gazette* journal stands as a notable potential cause. Related to this cause is the clear conflict of interest between the journal and the Pathé corporation. If the *Phono Ciné-Gazette* was intended as an unofficial trade publication, a surreptitious and early attempt at target marketing to a specific industry, a claim Richard Abel backs up in 1998 when he discusses Benoit-Lévy’s involvement with the journal: “As the editor of Phono Cine-Gazette, which came close to serving as a publicity organ for Pathé-Freres at the time, Benoit-Levy served as a crucial, yet now largely forgotten agent of this French strategy”; if the Ciné-Club was intended as an extension of this trade publication with the goal to promote Pathé productions—it is certainly possible the obvious studio allegiance deterred potential members from joining what would be an organization not unbiased but clearly allied to one studio in particular.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 29.

While the conflict of interest with Pathé Frères could have played a part in the failure of the club, and should not be underestimated, the central cause was likely the larger-scale cultural and political issues that still plagued the French cinema at this time. The cinema was still primarily associated with fairgrounds (“fêtes foraines”), café-concerts, and music halls, rather than the “respectable” audiences of the theater, and as such, cinema fell under their legislation and regulations. Darré characterizes this time as one of “social and regulatory indignities” for the cinema; “it was taxed under the highest rate for the ‘droit des pauvres,’ a tax whose rate increased in proportion to the perceived immorality of a spectacle, in the eyes of the officials responsible for levying it...5% for the theatre, 9% for concerts, and the highest rate of 25% for dances, races, fairs and thus also for cinema.”<sup>286</sup> French cinema companies were fighting these taxation regulations, as well as censorship laws which classified the cinema among the “spectacles de curiosité”—grouping the cinema with travelling carnivals and fun fairs rather than the more culturally legitimate theater. In 1998, Richard Abel examined this difficulty faced by the nascent French cinema, noting the overtly exaggerated attempts used in Pathé advertising strategies in order to gain a “respectable audience.”: “Pathé ads and posters extolled the Omnia-Pathé’s [a Pathé-owned cinema hall] appeal to everyone in the family as well as every social class. One 1908 poster—in which a smiling gendarme seemed to be directing the cross-class ‘traffic’ of a cinema queue—even suggested that going to the cinema not only was respectable and safe but had the blessing of the state authorities.”<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Darré, *Histoire*, 17. My Translation.

<sup>287</sup> Abel, *Ciné*, 30-31.

Despite these exaggerated advertising campaigns and legal fights to reclassify the cinema, which later saw success, its reputation at the time of Benoit-Lévy's attempt to launch Le Ciné Club was still as a mass-culture product. Darré cites the early censures of many critics, including Louis Delluc, who criticized the cinema as a low-culture pastime early in his career. Delluc "bewailed the cinema's 'society gatherings collecting performers with the looks of coachmen and the distinction of petrol-bombers.'"<sup>288</sup> For author Georges Duhamel, it was "the pastime of the illiterate, of poor creatures, stupefied by their need...[it is] an idiotising machine."<sup>289</sup> Literary critic of the *Paris Review*, Paul Souday, said it was "necessarily limited and superficial in its means, inevitably vulgar in its destination."<sup>290</sup> In short, it was not an "honorable" distraction. Benoit-Lévy's Le Ciné-Club was a well-intentioned attempt to elevate the cinema to high-culture, even if for the gain of the Pathé corporation, and even if the French legal system and public were not yet ready to accept it as such.

While external cultural and political forces, and the Pathé publicity link, seem to have contributed to Benoit-Lévy's *Phono Ciné-Gazette*'s/Pathé's Le Ciné-Club shuttering its Montmartre headquarters, obviously, this early failure of the first film society to take root does not translate to the abandonment of the concept of the film society all together. A burgeoning movement of film societies begins to flourish not only

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<sup>288</sup> This needs some explanation: the original term used by Delluc is "pétroleuse," which was a term of abuse among the bourgeoisie, referring to women from the lower reaches of society who were alleged to have poured petrol on the fires set in the houses of the rich during the Paris Commune. Imaginative illustrations of the time depict wicked, grinning hags combining the features of terrorists, harlots, and criminals—all holding cans of petrol. Cited in Darré, *Histoire*, 17. My translation.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.



in France following the end of WWI, but all over the world. In 1925 the idea of the film society took root in London with the formation of the first British film society—the aptly titled “Film Society.” Founded by seven friends, all under 40 (and most under 30), the club was established according to the model of the Stage Society, a theater group which had “put on single performances of uncommercial or controversial plays for its members on Sundays.”<sup>291</sup> On September 19, 1925, *The Times* of London noted the Film Society’s founding and emphasis on films that may otherwise go unseen: “An organization, named ‘The Film Society,’ has been founded to show privately on Sunday nights films of artistic value which otherwise it would be impossible for the public to see.”<sup>292</sup> *The Times* subsequently followed and reported on the monthly film programs of The Film Society: publishing not only reviews of the evening’s films, but critiques of the Society’s programming selections, and the filmic medium itself. The articles swing wildly between appreciative or thankful (with the writer expressing gratitude to the Society for enabling exposure to a particular film), to the extremely critical (with the writer hoping for more easily digestible, comfortable fare).

In a *Times* review of *Raskolnikov* (1923), a screen adaptation of Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* shown at the second program to be put on by the Film Society, the article reads: “The present film should greatly increase his [producer Robert Wiene] reputation, and we are indebted to the Film Society for having enabled it to be seen.”<sup>293</sup> Yet, these compliments are tempered within the same article, making it clear that though this particular work of the cinema is good, the cinema in general is still limited as an art

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<sup>291</sup> “Film Society: 1925-1939,” in *BFI National Library Guide to Collections* (London, BFI: 1995), 2.

<sup>292</sup> “Repertory Film Society,” *The Times*, September 19, 1925: 7, col. E.

<sup>293</sup> “‘Raskolnikov’ on the Screen,” *The Times*, December 22, 1925: 10, col. C.

form by comparison to the literary; in other words, it is as good as it can be: “It [Raskolnikov] does not provoke—partly because the need for brevity has imposed limitations upon it—the emotional or intellectual response which we make to the novel; it is, too, imperfect even within its own limitation; but it remains the most impressive and certainly the most hopeful work we have discovered on the screen.”<sup>294</sup> In an article the following year, *The Times* again offers criticism, this time of the avant-garde and foreign characteristics of the films the Society specialized in:

The trouble with the film [*Nju* (1926)—German] is that it does not often enough provide its spectators with the relief—the perpetual consolation of film-goers—of laughing at its absurdities. It is too heavily pretentious, too greedily sordid for that. What a blessed escape it was, when this was over, to see Mr. Chaplin’s face again! And how much pleasanter the Film Society’s programme would have been if they had given us a little less of the beer, the braces, and the basin, and a little more of such work as *The Life of a Plant*, which is a beautiful and fascinating picture of the growth and habits of a nasturtium, and happens to be British.<sup>295</sup>

To a certain degree, the cinema was suffering the same problem in England as it had in France—a problem of reputation. In an 1972 *Screen* interview with Ivor Montagu, one of the original founders of the Film Society, Montagu comments on the criticisms of *The Times*, and consequently the reasons for its French predecessor’s failure, when stating why the club was started, the reason for its founding: “In this way [via the Film Society] we [thought we] could draw into film, artists, sculptors, writers, who up to then disdained

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> “The Film Society: Fifth Performance,” *The Times*, February 15, 1926: 7, col. C.

films. Films were in general disdained. It was supposed to be low taste. Intellectual snobs would have nothing to do with film but of course when it was organized on the lines of the Film Society, they poured in.”<sup>296</sup> It was theorized that the large-market press, who up to then had been uninterested in reporting on the cinema, could be (and were) drawn in the same way. “We thought that by organizing special shows we would be able to interest such people [high society and the press],” states Montagu.<sup>297</sup> *The Times* was persuaded to report on the Society through Montagu’s marrying of something low (the cinema) with something high (society functions and gatherings)—they may have been reporting because the monthly events were billed and presented as high society functions, but the creation of a film review column that gave non-commercial and foreign films due space was the unintended (at least by *The Times*) byproduct. “In that respect,” says Montagu, “it was entirely successful.”<sup>298</sup>

Getting commercially unviable, independent, foreign, and experimental films to be screened, publicized, and to be taken seriously was the Society’s first and foremost goal. A note from the first program put on by the Film Society states: “It will be sufficient if it [the Society] can show a group of films which are in some degree interesting and which represent the work which has been done, or is being done experimentally, in various parts of the world. It is in the nature of such films that they are (it is said) commercially unsuitable for this country; and that is why they become the

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<sup>296</sup> Alan Lovell, “Interview with Ivor Montagu,” *Screen* 13, no. 3 (1972): 72.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

especial province of the Film Society.”<sup>299</sup> The lack of commercial viability was about more than just economics though; it was about the perception of “good taste” and “appropriate” fare—and the films which the Society aimed to show lacked that popular reputation in spades. One original society founder, Adrian Brunel was in fact forced to resign from the Society for the low culture taint his employers were afraid he would infect their own films with, according to Jen Samson’s 1986 history of the Society: “Adrian Brunel’s employers even insisted that he resign from the Council [the governing body of the Society] for fear that his association with the Society would damage the reputation of the films he made for Gainsborough [Studios].”<sup>300</sup> Fighting against this perception was one of the Society’s greatest obstacles to creating successful screenings.

While getting non-commercial films screened, getting them an audience, was the uppermost goal of the Society, there were secondary results of the Society’s efforts as well, stemming from their emphasis on the importance of the social and communal experience of films. Iris Barry, the lone female among the founders of the Society, who was also a film critic for the literary journal *The Spectator* (it has been said that this role is primarily why she was allowed to join the founding members), extolled the virtues of the social experience of group spectatorship in her column the February before the Society’s foundation:<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> George Amberg, ed., “The Film Society Programme, 1<sup>st</sup> Performance, Sunday 25 October 1925,” in *Film Society Programmes: 1925-1939* (London: Arno Press, 1972), 4.

<sup>300</sup> Jen Samson, “The Film Society, 1925-1939,” in *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema*, ed. Charles Barr (London: BFI, 1986), 310.

<sup>301</sup> “She became a founder member of the Film Society in 1925, largely on the basis of her role as the *Spectator*’s film critic.” Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 280.

At its very lowest, the moving picture brings every week both happiness and a definite nervous and mental relaxation to many millions of jaded human units in our less than ideal industrial civilizations. *Its social value is great*: the cinema plays no small part in broadening the *common* horizon....The public—and I must insist that the cinema to-day is frequented by men and women in every rank of society and of every degree of culture—has ceased to regard the ‘pictures’ solely as momentary distractions, and recognizes in them a possible vehicle of unique emotional and visual beauty.<sup>302</sup>

We are brought together in the cinema and by the cinema. It gives us a common experience: the psychologically uniting experience of sharing a unique moment of emotional and visual beauty together with others.

In November of the same year, one month after the first program put on by the Society, Barry again mentions the social value of the cinema; she treats it as so valuable, it performs its magic regardless of the quality of the picture on the screen: “If there are detestable films, there are equally detestable novels; but no one seems to mind this. And the cinema, entertaining so many millions of people with something which if it is not always very good, is still a re-creation in the deeper meaning of the word, performs a definite and *valuable social function*, is an antidote for depression and discontent.”<sup>303</sup> The cinema, according to Barry, lifts you out from under melancholy, re-creates you in an elated state of unification. The cinema has “civic importance,” does a “social good,” and

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<sup>302</sup> Iris Barry, “The Cinema: Progress is Being Made,” *The Spectator*, 14 February 1925, 235. My emphasis.

<sup>303</sup> Iris Barry, “The Cinema: Of British Films,” *The Spectator*, 14 November, 1925, 870. My emphasis.

its importance rests in the ability of the cinema to create a society of “pleasure-loving member[s] of the public.”<sup>304</sup>

The first time Barry mentions the Film Society in her column, on September 5, 1925, she twice mentions the desire of the Society (and of cinema in general) to “draw people together.”<sup>305</sup> And this desire is echoed in other direct accounts of Society members, and in what little scholarly literature on the Society exists. In David Robinson’s unpublished history of the Film Society, archived at the British Film Institute in London, he notes the importance of the social act of viewing that the Society produced, quoting Ewen Montagu (Ivor’s brother): “...the Film Society was quite a social event. It was quite a thing to do, to have someone to lunch on Sunday and then to go off to the Film Society.”<sup>306</sup> The magazine the Society chose to announce its first season also points to Barry’s emphasis on “drawing together,” on group experience and discussion, open conversation—but with a stress on the Society’s uppermost goal as well: establishing film as a legitimate art form, made more legitimate through serious communal academic conversation. It was on June 10, 1925 that Ivor Montagu published a statement of intent in the Oxford student magazine *The Isis*, emphasizing in addition to foreign and independent work, “revivals of re-edited films...re-issue or revival of old, brilliant films.”<sup>307</sup> This “archival emphasis,” as Laura Marcus describes it in 2007, is not only in line with the academic emphasis indicated by the courting of young students and a university audience through the Oxford magazine advert choice, but it also “indicat[es]

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<sup>304</sup> Iris Barry, “The Cinema: American Prestige and British Films,” *The Spectator*, 11 July 1925, 52.

<sup>305</sup> Iris Barry, “New Projects of the Cinema,” *The Spectator*, 5 September 1925, 363.

<sup>306</sup> David Robinson, *The Career and Times of The Film Society*. Unpublished (London: BFI Archives Film Society Collection, 1963).

<sup>307</sup> Ivor Montagu, “The New Film Society,” *The Isis*, 10 June 1925, 19-20.

that the establishing of film as an art was bound up with a commitment to film history and the beginnings of the archive and film museum movement.”<sup>308</sup> And the “archival emphasis” succeeds. With the London Film Society as her springboard, Iris Barry moves to New York in 1930 to help found not only the New York Film Society that same year, but by 1935 she also becomes the curator of the newly-founded Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art. Becoming its director by 1946, Barry eventually does the impossible and manages to gain the trust of D.W. Griffith to secure his archive of work for the museum, and the public. Marcus calls Barry “one of the most significant figures in the history of film studies and the film archive movement.”<sup>309</sup>

The academic bent of the Society succeeds as well, and like the “archival emphasis,” is just as intimately bound up with Barry’s, and the Society’s, desires for others to begin to understand and become involved in the social and group pleasures of cinematic spectatorship. In addition to courting an academic audience through *The Isis*, the Society also handed out a standard leaflet to new members directly stating that it was looking for “the most actively-minded people”: those interested in the group experience of film and its open discussion as a legitimate and serious art form.<sup>310</sup> In 2002, Gerry Turvey notes the academic texts that influenced Montagu’s programming notes as creating and encouraging cinephilia (in this context, meaning a social cinephilia) amongst Society members, and Montagu’s close friends: “both texts [*The 7 Lively Arts* and *The Art of the Moving Picture*] were known to him [Montagu] and his colleagues and they not

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<sup>308</sup> Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, 263.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>310</sup> “Membership information and leaflets to members,” The Film Society Collection, British Film Institute, Item 9.

only helped form his early film-reviewing practice but also stimulated the cinephilia of his friends.”<sup>311</sup>

In fact, the communal experience of cinema, a social cinephilia, an active spectatorship, becomes so lively in the Society film screenings that it eventually causes “repeated written rejoinders to the Society’s members to refrain from conversation during films...they [members] were, *pace* Vachel Lindsay, acting as ‘film explainers’ and producing their own critical commentaries on the spectacle before them.”<sup>312</sup> And within four years of the Society’s founding, that urge to discuss the cinema at greater length jumps the boundaries of the theater space when Society-sponsored study groups are formed. As Samson notes, “at least two ‘study groups’ were set up which involved members’ participation....The first, led by Eisenstein when he was in London in 1929, consisted of six two-hour lectures on different aspects of montage. Hans Richter taught the second study group, also in 1929, when he helped members to produce an abstract film’ called *Everyday*.”<sup>313</sup> This effect of the Society to inspire its members to actually become filmmakers themselves delighted Montagu in particular, who had hoped from the beginning to influence British ideas about filmmaking, and encourage young hopeful filmmakers to pursue the craft. As Montagu states, “We thought there are such a lot of films that we are interested in that are being made abroad that we would like to fertilise [sic] British film ideas by seeing some of them....it was [successful from that point of

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<sup>311</sup> Gerry Turvey, “Towards a Critical Practice: Ivor Montagu and British Film Culture in the 1920s,” in *Young and Innocent? The Cinema in Britain: 1896-1930*, ed. Andrew Higson (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 313.

<sup>312</sup> Marcus, *Tenth Muse*, 273.

<sup>313</sup> Samson, “The Film Society,” 311.



view] but that took some time before results appeared on the screen. We attracted young talent...and gave them encouragement, because this had become a popular thing.”<sup>314</sup>

The founders of the Society, too, used the organization as a springboard to become involved not only in filmmaking, but criticism, and academia. Sidney Bernstein formed the production company Transatlantic Pictures with Alfred Hitchcock following the end of World War II. Ivor Montagu became a critic and an associate producer, writing for *Granta* and *The Observer* in the 1920s, and working with Alfred Hitchcock to produce films like *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Sabotage* (1936). Adrian Brunel worked for the Bioscope Company and the film department of the Ministry of Information. Hugh Miller was already a successful actor at the time of the Society’s founding, and continued in this occupation. Walter Mycroft became a film critic and filmmaker. And Frank Dobson, inspired by the more avant-garde works in the Society’s programming, became a successful sculptor and professor at the Royal College of Art.

The Film Society fostered filmmakers, critics, academics, the beginnings of the film museum and archival movement. Some of the inspiration for these achievements is most certainly attributable to the never-before-seen avant-garde and foreign works the Film Society brought into the theater. Yet, Barry’s repeated emphasis on the social circumstances of viewing, the benefits of group spectatorship, taken together with the references to the Society’s fostering of a social cinephilia in other primary and secondary documentation, begs a question which reaches back to Le Ciné-Club, and forward to every other film society: why is group spectatorship desirable? What does the experience of watching film together give to us?

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<sup>314</sup> Lovell, “Interview,” 72-73.

Economics have long postulated a general theory of groups and club membership, in an attempt to answer the question “why do we form clubs?” by first asking what benefits club members derive from group membership. In 1965, J. M. Buchanan claimed in “An Economic Theory of Clubs,” that “whenever the utility derived by an individual from a specific good or service is dependent on the size of the consumption group, then a club organization will supply the service efficiently while the market will not.”<sup>315</sup> In other words, when goods or services can be consumed or purchased more efficiently as a group than as an individual, groups will naturally form. And the objective of the group will be to attain the desired goods or services in the most efficient way.

The economic theory of groups certainly enabled the Film Society in London to function, enabled it to gain the legitimacy and capital necessary to acquire films. As Montagu, slightly self-interestedly, states: “...without the subscriptions of the like-minded enthusiasts who joined the society, we should ourselves never have been able to afford to see them with a big audience and the right music—both essentials for proper appreciation—or maybe even entice their owners to send them to England at all.”<sup>316</sup> Thorold Dickinson’s 1969 survey of film societies echoes Montagu’s comments, but suggests economic necessity as *the* fundamental reason for society formation:

Their function was to provide an audience for the amateur and semi-amateur avant-garde films which were too abstruse for popular exhibition. Ciné-clubs

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<sup>315</sup> Buchanan’s position is summarized in: Eitan Berglas, “On the Theory of Clubs,” *The American Economic Review* 66, no. 2 (May 1976), 116.

<sup>316</sup> Ivor Montagu, *The Youngest Son: Autobiographical Sketches* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 273.

were the forerunners of the art house. Existing distributors and theatre owners could not understand avant-garde films and had no faith that they could attract a sufficient audience to pay for their exhibition. So it came about that private individuals would hire a cinema at an hour when it was normally closed or ill-attended and invite their friends to subscribe to a single performance.<sup>317</sup>

In other words, according to Dickinson, film societies diffuse costs—that is their sole function. That diffusion may enable the viewing of films that would otherwise go unseen, which in itself has a multitude of subsidiary benefits (as seen with the Film Society in London), which Dickinson recognizes, but while Montagu elsewhere alludes to the non-economic value of group spectatorship, Dickinson fails to see what is fundamentally different about group spectatorship—like the psychological closeness examined in Corbett’s 1998 study, quoted earlier in this chapter. In failing to do so, Dickinson points out the very flaw with using an economic theory of groups alone to explain the function of film societies. Economics cannot be held wholly separate from the formation of film societies, but it also cannot explain the desire to experience films together, cannot explain what is valuable in the group spectatorship film societies foster, apart from economic concerns.

Film studies itself has had no shortage of theories on the spectators in the audience. Yet, the emphasis has for the most part been on the individual—on the interaction between the individual and the filmic text. Psychoanalytic film theory, and Suture Theory in particular, have long theorized the relationship between the screen and the viewer. Suture, as its name implies, examines the processes by which spectators are

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<sup>317</sup> Thorold Dickinson, “Film Societies,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 3, no. 3 (1969), 85.

“stitched into” a film. Slavoj Žižek describes the “elementary logic of suture” in an idealized shot/reverse shot example from his 1999 text *The Fright of Real Tears*:

Firstly, the spectator is confronted with a shot, finds pleasure in it in an immediate, imaginary way, and is absorbed by it.

Then, this full immersion is undermined by the awareness of the frame as such: what I see is only a part, and I do not master what I see. I am in a passive position, the show is run by the Absent One (or, rather, Other) who manipulates images behind my back.

What then follows is a complementary shot which renders the place from which the Absent One is looking, allocating this place to its fictional owner, one of the protagonists. In short one passes thereby from imaginary to symbolic, to a sign: the second shot does not simply follow the first one, it is signified by it.<sup>318</sup>

In other words, “the threatening intrusion of the decentering Other, the Absent Cause, is ‘sutured’ [out],” the gap is closed, and the frame no longer undermines our absorption, our ability to take up subject positions within the film, our pleasure.<sup>319</sup> While this is a basic explanation of Suture, and there are other formulations of Suture that have developed from its original formulation (e.g. the work of Jean-Pierre Oudart, Kaja Silverman, Daniel Dayan, William Rothman, Stephen Heath, and Laura Mulvey), no incarnation of Suture attempts to formulate or account for anything beyond the singular individual experience. It accounts for the spectator and attempts to understand their individual interaction with, and relationship to the screen in the environment of the

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<sup>318</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski Between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: BFI, 1999), 36.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

theater, but Suture does not attempt to account for the group experience, the social aspect of the cinema.

In the late '60s and early '70s, Reception Theory also attempted to address the relationship between film and the spectator, by emphasizing what Robert C. Holub calls “a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader.”<sup>320</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, with whom Reception Theory originated in literary studies, states that it is intended to look at literature, and interpret it, by understanding it “as a dialectical process of production and reception,” between work and work-consumer.<sup>321</sup> Cultural theorist Stuart Hall extends Jauss’ position to media texts by taking the social positions of viewers into account, suggesting that there can be multiple ways to interpret and experience a text, to the degree that there need be “no necessary correspondence” between the way a text is encoded and the way it is decoded.<sup>322</sup> In other words, depending on your social and cultural position, there can be a “lack of equivalence” between the film’s intended message and its actual reception. However, while there is here again an investigation of the spectator-screen relationship, there is no accounting of group spectatorship. The “social” that is taken into account here is only social in the much broader sense: it refers to the social position of the individual in a given society and culture, not in the immediate proximal environment of the theater.

John Ellis’ work in Medium Theory perhaps comes closest to addressing the issue of group spectatorship. In 1982’s *Visible Fictions*, Ellis recognizes the growing

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<sup>320</sup> Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1984), xiii.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>322</sup> Stuart Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, no. 2 (1985): 104.

popularity of home video spectatorship, and so puts forth a theory on the difference between the televisual and cinematic mediums: answering questions about what is being gained and lost in this dramatic revision to spectatorship practices. In doing so, Ellis elaborates on what is distinct about the group spectatorship of the movie theater. Being part of the cinema audience, for Ellis, is to occupy a position between “belonging” and “loneliness.”<sup>323</sup> We “belong” together in that we share the experience. But we sit in “loneliness” as a result of our engrossment in the film and the spatial arrangement of the theater—a forward-facing matrix of seats. Ellis even goes as far as to suggest that the more complex the film, and the more skilled the viewer is in recognizing that complexity, the more individual the experience: “it [cinema] tends to remain an individual experience: the more adept at understanding the demands that cinematic narration makes upon an individual, the more engrossed each separate member of the audience becomes.”<sup>324</sup> And the more flaws with the work, the more a group experience emerges. If “the audience refuse[s] the illusion that the film is offering,” or if “one or more members of an audience demand an explanation of a particular aspect of the plot,” that is when “members of the audience relate directly to each other during the projection of a film.”<sup>325</sup>

Interpretations of spectatorship within one genre of film in particular, cult film, have offered some support for Ellis’ theorization. Critical work on cult film has long asserted that the thoroughly group experiences of cult film spectatorship practices can emerge on the basis of their films’ flaws—the “it’s-so-bad-it’s-good” theory. According to this perspective, it is the flaws that create the practices defining the benchmarks of cult

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<sup>323</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (New York: Routledge, 1982), 26.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

film spectatorship: heavily participatory theater practices like dialogue recitation, improvised dialogue response, cosplay, etc. This theory has been applied to Ed Wood-style aesthetics, *The Room* (2003), projections of the campy *Batman* television series (1966-68), the *Evil Dead* franchise (1981-92), *Showgirls* (1995), etc.—their flaws encouraging spectators to respond together as a group to the screen. Yet, if flaws alone are what create or encourage group spectatorship, as Ellis asserts, his theory eventually becomes irreconcilable with cult film theorization which, while recognizing the “it’s-so-bad-it’s-good” theory, also recognizes it as a sub-genre beneath the much larger umbrella of cult film—cult film also including critically acclaimed work, camp, independent films, auteur-ist devotion, etc. Consequently, Ellis’ theory cannot explain the long-running group spectatorship practices surrounding the queen of all cult films, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), the prevalence of David Lynch in midnight showings, the popularity of musical sing-a-longs to *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) or *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952), and many others.

In short, though the combination of belonging and loneliness seems an apt description for the experience of the theater, bonding over flaws alone cannot explain the “belonging” of group experience within or beyond cult films. Perhaps this is why Ellis puts forth an additional theory related to the voyeuristic gaze that psychoanalytic film theories have long examined, one that Ellis calls the “complicity of the crowd.” He states: “the complicity of the crowd in the experience of a film is very necessary. It is not only the film itself that licenses the activity of the spectator, silently watching, but also the presence of others who are engaged in a similar activity without disturbing each other,

without watching each other.”<sup>326</sup> Our group spectatorship, in other words, is “necessary to make watching a movie bearable rather than uncomfortable....looking into someone’s world on the screen as if it were us who were there, uninvited is deeply uncomfortable and positions us as ‘voyeur’. We need to know that others are also in this position to turn this discomfort into pleasure....[for this] we are dependent on the group.”<sup>327</sup> The group alleviates the anxiety of the individual voyeur. Yet, again, this theory too breaks down if reconciled with the loneliness/belonging paradigm Ellis states as always being in play. If we are more absorbed in the movie, and the experience thereby becomes more of an individual one, how is that anxiety diffused? And what of individual theatrical experiences? Are they by definition less pleasurable than group experiences? Anxiety-ridden? Can they not have a pleasure all their own that is just as great, albeit different? Though Ellis’ work in *Visible Fictions* stands as one of the clearest attempts to treat group spectatorship, rather than just one of its component parts, it fails to construct a theory of groups without dismantling the individual experience in the process.

Medium Theory joins Suture, Reception, and the economic theory of groups in its failure to explain group spectatorship, or assess more than part of its functioning. There, at present, is no theory common to, or commonly related to film studies, that has successfully assessed the value of group spectatorship in whole—accounting for the communal pleasure expressed by Corbett, Barry, Montagu, the Film Society in London, etc. There has been no answer for the questions posed above: why is group spectatorship

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>327</sup> Samantha Warren, “Psychoanalysis, collective viewing and the ‘social photo matrix’ in organizational research,” *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 7, no. 1 (2012): 94.



desirable? What can the experience of watching film together give to us? Surprisingly, the first discipline to proffer a cogent address of group spectatorship is organizational psychology, and visual organization studies in particular. Visual organization studies are a relatively new field within organizational psychology which aims to examine the collective dimension to viewing visual materials. Typically associated with corporate organization and management research, there is nevertheless a clear theoretical applicability to film studies. One very recent study by Samantha Warren even alludes to this relevance, noting in passing the significance to the “discipline of ‘audience studies,’” while also mentioning the same frustrating absence of group spectatorship research in her own field as noted above for film studies: calling this “missing collective perspective” the “blind spot” of organizational psychology.<sup>328</sup>

Visual organization studies are trying to fill in this “blind spot,” defining themselves as “the process of studying the visible elements of organizational life and/or studying organizational life using methods that make it visual.”<sup>329</sup> In other words, visual media (including film) can be examined to arrive at an understanding of how we organize ourselves (including our thoughts and behaviors), particularly in relation to others. And the assertions of the very few, very recent studies that exist in this field put forth the idea that in group spectatorship, images are publically experienced, publically made sense of. Not just in the broad socio-cultural sense (which visual organization studies recognizes, but does not take as its subject of study), but the immediate social context of the theater. This leads Warren to lay out the two broad claims visual organization studies have made

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 87 and 88.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 88.

about group spectatorship: 1) “viewing in a group situation will influence the way an individual responds to what is being viewed; and 2) the social dynamics of the immediate situation will mediate what is appropriate to express in response to what is viewed.”<sup>330</sup> It is from these two claims that the pleasure of group spectatorship can emerge. To understand this immediate social situation of group spectatorship, however, the relationship drawn between the individual and its social surroundings according to organizational psychology must be examined first.

In 1939, German sociologist Norbert Elias published *The Civilizing Process*, tracing the way particular individual psychic structures are formed through broader social attitudes. Translated to English in 1969, his work gained interest in the field of organizational psychology which has since integrated its ideas into contemporary figurations of the individual. Tim Newton and Dennis Smith’s 2002 work on the future of organization studies reminds us of this influence, taking from Elias what it sees as still valuable to the contemporary study of groups: the examination of how social and cultural macro-structures influence and determine the behavior in the micro-structures of small groups. It is always important to remember, according to Newton and Smith, Elias’ emphasis on “making connections between long-term tendencies in social and political macro-structures...and the way structures of thought and feeling develop within the [smaller] population.”<sup>331</sup> The influence of Michel Foucault is also easy to hear in this

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>331</sup> Tim Newton and Dennis Smith, “Introduction: Norbert Elias and the civilized organization,” in *The Civilized Organization: Norbert Elias and the future of Organization Studies*, ed. Ad van Iterson and others (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002), ix.

rhetoric, in particular his work describing how larger power structures are internalized to operate in individuals to the degree that they become self-governing subjects.<sup>332</sup>

What does this mean for the small group of spectators in the theater? As Dennis Smith asserts in 2002, it means that spectators cannot escape the social.<sup>333</sup> If viewers believe one or many of their reactions to the cinematic images being projected before them to be transgressive, shameful, disruptive, incorrect, or inappropriate—even in a very minor way—they will censor themselves. If they feel the desire to dance along with Elvis in *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), but everyone else is quiet and seated, they won't dance. If they find a moment in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) funny, but no one else laughs, they will suppress that laughter rather than risk the consequences of group judgment, shame, or humiliation.

This conception of collective theatrical viewing as simply a localized display of the larger social controls regularly governing individuals both in the theater and out, as the exhibition within the small immediate environment in the theater of previously internalized social structures transformed into self-censorship and self-governance, suggests that group dynamics are always present—even in the dark matrix of the theater—and can definitively alter, influence, or disrupt the experience of film spectators may be capable of having, or may wish to be having. It is the “tyranny of the group,” as

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<sup>332</sup> See in particular: Michel Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The Order of Things* (1970).

<sup>333</sup> Dennis Smith, “The Humiliating Organization: The functions and dysfunctions of degradation,” *The Civilized Organization: Norbert Elias and the future of Organization Studies*, ed. Ad van Iterson and others (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2002), 41-58.

Burkard Sievers calls it in 2007.<sup>334</sup> And it can threaten to suppress individual spectators' attempts at forming their reactions exclusive of situational dynamics, or what is known in organizational psychology as falling into "work-group activity," rather than freely responding with honesty to the screen. Yet Warren suggests that by design the forward-facing matrix of seats can prevent this "work-group" dynamic from taking a dominant hold on spectator behavior: "arrangement of participants [i.e. spectators] in the 'matrix' ...ensure[s] that 'the tyranny of belonging to a group or identifying with it does not prevail'. Identifying with others as a group, would invoke 'work-group' and 'basic assumption' dynamics among matrix participants."<sup>335</sup> The assertion is that spectators are "free from peer pressure, social norms and obligations, power/gender relations or any other form of situational dynamics that may otherwise shape their responses to the images [on the screen]."<sup>336</sup>

Warren's work here sounds like a clear echo of Ellis' loneliness/belonging theory of the theater: we are aware of belonging to a group including those around us, but the solitude of the matrix creates an aloneness permitting behaviors that would otherwise be deemed situationally inappropriate. Yet if this is the perpetual condition of theatrical viewing, why don't spectators laugh at times without the rest of the audience, or associate freely, dance, and otherwise? In practice, the situational dictum for quiet seated viewing generally remains inviolate, regardless of matrix seating. While the matrix creates a unique opportunity to simultaneously separate and connect, an additional suppression of

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<sup>334</sup> Burkard Sievers, "'Perhaps it is the Role of Pictures to Get in Contact with the Uncanny': The Social Photo Matrix as a Method to Promote the Understanding of the Unconscious in Organizations," *Organizational and Social Dynamics* 8, no. 2 (2008), 237.

<sup>335</sup> Warren, "Psychoanalysis," 92.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

internalized social censorship, a suppression of the expected situational group dynamic, of the “appropriate” behavior of the theater, is necessary to permit genuine honest reactions to come forth. I argue that, when permitted, those reactions are the desired outcome of the group theatrical experience *if* intended to satisfy the beautiful “more” that has been discussed since the beginning of this work; these reactions can satisfy the desire for greater connection, greater intimacy with the beloved film, and these reactions are freed through the suppression of the socially-regulated situational theater dynamic.

The objective is not simply to suppress the group, only to suppress the internalized censorship in each spectator that is necessary to maintain the expected situational group dynamic. And at the same time as this suppression within the group occurs, the group must also construct and foster an environment in which unique individual expressions are acceptable and encouraged. From the liberation of these individual expressions, the group dynamic must be rebuilt as one in which associations and amplifications of the expressions of others are permitted and validated. Nowhere has this environment been better fostered than in film societies, including what I will call “pop-up” film societies—those which do not have regular members, but which nonetheless function based on similar principles of group and individual expression.

The historical investigations that preceded this conception of the “freed group” were intended to show the foundations of this liberated environment, environments ironically freed through suppression to champion unique expressions and group amplifications. From the GFWC members each peeping through the Kinetoscope viewfinder, to the failed Ciné-Club, to the Film Society in London: each of these

moments in social film viewing history have contributed in different ways to the present possibilities for satisfying viewers looking for “more.” The story of the GFWC members is our disappointing foundation, full of possibility. Individual or group reactions were neither expressed nor asked for, and it is impossible not to think of that moment as a missed opportunity—a gap in film history unlikely to ever be filled in. Yet part of that disappointment is engendered by a desire for expression; it seems so absent for the GFWC women because expression appears so inevitable and necessary now. Le Ciné-Club attempted to create an environment in which the missing discussion of the GFWC could take place without judgment, but it too was suppressed—this time by negative public perceptions of the cinema. Benoit-Lévy’s work here proves the desire not only to alleviate the cinema of its negative stigma, but also to get more: to discuss the cinema at length with others, to further it as an art form, to find “pleasure” in it, as the Phono Ciné-Gazette promised. Less than 20 years later, the Film Society of London succeeds wildly in providing the pleasure Le Ciné-Club could not. It succeeds in encouraging the open academic and artistic interpretation of film, even if it did not yet understand open theatrical expression, and issued written censures to discourage it. Each of these iterations of social film spectatorship was a success in its own right. Each created or was working toward a satisfaction of the desire to move beyond the act of viewing—even if that success can only be defined by the failings each pointed out for future endeavors in group spectatorship to rectify.

These historical social groups of film viewers have advocated for (whether passively or actively) creating a contemporary film culture that makes possible greater

and greater open expression by film-goers in group spectatorship situations; they have made possible the most durable satisfaction of the desire for “more” that has occupied this work from its beginning, and the least problematic satisfaction in its theoretical apparatus. And the greatest success story, the greatest example of an open community of spectators who agree to suppress the individual self-censorship typically demanded of theatrical situational dynamics, who openly express themselves as individuals while also amplifying and associating with the expressions of other spectators and the film itself, this exuberant, unique, supportive, celebratory group dynamic which satisfies that desire for more interaction with a film than viewing can provide without creating the problematic theoretical disappointments of the other attempts to satisfy this desire—that success has been *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).

*Rocky Horror*'s evolution into a movie surrounded by and viewed in an environment which promotes the open, satisfying dynamic described above, is a unique one. Originally opening in 1973 as a satirical musical at London's Royal Court Theatre, the play was exported to America only to receive very middling success in its Broadway run. It was only after a move to Los Angeles' Roxy Theater, and a partnership with music producer Lou Adler, that it became a true off-beat triumph. It was Adler who soon thereafter signed the *Rocky* motion picture deal, bringing together actors from both the London and L.A. stage plays. By its debut in L.A. on September 26, 1975, however, its success was less brilliant. Its reception would more accurately be described as tepid...at best. *Time* magazine's T.F. Kalem described it as “very bullish on silliness,” advising

spectators who still decide to go to “get as bombed as the show.”<sup>337</sup> *AP* critic William Glover did not mince words when he said, “The key to ‘The Rocky Horror Show’ is that third word: Horror, as in vile.”<sup>338</sup>

There were others who were brave enough to love it. In a column intended only to provide the most basic movie information (e.g. showtimes, venues, starring actors, etc.), the *Chicago Tribune*’s Aaron Gold snuck his opinion in a parenthetical, saying, “(I thought he [Tim Curry] was superb)...a worthy fun endeavor.”<sup>339</sup> Kevin Thomas of the *L.A. Times* summarized the content of the play and then attempted to still convey the value of the film—trying to convince readers of the film’s worth is something Thomas recognizes the film’s content seems to belie: “All this plays as less depraved than it sounds. This Richard O’Brien musical [film] is simply too exuberant and too funny to be seriously decadent. Indeed, there’s an underlying quality of tenderness and even innocence in this loving send-up of horror and sci-fi flicks and celebration of post-graduate sexuality.”<sup>340</sup> This variance in opinions was even noted by Kalem who hypothesized at least why London and L.A. remained mostly on one side of this wide gulf. He states, “It is not easy to see why this campy trash was a long-running hit in London and a smash success in Los Angeles, except that transvestism has always fascinated the British and the L.A. scene is almost as kinky.”<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> T.F. Kalem, “The Rocky Horror Show,” *TIME*, March 24 1975, 77.

<sup>338</sup> William Glover “‘Rocky Horror Show’ Shabby,” *Lawton Constitution*, March 12, 1975, 29.

<sup>339</sup> Aaron Gold, “Tower Ticker,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1975.

<sup>340</sup> Kevin Thomas, “Movie Review: ‘Rocky Horror’ a Sci-Fi Spoof,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1975, sec. F15.

<sup>341</sup> Kalem, “Rocky Horror,” 77.



Twentieth Century Fox, *Rocky*'s distribution company, told a different story. The film wasn't exclusively successful in larger cities like L.A. and London. According to Bill Henkin, author of *The Rocky Horror Show Picture Book*, there were a few puzzling sell-out exceptions all over the country, as well as consistent (albeit smaller-sized) audience attendance numbers in some theaters. Twentieth Century Fox sent publicist Tim Deegan to investigate these "seemingly capricious attendance patterns,"<sup>342</sup> as Irene Oppenheim calls them in her 1991 retrospective on the *Rocky Horror* phenomenon. What Deegan finds in his on-site visits is, "while there might be fifty people in the audience for a given showing, these were often the same fifty people he'd seen the day before."<sup>343</sup> Deegan and executive producer Lou Adler remained unclear about what exactly was happening, and took a chance to salvage the distribution pay off by "set[ting] up an experimental low-cost midnight show, provide a minimum of advertising and let—as Adler puts it—*Rocky*'s audience 'discover the film on their own.'"<sup>344</sup> Since that first midnight appearance at the Waverly Theater in New York City in 1976, the film has far exceeded paying off its original investment.

To this day, the inspired idea for midnight showings, combined with *Rocky*'s at-times campy genius, has created a long-lasting community of pop-up *Rocky* film societies emerging at midnight in cities across the country. John Boe describes the excitement and enthusiasm which viewers still show for this movie by its "Dionysian revel and ritual."<sup>345</sup> And having attended my own share of *Rocky* shows in Minneapolis, Chicago, and San

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<sup>342</sup> Irene Oppenheim, "Rocky Redux," *The Threepenny Review* 44 (1991), 28.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> John Boe, "Don't Dream it, Be it: The Rocky Horror Picture Show as Dionysian Revel," *The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal* 4, no. 3 (Spring 1983), 63.

Francisco, I can confirm the energy of this celebratory environment. Audience involvement is not only encouraged, it is demanded. Boe describes his own experience as a “first-timer” (better known as “virgins” by regular goers to the midnight showings) in 1983:

A cast, with meticulously exact costuming and props, acts out the movie in front of the screen, miming the movements of the actors. Members of the audience continually shout at the movie screen, anticipating lines and action, roaring witticisms (usually obscene), and commenting on the characters (for example, shouting in union, ‘asshole,’ whenever Brad, the straight lead, appears on the screen). And at one time, large portions of the audience join the cast in doing the Time Warp, dancing in the aisles. There are people who, with an almost religious devotion, participate in this ritual every Saturday night, week after week, month after month, even year after year.<sup>346</sup>

How this film has managed to create and hold on to such a devoted and enthusiastic audience almost 40 years after its original release has been discussed and theorized at such great lengths by other authors I will not discuss it here. What remains of interest for this work is the method by which *Rocky*’s group spectatorship practices, its audience involvement, its pop-up community creation, satisfies that desire its devotees have to do more than simply view it in the quiet of the theater—to connect more intimately, to express their feeling for a beloved film.

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

The sociology of *Rocky* viewing practices has often been referred to with the same secular religious vocabulary that the cinephilic pilgrimage has within the rhetoric of the index; its following is built from the same intensity of devotion and affection. In their overview of *Rocky*'s theater practices as "communal activit[ies]" organized around "sacred objects," Patrick T. Kinkade and Michael A. Katovich describe the film in these terms. The film is made "temporarily sacred" within the context of these social events. The film becomes the "shared foci in relation to the social organization of behavior."<sup>347</sup> In other words, its love by all in the audience is assumed, and worshipping it, celebrating it, is also the assumed shared goal. It is on these grounds that the "expected" situational theater dynamic (to be quiet in one's seat) discussed earlier in the context of organizational psychology is also accepted by all as rightfully suppressed. Self-censorship and self-governance, too, are put aside. Typically transgressive or disruptive theater behavior becomes expected and encouraged. As long as the objective is your own celebration and integrating others into your celebration, encouraging them to amplify your behaviors (or vice versa), all behavior is warranted.

Oppenheim tells the story of one fan named Sal Piro who "credits himself with coming up with 'a good twenty or thirty of the funniest lines'" to yell at the screen with the rest of the audience in *Rocky* screenings. He says he came up with,

'She went ape-shit,' as a response to the movie lyric 'What ever happened to Fay Wray?' Mimicking the characters followed soon after. One night, Piro remembers, a girl came splendidly costumed as Frank-N-Furter and started to

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<sup>347</sup> Patrick T. Kinkade and Michael A. Katovich, "Toward a Sociology of Cult Films: Reading *Rocky Horror*," *The Sociological Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1992), 191.

duplicate Curry's moves. At the next show people jumped into the aisles to dance the 'Time Warp,' while Sal himself took on Columbia's little tap solo. Within six weeks, Piro happily recalls, 'we went from doing a little bit to doing the whole film.'<sup>348</sup>

While attending the 2012 FanimeCon anime convention in San Jose, California, I went down to the bar in my hotel lobby around noon. Anime is not really my thing, but at the behest of some friends, I went, vowing to give anything a try at least once. Conventions are notorious for their attendees efforts to cosplay the characters they love. I didn't recognize any of them. And after a while, I got tired of asking over-and-over, "Who's that?" That's how I ended up in the bar by noon. I sat by the window with my partner, watching the sea of costumes parade by outside, as we tried to theorize the value of mass costumed performance. After an hour or so, my partner got up to use the restroom. When he returned, he nudged me. "Hey, did you see that?" he asked. I turned around to see that two women had entered the bar, both wearing full, elaborate *Rocky Horror* costumes: one dressed as Columbia, the other as Magenta. Without thinking, I jumped up, grabbed my partner's arm, pulled him over to them with me and said, "Hi! My name is Brad Majors, and this is my fiancée, Janet Weiss. I wonder if you'd mind helping us. You see our car broke down a few miles up the road. Do you have a phone we might use?" To which the Magenta responded, without missing a beat, with one of Riff Raff's lines from the film: "You've arrived on a rather special night. It's one of the master's affairs." It was at this point that the Columbia began to tap dance.

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<sup>348</sup> Oppenheim, "Rocky Redux," 29.

While many other patrons in the bar seemed confused about what was occurring,



*Figure 4.6 – The author with Magenta and Columbia. Taken at FanimeCon 2012 in San Jose, California.*

understanding the accepted social rules of the film means enacting its celebration when confronted with it. To not do so would be to violate the film (Figure 4.6). The costumed women began with an individual expression of their desire

to celebrate *Rocky* by walking around fully costumed in public; I amplified that expression by approaching them with a dialogue recitation, giving both of us the opportunity to continue associating and amplifying off each other. By knowing and respecting the rules of the film’s midnight showings, we created our own pop-up film society, just as the film does every time it is shown in theaters across the U.S.

While most interpretations of *Rocky* categorize this type of behavior as either particular to *Rocky*, or particular to “cult film” as a genre, and analyze it from within that perspective, I argue otherwise. Quoting from Emile Durkheim’s early 1900s work on cults, Kinkade and Katovich say of *Rocky* that it is one of many cults, which “are collectives that follow specialized beliefs and practices in the context of arcane rituals and objectives. They represent a ‘system of diverse rites, festivals, and ceremonies

which...appear periodically.”<sup>349</sup> Why can’t any film fit this description? Why can’t any film be celebrated with this kind of fervor? Shouldn’t every film, if one wishes to enact a theoretically uncomplicated celebration of a film, be praised in this way? If *Vertigo* is my favorite film, why can’t I find other *Vertigo* lovers, rent out a space and advertise a *Vertigo*-fest at which everyone dresses as their favorite character? We could have rye to drink, and a ladder for people to climb and swoon off. We could kiss while spinning 360 degrees.

I disagree there is such thing as cult film. Its definitions always rely on descriptions like Kinkade and Katovich’s emphasis on “rituals” and periodic appearances. “Cult films” are placed apart as strange, or having peculiar followers—the title “cult” in itself has obvious negative connotations. I argue that their label simply denotes and sets them apart for their celebratory viewing practices: like those of Sal Piro, and like my own encounter in San Jose. Cult film, and *Rocky* in particular, provide a description not of particular films, but of the behaviors associated with particular films, behaviors which provide an uncomplicated satisfaction of the “more” that has been longed for since the beginning of this work. The suppression of group situational dynamics, the freeing of individual and group-amplified celebratory expression to create pop-up film societies/communities that can enact their enthusiasm for films together—what makes this the exclusive aegis of one genre of film? I argue: nothing. Other cinephiles already understood this long ago. *Lebowski Fest* organizers Scott Shuffitt, Ben Peskoe, and Will Russell figured this out in 2002 when they began an annual multi-city festival celebrating the Coen brother’s 1998 film *The Big Lebowski*. Getting together to

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<sup>349</sup> Kinkade and Katovich, “Toward a Sociology,” 192.

drink White Russians, bowl, recite dialogue, and view the film, their celebrations have become a major economic success, even drawing in the original cast to a gala 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Lebowski Fest celebration in New York held early 2012. Ohlone College figured out that the celebratory viewing and community practices thought to be the exclusive concern of “cult film” were in fact available to all films when they began to hold sing-a-longs for the classic American musical *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952). Their screenings not only include singing, but individual and group dancing, and costuming efforts. It is not as raucous as the *Rocky* screenings, but *Singin’* is not the same film as *Rocky*. From each film can spring its own concomitant practices, fitting its respective tone and content.

*Rocky* is merely a vehicle. The longest-running and most-successfully vehicle, yes, but only a vehicle for a set of enacted group spectatorship practices that long desired an environment for expression. But those practices should by no means be the exclusive concern of one film, or one particular genre of film. Group spectatorship practices freed from typical situational theater dynamics are open to all films, and do not suffer from any of the theoretical disappointments that have plagued the efforts discussed earlier in this work. There is no attempt to magically transcend into the film, to search for the magical real, as with the index-inspired cinephilic pilgrimages examined in chapter two. There is no attempt to integrate the film into one’s self-construct in order to gain ownership over it, as with the transformative works of fan fiction examined in chapter 3. There is “only” the beautiful satisfaction of the desire for “more” that was originally articulated by

Willemsen at the beginning of this work. Engaging in group spectatorship of this kind, and engaging with the pop-up or permanent film societies it can create, remains the least frustrating, least theoretically problematic, and most satisfying participation a viewer can have with his/her beloved film. So, if you'll excuse me. I need to go put on my costume; I have a film to see.



*Conclusion*

In a 1994 interview, Francis Ford Coppola characterized film as “a form of alchemy, of magic...I think cinema, movies, and magic have always been closely associated. Because the very earliest people who made film were magicians.”<sup>350</sup> The beginning of this work perhaps insinuated that I would unseat the index only to relocate that feeling of magical transcendence tied to it, and put it somewhere or attach it to something else. Because good film must have magic, right? It must be magical in order to satisfy the persistent desire for “more” that has served to tether this work together? Yet, so often does this work dislocate or relocate again and again the magic of film. We always seem to be at a remove, or just another step away from satisfaction.

In chapter 1, I open the dissertation by examining the primary theoretical concept which contemporary film criticism has employed to deride the digital: the indexical argument. When levied against the digital, the indexical argument essentially posits that digital media have fundamentally altered the relationship between the originally filmed object(s) and their representation on the screen through the addition of an intermediary: the binary digits of which digital media are comprised. According to the indexical argument, the consequence of this alteration to the filmed/viewed relationship is a termination of film’s presumed quality of preserving or even reanimating its originally filmed object(s) in a way that gives us magical existential access to a previous reality—what is levied as the fundamental beauty and value of film.

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<sup>350</sup> Francis Ford Coppola, interview by *Academy of Achievement*. Academy of Achievement Induction Ceremony, Las Vegas, Nevada, June 17, 1994.

Through a reexamination of the original theoretical sources for this argument, including the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, Peter Wollen, and Andre Bazin, I undermine the logic and value of the indexical argument—positioning myself against the recent full-length works of Dudley Andrew, D.N. Rodowick, and Lev Manovich. At the end of this chapter, I conclude that, whether analogue or digital, neither medium provides magical existential access to a previous reality. As a result of this conclusion, I call for long-standing fan practices tied to the indexical argument to be reevaluated; why pursue production artifacts, shooting locations, if they can get you no closer to your beloved film? The chapters that follow thus reexamine the objective of fan practices, beginning with the cinephilic pilgrimage—a practice founded on the indexical argument.

Chapter 1 dislocates the cinematic magic the index sought to explain. It does not destroy it outright, but rather takes apart the dominant contemporary explanation for how it is achieved. I acknowledge the desire, on the part of spectators, to experience that revelation, but take away the theoretical methodology that has been provided to do so. Chapter 2 further proves this dislocation of cinematic magic by investigating the practical application of the indexical argument, and unraveling it.

Chapter 3 marks the beginning of my attempts to relocate the source of cinematic magic. This chapter examines the practice of “textual poaching” that defines fan fiction. As what I call a “transformative” body of literature, it takes film and revises it, adds to it, subtracts from it, makes it permeable, open-ended. The objective of such transformative practices is proffered as ownership of both the transformative *and* the original (filmic) text. It is in this transformation aimed at ownership that the magic of cinema is

temporarily relocated. Satisfaction is suggested as being found through such “making one’s own.” Yet, as this theory is being put forth throughout this chapter it is also being questioned. And by the close of the chapter, transforming film texts in order to gain authority or ownership over the original in order to deepen or otherwise intensify the experience of film—that theory is rejected as well.

It not until the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter that the magic of film finds a permanent home, albeit one without clear boundaries. This final concluding chapter of “Reel Consequences” focuses on those spectator practices which not only acknowledge an inability to reach a previous “reality” via the index, but which acknowledge the dominance of the production as well—engaging with film and its limitations in a wholly celebratory, rather than possessive, way. As an attempted answer to the question, “how does one achieve “more” or experience the “magic” of the cinema?” it is likely unsatisfying if what was craved was a specific, well-defined practice or theory. The answer is a multi-ferrous, decentered call to engage in celebratory social practices and filmic community creation: returning to the cinephilia that began this work (before the indexical argument dominated cinephilic film theory). The magic is still there. How to get at it, however, perhaps seems less infused with magic.

While the present work ends with a call to explore the magic of cinema that can be found in its celebration, chapter 4 also leaves some questions unanswered. What is the relationship between celebratory practices and the history of other participatory art practices? Is it politicized in a similar way? How does such a fundamentally social activity provide a commentary on the seemingly never-ending exodus from theaters to the

home-viewing of films? I hope to address these questions in my future work, while also expanding the work in my second chapter by working in contemporary scholarship on Hitchcock, which has seen much recent increased production interest.

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