



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

**Author Functions, Auteur Fictions**  
*Understanding Authorship in Conglomerate  
Hollywood Commerce, Culture, and  
Narrative*

VOLUME I: ARGUMENTS

Thomas James Wardak

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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The University of Sheffield  
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School of English Literature

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## Abstract

In 1990, Timothy Corrigan identified a rising trend in Hollywood film marketing wherein the director, or *auteur*, had become commercially galvanised as a brand icon. This thesis updates Corrigan's treatise on the 'commerce of auteurism' to a specific 2017 perspective in order to dismantle the discursive mechanisms by which commodified author-brands create meaning and value in Conglomerate Hollywood's promotional superstructure. By adopting a tripartite theoretical/industrial/textual analytical framework distinct from the humanistic and subjectivist excesses of traditional auteurism, by which conceptions of film authorship have typically been circumscribed, this thesis seeks to answer the oft-neglected question *how does authorship work* as it relates to the contemporary blockbuster narrative. Naturally, this necessitates a corresponding understanding of *how texts work*, which leads to the construction of a spectator-centric cognitive narratorial heuristic that conceptualises 'the author' as a hermeneutic code which may be activated when presented with sufficient 'authorial' signals. Of course, authorial signals do not only emanate from films but also promotional paratexts such as posters, trailers, production diaries, and home-video special features like the commentary and behind-the-scenes documentary. These paratexts—by no means arbitrary or ancillary—are instrumental in constructing pre-textual expectations and, correspondingly, textual meaning and value. Through the exploitation of Romantic and auteurist maxims *art demands an artist* and *the director is the film artist*, the commercial projection of branded authorship sanctifies the product as unique and distinguished, rendering it irresistibly attractive to a consumer irrespective of its actual value; the bet-hedging branded author functions as an *a priori* guarantor of quality, which is especially important for a post-recession horizontally-integrated entertainment empire for which a film can still be a failure even if it makes dozens of millions of dollars. This thesis investigates the effect and affect of commercial brand-authorship with regards to J.J. Abrams' authorship of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*—how it manifested through a variety of media; how these media were tailored to pander to the fandom; and how online audiences responded to interviews, video-blogs, and SFX reels in order to construct their own utopian presumptive visions of the film. Yet the fetishised auteur-brand carries little interpretive weight and a sole focus on paratexts tells us even less about the *textuality* of contemporary authorship. Concordantly, this thesis concludes with an extensive authorial reading of *Interstellar*, *The Hobbit* trilogy, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe with an eye to how they each *use* their 'authors'—and for what ends. This, in turn, leads to an expansion of Gérard Genette's hypotheses on transtextuality and the discovery of auto-centric transtextual sub-categories: *autotextuality* (*Interstellar*), *intratextuality* (*The Hobbit*), and *unitextuality* (Marvel). Unlike an ahistorical auteurism that myopically valorises directorial style for its own sake, this thesis finds that there are numerous 'types' of authorship and that 'Nolan', 'Jackson', and Marvel's authoriality cannot be understood without a corresponding appreciation of their industrial burdens and commercial imperatives. Constituting a dialectic on 'authorship' versus 'auteurism', *Author Functions, Auteur Fictions* engages with a commercialised auteurism that has evolved far beyond Corrigan's model into a much more endemic and integral socio-economic system: *the author-industrial complex*.

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## Introduction

# The Author-Industrial Complex

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'The chief glory of every people arises from its authors'  
Samuel Johnson (1755)<sup>1</sup>

'If Heroes and Patriots constitute the first Column of National Glory, Authors of Genius constitute the second.'  
James Ralph (1758)<sup>2</sup>

'To write is mechanical; but to be an Author is no easy matter'  
Samuel Patterson (1772)<sup>3</sup>

Ever since the Renaissance, discussions about art have invariably been discussions about artists. The rise of Petrarch, Brunelleschi, and Da Vinci over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries heralded a tectonic shift in critical sentiments towards artists who were reconstructed from the anonymous craftsmen of the medieval age into singular prodigies possessing irreducible personal identities. Criticism, once the celebration of art as an expression of God's glory, transformed into the exaltation of the artist's divinity. To quote Nicholas V. Riasanovsky: 'Art was essentially a heavenly miracle. Artistic genius could not be taught or learned, and Raphael did not know why he painted as he did.'<sup>4</sup> The excerpts from Johnson, Ralph, and Patterson above prophesy the artist's deification as an idiosyncratic virtuoso impervious to the vicissitudes of nature and society that would come to dominate the intellectual landscape with the eruption of Romanticism in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Irrespective of the fact that their range of artistic freedom was ultimately delimited by the requirements of patrons and publishers, the Romantic genius—exemplified in figures like Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, and Blake—quickly formed humanist criticism's chief obsession and came to embody the key mythical ideals of creativity, originality, and autonomy.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson, 'Excerpts from the Preface to A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)', in *Selected Writings: Samuel Johnson*, ed. by Peter Martin (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 237-58 (p. 254).

<sup>2</sup> James Ralph, *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated. With Regard to Booksellers, the Stage, and the Public. No Matter by Whom* (London: R. Griffiths, 1758), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Patterson, *Joineriana: Or, The Book of Scraps*, vol. 1 (London: Joseph Johnson, 1772), p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Emergence of Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 55.

Although Gert Buelens et al. question the empirical existence of such 'solitary' geni<sup>5</sup> and Jack Stillinger is keen to demystify *Isabella* as a product of 'Keats and his helpers' [my emphasis],<sup>6</sup> mythopoeic Romanticism concretised the notion that *art*, being the incarnation of a unique human experience, demands an *artist* as its most fundamental corollary. As Christine Haynes explains, by the end of the Victorian era 'the Man of Letters had replaced the Hero-God, Prophet, Poet, and Priest as the predominant form of heroism in the modern age' and has since formed such a 'fixed component of the modern consciousness that even the most self-conscious and critical commentators have found it difficult to view authorship any other way.'<sup>7</sup>

Such can be said of institutional film academia as it was born in a fit of Romantic authorial fervour with the explosion of auteurism in the 1950s and 60s. Pioneered by French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* and popularised by American critic Andrew Sarris, auteurism postulated the popular Hollywood film as a director's medium, simultaneously sanctifying mainstream cinema as art and the studio director as artist/author/'auteur'. And much as Romanticism canonised a regiment of surnames into literary law, auteur criticism erected its own preternatural pantheon for cinema: here, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron were replaced by Ford, Hawks, and Hitchcock. According to the auteur-critics, these directors solitarily utilised the populist movie's machinery to create uniquely cinematic and uniquely personal films comparable the great works of literature. The auteurist mission, then, was not only to discover the American cinema's Shakespeares, Homers, and Twains, but to convince the rest of the world that they were worthy of such praise.

Looking at Hollywood today, it very much seems as if this crusade was successful. Surnamed icons like Spielberg, Scorsese, and Tarantino stand as the form's standard-bearers; there is an entire 'independent' industry propped up by individualistic filmmakers such as Paul Thomas Anderson, Wes Anderson, and Richard Linklater; and the past fifteen years have seen the rise of new contenders

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<sup>5</sup> Gert Buelens, et al., 'Introduction: *Authorship*', *Authorship*, 1.1 (Fall 2011)

<<https://www.authorship.ugent.be/article/view/773/776>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Haynes, 'Reassessing "Genius" in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline', *Book History*, 8 (2005), 287-320 (pp. 288-9).

to the mainstream auteur throne like J.J. Abrams, Christopher Nolan, and Peter Jackson. Each of these immediately recognisable names carries a specific aesthetic prestige; if I were to ask you to imagine ‘a Scorsese movie’ and ‘a Jackson movie’ it is likely the impressions would be distinct and distinguished, even if you may find it difficult to articulate exactly what they are. Indeed, this nebulous authorial cognisance has become a key component of Hollywood’s promotional strategy as auteurism migrated from the textbook to the one-sheet. Some directors, like Ridley Scott and James Cameron, can sell projects to a global audience on the sole basis of their names. In this sense, ‘Scott’ and ‘Cameron’ constitute brands like ‘Apple’, ‘Volkswagen’, and ‘Guinness’, signifying a certain kind of standardised product. *The Martian* and *Avatar* may have lacked the kind of pre-sold franchise attractions that buttress Hollywood’s typical tentpole output, but their directorial brands’ sheer luxuriance ensured their success: *The Martian* earned \$630.2 million worldwide to become 2015’s tenth highest grossing film whilst *Avatar*, the most moneyed film of all time, brought in \$2.777 billion on its theatrical run.<sup>8</sup>

However, the film author’s commercial imperium is not constrained to those big-ticket names like Scott and Cameron. For example, *The Change-Up*, a 2011 comedy directed by David Dobkin—hardly an auteur by any classical definition—is marketed as being from ‘FROM THE DIRECTOR OF WEDDING CRASHERS AND THE WRITERS OF THE HANGOVER’ [Fig. I.1 in Illustrations]. Although not promoted in the same humanist terms as ‘JAMES CAMERON’S AVATAR’ [fig. I.2], Dobkin’s authorial heritage is nonetheless significant for *The Change-Up*’s commercial identity, targeted as it is towards fans of the Frat-Pack comedy sub-genre codified by *Wedding Crashers* and *The Hangover*. In this sense, *The Change-Up*’s promotional authorial image is not concerned with proffering a Romantic ideal of individual artistry *per se*, but to comparatively summate the film’s character, content, and tone as well as embellish our presumptive conception of its value. *The Change-Up*’s

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<sup>8</sup> ‘2015 WORLDWIDE GROSSES’, *Box Office Mojo* (n.d.) <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view2=worldwide&yr=2015>> [accessed 13 March 2017]; ‘2009 WORLDWIDE GROSSES’, *Box Office Mojo* (n.d.) <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?view2=worldwide&yr=2009>> [accessed 13 March 2017] [N.B. All subsequent box office statistics in this thesis are taken from *Box Office Mojo* and are accurate at the time of submission].

commercial hypothesis can thus be summarised as: *if x is made by the same person as y—and if y was good—x must be like y and of a similar quality*. That *The Change-Up* would find itself on *The Telegraph's* list of 2011's ten worst films is of little consequence to its pre-release authorial publicity which traded in speculative illusions, not empirical measures, of worth.<sup>9</sup> And *The Change-Up* is hardly an isolated case of such hyped-up authorial marketing: *Project X's* poster also exploits its Frat-Pack lineage with, 'FROM PRODUCER TODD PHILLIPS, THE DIRECTOR OF THE HANGOVER' [fig. I.3]; *Sausage Party* is promoted as coming 'FROM THE SAME GUYS WHO BROUGHT YOU *THIS IS THE END*' [fig. I.4]; *Ant-Man* is proud to say it is 'FROM THE STUDIO THAT BROUGHT YOU *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*' [fig. I.5]; similarly, *Fant4stic* comes 'FROM THE STUDIO THAT BROUGHT YOU *X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST*' [fig. I.6]. Moreover, it is interesting to note that 2014's *The Judge*, Dobkin's first directorial effort since *The Change-Up*, makes no paratextual reference to its antecedent, *Wedding Crashers*, or even Dobkin himself, opting instead for a promotional emphasis on Robert Downey Jr. and Robert Duvall's stardom [fig. I.7].

It is thus apparent that authorship—which is to say that a work possesses a recognised issuing source—is vital to a film's commercial construction and that 'the author' need not be a director, as auteurism implies. Producers, studios, and stars are all viable authorial candidates in Hollywood marketing and Dobkin's conspicuous invisibility in *The Judge* demonstrates that promotional authorship is more concerned with formulating product identities and dictating prospective expectations than it is with honouring those who practically originated the work (and in collaborative film production, each picture inevitably has dozens, if not hundreds, of authors). The ubiquity of authorial figures in contemporary Hollywood's self-constructed mythology speaks more of an elemental need for authors than it does a creative cornucopia teeming from Los Angeles' backlots. Thanks to Romanticism, 'authors' possess unmatched cultural capital which directly translates to marketplace currency; merely by the dint their paratextual presence, authors operate as a

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<sup>9</sup> 'Ten worst films of 2011', *The Telegraph* (n.d.) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culture-review-of-the-year/8954287/Ten-worst-films-of-2011.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 8.

*priori* guarantors of quality. The commercial auteurism regnant in today's Hollywood depends upon our continued beguilement by the Romantic fallacies of singular genius and authorial hegemony that have naturalised the twin ideas that *art demands an artist* and that *if there is an artist, there must also be art*. This thesis' primary objective is to encounter this system and examine authorship's functions in our current Hollywood climate.

However, this is a proposition offered with much more ease than it is addressed, not least because the 1970s' poststructuralist revolution recast the Romantic hero as a despot who holds the lands of Interpretation in a totalitarian chokehold. This was not just the consequence of some anti-Romantic sentiment (strains of which were already evident in Russian formalism and New Criticism), but an epochal theoretical upheaval that metamorphosed structural linguistics into a more ideologically robust textual analysis. Essentially, poststructuralism was a rejection of the logocentric hypothesis that symbolic signifiers ineluctably refer to, and are wholly delimited by, a non-symbolic "'transcendental" signified' — that being a sign-system's metaphysical, independent, and external determinant which could be psychological logic (what Jacques Derrida deems 'the thought of being'), God, or, yes, the author.<sup>10</sup> Derrida writes that from 'the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. *We think only in signs.*'<sup>11</sup> In order to understand a sign, then, we must refer to another sign, which is itself legible only as it relates to other signs, and so on. 'Meaning', such as it is, pinballs around the sign-system, constantly deferred (hence the central Derridean concept of *différance*).<sup>12</sup> There is no meaning outside of language: after all, dictionaries, thesauruses, and encyclopaedias are only made up of words. Thus, the study of *intentionalism* (what the author originally sought to communicate) was usurped by the study of *signification* (how language speaks and comes to 'mean' by itself). And with Roland Barthes proclaiming the author's supposed 'death' in

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<sup>10</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edn., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



1967, critical focus quickly shifted from *authorship* to *readership*.<sup>13</sup> Ever since, the academic community has ferociously debated whether art actually needs artists at all and for a time the author became *persona non grata* to literary critics—to many film critics, ‘auteur’ remains taboo to this day.

Yet the author’s excommunication was not absolute. Barthes himself said in 1971 that so-called ‘paper author[s]’ can still infiltrate their works as ‘guest[s]’—textual entities not entirely unlike the narrative’s characters.<sup>14</sup> The author, then, ‘is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to the work.’<sup>15</sup> Put otherwise, the ‘author’ is a product of the reading process and only exists within the ‘text’. Furthermore, Michel Foucault considers ‘the “author” as a function of discourse’ and writes that the ‘author-function’ is

tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine, and articulate the realm of discourses; [...] it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual[.]<sup>16</sup>

The film author’s marketplace dispersal is a definite example of such an institutionally dictated authorial discourse: ‘James Cameron’ the brand is not necessarily correlative to James Cameron the human being but is, as Foucault would say, a discursive ‘projection’ deployed to ‘authenticate [...] the particular texts in its possession.’<sup>17</sup>

Despite the author’s academic disenfranchisement and decentralisation in the twentieth century’s latter decades, Romantic auteurism survived (and thrived) in the non-academic sphere, owing not only to the auteur’s promotional mobility—which gained significant traction in the wake of the 1970s’ New Hollywood movement (with NYU-educated Movie Brat Martin Scorsese accrediting *Cahiers*- and Sarris-branded auteurism for blowing ‘fresh air’ into practical film

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1466-70 (p. 1466).

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘From Work to Text’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1470-5 (pp. 1473-4).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1474.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘What Is an Author?’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1622-36 (p. 1628; p. 1631).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1929; p. 1930.

pedagogy)—but also the exponential proliferation of auteurist concepts in popular discourse.<sup>18</sup>

Auteurism's normalisation in mainstream rhetoric is demonstrable in the laudatory obituaries that *The New York Times*,<sup>19</sup> *Los Angeles Times*,<sup>20</sup> *The Washington Post*,<sup>21</sup> *The Independent*,<sup>22</sup> *The Guardian*,<sup>23</sup> and *Sight & Sound*<sup>24</sup> published when auteur theory vanguard Andrew Sarris died in 2012. *The New Yorker's* Richard Brody went so far as to call Sarris 'the one indispensable American film critic.'<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the subsistence of the Romantic auteur allure is evident in the emergence of 'Vulgar Auteurism' on online cinephile communities over the summer of 2013, which gained widespread visibility with Calum Marsh's *Village Voice* article 'Fast & Furious & Elegant: Justin Lin and the Vulgar Auteurs' (purportedly the millennial equivalent of François Truffaut's 1954 auteur-instigating *Cahiers* piece, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema'). Much as how classical auteurism lionised the lowbrow artistry of Nicholas Ray, Raoul Walsh, and George Cukor, Vulgar Auteurism sought to critically validate overlooked action directors like Justin Lin, John Hyams, and Paul W.S. Anderson by disregarding their stories—acknowledged by Walsh to be 'wafer thin in narrative and thematic conception'—and honing instead on their 'striking formal elegance.'<sup>26</sup> Although the relatively benign Vulgar Auteurism offered nothing new, being as it was a sub-formalist refashioning of *Cahiers du Cinéma's* original *mise-en-scène* criticism (which was itself 'vulgar' by design), the vicious backlash

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Pye and Linda Myles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over Hollywood* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Powell, 'Andrew Sarris, Village Voice Film Critic, Dies at 83', *The New York Times* (20 June 2012) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/movies/andrew-sarris-film-critic-dies-at-83.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>20</sup> Dennis McLellan, 'Andrew Sarris dies at 83; longtime film critic', *Los Angeles Times* (22 June 2012) <<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/22/local/la-me-andrew-sarris-20120622>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>21</sup> Matt Schudel, 'Andrew Sarris, critic who promoted "auteur theory" of film, dies at 83', *The Washington Post* (20 June 2012) <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/movies/andrew-sarris-critic-who-promoted-auteur-theory-of-film-dies-at-83/2012/06/20/gJQA7foNrV\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/movies/andrew-sarris-critic-who-promoted-auteur-theory-of-film-dies-at-83/2012/06/20/gJQA7foNrV_story.html)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>22</sup> Tom Vallance, 'Professor Andrew Sarris: Film critic who played a leading role in promoting the "auteur" theory', *Independent* (29 June 2012) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-andrew-sarris-film-critic-who-played-a-leading-role-in-promoting-the-auteur-theory-7899871.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Bergan, 'Andrew Sarris obituary', *The Guardian* (22 June 2012) <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jun/22/andrew-sarris>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>24</sup> David Thompson, 'Andrew Sarris, 1928-2012', *Sight & Sound* (12 June 2015) <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/obituaries/andrew-sarris>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>25</sup> Richard Brody, 'Andrew Sarris and the "A" Word', *The New Yorker* (12 June 2012) <<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/andrew-sarris-and-the-a-word>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 13.

<sup>26</sup> Calum Marsh, 'Fast & Furious & Elegant: Justin Lin and the Vulgar Auteurs', *The Village Voice* (24 May 2013) <<http://www.villagevoice.com/film/fast-and-furious-and-elegant-justin-lin-and-the-vulgar-auteurs-6438466>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 11.

against it epitomised in Nick Pinkerton's avowal that Vulgar Auteurism is 'a clueless kiddie fad with a mayfly lifespan' demonstrates a painful sense-memory of the late 1960s' auteur hangover.<sup>27</sup> It is not that critics are allergic to propositions that Hollywood directors can be viable artists, as was the case in auteurism's infancy. In fact, that idea has become entrenched in the common psyche and is one of auteurism's greatest victories. Rather, what aggravates is an auteurist rhetoric that still bears the extravagant subjectivist connotations borne out of its radical polemics (i.e., the consecration of the director as a film's sole progenitor and the valorisation of directorial personality *über alles*).

To be sure, film academia post-poststructuralism has a somewhat fractious relationship with auteurism, which, despite Barthes and co.'s exhortations, never really went away (even if the a-word did become somewhat stigmatised over the 1970s and 80s). Timothy Corrigan's revitalising 1990 treatise on the 'commerce of auteurism', a cinematic recapitulation of Foucault's author-function wherein the auteur 'has rematerialized [...] as a commercial performance of *the business of being an auteur*', has been massively influential in shepherding cinematic author studies into a more industrially-minded paddock—as seen in the works of Justin Wyatt, Steve Neale, Jonathan Gray, Derek Johnson, Catherine Grant, Yannis Tzioumakis, Tom Dorey, and Roberts Brookey and Westerfelhaus (as well my own notes on authors-as-brands in this introduction and throughout the forthcoming chapters).<sup>28</sup> Yet, by focusing so intently on the auteur's paratextual manifestations, commercial auteurism neglects to address how the auteur's appropriation by the promotional system impacts authorship's textuality. Meanwhile, C. Paul Sellors recognises auteurism's rank obsession with Romantic ideals of singular directorial genius and attempts to lock the Hollywood film within a 'collaborative production framework' that, through fastidious empirical research, assigns credit to those that actually deserve it.<sup>29</sup> But Sellors' account is merely a repackaged crypto-Romantic intentionalism that does not sufficiently penetrate why such accreditation is vital for an

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<sup>27</sup> Nick Pinkerton, 'Bombast #96', *Sundance Now Blog* (7 June 2013) <<http://blog.sundancenow.com/weekly-columns/bombast-96>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 17 of 17.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'The Commerce of Auteurism: A Voice without Authority', *New German Critique*, 49 (1990), 43-57 (p. 47).

<sup>29</sup> C. Paul Sellors, *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2010), p. 3.

understanding of the film narrative. And despite token acknowledgements of poststructuralist notions of authorship-as-discourse, Leighton Grist's two-book study of Martin Scorsese proceeds on a largely biographical and evaluative (i.e., classically auteurist) tract. Whilst Grist's penchant for psychoanalysis and location of Scorsese's output within specific ideologically-encumbered 'production context structure[s]' do signal a departure from auteurist dogmata, his analyses (like many auteurist critiques in fact) forgo what I believe to be the central issue of authorship.<sup>30</sup> Auteurism is fairly adept at signposting signatory traces in cinematic artworks but enquiries usually stop before answering the basal question of why our recognition of those signatures is so important—not just for our understanding of the narration, but the film's (and author's) commercial status and economic health. As mainstream movies are primarily commodities such issues cannot be ignored, particularly in our brand-obsessed Conglomerate Hollywood. Auteurism is traditionally the study of cinematic art for its own sake, but we must go further in synthesising textual and industrial matters into a unified criticism. Therefore, where André Bazin attacked the original auteur critics' addiction to vacuous stylistics with the cutting '*Auteur, yes, but what of?*', I offer an updated version of his query for our current regime of authorial criticism: '*author of this, perhaps, but to what ends?*'<sup>31</sup>

Concordantly, this thesis is not only an investigation into authorship's function in contemporary Hollywood but is, more significantly, an audit of *how* authorship functions—in commerce, in culture, in narrative. In order to establish what this thesis is, it is perhaps easiest to begin with some notes on what it is *not*. Firstly, this thesis is not a defence of auteurism nor is it an attempt to rehabilitate archaic notions of 'the auteur' by augmenting auteurist programmes with posterior theoretical paradigms. In fact, I consider 'auteur' and 'author' as two distinct conceptual constructs, neither of which are intrinsically related to flesh-and-blood artists who create (or author) artworks: in my purview, the former constitutes a fundamentally value-laden image erected by critical and promotional agents, the latter an interpretive abstraction that may be created by a

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<sup>30</sup> Leighton Grist, *The Films of Martin Scorsese, 1963-77: Authorship and Context* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> André Bazin, 'On the *politique des auteurs*', trans. Peter Graham, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 248-59 (p. 258).

spectator upon contact with a given filmic work. Subsequently, and secondly, this thesis is not a study of empirical authorship but *implied authorship*. Here, I pay homage to critics like Wayne Booth, Walker Gibson, and Seymour Chatman, yet the concept still bears clarification at this early stage. An implied author is the authorial image that readers inferentially extract from their actualisation of a text; the implied author is not perforce an artefact conspicuously buried within the work by its empirical author/s nor is the implied author the work's property, available in identical form to each and every consumer. Our understanding of implied authorship is contingent upon our textual literacy as well as our contextual knowledge, transtextual competence, and extra-textual expectations. These facets vary from spectator to spectator and are susceptible to manipulation by extraneous forces. Stephen Donovan et al. explain that "*auctor*", the Latin origin of "author", is derived from the verb *augere*, which means "to increase, augment, strengthen that which is already in existence"; in addition, it means "to exalt, embellish, enrich".<sup>32</sup> As such, I perceive 'authorship' as a mechanism that influences a spectator's apprehension, comprehension, and appreciation of a filmic text and this thesis interrogates authorship essentially as a consequence of commodity fetishism and the self-reflexive cultification of branded media properties in a transmedia entertainment industry – which brings me to my third note. This thesis is not an all-encompassing exegesis of cinematic authorship in its totality. I study Hollywood, and within that I focus on the mass-advertised mega-budget mainstream movies that inundate multiplexes every spring and summer. Consequently, I do not claim catholic applicability to all forms of international cinema, or even to all forms of American cinema. I am interested predominantly in post-2010 texts – which is to say our contemporary Hollywood environment – but reference will naturally be made to pre-2010 works, along with non-blockbusters, as an understanding of where we are has to be framed within an understanding of how we got here.

In order to conduct this investigation our theoretical grasp on authorship must be consolidated. Given criticism's fractured and often combative history with authorship, this is of

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, and Rolf Lundén, 'Introduction: Author, Authorship, Authority, and Other Matters', in *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship*, ed. Stephen Donovan, Danuta Fjellestad, and Rolf Lundén (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), 1-19 (p. 2).

paramount importance. Therefore, **Part One: Authorship in Criticism** is a capacious analysis of theoretical perspectives on both authorship and readership as they pertain to cinema, through which I carefully reinstate 'the author' — defrocked of their Romantic autonomy, captive to their cultural/industrial contexts, obedient to the spectator's perspicacity — into a hypothetical heuristic of narrative response. **Chapter One: An Anatomy of Auteurism** is an autopsy of classical cinematic auto-criticism's three principal strands: *Cahiers du Cinéma's politique des auteurs*, Andrew Sarris' auteur theory, and British cine-structuralism. As auteurism's history is a cacophonous tangle of misreadings and personal attacks, fabricating a comprehensive 'narrative' is impractical — not least because there is not one 'auteurism' to which all critics abide but a multitude of individual auteurisms. Yet, trends, attitudes, certain proclivities can be observed. Far from a straightforward historiography, then, this chapter is interrogatively charged to untangle the knot, as it were, and identify through all the rhetorical obscurantism and facile squabbling the auteur's numerous guises throughout 1950s and 60s' film criticism: their deficits, their merits; what should be discarded, what — if anything — should be retained. Having identified the necessity for a new authorial methodology distinct from auteurism, **Chapter Two: Reading Authority** ventures forward into reader-ruled theoretical territories. Inspired by cognitive phenomenology, affective stylistics, and semiotic narratology (whilst standing beholden to none in particular) — and through the working out of fraught issues of intentionalism, cinematic narration, and spectatorial agency — this chapter conceptualises the personalised implied author as a hermeneutic code that may be activated by a spectator in order to facilitate textual comprehension when presented with a work that expresses sufficient narratorial signals. In this way, authorial signals and the author code work on a similar top-down schematic stratum as generic signals and genre codes.

However, with the recognition that the spectator is an active participant in the concretisation of meaning must also come the acknowledgement that films and their audiences are historically circumscribed — something wilfully ignored by auteurism. If **Part One** can be summarised as a meditation on how we may respond to authorship in somewhat abstracted terms, **Part Two:**

**Authorship in Commerce** tackles how we are *being made* to respond to authorship by our current Hollywood culture. After a survey of Classical Hollywood promotion that reveals authorship's centrality in film marketing as early as the 1930s (meaning commodified authorship is not necessarily a consequence of auteurism as some might surmise), **Chapter Three: Branded Auteurs** turns to assess the commercialised auteur's agency and impact in contemporary Hollywood's industrial discourse. This discussion is framed within a wider appreciation of the twenty-first century retail industry's brand mentality and the synergetic responsibilities of a horizontally-integrated conglomerate media empire. Inside a matrix of fetishised brand attractors, the auteur-brand possesses a unique persuasive pull and demonstrates the marketing machine's ultimate commodification of Romanticism. The auteur-brand obfuscates corporate ownership of media properties by projecting a fantasy of singular authorship that concurrently individuates, validates, and familiarises its corresponding product. Adapting **Chapter Two's** cognitive narratological framework, this section analyses how film trailers seduce prospective consumers through mechanisms I call *hypercontinuity* and *hyperfabula*. I propose that trailers 'buy' their audiences by proffering purposively deficient quasi-narratives (facilitated by hypercontinuity editing) against which spectators create their own idealised stories, or *fabulae*, via their installation of hypertextual meshes derived from favourable anterior textual experiences—which may be related to the promoted text by a shared author.

**Chapter Four: Authoring from the 'Outside'** advances these ideas within a more focused critique of the paratextual creation and mediation of authorship, particularly as it manifests through new technology and media like YouTube, Blu-ray special features, online discussion forums, and even filmmaking technology itself. Firstly, I investigate how Disney recoded *Star Wars* from its George Lucas doldrums in the run-up to *The Force Awakens'* release in December 2015 through a paratextual articulation of J.J. Abrams' authorship that signalled the renaissance of 'vintage' *Star Wars* values and aesthetics. In order to measure the effect and affect of Abrams' promotional authorship, I chart the shift in internet fan communities' opinions from the disaffected hatred of Lucas' prequel trilogy to the new hope offered by Abrams as he (ostensibly) eschews Lucas' digital techniques in

favour of celluloid, practical effects, and real locations. Moreover, I explain how the Abrams auteur-brand succeeded in influencing this audience's expectations for *The Force Awakens* and effectively guaranteed their patronage. Secondly, this chapter sees the interrogation of author-branded home-video releases in light of the threats posed by piracy and competing streaming services like Netflix, with specific interest in the tripartite actor-studio-director authorial hierarchy evident on Warner Home Video's 2012 Blu-ray compilation of *Heat*, *GoodFellas*, *The Mission*, and *Once Upon a Time in America*—brought together as the *Robert De Niro Collection*. Whilst the box-set's packaging and programming do offer an idiographic thematic insight into its films as they are unified under a vision of De Niro's 'authorship', this in fact serves a promotional function as it relates to Warner Bros. as a distributor. Additionally, home-video paratexts (specifically the commentary and behind-the-scenes documentary) work to calcify a directorial hegemony for each film, rebranding intentionalism as entertainment and, again, serving an innate promotional purpose as they reinforce the Romantic mythology of the pre-release hype industry.

Finally, **Part Three: Authorship in Practice**—constituted of **Chapter Five: Use Your Allusion's** long-form case studies and the thesis' **Conclusion**—amalgamates **Part One's** textual insights with **Part Two's** industrial concerns in order to examine exactly how authorship works in the twenty-first century Hollywood narrative. The films under the microscope are 2014's *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* trilogy that ran from 2012-2014. The focus of the analysis is, of course, how these films and their promotional programmes encourage, support, and (in some instances) demand a recognition of Christopher Nolan and Peter Jackson's authorship and furthermore how these texts *use* their authors—and for what ends. These in-depth readings lead to an expansion of Umberto Eco's notes on the postmodern 'cult movie' as a self-reflexive transtextual platform, which in turn progresses into an auctorial reconsideration of Genette's five-tiered transtextual framework.<sup>33</sup> Of particular interest are the two hypertextual sub-categories I designate *autotextuality* and *intratextuality* (which have a specific

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<sup>33</sup> Umberto Eco, "'Casablanca': Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage", *SubStance*, 14.2.47 (1985), 3-12 (p. 10).



pertinence to *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* respectively) as well as a variation of architextuality I call *unitextuality*, which I expose through an authorial overview of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In the final analysis, authorship is revealed to be essential to *Interstellar*, *The Hobbit*, and Marvel's superhero canon, but 'authorship' is not identically operative in each instance. Indeed, I identify divergent forms and uses of authorship: *Interstellar's* modified autotextuality serves to redefine Nolan's authorial brand, which factors into Warners' wider promotional campaign to transform Nolan from a blockbuster director into a prestige artist; *The Hobbit's* intratextual dependence on Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* is indicative of a broader trend in 2010s blockbuster aesthetics wherein franchise tentpoles gain an immense wealth in emotional currency through the tactical deployment of nostalgic self-reference, even at the expense of narrative coherency; and the Marvel Cinematic Universe's unitexture—which sees narratives dispersed across multifarious individual properties consolidated under a unified house style—secures the reciprocal success of its entire output, essentially eliminating risk as Marvel Studios begins to plumb the depths of its superhero stable with multi-million-dollar franchises built around tertiary characters like Ant-Man, Doctor Strange, and Star-Lord that do not have the immediate pre-sold appeal of, say, Captain America or the Incredible Hulk. Ergo, authorship is an indispensable component of both commercial strategy and textual (re)composition in twenty-first century Hollywood. In order to understand the author and auteur's function in this system, we must synthesise considerations of auteurism, authorship, and spectatorship into an industrio-textual criticism.

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Part One

# Authorship in Criticism

# Chapter One

## An Anatomy of Auteurism

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### *The Rise and Fall of the Author in Film Criticism*

#### 1.i – Revolutions

Any examination of auteurism must begin with *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Although, as Jim Hillier points out, directors had been discussed for many years in European film criticism (notably in the French magazine *Revue du Cinéma*), it was only with the emergence of *Cahiers*, *Revue*'s spiritual successor, in the early 1950s that the film director became foregrounded as a principal object of study.<sup>1</sup> The director-as-artist axiom prior to *Cahiers*, which favoured avant-garde filmmakers and cinematic pioneers like Sergei Eisenstein and D.W. Griffith, habitually obviated whimsical suggestions that the Hollywood foundry could be fertile ground for artistic expression—except in aberrant cases like Orson Welles, whose conflict with the system congealed with pre-existent Romantic mythologies of ‘the artist-genius who is ignored by society, but who struggles heroically against philistinism, is reluctantly recognized and eventually becomes a cultural giant.’<sup>2</sup> Like the once-unworthy sculptors and painters of yore the Hollywood director was deemed an unexceptional artisan, subservient to the edicts of the screenwriter. *Cahiers*, however, instigated a controversy that would irrevocably alter the course of critical history: its critics not only acknowledged the technical mastery of certain Hollywood filmmakers, but espoused their ability to transmute their material with an idiographic style that made them authors, or *auteurs*, in their own right. By upgrading the commercial film-maker into film-artist, which naturally entailed the correlative elevation of Hollywood out of its capitalistic pejoratives into an art-form fit for study, *Cahiers*' writers were able to validate mainstream cinema and, by extension, their own *raison d'être* as film critics.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Hillier, ‘Introduction’, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1-20 (p. 5).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Murphy and David Roberts, *Dialectic of Romanticism: A Critique of Modernism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 184.

Whilst *Cahiers'* rival paper *Positif* shared its authorial concerns somewhat, albeit with a more politicised bent, it was *Cahiers* that led the auteur revolution, both in its critical author policy, or *politique des auteurs*—which quickly disseminated to Britain and the USA by way of *Movie* and Andrew Sarris—and the impact its 'Young Turk' critics (Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, et al.) had on the instatement of a *cinéma d'auteurs* in France via their contribution to the *nouvelle vague*. Although the subject of this study is *Cahiers'* critical innovations and not its staff's artistic achievements outside the magazine, it must be stressed that these two facets are intimately connected. It is not sufficient nor entirely accurate to suggest that the *Cahiers* critics simply noticed strains of expressive individualism within the American movies that flooded Paris after the Occupation and erected their *politique* as a means to identify that which is idiosyncratic to the movies of Howard Hawks, Nicholas Ray, Robert Aldrich, and Sam Fuller. This, to some degree, is true, but the *politique* rarely functioned to satiate some kind of solipsistic yankophilia (and it should be noted that *Cahiers* valued French outliers Jean Renoir and Robert Bresson, as well as the Italian neo-realists, as much as, if not more than, their American counterparts). Discoveries in America's popular cinema were matched, if often inferentially, to deficiencies in their own. Giving a voice to the *Cahiers* editorial board in 1957, Jacques Donoilo-Valcroze states that 'the cinema in France has nothing to say, and [...] French film says nothing.'<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Rohmer regards the California coast as the artistic 'haven which Florence was for painters of the Quattrocento or Vienna for musicians in the nineteenth century.'<sup>4</sup>

A dialectical binary between Los Angeles and Paris was established and the *politique* operated as a polemical weapon to create a paradigm for the advancement of French cinematic culture away from what Truffaut calls the 'Tradition of Quality' embodied in the homogenised nineteenth century

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<sup>3</sup> André Bazin et al., 'Six Characters in Search of *auteurs*: a Discussion about the French Cinema', trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 31-46 (p. 38).

<sup>4</sup> Eric Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 88-93 (p. 89).

literary adaptations of screenwriters Jean Aurenche, Pierre Bost, and their manifold imitators.<sup>5</sup> Whilst I am careful not to insinuate that the *politique des auteurs* was a manifesto for the *nouvelle vague* (a claim easily invalidated by New Wave maestro Alain Resnais' lack of affiliation with *Cahiers* or its associated ciné-clubs, as well as his experimental montage-oriented style that largely flouts the realist aesthetic favoured by the *politique*), that a significant number of the *Cahiers* contingent would go on to form prominent figures of the new French cinema is not coincidental. Therefore, we could consider *Cahiers* as the workshop where these cinéastes-in-waiting honed their artistic sensibilities: to quote Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'Truffaut the critic has shaped the director of the same name.'<sup>6</sup> Consequently, it is important to imagine the *politique* as not merely the transplantation of literary Romanticism into film discourse, but a metaphysical aesthetic opposed to the literariness (or what Jacques Rivette denigratingly calls '*academicism*')<sup>7</sup> and anti-clerical immorality of the then-dominant French cinema which often perniciously exploited religious frameworks as façades for 'profanation and blasphemy'<sup>8</sup>—an aesthetic exemplified in the purportedly artless factory-line products of the Hollywood machine that proffered a thematic universality and unalloyed ethical philosophy the popular French cinema seemed so eager to abandon after the War. As Rohmer says, Hollywood touched 'that innate taste that we French never lose for a moment—beyond all changes of fashion—for the art of the moralist.'<sup>9</sup>

With regards to academicism, Truffaut believes Aurenche and Bost's poetic-realist aspirations, self-sabotaged by a propensity to over-embellish their material with literary 'formulas, plays on words, maxims', to be a contemptuous underestimation of cinema's aesthetic potentialities: 'When they hand in their scenario,' Truffaut writes, 'the film is done; the *metteur-en-scène*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it.'<sup>10</sup> Here emerges a reformulation of the distinction

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<sup>5</sup> François Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 9-18 (p. 9).

<sup>6</sup> Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'The First Person Plural', trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 53-7 (p. 54).

<sup>7</sup> Bazin et al., 'Six Characters', p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency', p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency', p. 15.

Samuel Johnson drew between ‘drudges of the pen’, who ‘like other artificers, have no other care than to deliver their tale of wares at the stated time’,<sup>11</sup> and the Romantic hero of literature whose ambition was ‘to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge by discovering and conquering new regions of the intellectual world.’<sup>12</sup> In their place are the *metteur-en-scène*, a journeyman director who can only translate a given screenplay into pictorial form, and the *auteur* who uses the scenario as a catalyst for a work that is uniquely cinematic and personal. Specificity to cinematic modes of expression, according to Truffaut, is what sanctifies an auteur’s work (and consequently the masterpieces of cinema); the choice of subject is not as important as ‘how he chooses to treat this subject and the scenes to illustrate it.’<sup>13</sup> This is supported by Rivette, when he asks what the cinema is ‘if not the *play* of actor and actress, of hero and set, of word and face, of hand and object?’<sup>14</sup> by André Bazin, in his belief that it is Anthony Mann’s ‘*mise en scène* more than his scenarios which renders his Westerns the purest of the post-war period’;<sup>15</sup> by Godard’s conviction that *Rebel Without a Cause* is ‘something which exists only in the cinema, which would be nothing in a novel, the stage or anywhere else, but which becomes something fantastically beautiful on the screen’;<sup>16</sup> and finally by Hoveyda’s statement that

The specificity of the cinematographic work lies in its technique and not in its content, in its *mise en scène* and not in the screenplay and the dialogue [...] the distinguishing feature of a great author is precisely his ability to metamorphose the stupidest plot through his technique.<sup>17</sup>

This abandonment of scenario was not just a way for *Cahiers* to distance itself further from the intricately plotted Tradition of Quality films. It enabled a singular focus on the director’s input. As, to

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘145 – Petty writers are not to be despised’, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL., D.*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Murphy (New York: Scatcherd & Adams, 1837), 224-5 (p. 225).

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘137 – The necessity of literary courage’, in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL., D.*, vol. 1, ed. Arthur Murphy (New York: Scatcherd & Adams, 1837), 212-3 (p. 212).

<sup>13</sup> François Truffaut, ‘The Rogues are Weary’, trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 28-30 (p. 28).

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Rivette, ‘The Essential’, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 132-5 (p. 135).

<sup>15</sup> André Bazin, ‘An Exemplary Western’, trans. Phillip Drummond, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 169-72 (p. 170).

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, ‘Nothing But Cinema’, trans. Tom Milne, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 116-7 (p. 116).

<sup>17</sup> Fereydoun Hoveyda, ‘Sunspots’, trans. Jill Forbes, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 135-45 (pp. 138-9).

quote Thomas Elsaesser, Hollywood directors typically have ‘no more than a token control over choice of subject, the cast, the quality of dialogue’, any evidence of personal creativity had to be found within ‘the visual orchestration of the story, the rhythm of the action, the plasticity and dynamism of the image.’<sup>18</sup> This is what Hoveyda deems the ‘essence of cinema’: *mise-en-scène*.<sup>19</sup>

John Caughie writes that *mise-en-scène* is ‘probably the most important positive contribution of *auteurism* to the development of a precise and detailed film criticism, [that engages] with the specific mechanisms of visual discourse.’<sup>20</sup> It formed a radical break from both the sociological impressionism of opposing magazines such as *Sight & Sound* and the orthodoxy of Russian film theory which stipulated that cinema ‘is, first and foremost, montage’.<sup>21</sup> According to Sergei Eisenstein, cinematic expression does not occur *within* images but through their editorial eruption ‘into a concept’.<sup>22</sup> Vsevolod Pudovkin, who similarly asserts that montage is cinema’s ‘basic method’, states that editing is a procedure ‘that controls the “psychological guidance” of the spectator.’<sup>23</sup> Bazin, *Cahiers’* elder statesman, believes this to be the case, but holds that ‘montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression’: analytical cutting is tantamount to falsification, the imposition of an external singular interpretation that squanders the cinema’s unique ability to capture reality.<sup>24</sup> Ergo, Welles and Renoir’s mastery of the long-take and deep-focus photography, as well as the unobtrusive *plain américain* framing and invisible continuity editing characteristic of the Hollywood cinema (epitomised in the films of Howard Hawks), satisfies Bazin’s need for cinematic realism by overtly effacing the presence of a didactic hand. That is not to deny the creativity of the filmmaker: on the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Two Decades in Another Country: Hollywood and the Cinephiles’, in *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 233-50 (p. 244).

<sup>19</sup> Fereydoun Hoveyda, ‘Nicholas Ray’s Reply: *Party Girl*’, trans. Norman King, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 122-30 (p. 124).

<sup>20</sup> John Caughie, *Theories of Authorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p.13.

<sup>21</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, ‘Beyond the Shot’, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13-24 (p. 14).

<sup>22</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, ‘The Dramaturgy of Film Form’, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24-40 (p. 27).

<sup>23</sup> Vsevolod Pudovkin, ‘On Editing’, in *Film Theory and Criticism*, 7<sup>th</sup> edn., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7-12 (pp. 9-11).

<sup>24</sup> André Bazin, ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’, in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 23-40 (p. 36).



contrary, *mise-en-scène* is valued specifically because it originates from, and mirrors, a director's conception of the world.

Although this stance, coupled with *Cahiers'* nonchalance towards traditional conceptions of screen narrative as the dominion of the scenarist, could be seen as exalting form over content, *mise-en-scène* was instead intended to celebrate the manifestation of content *through* form in a way that is unique to the filmic apparatus. Indeed, Bazin contends that art for art's sake 'is just as heretical in cinema as elsewhere, probably more so.'<sup>25</sup> Luc Moullet's famous maxim 'Morality is a question of tracking shots' summates this position clearly.<sup>26</sup> It is the acknowledgement that seemingly arbitrary mechanical choices—Pan or tilt? Wide-angle or telephoto? High-key or low-key?—possess a significant semantic import and their cumulative effect is the construction of an ephemeral and epigrammatic world-view that transcends the sum of its many parts and indeed the boundaries of the film itself, percolating into coherence over the course of an auteur's career. For example, Truffaut decrees Nicholas Ray to be 'an *auteur* in our sense of the word' because 'All his films tell the same story, the story of a violent man who wants to stop being violent.'<sup>27</sup> Essentially, following Alexandre Astruc's conception of the '*caméra-stylo*': if the camera is a pen, the *mise-en-scène* is the ink with which the auteur records a distinctive representation of reality refracted through their *Weltanschauung*.<sup>28</sup> The difference between Hollywood and the Tradition of Quality, *mise-en-scène* and montage, can thus be summarised (quoting Bazin) as that

between true realism, the need that is to give significant expression to the world both concretely and its essence, and the pseudorealism of a deception aimed at fooling the eye (or for that matter the mind); a pseudorealism content in other words with illusory appearances.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bazin, 'Language of Cinema', p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Luc Moullet, 'Sam Fuller: In Marlowe's Footsteps', trans. Norman King, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 145-55 (p. 148).

<sup>27</sup> François Truffaut, 'A Wonderful Certainty', trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 107-9 (p. 107).

<sup>28</sup> Alexandre Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*', in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI, 2009), 31-38 (p. 32).

<sup>29</sup> André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans and ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9-16 (p. 12.).

However, whilst *mise-en-scène* was proposed as the ennobling of a specific aesthetic that disseminated a precise value-set rather than the mere aggrandisement of a universal and amorphous film 'style', which would be little more than a repackaged formalism, in practice reviews typically slackened into what Richard Roud disparagingly calls a '*critique des beautés*' (or criticism by beauty), wherein 'x number of beautiful shots equals a great film.'<sup>30</sup> Caughie also chides *Cahiers* for its 'hedonistic pleasure in visual delights.'<sup>31</sup> Hoveyda justifies his extensive fascination toward the lush minutiae of *Party Girl's* set décor and props, the so-called 'tiny details [...] which change everything', on the assumption that, as an assigned project, Ray had no influence on the 'idiotic story': any meaning had to be found 'purely and simply in the *mise en scène*.'<sup>32</sup> However, it is questionable to what extent form can be successfully unmoored from content—if the two can be separated at all—without severely debilitating the analysis. 'Unlike a painting,' Roud writes, 'a film exists in time, and there must be something to link [...] shots together.'<sup>33</sup> Hoveyda's review is little more than a stroll through *Party Girl's* aesthetic wonders, with images valued for their tactility, texture, and contribution to Ray's overarching world-view rather than their immediate purpose in the construction of the film's narrative. The subject is rendered redundant. In fact, Bazin states 'the *auteur* is a subject to himself' and that, as far as the *auteur*-critics were concerned at least, 'in art it is the *auteurs*, and not the works, that remain.'<sup>34</sup>

Bazin was sceptical about the *politique* and anxious about *Cahiers'* younger critics' brash desire to unify *auteurs* with their works. He writes that 'as soon as you state that the film-maker and his films are one, there can be no minor films, as the worst of them will always be in the image of their creator.'<sup>35</sup> Once this happens, adjudications become *a priori* with critics 'beginning by reading the signature at the bottom of the painting' and a blind prejudice arises in which, to paraphrase Truffaut,

<sup>30</sup> Richard Roud, 'The French Line', *Sight & Sound* (Autumn 1960), 166-71 (p. 170).

<sup>31</sup> Caughie, *Theories of Authorship*, p. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Hoveyda, 'Nicholas Ray's Reply', p. 125; p. 123; p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> Roud, 'The French Line', p. 171.

<sup>34</sup> André Bazin, 'On the *politique des auteurs*', trans. Peter Graham, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 248-59 (p. 255; p. 250).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

the worst film of an auteur will automatically be seen as superior to a *metteur-en-scène*'s best work—even before both have been viewed and assessed on their own merits.<sup>36</sup> Although the *politique* ostensibly widened the critical corpus to include Hollywood it was nonetheless a rarefied practice: the auteur-critics were much more eager, and worked harder, to validate an auteur's misstep (i.e., *Party Girl*) than they were to give a film without a signatory its due consideration. This was, according to Bazin, the greatest danger of a *politique* unchecked: overvaluing films that do not deserve it is not so egregious as rejecting a worthwhile film 'because its director has made nothing good up to that point' or because its director sublimates their authorial personality and effectively excises themselves from the narration.<sup>37</sup>

Granted, Hoveyda is an extreme example. His indifference to content is likely intended to inflame in his polemical campaign to apotheosise the director at the cost of the screenwriter's death, and Bazin does not renounce the *politique* outright—even if he has misgivings about its systematic instability. 'It is significant', he writes in his 1957 critique, that the auteur-critics 'have been practising [the *politique*] for three or four years now and have yet to produce the main corpus of its theory.'<sup>38</sup> Actually, in spite of Moullet's mention of 'Truffaut's celebrated *auteur* theory'—a misnomer Andrew Sarris would later adopt to calamitous effect—the *politique* was not a theory at all, more a broad manifesto that the *Cahiers* critics modified to fit their own agendas.<sup>39</sup> The term *auteur* itself had drastically divergent denotations. In his original attack on the Tradition of Quality, Truffaut uses '*auteur*' as a purely classificatory tag to signify directors who also write their own scripts; when comparing Roger Vadim's *And God Created Woman* and *No Sun in Venice*, Godard employs it as a badge of excellence awarded to a filmmaker on a film-by-film basis: 'the first was the film of an *auteur*, the second only of a director.'<sup>40</sup> Further, Barrett Hodsdon censures *Cahiers*' definition of *mise-*

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

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

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>39</sup> Moullet, 'Sam Fuller', p. 149.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, 'Sufficient Evidence', trans. Tom Milne, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 47-50 (p. 48).

*en-scène* as ‘nebulous’ and says that the term was often exploited ‘as a vehicle for abstract philosophising.’<sup>41</sup> To illustrate, Astruc opens his article on Kenji Mizoguchi, aptly titled ‘What is *mise en scène*?’, by stating that ‘there is no such thing as *mise en scène*’, before continuing:

I see *mise en scène* as a means of making the spectacle one’s own—but then what artist doesn’t know that what is seen matters less, not than the way of seeing, but than a particular way of needing to see and to show. [...] What is caught by the lens is the movement of a body—an immediate revelation, like all that is physical: the dance, a woman’s look, the change of rhythm in a walk, beauty, truth, etc.<sup>42</sup>

This esoteric conception of *mise-en-scène* is characteristic of the *Cahiers* clique: Rivette, for example, asks the same rhetorical question as Astruc even whilst admitting that he has ‘no intention of answering it.’<sup>43</sup> Perhaps Rivette provides no definition because there is none: *mise-en-scène*, seen only by the seers, is deployed throughout *Cahiers* as an evanescent preamble for pontifications about something which seems very much like film style but which transcends the technicalities of image construction and even the images themselves. *Mise-en-scène* is ineffable and sublime, neither seen nor heard but *felt*. The problem is obvious. Allowing emotive bias to direct criticism not only distorts perception but signals a disengagement with the text as a whole and a preference for its more affective, enjoyable qualities.

*Cahiers* was fractured on more than its terminology and Hoveyda’s blatant disregard for narrative was not shared by Rivette, who acknowledges that there ‘isn’t a single one of the great American directors who doesn’t work on the scenario himself right from the beginning.’<sup>44</sup> Moreover, whilst many of *Cahiers*’ auteurs generally deny the influence of collaborators, Roger Leenhardt asserts that the ‘notion of a total *auteur* is a myth.’<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to assess the *politique* as a system because there are no static, shared criteria or principles apart from the most basic mandate that films be analysed as incarnations of their director’s will. Donald Staples epitomises it well, saying that

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<sup>41</sup> Barrett Hodsdon, ‘The mystique of *mise en scene* revisited’, *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, 5.2 (1990) <<http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/5.2/Hodsdon.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 11-14 of 49.

<sup>42</sup> Alexandre Astruc, ‘What is *mise en scène*?’, trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 266-68 (p. 266; p. 268; p. 266).

<sup>43</sup> Rivette, ‘The Essential’, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> Bazin et al., ‘Six Characters’, p. 38.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

'instead of developing a real theory, [the *politique*'s] proponents have limited themselves to dogmatic and, it must be added, somewhat subjective assertions as to who the real auteurs are.'<sup>46</sup>

One area in which *Cahiers'* auteur-critics do coalesce, though, is in their wilful neglect of addressing the workings of the Hollywood system, which is somewhat ironic considering that their favoured cinema was undoubtedly the one most affected by commercial pressures and top-down limitations on the scope of artistic freedom. After suggesting that the 'Hollywood of sums' be left to the economists, Rivette states:

It was still the rule until recently to talk about American cinema in terms of genres; but where does this approach lead, when we see the majority of young film-makers passing with equal facility from one genre to another, without paying much attention to their particular rules and conventions, and dealing with strangely analogous themes of their own choosing?<sup>47</sup>

Essentially, because the auteur's identity remains consistent trans-genre, the auteur-critics felt vindicated in their condescension of cinematic conventions (and consequently the socio-economic circumstances that give rise to them). This is unsurprising, given its accordance with the Romantic myth of solitary genius, but it nevertheless seems remiss, particularly when some auteurs' thematics are so patently shaped by genre tropes (i.e., male camaraderie in Hawks' action movies and frontier dialectics in John Ford's westerns). Bazin, who is aghast that 'one can read a review in *Cahiers* of a Western by Anthony Mann [...] as if it were not above all a Western', pronounces that 'there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determine it.'<sup>48</sup> As a Personalist concerned with the status of the individual within the world, Bazin is similarly attuned to art's placement within the industry and suggests that, in addition to artistic genius, critics should also pay attention to 'the genius of the system' and not so readily deny the importance of the cinematic tradition.<sup>49</sup> He strives for a total understanding of cinema,

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<sup>46</sup> Donald E. Staples, 'The Auteur Theory Reexamined', *Cinema Journal*, 6 (1966-1967), 1-7 (p. 4).

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Rivette, 'Notes on a Revolution', trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 94-7 (p. 94).

<sup>48</sup> Bazin, '*politique des auteurs*', p. 257; p. 251.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

demonstrated in his analyses of Humphrey Bogart's screen persona and the evolution of the Western which propose supplemental non-auteurist policies for the magazine. However, the younger auteurists— isolationists that Pam Cook believes became disillusioned with French society after the War— were instead fascinated with the individual's struggle *against* the world and, consequently, their independent agency.<sup>50</sup>

To be true, the *politique* never aspired to be a panoptic method. It was a specific tool designed for a very specific purpose: to valorise a particular aspect of a small section of cinema. Essentially, to cite John Hess, the 'original auteur critics were much more interested in artistry and the art of direction than in film *per se*.'<sup>51</sup> Given its polemical thrust and the socio-cultural system against which it was rebelling, it is not so difficult to condone the *politique's* epistemological infirmity— especially now that the lenses of hindsight allow us to see that the *Cahiers* critics very much succeeded in their mission to revolutionise the way we think about not only Hollywood and its directors, but the mechanics of cinematic expression itself. Bazin saw a lot of potential value in the *politique*, its tenets if not its means, and wanted to redirect auteurism into a much more inclusive appreciation of cinema that did not simply obsess over its successes in a vacuum. He believed that, practised with pertinacity and reason, it would not devolve into an 'aesthetic personality cult.'<sup>52</sup>

Yet that is exactly what happened when auteurism was imported to the English-speaking world by Andrew Sarris in the 1960s. Sarris was by no means the only Anglo-American auteurist: the critics of England's *Movie* magazine also adopted the *politique* and their microscopic infatuation with mechanical minutiae inflated *mise-en-scène* to its inevitable imagistic (and subjectivist) terminus. Neither was Sarris the first. Manny Farber dipped his toes into auteurist waters early in his career before recoiling completely, announcing that the consecration of filmmaking as a 'one-person operation' was a fallacy doomed to fail 'because of the subversive nature of the medium: the flash-

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<sup>50</sup> Pam Cook, 'For a New French Cinema: The *Politique des Auteurs*', in *The Cinema Book*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., ed. Pam Cook (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 390-410 (p. 390).

<sup>51</sup> John Hess, 'Auteurism and After: A Reply to Graham Petrie', *Film Quarterly*, 27.2 (1973-1974), 28-37 (p. 32).

<sup>52</sup> Bazin, '*politique des auteurs*', p. 257.

bomb vitality that one scene, actor, or technician injects across the grain of a film.’<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Eugene Archer’s 1956 article on Max Ophuls exudes a certain *Cahiers*-branded Romanticism in its dismissal of industrial practices offering anything other than a hindrance to creativity: Archer lionises Ophuls as ‘a director of poetic sensibility’ and his films’ sole artistic source—at least when they succeed (when the films fail Archer ignominiously accredits the camerawork to cinematographer Christian Matras).<sup>54</sup> Archer, however, ‘ran for cover after the first outburst of anti-auteurism’, to quote Sarris himself.<sup>55</sup> Sarris was the most vocal and visible of the Western auteurs and it was undeniably he who popularised auteurism outside of France with his ‘*auteur* theory’. Indeed, as he often considered himself to be the lone light in a troglodytic critical darkness, standing ‘all alone against hundreds of non-auteurs’, it is perhaps only fitting to treat him as such—especially considering that his approach encapsulates the improprieties of Western auteurism and single-handedly fulfils Bazin’s worst fears about the *politique*.<sup>56</sup>

## 1.ii – Devolutions

Much as how *Movie* introduced aspects of the *politique* as an Anglo-centric corrective to *Sight & Sound*, Sarris’ auteur theory was hypothesised as a substitute for the sociological bias and anti-Hollywood snobbery of the American critical community. In this sense, the auteur theory and *Cahiers’ politique des auteurs* seem to share a polemical imperative. Yet the auteur theory was not simply an analogous translation of *Cahiers’* author policy into English: it was an attempt to systematise the method and erect a scheme of supposedly objective values against which films could be judged and categorised exclusively on the perceptibility of their directors’ personalities. Some points bear underscoring before progressing as we can already detect significant fault-lines between this new auteurism and its French precursor.

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<sup>53</sup> Manny Farber, ‘The Subverters’, in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 184-7 (p. 184).

<sup>54</sup> Eugene Archer, ‘Ophuls and the Romantic Tradition’, *Yale French Studies*, 17 (1956) 3-5 (p. 5).

<sup>55</sup> Andrew Sarris, ‘Auteurism is Alive and Well’, *Film Quarterly*, 28.1 (1974), 60-3 (p. 61).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Unlike the *politique*, the auteur theory aimed to be a totalising 'critical device for recording the history of the American cinema, the only cinema in the world worth exploring in depth.'<sup>57</sup> While *Cahiers'* idolism of Hollywood certainly came at the expense of its native *mainstream* cinema, it never intended to anoint Hollywood as the apogee of cinematic mastery. Sarris, exhibiting an intense antipathy for foreign 'art' films, instead claims that

Alfred Hitchcock is artistically superior to Robert Bresson by every criterion of excellence and, further, that, film for film, director for director, the American cinema has been consistently superior to that of the rest of the world from 1915 through 1962.<sup>58</sup>

Returning to Hess, *Cahiers'* 'judged directors, not films; their subject of study was the art of direction.'<sup>59</sup> Thus, whilst Hoveyda's dismissal of *Party Girl's* so-called idiotic story would seem to be a tacit acknowledgement that the film was in some way fundamentally flawed, this in no way abrogated an in-depth discussion of Ray's *mise-en-scène*. But the very separation of form from content intimates a discordance in the film's constitution between its weak concept and strong execution. Again, the *politique's* objective was to demonise the screenwriter and prove that directors could still make *interesting*, if not good, films out of bad scenarios. Sarris mistakenly accepts *Cahiers'* elevation of directorial expression as the *de facto* criterion for a film's overall worth and this ostensibly superficial misreading leads to an extreme distortion of the *politique*.

Moreover, by assembling a history of cinema solely upon the flimsy bedrock of directorial visibility, Sarris ignores Bazin's call for a more socio-economically inclined auteurism. Although he would later claim that the auteur theory 'was always as much about genres as about directors, and as much about subtexts as about contexts', his writing in the 1960s certainly did not demonstrate it.<sup>60</sup> For example, in 1962 Sarris declares that he finds 'it impossible to attribute X directors and Y films to any particular system or culture', before going on to say that if 'directors and other artists cannot be

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962', in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 35-45 (p. 42).

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

<sup>59</sup> Hess, 'Auteurism and After', p. 32.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Sarris, 'Notes of an Accidental Auteurist', *Film History*, 7.4 (1995), 358-61 (p. 359).



wrenched from their historical environments, aesthetics is reduced to a subordinate branch of ethnography.<sup>61</sup> While the *Cahiers* crowd's abandonment of tradition is somewhat justified by the scope and purpose of their enquiry, Sarris' denial of conditions is less tenable given that he is proposing a 'history' of cinema that blatantly denies the influence of circumstance. Bazin warns against such Romantic delusions in his averment that a director's 'artistic course has to be plotted according to the currents [of the system]—it is not as if he were sailing as his fancy took him on the calm waters of a lake.'<sup>62</sup> Sarris saw his auteur theory as a 'reaction against sociological criticism that enthroned the what against the how', and in this he mirrors *Cahiers*, but his attempt to usurp the 'pyramid fallacy of many film historians' (which compartmentalises history into chronological periods and aesthetic movements that privilege early innovations at the cost of later refinements) only replaces it with another fallacy in kind.<sup>63</sup> In his 'inverted pyramid' Sarris rectifies the anonymisation of the director in favour of the system by simply anonymising the system.<sup>64</sup> And while there is something admittedly attractive in allowing artists mastery of their fates—to be sure, Sarris' division of film history into a topography of directors has been, to quote Edward Buscombe, 'extremely productive, as a map should be, in opening up unexplored territory'<sup>65</sup>—the artist and their environment need not be mutually exclusive, and Sarris allowing each director 'a personal mystique apart from any collective mystique of the cinema as a whole' is a hermetic Romanticism at its most naïve.<sup>66</sup>

The auteur theory, at least as it was originally postulated, consists of a bull's-eye schema comprising three concentric circles a director has to pass through in order to be ordained an auteur. The first circle stipulates 'the technical competence of the director as a criterion of value', with Sarris going on to say that 'if a director has no technical competence [...] he is automatically cast out of the

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<sup>61</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Bazin, '*politique des auteurs*', p. 252.

<sup>63</sup> Andrew Sarris, 'The Auteur Theory and the Perils of Pauline', *Film Quarterly*, 16.4 (1963), 26-33 (p. 29).

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

<sup>65</sup> Edward Buscombe, 'Ideas of Authorship', in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 22-34 (p. 27).

<sup>66</sup> Sarris, 'Perils of Pauline', p. 29.

pantheon of directors.’<sup>67</sup> While it seems fairly self-evident that ‘a great director has to be at least a good director’,<sup>68</sup> Pauline Kael, in her extensive critique of Sarris, suggests that ‘the greatness of a director [...] has nothing to do with mere technical competence: his greatness is in being able to achieve his own personal expression and style.’<sup>69</sup> A director should, she proposes, ‘be judged on the basis of what he produces’ instead of inferences about their ‘competence’, the measures of which Sarris never makes clear.<sup>70</sup> Sarris’ requirement for technical competence is bizarre, particularly considering that his ideas of what constitutes film direction are muddled to the point of incoherence. For example, take the following:

A badly directed or undirected film has no importance in a critical scale of values, but one can make interesting conversation about [...] the acting, the color, the photography, the editing, the music, the costumes, the décor, and so forth.<sup>71</sup>

If these components do not fall under the banner of direction, it is difficult to conceive of what does. In the echelon of artists, directors are unique in that they traditionally have no tactile relationship with their materials. Of course, this paradigm has shifted somewhat with the emergence of One-Man-Band independent filmmakers like Robert Rodriguez and Shane Carruth as well as directors who also act as their own cinematographer (Steven Soderbergh), composer (John Carpenter), or editor (‘Roderick Jaynes’, the Coen brothers’ *gestalt nom de guerre*). But on larger scale unionised productions with budgets reaching into the multi-millions, the roles of the crew, directors included, tend to be much more compartmentalised—especially so in the Classical Hollywood cinema Sarris was studying. In a practical sense, the director’s employees are the real artists for they are the ones who change the light bulbs and lenses, read the screenwriter’s dialogue in front of the cameras, and cut their fingers splicing together film strips. While this would seem to support Sarris’ point that the elements can be removed from the compound and evaluated in isolation, casts and crews operate

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<sup>67</sup> Sarris, ‘Notes on the Auteur Theory’, p. 43.

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

<sup>69</sup> Pauline Kael, ‘Circles and Squares’, in *I Lost it at the Movies* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), 264-88 (p. 267).

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

<sup>71</sup> Sarris, ‘Notes on the Auteur Theory’, p. 43.

under the mandates of their director whose role is to transmit a vision to their workers and consolidate their efforts into a coherency that mirrors his/her design. As Eisenstein says, 'it is the director who is responsible for the organic unity of style of the film.'<sup>72</sup> If a costume, shot composition, or line delivery appears in a film we can assume with some degree of safety that the director approved of it (barring any front-office intrusion, though Sarris himself argues that a 'producer is more likely to tamper with a story line than a visual style').<sup>73</sup> The director's power may only be that of the veto, but it can be felt within all elements of the film.

Technical competence, then, is not the domain of the director at all. Rather, what should be investigated is the solidarity into which all the disparate constituents are brought and, lest we forget, their dramatic significance. Simply, if we are to talk intelligently about direction we should not necessarily consider whether, say, focus is pulled skilfully or not, but what that visual effect means for the film's storytelling. If we instead enforce Sarris' first dogmatic, Godard would instantly be cast into Sodom as the spasmodic photography and violent jump cuts in *Breathless* flout all accepted norms of cinematic style, which is to say nothing of the pioneers of the Dogme 95 movement or the mass of no-budget filmmakers that have sprung up in response to the diffusion of affordable digital filmmaking equipment over the last decade. In fact, Sarris' demand for so-called 'technical competence' actually acts as a barrier to progress because, as Kael contends, 'standards of technical competence are based on comparisons with work already done.'<sup>74</sup>

Sarris' second circle insists upon the 'distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value.'<sup>75</sup> Here, Sarris' schism from *Cahiers* is at its most conspicuous. The original auteur-critics' fascinations converged upon the art of direction and the malleability of *mise-en-scène* through which certain directors were able to construct distinct metaphysical world-views that were perceptible across their works—that much is true—but directorial personality, while unquestionably valued, was

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<sup>72</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Notes of a Film Director* (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), p. 31.

<sup>74</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 267.

<sup>75</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 43.

essentially a by-product of exceptional directorial craft, not its prerequisite. *Cahiers* did not indiscriminately validate artistic world-views purely on the basis of their existence. In fact, Truffaut acknowledges the Tradition of Quality screenwriters' world-views and it is specifically their crypto-bourgeois philosophies he finds so reprehensible. Therefore, the *Cahieristes* ratified a certain kind of aesthetic, one that adhered to their own sensibilities [cf. Bazin and realism in 1.i]. Contrarily, Sarris asserts that over the course of a career 'a director *must* exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature' [my emphasis].<sup>76</sup> The moral value of those aesthetics and the adroitness with which they are incorporated into each film are irrelevant. All that matters is that there is a syntactic consistency that allows an insight into the director's character: as Sarris says, the manner in which 'a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels.'<sup>77</sup> Gone is *Cahiers'* requirement for a universal and moral world-view, Rohmer's love for Hollywood's 'efficacy and elegance'; in their place is an authoritarian desideratum for a signature, nothing else.<sup>78</sup>

Sarris' criterion hinges upon the *salience* of personality as a measure of value, which, to quote Kael, 'completely confuses normal judgment'.<sup>79</sup> Throwing the issue into sharp relief, she writes, 'the smell of a skunk is more distinguishable than the perfume of a rose; does that make it better?'<sup>80</sup> To illustrate: Steven Spielberg's characteristic father/son dialectic is more *distinguishable* in *Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull* than it is in *Jurassic Park*. By Sarris' criteria, the former would automatically be seen as the superior film yet it is clear that *Crystal Skull's* paternal conflict is merely a torpid inverted photocopy of the Sean Connery/Harrison Ford dynamic that worked to great effect in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (due, in no small part, to the fact that Spielberg saw *Indiana Jones* as his attempt to craft a "'James Bond-esque'" action franchise and exploited *Last Crusade* as a platform to spoof Connery's Bond persona).<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Kael asserts that often 'the works in which we are most aware of

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

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Rohmer, 'Rediscovering America', p. 89.

<sup>79</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 268.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Von Gunden, *Postmodern Auteurs: Coppola, Lucas, de Palma, Spielberg and Scorsese* (Jefferson and London: MacFarland and Company, Inc., 1991), p. 121.

the personality of the director are his worst films – when he falls back on the devices he has done to death.<sup>82</sup> And what of genre chameleons like Richard Linklater and Ang Lee who sublimate their personalities into the very fabric of their narratives, perceptible only to the most observant? Are they empirically inferior to the self-plagiarists of the tentpole realm whose films can be identified from only a handful of frames? The ridiculousness of Sarris' hypothesis, which rewards stagnation and admonishes adaptability, quickly becomes clear. It is built upon the asinine notion that *Hamlet* is significant simply because it was written by William Shakespeare, when it is obvious that Shakespeare is only the cultural juggernaut he is because of the impact of his catalogue. Sarris contends that it is impossible 'to honor a work of art without honoring the artist involved', but the Sarrisite auteur school actually places the creator above and before their works which is the very definition of a cult of personality.<sup>83</sup>

So Sarris disentangles himself from any meaningful interaction with his texts, opting instead for a superficial invoice of parallels as evidenced in his identification of Raoul Walsh's repeated trope of sleep-talking in *Every Night at Eight* and *High Sierra*. When Sarris notes the significance of 'one of the screen's most virile directors [employing] an essentially feminine narrative device to dramatize the emotional vulnerability of his heroes', he offers no analysis on the scenes' stylistic articulations nor their narrative purpose.<sup>84</sup> Rather, the degree of a text's worth is directly correlative to how much of the director's character it reveals. The film-as-autobiography fallacy maintained by many of the post-*Cahiers* auteurs, which Sarris says is 'reflected in the increasing frequency of director retrospectives and in the popularization of director cults',<sup>85</sup> is dangerous not only because it flouts the realities of collaborative capitalistic production, but it proceeds on the presumption that narratives inevitably contain, to quote M. H. Abrams, 'covert symbolism which is expressive of elements in the

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<sup>82</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 269.

<sup>83</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 37.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>85</sup> Sarris, 'Perils of Pauline', p. 29.

author's nature.'<sup>86</sup> Therefore, through a kind of hermeneutic pseudo-psychoanalysis, the critic can 'come to know an author more intimately' than the author 'could have possibly known himself.'<sup>87</sup> This exposes a consummate blindness toward the independence of narrative aesthetics from one's real-life personality and a confusion of the artist with the man. And when the abstractions the-man-is-the-artist and the-artist-is-the-work are combined, the floodgates are perilously cast wide open for salacious inferences such as the now canonised acceptance of D.W. Griffith's supposed racism in light of *The Birth of a Nation*. But holding speculative data about a director's personal history, politics, or sexuality as a kind of skeleton key that unlocks meaning and then forcing those preconceptions onto texts that might not necessarily accommodate them is careless, not to mention exceedingly distortive, criticism. As Bazin explains, 'the anonymity of a work of art is a handicap that impinges only very slightly on our understanding of it.'<sup>88</sup> The fact that one can appreciate *The Searchers'* aesthetics and narrative without any foreknowledge of John Ford's syntactic/sematic traits severely undermines the fundamental necessity that Sarris attempts to infuse into his second circle. Undoubtedly, one's appreciation for *The Searchers* is *enhanced* when one looks at it through a Fordian lens and identifies its affinities to and divergences from Ford's authorial framework, but the text's artistic comprehensibility is in no way predicated upon adopting that perspective.

Sarris' third and final circle 'is concerned with interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art.'<sup>89</sup> Interior meaning, 'extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material', is tangentially linked to *Cahiers'* notion of an aesthetic world-view and, without any solid definition (Sarris only offers the flimsy tautology that it is 'an élan of the soul'), appears to be a redundant recapitulation of the second circle—albeit swaddled in a more mystical and mystifying rhetoric.<sup>90</sup> However, Sarris' mention of *tension* is revelatory in that it, for Kael at least, 'clarifies the

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<sup>86</sup> M. H. Abrams, 'Literature as revelation of personality', in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 17-21 (p. 21).

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

<sup>88</sup> Bazin, '*politique des auteurs*', p. 251.

<sup>89</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 43

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

interests of the auteur critics': namely, that they are obsessed with venerating corporate mass-market 'trash' in which auteurs have to resort to covert tactics in order to infuse themselves artificially into the narrative at the expense of those films which exhibit a synergy between form and content, director and material.<sup>91</sup> Sarris explicates his biases when he states that 'the auteur theory values the personality of a director precisely because of the barriers to its expression.'<sup>92</sup> Ergo, the 'abstract style' of a George Cukor (or a Zack Snyder to use a more contemporary referent), which can be transplanted into whatever circumstance with only a modicum of alterations and floats disjointed above the detritus of narrative miscellany, is seen to be intrinsically more valuable than the world-views of an Ingmar Bergman, Wes Anderson, or any other writer-director who fashions their directorial style around their own written material (which is a diametric contradiction to Truffaut's original conception of the '*auteur*').<sup>93</sup> Whilst conventional wisdom dictates that the Bergmans and Andersons have exceedingly more latitude to exploit the cinema as an expressive medium — indeed, Roud contends that the 'most satisfying work of art is surely the one in which the content, or the story, doesn't have to be transcended' — the auteur theory devalues their efforts in favour of those who seem to be actively working *against*, or at the very least in disharmony with, their material.<sup>94</sup> Kael believes the auteur theory to be the antithesis 'of what we have always taken for granted in the other arts, that the artist expresses himself in the unity of form and content' and Sarris' valorisation of tension-generated interior meaning as cinema's 'ultimate glory' not only makes any pantheon of great directors constructed upon the auteur theory seem ludicrous, it exposes his obstinate critical ideology which has acted as a barrier to auteurism's acceptance as a serious mode of analytical enquiry.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst Sarris' objectives to validate Hollywood to the American critical community and provide a canon of key texts for film students are far from ignoble, his auteur theory is, to borrow a phrase from Kael, a 'fundamentally anti-art' scheme sloppily retrofitted onto a misappropriated

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<sup>91</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 272.

<sup>92</sup> Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p. 31.

<sup>93</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 43.

<sup>94</sup> Roud, 'The French Line', p. 171.

<sup>95</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 272.

aesthetic, fuelled by a kind of lowbrow snobbery, and deployed to consecrate his own arbitrarily determined chart of preferences into the law of history.<sup>96</sup> Sarris, who has 'always felt a cultural inferiority complex about Hollywood', is only able to elevate the critical perception of American cinema by eradicating the avant-garde orthodoxy.<sup>97</sup> Sarris believes that one must make a decisive choice, which for an aspiring total-critic is staggeringly disingenuous. There can be no hope of parity between lowbrow and highbrow art within the Sarrisite auteur system simply because, beneath the scientific gloss a word like 'theory' affords, the so-called auteur theory is nothing but a pretence for Sarris' own subjective value judgments. Looking at his application of the auteur theory in *The American Cinema*—wherein he delivers the auteur pantheon to the world as if descending Mt. Sinai—it quickly becomes obvious that the goal of Sarris' auteur project is simply to elucidate who he thinks the 'good' filmmakers are, not necessarily offer an insight into their methods or means. This is a gross devolution of the *politique* which, while admittedly subjective and exclusionary in its more extreme incarnations, was built around an analytical core that interrogated the way filmmakers worked via the *mise-en-scène*. The fundamental difference between Sarris' auteur theory and *Cahiers'* brand of auteurism can be reduced to that between evaluation and analysis. Sarris writes, with a vacuous rhetorical flourish characteristic of his work, that John Ford 'is a storyteller and poet of images, [who] made his movies both move and be moving', but—barring the most superficial mention of his 'economy of expression'—does not justify to any convincing degree why Ford is worthy enough to be a Pantheon director and why Anthony Mann is confined to *The Far Side of Paradise* or David Lean is a filmmaker who is *Less Than Meets The Eye*.<sup>98</sup> His earlier bull's-eye model and the façade of impartiality that it constructed dissipates into an even more obtuse, instinctive, and esoteric criteria that relies fundamentally upon emotion—and Sarris goes some way to confirm this when he states that film history 'constitutes a very significant part of [his] emotional autobiography'.<sup>99</sup> The auteur

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>97</sup> Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory', p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p. 49; p. 47.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.



theory's validity is further damaged by Sarris reneging on his earlier adoration of interior meaning when he writes in *The American Cinema* that the 'whole point of a meaningful style is that it unifies the what and the how into a personal statement.'<sup>100</sup> Moreover, even though he perceived the auteur theory to invite 'debate in a dialectical spirit of pooled scholarship', when given the opportunity to respond to Kael's criticisms in *Film Quarterly* Sarris instead launches into a blanket attack on the magazine's supposed misreadings of *Cahiers* and general under-appreciation of American cinema.<sup>101</sup> The fact that he does not, or cannot, defend his theory speaks volumes about there not being any theory to defend, and Sarris would later admit that he does not 'approach criticism systematically' but 'intuitively'.<sup>102</sup>

The fundamental failure of the auteur theory is not necessarily attributable to the fact that Sarris' judgments are based upon his own predilections rather than any formulated critical acumen, but that the auteur theory is directed toward making those judgments in the first place. Perhaps this is a result of Sarris' background as a newspaper reviewer and not an academic, but the role of the critic, to quote Kael, 'is to help people see what is in the work' and a good critic is one who is able to allow their readers to 'understand more about the work than they could see for themselves.'<sup>103</sup> Granted, the auteur theory is historically significant because the fights that sprang up around it awoke a great many people to the American cinema's aesthetic potential and Sarris no doubt gained sympathisers because the auteur theory emerged at a time when soup cans and inverted urinals were questioning entrenched questions about what constitutes art.<sup>104</sup> And whilst I do not wish to suggest that the auteur theory has not contributed immensely to the construction of film academia, I do not believe, especially in Sarris' hands, that it is a viable critical approach simply because the goal of criticism is not to deign what is good or bad, or what should and should not be seen, but to

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>102</sup> Al Auster and Leonard Quart, 'Confessions of a Middle Class Film Critic: An Interview with Andrew Sarris', *Cinéaste*, 9.3 (1979), 10-5 (p. 11).

<sup>103</sup> Kael, 'Circles and Squares', p. 277.

<sup>104</sup> Raymond K. Haberski, Jr., *It's Only a Movie!: Films and Critics in American Culture* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 122-43 (p. 141).

investigate the form's modes of communicating meaning. That one can write invigorating and elucidating criticism, and not just be critical, about texts they dislike attests to this—and this is the crucial difference between reviewers and critics. Sarris even acknowledges this when he explains that reviewing is 'a consumer report for the uninitiated; criticism a conversation with one's equals.'<sup>105</sup> But what is *The American Cinema*, Sarris' most in-depth application of the auteur theory, if not a consumer report for the uninitiated? By enduring thousands of hours of dross and identifying his favourite films—the best films, he believes—Sarris is able to signpost his ideal route through cinematic history, but a canon cannot be created by any one person because it will ultimately depend on their taste (Sarris' rejection of Vittorio De Sica in his evaluation of post-War Italian Cinema is a prime example of this).<sup>106</sup> Buscombe writes that 'the *auteur* theory becomes more tenable if in fact it is not required to carry in its baggage the burden of being an evaluative criterion' and I would agree with this broad sentiment—but it is authorship as an amorphous principle which becomes more attractive when stripped of qualitative bias, not the auteur theory which is nothing but a synonym for Sarris' scheme of aesthetic preferences.<sup>107</sup> If we are to truly include considerations of authorship in our analysis of cinema, we must look elsewhere.

### 1.iii – Structures; Strictures

Surveying the history of auteurism—from the *politique des auteurs* in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of the 1950s, to Sarris' translation of the *politique* as the auteur theory and its subsequent diaspora throughout the next decade, to *Cahiers'* eventual prying out of the authorial lynchpin in their ideological reading of *Young Mr. Lincoln* in 1970—it is easy to dismiss the brief structuralist turn in late-1960s' British auteur criticism as an insignificant blip, or worse: a catastrophe. Indeed, Brian Henderson, one of its key detractors, declares it a 'scandal', an impenitent disgrace to both the Lévi-Straussian structuralism from which it purloined its methods and the outmoded auteur theory it

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<sup>105</sup> Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup> Sarris, 'The Perils of Pauline', p. 31.

<sup>107</sup> Buscombe, 'Ideas of Authorship', p. 30.

sought to rehabilitate.<sup>108</sup> Yet such a view wilfully blinds itself to the boons found in the undeniably imperfect works of the so-called cine-structuralists (a latent pejorative used by Charles Eckert to describe a disparate assortment of critics only brought together retrospectively by their shared objectivist interests and affiliation with the British journal *Screen*—a term which I shall reclaim here for the sake of simplicity). However, before cine-structuralism can be assessed, we first need to identify the key concepts of structuralism as it relates to this branch of film studies.

In the 1950s, Saussurean structural linguistics, founded upon the concept of language (*langue*) as an instinctive system beyond the volition of its speakers, offered anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss a potential alternative to the then-dominant philosophy of Sartrean existentialism wherein ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘there is no determinism—man is free, man *is* freedom.’<sup>109</sup> Lévi-Strauss’ structural anthropology, as it would surface during the 1960s, instead posited the opposite: that essence precedes existence, that there is an ordering structure rooted within the human consciousness which is discernible in the trans-continental, trans-historical organisational congruence of marriage rites, kinship systems, and myths. Much as how Vladimir Propp recognised a limited and recurrent set of dramatic actions in his morphology of Russian folk-tales, Lévi-Strauss saw in myths the same fundamental narratives relayed time and again and endeavoured to discover, to employ Saussurean terminology, the transcendent *langue* that patterned the *parole* of each individual story. Yet Propp’s prescriptive method merely identified the ‘functions of the dramatis personae’ contingent to their diachronic ‘place in the course of narration’ without organising them into a system.<sup>110</sup> Lévi-Strauss condensed his myths similarly, to short sentences consisting of a function linked to a subject, which he designated ‘relations’ or ‘mythemes’, but he recognised that the ‘true constituent units of myth are not the isolated relations but *bundles of such relations*, and it is only as bundles that these

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<sup>108</sup> Brian Henderson, ‘Critique of Cine-Structuralism (Part I)’, *Film Quarterly*, 27.1 (1973), 25-34 (p. 27).

<sup>109</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Existentialism and Humanism’, trans. Philip Mairet, in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, ed. Stephen Priest (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 26-45 (p. 32).

<sup>110</sup> Vladimir Propp, ‘Morphology of the Folk-Tale’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 72-5 (p. 73).

relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning.’<sup>111</sup> Unlike Propp, who considered that the ‘sequence of events has its own laws’ and is ‘strictly uniform’,<sup>112</sup> Lévi-Strauss rearranged his mythemes until their relationships and oppositions became evident, at which point he read the myth synchronically in order to ‘understand’ its meaning: a technique justified by his conviction that the substance of mythology ‘does not lie in its style [...] or its syntax, but in the *story* which it tells.’<sup>113</sup>

This system enabled Lévi-Strauss to identify within the Oedipus myth a clash between the abstractions that man is a product of intraspecies intercourse and that man arises naturally from the soil. Ergo, the myth expresses a dilemma in the form of a binary contradiction and functions as a ‘logical tool’ for primitive cultures that hold the latter belief to attempt to reconcile the former.<sup>114</sup> The myth does not, however, provide a resolution to the conflict and neither are the creators of myth aware of this structure, much as how speakers of a language are oblivious to the subterranean workings of the *langue*. A myth’s so-called ‘meaning’ is often drastically different from its surface manifestation which fluctuates according to its cultural circumstance: the *récit* changes but the myth remains constant, its mythemes demarcated not by any diegetic connotation but their intramythical opposition to other mythemes. Therefore, structural analysis of a single mythical form cannot reveal its integral structure as each telling is idiosyncratic and subject to errors in memory and broadcast. As ‘a myth is made up of all its variants’ they must all be appraised, their redundancies consolidated, their differences correlated.<sup>115</sup> Only then will ‘the structural law of the myth’ reveal itself.<sup>116</sup> Structuralism apparently allowed Lévi-Strauss to objectively account for the thematic meaning of myths and he predicted that structural linguistics would ‘certainly play the same renovating role with respect to the social sciences that nuclear physics, for example, has played for the physical sciences.’<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 211.

<sup>112</sup> Propp, ‘Morphology of the Folk-Tale’, p. 74.

<sup>113</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 314; p. 210.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

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

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

This was soon realised by the influx of structuralism into practically every intellectual discipline, from politics to psychology (by way of Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan's radical structuralist readings of Marx and Freud). It was perhaps inevitable, then, that structuralism would infiltrate film theory—and, by extension, auteurism.

However, the auteur-structuralism that eventually emerged in the pages of *Screen* (and the monographs of Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Peter Wollen, and Jim Kitses) was an attitudinal rather than a wholesale methodological appropriation of Lévi-Strauss, a balm for the instinctual and assertive auteurist writings of Sarris and Leavisian critics like *Movie's* Robin Wood who valued a text's 'organic quality' and whose work Alan Lovell believed to be bereft of any 'analytical and evaluative apparatus.'<sup>118</sup> If the 'cine-structuralists' had a common goal (and it is important to reiterate here that they were not a school promoting a unified project *vis-à-vis* OPOJAZ), it was not to supplant Sarrisite auteur theory but to supplement it with a verifiable, materialist framework: in effect, to exchange Wood's subjectivism for a scientific empiricism. Therefore, an account of cine-structuralism must also take account of Wood. After all, like linguistic signs and Lévi-Straussian mythemes, the value of critical methods can perhaps only be reciprocally established.

Both Wood and Wollen (who we shall take, for the time being, as an emblematic cine-structuralist) generally draw from texts the same vital material. Both emphasise the preponderance of the hermetic all-male microcosmic society in Howard Hawks and the essential contrast between his adventures and comedies (a 'reciprocal relation' originally established by Rivette in a 1953 issue of *Cahiers*).<sup>119</sup> Wood even dabbles with pseudo-structuralist techniques when, in his analysis of *Bringing Up Baby*, he draws up a binary between Alice and Susan as representations of Duty and Nature.<sup>120</sup> Yet, as Wollen says in an early confrontation with Wood, 'the words [Wood] uses and stresses are quite different from those [Wollen] would choose.'<sup>121</sup> A petty distinction, perhaps, but one indicative

<sup>118</sup> Alan Lovell, 'Robin Wood—A Dissenting View', *Screen*, 10.2 (1969), 42-55 (p. 44).

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Rivette, 'The Genius of Howard Hawks', trans. Russell Campbell and Marvin Pister, in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 126-31 (p. 126).

<sup>120</sup> Robin Wood, *Howard Hawks* (London: British Film Institute, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Wollen [pseud. Lee Russell], 'Reply to Robin Wood on Godard', *New Left Review*, 39 (1966), 83-7 (p. 83).

of a vast ‘underlying difference in critical method’.<sup>122</sup> Lovell goes considerably further in denouncing Wood as simply ‘a more sensitive and knowledgeable “common reader” bereft of the ability to ‘articulate his assumptions and the way in which he has applied them.’<sup>123</sup> The following excerpts, though deprived of context, readily exhibit Wood’s arcane and rather unsatisfactory critical approach:

*Only Angels Have Wings* is a completely achieved masterpiece, [...] It has a wonderful freshness, a total lack of self-consciousness: no previous film is so inclusive in its exposition of the director’s interests.<sup>124</sup>

what is lacking in [*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*] and present in [*My Darling Clementine*] is something much less tangible, something perhaps only describable in loose terms such as “aura” but palpably *there* in *Clementine*.<sup>125</sup>

What is lost for the characters is defined in concrete, dramatic terms in the film—but there is beyond this a sense that the loss is also Ford’s.<sup>126</sup>

Wood’s prose is teeming with judgments that propound directorial visibility as *the* criterion of value, abstruse descriptions of subjective responses that have more to do with the critic’s enjoyment than the film’s qualities, and a tendency to read texts as their authors’ revelatory psycho-autobiographies—in other words, the more vulgar indulgences of Sarris-branded auteurism. In his critique of Wood, Lovell delineates between intuitive evaluation tendered without evidence and rational analysis, the latter of which Wollen professes is attainable through an advancement of the structural approach established in Nowell-Smith: that being the pursuit of a ‘structural hard core of basic and often recondite motifs’ within a director’s films.<sup>127</sup>

Wollen establishes the cardinal division between the work of auteurs like Wood and his own as being the difference between a formalism that proceeds ‘by simply noting and mapping resemblances’ and a structuralism which ‘cannot rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions [...] but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions.’<sup>128</sup> Like Lévi-Strauss, who

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Lovell, ‘Robin Wood’, p. 45.

<sup>124</sup> Wood, *Howard Hawks*, p. 17.

<sup>125</sup> Robin Wood, ‘Shall we gather at the river?: the late films of John Ford’, in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 83-101 (p. 84).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>127</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Visconti (extract)’, in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 136-7 (p. 137).

<sup>128</sup> Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p. 60.

distanced himself similarly from Propp, Wollen is concerned with synthesis by means of binary differentiation. Thus, he sees Hawks' dramas and comedies, 'the positive and negative poles of the Hawksian vision', as necessarily symbiotic: the stoic and self-reliant derring-do of Hawks' male action heroes is determined through the infantilism of his subordinated comedy protagonists and the comedies are the 'agonised exposure of the underlying tensions of the heroic dramas.'<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, Wollen writes that John Ford's corpus is constructed upon a complex system of binary oppositions – garden versus wilderness, book versus gun, etc. – and his films are distinguished by 'a kind of exploration of certain possibilities, in which some antinomies are foregrounded, discarded or even inverted, whereas others remain stable and constant.'<sup>130</sup> Thus, to tease out a director's 'archi-tale', the critic must – again, like Lévi-Strauss – assess all of its variants, irrespective of their perceived quality.<sup>131</sup> Where Wood disregards *Donovan's Reef* and *7 Women* because he finds 'both films so weak that [he] can't imagine what serious case could be argued in their defense', Wollen proffers a more inclusive methodology that instates supposed aberrations on the same stratum as the presumed masterpieces.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, Wollen suggests that the 'text of a structural analysis lies not in the orthodox canon of a director's work, where resemblances are clustered, but in films which at first sight might seem eccentricities.'<sup>133</sup> Wood and Wollen both highlight the significance of the reversal of the traditional roles of the savage Indian and civilised Cavalryman in *Cheyenne Autumn*, but Wood, who suggests the film 'becomes intensely moving only [...] [when one] thinks of Ford rather than his characters', writes: 'Ford clearly made *Cheyenne Autumn* with the deliberate intention of righting the balance of sympathies and allegiances in the earlier cavalry westerns.'<sup>134</sup> Conversely, Wollen considers *Cheyenne Autumn* the culmination of Ford's late-career mission to disengage the civilised/savage binary from its generic European/Indian connotations – a hypothesis engendered

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53; p. 59.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>132</sup> Wood, 'Shall we gather at the river?', p. 97.

<sup>133</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 61.

<sup>134</sup> Wood, 'Shall we gather at the river?', pp-86-7.

from an empiric analysis of textual material rather than speculative inferences about the director's character.<sup>135</sup> This represents a significant fracture from the 'intentional fallacy' by which classical auteurism is circumscribed [cf. **2.ii**].<sup>136</sup> Lovell describes the impetus of auteur-structuralism as the wish to shift criticism 'from personal qualities to impersonal ones'<sup>137</sup> and Wollen would later solidify the break from intentionalism by reconceptualising the auteur as an 'unconscious catalyst' and erecting a schism between Ford the man and 'Ford', the structure which can be read out of the films bearing his name<sup>138</sup>—a concept not entirely dissimilar to Michel Foucault's 'author function' which operates as a classificatory discourse not necessarily attached to any specific flesh-and-blood person [cf. **Introduction/3.ii**].<sup>139</sup>

While Wollen's structuralist method seems, at first glance, preferable to the humanistic excesses of the auteur theory, offering an impartial explanation for the conceptual homogeneities within Hawks and Ford, it is nonetheless problematic not least because Wollen submits to the auteurist delusion of comparative approbation. For all the good he does in extricating bias from the analytical process, he cannot resist declaring Ford a superior filmmaker to Hawks:

My own view is that Ford's work is much richer than that of Hawks and that this is revealed by a structural analysis; it is the richness of the shifting relations between antinomies in Ford's work that makes him a great artist, beyond being simply an undoubted auteur.<sup>140</sup>

Thus, Wollen's objectivist framework, instead of eradicating the prejudiced distinction between *auteur* and *metteur-en-scène*, actually enforces the innately subjective notion that there is a direct correlation between a film's artistic value and the complexity of the directorial personality it exhibits—only now, this manifests in a 'structure' rather than a 'world-view'. Nowell-Smith's exhortations against such a

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<sup>135</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 66.

<sup>136</sup> William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 1374-86 (p. 1377).

<sup>137</sup> Alan Lovell, 'The Common Pursuit of True Judgment', *Screen*, 11.4-5 (1970), 76-88 (p. 77).

<sup>138</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 115.

<sup>139</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What Is An Author?', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2001), 1622-36 (p. 1628).

<sup>140</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 70.



critical mentality, which ‘is simply gratuitous and leads only to a purposeless and anti-critical aesthetic dogmatism’, apparently fell upon deaf ears.<sup>141</sup>

Lovell, on the other hand, avoids making assertive value judgments in his structural study of Arthur Penn but his method draws significant fire from Wood, who condemns it as a mundane imposition of the ‘Highest Common Factor’ mathematical principle.<sup>142</sup> This brings us to the second major deficit of cine-structuralism: its attempts to recast auteurism as a science had the adverse side-effect of transforming criticism into a reductive pattern-finding mechanism. Again, Nowell-Smith forewarned of this in 1967 when he wrote that the structuralist approach, used haphazardly, had the potential to narrow ‘the field of inquiry almost too radically, making the internal (formal and thematic) analysis of the body of works as a whole the only valid object of criticism.’<sup>143</sup> This perhaps pays undue credit to the cine-structural approach as deployed by Wollen and Lovell which forsakes formal qualities—namely, the *mise-en-scène* analysis that formed the backbone of classic auteurism—for a purely thematic focus. Wollen attempts to exonerate himself by invoking the Lévi-Straussian concept of the extra-syntactical mythic substance, but this misappropriation of Lévi-Strauss unveils the essential incompatibility of mythological structuralism and film.

Lévi-Strauss places mythology ‘in the gamut of linguistic expressions at the end opposite to that of poetry’ and, channelling Roman Jakobson, explains that poetry ‘is a kind of speech which cannot be translated except at the cost of serious distortions.’<sup>144</sup> Although, to quote Eckert, the ‘study of narrative structure in film employing purely linguistic analogues does not look promising’, the poetic qualities of cinematic language are fairly evident in the impossibility of direct lexical quotation.<sup>145</sup> Jakobson explains that in poetry (and by our extension films) ‘grammatical categories carry a high semantic import.’<sup>146</sup> Thus, by abandoning *mise-en-scène* through which the film is

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<sup>141</sup> Nowell-Smith, ‘Visconti (extract)’, p. 137.

<sup>142</sup> Robin Wood, ‘Ghostly Paradigm and H.C.F.: An Answer to Alan Lovell’, *Screen*, 10.3 (1969), 35-48 (p. 40).

<sup>143</sup> Nowell-Smith, ‘Visconti (extract)’, p. 137.

<sup>144</sup> Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, p. 210.

<sup>145</sup> Charles Eckert, ‘The English cine-structuralists’, in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. John Caughie (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 152-65 (p. 153).

<sup>146</sup> Roman Jakobson, *Selected Writings II: Word and Language* (Paris: Mouton, 1971), p. 265.

narrated and its themes/structures given connotative significance, a cine-structural account can only offer a partial report on the films studied. Wood elaborates:

It is an admirable *introduction*, providing a useful map or blueprint from which one could explore [a director's] work. Yet it stops short where criticism begins. It will explain to anyone the thematic structure of [the director's] work; it will not, I think, convince anyone of the work's value or even supply the kind of basis on which its value could be discussed.<sup>147</sup>

Whilst Wood drags us back into the dungeon of 'value'—indeed, he asserts that a 'sense of value is inherent in the critic's response from the outset'—his argument is lucid: cine-structuralism validates bodies of films only on the basis of thematic framework's *existence*, rather than an assessment of how those themes are expressed intra- and inter-textually.<sup>148</sup> John C. Murray upholds the critique, stating

the weakness of the structuralists' case lies in the argument that the significance of a film or body of films is established by deduction from the principle that certain structures, archetypes or antinomies—of which the films are instances—have a prior significance.<sup>149</sup>

So, following Murray, when Lovell uncovers the absentee-father/social-outcast binary he finds in Penn, he takes the force of this antinomy for granted. For cine-structuralism to be authenticated, its proponents needed to justify their findings by establishing how those structures are constituted narratively, or else what is revealed, according to Wood, 'will be of its nature very basic and probably very banal.'<sup>150</sup> Lovell defends his position by stating that he wanted simply to 'create a framework for an exploration of Penn's work not to provide a total account for each film'<sup>151</sup> and Wollen makes a similar argument in his 1972 afterword to *Signs and Meaning*—'[cine-structuralism] is an explanatory device which specifies partially how any individual film works [...] by specifying what its mechanics are at one level'<sup>152</sup>—but neither of them expand their method to accommodate a more rigorous analysis of how structures manifest formally.

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<sup>147</sup> Wood, 'H.C.F.', p. 42.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>149</sup> John C. Murray, 'Robin Wood and Structural Critics', *Screen*, 12.3 (1971), 101-10 (p. 105).

<sup>150</sup> Wood, 'H.C.F.', p. 47.

<sup>151</sup> Lovell, 'Common Pursuit', p. 85.

<sup>152</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 115.

Murray's note about structures having an *a priori* significance bears further investigation as it forms the crux of Eckert's critique. Eckert explains that figures in mythology 'cannot be assigned set meanings, as is typically done in an archetypal or Freudian analysis, nor should they be expected to maintain the same meaning in so dynamic a thought-form as myth.'<sup>153</sup> Therefore, when Jim Kitses writes that Sam Peckinpah shares Ford's fascination with 'the dialectic of the sacred and the savage', Eckert believes that he is deferring to traditional rather than truly relational meanings as are found in mythology.<sup>154</sup> According to Eckert, only Kitses' emphasis upon the characters' 'tendency to form antinomic pairs resembles Lévi-Strauss's analysis.'<sup>155</sup> 'The acceptance of such set meanings', he continues, 'commits us to the surface meaning of myth—to the narrator's rationalized account of what his story is about, or the critic's overlay of fossilized myth upon a living structure.'<sup>156</sup> This leads us to Henderson's 'scandal': he decrees cine-structuralism to be utterly destitute because of its lack of a stable theoretical foundation in Lévi-Strauss—or, as he puts it, Wollen and co.'s 'absence of an auteur-structuralist epistemology'.<sup>157</sup> Essentially, because the cine-structuralists have not established that films are *identical* to myths and that auteurism is *identical* to structuralism, they 'destroy themselves' by recklessly grafting them together.<sup>158</sup>

However, Eckert and Henderson have mistaken Wollen's essentialist cherry-picking of Lévi-Straussian ideas and techniques (he is the only critic to make overt reference to Lévi-Strauss) for an endemic eclecticism. Moreover, the requirement of a dogmatic adherence to Lévi-Strauss is strange considering John Sturrock's claims that structuralism is merely the 'latest, unusually sophisticated stage reached by a form of literary criticism that has existed since Aristotle' (Aristotle's codification of the tragedy genre in *Poetics* could be considered proto-structuralist) and that 'Lévi-Straussian Structuralism is at best a loose and at worst a metaphorical derivative of the Saussurean model.'<sup>159</sup> If

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<sup>153</sup> Eckert, 'The English cine-structuralists', p. 162.

<sup>154</sup> Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Directing The Western from John Ford to Clint Eastwood: New Edition* (London: British Film Institute, 2012), p. 203.

<sup>155</sup> Eckert, 'The English cine-structuralists', p. 162.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>157</sup> Henderson, 'Critique (Part I)', p. 27.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>159</sup> John Sturrock, *Structuralism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.99; p. 74.

literary criticism has always been partially structuralist, the cine-structuralists' only real crime is the assumption of a pseudo-scientific lexis vicinal to Lévi-Strauss who similarly played fast and loose with Saussure for his own ends. It seems structuralism, akin to Jakobson's poetic language, cannot be translated from one field of enquiry to another without severe modifications. Foundational concerns are further abrogated by Nowell-Smith who clarifies that the 'cine-structuralists' (once more, it must be stressed that they were not a united band of writers) were not trying to import Lévi-Straussian structuralism *mutatis mutandis* into film theory, but adopted structuralist themes in order to 'escape the Scylla and Charybdis of pro-*auteur* subjectivism and anti-*auteur* empiricism.'<sup>160</sup> He continues:

the operative question is whether the concepts employed in the revision of the *auteur* theory make sense in the place in which they are found, and, frankly, the more eclectic and even abusive the use of "structuralist" concepts, the more likely they are to belong in their new location. [...] If any of us English film critics had really had ambitions to turn our trade into a sub-branch of structural anthropology, then one or other of the charges might stick, but fortunately we did not.<sup>161</sup>

It may be more appropriate, then, to call the cine-structuralists *semi-structuralists*. Their self-professed 'sub-theoretical' works were unconcerned with advancing a structuralist paradigm for film (*à la* Christian Metz's *grand syntagmatique*): they only sought to ameliorate the floundering auteur theory.<sup>162</sup> In this sense, their failures do not seem so absolute (and Nowell-Smith's argument in fact prompted Eckert to rescind his critique).<sup>163</sup>

One of Henderson's censures still stands, however, and demonstrates that the cine-structuralists were not exceedingly thorough in their audit of auteurism: namely, they did not rectify auteurism's ahistoricism. Henderson writes that cine-structuralism 'takes for its object the text as a given', and that this given 'is its horizon and absolute'.<sup>164</sup> The synchronic study of an auteur's canon enforces the notion that, for example, the Fordian structure entered the world fully-formed and is existent throughout Ford's entire filmography. Considerations of an artist developing over time —

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<sup>160</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'I Was a Star\*Struck Structuralist', *Screen*, 14.3 (1973), 92-9 (p.96).

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>163</sup> Charles Eckert, 'Shall We Deport Levi-Strauss', *Film Quarterly*, 27.3 (1974), 63-5 (p. 64).

<sup>164</sup> Henderson, 'Critique (Part I)', p. 33.

which Eckert states is a ‘more nineteenth-century conception, attuned to the belief in purposive evolution’ (i.e., the kind of existentialist thought Lévi-Strauss was combating)—the artist being subject to the whims of the industry, and their films being shaped by an engagement with genre as well as extra-generic works are disregarded for a purely textual focus.<sup>165</sup> But Henderson, echoing Bazin somewhat, rightly contends that ‘the text cannot be understood by examination of the text alone.’<sup>166</sup> He offers *Cahiers’* 1970 ‘active reading’ of *Young Mr. Lincoln* as a preferable practice: one which, he believes, obliterates structuralism and auteurism in one fell swoop.<sup>167</sup>

It should be noted before progressing that the *Cahiers du Cinéma* of the early 1970s was not the same *Cahiers* that had fostered the *politique des auteurs*. After the May 1968 strike against Charles de Gaulle, the intellectual landscape in France changed and *Cahiers*, now edited by Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni, became politically energised. They upgraded Bazin’s original question ‘what is the cinema?’ to the more polemical ‘what is the film *today?*’ [my emphasis]—or, to be more specific, *what is the function of the film in capitalist hegemonies such as Hollywood?*<sup>168</sup> Following Althusser, they write that ‘*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it.’<sup>169</sup> Of particular interest are what they deem category (e) films that ‘seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology [...] but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner.’<sup>170</sup> Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*, as discovered through the Althusserian process of symptomatic reading which ‘divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a *different text*, present as a necessary absence in the first’, is considered one of these subterraneanly ambivalent pictures.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Eckert, ‘The English cine-structuralists’, p. 163.

<sup>166</sup> Henderson, ‘Critique (Part I)’, p. 33.

<sup>167</sup> ‘John Ford’s *Young Mr. Lincoln*: A collective text by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*’, trans. Helen Lackner and Diana Matias, *Screen*, 13.3 (1972), 5–44 (p. 8).

<sup>168</sup> Jean-Luc Comolli and Paul Narboni, ‘Cinema/Ideology/Criticism’, trans. Susan Bennett, *Screen*, 12.1 (1971), 27–37 (p. 29).

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>171</sup> Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon, 1971), p. 8.

The *Cahiers* critics explain that their application of symptomatic/active reading (which is deployed as a direct attack against their rival magazine *Cinéthique*) is an attempt to make films

say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks; these are neither faults in the work [...] nor a deception on the part of the author [...]; they are *structuring absences*, always displaced—an overdetermination which is the only possible basis from which these discourses could be realised, the unsaid included in the said and necessary to its constitution.<sup>172</sup>

Drawing upon Althusser's reconceptualisation of the Freudian concept of overdetermination—that is, an effect having multiple, possibly contradictory, causes—*Cahiers'* methodology is diachronic and cumulative, assessing the text not as a closed entity but a process whereby different determinants are brought to the fore in successive scenes at the expense of repressing other codes (here: political, historical, erotic). The function of their reading, then, is not to be a demystifying commentary (*à la Cinéthique*) but to participate in the 'film's process of becoming-a-text'.<sup>173</sup> The *Cahiers* critics 'do not hesitate to force the text, even to rewrite it, insofar as the film only constitutes itself a text by integration of the reader's knowledge.'<sup>174</sup> Essentially their reading, which constitutes a new 'text' via confluence with the film, orients on what they perceive to be the purpose of *Young Mr. Lincoln*—to deify Abraham Lincoln as a mythical, pure, unitary (read: depoliticised) embodiment of Truth in order to secure the election of a Republican President in 1940 (deduced from the Big Business ties of Fox studio-head Darryl Zanuck)—and how this ideological project is inevitably disrupted by Ford's inscription of the character within the narrative necessities of a fiction film intended for mass consumption.

Although Henderson is horrified at any recognition of the author within *Cahiers'* active reading—he considers anyone still clinging to authorial sympathies as 'agent provocateur or just plain saboteur'—there is a significant reliance on Ford's authorship in the *Cahiers* article.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, their reading of the dance scene is predicated upon the Fordian trope of the 'ritual *miming ideal*

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<sup>172</sup> 'Young Mr. Lincoln', p. 32.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>175</sup> Brian Henderson, 'Critique of Cine-Structuralism (Part II)', *Film Quarterly*, 27.2 (1973), 37-46 (p. 45).

*harmony* which is in fact far from regulating the relations of the social group' and they even cite the 'aesthetic process[es] (characters, cinematic *signifiers*, narrative mode) specific to Ford's writing' as being integral to the film's disruptive force.<sup>176</sup> However, the author *is* dead in the Barthesian sense, de-centred, no longer allowed monopoly over textual meaning—the onus of which is shifted to, if anyone, the reader. *Cahiers'* poststructuralist text is far from the authorial *coup-de-grâce* Henderson would like it to be yet its implications for cine-structuralism, and by extension auteurism, are far less optimistic. If we are to continue talking about authors, we must frame that discussion within a wider conversation about (and, indeed, with) the text: one which considers its industrial motivations, its placement within the history of the art-form and the author's catalogue, and, most of all, its workings *as a text*. Authorial techniques should therefore be used parsimoniously, following Wood, as 'a tool, no more, to be taken up and laid aside at will' rather than an isolated all-encompassing critical method in itself.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> 'Young Mr. Lincoln', p. 29; p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> Wood, 'H.C.F.', p. 40.

## Chapter Two

# Reading Authority

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### *Constructing a Strategy of Authorial Response*

#### 2.i – Post-mortem

Clearly auteurism demands a mutation of sorts if it is to have a place within the critical toolbox. This is not as simple as, say, introducing an industrial perspective to the *politique des auteurs*, purging the auteur theory of its predilection for value judgements, and supplementing cine-structuralism's thematic empiricism with a consideration of film style—as might be inferred from the criticisms that constituted the previous chapter. In fact, *Cahiers du Cinéma's* 'Young Mr. Lincoln' broadly addresses these issues: it considers the historical context of the film's production and release, offers no evaluative opinion of the text, and examines the formal articulation of Ford's authorship with regards to its impact on the narrative at hand. And while it would be somewhat disingenuous declaring this active reading as auteurist, the sublimation of the author within a more extensive account of narrational processes—or more specifically how viewers organise and interpret narrative cues—gestures toward a potential avenue for progress.

But the 1970s saw the desiccation of auteur studies in academe. While this may indeed be attributable to the malaise generated by Andrew Sarris' auteur theory along with *Cahiers'* rejection of its earlier manifesto and re-organised focus on Maoism, David Bordwell points more generally to the rise of Grand Theories (such as subject-position theory and culturalism) that discuss cinema 'within schemes which seek to describe or explain very broad features of society, history, language, and psyche' as sounding the death-knell for the film director as a serious object of scholarship.<sup>1</sup> And this academic rejection of the author was by no means limited to the cinematic sphere. *Cahiers'* 'Young Mr. Lincoln' provides an ideal point of departure as its publication in 1970 coincided with the release of Roland Barthes' *S/Z*, a revolutionary post/structuralist reading of Honoré de Balzac's short story

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<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell, 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 3-36 (p. 3).



'Sarrasine' wherein the text is advanced as 'a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds' with 'several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.'<sup>2</sup> The polysemous text can be read in multiple ways, with Barthes indicating that up to five interpretive codes (such as the connotative semic and metonymic symbolic codes) are potentially operative in any given unit of signification—thereby shattering the illusion of definitive singular, authored meaning.<sup>3</sup> *S/Z* is therefore a study of what Umberto Eco would call 'overcoding' wherein a singular cause is recognised to have multiple effects.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, *Cahiers'* thesis on overdetermination is a more overtly politicised exploration of multiple causes leading to a singular effect. This appears antithetical to Barthes' philosophy but in the final analysis the two methods correspond in one vital area: they both underline the fundamental incompleteness of works of art that say, and 'mean', more than what is manifestly inscribed. Instead of the text being an autonomous unified whole that transparently transmits a unique and incontrovertible meaning against which the reader is, to quote Barthes, 'left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text', there is now an acute recognition that the reader/spectator is an active participant in the creative process.<sup>5</sup> Barthes says that the 'goal of the literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' and it is only through the act of reading that the text is given meaningful shape.<sup>6</sup>

The implication that the reader's emergence as a productive agent had, and still has, on concepts of textual authorship cannot be overstated. Contrary to the Romantic tradition, in which the 'Author is thought to *nourish* the book, [...] in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to a child', Barthes' pioneering aesthetic established in 1967's 'The Death of the Author' seeks to demystify and demolish entrenched convictions of authorial sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> He writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1466-70 (p. 1468).

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. [...] Did [the writer] wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner “thing” he thinks to “translate” is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, as ‘it is language which speaks, not the author’, and since no one writer can boast ownership of language (and consequently their artistic ideas which are inevitably linguistic in nature, and thus fundamentally derivative), Barthes undermines the critical sophism that texts can be unilaterally explicated and exhausted of all contained meaning by mere reference to their composers.<sup>9</sup> This would seem to have a precedent in William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley’s 1946 treatise on the ‘intentional fallacy’ wherein poetic meaning is conceived as being discoverable ‘through the semantics and syntax of a poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries, and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries’ and not any appeal to what is ‘private or idiosyncratic; not part of the work as a linguistic fact.’<sup>10</sup> Yet, though Wimsatt and Beardsley denaturalise the assumption that one must know what a poet intended in order to judge their work, they nonetheless concede, albeit implicitly, that poems are products of a singular creative consciousness. Artistic design is maligned simply because it is unavailable and should, if successfully effected, be detectable within textual material itself. Barthes goes considerably further in his suggestion that authors are ‘born simultaneously with the text’ and are ‘in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing.’<sup>11</sup> Texts, he continues, are ‘eternally written *here* and *now*’ within the minds of readers, who become ‘the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost.’<sup>12</sup>

‘The Death of the Author’ was not so much a proclamation of the author’s sudden expiration as a battle-cry for a more conscientious approach to literature that does not compulsively bend its

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1467.

<sup>10</sup> William K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, ‘The Intentional Fallacy’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1374-87 (p. 1381).

<sup>11</sup> Barthes, ‘Death of the Author’, p. 1468.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1468; p. 1469.

knee to the hegemonic order of creators. Barthes sought to exchange archaeological/biographical hermeneutics for a focus on the play of reading and the processes by which texts are made intelligible: how the said is constituted by, and in turn obfuscates, the not-said. The critic is now charged 'not to give [a text] a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it.'<sup>13</sup> This, Bordwell notes, heralded a monumental transition in the humanities from the *implied* (i.e., authorial) meanings studied in conventional explicatory criticism to the *symptomatic* (i.e., unintentional/repressed/ideological) meanings extracted by poststructuralist Grand Theories such as Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis that conduct a kind of textual exorcism in order to reveal and interrogate an artwork's socio-political dimensions:

Post-1968 symptomatic criticism, as befits a hermeneutics of suspicion, traffics in somewhat different semantic fields [than explicatory/authorial criticism]. The individualist perspective is replaced by an analytical, almost anthropological detachment that sees sexuality, politics, and signification as constituting the salient domains of meaning. The theme of fate is replaced by the duality power/subjection. Love is replaced by desire, or law/desire. Instead of the individual there is subject/object or phallus/lack. Instead of art there is signifying practice.<sup>14</sup>

Considering the widespread diffusion of capital-T Theories in the 1970s and 80s that recast the popular film as a cultural artefact and sought to dismantle its apparent ideological naiveté, it seems the authorial divorce was necessary for the survival and continued health of film studies as a professional intellectual discipline. However, 'Theory', such as it is, has not gone unchallenged and debates have raged about the author/reader dichotomy as well as more fundamental questions as to what a critical reading is—or should be.

Jonathan Culler, for example, claims that the goal of a critical reading is 'not to produce yet another interpretation of *King Lear* but to advance one's understanding of the conventions and operations of an institution, a mode of discourse', and thereby erects a balustrade between idiosyncratic suppositions and acts of descriptive critical analysis that aspire to some standard of

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<sup>13</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991), p.109.

impartiality.<sup>15</sup> Susan Sontag is similarly opposed to ‘conscious act[s] of the mind which [illustrate] a certain code, certain “rules” of interpretation’ in criticism.<sup>16</sup> She equates the hermeneutic practice of aggressively selecting textual elements in order to explicate the whole’s purported content to a distortive translation that ‘makes art into an article for use, for arrangement into a mental scheme of categories.’<sup>17</sup> Such a critic who operates in this mode—Sontag points specifically to the Theoretical doctrines of Marx and Freud—‘digs “behind” the text, to find a sub-text, which is the true one.’<sup>18</sup> Interpretation, then, is tantamount to molestation. Sontag calls for Theoretical hermeneutics to be replaced by an illustrative neo-formalism, an ‘erotics of art’, stating that the function of criticism ‘should be to show *how it is what it is, even that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*.’<sup>19</sup>

Yet hermeneutics and poetics may not be so easily detached, as Naomi Schor suggests when she says that interpretation is not something that is ‘done *to* fiction but rather as something that is done *in* fiction.’<sup>20</sup> Because there is no such thing as unequivocal transference from one consciousness to another, because the nature of encoding into linguistic (and, in our case, iconic) signs necessarily introduces allusive ambiguities and ‘areas of indeterminacy’, to borrow a phrase from Wolfgang Iser, a reader/spectator will always have to exercise some degree of mental faculty in decoding and arranging the perceived material into a coherent message.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while the skeleton of an artwork remains rigid, the asymmetry between the ‘positions of the “personifications”, encoder-producer and decoder-receiver’ established in Stuart Hall’s semiotic communication model afford the reader a relative freedom in how they assimilate a text.<sup>22</sup> Although ‘signified facts are *understood*’ (i.e., on a semantic level), Tzvetan Todorov asserts that ‘symbolized facts are *interpreted*; and interpretations

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘Against Interpretation’, in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 3-14 (p. 5).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Naomi Schor, ‘Fiction as Interpretation/Interpretation as Fiction’, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 165-82 (p. 168).

<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding/Decoding’, in *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks, Revised Edition*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 163-73 (p. 166).

vary from one subject to another.<sup>23</sup> Interpretation, then, is not only a necessary facet of comprehension, it is the essential component of reading.

Robert Crosman expands upon this, stating that the act of translation Sontag abhors is an inextricable moment in the reading process. The text, he says, ‘supplies me with words, ideas, sounds, rhythms, but I make the poem’s meaning by a process of translation. That is what reading is, in fact: translation.’<sup>24</sup> Essentially, a text has no meaning until a mind construes it. Furthermore, on the status of authorial hegemony, Crosman suggests that accepting an author’s intention is yet another act of readers *making* their own meaning: authorial biography and statements of design are still subject to the same interpretive processes as primary texts and if a reader settles on a so-called ‘authorial meaning’ it is only because they have *chosen* to do so, not necessarily because that authorial meaning is intrinsically more valid [cf. 2.ii].<sup>25</sup> Yet by gifting the reader so much agency, Crosman perilously leaves the door open for relativism and nihilism.

Umberto Eco, meanwhile, notes that any text can potentially have an indefinite number of meanings but that does not mean that texts have *unlimited* meanings, or that all interpretations are necessarily born equal. Eco’s hypothetical example of the potential interpretations of an ostensibly simple letter—‘Dear Friend, In this Basket brought by my Slave there are 30 Figs I send you as a Present’—is especially demonstrative in this regard.<sup>26</sup> The message may be read as be coded (‘where *basket* stands for “army,” *fig* for “1,000 soldiers,” and *present* for “help”’), rhetorical, allegorical, or merely indexical as it seems.<sup>27</sup> The reader, Eco writes,

can dream of those lost actors, so ambiguously involved in exchanging things or symbols [...], and could start from that anonymous message in order to try a variety of meanings and referents ... But the interpreter would not be entitled to say that the message can mean everything.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Reading as Construction’, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 67-82 (p. 73).

<sup>24</sup> Robert Crosman, ‘Do Readers Make Meaning?’, in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 149-64 (p. 152).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161

<sup>26</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

So even though Eco realises that ‘symbols are paradigmatically open to infinite meanings’, a symbol’s positioning within a syntagmatic sequence of other symbols will invariably block some of its connotations.<sup>29</sup> Ergo interpretation is bound, albeit fuzzily, by textual context—a standpoint advocated by Hall, who explains that ‘encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate. [...] If there were no limits, audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message.’<sup>30</sup>

Despite the brevity of this survey, it is clear that the principles of ‘reading’ are a hotly contested topic. Sontag’s philosophy of reading is drastically unlike Eco’s, say, but that is not to say that one is empirically better or worse than the other: they are simply different hypothetical conceptions of what is a fundamentally indefinable multifarious human phenomenon. Different readers read differently and different critics, with different biases and prejudices, will emphasise and denigrate different aspects of the reading process in their approaches. Moreover, auteurism’s academic demise did not impinge on its proliferation in popular discourse and the rhetoric of the Hollywood system, especially once the New Hollywood rose to dominance with its *nouvelle vague*-inspired Movie Brats [cf. **Chapter Three**]. Considering its sustained ubiquity in non-academic regions, the auteur’s critical return was practically guaranteed. In 1993 Dudley Andrew suggested that after ‘a dozen years of clandestine whispering we are permitted to mention, even to discuss, the auteur again’, and, in a sense, announced the renaissance of critical auteurism spearheaded by critics like Timothy Corrigan and Justin Wyatt who consider the auteur chiefly in terms of market capital—a resurgence interestingly coincident with the disaffection towards and downturn of Grand Theory.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, whilst Corrigan et al.’s commercial auteurism has opened up a vast intellectual terrain for the auteur’s extra-textual promotional agency, the impact of the auteur’s commodification on the constitution and readability of the film text itself, particularly in 2010s Hollywood, has not enjoyed the

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Hall, ‘Encoding/Decoding’, pp. 170-1.

<sup>31</sup> Dudley Andrew, ‘The Unauthorized Auteur Today’, in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 77-85 (p. 77).

same critical attention. This is something we will redress in the latter pages of this thesis but before we can conduct that analysis we need to stabilise our conception of film authorship, which in the wake of poststructuralism necessitates an appeal to film spectatorship. If prior forms of 'classical' auteurism are unsuitable for progress, what is necessary is a kind of exhumation and advancement of the project intimated (perhaps accidentally) by *'Young Mr Lincoln'* — that being the relocation of the author within the narrative equation from the source of communication to a hypothetical spectator-generated entity which offers a potential (but by no means universal) device for textual decryption. Such a strategy will ineluctably focus on cinematic narration and, most significantly, the spectator's agency in assembling that narration into a coherent story that may be inflected with auxiliary meanings via its occupancy of (activated) authorial signals.

However, unlike *'Young Mr. Lincoln'* — and, for that matter, most Theoretical works — this methodology will not operate under the *a priori* assumption of symptomatic meaning (although it certainly does not preclude its possibility). In fact, I hesitate to tender the word 'Theory' in the first, even if the following pages do indeed address theoretical issues. As I instead offer what Bordwell would call "'middle-level" research' organised around 'questions that have both empirical and theoretical import', it may be better to use the term *heuristic*.<sup>32</sup> Because such research is 'problem — rather than doctrine — driven' (unlike Grand Theory), Bordwell accepts that 'scholars can combine traditionally distinct spheres of inquiry' and 'cut across traditional boundaries among film aesthetics, institutions, audience response.'<sup>33</sup> Thus, in constructing my pragmatic heuristic I will be deliberately eclectic in drawing upon aspects of formalism, post/structuralism, semiotics, narratology, and various forms of reader-response criticism (author-surrogates, cognitive phenomenology, affective stylistics, etc.) without prescribing to any one school wholesale. I am not concerned with advancing a Theoretical paradigm for film, with exploiting authorship as proof for such-and-such Theory; I merely seek to use theoretical ideas to aid in answering the question *how best do we conceive of*

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<sup>32</sup> Bordwell, 'Contemporary Film Studies', p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

*authorship in a model of film spectatorship*. This enquiry can be compartmentalised into three sub-queries—*who is the author, where do we find the author, and how do we understand the author*—which I will address in turn.

## 2.ii – Tending Intention

We begin with Eric Donald Hirsch, whose intentionalist position most closely approximates the ‘standard’ auteurist perspective with which we are most familiar from 1.i and 1.ii—that being the conception of a stable text that contains a singular authored meaning, the pearl in the proverbial oyster the critic is tasked with extracting. Hirsch, writing in the same year as Barthes’ ‘*mort de l’auteur*’, resists the pull toward reader-centric Theories of meaning construction. He believes this to be an exegetical movement impelled by ‘historical not logical reasons, since no logical necessity compels a critic to banish an author in order to analyze his text.’<sup>34</sup> The theory of semantic autonomy, in which words are uncoupled from their auctorial source and are seen to speak for themselves with meanings emanating instead from the structures of language, is dangerous according to Hirsch because the critic’s (potentially spurious) interpretation essentially displaces the author’s intended meaning and it also ignores ‘the fact that meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words.’<sup>35</sup> Like the anti-intentionalists he was railing against, Hirsch recognises the polysemy of arbitrary linguistic signification systems and the resultant freedom that affords readers in interpretation but uses this as ammunition for his intentionalist stance. Since ‘any word sequence can, under the conventions of language, legitimately represent more than one complex of meaning’, for there to be a *valid* representation of a text’s meaning, one must defer to the author’s original design or else whatever ‘meaning’ is produced, however inventive or elucidating, will be *invalid*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eric Donald Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



For Hirsch texts are indeed univocal, crystallised in a permanent form, their signs engraved with a specific and unique meaning by their author at the moment of writing. Readers, critics, and even the authors themselves may interpret textual data differently from what the author originally intended when they set the words down, but this is not analogous to meaning. Hirsch elaborates:

*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or situation, or indeed anything imaginable. Authors, who like everyone else change their attitudes, feelings, opinions, and value criteria in the course of time, will obviously in the course of time tend to view their own work in different contexts. Clearly what changes for them is not the meaning of the work, but rather their relationship to that meaning. Significance always implies a relationship, and one constant, unchanging pole of that relationship is what the text means.<sup>37</sup>

The separation of *significance* (idiosyncratic interpretation potentially influenced by external factors) from *meaning* (the textual signifier's inherent and only signified) is notable because it allows Hirsch to reassert the primacy of the author without denying the existence of the plurality of so-called meanings found in anti-intentional formalist and structuralist criticism. However, the resultant implication is that there exists an official, objective account of a text against which all others are rendered subjective and therefore false.

This is problematic, not least because it is founded upon the paradoxical hypothesis that, to quote Burhanettin Tatar, 'meaning is at the same time both a matter of consciousness and an autonomous entity.'<sup>38</sup> Basically, Hirsch's objectivity is predicated upon the solidity of meaning ascertained through an investigation into the authorial consciousness at the time of writing (what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls the *mens auctoris*).<sup>39</sup> Tatar challenges Hirsch's objective standard on the reader's inability to vacate their own historically-situated consciousness in order to adopt another's mentality:

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Burhanettin Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G. Gadamer vs E.D. Hirsch* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Wiensheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edn. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xxviii.

If we deny the possibility of reconstructing the historical intention, since we cannot transcend our own horizon, the meaning of the historical text will be relative to our horizon, and consequently we cannot have an objectively grounded meaning.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Tatar claims, Hirsch ‘falls into subjectivity while trying to overcome it’ by attempting to ‘reach at the *objective* meaning in the reconstruction of the *subjective act* (perspective of the author).’<sup>41</sup> If, then, the discovery and acceptance of an authorial intention—if such an intention can actually be recovered—is merely a subjective act of creation by the reader operating under a certain interpretive strategy [cf. 2.iv], why should this supposed intention, and the meaning it generates, be automatically considered hegemonic over another reading that employs a non-intentionalist methodology? Hirsch does not justify to any satisfying degree why this should be so, why one fundamentally subjective interpretation should be superior to another, other than the flimsy justification that the former purportedly resembles an (unattainable) authorial intention.

Gadamer, channelling Johann Martin Chladenius, suggests that ‘to understand an author perfectly is not the same thing as to understand speech or writing perfectly’ and, furthermore, that the ‘norm for understanding a book is not the author’s meaning’ since one’s inability to possess an omniscient comprehension and control of language (which would enable an absolute elimination of ambiguity) introduces a certain degree of unintentional ambivalence into their meanings *nolens volens*.<sup>42</sup> The artwork, Gadamer writes, ‘always fundamentally surpasses any subjective horizon of interpretation, whether that of the artist or the recipient.’<sup>43</sup> Ergo, ‘the *mens auctoris* is not admissible as a yardstick for the meaning of a work of art.’<sup>44</sup> Hirsch’s belief in textual objectivity belies a naïve—not to mention retrogressively Romantic—conception of the processes of literary communication wherein the text constitutes an unimpeachable vessel that preserves the author’s psyche in a vacuum until the reader unwraps the textual parcel and receives its meaning, unsullied, just as it was

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<sup>40</sup> Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author*, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 184.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

packaged by its sender. Here, the text is depicted as a unified whole, its indeterminacies elided, with the neutered reader playing no part in the actualisation of a meaning that is already composed *in toto* (a passivity that later critics would convincingly contest and dismantle [cf. 2.iii-iv]).

Michael Krausz further problematises Hirsch's conceptualisation of authorial/textual stability in which a single author is held to be responsible for a single work:

No *one* person or persona might be identified as the author of the pertinent work. Indeed, the author might *assume* various and perhaps competing personae. She or he may be literal at one sitting, ironic at another, and of yet further stances at succeeding sittings. [...] The very idea of *an* author seems to suggest a kind of fixity or stability of voice from which the work is supposed to have been issued.<sup>45</sup>

Due to the multitude of masks an author inevitably wears during the writing process, and the continual flux of potentially contradictory meanings that push themselves to the fore in successive sentences/paragraphs/scenes/etc., attempting to localise a specific moment of consciousness as constituting the author's 'identity', so to speak, and extrapolating from that an overriding intention is futile even if access to that consciousness was possible in the first. The author may 'be the same spatiotemporal identity' throughout, but at which point along the axis of creation are we to situate them and derive our intention?<sup>46</sup> The first draft, in which ideas are still gestating, not fully articulated or even accessible to their waking mind? The redraft, wherein old ideas are augmented or erased and the author responds to critiques by friends, peers, and editors (who each can potentially lay claim to authorship, dilating the dilemma)? When the work is released, and an indeterminate amount of time has separated the author from the 'meaning experience' of inscription?<sup>47</sup> At each of these given junctures the author will adopt a different perspective upon their work and, in essence, effect a different intention upon it. Hirsch himself admits that an author may alter his/her stance about the meaning of their work *after the fact*, implicating that this inconstancy of mind is only possible after an uncertain amount of time from the text's emergence and not during the creative process itself; it is as if

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Krausz, 'Intention and Interpretation: Hirsch and Margolis', in *Intention & Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 152-66 (p. 152).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 16.

both text and author simultaneously spring into existence from the head of Zeus fully-formed. This is, of course, absurd and crippling to the intentionalist hermeneutics Hirsch proposes. Problems are compounded when Hirsch—like many auteur-critics, in fact—commits the cardinal error of mistaking the voice of the text for that of the author, which abrogates any recognition of the narrator as a heterodiegetic fictional construct necessarily distinct from its flesh-and-blood progenitor [cf. 2.iii]. As a consequence of all this, identifying the author, before even broaching the subject of intention, is troublesome, even in supposedly singularly authored pieces like novels and poems. This problem proliferates exponentially when considering collaborative art-forms such as cinema.

Yet C. Paul Sellors in his recent examination of auteurism asserts that Hirschian intentionalism is not only possible in film criticism but integral to cinematic comprehension: ‘only by retaining a notion of authorial meaning’, Sellors writes, ‘can a theory of authorship explain authors’ ownership and accountability for their expressions.’<sup>48</sup> Because film is a sign system without the organising sub-structure of grammar within which linguistic expressions are circumscribed, cinematic sequences invite even more interpretive possibilities than do words and sentences. This, Sellors suggests, ‘eliminates a central public resource for the interpretation of film’ and necessitates an appeal to authorial intention, without which ‘we have limited means to choose between comparable interpretations, or recognise alternative purposes behind seemingly conventional representations.’<sup>49</sup> Again, the notion of a ‘correct’ interpretation rears its head: ‘Fidelity between intention and interpretation rests with a reader’s obligation to evaluate intention.’<sup>50</sup> As for how we obtain this data, Sellors suggests rigorous research into production histories that will, hypothetically, elucidate those within the production collective responsible for the contents of the cinematic utterance and who are ‘in control of the making of the work that conveys that utterance.’<sup>51</sup> This concept of *control* bears some similarities (and with them, corresponding weaknesses) to a model Graham Petrie offered as an

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<sup>48</sup> C. Paul Sellors, *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38; p. 62.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

alternative to Andrew Sarris' auteur theory, which he considered 'an attempt to by-pass the issue of who, ultimately, has control over a film.'<sup>52</sup>

Petrie proposes an empirical investigation into the particularities of film production in order to denaturalise the Romantic fallacy of the director-auteur:

By distilling something called "personal vision" from a film, and marketing this as the "essence" of its success, [...] [auteur-critics] hoped to evade all the sordid and tedious details of power conflict and financial interests that are an integral part of any major movie project: "Personal vision" made it unnecessary to pay much attention to such minor matters as: Who instigated the project, and for what motives? Who actually wrote the script, and how much of it survived? Who cast the film, and for what reasons? Who edited the final product, and under whose directives?<sup>53</sup>

Petrie's project (and by extension Sellors'), at least until this point, appears logical and substantial.

After all, one of auteurism's major defects was its prevailing ahistoric focus on singular genius—a facet heavily criticised by André Bazin in the 1950s before auteurism grew into its full form with Sarris *et al.* and one that none of the auteur-critics studied in **Chapter One** reined under control. Petrie assumes to blast open the film-critical sphere to include screenwriters, cinematographers, actors, editors, and producers and approaches somewhat of a Bazinian conception of the 'genius of the system' in his assessment of *Dark Victory* and *Now, Voyager* as 'products of a particular *genre* and a particular studio, and in theme, structure, moral tone, sets, costumes, lighting and camera style they meet the requirements laid down by these rather than expressing anything deeply felt on the part of the director.'<sup>54</sup> However, in declaring that they are Bette Davis' films instead of Edmund Golding or Irving Rapper's (*Dark Victory* and *Now, Voyager*'s respective directors) he ultimately transfers a Romantic conception of direction to a Romantic conception of acting, simply because it is believed Davis 'wielded much more power at Warner's at that time than most directors.'<sup>55</sup> This appears to be a similar sensibility to Manny Farber's 'The Subverters', but rather than discussing 'scene-stealing' performances that undermine Romantic fallacies of directorial dominance within the discursive frame

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<sup>52</sup> Graham Petrie, 'Alternatives to Auteurs', *Film Quarterly*, 26.3 (1983), 27-35 (p. 27).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

itself, Petrie's method focuses on backstage politics as evidenced when he alleges Greta Garbo possessed more influence than Ernst Lubitsch in the choice of *Ninotchka's* crew.<sup>56</sup> Such knowledge 'can only help to enrich our appreciation of the films', Petrie claims, but at which point the enquiry tips into gossip and trivia is questionable, as is the utility of the data obtained.<sup>57</sup> How does a recognition of Garbo's corporate agency aid an analysis of *Ninotchka* superior to the conventionalist or even the auteurist? Petrie remains silent on the specifics.

Furthermore, Petrie erects his own implicitly evaluative pantheon in opposition to Sarris, only here directors are not ranked in accordance with their stylistic personalities but the 'degree of creative freedom they can *reasonably be assumed* to have enjoyed during the most important periods of their careers' [my emphasis], which is an even more brittle concept, one that is nigh impossible to define let alone assert confidently.<sup>58</sup> My emphases in the previous quotation are significant because it is impossible to know, even with the most detailed of production documents, exactly who is responsible for what on a film shoot. Say, for example, a famous director is traditionally credited for a shot sequence which research reveals was actually conceived by the cinematographer, as Petrie maintains is the case with the railway station scene in Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons*.<sup>59</sup> From whom has that information been obtained? If from the cinematographer, the data is immediately cast into doubt: perhaps he and the famous director had a falling out and this is his attempt to ruin the director's reputation, or maybe the cinematographer simply has an exaggerated sense of his own self-worth; perhaps he misconstrues the extent of his influence upon the scene in the process of mutual collaboration; or perhaps he simply misremembers, as we are wont to do. If from a third-party on the set—say, a key grip or focus puller—the data is similarly questionable: perhaps the director and the cinematographer collaborated on the shot during pre-production away from their view (a frequent process for expensive and complicated shots); perhaps the third-party misremembers or does not

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<sup>56</sup> Manny Farber, 'The Subverters', in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1998), 184-7 (p. 187).

<sup>57</sup> Petrie, 'Alternatives to Auteurs', p. 30.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

understand the functionality of a film set. If, finally, the knowledge is obtained from someone else outside the production environment, its use is severely limited for they will be either regurgitating second-hand rumours or consecrating their own inference as fact. Put simply, we are still dealing with subjective interpretations. I say this not to unilaterally denigrate production documents, merely to highlight the fundamental unreliability lingering underneath their façade of objective fact. There is no such thing as an objective history. Even with the most auspicious historian, their motives must be questioned as must their selections and omissions. And, following Crosman, if in order to understand a text one must defer to a history of its making, surely that secondary historical text is open to the same scrutiny and its own production must be investigated, and so on *ad infinitum*.<sup>60</sup>

Yet when Petrie states that Charlie Chaplin is 'the only figure in the history of cinema to have been able to make *all* of his feature-length works exactly as he wanted to make them and to release them without interference or alteration to the finished product', he tenders no evidence and thus submits to a repackaged Romantic idolatry. By putting more stock in dubious reports of supposed creative freedom than the immediately and freely available evidence on the screen (which is comprehensible without any recourse to the peculiarities of who happened to have control of the camera or editing desk at any given time), Petrie's ranking constitutes an even more perverse personality cult than Sarris' pantheon.<sup>61</sup> To cite John Hess, Petrie's 'xerox, compendia approach to the cinema is not only boring and a waste of time, but it distracts our attention from the aesthetic, economic, political, psychological, and sociological function and meaning of specific films in relation to the society and class which produced them.'<sup>62</sup> This is not to deny production research's potential boons, for there are many if, returning to Hess, 'it would concentrate on the relationship between money and art' — i.e., the influence of economic superstructures, such as the Hollywood system, on the articulation of cinematic meaning.<sup>63</sup> But conducting this research solely as a means to accredit Person-

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<sup>60</sup> Crosman, 'Do Readers Make Meaning?', p. 161.

<sup>61</sup> Petrie, 'Alternatives to Auteurs', p. 32.

<sup>62</sup> John Hess, 'Auteurism and After: A Reply to Graham Petrie', *Film Quarterly*, 27.2 (1973-1974), 29-37 (p. 29).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

A or Person-B for the creation of Object-X has little *analytical* value: Object-X has a practical existence either way. Now, if we *read* Object-X as being a product of Person-B rather than Person-A and this reading leads to new insight into the status of Object-X, then the approach is valuable. Yet this reading is by no means dependent upon research into production histories. It is a creative act on the reader's part, a response to the implied characteristics of Person-A and Person-B principally derived from the reader's engagement with textual material and not unreliable information about their true-life personalities or degree of creative agency.

An *implied author*, as established by Wayne Booth, is an image of the author created by the reader during their reading of a text. Neither a facsimile of the empirical author nor an analogy to the textual narrator ("Narrator" is usually taken to mean the "I" of a work, but the "I" is seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist'), the implied author operates as a junction between them, a metaphysical entity who 'has chosen, consciously or unconsciously (so any given reader will infer), every detail, every quality, that is found in the work or implied by its silences.'<sup>64</sup> Booth explains:

Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all of the characters. It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which is expressed by the total form.<sup>65</sup>

Put otherwise: an implied author is fantasy, no more real and no less fictive than the narrative's characters but an extradiegetic entity constructed by the diegetic space's formal and ideological topography. Moreover, as the implied author is constituted solely from textual material intentionalist enquiries of the likes of Hirsch, Sellors, and Petrie are rendered redundant. To respond to the implied author is to respond to the text itself, to what Gadamer would call its 'subject matter (*Sache*)'.<sup>66</sup>

Peter Wollen's *auteur-structure*—wherein John Ford the man is separated from 'John Ford', the structure that can be read out of his films [cf. 1.iii]—has definite roots in Booth's implied author

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<sup>64</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 73; p. 429.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>66</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 180.



model. However, for Booth each implied author is text-specific: the implied image of Ford we extract from *Stagecoach* is not the same as the one that flows from *My Darling Clementine* or *The Grapes of Wrath*. Although they may bear distinct similarities, each implied author is rooted firmly within, and has no existence outside, the text at hand. Wollen's 'John Ford', on the other hand, is a structure deduced from the entirety of Ford's canon and essentially a distillation of textual specificities into a prescriptive scheme of antinomic binary pairs. As such, the auteur-structure can only offer a rudimentary and reductive account wherein films are perceived only as articulations upon a given auteur's *ur*-theme. Therefore, whilst a cine-structural approach to Martin Scorsese will reveal a plethora of thematic congruities between *GoodFellas*, *Casino*, and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (as manifestations of a wealth/corruption binary), it will struggle to account for anomalous films such as *Hugo*, *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, or his various music documentaries without severe distortions. Employing a Boothian conception of a composite career-author 'who persists from work to work' would enable us to sidestep such a pitfall while retaining the empiricist discoveries of cine-structuralism.<sup>67</sup> For example, we could compose an aggregate of *GoodFellas*, *Casino*, and *The Wolf of Wall Street*'s implied authors in order to assess the thematic variations exhibited within these texts without presuming to explain, say, *The King of Comedy* and *Taxi Driver* which would necessitate a different kind of composite implied author, one that would perhaps focus on loneliness, insanity, and the media in a postmodern culture. Moreover, if we adopt Francois Jost's definition of the author as an abstract entity to whom the spectator simply (and to some degree arbitrarily) assigns responsibility for the 'artistic communication', we could potentially relocate *Taxi Driver* within a composite implied authorial matrix derived from the films of its writer, Paul Schrader (linking to *Light Sleeper* and *American Gigolo* as meditations on solitude and redemption), or even Robert De Niro [cf. 4.iii]—all the while never claiming to exhaust *Taxi Driver* or reduce it to a singularity of meaning, as would an intentionalist approach.<sup>68</sup> If we consider the career-author not as a synonym for the auteur-structure

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<sup>67</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 431.

<sup>68</sup> Francois Jost, 'The Polyphonic Film and the Spectator', in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 181-91 (p. 186).

but rather a combination of more than one implied author, a wealth of interpretive potentialities are made available given that the obligation toward panopticism is disaffirmed and a veritable spider's web of congruencies and contrasts can be drawn within a director's (or writer's, or actor's) catalogue, between all, many, or just a few of their films. Supporting this, Seymour Chatman professes that 'much of *auteurisme* can be better explained as cinematic career-authorship.'<sup>69</sup> Likewise, Susan S. Lanser suggests that 'if we read textual surfaces instead of attempting to resolve them into a noncontradictory deep structure, we might figure the implied author not as a body but as the clothes the body wears—clothes that can be altered, discarded'.<sup>70</sup>

Booth's model not only accounts for textual meaning without empirical intention (but an inferred intention drawn from the text itself), it opens up to a consideration of the reader. 'It is not, after all, an image of himself that the author creates', Booth says, 'Every stroke implying his second self will help to mold the reader into the kind of person suited to appreciate such a character and the book he is writing.'<sup>71</sup> The *implied reader* (which Walker Gibson also calls the 'mock reader') is a corollary to the implied author and no more relative to the real reader as the image of the artist is to the artist him/herself.<sup>72</sup> The implied reader is essentially an idealised reader, one whose attitudes and values are perfectly aligned with that of the implied author considering 'the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement.'<sup>73</sup> Consequently, Booth and Gibson's consideration of a reader's response is somewhat limited to the acceptance or rejection of the text, or rather their willingness to adopt the role of the implied reader. Gibson writes that a bad book is 'a book in whose mock reader we refuse to become, a mask we refuse to put on, a role we will not play.'<sup>74</sup> Similarly, Booth claims that despite 'my real beliefs and practices, I must

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<sup>69</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 130.

<sup>70</sup> Susan S. Lanser, '(Im)plying the Author', *NARRATIVE*, 9.2 (2001), 153-9 (p. 158).

<sup>71</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 89.

<sup>72</sup> Walker Gibson, 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 1-6 (p. 2).

<sup>73</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> Gibson, 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers', p. 1.

subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full.<sup>75</sup> He continues: 'If I say to myself, as I read *Ulysses*, "Bloom is a bad man because he masturbates in public," [...] I am obviously barred from any complete experience of *Ulysses*.'<sup>76</sup> Ergo, Booth and Gibson's critical perspectives are grounded in (essentially evaluative) ethical issues. As Susan R. Suleiman explains, Booth 'seeks not only to formulate the set of verbal meanings embedded in the text, but above all to discover the values and beliefs that make those meanings possible—or that those meanings imply.'<sup>77</sup> Therefore, if the values and beliefs of the implied reader (implicated by the moral constitution of the implied author, itself derived from the formal and thematic makeup of narrative action) do not accord with those of a real reader, that real reader will be unable to enter into a fully communicative, coactive relationship with the text. This leads inevitably to aberrant readings, or readings that work against the inscribed position of the implied reader, with Booth suggesting that to 'pass judgment where the author intends neutrality is to misread.'<sup>78</sup>

So Booth's scheme does not shoot as far away from Hirsch as it first seems: the notion of a correct reading is still in place, as is the concept of a pre-existent autonomous text upon which the dependent reader has little agency. Nevertheless, Booth represents a significant fracture from the intentional fallacy upheld by Hirsch and a shift toward the textual pragmatism that would form the bedrock for developments by later theorists. For example, Chatman agrees with Booth that the implied author 'establishes the norms of the narrative' but notes that 'Booth's insistence that these are moral norms seems unnecessary.'<sup>79</sup> Chatman instead conceives of the implied author's norms as 'general cultural codes' that we react to on an 'aesthetic, not ethical' basis; Chatman's implied author is not an ideological simulacrum of the real author but a 'structural principle' immanent to the activity of reading, the hypothetical source extrapolated from the text's coherency (which is particularly

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<sup>75</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 138.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>77</sup> Susan R. Suleiman, 'Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism', in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-45 (p. 8).

<sup>78</sup> Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 144.

<sup>79</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 149.

significant with relation to collaborative film production where many agents work cooperatively toward a singular goal, that being the creation of narrative).<sup>80</sup> This customisation of the implied author will be revisited in section 2.iv with regards to cinematic narration.

But first we return to Sellors, whose reinstatement of Hirschian intentionalism is spurred, in no small part, by misgivings toward the ‘serious tautology’ of author surrogate theories such as those found in Booth, Wollen, and Chatman.<sup>81</sup> His argument is simple: author surrogate arguments ‘resolve the difficulties posed by empirical authors by not discussing them.’<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, they fail to take seriously

that films are intentionally produced human artefacts. We look for authors because there are authors, and we work to understand why they construct the works they do. Any theory of authorship that does not establish this as a central premise dodges the central question of authorship. The consequence of author surrogate theories is they construct a barrier between authorship and meaning. [...] The drive to find an author of a work is not simply to attach a name or identify a genius, but to search out an interlocutor to validate a film as meaningful, and not simply a collection of markings on celluloid.<sup>83</sup>

His argument is salient. Films are, indeed, human artefacts, purposively created. But that does not justify intentionalism. The barrier between authorship and meaning is not created by any author surrogate theory. We have no more unmediated access to the consciousness and intentions of an author than we do our goldfish. This is not solipsism, it is fact. Sellors disparages the author surrogate because it is ‘equivalent to a spectator’s interpretation’ and ‘imposed as the source of the meaning that the spectator has already understood.’<sup>84</sup> But is not Sellors’ concept of the ‘we-intention’ — wherein a symphony orchestra is not motivated by an accumulation of individual intentions but a collective intention that eliminates the necessity of investigating the individual (and thus contrary to his entire enterprise) — not simply another instance of subjective ‘spectator interpretation’?<sup>85</sup> The ‘we-intention’ is inferred from the unity of collective expression, not any empirical research, and we need only

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Sellors, *Film Authorship*, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

switch the terms 'we-intention' for 'implied author' to suddenly find ourselves back in Chatman's territory. And say we were able to transcend the laws of reality and somehow obtain a truly objective statement of intent, would not the mere perception of this transform it into a subjective interpretation itself? Even if it did not, the acquisition of such an intention does not alter the ontological status of the text and we are in no way obligated to acquiesce to it—an author's interpretation is simply yet another interpretation, no more and no less, and I see no cogent reason why an author's opinion should automatically invalidate any other.

It is apparent that Sellors' intentionalism is a reaction against the monolithic Romanticism of popular auteurism that asseverates the film director as sole artist and generator of filmic meaning and is an attempt to dismantle the auteur myth. This is an admirable goal and one that should be retained. But intentionalism is not the way to achieve it. This is not to recommend the wholesale abandonment of industrial research—in fact, this will become important as we consider the auteur's commercial mobility—but rather that we stop grasping at something we can never get. Empirical attribution of intellectual properties is important for legal issues of literal authorship and more straight-forward film history, but in a criticism which deals with *textual effects* compulsorily removed from those who created them such matters are indeed negligible. Of course, empirical research can bolster such a study and provide vital contextual information, but only if its perspective is not magnetically focused on the narrow and, it bears repeating, futile question *who is responsible for this?* A more fruitful question would be *how does this work?*

### 2.iii – Spectating Narration

Although implied authorship possesses many benefits over intentionalism it is nonetheless a concept fraught with problems. Susan S. Lanser is particularly wary (and weary) of the implied author, saying that as 'neither an identifiable textual voice nor a demonstrable material being', but rather a '*reading effect* [...] something that *happens* rather than something that is', implied authors should not be

confused with real authors, or worse: taken as a replacement for real authors.<sup>86</sup> We must be vigilant in our cognisance of the implied author as an interpretive construct predicated upon a ‘hypothetical intentionalism’ that facilitates a reader/spectator’s ‘reconstruction, rather than simply a construction, of the text as a whole.’<sup>87</sup> Lanser, it seems, is suspicious that the ease of typographically transforming a ‘real’ author into an implied author elides the vast procedural difference between stances that presuppose the dominion of the former and those that operate under the assumption of the latter. She writes:

We know almost nothing systematic about the project of (re)constructing an (implied) author through the reading of a text. If the concept of implied authorship is to have a place in a narrative poetics, we will need to know how readers infer an “author” from a work of fiction.<sup>88</sup>

So Lanser is advocating a shift in attention from *which (implied) author made this text* to *how this text makes its (implied) author* and wants critics to be more perspicacious in acknowledging and articulating the mechanisms by which implied authorship is actually constructed during the process of narration.

This, of course, demands a primary understanding of *how the ‘text’ is made* and its corollary concern *who makes the text*. Conventional literary wisdom would suggest that it is the narrator that ‘speaks’ the text (and Booth is quite clear in his separation of narrators from implied authors [cf. 2.iii]). Gerald Prince, for example, states that there ‘is at least one narrator in any narrative and this narrator may or may not be explicitly designated by an “I”.’<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Chatman:

The narrator’s presence derives from the audience’s sense of some demonstrable communication. If it feels it is being told something, it presumes a teller. The alternative is a “direct witnessing” of the action. Of course, even in the scenic arts like drama and the ballet, pure mimesis is an illusion.<sup>90</sup>

But David Bordwell questions the very existence of narrators (and implied authors) in cinema and posits the viewer — ‘a hypothetical entity executing the operations relevant to constructing a story out

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<sup>86</sup> Susan S. Lanser, ‘The Implied Author: An Agnostic Manifesto’, *Style*, 45.1 (2011), 153-60 (pp. 153-4).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155; p. 154.

<sup>88</sup> Lanser, ‘An Agnostic Manifesto’, p. 157.

<sup>89</sup> Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative* (Berlin, New York, and Amsterdam: Mouton, 1982), p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Chatman, *Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, p. 147.

of the film's representation' — as the agent wholly responsible for the coherent film narrative.<sup>91</sup> Without the cognitive activities of the spectator the film remains inert, its story untold. This appears to be built upon Barthes' distinction between a *work* and a *text*, wherein 'the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field [...] *experienced only in an activity of production.*'<sup>92</sup> The filmic *work*, then, would be the reel of celluloid in the can delivered to the theatre (though it now may be more appropriate to speak of the 0s and 1s on the hard-drive). In themselves works have no fictional quality and the mere projection of the images printed on the strip or stored on the disc is not enough to free the filmic work from its inertia; it is only when a spectator *perceives* and *processes* those images that textual construction can occur. This filmic text lives only in the psyche of the spectator and Bordwell states that narrative sense depends upon the spectator's questioning of 'what happens and where, when, and why it happens' — which necessitate the application of cognitive programmes such as the prototype and template schemata that enable the identification of 'individual agents, actions, goals, and locales' and 'can add information when it is absent and test for proper classification of data', respectively.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, according to Bordwell, story (*fabula*) is 'a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences. It is the developing result of picking up narrative cues, applying schemata, framing and testing hypotheses.'<sup>94</sup> The spectator is provided such cues by the 'blow-by-blow' plot (*syuzhet*) and the film's style, where 'syuzhet embodies the film as a "dramaturgical" process; style embodies it as a "technical" one.'<sup>95</sup>

Ostensibly, Bordwell's cognitive model aligns with Wolfgang Iser's phenomenology of reading that deems such psychic engagement as compulsory because the work of art 'differs from real and ideal objects through its lack of determinacy.'<sup>96</sup> A work only becomes a text when its immanent

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<sup>91</sup> David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 30.

<sup>92</sup> Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 1470-5 (p. 1471).

<sup>93</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 34.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>96</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henly: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 180.

indeterminacies—i.e., a scene's location within the diegetic space as well as its logical and symbolic relation to the preceding procession of sequences—are filled in and essentially annulled by the spectator. Iser explains:

What *is* said only appears to take on significance as a reference to what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning. But as the unsaid comes to life in the reader's imagination, so the said "expands" to take on greater significance than might have been supposed: even trivial scenes can seem surprisingly profound.<sup>97</sup>

Iser and Bordwell are in general agreement in acknowledging the reader/spectator's contribution to the formation of the text, by filling in the work's 'blanks' (and giving voice to its unsaid dialogue and form to its undisclosed action), but Iser suggests that this agency is not absolute or limitless.<sup>98</sup> He writes that the text

cannot be reduced to the reality of the [work] or the subjectivity of the reader, [...] its actualization is clearly the result of an interaction between the two, and so exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself.<sup>99</sup>

The reader, then, is not a free agent and their response is to some degree preformed and mediated by the intersubjective determinacies of the work; textual concretisation, in this sense, is accomplished via the reader's engagement with the narrative and their varying modes of acceptance, inference, and supplementation of the information supplied to them. Iser's conception of textual communication is thus induced 'by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit', wherein implicit data 'spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed.'<sup>100</sup> Simply, the reader's freedom is delimited by boundaries inherent in the narration, which contains a narrator as one of the work's 'main perspectives' (along with its plot and characters) that provide the determinacy that positions the reader and corresponding indeterminacy that activates their mental faculties.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>99</sup> Wolfgang Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 106-19 (p. 106).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>101</sup> Iser, 'Interaction between Text and Reader', p. 113.



Bordwell's cognitivist model of schematic-based data processing, on the other hand, claims that film 'does not "position" anybody.'<sup>102</sup> This is somewhat problematic and Warren Buckland, for instance, is critical of Bordwell's suggestion 'that the spectator is a context-free "entity" and that film viewing is a purely rationalist activity.'<sup>103</sup> Contrary to Iser's brand of phenomenology that attempts an intersubjective synthesis between authorial inscription and reader-response, Bordwell's constructivist model conceives of film narration purely as a spectator-situated perceptual arrangement of data with narratives built fundamentally upon a principle of causality. Ergo, Bordwell does not speak of *narrators* but of *narration* as an intellectual activity. Bordwell's rejection of a figurative cinematic narrator is predicated chiefly upon the nonlinguistic qualities of cinematic narration (as opposed to the purely lexical narration of literature, wherein the written representation of verbal utterances alludes to the presence of some kind of armchair-by-the-fireplace orator). Because 'film lacks equivalents for the most basic aspects of verbal activity'—i.e., deictic markers like personal pronouns (I/you) and adverbs of space (here/there) and time (now/then), which offer contextual information about the utterance as well as the enunciator and addressee—Bordwell advocates the abandonment of enunciative narrative concepts being as they are so embroiled in linguistic properties that do not have analogues in film style.<sup>104</sup> Because a film cell, unlike a sentence, cannot say *I* or *you*, Bordwell feels justified in denying the personalised narrative mediator, saying that to 'give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in anthropomorphic fiction.'<sup>105</sup> Consequently, he writes, a film narrative 'presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender of a message' and cannot be considered within the semiotic communication model (sender → message → recipient) advocated by, say, Francesco Casetti.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 29.

<sup>103</sup> Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

Casetti believes that film does in fact possess linguistic properties: the objective shot *says* 'I look at something and I make you look at something.'<sup>107</sup> But Christian Metz is unconvinced, suggesting that interactive enunciative discourse allows for a reversal of the I/you binary and a deictic symmetry between the positions of enunciator/addressee; film, he says, is a 'monodirectional' discourse and 'does not produce a YOU answering the I; neither does the [film] produce a HE on the screen.'<sup>108</sup> Buckland reinforces Metz's rejection of linguistic deixis in cinema but encourages a widening of deixis into 'a broad cognitive concept rather than a narrow linguistic one (which equates deixis with pronouns).'<sup>109</sup> Deixis, then, could be considered *the perceptual orientation of spatio-temporal relations* rather than simply exposing the extra-linguistic context of an utterance and Buckland offers the following critique of Metz in order to establish the 'reflexive (and therefore meta-discursive and enunciative) nature of filmic discourse':<sup>110</sup>

He gave the example of an image of a revolver, which, Metz tells us, does not signify "revolver" but "Here is a revolver." If the image simply signifies "revolver" it would be purely denotational (i.e. functioning as object language). But by signifying "Here is a revolver" the image also functions reflexively as metalanguage, since it acknowledges its own presentation of the revolver to a spectator.<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, by perpetually embodying the "'Here is" [Voici]' deictic, all images, whether resolved by camera, brush, or computer, belie the influence of a kind of mediatory agent that not only presents, but *comments*.<sup>112</sup> Prince writes that

there is a class of deictic terms ("now", "**here**", "yesterday", "tomorrow", and so on) which relate to the situation of their utterance and, more particularly, to the spatio-temporal situation of the utterer. Should one of them appear in a narrative and should it not be part of a character's utterance, it must be related to a narrator.<sup>113</sup>

[my emphasis]

<sup>107</sup> Francesco Casetti, 'Face to Face', trans. Warren Buckland and Guy Austin, in *The Film Spectator: From sign to mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 118-39 (p. 130).

<sup>108</sup> Christian Metz, 'The Impersonal Enunciation, or the Site of Film', trans. Beatrice-Durand-Sendrail and Kristen Brookes, in *The Film Spectator: From sign to mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 140-63 (p. 144; p. 150).

<sup>109</sup> Buckland, *Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, p. 52.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

<sup>112</sup> Metz, 'Impersonal Enunciation', p. 147.

<sup>113</sup> Prince, *Narratology*, p. 9.

This supports the Fictional Showing Hypothesis forwarded by George M. Wilson which states that in ‘classical narrative movies, there is implicitly represented an internal fictional activity of audio-visual narration.’<sup>114</sup> This is not to say that films unitarily possess anthropomorphised narrators but to suggest the existence of a ‘minimal narrating agency’ responsible for the fictional account, which Wilson says is endemic to ‘what we imagine and are supposed to imagine in our normal games of make believe with works of literary fiction.’<sup>115</sup> As such, instead of using linguistically-entangled terminology like *deixis* or anthropomorphising nomenclature like *perspective* or *point-of-view*, I will adopt Chatman’s use of ‘*slant*’ to designate the narration’s ‘attitude toward the events or characters.’<sup>116</sup>

In order to demonstrate narratorial ‘slant’, let us consider the opening scene from *The Master*. The first time we see Freddie Quell is in a close-up with the camera’s shallow depth-of-field reducing his Navy squad-mates to a nondescript blur [fig. 2.1]. Next, we see Freddie on the beach concocting an alcoholic cocktail in a coconut: here, the lens’ extreme wide-angle distorts the shot into an almost fish-eye effect, accentuating the physical distance between Freddie in the foreground and the extras on the sea-front [fig. 2.2]. This cuts to a wide shot of Freddie’s peers playfully wrestling with each other [fig. 2.3], which, in turn, cuts back to Freddie on his own, his makeshift shelter forming a visual boundary between him and everyone else [fig. 2.4]. Fig. 2.5 shows Freddie instructing someone on how to violently eradicate pubic lice with an icepick but we never see a reverse-angle that shows whom he is addressing. In fig. 2.6, Freddie observes a group of men building a naked woman out of sand (note the arrangement of the men and Freddie’s awkward, wizened posture outside the huddle). Freddie then pushes through the throng and simulates sex with the sand-woman. Although the men initially find this amusing, Freddie’s persistence with the effigy causes notable discomfort within the crowd [fig. 2.7]. The scene ends with a telephoto shot of Freddie masturbating into the ocean while people pass in

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<sup>114</sup> George M. Wilson, ‘Elusive Narrators in Fiction and Film’, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 135.1 (August, 2007), 73-88 (p. 75).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>116</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Reading Narrative Fiction* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), p. 134.

front of the camera, their magnified statures acting as depth cues that diminish Freddie's presence within the frame [fig. 2.8].

If, following Stanley Fish, we consider '*meaning as an event*, something that is happening between the words and in the reader's mind, something not visible to the naked eye, but which can be made visible (or at least palpable) by the regular introduction of a "searching" question (what does this do?)', we can see that the effect of this scene is an incremental isolation of Freddie from his peers, a quarantine that is principally articulated as spatial (here, the lack of an intercut to Freddie's addressee in fig. 2.5 takes upon a greater significance).<sup>117</sup> This physical segregation in turn represents a psychological and emotional dissociation. Freddie's military counterparts are all shown to be violent and sexual through their communal play-fighting and building of the naked sand-woman, but this behaviour is normalised by the group dynamic. On the other hand, Freddie's alcoholism, sadism, and sexual perversion (key components of his character that will later be exploited by cult leader Lancaster Dodd) are shown to be an order of magnitude more perturbing through the narration's slant, and here I point specifically to fig. 2.8 where the masturbating Freddie straddles the border between land and sea, a truly liminal and isolated figure: the shot essentially says '*here is Freddie, set apart (physically, emotionally, mentally) from everyone else*'.

Whist I do not submit to Berys Gaut's '*symmetry thesis*' that 'holds that narration in fiction and film is identical in respect of the structural features of narration' — and, in that sense, agree with Bordwell — this example clearly shows that film has the potential to offer a mediated account of a shot sequence which can be said to be *narrated*, with our understanding of the scene's extra-literal significance resulting from our interrogation of the scene's narratorial mediacy.<sup>118</sup> Following Chatman, such a reading of a narrated scene 'reconstructs its intent and principle of invention — *reconstructs*, not *constructs* [*à la* Bordwell], because the text's construction preexists any individual act of reading.'<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Stanley Fish, 'Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics', in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 21-67 (p. 28).

<sup>118</sup> Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 198.

<sup>119</sup> Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, p. 74.

What we reconstruct are the traces of intervention stamped onto the image by the filmmakers, which, when read, constitute an interposing presence standing between us and the diegetic realm. After all, the monocular porthole into the diegesis offered by the film shot is only achieved through the processes of exclusion that (often implicitly) accompany the activity of selection. We are therefore not only seeing a single image, we are also *not* seeing an infinity (minus one) of other images: the image is consequently motivated and semantically encumbered. Bordwell himself recognises the existence of ‘an invisible intermediary that structures what we see’ but strangely limits this conception to art-cinema that features ‘highly self-conscious [...] Deviations from classical norms [that] can be grasped as commentary upon the story action.’<sup>120</sup> And whilst it is feasible to classify *The Master* as an ‘art’ film, its commentative narration in the prior scene is rooted in the same spatial qualities of composition and blocking that are operative in the most classical of films which are unilaterally subject to the inherent mediatory slant of image construction [cf. *King Kong* in 5.i – fig. 5.9-18].

Bordwell states that when dealing with those films that express sufficient narrational mediacy (which we are postulating as *all* films), the ‘institutional “author” is available as a source of the formal operation of the film’—he even goes so far as to state that ‘the author becomes the real-world parallel to the narrational presence “who” communicates [...] and “who” expresses’, thereby succumbing to the selfsame linguistic anthropomorphism he is supposedly combating.<sup>121</sup> But *The Master*’s reflexive narration is in no way dependent upon a recognition of Paul Thomas Anderson. Gérard Genette proclaims that ‘the narrating situation of a fictional account is *never* reduced to its situation of writing’ and section 2.ii clearly outlined the epistemological quandaries with relating a cinematic text to a flesh-and-blood creator.<sup>122</sup> Neither can we, as Gregory Currie implores, accredit the implied author as the agent responsible for the extradiegetic narration.<sup>123</sup> The implied author exists on the same ontological layer as reality, so to speak, as the organising principle that, to cite Jerrold Levinson,

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<sup>120</sup> Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 211.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 214.

<sup>123</sup> Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 263.

'appears to have invented, arranged, and integrated the various narrative agents and aspects of narration involved in the film, as well as everything else required to constitute the film as a complete object of appreciation.'<sup>124</sup> Levinson further states 'the implied filmmaker can't be in the position of directly affording us—as with a silent gesture of "behold!"—the vision and audition of something that is only fictional with respect to himself.'<sup>125</sup> What is necessary, therefore, is a hypothetical entity along the lines of Chatman's cinematic 'presenter' who not only activates the fictionalisation of the image sequence, but acts as guide throughout it.<sup>126</sup> Such a mediating agent operates on the same ontological stratum as the fiction, to which it has, as Genette would say, a '*heterodiegetic*' relationship.<sup>127</sup>

This mediating agent—which Manfred Jahn calls the 'filmic composition device', or FCD—possesses, at once, no voice and the only voice.<sup>128</sup> The FCD operates not only through the characters' dialogue, but through the creases in their clothes and the shadows on their faces. Focal length, depth-of-field, non/diegetic audio, and all of the other components that make up the shot's composition and character also constitute the FCD. Furthermore, the FCD narrates through the arrangement of those images into a sequence. 'Because the FCD is the highest authority in the hierarchy,' Jahn writes, 'all filmic information ultimately flows from its mediation, choice, organization, and arrangement', which means that it can 'freely adopt, quote, and represent data from sources at its disposal.'<sup>129</sup> Without a tangible form, the FCD is able to transcend physical boundaries and adopt various perspectives. In short, the FCD, from which we may infer a cinematic narrator, is the result of the filmmakers (in the plural) organising and presenting pro-filmic entities (sets, actors, props, lenses, lights, etc.) in such a way as to make them *represent* narrative data. It is through our acknowledgment of the cinematic narrator that we see Freddie Quell instead of Joaquin Phoenix, a department store in 1950 instead of a set that was built, dressed, and filmed in 2011. The FCD is not a synecdoche of the writer, director,

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<sup>124</sup> Jerrold Levinson, 'Film Music and Narrative Agency', in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 248-82 (p. 253).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, p. 113.

<sup>127</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 245.

<sup>128</sup> Manfred Jahn, 'A Guide to Narratological Film Analysis', *English Department, University of Cologne* (2 August 2003) <<http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppf.htm>> [accessed 13 March 2017] F.4.1.2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, F.4.1.4.

cinematographer, editor, composer, and actors but an aggregate of their effects into, to quote Jakob Lothe, a 'heterogeneous mechanical and technical instrument, constituted by a large number of different components.'<sup>130</sup> The cinematic narrator is constructed in the spectator's mind when those effects are perceived and consolidated into the singularity of narration.

To summarise: the implied author/filmmaker and cinematic narrator are not inherent in film *per se*. They are illusory fictive constructs erected by the hypothetical spectator in order to enable the activity of fictive sense-making. The cinematic narrator is a textual node activated by the spectator upon coming into contact with a sequence of images that belie the mediation of a human agency. By supposing a narrating instance the spectator is able to unify all of the disparate elements of sound and vision offered by the film into a coherency of expression and furthermore conceive of the image as a fictional representation. The implied author in this instance is the supposed architect extrapolated from the aesthetic and thematic constitution of the narrator's mediation and need not be correlated with any flesh-and-blood artist; the implied author is hypothesised as the source of communication, with the narrator (itself constituted from a variety of audiovisual cues) being their communicative instrument. Although the onus of comprehensibility in this system lies with the individual spectator's ability in bridging the narration's inherent indeterminacies and their arsenal of interpretive schemes (which, for instance, allows them to understand that a dissolve between two scenes indicates a longer passage of time than a normal cut), the spectator does not *create* narration. The spectator is bound by the determinacies inscribed into the image which constitute a mediating presence that precedes the act of viewing. So the spectator *recreates* narrative via their inferential interactions with the FCD. Whilst 'narrator' is an admittedly imperfect term that comes bundled with linguistic and anthropomorphic connotations that may not be the most appropriate for a consideration of film style, I feel it is the most sensible, and least torturous, way to conceive of the means by which fiction films tell stories.

Moreover if we, like Michel Colin and unlike David Bordwell, accept a 'computational' model of mind

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<sup>130</sup> Jakob Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 30.

in which (quoting Ray Jackendoff) 'There is a *single* level of mental representation, *conceptual structure*, at which linguistic, sensory, and motor information are compatible', we can utilise rhetorical concepts (the narrator being one) in our consideration of film narrative without embarrassment.<sup>131</sup>

However, with the acknowledgement of the spectator's agency in narrative ontology must also come the recognition that spectators do not view films in vacuums. You and I may sit next to each other and imbibe the same audiovisual stimuli from a film but we will not experience the same 'text' as our competencies and associations will invariably differ. If, say, we are watching *The Master* (to return to the earlier example) and one of us is familiar with Anderson's filmography and the other is not, our texts will vary due to transtextual connections one of us may identify between Freddie and Dodd's relationship and Eli and Daniel's in *There Will Be Blood*, Stanley and Rick's in *Magnolia*, or Dirk and Jack's in *Boogie Nights*. Such additional meaning is not necessarily contained within *The Master* but emerges through our augmentation of the film's implied author with a unique personality. It is here on this transtextual plane that authorial specificities operate and now we turn to address directly the manner in which authorship can influence our understanding of a film narrative.

#### **2.iv – Communities, Codes, and Great Expectations**

Having established the spectator's centrality in narrative actualisation and the notion of 'text' as a synergetic confluence of source and recipient, it follows that our attention must now be directed towards the factors that influence spectatorial response beyond those internal narratorial constraints explored in 2.iii. By moving away from the objective paradigm, which David Bleich says assumes a universal perception of an object and the corresponding 'illusion that the object is real and that its meaning must reside in it', we acknowledge that textual meaning is as much a matter of what the spectator brings as what they find.<sup>132</sup> Yet if we are to recognise the audience's activities 'not as leading

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<sup>131</sup> Michel Colin, 'Film Semiology as a Cognitive Science', trans. Claudine Tourniarie, in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 87-110 (p. 104).

<sup>132</sup> David Bleich, 'Epistemological Assumptions in the Study of Response', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 134-63 (p. 135).



to meaning, but as *having* meaning', to quote Stanley Fish, we must do so with care.<sup>133</sup> The deeper we wade into the waters of response, the harder it is to return to the object of analysis which, lest we forget, is the filmic work. Yes, the 'unified' film-text may be an endophyte that resides within the spectator's psyche, but it must be stressed going forth that the compound text always demands two equally important elements—the spectator and the film to which s/he *reacts*. Prior to perception the film may indeed be inchoate but it nevertheless has an empirical existence, identical in output each time it is projected, irrespective of who views it. It is only the particular processing of the film's stimuli that changes between time and person. Such interpretive matters were touched upon earlier in **2.i** but the issue is revived here because promoting the spectator into a position of textual responsibility inevitably brings dangers of solipsism and ego-centrism that must be navigated carefully.

For instance, Norman Holland's psychoanalytic reading strategy posits that readers 'work out through the text [their] own characteristic patterns of desire' and that each reader 'shapes the materials the literary work offers him—including its author—to give him what he characteristically both wishes and fears, and that he also constructs his characteristic way of achieving what he wishes and defeating what he fears.'<sup>134</sup> For Holland, interpretation consists of the reader transforming the work into a form that mirrors their 'identity theme': the unchanging shape of the reader's mind that dictates not only how they act but how they perceive.<sup>135</sup> This is troublesome because if all texts essentially reduplicate the reader's subconscious as an allegorical masquerade, any themes brought forth are not constitutive of the work but the ego reflecting itself onto it. Like in a Lévi-Straussian reading of myth [cf. **1.iii**], all works are reduced to a singularity of abstracted 'meaning' which is deferred to a deep structure—only here it is assumed to originate from within the individual's psyche rather than being attributed to any universal symbolic network. The artwork is therefore perfunctory

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<sup>133</sup> Stanley Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 164-84 (p. 172).

<sup>134</sup> Norman M. Holland, 'Unity Identity Text Self', in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 118-33 (p. 124; p. 125).

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

with analysis becoming relativistic, interpretation mere idiosyncrasy. How, then, can any useful analytical generalisations about an artwork be produced? Holland's model may have some benefit if identity themes were in some way correlative to socioeconomics, race, or gender, but Holland states that it is common 'to find people similar in age, sex, nationality, class, and interpretive skill nevertheless differing wildly over particular interpretations.'<sup>136</sup> Identity, for Holland, is dictated by the psychic wiring of defence mechanisms through which repressed guilt and anxiety manifest into consciousness via fantasy enactment. The hypothetical pseudo-scientific apparatus psychoanalysis provides may allow for high-level conceptualising about mental processes, but as its findings can be neither verified nor disproven—only argued for and against on logical grounds, much as any other literary theory—and because Holland's method is so focused on specialised readings and subjective text-catharsis, we must look elsewhere for a model that satisfactorily accounts for the variance of any given work's potential concretisations.

Roger Odin's cinematic semio-pragmatics follow Holland in the sense that Odin decrees the work to be inert in the determination of its own reading. Indeed, he distinguishes '*directing space*' and '*reading space*' as two distinct spheres where meaning is produced: in the directing space, filmmakers produce meaning as it relates to the '*direction-film*' but this in no way corresponds to the '*reading-film*' constructed by the spectator.<sup>137</sup> But rather than rely on private identity themes to dictate the shape of reading, Odin suggests that meaning emanates from the strictures of external interpretive structures, which he calls 'institutions', and furthermore stresses that the spectator is not a real person but a 'constructed entity', a so-called 'actant' that operates as 'the *point of passage* of the determinations characterizing a given institution.'<sup>138</sup> Thus, the hypothetical spectator 'proposes a meaning, and puts it to test in the structure of the image' and 'if this proposition seems compatible with the constraints of the structure of the image, meaning is then produced.'<sup>139</sup> A film, therefore, is only made legible when

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>137</sup> Roger Odin, 'For a Semio-Pragmatics of Film', trans. Claudine Tourniaire, in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 213-26 (p. 218).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 215-6.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

an interpretive frame is fixed upon it and the film can only 'block a number of possible investments of meaning.'<sup>140</sup>

This bears a striking resemblance to Jonathan Culler's Chomskyian theory of generative 'literary competence' which holds that a work 'has structure and meaning because it is read in a particular way, because these potential properties, latent in the object itself, are actualized by the theory of discourse applied in the act of reading.'<sup>141</sup> Culler effectively demonstrates this when he reformats a newspaper extract detailing a car crash into something that looks like poetic verse. Culler explains that the spatial reorganisation of words 'brings into play a new set of expectations, a set of conventions determining how the sequence is to be read [...] clearly different from the way in which journalistic prose is to be interpreted.'<sup>142</sup> Readers are cued to apply prosodic devices such as enjambment, caesura, dramatic irony, and bathos that enhance the tragic and literary flavour of the piece, which prior to the presentational shift was considered dry, disconnected, mundane. The semantics of the 'poem' are identical to those of the prose, but the words' typographical rearrangement encourages poetic hermeneutics by the reader. However, this process will only occur if the reader is familiar with and competent within the poetic tradition, and the more one becomes conversant with the formal patterns of poetry the more rigorous and extensive their interpretive faculties become. Culler asserts that

it is clear that the study of one poem or novel facilitates the study of the next: one gains not only points of comparison but a sense of how to read. One develops a set of questions which experience shows to be appropriate and productive and criteria for determining whether they are, in a given case, productive; one acquires a sense of the possibilities of literature and how these possibilities may be distinguished.<sup>143</sup>

Interpretation, then, is directed by conventional rules tacitly gained through a lifetime of literary exposure rather than personal ones, thus signalling a move away from the brand of subjectivism

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 132.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188-9.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

found in Holland toward impartial criteria that can be articulated, interrogated, and defended in a public forum.

Therefore, we can postulate that meaning is determined by the spectator's adoption of a certain interpretive position toward the text. For instance, a narrative fiction film is read as such because the spectator engages the hermeneutic system of the fiction film institutional framework, which Odin defines as 'a structure activating a whole bundle of determinations.'<sup>144</sup> A film's fictionality is not fixed *a priori* but is a result of the spectator's activities in recognising the film as fictional and then executing a set of operations that results in the image being read as the output of the kind of fictionalising cinematic narrator described in 2.iii. But the spectator could feasibly approach the same filmic data and perform the same procedures of diegetic construction, narrativisation, and *mise-en-phase*—wherein the film's style is aligned with the diegesis 'in such a way that the spectator is made to "resonate" to the rhythm of the events told'—yet refuse to consider the film's enunciator as fictional.<sup>145</sup> If the spectator instead constructs a narrator 'who functions as a *real* origin', they are effecting a process of '*documentarization*.'<sup>146</sup> Ergo, fiction films and documentaries are distinguished fundamentally by the perspectives through which they are viewed.

Granted, stylistic features like a 2.35:1 aspect ratio and complex tracking shots are associated with fiction films enough to be almost naturalised, much as how low-fi digital formats, handheld camerawork, and flat lighting are with the documentary, but neither cinematic institution is rooted within these specific formal qualities. It is instead the acceptance of a certain psychic mode of attention that makes the form meaningful in a particular way. For example, mockumentaries such as *This is Spinal Tap*, *Forgotten Silver*, and *Man Bites Dog* depend upon their spectators' willingness to forgo the installation of a fictionalising narrator and instead view the films as if they were artefacts ripped from the real world. Of course, it is unlikely that the spectator will forget that they are

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<sup>144</sup> Odin, 'For a Semio-Pragmatics of Film', p. 216.

<sup>145</sup> Roger Odin, 'A Semio-Pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film', in *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind*, ed. Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 227-35 (p. 228).

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

watching a fiction; rather these films encourage a kind of play in which the film pretends it is not a carefully constructed narrative with the spectator colluding in this fantasy. Inversely, a spectator may approach a documentary and choose to impose a fictionalising narrator (be it through their identification of certain stylistic and structural features they associate with fiction films or suspicion of the FCD's motives), thus annulling the film's vision of the 'truth'. It is difficult to imagine a twenty-first century spectator reading *Nanook of the North* without the presence of a fictionalising narrating instance given that Robert J. Flaherty's blatant intervention in and staging of pro-filmic events is widely documented. However, *Nanook's* contemporary 1922 audience, bereft of such knowledge, fully bought into the film's reality with Shari M. Huhndorf noting that 'Nanookmania' swept the United States shortly after its release.<sup>147</sup> The work itself has not changed in the intervening years; the variance between interwar and millennial text-actualisations is simply that of differing expectations and interpretive frames.

Stanley Fish writes that interpretations do not occur after the fact, but 'are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is commonly assumed, arising from them.'<sup>148</sup> Meaning, though Fish is suspicious of the word, is simply a matter of whatever interpretive strategy the reader arms themselves with when approaching a work. Whether consciously or not, the reader always decides upon the articulation of the work's inherent potential. Different interpretive strategies result in different texts: someone working within Holland's 'defense-fantasy-transformation' (DEFT) model will read a different text than one who subscribes to Hirsch's intentionalist strategy.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, one may possess a multitude of strategies that come to the fore at different times with the same work or at the same time with different works. Like the semio-pragmatists, Fish endorses the overriding maxims of competence and relevance. If, say, one becomes competent in Marxist theory and they revisit a work,

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<sup>147</sup> Shari M. Huhndorf, 'Nanook and His Contemporaries: Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922', *Critical Enquiry*, 27.1 (Autumn, 2000), 122-48 (p. 125).

<sup>148</sup> Stanley Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 147-73 (p. 168).

<sup>149</sup> Holland, 'Unity Identity Text Self', p. 127.

the new mechanisms of the Marxist interpretive strategy they now possess may result in a new text being read if the work supports the Marxist structures the reader places upon it. The fact that several readers may read (or rather write) the same Marxist text does not necessarily increase its validity nor does it automatically denigrate contrastive critiques. Each interpretive community (constituted of readers who share the same strategy) will naturally clash because, as Fish explains, the 'assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.'<sup>150</sup>

Fish's model is shrewd in its simultaneous, almost paradoxical, verification and annulment of critics like Holland and Hirsch who attempt to construct monadic theories of 'correct' reading by referring to either the overriding influence of mental conditioning on perception or the objectivity of the textual object. Their interpretive strategies essentially create their own psychology and intention and cite these as sources for *their* (not '*the*') text's meaning. Fish stresses that these textual experiences, undoubtedly real and valid to the respective members of each interpretive community, are empirically equal even though they seem to stand starkly opposed at the extremities of the subject-reader/object-text binary. This is not to suggest that I personally advocate parity between interpretive strategies, merely to highlight that interpretation is always a choice and it is a choice, Fish writes, 'between an interpretation that is unacknowledged and an interpretation that is at least aware of itself.'<sup>151</sup> No interpretive strategy is endemic to the human condition; they are all learned behaviours which means that interpretive communities are impermanent and notoriously unstable, always under threat of abandonment or subterfuge. Auteurism is a notable victim of the inconstancy of vogue: it originated with film criticism's adoption of literary criticism's Romantic interpretive strategy and exploded into mainstream popularity when *Cahiers* and Sarris were able to utilise the framework to create revolutionary new texts; Romanticism's decline in favour of post/structuralism in the literary sphere prefigured a similar shift in fashion in film academia and the auteurist interpretive community

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<sup>150</sup> Fish, 'Interpreting the *Variorum*', p. 171.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

dwindled in the 1970s as critics transitioned to seemingly more bountiful symptomatic analytical modes. So instead of standing blindly beholden to the tides of critical trends, wherein interpretations must adhere to the latest fad or are immediately stigmatised as retrograde, Fish's hypothesis of multiple interpretive communities in continual flux enables a kind of non-partisan arbitration of analytical modes wherein interpretive choices can be gauged against the criteria of applicability, suitability, and sense. Therefore, we can ask if authorship was forsaken because it was ultimately proved to be inferior to other reading strategies or if critics turned away from it simply because it became unfashionable. If the auteur concept truly holds no power, why has its rhetoric sustained, even flourished, in the public sphere while it perished in the academic? **Chapter One** detailed the manifold fallacies of *Cahiers*, Sarris, and *Screen*-branded auteur studies yet I do not believe that their failures warrant or justify a wholesale desertion of the authorial mission that, when reduced to its most basic form, suggests that films can be imbued with additional meanings when read under a particular transtextual framework.

We could read Brian De Palma's *Scarface* and *Carlito's Way* within a genre matrix that focuses on the films' respective adoption and subversion of stock gangster tropes (particularly in relation to their manipulation of Al Pacino's criminal screen persona engendered by, among others, *The Godfather* films), which will naturally bring the discussion round to films such as *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, and Howard Hawks' 1932 *Scarface* as genre codifiers and standard-bearers. But one could also reflect on *Scarface*'s idiosyncratic and moody Giorgio Moroder synthesiser soundtrack with respect to De Palma's own ground-breaking use of audio in *Blow Out*; likewise, one could draw many interesting aesthetic parallels between the train station set-pieces in *Carlito's Way* and *The Untouchables*. The only real difference between these two interpretive strategies, which can be named the generic and the authorial, is that they offer up different transtextual reference pools. Neither model offers a 'superior' account of the texts at hand nor does one assume to venture a totalising exegesis where the other does not. Furthermore, the relative strength and frequency of transtextual connections one finds in these films through each of the strategies has no bearing on the perception of quality: when recognised,

genre references and auto-citations bolster the screen image with added connotational substance yet the destabilisation and satirisation of Arnold Schwarzenegger's generic iconography does not necessarily make *Kindergarten Cop* a 'better' movie nor does David Lynch's advancement of *Blue Velvet*'s nightmarish theatrical set-pieces in *Mulholland Dr.* impulsively elevate the works to masterpiece status. Instead, transtextuality—or rather the spectator's imposition of a transtextual network—facilitates the making of sense via comparative interpretation.

For example: *Unforgiven* follows retired gunslinger William Munny as he is lured back into a life of violence. The story, as told, is totally comprehensible without recourse to transtext. The coherent composition of the screen image allows the spectator to suppose the mediating presence of a cinematic narrator and the narrative's classical structure fulfils the basic expectations of story and character development. However, if the spectator recognises Clint Eastwood as The Man With No Name from Sergio Leone's trilogy of spaghetti westerns, they could potentially read Munny as a meditation on that character type. Eastwood in Leone's films kills wantonly, typically with a Bondesque quip, and rarely for any other reason than personal financial gain. The Man With No Name's sadistic tendencies and gold-lust are not only sanctioned in Leone's films but celebrated. Through flattering close-ups, heroic musical cues, and even superimposed titles that unambiguously identify him as *il buono* (the good), The Man With No Name is consecrated—one could even say mythologised—as the model Western hero. *Unforgiven*'s Munny, described as having an aggressive past not dissimilar to The Man With No Name, is contrastively consumed with guilt and depicted as pathetic (most notably in his inability to mount a horse, that key component of the cowboy iconography). His eventual concession to violence at *Unforgiven*'s climax does not signal a return to Leone's heroic ideal. In fact, vengeance seems to come at the cost of Munny's humanity. The dank and dark *mise-en-scène*, the complete absence of orchestral flourishes that would otherwise signify positive catharsis, and the unglorified excess of blood all contribute to a sense of horror and disgust. Ergo, if we choose to acknowledge Eastwood's extratextual connection to the Western tradition and read Munny as a commentary on the typical Western hero (embodied in The Man With No Name),



we can identify within *Unforgiven* a thematic structure that scorns Leone's bloodless carnage, one that highlights the dehumanising and abhorrent qualities of the supposedly gallant cowboy archetype. Read in this way, *Unforgiven* can be conceived as a demythologisation of the Western—a hypothesis reinforced by the revelation that English Bob's famous exploits as a gunslinger are all lies. This reading employs the generic framework but one can reach a similar conclusion by placing *Unforgiven* within the chronology of Eastwood's directorial efforts *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *Pale Rider*, and *High Plains Drifter*, each of which subtly challenge the Classical Hollywood Western's entrenched attitudes. So, much as how Eastwood inverts the civilised/savage binary with his treatment of Native Americans in *Josey Wales*, he makes his most morally corrupt character in *Unforgiven*, Little Bill, the one who wears the badge of the law. Moreover, a reading of *Unforgiven* utilising a transtextual author code reveals a certain congruence with other films in the Eastwood oeuvre such as *White Hunter Black Heart* and *Gran Torino* in that they all follow the same fundamentally pacifist tract, sharing negative attitudes toward selfish violence and hatred.

Certainly a spectator may arrive at all of the above conclusions with a solitary focus on *Unforgiven* but what the generic and authorial strategies do is establish a contrastive thematic arena in which these motifs and concepts are that much more observable. In this sense, they act as a kind of hypothetical microscopic dye. Unlike Sarrisite auteurism, such an authorial strategy is not essential for analysis but stands a supplementary tool that facilitates the spectator in teasing out qualities of the work that may not necessarily be as apparent if taken on its own. Likewise, whereas the cine-structural school presumed it was creating *content* through a pseudo-mythological rearrangement of textual matter, placing an authorial frame around a text establishes *context*. Consider *The Wrestler* and *Black Swan*, which director Darren Aronofsky considers 'companion pieces'.<sup>152</sup> Both films are intelligible on their own terms, which is to say that neither necessitates the involvement of authorial strategies in order to be understood, but when viewed through an authorial lens it becomes apparent

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<sup>152</sup> Adam Rosenberg, 'EXCLUSIVE: 'Black Swan' And 'The Wrestler' Started Life As One Movie, Darren Aronofsky Says', *MTV* (30 August 2010) <<http://moviesblog.mtv.com/2010/08/30/black-swan-the-wrestler-darren-aronofsky-natalie-portman/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 9.

that they tell the same fundamental story. While surface specificities may differentiate the narratives—Randy is a professional wrestler, Nina is a ballerina; Randy is an elderly former star, Nina is a young undiscovered talent; Randy has domestic problems with his daughter, Nina has domestic problems with her mother; *The Wrestler*'s FCD adopts a gritty realist style, shot on 16mm with mostly handheld cameras and natural lighting, while *Black Swan* employs more surreal CG-infused imagery—both stories revolve around lonely people who find solace within their craft and must sacrifice themselves in order to master their art. That two seemingly disparate stories resolve themselves in such a similar manner galvanises this theme and endows upon it a greater sense of dramatic significance. If a spectator enters *Black Swan* with prior textual experience of *The Wrestler* and they know that both films are directed by the same person, it is likely that they will pre-emptively engage an authorial interpretive strategy which will make them more receptive to the congruities between the two works and thus much more likely to arrive at this thematic endpoint.

However, while we have the freedom to apply various and often contrary cinematic institutions (such as the above author code) to works, which Buckland says is 'what academic film scholars do when they produce symptomatic readings of films', this autonomy is not unlimited nor is it unmediated by external forces.<sup>153</sup> We anticipate different kinds of texts (and pre-emptively activate certain mental frameworks) if we enter a multiplex or an independent cinema, if we anxiously await a film's theatrical release or stumble across it on television some years later—much as how the Twentieth Century Fox, Miramax, and Marvel studio banners that precede films can alter our expectations as to what is to follow. Our contextual knowledge of actors, directors, genres, and Hollywood politics inevitably influence how we read films as do the films' paratextual marketing campaigns that sell an idealised narrative that may not necessarily accord with the work proper. For instance, the trailer for *Noah* announces that it is 'From Darren Aronofsky | The Director of *Black Swan*' and certain elements within the spot (namely the presence of the kind of intense time-lapse

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<sup>153</sup> Buckland, *Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, p. 89.

photography found in *Requiem for a Dream* as well as that film's star, Jennifer Connelly) slot *Noah* somewhat comfortably within the aesthetics of Aronofsky's *oeuvre*. Yet as an integral component of Paramount's Spring 2014 schedule, with a budget of \$125 million—more than double the cumulative budget of all of Aronofsky's films to that point—it is of little surprise that *Noah* falls more in line with the stock tentpole blockbuster caste with little to boast of the personal touches that made Aronofsky's lower-budget independent pieces so noteworthy. This is not to imply that Paramount's marketing campaign for *Noah* intentionally misled its prospective audience, but the paratextual prominence of the director's name warrants further discussion as it stands as one example among many of distributors actively encouraging the pre-application of authorial reading schemes to their products.

Timothy Corrigan recognised this emerging trend in Hollywood marketing in his 1990 article 'The Commerce of Auteurism' wherein he redefines the auteur as a particular kind of social agency that controls how audiences interact with texts. He writes that 'auteurs have increasingly become situated along an extra-textual path, in which their commercial status as auteurs is their chief function as auteurs: the auteur-star is meaningful primarily as a promotion or recovery of a movie or group of movies, frequently regardless of the filmic text itself.'<sup>154</sup> Corrigan continues:

The subsequent auteurist marketing of movies [...] guaranteed, through the reverberations of directorial names across titles, a relationship between audience and movie whereby an intentional and authorial agency governs, as a kind of brand-name vision whose contextual meanings are already determined, the way a movie is seen and received.<sup>155</sup>

To see a clear example of the director-as-brand in play, look to the poster for 2014's *Exodus: Gods and Kings* [fig. 2.9], which boasts its shared authorial lineage with 2000's Oscar-winning *Gladiator*. But a fourteen year gap separates the two films and in that interim director Ridley Scott made works that were perhaps more indicative of his current aesthetic and thematically correlative to *Exodus*, such as *Robin Hood* and *Kingdom of Heaven*. Yet these films, critical and commercial failures both, are conspicuous for their absence. By emphasising *Gladiator* and ignoring *Robin Hood* and *Kingdom of*

<sup>154</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'The Commerce of Auteurism: A Voice without Authority', *New German Critique*, 49 (1990), 43-57 (pp. 48-9).

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

*Heaven, Exodus'* poster accentuates a certain facet of Ridley Scott's brand in order to instigate hypotheses and pre-interpretations as well as generate hyped-up interest. Note that *Alien* and *Blade Runner* are also absent, even though like *Gladiator* they have instant household name recognition, as they would perhaps generate the wrong kind of generic/thematic suppositions. Essentially, the poster creates an ideal authorial essence particular to *Exodus* and a definitive structuring principle through which it is to be anticipated and read: a vision that wilfully disregards the fact that Scott, as an artist, has diminished in potency significantly since the career highpoint of *Gladiator* which stands in his twenty-first century filmography as an outlier rather than synecdochic indicator of quality.

This is a strange perversion of Sarris' auteur rhetoric. Whereas Sarris considered the 'auteur' moniker as a trophy to be gifted to a filmmaker *after* a critical audit of their filmography, Hollywood's deployment of auteurism sees author figures reconfigured as paratextual promotional constructs (i.e., 'from the director of *x*', 'from the team that brought you *y*', etc. [cf. **Introduction**]) that guarantee quality, irrespective of the work's actual value. By exploiting the Romantic tenet that art demands an artist and Sarris' own conflation of style with quality, Hollywood marketers can inject their homogenised tentpole blockbusters with an aura of legitimacy, individuality, and worthiness by positioning them as products of a singular creative consciousness, even though the high-stakes, high-budget realm of the tentpole blockbuster is that in which there is perhaps the least latitude for creative agency.

The significance of paratexts and Hollywood's commercialisation of the auteur will be discussed in much greater depth in **Part Two**, but the topic is introduced here to stress the importance that *expectations* have upon reading. It is not as if films are crafted in top-secret laboratories and unleashed upon the world without a whisper of warning; by the time a spectator buys a ticket they are typically already several months or even years into a complex relationship with the text—which is especially prevalent in the case of sequels, prequels, remakes, adaptations, and franchise films. This is a relationship of expectations fuelled by hype-generating marketing materials as well as the spectator's own experiences with previous texts (which may be related to the upcoming work via

director, star, genre, studio, etc.). Returning to Culler's notion of personal literary competence, it follows that this fabric of anticipation will inevitably cue spectators to pre-emptively activate certain interpretive schemes which then controls the shape of the actualised text proper. Hans Robert Jauss writes that the 'psychic process in the reception of a text is [...] by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception.'<sup>156</sup> This direction obviously emanates from within the confines of the screen image [cf. 2.iii], but also results from the spectator's engagement with culture, their placement inside a certain historical moment.

It is essential, therefore, that we examine what Jauss calls a work's contemporary 'horizon of expectations' — which I will define as the cultural, aesthetic, and commercial framework against which the work is made and into which it is released.<sup>157</sup> Hollywood films, after all, are products designed to generate pleasure (and consequently profit); it entails that these products react to a chronology of response and are themselves tailored toward specific expectations. Hollywood feeds the expectations of its audience whose expectations in turn demand a certain kind of product in an ouroboric cycle of manufacture and consumption. Therefore, it is not satisfactory to view a film isolated from its history as classical auteurism implies. A film's mere existence is a reply *to* history and Jauss demands 'that one insert the individual work into its "literary series" to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature.'<sup>158</sup> When critiquing a film we should gauge our response within a consideration of the picture's moment of ingress: not just the socio-political climate of the time, but the factors that induced the work's production, the traditions it was working within (or against), the promises it made, what audiences wanted from it. By reassembling a film's contemporary horizon of expectations we can, quoting Jauss, 'pose questions

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<sup>156</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

that the text gave answer to, and thereby discover how the contemporary [viewer] could have viewed and understood the work.’<sup>159</sup>

It should be noted we do not seek to recreate an artwork’s contemporary horizon in order to appropriate its primary audience’s empirical response. Indeed, to extrapolate a singular ‘interpretation’ and impose it upon a unified ‘audience’ would be to neglect the intrinsic polyvalence of a film-going public constituted by a plurality of audiences conveying a profusion of interpretations. The aim is not to harmonise the cacophony of real-world spectatorship but to understand how the work presented itself in order to be understood. In other words, we seek to recover the discursive spaces in which the artwork operated. Our goal is to ascertain the hermeneutic signals, historical determinants, and cultural/industrial factors that positioned the film in relation to its *target* audience—conditions which may not be observable ‘in’ the work but which were nonetheless instrumental in pre-forming response. This horizon is comprised not only of the textual context that the reasonably informed and reasonably interested target consumer is assumed to have known (i.e., aesthetic trends, genre conventions, coded star characteristics, authorial history, etc.), but also the extra-textual promotional framing of the new product with respect to that context. For example, in the echelon of *Superman* films, 2013’s *Man of Steel* seems anomalous given its tonal, ethical, and structural dissimilarity to its source material and its widely-accepted ‘canonical’ adaptation, 1978’s *Superman: The Movie*. However, this stylistic divergence becomes somewhat more intelligible once we consider that *Man of Steel* was produced in the wake of Christopher Nolan’s immensely successful Batman films of the 2000s, that 2006’s *Superman Returns* had failed to connect with its audience, and that Warner Bros. and DC Entertainment were desperate to kick-start their own Extended Universe to compete with Disney’s Marvel Cinematic Universe (especially given that Warners’ 2011 *Green Lantern* film, which was originally intended to launch their multi-property franchise, floundered at the box office and was met with critical ridicule). Nolan’s ubiquitous

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

paratextual presence as *Man of Steel*'s producer—as well as the film's dour aesthetic, murky moral landscape, and *noir*-ish non-linear narrative structure which all recall *Batman Begins*—lock the film firmly within a common conception of Nolan's style; by emphasising these facets in *Man of Steel*'s promotional materials, Warner Bros. were able to distinguish it from the lacklustre *Superman Returns* and essentially guarantee the film's success by cashing in on the popularity of the Nolan brand even though he is not the film's 'author'. While this raises issues of authorship-by-proxy (which will be revisited in **Chapter Three** but can quickly be addressed here as an instance of brand-driven enforced implied authorship [cf. 2.ii]), the fact that Warner Bros. bought its audience on this authorial principle is significant to *Man of Steel* both as a commercial product and as a narrative. This may not be obvious to a future spectator whose interaction with *Man of Steel* begins and ends with its opening and closing credits, but to a contemporary cinema-goer inculcated in 2013 popular culture these facets would be common knowledge and would have likely informed not only their spending choice but also their processes of textual actualisation.

Thus, the objective of horizon reconstruction is to make explicit the tacit, often unacknowledged, framework of understanding that guided contemporary production and consumption. Although one can retrospectively view *Man of Steel* and comprehend its plot on a literal/causal level [cf. Bordwell and narration in 2.iii] without the recreation of its original context, if we wish to appreciate its operations as a text (in other words, to *critique* it), we need a firm grasp on that framework. Put otherwise, if a naïve viewing focuses on the *what* of the text (i.e., what is the story?), criticism hones in on the *how* and the *why*: how is the text constructed, how does it elicit the activation of transtextual networks, why does it do this? If a critical meta-reading is to be reliable and informed, it should be situated within both historical and textual contexts with an awareness of how consumers within those contexts were cued to approach the work and the interpretive tools they were likely to have possessed. If consumers were encouraged to consider the work as 'authored' [cf. *Noah*, *Exodus*, and *Man of Steel*], we must discern the commercial imperatives that drove such authorial production, the promotional mechanisms that articulated authorship in the pre-release sphere, and

the ways in which the film itself can be understood in light of its 'author'. I discussed in 2.ii the critic's inability to vacate their own historically-situated consciousness with regards to Hirschian intentionalism and it remains true that all text-actualisations will be products of the times in which they are made. Such is unavoidable. Yet a contemporary horizon's recreation is not bound by a spatio-temporally rooted psychology—it is based in research. We cannot stop at the boundaries of the text-as-given. In order to understand the circumstances determining a film's constitution, we must look beyond the work and its studio-sanctioned paratexts to interviews with its cast and crew, behind-the-scenes featurettes, magazine previews, newspaper reviews, box office receipts, and all of the anticipation, ecstasy, disappointment, and confusion experienced by real spectators that is documented on the copious, freely-available internet resources which provide a perpetually updated and preserved time capsule of expectation and opinion. From this, a critic will be able to assess why a work was made and the factors that contributed to its success or failure with its audience, which will allow them to then proceed with a conscious interrogation of the text's modes of communication which may choose certain interpretive strategies (i.e., the authorial) if found to be applicable and, most of all, historically relevant. By doing this, we guard against auteurism's ingrained ahistoricism. Indeed, by focusing so intently on the mechanisms of implied authorship, narration, and spectatorial interpretation, along with the influence of industry and culture, we move far away from auteurism and its obsession with flesh-and-blood filmmakers and their intentions. It is critical, then, that we explicate our stance in relation to conventional authorial criticism.

## **2.v – Consolidation – An Auteurist Epitaph**

The thesis so far has consisted mainly of a critique of auteurist and post-authorial theories of reading, and while a potential avenue of progress has been intimated within the assessment I have yet to clearly delineate what this route is, how it attempts to solve the problems of the past, and the possible boons it offers. In order to accomplish this, and demonstrate how aspects of a defunct auteurism can



be folded into a heuristic of response, let us consider the principal fallacies of classical cinematic authorship studies and how these can be nullified within a more conscientious criticism.

1. Auteurism assumes the autonomy and pre-eminence of the film director, who is considered the prime source of filmic meaning.

By considering the FCD as our principal point of contact with a film text and furthermore recognising that the cinematic narrator is simply an aggregate of effects issued from numerous sources, we can disentangle ourselves from the delusion of singular genius. The concept of the implied author enables us to still talk of texts as 'authored' without necessarily validating the Romantic idolum of purposively self-governing artists operating with unlimited independence. We speak of authorship not as an empirical activity but as an interpretive concept axiomatically disengaged from the realities of production. The implied author, as an imagined construct brought into existence only through the procedures of narrative actualisation, has no personalised identity until we supplement them with one. It is the spectator that decides 'who' the implied author is and they are not obligated to choose the director. Yes, one can assess *Jurassic Park* as a fantasy grounded by the dynamics of the familial unit in light of other Steven Spielberg films such as *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *Hook*, but they could just as easily investigate the film's moralistic stance on science (and the abuse thereof) using co-screenwriter Michael Crichton's *Westworld* as a point of departure. These two implied authors are by no means mutually exclusive nor is the Spielbergian implied author allowed automatic ascendance; a critic may in fact wish to synthesise them into an analysis that interrogates how these disparate elements are consolidated into a singular coherent form by identifying locations of correspondence between the author codes.

2. Auteurism values directorial personality above and beyond all other facets and a recognition of this directorial personality is seen to be necessary for filmic comprehension.

Whilst the construction of an implied author connected to the cinematic narrator is a reflexive action inherent within narrative actualisation, the interpretive application of an author code (i.e. imbuing that implied author with a recognisable 'personality'), at least in the mainstream Hollywood products

we are studying, is completely discretionary—and in some cases may even be inapplicable. All works are authored, which is to say that they are created by flesh-and-blood human beings, but that does not imply that the authorial approach is always the most viable. It may be more relevant to talk of a film as a product of a genre or a historical trend (i.e., the Young Adult literary adaptation franchise which dominated Hollywood's summer slate in the early 2010s). Unlike Sarrisite auteur theory, the authorial code is a supplement that *enhances* analysis rather than comprising it *in toto*. This is because directorial personality is *not* considered the ultimate goal of film artistry. Of course, certain directors possess certain identifiable styles, but the goal of criticism is not to establish from those styles a criterion of excellence against which all others are rendered insignificant. Directorial style for its own sake is disinteresting; directorial style deployed to serve narration, on the other hand, is worth discussing—but that discussion will always focus on narrative as its primary object. Put simply, I am promoting a criticism of a narrative machine that has many moving parts: the authorial code may comprise one of these cogs, but it also may not. It all depends on the particular text being studied and moreover the critic's competence in being able to recognise when an authorial strategy's application is suitable. The author code is not to be used indiscriminately.

3. Auteurism considers films as their authors' expressive psycho-autobiographies and we must know what the director was thinking in order to decrypt the text.

Naturally, there are some writer-directors such as Spike Lee and Richard Linklater who use their own experiences as the subject matter for their films. But we need not know the specificities of their biographical lives in order to interpret *Do the Right Thing* or *Before Sunrise* which comprise fictional scenarios inhabited by fictional characters relatable to anyone with enough cinematic literacy to fathom the diegetisation of the moving image—which is to say the entirety of the film-viewing public.

To quote Hans Robert Jauss:

When the author of a work is unknown, his intent undeclared, and his relationship to sources and models only indirectly accessible, the philological question of how the text is "properly"—that is, "from its intention and time"—to be understood can best be answered if one foregrounds it against

those works that the author explicitly or implicitly presupposed his contemporary audience to know.<sup>160</sup>

This is one of the reasons why the creation of a horizon of expectations is so important to an assiduous criticism. Hollywood films are designed to be consumed and comprehended by the mass market, both domestically and internationally. Following Jauss, it is the historical textual framework in which works emerge that makes them intelligible. The legibility of Hollywood films depends upon a cinematic intelligence grafted from an exposure to other filmic texts and not upon an author's biography or supposed intention. We, as spectators, critics, and researchers can never know for absolute surety exactly who is in control of the screen at any given time, let alone what they were thinking while doing it. Of course, we can turn to interviews and production documents but such records are fundamentally unreliable and not truly representative of the realities of production, being as they will be distorted by production rhetoric, the biases of egotism, or the natural inconstance of human memory. We can *deduce a hypothetical* intention from the text—which, granted, may be reinforced by the aforementioned research—but this 'intention' is property of the implied author we ourselves construct, not the real author/s to whom we are forever denied access.

4. Auteurism projects a positive bias toward certain film-artists/film-cultures and discriminates against all else—it is a fundamentally prejudicial system of value judgment and subjective preference.

The key word here is 'value'. The qualitative distinction between the *auteur* and *metteur-en-scène* arose from polemics that sought to valorise particular facets of the cinema at the expense of those spheres the critics deemed to be contemptible (i.e., The Tradition of Quality for *Cahiers*, the foreign avant-garde for Sarris). And while auteurism in the 1950s and 60s did engender a more magnanimous appreciation of American cinema than had existed previously, the idea of supreme cinematic artistry being grounded purely in an expression of directorial personality—often over and against the narrative—is retrograde and needs to be abandoned. The auteur concept severely limits the field of enquiry only to those supposed cinematic masters of the likes of Hitchcock, Ford, and Hawks, which

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<sup>160</sup> Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 28.

ultimately means that auto-centric literature will eventually degrade into a stagnant critical echolalia if the course is not redirected into a commodious and impartial awareness that a filmmaker does not need to be ordained an '*auteur*' for one to conduct a stimulating examination of their work utilising an authorial code. The author code as a purely analytical instrument bears no such evaluative baggage and I see no place for subjective decrees of quality in a criticism of textual effects.

5. Ateurism promotes an exclusionary attitude which microscopically focuses only on visual style [*Cahiers*] or theme [cine-structuralism].

Since we are investigating *narrative*, and our understanding thereof, adopting such preclusive perspectives needlessly narrows the critical field of vision and effectively prevents one from making a comprehensive, convincing argument as to how a specific text works. Remember, the classical auteurs were polemicists: *Cahiers'* over-emphasis on *mise-en-scène* was motivated by a desire to minimise the influence of the screenwriter and the cine-structuralists' subsequent abandonment of *mise-en-scène* was attempt to slot auteurism within a pseudo-Lévi-Straussian method of analysis. Stripped of their invectives these divisions make little sense. If we unmoor style from story, what is there to say about the images outside of their immediate aesthetic beauty? Likewise, how does cataloguing a sample's 'mythemes' enhance our appreciation of the texts under scrutiny if there is no clarification on the specific nuances of how each text chooses to articulate these themes? In both cases, we produce extremely rudimentary sets of data. Form and content are symbionts — smoke and fire, cause and effect. We cannot study style without considering its function, much as how there can be no comprehension of theme if its modes of diegetic expression are left untouched. Granted, some films may offer more to discuss on an aesthetic front than a thematic one, and *vice versa*, but one will always feed back into the other as the subject of analysis is narrative communication. Like engine gears, form, function, content, and theme all depend upon the precise movements of the other constituent parts. We can remove a belt from the motor in order to assess its material composition, but we cannot understand the efficiency of its torque transmission without assessing the configuration of pulleys on which it runs. Thus, it becomes apparent that strict compliance to *passé*

formalist and structuralist dogmata (which privilege either the belt or pulley) are incompatible with a thorough criticism.

6. Auteurism only seeks to identify parallels between texts; it does not attempt to integrate these patterns into a coherent analysis.

This is a problem based more in practice than in theory and it depends upon the particular critic's purpose for employing authorial frameworks of reference. If, like Sarris, one is hoping to establish a hierarchy of greatness wherein there is a positive correlation between the number of similarities within a canon and its level of genius, then of course the critique is valid. Likewise, identifying authorial patterns in itself is a scarce contribution to critical discourse. But we could make a similar argument against genre programmes. Establishing a definition of the Western as a form that utilises cowboys, deserts, and showdowns against the backdrop of the conflict between frontier and wilderness actually tells us very little about the genre. *El Topo*, *Dead Man*, *Quigley Down Under*, and *Shanghai Noon* all fall broadly within this traditional categorisation of the Western, yet it is somewhat deceptive deeming them straight-forward entries into the genre as they each ironise, subvert, and parody the Western's generic conventions in specific ways. Reading *El Topo* as a Western, then, is only productive if one considers how the film utilises those tropes—as well as our expectations as to how these tropes are to be used—in, as Fish states in his treatise on affective stylistics, 'the temporal flow of the reading experience.'<sup>161</sup> Such is the case if one instead wants to read *El Topo* with the Alejandro Jodorowsky author code. The synchronic methodologies promoted by classical auteurism can be beneficial in cataloguing the semantic and syntactic traits that indicate a particular kind of interposing authorial presence, but when dealing with a given text's authorship we must proceed on a diachronic course that mimics the cumulative reading process—one that pays specific attention to how the FCD uses those pre-identified stylistic/thematic tropes to elicit a particular implied author. With an 'author' in place, the analytical question turns to how the FCD *uses* its author (or, to be more specific, how it accommodates the spectatorial imposition of authorial transtextuality). Therefore,

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<sup>161</sup> Fish, 'Literature in the Reader', p. 27.

reference to any transtextual codes should only be made if they are relevant to that linear textual process and not for the mere self-serving sake of invoicing parallels.

7. Auteurism considers the text-as-given as its entire horizon. It removes historical artefacts from history and assesses its object in a self-absorbed vacuum.

Perhaps the most serious deficiency of classical auteurism in all of its transatlantic permutations was its blatant disregard of the influence commerce, culture, convention, and circumstance have upon cinematic storytelling, which is taken as self-evident and self-reliant. Yet artful as some its products indeed are, Hollywood is, after all, a capitalist industry. Film art does not exist as its own justification and purpose. The 'Hollywood of sums' Rivette disparages is essential to an understanding of his so-called 'Hollywood of individuals'.<sup>162</sup> If we are interrogating *how a text means* and *why it means* (which I suggest are much more pressing issues than *what it means*, which relies more on the subjectivity of the individual spectator), we cannot so easily set aside the economic motivation and anthropological context of the work at hand. Put otherwise, if we are analysing commercial products constructed for and released within a certain socio-economic environment, as Hollywood films are, it is careless and somewhat narcissistic to presume that one can fully comprehend these products without also examining their function as business capital. Considering Hollywood movies as assets first and art second may appear antithetical to the critical goal of narrative analysis (and indeed may not be as viable an approach for independent or avant-garde films), but the egotistical closed-loop system of author-text-critic that auteurism advertises negates all geo-historical determinants in favour of those belonging to the critic, which are then transplanted onto their idea of the author. Their meaning, their text, becomes the only one. Yet the critic's responsibility should not be to simply advance *their* meaning, but instead to examine how a work *comes to mean* in the first place. The paratextual and socio-cultural contexts into which a film is released are by no means arbitrary. They set the stage for the film's arrival and even alter the way it is perceived; if the context encourages an application of an author code, the critic should interrogate how this was first persuaded, the effects it had on

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<sup>162</sup> Jacques Rivette, 'Notes on a Revolution', in *Cahiers du Cinéma—The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New-Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 94-7 (p. 94).

contemporary expectations, and most of all whether the work actually supports its presence. Put simply, by placing a film in its historical moment we gift ourselves a valuable set of contextual data which can be utilised in answering the question *how does this work*.

To summarise: I am advocating a strategy of critical analysis for Hollywood cinema which focuses not on authors, but the mechanisms by which a spectator constructs narrative from audiovisual works of commercial art. The film author (*née auteur*) is by no means dead within this system; they are simply sublimated into a cognitive competency model as an interpretive code which may or may not be activated upon contact with a given text. In truth, while this thesis focuses on the potential applications of the author code in film analysis, the implications of such a system extend far beyond authorship. Since the author code is always an optional supplement to analysis, there comes with that the innate acknowledgement that there will always exist at least two interpretations of a text: one that utilises an author code and one that does not. And this number dilates exponentially when notions of genre, star, and studio—to name but three—are introduced. What results is an indeterminate network of meanings in which no one reading is given automatic ascendancy. As interpretation is so dynamic and fluid between and within generations, genders, classes, and, of course, interpretive communities, there can never be such a thing as definitive meaning. By that same token, no one critic can hope to account for every single divergent textual actualisation. The critic, then, should aim not to be *explicative* ('this is what the text means'), but *explorative* ('this is how the text can mean').

As a purely hypothetical model of reading, the discussion on authorship ends here. A film is only 'authored' when we choose to make it so by activating the author code and personalising the narrative's implied author. By consciously acknowledging this cognitive operation, we allow ourselves agency in its invention. However, this process of identification is not always a conscious one by every single spectator. The increasing commercialisation of the paratextual *auteur*-brand by the Hollywood marketing machine seems to be making our choice in engaging the author code more and more compulsive. By consistently promoting its products as singularly authored creations—

through taglines such as ‘A Steven Spielberg film’ – Hollywood is ensuring that the auteur concept remains an irremovable component of its international audience’s *lingua franca*. By accepting ‘text’ as the offspring of both work and spectator, and moreover that spectators are guided by directives beyond the observable film work (i.e., promotional paratexts as well as their own cinematic literacy and chosen interpretive strategy), it becomes increasingly difficult to clearly demarcate where the text begins and ends. If trailers, posters, and other such promotional paratexts serve to generate expectations and interpretations in order to position the spectator, they surely constitute part of the ‘text’ as well. The exponential and overt paratextual presence of the commercialised auteur, then, must be addressed. Only then can we begin to understand how authorship functions in the construction of the twenty-first century Hollywood narrative.



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Part Two

# Authorship in Commerce

## Chapter Three

# Branded Auteurs

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### *Fetishising Authorship in the Cinema of Attractors*

#### 3.i – Here, There, and Everywhere

It is tempting to dismiss the authorship debate as an academic battle fought by academics for the sole benefit of academics, given the ostensible wealth of critical literature dedicated to the subject and relative dearth of combative auteurist dialectics in popular film magazines like *Empire*, *Total Film*, and *SFX*—as well as the more casual discussions on, say, the BBC Radio 5 Live show *Kermode and Mayo's Film Review*—which characteristically address whether the latest releases are worth watching and not necessarily what they mean, let alone if a recognition of authorship contributes to effective interpretation. Yet even the most cursory of glances at, for example, *Empire's* November 2015 issue quickly dispels any notions of the film author's diminished importance in the popular sphere as opposed to the academic. The magazine is guest-edited by Sam Mendes in an obvious promotional manoeuvre for his then-upcoming James Bond picture, *Spectre*: the cover's prominent photographs of Daniel Craig and Christoph Waltz (in character as Bond and Blofeld), the typographical dominance of 'SPECTRE', and its headline designating the issue as a '007 BESPOKE COLLECTOR'S EDITION' all prove this easily [fig. 3.1]. But this particular edition is just as concerned with promoting Mendes' individual aura as an artist, and furthermore the overall mystique of film direction as a profession and craft, as it is about Bond.

Beside the cast interviews, behind-the-scenes features, and reviews that comprise the magazine's typical constitution, *Empire's* November 2015 issue includes an editorial in which Mendes jokingly compares himself to fictional newspaperman Charles Foster Kane (and by proxy Orson Welles); a selection of Mendes' personal photographs from the shoot that depict a cosy and collegiate troupe united under his leadership against the harsh wilderness and figurative Everest that is Bond; a joint-interview with Mendes and Craig which serves to highlight, indeed romanticise, the hardships

of undertaking such an ambitious project ('God knows, there's been difficult shit on this movie', Mendes says);<sup>1</sup> a retrospective on *American Beauty* that brings Mendes together with the film's cast for a discussion that, again, focuses on the film's crises and ultimate conquests; and, perhaps most conspicuously, a one-sheet advertisement for the stage production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* headed by a quote from *Time Out* which declares 'Bond director Sam Mendes' HUGE NEW MUSICAL IS THE HOTTEST PROPERTY IN THE WEST END' [fig. 3.2]. The cumulative effect is not simply a foregrounding of Sam Mendes as the director of *Spectre* but the construction of an almost mythic narrative about an exceptional artist unbound by the strictures of genre or medium, a leader perpetually beleaguered by calamities (not unlike Welles) who is nonetheless able to marshal his troops towards creating works that surpass mere critical and commercial success and enter the very fabric of popular culture—with Mendes holding as a point of personal triumph that his crew on *Spectre* wore *Skyfall* t-shirts instead of the usual assortment of *Star Wars* memorabilia.<sup>2</sup> And this all feeds back into *Empire's* promotional rhetoric surrounding *Spectre*. *American Beauty* is by no means discussed naïvely: although *Spectre* is never mentioned, *American Beauty's* qualities of artistic excellence and integrity (and consequently Mendes') are transposed onto it by the virtue of their proximity with the rest of the magazine's heavily Bond-centric composition.

The most striking feature in the November 2015 issue of *Empire*, however, is the eight-page compilation of Mendes' interviews with sixteen other directors (to list them all would be misspent ink but Steven Spielberg, David Fincher, and Ang Lee summarily indicate the calibre of Mendes' interviewees). The article, amusingly titled 'Auteur Theories', is perhaps best described by Mendes himself:

I've been given full licence to channel my inner nerd, and ask all my director friends the questions that I REALLY want to have the answers to. Never mind about shot selection and story-boarding, what about how many cups of coffee you drink per day, or what you always carry in your pockets? [...] I'm just a fan, like most of you.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Hewitt, 'We Just Push Each Other', *Empire* (November, 2015), 90-5 (p. 92).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Mendes, 'Editor's Letter', *Empire* (November, 2015), 4 (p. 4).

Whilst it is doubtful that you will gain any meaningful insight into Fincher's method by learning that he 'become[s] more caustic/vengeful' if he has more than three cups of coffee or that the most takes he has ever done of a single shot is 107, the feature is nonetheless significant in the context of this thesis because it demonstrates that the cult of personality Bazin warned against in the 1950s has become a normalised and indelible mentality for the twenty-first century film-going audience.<sup>4</sup> Mendes asking these questions of his 'director friends' is not so important as the fact that a magazine — which boasted a combined print and digital reach of 897,000 individuals in the UK alone between October 2014 and September 2015 — should choose to print their answers and at such length.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the largely unacknowledged workhorse directors of the Classical period, a vast swath of directors in today's Hollywood are celebrities as much as, and sometimes more than, the stars of their films. As such, it is of little surprise that they are subject to the same kind of frothy-mouthed fandom as actors, pop stars, and reality television personalities that permits miscellaneous trivia such as 'have you ever walked off a set in a temper?' to be a prime selling point for an international film magazine.<sup>6</sup>

To demonstrate just how symptomatic director fandom has become, the forums on Christopher Nolan fan-site NolanFans have, at the time of writing, 1,025,757 individual posts from 14,428 members. Along with the to-be-expected assortment of opinion, speculation, and discussion of Nolan's work, the community also reflect on whether he plays video games, if he took his children to see *Avatar*, and even the style of beards found in his films (with user the crimson elephant's comment that 'the beards look like peach fuzz that never fully got all the way through puberty. but i still think nolan is god. lol [*sic*]' neatly indicating the fan-club's playful but ultimately reverent attitude).<sup>7</sup> There is an obvious desire, beyond appreciating Nolan's works on an aesthetic basis, to preternaturally connect with the man himself on a level that approaches an almost religious fervour. Such is the fan-

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<sup>4</sup> Sam Mendes, 'Auteur Theories', *Empire* (November, 2015), 54-61 (p. 58).

<sup>5</sup> 'Monthly reach of Empire magazine in the United Kingdom (UK) from October 2012 to September 2015 (in 1,000s)', *Statista: The Statistics Portal* (n.d.) <<http://www.statista.com/statistics/413664/empire-monthly-reach-uk/>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>6</sup> Mendes, 'Auteur Theories', p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> the crimson elephant's comment, 'Beard styles in nolan movies!', *Nolan Fans Forums* (26 November 2012) <<http://www.nolanfans.com/forums/viewtopic.php?f=30&t=12158>> [accessed 13 March 2017], p. 2 of 3.

base's affection (or obsession) for Nolan that those critical of *The Dark Knight Rises* in 2012, such as Marshall Fine, received death threats; for some Nolan fans there is no delineation between the man and his works, and a slight against the latter is most definitely seen as an insult to the former and tantamount to blasphemy. Granted, not all of Nolan's fans are as rabid as 'Jake B.', who wanted to beat Fine 'with a thick rubber hose into a coma', but the general point stands: film directors now hold a sacrosanct position in the popular imagination and are regarded just as highly as the films they make.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, *Empire* is appealing to this fascination with these figures, pushed so far beyond the mundane realm of the everyday by Hollywood myth-making and the pageantry of the red carpet that they seem almost extra-human. In this sense, 'Auteur Theories' is somewhat of a corrective to the auteur theory: where Sarris placed the film director far out of mortal reach at the summit of an Olympus of artists, Mendes attempts to humanise them by inflecting them with quirks, habits, and personalities. By equating himself with the fans, Mendes' choice of humdrum workaday questions becomes emblematic of the public's need to demythologise these artists and see them on a plane of equivalence with themselves. Mendes facilitates this emotional affinity on behalf of the reader by allowing us a glimpse into their day-to-day lives but the world he describes, wherein James Cameron and Martin Scorsese casually offer sage life-lessons and Francis Ford Coppola is simply known as 'dad', is no closer to us than it was before.<sup>9</sup> Beneath the gloss of banality the aspirational myth of the director-god persists, which even beguiles many of the filmmakers themselves who admit they often ask 'how would Kubrick have done it?'<sup>10</sup> What counts is the *illusion* of closeness, that sense of familiarity and recognition one typically feels after reading an autobiography or watching a documentary, even though their narratives are no less constructed — and in that sense, artificial — than those found in fiction.

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<sup>8</sup> Matt Singer, "'Dark Knight Rises' Critic Receives Death Threats', *IndieWire* (16 July 2012) <<http://blogs.indiewire.com/criticwire/dark-knight-rises-critic-receives-death-threats>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3 of 5.

<sup>9</sup> Mendes, 'Auteur Theories', p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

This tendency to value the person and personality of the director over their films might seem to suggest that considerations of the film author in popular discourse have degraded into a super-Sarrisite hero worship wherein movies are only valued for how they offer portholes into their makers' psyches, but such fanaticism is hardly endemic in the populace at large. However, what is noticeable is a pervasion of auteurist rhetoric into the mainstream vernacular to the point where it now seems to be a perfectly natural way to talk about movies. Take, for example, Mark Kermode's review of *Bridge of Spies* on the 27 November 2015 episode of his popular radio programme, which operates along clear auteurist lines as Kermode locates the film within a chronology of Steven Spielberg's cinematic output:

Although it looks like, in many ways, a companion piece to *Catch Me if You Can*, that kind of period caper, actually it's closer in theme to *Lincoln* because it's essentially about one man and the desire to validate the Constitution and to do what's right, even when everybody around him seems to be telling him that, actually, that's the wrong thing to do.<sup>11</sup>

By tracing *Bridge of Spies*' genetic ancestry to *Catch Me if You Can* and *Lincoln*, Kermode assumes that his listeners are not only familiar with Spielberg's previous films but have internalised the authorial traits and clichés that would make such a juxtaposition comprehensible. This presumption of authorial knowledge extends into the somewhat abstruse references Kermode makes to the Coen brothers as well as James Stewart and Frank Capra (specifically regarding their collaboration on *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, but the fact that Kermode gives their proper names instead of simply the film's title unveils a predominantly authorial tract). Even though the noun '*auteur*' is noticeable only as a phantom pain in Kermode's review, his evaluations are plainly rooted in an author-centric perspective: he notes that the joy of *Bridge of Spies* is not necessarily its complex political commentary on Cold War-era East/West relations, but 'watching how it is that Spielberg manages to manipulate all these things and to turn them into a really, really mainstream, totally enjoyable, absolutely understandable' film.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, *Bridge of Spies*' greatness is to be found foremost in the beauty of

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Kermode and Simon Mayo, *Kermode and Mayo's Film Review*, BBC Radio 5 Live (27 November 2015) <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06ps23j>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 1:00:08.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:01:51.



Spielberg's mechanical excellence and direction of Tom Hanks as a modern-day everyman *à la* Capra/Stewart ('that classic Spielberg thing', so says Kermode) rather than its narrative — which is a classical auteurist argument *par excellence*.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Roger Ebert's review of *To The Wonder*, the last he submitted before his death in 2013, rounds on how Terrence Malick, 'who is surely one of the most romantic and spiritual of filmmakers, appears almost naked here before his audience, a man not able to conceal the depth of his vision.'<sup>14</sup> Ebert reads the film through the prism of Malick's directorial allure and even registers a parallelism between Malick and Robert Bresson in how they utilise actors as mostly-mute 'models' through which they are able to transmit their idiosyncratic senses of emotional truth.<sup>15</sup> And what is perhaps most striking about these reviews is how uncontroversial, how utterly normal, they seem in a supposedly post-auteurist landscape.

There is an evident divide between academic perspectives on art which sought to distance the author from their works and popular attitudes which are trying to bring those same authors ever closer. This is not to accuse Kermode and Ebert of critical philistinism. On the contrary, when relevant they consider the collaborative impact of actors, editors, cinematographers, and writers, as well as the shaping influences of industry, genre, and the overall history of the medium, thereby circumventing the typical auteurist pitfalls [cf. 2.v]. Yet the director's prominence in their arguments is nonetheless significant, particularly considering that Kermode's audience (judging from email correspondence to his show) runs the gamut from anaesthesiologists, bus drivers, housewives, and schoolchildren — hardly the elitist cinéphilic clique to which *Cahiers* catered in the 1950s. Thus, it is apparent that the notion of authorship — that is, that an artwork has an identifiable issuing source — still holds significant sway in how we respond to texts, irrespective of any critical theory which might attempt to argue otherwise. Moreover, the fact that these critics deem it necessary to include allusions to directors, and at such frequency, indicates that authorship is potentially one of the key determinants

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:01:03.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Ebert, 'To The Wonder', *RogerEbert.com* (6 April 2013) <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/to-the-wonder-2013> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 8 of 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 7 of 10.

in whether one chooses to consume one film product over another. This foregrounding of the author in the marketplace is by no means limited to consumer-centric discourse. In fact, there is a noticeable omnipresence of authorial concepts in marketing materials issued by distributors, which I would like to demonstrate with a small anecdote.

I was travelling to visit some friends in East London in late October 2015 and my connection on the Underground from Kings Cross St. Pancras to Leytonstone was Liverpool Street. The first thing I noticed when I stepped onto the platform was a large poster for *Pan*, the Joe Wright directed prequel to J. M. Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy* [fig. 3.3]. I was immediately struck by its headline: 'FROM THE STUDIO THAT BROUGHT YOU HARRY POTTER'. The poster's saturated colours, centring of child star Levi Miller as its subject, and fantastical *mise-en-scène*—a flying ship, a quasi-medieval town hidden in a valley, Hugh Jackman and Rooney Mara's outlandish costumes—all served to locate *Pan* within a rough aesthetic understanding of *Harry Potter*. Indeed, *Harry Potter* in this instance was positioned as a corporate product of Warner Bros. (and not J.K. Rowling, Steven Kloves, or David Yates), with *Pan* situated as a spiritual successor pressed from the same mould. As I walked through the concourse to my next train, I passed a wall of posters for *Brooklyn* [fig. 3.4]. Here, instead of a suppression of the film's literary heritage was a celebration of it, with the poster trumpeting that its product was 'BASED ON THE AWARD-WINNING NOVEL BY COLM TÓIBÍN' and 'ADAPTED BY ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE NICK HORNBY'. Recognising that Tóibín had been shortlisted for the Man Booker prize numerous times and that Hornby's screenplays adapted from other novelist's sources, such as *An Education*, shot for a more high-brow and critically aspirational style than those works adapted from his own novels (like *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy* which target a wider segment of the public), I was able to surmise *Brooklyn's* general tone, theme, and intended audience without knowing anything specific about its source material—a hypothesis assisted by the fact that it was approaching award-season and the poster's numerous mentions of its cast's Oscar pedigree. When I arrived at the eastbound platform on the Central Line I was greeted by a massive one-sheet on the other side of the tracks for *Junun*, with 'PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON' enigmatically

printed under the film's title [fig. 3.5]. As an admirer of Anderson's work, this poster more than either of the others piqued my interest, particularly because I had not heard of it before (*Inherent Vice* had not long been released and I assumed it would be a time before Anderson's next project, given the five year gap between *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master*). The fact that the poster did not demarcate Anderson as a producer, writer, or director only intensified my curiosity, as did MUBI's presence as a distributor as I knew it to be an online streaming platform specialising in world cinema. *Junun*, it turns out, is a small documentary, directed by Anderson, concerning Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood recording an album in a fifteenth-century Indian fort. I know this only because I looked it up on my iPhone while still standing in front of the poster.

Once the train arrived and I had packed myself into the carriage, I started to think about what I had just seen. I had engaged with three film posters in the span of less than two minutes: posters that promoted their products as distinctively *authored*, whether by studio (*Pan*), writer (*Brooklyn*), or director (*Junun*). From these authorial cues, I had constructed an identity for each text and made a decision to dismiss two and pursue the third based solely on their authorial principles—a reflexive process that occurred almost at the speed of thought. Would I have been more receptive to *Pan* if the poster said 'FROM THE STUDIO THAT BROUGHT YOU MAD MAX: FURY ROAD' or to *Brooklyn* if director John Crowley's work on HBO miniseries *True Detective* had been highlighted over his writers? Similarly, would I have given *Junun* a second thought had it not been for the excrescence of Paul Thomas Anderson's name? Note that, at the time, I was two years into researching and writing this thesis so I was perhaps especially attuned to notions of film authorship, particularly in advertising. Yet everyone else on this train had seen what I had and likely made similar snap decisions based on the same criteria, even if they weren't conscious of it. I later learned that Liverpool Street station has an annual footfall of 148 million, with a daily rush hour traffic of 75 thousand commuters, so advertisements such as these have a tremendous reach.<sup>16</sup> These thoughts were still swimming around

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<sup>16</sup> 'Footfall Breakdown for each Station', *Network Rail* (n.d.)

<<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/FootfallBreakdownForEachStation.pdf>> [accessed 12 December 2015] [NB: since drafting this

my head when I alighted at Leytonstone and began the walk to my friends' house. Yet it seemed I could not escape film authors as the tunnel leading out of Leytonstone station is a kaleidoscopic pageant of mosaics detailing scenes from Alfred Hitchcock's films (such as the famous crop-duster set-piece from *North by Northwest*) as well as renditions of Hitchcock's childhood. Leytonstone, of course, is Hitchcock's hometown: a fact reiterated once more by the name of the pub we happened to visit that night, The Sir Alfred Hitchcock Hotel.

What all of these examples—the issue of *Empire*, Kermode's review, the posters on the Underground, Leytonstone's Hitchcock paraphernalia—clearly demonstrate is that the film author is very much a vital component of the popular imagination. And what is significant is that all of these instances of casual auteurism presented themselves to me over the short span of only a few weeks without any effort on my part. So, where the previous chapters focused on the author's place in analytical thought, the question must now turn to their function in the commerce of everyday culture. The auteur's subsistence in the more mundane regions of film discourse can be attributable to a number of factors: Sarris' popularity with non-academic readers in the 1960s; the success of the *Cahiers*- and Sarris-influenced Movie Brats in 1970s' Hollywood; the rise of independent filmmakers and filmmaking culture in the 1990s; the proliferation of university film courses which invariably feature auteurist literature on their syllabi; the mass expansion of film fandom on the internet, which enables spectators worldwide to share their opinions (an intense cinephilia facilitated by a hitherto unprecedented access to films on the home-video market); and, of course, the fact that Romantic attitudes still reign supreme in common considerations of literature, music, and visual art given that poststructuralist anti-author theories have not gained mainstream attention due to their technical and, frankly, difficult nature. Yet it is their pre-eminence in the paratextual marketing lexicon of the Hollywood distribution system which has sustained the auteur and gifted them a new lease on life in the twenty-first century. Therefore, it is time to shift our attention from the theoretical to the

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chapter, this website has become inaccessible. A cached version of the quoted webpage can be viewed on the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at the following link:  
<<https://web.archive.org/web/20160910230139/https://www.networkrail.co.uk/FootfallBreakdownForEachStation.pdf>>].

commercial and assess how auteurism operates—not as a critical mode of judgment or analysis, but a distributor-driven promotional practice.

### 3.ii – Credit Where Credit is Given

In order to fully comprehend the form and function of film promotion, we must ground our analysis in the fundamental understanding that we are no longer dealing with ‘texts’ as discrete objects. Rather, we encounter a discursive field that orbits an artwork, envelops it, and, indeed, is partly responsible for establishing and sustaining it. Given that we are addressing the space which encircles a text—the textual ozone layer, if you will—we are not so much concerned with *textuality* (as in **Part One**) as we are *paratextuality*, or how texts are installed within the prospective consciousness via ancillary media produced by distributors. We briefly referred to ‘paratexts’ in **Chapter Two** [cf. **2.iv**] but have not yet properly interrogated their methods and means with regards to Hollywood marketing. To this, we now turn our attention. Concurrent with that analysis, of course, comes an examination of authorial paratexts: not only in terms of their design and message, but their cognitive mechanisms and commodity status in an increasingly brand-oriented retail enterprise. Finally, this leads to a survey of contemporary Hollywood as a constituent of a vast conglomerated multimedia empire and how the auteur-brand operates within this system as an integral ‘attractor’.

G rard Genette, the pioneer of paratextual studies in literary criticism, outlines the paratext as a threshold which ‘offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.’<sup>17</sup> He writes that the

text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to

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<sup>17</sup> G rard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2.

*make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption.<sup>18</sup>

Posters and trailers are perhaps the most obvious examples of cinematic paratexts, and are the most pertinent to our current study, but they are hardly the only paratexts that determine a film's outward countenance. Much as a book is presented by semantically congested elements like its dust-jacket, blurb, publisher imprint, and typography, so is the film made present by industry journalism, interviews with cast and crew, professional and amateur reviews, colloquial discussions, recommendations by friends and computer algorithms, award ceremonies, premieres, leaked set photographs, spoilers, fan theories, action figures, calendars, t-shirts, home-video packaging, behind-the-scenes documentaries, and DVD/Blu-ray commentaries. The majority of these will be revisited in **Chapters Four and Five**, but they are raised here to demonstrate, as Jonathan Gray says, 'that paratexts are not simply add-ons, spinoffs, and also-rans: they create texts, they manage them, and they fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them.'<sup>19</sup> This creational agency is not to be underestimated. Paratexts not only determine the works we consume by raising our awareness of their existence and persuading us to engage in a textual relationship with them but, more significantly, they encourage certain hermeneutic filters through which we actualise the text proper.

Recall the London Underground posters for *Pan* and *Brooklyn* in 3.i [figs. 3.3-4] and we can see that although both sheets abide by a similar design principle—the tableau arrangement of actor portraits in front of a sweeping landscape—they each offer specific clues as to their films' characters, narratives, genres, tones, and target market. *Pan*'s status as a pseudo-prequel to *Peter and Wendy* is indicated by the poster's tagline 'EVERY LEGEND HAS A BEGINNING' as well as its presentation of the cast. The size and centrality of Levi Miller as Peter Pan with respect to the other actors clearly designates him as the protagonist (indeed, he stands over the title 'Pan') and his sideways posture separates the sheet into two planes: to the right and facing Miller's back is Hugh Jackman's menacing

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Spoilers, Promos, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 6.

Blackbeard, apparently the film's villain; to Miller's left and front are Rooney Mara's Tiger Lily and Garrett Hedlund's James Hook. The inclusion of Peter Pan's canonical arch-nemesis Captain Hook on the poster's sympathetic side raises questions as to the characters' relationship and intimates that the film's central focus is perhaps not the ostensible conflict with Blackbeard but the establishment of Peter and Hook's fall into antagonism. Thus, *Pan* presents itself as an origin story for Captain Hook as much as its hero and a potential franchise starter – which is most noticeable in the creation of a distinct, recognisable logo which will go on to authenticate this film's merchandise along with any further cinematic entries into the series. Contrastively, *Brooklyn*'s placement outside the tentpole realm of IP-driven multimedia synergy is suggested by its title's use of the serif *Trajan* typeface, typically associated with Oscar material, and the spread of international production companies and distributors along the bottom of the poster (i.e., BBC Films, HanWay Films, Lionsgate) that target more niche markets than Warner Bros. Pictures, which distributed *Pan*. Nonetheless, like *Pan*, *Brooklyn*'s tagline 'TWO COUNTRIES, TWO LOVES, ONE HEART' implies a story which is reinforced by the poster's layout. The balanced composition wherein an enlarged Saoirse Ronan, flanked by love interests played by Domhnall Gleeson and Emory Cohen, stands between the Irish coast and the Brooklyn Bridge transmits the core of the film's romantic plot: Gleeson's downcast gaze, Ronan's determined forward-looking pose, the subtle background gradient that moves from grey to turquoise as the scene changes from Ireland to America, and even the film's title 'Brooklyn' all prompt the potential spectator into surmising a narrative trajectory of a young woman abandoning the stifling comforts of home for the exciting uncertainties of a bustling metropolis (themes encapsulated by both locale's respective male characters). Additionally, the dearth of modern skyscrapers on the poster's depiction of New York and the cast's old-fashioned wardrobe firmly establish *Brooklyn* as a period piece set in the 1950s.

Even with no prior knowledge of *Pan* and *Brooklyn*, decoding these images gives the consumer a stable, albeit rough, appreciation of each work's central concepts and story ideas. Finola Kerrigan writes that whilst film marketing materials are often admired for their aesthetic value, 'it is

important to consider posters as advertising texts. In so doing, we must consider their production and consumption in terms of their ability to communicate the *key essence* of a film to the target audience' [my emphasis].<sup>20</sup> This is especially important in the film market where products cannot be distinguished in purely economic terms like clothing, food, or home electronics. Whereas the presumed higher quality of an Apple iPhone over a no-brand smartphone is implied by its higher cost, film tickets, home-videos, and digital downloads all have standardised price models so spending choices must be based on criteria other than dollars and cents. The film industry, as Kerrigan says, is an 'experience economy' where product value cannot be so easily quantified.<sup>21</sup> However, the film industry still abides by the wider rules of market segmentation, which, quoting Jonathan E. Schroeder, 'produces a world where everything depends on differentiation of products, services, and ideas.'<sup>22</sup> Hence the necessity for film advertising to communicate a work's key essence, which John Ellis also calls the 'narrative image'.<sup>23</sup> According to Ellis, the promotional construction of the narrative image

enables cinema to offer single texts, films which have a high degree of difference each one from the next [...]. The mechanism of the narrative image is crucial to this process, as it offers a publicly circulating definition of a particular film, attempting to specify it out from other films in the marketplace.<sup>24</sup>

*Pan* and *Brooklyn's* posters, as demonstrated in the previous paragraph, successfully differentiate their films as products fit for consumption by succinctly communicating their own distinct narrative images, and they achieve this self-identification through their use of graphic design conventions.

If film advertising is to effectively relay narrative images to the broad church of film consumers in diversely populated areas such as the London Underground, it needs to work on a level that is universally comprehensible. Schroeder stresses that marketing cannot be 'a hidden language or

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<sup>20</sup> Finola Kerrigan, *Film Marketing* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2010), pp. 129-30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder, *Visual Consumption* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions—Cinema : television : video* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



knowledge system, accessible only to the semiotically literate. Images, particularly advertising images, need to make clear associations in order to get their message across.<sup>25</sup> Building upon this, Kerrigan explains that 'conventional methods of presenting types of films are adhered to so that the consumer is not left in a state of confusion regarding the benefits which may be derived through consuming the film.'<sup>26</sup> For example, we can instantly tell that *Pretty Woman* [fig. 3.6] and *Two Weeks Notice* [fig. 3.7] are romantic comedies thanks to their posters' back-to-back arrangement of their stars. This pseudo-antagonistic blocking convention, which has become somewhat of a cliché in the romcom promotional lexicon, possesses a high degree of semiotic clarity, transmitting legible concepts of light-hearted combative courtship to the target audience. Yet if we look to the posters for *Black Snake Moan* [fig. 3.8] and *Action Jackson* [fig. 3.9], it is evident that although these sheets feature similar design choices in terms of actor presentation, their narrative images are decidedly not romantic comedies. The pose, then, is not a transcendent symbol with universal meaning. Its communicative power is reliant upon the poster's entire symbolic network, which includes the actors' expressions (smiles in *Pretty Woman* and *Two Weeks Notice* intimate comedy, the stern grimaces of *Black Snake Moan* suggest drama); the actors' coded star qualities (unlike Richard Gere and Hugh Grant, Samuel L. Jackson and Carl Weathers are not typically associated with romcoms); the depiction of props (*Action Jackson*'s pistol and *Black Snake Moan*'s chain imply violence); the colour palette (*Two Weeks Notice* is comprised of soft blues and whites, which Kerrigan says are the 'dominant colours [...] when promoting a romance', *Black Snake Moan* features much harsher warm tones);<sup>27</sup> the typography (*Two Weeks Notice* employs a slender lower-case san-serif font whilst *Action Jackson* uses a stencil-like militaristic typeface); and the titles themselves ('*Pretty Woman*' and '*Action Jackson*' are fairly demonstrative whereas the more allusive '*Black Snake Moan*' has certain racial and sexual connotations as well as a strong link to Delta Blues music, as it is taken from a song by Blind Lemon Jefferson). Over time and through repeated use, certain combinations of these design

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<sup>25</sup> Schroeder, *Visual Consumption*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

constituents form meaningful prototypes that function as aesthetic shorthand. Of course, design does not become completely homogenised but the narrowing of graphic templates does result in a presentational regularity—*Two Weeks Notice*'s deliberate invocation of *Pretty Woman*'s poster provokes consumer cognisance of the anterior film and encourages them to place those qualities upon the upcoming product. Therefore, as convention-driven narrative images work to differentiate products their reliance on graphic standards also elicits similarities in the creation of reciprocally-defined value.

It is important to note that promotional design is dictated by legal requirements and back office politics as much as symbolic conventions. Robert Marich writes that 'Hollywood is something of an anomaly in the business world because the people who create the product—the filmmakers and the actors—often exert extraordinary influence on the marketing.'<sup>28</sup> Personnel representation and accreditation in film marketing are subject to contractual agreements, union guidelines, and frequently aggressive negotiations by talent agents. *The Towering Inferno* is a particularly notorious example of the sometimes furious nature of billing disputes. Steve McQueen and Paul Newman both wanted to be seen as the film's 'star' but could not reach a settlement on who received top billing on the film's promotional materials. This was eventually resolved by a 'staggered billing' wherein McQueen's name was printed lower on the left and Newman's higher on the right, so as to give each top billing if read either horizontally or vertically [**fig. 3.10**].<sup>29</sup> Along with star certification, billing also determines the commercial projection of authorship. Whilst the Directors Guild of America (DGA) mandates that directors are acknowledged on all one-sheet posters in the billing block along with the rest of the principal cast and crew, directors are not automatically granted possessory credit and may even be omitted from certain types of posters, such as large billboards that feature only actor

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Marich, *Marketing to Moviegoers: A Handbook of Strategies and Tactics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2009), p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> Matt Wolf, 'The Maggie and Judi Show', *The Observer* (13 October 2002)

<<http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/oct/13/featuresreview.review1>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 18 of 23.

portraits.<sup>30</sup> Of course, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) have similar stipulations, which means that ownership of films can often become hotly contested, with Marich stating that ‘Directors, producers, and writers often battle for such possessory credits in what goes beyond director or other guild basic agreements.’<sup>31</sup> This can manifest in various forms, like ‘Quentin Tarantino presents’, ‘A Ron Howard film’, ‘written and directed by Richard Linklater’, ‘Tim Burton’s *The Nightmare Before Christmas*’, ‘from the director of *Bridesmaids*’, etc. Although Margaret Heidenry is quick to call these ‘vanity’ credits and criticises them for snuffing out the collaborative nature of filmmaking,<sup>32</sup> Marich states that the fight for promotional ownership ‘isn’t just egotistical, because billing can determine salary and standing on future films.’<sup>33</sup> More than this, paratextual authorship can drastically influence the film’s narrative image and serves a cross-promotional function in that the film’s marketing enhances the cultural status of its author even as it is itself enhanced by it.

In fact, Genette states that authorship is chiefly articulated on this paratextual level: the paratextual ‘fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*.’<sup>34</sup> Authorial paratexts operate as influencers by instilling in the work an aura of legitimacy, familiarity, and aesthetic continuity – by acquiring, to borrow Marie Maclean’s words, the ‘*auctoritas* and *gravitas*’ of a brand name.<sup>35</sup> It is this ‘aura’ that Walter Benjamin believes ‘wither[s] in the age of mechanical reproduction’ that ‘detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.’<sup>36</sup> Essentially, and especially so in our time of precise digital replication, a cloned work is displaced

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Heidenry, ‘The Vanity Credit Turns 100: Why Directors Turn to “A Film by” – and Why It’s Caused Fights for Decades’, *Vanity Fair* (20 March 2015) <<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/03/vanity-credit-a-film-by>> [accessed 26 August 2017] para. 1 of 15.

<sup>33</sup> Marich, *Marketing to Moviegoers*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Marie Maclean, ‘Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral’, *New Literary History*, 22.2 (Spring 1991), 273-9 (p. 276).

<sup>36</sup> Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217-52 (p. 221).

from its 'presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place' that 'determined the history to which it was subject.'<sup>37</sup> Because of this, Benjamin declares the 'presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.'<sup>38</sup> Whether film—which is in a continual process of reproduction through the stages of image capture, processing, editing, grading, and distribution to theatrical and home environments—even has an 'original' form is questionable but Gray asserts that artistic aura is alive and thriving in Hollywood (by far the most mechanical of the mechanical arts) and can be seen most readily in the paratext. He writes:

In an impressive act of alchemy, numerous paratexts create an author figure, surround the text with aura, and insist on its uniqueness, value, and authenticity in an otherwise standardized media environment, thereby taking a heretofore industrial entity and rendering it a work of art.<sup>39</sup>

As a consequence, paratextual authorship serves to enhance the *performance* of the work—in both the economic sense (by proffering the work as invaluable art) and its more literal meaning as the spectator 'performs' the text in union with the film, their interpretive faculties galvanised by the auctorial impetus. If a paratext proffers noticeable authorial cues, it is likely a consumer will activate the author code and essentially 'author(ise)' the text, before they have even bought a ticket, by bestowing upon its implied author a specific identity. We could even say that the paratextual presence of authorship is what spurs the consumer to buy the ticket in the first place.

If we are to analyse promotional paratexts, we need to have an overt awareness of the connotations of design constituents like composition, colour, and typography (which, Ingrid Haidegger explains, 'creates a strong informational stimulus that can indicate a film's qualities via its graphic design' and 'directly influences a reader's reaction to advertising material').<sup>40</sup> Additionally, and more specifically with regards to our current investigation, we need to consider the industrial and commercial implications of acknowledging an author. Expanding on Schroeder's model of

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> Ingrid Haidegger, 'What's in a name? the art of movie titling', *Word & Image*, 31.4 (2015), 425-41 (p. 431).

commercial analysis, Kerrigan suggests that one of the main frameworks of consumer sense-making is the 'process of resemblance', which she defines as follows:

This is where the images used must resemble the essence of what is being presented. In the case of film marketing, this may be in terms of either "grade" or quality of film as well as the type of film in terms of genre or style. By highlighting key actors in the communications, this gives the impression of a "star vehicle", if the director is given prominence then the film may be more stylistically or artistically driven. If a film is linked to an earlier film, book or another known "property", then this can also be seen as linked to the process of resemblance.<sup>41</sup>

In order to examine the procedures of authorial resemblance, let us compare the theatrical release posters for *John Carpenter's Vampires* [fig. 3.11] and *Bram Stoker's Dracula* [fig. 3.12], two vampire films from the 1990s notable, in this instance, for how their promotional materials utilise above-the-title possessory credit.

By the time that *John Carpenter's Vampires* was released in 1998, director John Carpenter had earned the critical moniker of the 'Master of Terror' which the poster duly cites in its tagline: 'FROM THE MASTER OF TERROR COMES A NEW BREED OF EVIL'. This nickname is indicative of the fact that, at this juncture at least, a certain structure of aesthetic norms was associated with Carpenter's name. Therefore, by overtly attributing itself to that name, *John Carpenter's Vampires* is able to fasten itself to films such as *John Carpenter's Halloween*, *John Carpenter's The Thing*, and *John Carpenter's Prince of Darkness*, and consequently establish its own thematic and stylistic set by the mere dint of association (i.e., the process of resemblance). So for the niche audience to whom Carpenter is a known quantity the title *John Carpenter's Vampires* brings those associations to bear and effectively kick-starts the hermeneutic process: the title initiates and directs interpretation and even mediates the scope of the text's potential meaning long before the film has even been viewed [cf. interpretive strategies in 2.iv]. Meanwhile, to the lay person unfamiliar with Carpenter, the film proffering itself as 'authored' nonetheless has a significant qualitative impact. If we are made to recognise that an object is the

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<sup>41</sup> Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, p. 133.

product of an artist, it naturally entails that we will approach that object as if it were art itself [NB: we will examine the cognitive mechanisms of this process with respect to frame theory in 3.iii].

Returning momentarily to the concept of the Romantic genius outlined in **Introduction**—as well as the overarching history of auteurism from **Chapter One**—there is somewhat of an innate admission of esteem whenever an individual is lifted from the anonymity of the drudge of the pen or the *metteur-en-scène* and is not only granted a proper name but furthermore identified as being responsible for whatever is communicated by the art. Writing of such ‘*onymity*’, which is ‘sometimes motivated by something stronger or less neutral than, say, the absence of a desire to give oneself a pseudonym’, Genette suggests that endowing a book with a recognisable originator can influence the impact of the new work by welding it to a secure tradition of accomplishment and thematic/narrative organisation.<sup>42</sup> He continues:

The name then is no longer a straightforward statement of identity (“The author’s name is So-and-So”); it is, instead, the way to put an identity, or rather a “personality,” as the media call it, at the *service* of the book: “This book is the work of the illustrious So-and-So.”<sup>43</sup>

[my emphasis]

Such can be said of cinema, where the possessive qualifier ‘John Carpenter’s *x*’ operates not just as simple linguistic deixis but an evaluative marker, *branding* its film with unique characteristics.

Speaking also of the novel, Michel Foucault acknowledges that “‘literary’ discourse was acceptable only if it carried an author’s name’ and the ‘meaning and value attributed to the text depended on this information.’<sup>44</sup> Onymity not only validates a work, it constructs it; the auctorial discourse supplies an interpretive framework which facilitates textual actualisation and, indeed, can authorise and veto certain readings. Foucault’s sense of authorship-as-discourse has just as much validity for film as it does literature and Carpenter is a prime example. By allowing his name to be attached to a product, Carpenter-the-man enables Carpenter-the-discourse to be employed at the *service* of the

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<sup>42</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. William E. Cain et al. (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2001), 1622-35 (p. 1629).

film—for both interpretation and profit. And this is a process and effect of which Carpenter seems very much conscious: he rejected his own possessory credit for the Chevy Chase vehicle *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* because, Bill Chambers explains, of the ‘studio interference he knew full well would take place prior to signing on’ with Warner Bros.<sup>45</sup> While Chambers is quick to argue that *Memoirs* demonstrates Carpenter’s artistic versatility and attempts an auteurist restoration of the film by linking its romantic elements to the much more successful *Starman* (promoted, of course, as *John Carpenter’s Starman*), Carpenter patently did not believe that *Memoirs*—for all intents and purposes a studio product—warranted or deserved his name. In fact, overtly including *Memoirs* in the Carpenter canon could have damaged the whole brand and injured Carpenter’s future prospects with his fans. Such is the importance of the authorial hallmark that the DGA created scapegoat pseudonym ‘Alan Smithee’ in 1968 which has allowed disgruntled directors (like David Lynch with the broadcast version of *Dune* and Kiefer Sutherland with *Woman Wanted*) to disavow those troubled films in which executive meddling blotted their creative vision.<sup>46</sup> As Foucault says, ‘the name of an author is not precisely a proper name among others [...] Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of classification.’<sup>47</sup> Hence, the authorial moniker is subject to a certain degree of image management and cultural mediation, and *John Carpenter’s Vampires*, irrespective of its actual textual qualities, is one of a great many films whose marketing has depended upon a strong identification of an authorial name with a specific aesthetic/evaluative/industrial structure.

Meanwhile, *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* invokes an author who, by all accounts, had nothing to do with the work at hand: Bram Stoker died eighty years before the film bearing his name was released in 1992. *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* was directed by Francis Ford Coppola and it is worth interrogating why he is not granted the same authorial distinction as Carpenter. Coppola is one of the great icons of

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<sup>45</sup> Bill Chambers, ‘Memoirs of an Invisible Man (1992) – DVD + John Carpenter: The Prince of Darkness – Books’, *Film Freak Central* (6 October 2012) <http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/ffc/2012/10/memoirs-of-an-invisible-man-john-carpenter-the-prince-of-darkness.html> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 7.

<sup>46</sup> Amy Wallace, ‘Name of Director Smithee Isn’t What It Used To Be’, *Los Angeles Times* (15 January 2000) <<http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jan/15/entertainment/ca-54271>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1 of 2.

<sup>47</sup> Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’, p. 1627.

Postclassical Hollywood, the spearhead of the Movie Brat movement that revolutionised New American Cinema in the 1970s; it can even be argued that he has certainly directed more culturally significant and prestigious films than Carpenter if we were to compare *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now* to, say, *Escape From New York* and *Big Trouble in Little China*. Yet Coppola's name is diminutive on the *Dracula* poster, rendered almost invisible among the billing block at the bottom of the sheet. There is a potential explanation for this. By invoking Stoker, this version of *Dracula* is able to individuate and validate itself against the manifold other cinematic interpretations of the character that abused the source in order to maximise its baser aspects: namely, the Universal horror cycle of the 1930s and 40s and Hammer's *Dracula* series from 1958 to 1973—the latter of which is particularly culpable for exploiting the vampiric tropes codified by Stoker for cheap titillation, shock value, and gore. Ergo, by proclaiming itself to be 'Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', rather than 'Universal's' or 'Hammer's', Coppola's film is able to align itself more closely to its source material and essentially concretise its own fidelity to it (even though the film itself features notable departures from the novel). In effect, the title *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, in three short words, constructs a hierarchy of value at the top of which it stands alone.

Yet it may not be as simple as this. If we go back to 1981 when Coppola was at the height of his fame and influence and look at the poster for *One From the Heart* [fig. 3.13], we can see a drastic difference in marketing strategy. Here, the film is clearly situated within a consideration of Coppola's cultural mystique as a cinematic genius and this is achieved by the host of critical plaudits that dominate the top half of the poster. Some choice excerpts:

**Coppola's** film is sensuous, gaudy, dreamlike, baroque [...] The stylistic hedonism is dazzling

[...]

**Coppola's** movie sustains an intricate texture from beginning to end;

It will stand as yet another innovative, audacious effort from **the director of "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now"**

[...]

**Francis Coppola** proves once and for all, that he is the movies' master magician.

[my emphases]



By accentuating its director's stylistic and technical achievements to such a degree, *One From the Heart's* poster dictates that our engagement with the text be predicated upon an engagement with its author. In this sense, the film's narrative—its story, its characters—is made absolutely perfunctory. Thus we can see in full swing Timothy Corrigan's conception of the commercialised auteur's primary function 'as a promotion or recovery of a movie [...] regardless of the filmic text itself' [signposted in **2.iv** viz. Ridley Scott].<sup>48</sup>

Why, then, is Coppola not so prominently placed on the *Dracula* poster? If we look at the domestic box-office figures and critical receptions of Coppola's films in the 1970s and 80s [**table 1**], we can identify three general trends: first, a growing aversion on the part of critics, indicated by the falling Rotten Tomatoes percentage (which is taken here as a general barometer of response); second, a growing apathy on the part of the audience, demonstrated in the diminishing receipts; and third, a growing antipathy on the part of investors that grant Coppola incrementally less and less money to work with after *One From the Heart* only makes a \$636,796 return on a \$26 million outlay—effectively forcing Coppola and his production house Zoetrope Studios into a debt they would spend the next decade repaying.<sup>49</sup> The cumulative effect of these three factors is that, by the time of *Dracula's* release in 1992, Coppola's cultural capital had diminished drastically since its heights in the early seventies after films such as *The Godfather* and *The Conversation*.

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<sup>48</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'The Commerce of Auteurs: A Voice without Authority', *New German Critique*, 49 (1990), 43-57 (p. 49).

<sup>49</sup> Michael Cieply, 'A Filmmaker's Finances Faces a Court Assault', *Los Angeles Times* (3 June 1990) <[http://articles.latimes.com/1990-06-03/business/fi-949\\_1\\_francis-ford-coppola](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-06-03/business/fi-949_1_francis-ford-coppola)> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1 of 4.

Title (Year)	Budget (\$)	Domestic Gross (\$)	RT %
<i>The Godfather</i> (1972)	6,000,000	133,698,921	99
<i>The Conversation</i> (1974)	1,600,000	4,420,000	98
<i>The Godfather: Part II</i> (1974)	13,000,000	47,542,841	99
<i>Apocalypse Now</i> (1979)	31,000,000	78,784,010	99
<i>One From the Heart</i> (1981)	26,000,000	636,796	50
<i>The Outsiders</i> (1983)	10,000,000	25,697,647	66
<i>Rumble Fish</i> (1983)	10,000,000	2,494,480	71
<i>The Cotton Club</i> (1984)	58,000,000	25,928,721	75
<i>Peggy Sue Got Married</i> (1986)	18,000,000	41,382,841	85
<i>Gardens of Stone</i> (1987)	13,000,000	5,262,047	43
<i>Tucker: The Man and His Dream</i> (1988)	24,000,000	19,652,638	84
<i>The Godfather: Part III</i> (1990)	54,000,000	66,666,062	67

[table 1]

Meanwhile, if we look at Coppola's Movie Brat peers Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, we can see that they were able to maintain, and even extend, their promotional presence during the blockbuster boom of the 1980s precisely because they were able to make consistently successful films. The poster for *Raiders of Lost Ark* [fig. 3.14] frames our anticipation of the film within an understanding of *Jaws* and *Star Wars* as high-concept Manichean escapist fantasies and effectively cashes in their cultural and commercial currency in order to imbue this new intellectual property with a sense of prestige and value. Likewise, the arrangement of Spielberg's name over director Robert Zemeckis on the *Back to the Future* poster [fig. 3.15] immediately and intimately links the film to Spielberg's brand of family-oriented spectacle, even though the extent of his influence on *Back to the Future's* narrative was likely limited given his status as a producer and not a writer or director. Therefore, we can see clearly that distributors acknowledging authorship in promotion is more a process of shaping product identity and influencing saleability than it is necessarily concerned with honouring the work that has gone into actually making the film. There is a distinct ideological encumbrance attached to assigning authorship that is driven by strong economic imperatives. Coppola's descent into paratextual anonymity, then, could be said to be a result of his diminishing value as a commodity in the cinematic marketplace of the 1980s.

This, of course, begs the question *when did authorship become so important to Hollywood's sales rhetoric?* The easy assumption would be that this is a phenomenon coincident with the rise of New Hollywood's auteur movement in the late 1960s, in which *nouvelle vague*-inspired filmmakers like Arthur Penn, Dennis Hopper, and Mike Nichols released a spate of what David A. Cook calls 'visually arresting, thematically challenging, and stylistically individualized' films which connected with a demographic that was 'younger, better-educated, and more affluent than Hollywood's traditional audience.'<sup>50</sup> After all, the auteurist narrative detailed in **Chapter One** claims that film authorship was discovered by *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the maligned and malnourished figure of the Hollywood director who was released from bondage and publicly exonerated once Sarris hit the mainstream. Whilst it is indeed true that the success of *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider*, and *The Graduate* enthused 'studios to hire young, nontraditional producers and directors to appeal to a younger clientele'—which opened the door for the likes of Coppola, De Palma, and Scorsese to assert their dominance over the course of the 1970s—it is not entirely accurate to suggest that the director ascended to promotional sovereignty the moment the word 'auteur' reached American shores.<sup>51</sup>

*Bonnie and Clyde*—released five years after Sarris' 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962'—was marketed purely in terms of its narrative and genre (the trailer opens with Faye Dunaway replicating the real-life Bonnie Parker's famous gun-toting, cigar-chomping pose against a 1932 Ford [fig. 3.16-3.17], followed by Warren Beatty modelling the instantly identifiable regalia of the 1930s Hollywood gangster), its stars (particularly their erotic chemistry as they are shown fondling one another atop a bed on two separate instances), and its controversial violence (the trailer culminates in a cacophony of gunfire—including the graphic close-up of a bank attendant being shot in the head with a level of on-screen gore heretofore unseen in Hollywood—accompanied by intertitles claiming 'There has never been... You have never seen... a motion picture like this one!').<sup>52</sup> And all the while, director Penn is

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<sup>50</sup> David A. Cook, 'Auteur Cinema and the "Film Generation" in 1970s Hollywood', in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 11-37 (p. 12).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> 'Bonnie and Clyde – Trailer (1967)', *YouTube* (9 July 2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ACCPxAA-MU>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:02:44.

nowhere to be seen. *Bonnie and Clyde's* trailer broadly accords with the primary rhetorical enthymemes of genre, narrative, and stardom Lisa Kernan identifies within the conventional structuring of trailers in *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (the first book-length study of trailers and one of only two significant examinations yet written in English, the other being Keith M. Johnston's *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology*).<sup>53</sup> However, if we fast-forward ten years from 1967 to 1977 and look to the trailer for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, an exceedingly different tactic and order of paratextual priorities presents itself.

The first two minutes of *Close Encounters's* five minute trailer are composed largely of a slideshow of the film's crew with the accompanying voice-over:

The director is Steven Spielberg, whose most recent motion picture, *Jaws*, is already a legend. The producers are Julia Phillips and Michael Phillips, of *The Sting* and *Taxi Driver*. Creating special effects is Douglas Trumbull, who in this film goes far beyond his achievements in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. For the music, there was only one choice: 11 time Academy Award nominee John Williams, composer of the scores for *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. The technical advisor is the world's foremost authority on unidentified flying objects, Dr J. Allen Hynek of Northwestern University. Heading the cast is Richard Dreyfuss, who has shown his rare talent in such diverse films as *American Graffiti*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, and *Jaws*. And making his American debut as an actor is the great French director, François Truffaut, winner of the 1974 Academy Award.<sup>54</sup>

Spielberg's authorial hegemony is obvious. Not only is Spielberg placed front and centre but *Jaws* is name-checked three times, reinforcing Spielberg's authorial presence with each utterance. Also noteworthy is the trailer's extensive use of intertextual references with each serving to bolster *Close Encounters's* superiority over films such as *2001* and *Star Wars*, and hence Spielberg's over Kubrick and Lucas. Most curious, though, is Truffaut's inclusion which further concretises Spielberg's supremacy as an auteur, not only by generating an obvious junction with the *nouvelle vague* (infusing *Close Encounters* with a certain degree of artistic validity before any footage has even been shown), but the positioning of the Oscar-winning pioneer of New French Cinema under Spielberg's control fabricates

<sup>53</sup> Lisa Kernan, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) – Original Trailer', *YouTube* (11 September 2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exp32VHaYdE>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:35.

an authorial echelon at the head of which reigns an insuperable Spielberg. Remembering our notes on billing arrangements with respect to posters, it is reasonable to assume similar precepts guide the construction of trailers. Hence, by tracing the chronology of billing in trailers we can essentially construct that film's promotional hierarchy of significance in which elements introduced sooner (or writ larger) are considered more important for a prospective audience. Beatty and Dunaway are much more important to *Bonnie and Clyde* than the (invisible) Penn where *Close Encounters* is built squarely upon Spielberg's post-*Jaws* prestige.

Ostensibly, this confirms the auteurist fable. Indeed, we can identify a surge in director-centric marketing in the 1970s which largely coincides with the auteur theory's rise in popular discourse, with the directorial exaltation of *Close Encounters* making for a striking synecdochic comparison with *Bonnie and Clyde*. This would suggest that the promotional significance of authorship is in fact a consequence of New Hollywood's transition toward a more individualistic production template than that of Classical Hollywood's assembly line model. In order to confirm this, then, we must reach back to Hollywood's halcyon days and assess the director's typical commercial destiny within the studio system.

John Huston's early career at Warner Bros. seems to demonstrate the kind of paratextual invisibility directors were fated to enjoy pre-auteurism. Huston's first feature, *The Maltese Falcon*, is sold principally on its genre, its story adapted from 'DASHIELL HAMMETT'S GREATEST NOVEL', and the star status of 'HUMPHREY BOGART TOPPING HIS SMASHING SUCCESS IN "HIGH SIERRA"'.<sup>55</sup> Returning to Kernan's treatise on trailers which emphasises the importance of genre, story, and star rhetorical structures, it is worth quoting her thoughts, particular those on stardom, at length:

Within [the] assumed parameters of audience desires for genres and stories, most trailers make assumptions about the audience's interest in the *stars* who people the narrative and inhabit the generic spaces of Hollywood films. [...] Of the three, the rhetorical appeal to interest in stardom is the lowest logical type (stars are components of film narratives, which fall within genres), and thus possesses the highest level of organization and semiotic density (such as the complexity that stars' indexical connection to the external world brings

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<sup>55</sup> 'Maltese Falcon (1941) Official Trailer – Humphrey Bogart Movie', *YouTube* (29 January 2014) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3a9YU1SVbSE>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:30; 00:02:10.

with it) of the three appeals. Trailers' rhetorical appeals are all thus built on the foundation of star appeals and cannot function unless peopled with (famous and emerging) stars, just as contemporary Hollywood wisdom considers casting as the most crucial feature in packaging a film.<sup>56</sup>

Although Bogart was not yet the pop cultural icon he would later become (*Casablanca* was still another year away), he had been a recognisable stalwart of Hollywood gangster movies for the majority of the 1930s and *The Maltese Falcon*, in which he replaced the more bankable George Raft, heralded Bogart's transition into a leading man. Hence, Bogart provides his audience an integral point of ingress into *The Maltese Falcon*, wherein the qualities the trailer assigns Sam Spade (validated by the pre-established semantics of Bogart's screen persona)—'HE MAKES CRIME A CAREER—AND LADIES A HOBBY! HE'S AS FAST ON THE DRAW—AS HE IS IN THE DRAWING ROOM... HUMPHREY BOGART AS THE MOST RUTHLESS LOVER YOU'VE EVER MET!'—effectively transpose onto the film's overall characterisation as a *film noir* suffuse with intrigue, violence, and eroticism.<sup>57</sup>

The promotion of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* is similarly focused on its stars. Indeed, the trailer describes it as 'A NEW EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE BROUGHT TO GREATNESS BY A SUPERB CAST!' and Bogart, now with an Oscar nomination to his name as well as a high-profile marriage to Lauren Bacall, once more receives prominent billing, being highlighted twice for 'SURPASSING EVERY OTHER TRIUMPH'.<sup>58</sup> Huston, again, remains locked backstage with a title card that instead celebrates the studio: 'WARNER BROS. PRESENTS "THE TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE"'.<sup>59</sup> *Key Largo*'s trailer abides by a parallel structuring paradigm in which Huston is, unsurprisingly, denied directorial credit. Rather, the trailer trumpets *Key Largo* as 'MAXWELL ANDERSON'S SMASHING STAGE SUCCESS! BROUGHT TO GREATER BRILLIANCE BY THE MOST SUPERB CAST OF THE YEAR!' with specific stress upon Bogart and Bacall's tender, passionate romantic chemistry<sup>60</sup>—a tactic evident

<sup>56</sup> Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, p. 215.

<sup>57</sup> 'Maltese Falcon (1941) Official Trailer', 00:00:55.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Treasure of the Sierra Madre (1948) Trailer', *YouTube* (21 January 2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGpvO8JabEc>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:30; 00:02:34.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:02:43.

<sup>60</sup> 'Key Largo Official Trailer #1 – Humphrey Bogart Movie (1948) HD', *YouTube* (5 October 2012) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U95Zk5nBQIM>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:02:03.

also in the marketing of *Dark Passage*, *To Have and Have Not*, and *The Big Sleep* (whose trailer accentuates how 'THAT MAN BOGART! AND THAT WOMAN BACALL! ... ARE THAT WAY AGAIN!').<sup>61</sup>

And, following on from *Sierra Madre's* precedent, Warners take possessory credit as the trailer closes with 'Warner Bros.' "KEY LARGO".<sup>62</sup>

Surveying Warners' trailer campaigns for its other products, we can see that such directorial suppression in favour of star marketing infused with studio aggrandisement is not restricted to Huston and can be observed in *Sergeant York*, *Across the Pacific*, *Now, Voyager*, *Casablanca*, *Mildred Pierce*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, *Bonnie and Clyde* (explaining Penn's paratextual truancy addressed earlier), *Dirty Harry*, *All the President's Men*. Even while other studios were starting to wake up to the director's promotional pull (like Paramount which enumerated Roman Polanski in its trailer for *Rosemary's Baby* in 1968) Warners was staunch in its marketing model, acknowledging directors only in a few abnormal circumstances: William Friedkin with *The Exorcist* in 1973 (potentially a consequence of his Academy Award for *The French Connection* in 1971, though Friedkin is nonetheless subordinated under novelist William Peter Blatty) and Mel Brooks for *Blazing Saddles* in 1974 (the trailer designates it 'A MEL BROOKS FILM' but makes overt reference only to his acting and writing).<sup>63</sup> It is apparent, then, that Warners were predominantly concerned with constructing a 'house style' populated by a stable troupe of dependable stars like James Cagney, Ingrid Bergman, Bette Davis, and Edward G. Robinson, whose textual and extratextual meanings were compatible with their generic branding and coherently circumscribed within the public discourse.

Keith M. Johnston is eager to underscore, contrary to Kernan, that trailers from this period were not solely organised around genres, narratives, and stars, but also incorporated considerations of 'color film technology, the dismantling of the studio system, the growth of competitive technology

<sup>61</sup> 'The Big Sleep Official Trailer #1 – Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall Movie (1946) HD', *YouTube* (5 October 2012) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-K49CUaeto>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:13.

<sup>62</sup> 'Key Largo Official Trailer', 00:02:17.

<sup>63</sup> 'Blazing Saddles (1974) Original Trailer – Gene Wilder Movie', *YouTube* (30 January 2014) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKayG1TrfuE>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:28.

(television), gender roles', among others.<sup>64</sup> Accounting for these various impulses under a system of 'unified analysis' allows us to grasp how trailers work textually as persuasion (*vis-à-vis* Kernan) as well as 'what they can reveal as historical sources.'<sup>65</sup> Before the studios vertically integrated in the 1920s and controlled exhibition, the onus of advertising fell largely to the owners of the individual theatres with each miniature drive varying severely in terms of their emphases and quality. Janet Staiger notes that with vertical integration, 'firms sought profit maximization at every level of the company, [so] they began paying more attention to how well advertising performed' and 'also began considering how well their marketing investments were directly rewarded.'<sup>66</sup> Thanks to bodies such as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA)—which established a '12-point ad code' arbitrated by the International Motion Picture Advertising Association (IMPAA)<sup>67</sup>— and the National Screen Service (NSS) that, according to Keith J. Hamel, 'assured [studios] that its films received comparable advertising materials at independent, fourth- or fifth-run, neighbourhood theaters as they did at its own first-run houses', film marketing transformed from a gaggle of personalised campaigns to a singularised national strategy dictated by the studio.<sup>68</sup> Hence the majors, as they now were, could control exactly how their products were to appear on the market. Although the 1948 antitrust Paramount Decree outlawed vertical integration and effectively killed the studio system, distributors were nonetheless resolute in preserving their brand distinctions in the marketplace; with the death of block-booking—which meant the sale and exhibition of a studio's films was no longer guaranteed—and the coincident transition to fewer, more expensive, and extensively marketed products per year, perhaps it had never been more important to their survival. Consequently, we can understand the anonymity of Huston and his contemporaries within the

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<sup>64</sup> Keith M. Johnston, *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11; p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Janet Staiger, 'Announcing Wares, Winning Patrons, Voicing Ideals: Thinking about the History and Theory of Film Advertising', *Cinema Journal*, 29. 3 (Spring 1990), 3-31 (p. 14).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Keith J. Hamel, 'From Advertisement to Entertainment: Early Hollywood Film Trailers', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 29.3 (2012), 268-78 (p. 274).



Warner promotional system as the studio's attempt to assert and maintain *its* authorship (and corporate identity) within an increasingly fraught landscape.

This would seem to be confirmed by Huston's move from Warners to United Artists for *The African Queen* in 1951 which finally brought him some paratextual exposure. The trailer identifies him as the 'winner of a double Oscar award for *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*' and closes with a protracted shot of The *Picturegoer* Seal of Merit 'awarded to JOHN HUSTON for THE AFRICAN QUEEN judged by the PICTUREGOER AWARDS PANEL for outstanding merit in film craftsmanship and entertainment' (*Picturegoer* being a British fanzine that ran from 1921 to 1960).<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, if we skip forward to Columbia's 1975 advertisement for *The Man Who Would Be King* we are immediately received by Huston himself [fig. 3.18], sitting in front of the lens on location in Morocco as he narrates the trailer:

Welcome my friends to India and Afghanistan... and Kafiristan. Kafiristan: the remotest place on Earth, and only Alexander the Great has been before. With the help of Michael Caine and Sean Connery, and Christopher Plummer, we are doing all in our power to tell this wild, funny, and bizarre tale: *The Man Who Would Be King*. The year is 1885, not that that matters. For in Kafiristan time is without beginning or end; it is timeless as Rudyard Kipling's story *The Man Who Would Be King*.<sup>70</sup>

By having Huston's face (which audiences were now likely to recognise after his role in 1974's *Chinatown*) open the trailer, it is he—not Kipling, Columbia, Connery, or Caine—who acts as the text's prime structuring principle. It is his voice that transports us from the cinema to Kafiristan and whisks us back in time, his voice that introduces the stars (who 'help' Huston, thus establishing a hierarchical relationship of control and mediated meaning). By taking the place of the traditional anonymous voice-over trailer narrator, Huston essentially constructs the film before our eyes—a transcendental feat supposedly comparable to Alexander the Great's empire. Two times Huston announces the film's title, so as to reinforce his ownership of it, and even though Huston qualifies *The Man Who Would Be*

<sup>69</sup> 'The African Queen (1951) Trailer', *YouTube* (21 January 2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88jytHOsDos>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:58; 00:02:18.

<sup>70</sup> 'Rudyard Kipling's The Man Who Would Be King (1975) Trailer', *YouTube* (18 January 2010) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNb6SxXcD7g>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:10.

*King* as Kipling's near the end, the narratorial authority he has installed over the preceding two minutes cannot be superseded: Huston speaks, and Kipling is granted possessory credit by his grace. Huston's authorial power could not be stronger, given the final minute of the trailer is dedicated to a scroll of cherry-picked laudatory critical quotes (which brings us, in a sense, back to the marketing of Coppola in *One From the Heart*):

[I]t has been craftily directed by John Huston... a prince among pictures.

[...]

It has been a long time since a director has made this kind of entertainment work so enjoyably. John Huston stands taller this year.

[...]

THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING is John Huston's best film in 25 years...<sup>71</sup>

Huston's career, traced through the promotional articulation of his authorship, apparently conforms to the idea that the film director was shackled within an unappreciative production industry until the auteurist boom of the 1970s bestowed upon them great fame and riches, with *The Man Who Would Be King* standing as a particularly dazzling example of postclassical promotional auteurist vigour. As Timothy Corrigan suggests, 'the industrial utility of auteurism from the late 1960s to the early 1970s had much to do with the waning of the American studio system and the subsequent need to find new ways to mark a movie other than with a studio's signature.'<sup>72</sup> Yet Huston's commercial emergence with *The African Queen* in 1951 fractures the stability of that timeline. Granted, this could be an upshot of United Artists' more author-friendly aesthetic but to suggest that the majors were categorically allergic to the promotional acknowledgement of authorship preterms the complexity of a commercial discourse that has actually relied upon authorial figures for considerably longer than one might suppose under the auteurist fancy.

For example, Frank Capra is a marked case of a director/producer who exerted a massive promotional influence during Classical Hollywood's heyday. The trailer for 1939's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* opens with H.V. Kaltenborn saying: 'I consider it a real privilege and a real experience to

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:02:12.

<sup>72</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'Auteurs and the New Hollywood', in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham and London: Duke University press, 1998), 38-62 (p. 40).

have played even a minor part under the distinguished direction of Frank Capra.’<sup>73</sup> As ‘FRANK CAPRA again has made motion picture history...’ cuts across the screen, Capra himself manifests within the trailer-diegesis, laughing with crew members whilst setting up a shot (establishing that collegiate everyman aura Sam Mendes attempted to construct in ‘Auteur Theories’ and exhibit in his *Spectre* photographs) [fig. 3.19].<sup>74</sup> Then, while the voice-over narrator describes *Mr. Smith* as ‘by far the greatest picture of filmdom’s top director’, the trailer cuts to a close-up of a pensive Capra mulling over a cigarette—a brooding figure locked in deep thought whose sunken eyes turn to meet the camera as the negative double-exposes a shot of his three golden Academy statuettes [fig. 3.20].<sup>75</sup> The narrator later describes *Mr. Smith*’s plot in terms of ‘those inimitable Capra overtones of drama, laughter, and romance’, with the penultimate title-card imploring us to ‘watch for FRANK CAPRA’s *supreme triumph*’.<sup>76</sup> Although the trailer does get decent mileage out of James Stewart’s star image, its principal subject—what Finola Kerrigan would call it ‘unique selling proposition’—is clearly Capra: depicted here as a man both boisterous and solemn, an artist capable of mapping the whole spectrum of human emotion and experience.<sup>77</sup>

Such was Capra’s power that that the trailer for *His Girl Friday* opens: ‘from the Columbia studios in Hollywood comes an exciting new film triumph, a companion hit to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.’<sup>78</sup> Howard Hawks, *His Girl Friday*’s undisclosed director and producer, is marginalised in favour of a fairly tendentious link to Capra on the grounds of their shared studio, even though *Mr. Smith* and *His Girl Friday* express only the most passing of resemblances. This would be of little consequence if Hawks had not been allowed a possessory credit for (‘HOWARD HAWKS’ production of’) *Bringing Up Baby* by RKO only two years previously.<sup>79</sup> Hawks’ disappearance in *His Girl Friday*’s

<sup>73</sup> ‘1939 Mr Smith goes to Washington – Trailer’, *YouTube* (17 January 2008) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm9qaEJ3MBc>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:20.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:00:30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:00:39.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:07; 00:01:30.

<sup>77</sup> Finola Kerrigan, *Film Marketing* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2010), p. 41.

<sup>78</sup> ‘His Girl Friday – Trailer’, *YouTube* (15 May 2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHVvnEWez1M>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:07.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Bringing Up Baby (1938) Official Trailer – Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant Movie HD’, *YouTube* (22 June 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F25nzu6hh0Q>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:02:12.

spot becomes even more suspect when placed beside the trailer for *Only Angels Have Wings*—released by Columbia in 1939 between *Bringing Up Baby* in 1938 and *His Girl Friday* in 1940. Like *Mr. Smith's* advertisement, the trailer shifts from the narrative to a production diegesis to show Hawks on set (cutting a much more sombre figure than the jovial Capra). The narrator defines *Only Angels Have Wings* as 'created by the wizardry of a master picture-maker, Howard Hawks, in the shining tradition of filmdom's mightiest achievements' and, after Cary Grant and Jean Arthur receive their shared billing, the trailer once more transitions from fiction to reality to show Hawks at his desk—cigarette in hand, eyes piercing the distance, the very mirror of *Mr. Smith's* Capra—framed by, 'with the directorial genius of HOWARD HAWKS' [fig. 3.21].<sup>80</sup> Clearly, though not stressed to the same extremes as Capra in *Mr. Smith*, Hawks' authorial allure is organised as a significant component of *Only Angels'* marketing campaign. Yet the trailer's opening title card—'From the studio that gave you "YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU" winner of the Academy Award'—nonetheless assembles an anticipative frame for the film that, following the concept of the diachronic ordering of paratextual significance, places emphasis firmly on Capra.<sup>81</sup> Thus it becomes apparent that hierarchies of value exist not only within the individual marketing text but between multiple products and campaigns. In this case, Columbia, obviously wishing to capitalise on *Mr. Smith's* critical and commercial success, sought to recode *His Girl Friday* from a relatively low-key romantic screwball comedy to a pseudo-Caprian masterpiece. Ergo, what was once Capra's directorial charm becomes Columbia's corporate imprint—their so-called 'shining tradition of filmdom's mightiest achievements'.

Although Capra and Hawks are foregrounded in terms of their directorial ability, we must remember they also produced the films in which their direction is celebrated—thus their institutional currency was an order of magnitude more valuable than those who simply directed. Indeed, production was almost unilaterally considered hegemonic over direction in Classical Hollywood.

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<sup>80</sup> 'Only angels have wings trailer', *YouTube* (15 March 2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nz-vDLCOzhk>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:20; 00:02:38.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:00:10.

'METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PRESENTS TOD BROWNING'S PRODUCTION OF *FREAKS*' portrays Browning's production as more commercially relevant than his direction.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, *Citizen Kane* is marketed as 'A MERCURY PRODUCTION by Orson Welles' with no indication of his standing as the film's director<sup>83</sup> and 1940's *The Thief of Bagdad* is sold purely on the basis of its producer: 'with *The Thief of Bagdad*, producer Alexander Korda takes you on a magic carpet to the seven wonders of the world of entertainment.'<sup>84</sup>

*The Grapes of Wrath*'s trailer is especially revelatory in this regard. A great length of its runtime is dedicated to establishing the cultural enormity of John Steinbeck's novel and the bidding war for its film rights. After celebrating Twentieth Century Fox's purchase of the book (visually represented by the close-up of *Motion Picture Daily*'s headline, 'Zanuck gets "*Grapes of Wrath*"'), the trailer transitions to a montage of kitchen workers, priests, deliverymen, housewives, and farmhands in animated (albeit voiceless) debate, their words supplanted by the narrator's: 'speculation and rumour are rife to the effect that no *producer* will venture to film this great dramatic masterpiece of human heart' [my emphasis].<sup>85</sup> We then dissolve to a shot of Zanuck (sat, like Capra and Hawks, behind his desk, that ultimate symbol of authority) [fig. 3.22] accompanied by a stirring orchestral gesture and the continuing voice-over: 'Daryl F. Zanuck, production head of Twentieth Century Fox Studios, emphatically announces that *The Grapes of Wrath* will be made.'<sup>86</sup> What follows is a long helicopter shot of the Fox offices and backlot, superimposed with a quick series of scenes showing frenetic preparation—intense meetings, lorries being loaded, cameras tested, props manufactured, negatives developed, film unspooled and cut—none of which last long enough to identify any of the workers. The narrator emphasises that 'all of the resources of this vast studio are marshalled for the production'

<sup>82</sup> 'Freaks Official Trailer #1 – Wallace Ford Movie (1932) HD', *YouTube* (5 October 2012)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzoKz5EsUro>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:01.

<sup>83</sup> 'Citizen Kane (1941) Official Trailer #1 – Orson Welles Movie', *YouTube* (21 February 2014)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dxh3lwdOFw>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:03:37.

<sup>84</sup> 'The Thief of Bagdad (1940) – Theatrical Trailer', *YouTube* (11 September 2011)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMiF67ggUOM>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:32.

<sup>85</sup> 'The Grapes of Wrath | #TBT Trailer | 20<sup>th</sup> Century FOX', *YouTube* (21 May 2015)

<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOuAZLA\\_jWQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOuAZLA_jWQ)> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:58; 00:01:05.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:13.

and adds, almost flippantly, that ‘John Ford, Academy Award winner, is given the directorial assignment.’<sup>87</sup>

The trailer’s sleight-of-hand is impressive. It presents adapting *The Grapes of Wrath* as a practically impossible quixotic quest. These worries, expressed by the excitedly cautious public (their ostentatious *mise-en-scène* marking them as distinctly working-class), are nullified by the appearance of Zanuck: a nearly angelic figure dressed in white. We are allowed the time to bask in his presence, to identify with the man and his noble mission to do justice to this American literary masterpiece and not debase it into a mere commodity as would the other, less-worthy studios. Zanuck, lord of creation, commands his workforce to mobilise and we survey his domain from a God’s-eye perspective as visions of his employees flash before us. Ford’s superficial acknowledgement coinciding with imagery of vast machines operated by faceless drones transmutes the director into just another spanner in Zanuck’s toolbox. The rousing score and narration’s induction of a sensationalist aura of fearless exploration (metaphysically linking Zanuck to the mythological frontiersmen who founded America) allows the trailer to effortlessly glide over the inherent irony of utilising the same kind of exploitative industrial apparatuses Steinbeck critiqued in his novel in its adaptation. In the final analysis, *The Grapes of Wrath*’s trailer, which tidily demonstrates the factory-line configuration of Classical Hollywood, is sold definitively as Zanuck’s film—not necessarily Steinbeck’s, and certainly not Ford’s.

Nonetheless, Ford’s extensive catalogue and awards success meant that his paratextual ascendance was all but guaranteed. This prophecy was fulfilled with *My Darling Clementine*’s 1946 trailer, which opens with a close-up of an Oscar statuette and the following crawl: ‘JOHN FORD 3-TIME WINNER OF THE ACADEMY AWARD FOR “THE INFORMER” “GRAPES OF WRATH” “HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY” DIRECTOR OF THE UNFORGETTABLE “STAGECOACH” NOW THRILLS THE WORLD WITH HIS NEWEST TRIUMPH’.<sup>88</sup> Here, Zanuck is relegated to the final title card in which Ford is gifted a ‘directed by’ nod *as well as* possessory credit of the entire film—‘DARRYL F. ZANUCK *presents* JOHN

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:21.

<sup>88</sup> ‘My Darling Clementine – Trailer’, *YouTube* (19 December 2006) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WTaci5qIJ0>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:01.

FORD'S "MY DARLING CLEMENTINE" — where the subtle but sharp size difference between Zanuck and Ford's names tells us everything we need to know about *Clementine's* promotional priorities [fig. 3.23].

Although the director's promotional proliferation post-Classical Hollywood [cf. Carpenter, Spielberg, and Huston in this section; Ridley Scott and Darren Aronofsky in 2.iv; David Dobkin and James Cameron in **Introduction**] does lend credence to the belief that commercial auteurism is a response to the popularisation of critical auteurism, authorship has been a central aspect of film marketing since at least the 1930s (unfortunately, the sparse availability and poor archiving of promotional paratexts from pre-sound Hollywood precludes more rigorous and definitive research). By recognising Humphrey Bogart's star-qualities as having a determining influence upon *The Maltese Falcon's* constitution (which you could then recommended to a friend as 'a Bogart film' and be perfectly understood) are we not assigning authorship, in its purest sense, to Bogart? I would say so. Similarly, the foregrounding of Warner Bros.' logo on *The Maltese Falcon's* trailer and posters asserts Warners' 'authorship', even though all the company provided was the environment, capital, and brand guidelines that enabled and circumscribed the filmmaking process which was undertaken by other (human) agents. Furthermore, *The Maltese Falcon's* self-proclamation as 'DASHIELL HAMMETT'S GREATEST NOVEL' furnishes the credence of Hammett's literary acumen upon the film, which was actually written by Huston. Indeed, the author of the to-be-adapted work is often granted a high degree of paratextual sway in Classical film promotion and we have already seen a variety of examples of this in play: Maxwell Anderson (*Key Largo*), William Peter Blatty (*The Exorcist*), C.S. Forester (*The African Queen*), Rudyard Kipling (*The Man Who Would Be King*), and John Steinbeck (*The Grapes of Wrath*) are all underlined in their respective adaptation's trailer even though each did nothing for those films besides supply their source material, which was then rewritten as a screenplay (before being 'rewritten' again by the director and actors on set, and once more in the cutting room) with extremely divergent measures of fidelity. Yet the citation of a novelist or playwright's name allowed literature's rich aesthetic heritage (and all of the critical and qualitative weight that bears) to

be transplanted to the nascent medium of cinema which was struggling to assert its own artistic value. Allowing a novelist possessory credit, then, instantaneously authenticates a film and makes it attractive to a different, perhaps cine-sceptical, audience.

Kernan is right to suggest that marketing 'cannot function unless peopled with (famous and emerging) stars', but I would suggest a slight alteration to her terminology: it is authors, not stars, upon which successful promotion depends (if we follow the prior concept of stars comprising an authorial sub-category and consider 'author' in this context as simply denoting a recognised issuing source).<sup>89</sup> Commercialised authorship, then, is not a consequence of auteurism, but auteurism—as it manifested through popular critical discourse and the emergence of self-styled auteurs like Francis Ford Coppola and Michael Cimino in the 1970s—was instrumental in mainstreaming the film director as *the* author ahead of the producer, star, or writer. The director's reconceptualisation as a Romantic genius offered the marketing machine exactly what it needed as the studio system disintegrated. To be true, directors were hardly subaltern members of Classical Hollywood society—Best Director accolades have been staples of the Academy Awards since their inception in 1929; the Directors Guild of America has fought for the director's right to possessory credit since being formed in 1936; some directors, like Capra and Ford, were able to break through their paratextual glass ceilings even at the height of studio hegemony—but the revelation and mass acceptance of the director's artistic control and excellence gifted distributors a peerless humanistic vector through which to transmit their promotionally-charged authorial energies.<sup>90</sup> This is not to suggest that the director has completely subsumed all other authorial figures, as you will still find films promoted on the basis of their producer (Jerry Bruckheimer/J.J. Abrams), studio (Marvel/Disney), star (Tom Cruise/Leonardo DiCaprio), and writer (J.K. Rowling/Charlie Kaufman). Nor does this necessarily mean that the director has gained an artistic freedom in accordance with their visibility. This may have been the case in the brief span of decentralisation and deregulation during Hollywood's 'New' 70s and within the

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<sup>89</sup> Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, p. 215.

<sup>90</sup> 'Possessory Credit Timeline', *Directors Guild of America* (February 2004) <<http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/0402-Feb-2004/Possessory-Credit-Timeline.aspx>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 16.



1990s' flash-culture of independent film, but as the majors became sublimated under larger corporations over the 1980s and those independent studios like Miramax and New Line Cinema were swallowed up by the conglomerates in the 2000s, we have reached a period of industrial hegemony in the 2010s comparable to Classical Hollywood. This survey has shown that the marketing machine's articulation of authorship is inextricably linked with producing a product's saleable identity, so the director's continued growth within this system must be interrogated as something other than the blanket endorsement of creative autonomy.

### **3.iii – Hype(r) Texts and The Paratextual Primacy Effect**

Having realised that authorship has always been a principal component of film advertising, our attention must be redirected towards the decidedly trickier questions of why directors have become so essential to contemporary Hollywood as branded commodities and how authorial paratexts actually function on a cognitive level. We could simply say that directorial markers in promotion serve to differentiate and distinguish products in an ever-crowded market, where cinema now has to compete not only with television and its traditional rival media (literature, music, theatre, and such), but video games, social media, and the multitude of distractions offered by the internet – which is to say nothing of the virtually interminable number of leisure activities and hobbies that all vie for the consumer's precious and inescapably limited sum of attention, time, and disposable income. In this, we could draw upon Steve Neale's thoughts on art cinema's institutional framework in the 1980s – wherein he suggests the construction of an auteurist canon peopled by the likes of Bernardo Bertolucci, Werner Herzog, and Wim Wenders fostered in the international art market a 'realm of creativity, freedom and meaning' against the 'impersonal profit-seeking' of a genre-glued Hollywood – to say that the correlative formation of an auteur pantheon in present-day Hollywood marketing injects its products with a pseudo-art cinema authority whilst simultaneously augmenting the mass saleability of those

more conventional aspects of genre, spectacle, and escapist entertainment.<sup>91</sup> Although such a terse response elides the multifarious purposes and interests commercialised authorship serves, as well as how the branded auteur's constitution is dictated by marketing imperatives that are entwined with developments in the film industry's conglomerate infrastructure during the twentieth century's dusk decades (which will we address in 3.iv), it does provide a useful point of ingress in that majority of promotional campaigns in the twenty-first century now boast directorial credit. The authorial paratext is so innately persuasive that Genette suggests 'magical thinking (act as if it were so, and you'll make it happen) occasionally leads the publisher to engage in promotional practices that somewhat anticipate glory by mimicking its effects.'<sup>92</sup> This we can see in Hollywood's current market philosophy, in which some directors are granted proper names and possessory credit even without the sustained catalogue of celebrated work that would usually justify their classification as an auteur (thus bypassing Classical Hollywood's passage-of-prestige directors like Huston had to endure before attaining a paratextual profile).

*Transcendence*, the first feature as a director for Wally Pfister (Christopher Nolan's chosen cinematographer since *Memento*) features 'FROM DIRECTOR WALLY PFISTER' prominently in its 2013/2014 ad campaign without the qualifiers of previous success that usually accompany neophyte filmmakers<sup>93</sup>—as can be seen in *Elysium*'s paratexts that identify Neill Blomkamp, not yet worthy of proper name recognition, as simply 'THE DIRECTOR OF DISTRICT 9'.<sup>94</sup> *Transcendence*'s trailer's spotlighting of *The Dark Knight*'s Morgan Freeman and Cillian Murphy, accentuation of the narrative's science-fiction conceit of consciousness-transferral (which recalls, in a sense, *Inception*), and its gritty *mise-en-scène* all quickly evoke Pfister's collaborations with Nolan, who acted as the film's Executive Producer. This displacement of authorial identity empowered Warner Bros. to utilise

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<sup>91</sup> Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema as Institution', *Screen*, 22.1 (1981), 11-40 (p. 36).

<sup>92</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 39.

<sup>93</sup> 'Transcendence Official Trailer #1 (2014) – Johnny Depp Sci-Fi Movie HD', *YouTube* (20 December 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCTen3-B8GU>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:35.

<sup>94</sup> 'ELYSIUM – Official Full Trailer – In Theaters 8/9', *YouTube* (13 June 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QILNSgou5BY>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:16.

the cachet of their most bankable star-director to frame our anticipation of *Transcendence* as a pseudo-Nolan picture (calling to mind Columbia's Capra-oriented recoding of *His Girl Friday*). Likewise, the posters for actor Ryan Gosling's directorial debut *Lost River* uniformly demarcate the work as 'A FILM BY RYAN GOSLING', applying Gosling's fame as an indie heartthrob to consecrate *Lost River* as an auteur film. Warners' mediation of Gosling's lack of an established authorial style is intriguing, as *Lost River's* posters noticeably draw upon the syntactics of other directors' print paratexts. *Lost River's* portrait sheet [fig. 3.24] depicts a large stone archway forming a demonic face that, along with the poster's neon wash, summons the similar iconography of Nicolas Winding Refn's Gosling-starring *Only God Forgives* [fig. 3.25]. Additionally, the etched scrawl of *Lost River's* title bears striking similarities to the typography of *Drive's* logo [fig. 3.26], also starring Gosling under Refn's direction. Meanwhile, the composition of *Lost River's* landscape poster [fig. 3.27]—above the title, an arrangement of cast mug-shots; below, a tableau scene with its subject framed from behind—rekindles memories of *The Place Beyond the Pines* [fig. 3.28], directed by Derek Cianfrance and starring Gosling (as well as Eva Mendes and Ben Mendelsohn, whose appearance on *Lost River's* poster further concretises the bridge to *Pines*, as does Christina Hendricks to *Drive*). Ergo, the crafty stylistic synthesis of *Lost River's* paratexts projects Gosling's auteur persona as an amalgamation of Refn and Cianfrance: a unification reinforced by the trailer, which combines *Pines's* air of rural reminiscence with *Only God Forgives's* effervescent cinematography and the type of atmospheric electronica found on *Drive's* soundtrack.

Not only do these two examples indicate that the same auctorial promotional trends are evident in both mainstream and 'art-house' markets, as well as how far Warner Bros. has moved away from its Classical anti-director policy, they demonstrate that paratexts work vicariously as parasitic intertext, draining semantic authority from other sources in a process of enforced idealised nostalgia which Nathan Hunt sees as 'activating personal and affective histories of pleasurable film

reception'.<sup>95</sup> In a sense, the process of resemblance [cf. 3.ii] has become weaponised. By instigating a kind of sense-memory of enjoyable textual experiences, authorial paratexts operate in an almost Pavlovian manner: the surreptitious induction of reminiscent gratification by the prospective paratext copies those textual values to the promoted film, as we do not necessarily recognise or distinguish the pleasure of memory from the pleasures of perception. Some paratexts are more conspicuous than others in shaping their autotextual contours [cf. *Elysium*] and whether *Transcendence* and *Lost River*'s campaigns are accurate in portraying Pfister as Nolan-lite and Gosling as a gestalt of Refn and Cianfrance is irrelevant from a marketing perspective. Indeed, Yannis Tzioumakis suggests that an analysis of commercial auteurism 'could potentially reveal "a different author," an author whose presence is assigned institutionally, which often makes sense only in light of distributors' attempts to market a specific product to a particular audience.'<sup>96</sup> Concordantly, we must remember the oft-forgotten fact that films are bought before they are seen in a process Gray calls '*speculative consumption*', where we pay 'for the *chance* of entertainment, not necessarily for actual entertainment.'<sup>97</sup> Their respective box-office successes and failures cannot, then, be automatically correlated to textual qualities. Good films can bomb as often as bad films can break records; a film makes money on the basis of how persuasive its paratexts are. John Ellis writes that buying a ticket 'is an act of approving the promise that the film offers through the mechanism of the narrative image' and this concept warrants further elaboration.<sup>98</sup>

To reiterate: Ellis defines the narrative image as an 'idea of the film [which] is widely circulated and promoted, [...] the cinema industry's anticipatory reply to the question "What is this film like?"'<sup>99</sup> Continuing, Ellis explains that the narrative image

does not produce an accurate summary or thumb-nail sketch: [...] It does not summarise the film, it indicates it. [...] The narrative image proposes a certain

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<sup>95</sup> Nathan Hunt, 'Nostalgic [re]remembering: film fan cultures and the affective reiteration of popular film histories', *Image & Narrative*, 12.2 (2011), 96-117 (p. 99).

<sup>96</sup> Yannis Tzioumakis, 'Marketing David Mamet: Institutionally Assigned Film Authorship in Contemporary American Cinema', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 57 (Spring 2006), 60-75 (p. 60).

<sup>97</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, p. 24.

<sup>98</sup> John Ellis, *Visible Fictions – Cinema : television : video* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

area of investigation which the film will carry out; it states the thematic of the film, but refuses to do more than that. The narrative image is an enigma, an offer; the film is offered as the resolution of the narrative image.<sup>100</sup>

This fragmentary sense of narrative impressionism is perhaps best expressed in an analysis of the contemporary film trailer, which has largely been taken as given. While it would be somewhat tendentious to suggest that trailers, not films, have become Hollywood's most important product, the brute fact is that we, to quote Gray, 'know many films only at the paratextual level' and the majority of our textual experiences begin and end with the trailer.<sup>101</sup> Due to their phenomenological resemblance to actual film consumption and their quotational style which offers spectators a 'free sample', trailers more than any other paratext provide consumers a solid basis upon which they can decide whether to invest their money.<sup>102</sup> In this, they function as perhaps the most observable case of a paratextual threshold, offering as they do a tantalising glimpse whilst making promises of greater riches within. Trailers have become even more powerful and ubiquitous with the universal spread of the internet and personal smart devices like phones and tablets that enable users to watch trailers anywhere, anytime. As a result, the trailer has migrated from the centralised (and consequently limited) theatrical position it occupied until the mid-1990s to an international omnipresence—freely accessible with only a few swipes of a finger and available whenever one wishes to indulge in cinematic spectation. A trailer can be released onto YouTube and garner millions of views in a matter of hours (*The Fate of the Furious*' first trailer was viewed a record-breaking 139 million times in the twenty-four hour period following its release on 11 December 2016), with thousands upon thousands of spectators joining in a communal discourse about the trailer's properties, textual implications, and their theoretical expectations of eventual actualisation.<sup>103</sup> Corresponding with a trailer's release are untold articles on professional and enthusiast websites, posts on social media, and even so-called

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>101</sup> Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, p. 26.

<sup>102</sup> Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> Anthony D'Alessandro, "'The Fate of the Furious' Shatters Worldwide Record For Most Viewed Trailer', *Deadline* (13 December 2016) <<http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-fate-of-the-furious-vin-diesel-dwayne-johnson-jason-statham-1201869572/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 9.

‘reaction videos’ where web personalities film themselves as they deliver a running commentary of their first viewing of the spot—with each of these responses in turn generating more audience engagement and public dissemination of the trailer’s narrative image. Trailers have such a cultural eminence that they are the only reason some people choose to watch the Super Bowl and we have even come to the point where trailers are themselves advertised by mini-trailers: a recent example being Sony’s February 2016 ‘announcement’ teaser for their reboot of *Ghostbusters*, which ended with a ‘TRAILER PREMIERE’ date and was viewed 3,596,910 times even though it consists of only four rather abstruse establishing shots and the film’s logo.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, trailers are neither arbitrary nor insignificant; more than mere persuasive adverts and elliptical synopses of their parent texts, they are, as Kernan stresses, a ‘unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined’ with enough ‘semiotic density’ that they can be consumed, enjoyed/despised, and analysed on their own terms.<sup>105</sup>

However, Kernan’s conception of the trailer’s overriding reliance on ‘classical [linguistic] rhetoric’ has become somewhat archaic in light of recent modifications to the trailer model.<sup>106</sup> No longer do trailers possess those overt persuasive markers of “‘See!” “Hear!” “Feel!”” so characteristic of Classical Hollywood promotion.<sup>107</sup> In fact, since the death of go-to trailer narrator Don LaFontaine in 2008 trailers have largely abandoned the omniscient voice-over and intertitles are used sparingly to indicate the studio, director, stars, and offer slogans vaguely related to plot or theme (i.e., *Dallas Buyers Club*’s ‘SOMETIMES | IT TAKES A HUSTLER | TO CHANGE THE WORLD’<sup>108</sup> and *Deadpool*’s ‘WITH GREAT POWER | COMES GREAT IRRESPONSIBILITY’).<sup>109</sup> Today’s trailers do not overtly resemble advertisements but actual miniature films dictated by a unique structuring paradigm, or what Kernan

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<sup>104</sup> ‘GHOSTBUSTERS – Trailer Announcement’, *YouTube* (14 February 2016)  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zen753JD5kI>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:21.

<sup>105</sup> Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, p. 1; p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>108</sup> ‘Dallas Buyers Club – Official Trailer (HD) Matthew McConaughey’, *YouTube* (27 August 2015)  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8utPuIFVnU>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:01:47.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Deadpool | Red Band Trailer 2 [HD] | 20<sup>th</sup> Century FOX’, *YouTube* (25 December 2015)  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIM1HydF9UA>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:02:04.

calls 'trailer logic', that abides by a 'two-thirds formula' wherein the first hour of a ninety minute picture is condensed into an intensified format, leaving spectators hungry for the narrative climax (which, of course, demands the purchase of a cinema ticket).<sup>110</sup> Whilst I do agree with Kernan's finding that 'One shot in a two-minute trailer is called upon to stand in for a number of narrative elements, such as character subjectivity and relations, plot development and suspense', I feel that her somewhat underdeveloped coinage of 'discontinuity editing' to describe trailers' montage patterns does not accurately represent the unique qualities of contemporary trailers' affective structures.<sup>111</sup> Instead, I proffer the terms *hypercontinuity* and *hyperfabula* (distinct from Matt Hills' use of 'hyperdiegesis' [cf. 5iv]) on the basis of the former's skittish hyperactivity and the latter's hypertextual dependencies, as well as the prefix's convenient relationship to *hype*—that fervid state of excessive excitement these two elements are very much determined to create.<sup>112</sup>

It is important at this juncture to explicate where promotional hypercontinuity montage stands in relation to the invisible continuity style championed by the Classical Hollywood picture and more recently theorised developments of that form, such as David Bordwell's 'intensified continuity'<sup>113</sup> and Steven Shaviro's 'post-continuity'.<sup>114</sup> Bordwell uses intensified continuity as an umbrella term for a stylistic paradigm shift in post-1960s mainstream cinema wherein an increased cutting rate is married with a fluctuation between wide-angle and telephoto lens lengths, a dependency on close-up shots, and a more pronounced fluidity in camera movement. The result is a highly energised image sequence that generates, in Bordwell's words, a more 'keen moment-to-moment anticipation' than the comparatively stately classicism of Golden Age cinema;<sup>115</sup> those techniques kept aside for more impactful moments in the pre-1960 film—which typically had an average shot length (ASL) between eight and eleven seconds—have become commonplace in the

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<sup>110</sup> Kernan, *Coming Attractions*, p. 10; p. 54.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>112</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 101.

<sup>113</sup> David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), p. 120.

<sup>114</sup> Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Winchester and Washington: O-Books, 2010), p. 123.

<sup>115</sup> Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, p. 180.

twenty-first century filmmaking vernacular (where ASLs span three to six seconds), observable in even the most mundane of dialogue scenes.<sup>116</sup> However, whilst intensified continuity sees the erosion of the long take, the master shot, and the static camera—indeed, Bordwell mourns the ‘loss of some expressive resources of studio-era cinema’—it does not necessarily herald the end of continuity as the guiding principle for image-based storytelling.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Bordwell writes that ‘When every shot is short, when establishing shots are brief or postponed or nonexistent, the eyelines and angles in a dialogue need to be even more unambiguous, and the axis of action is likely to be respected quite strictly.’<sup>118</sup> Despite accusations of an endemic ‘fragmentation and incoherence’ in mainstream millennial stylistics, Bordwell holds that intensified continuity is, as the name suggests, simply a more extreme (albeit neutered) manifestation of the classical style.<sup>119</sup>

On the other hand, Shaviro suggests that post-2000 digital filmmaking passed a ‘critical threshold’ and pushed intensified continuity to an ‘absurd, hyperbolic point’.<sup>120</sup> Addressing the films of Michael Bay, Paul Greengrass, Tony Scott, and Nevelidine/Taylor specifically, Shaviro notes that ‘a preoccupation with the immediate effects trumps any concern for broader continuity—whether on the immediate shot-by-shot level, or on that of the overall narrative.’<sup>121</sup> According to Shaviro, post-continuity filmmaking

abandons the ontology of time and space; it no longer articulates bodies in relation to this. Instead it sets up rhythms of immediate stimulation and manipulation. The shots are selected and edited together only on the basis of their immediate visceral effect upon the audience moment to moment.<sup>122</sup>

This idea of ‘stimulation and manipulation’ is central to Shaviro’s argument that claims post-continuity filmmaking principally operates on a somatic rather than a cerebral level—which is to say that the impact of visual orchestration wholly overrides causal spatio-temporal logic. Where the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>120</sup> Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, p. 123.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.



traditional continuity style and its intensified variation function to orient us within space and time, post-continuity films conversely work to actively disorient the spectator; post-continuity offers a frenzied assault on the senses rather than coherent storytelling, a literal (and, if we are to follow Shaviro, ‘cynical’) disintegration of film form.<sup>123</sup>

At first glance, the contemporary film trailer very much seems to fall in line with the stylistics of post-continuity in that there is often an absolute disregard for conventional editorial tenets. Notions of legible space and time are rejected for a spasmodic sensory onslaught in which vignettes are anachronistically reassembled for maximal affect. If, quoting Shaviro, post-continuity’s prime aim is ‘setting off autonomic responses in the viewer’, film trailers that frequently resemble theme park thrill-rides seem obvious candidates for inclusion.<sup>124</sup> Yet I would hesitate to designate trailer montage patterns as ‘post-continuity’ or even ‘intensified continuity’ (even when trailers are made for, and from, post-continuity or intensified continuity movies) due to the simple fact that trailers are an audio-visual narrative medium distinct from the feature film. A trailer does not aim to *tell* a story—its purpose is to *sell* one. This may be an obvious point to make, but it entails an entirely different set of mechanisms and expectations than long-form fiction cinema. Ergo, we require a separate analytical framework with its own terminology.

Remembering our discussion on cognitive institutional frameworks—wherein the discursive registers of documentary and fiction films are differentiated on the basis on spectatorial assumptions and the perceptual frames each encourage and support, rather than their observable formal qualities [cf. 2.iv]—we can say that trailers trigger the application of mental hermeneutic schemes wholly distinct from the feature film they promote. Put otherwise, a spectator will actualise a trailer differently than a film. For example, the cognitive process of *trailerisation* one undergoes when viewing a trailer enacts a temporal reconfiguration of the FCD’s narratorial slant: the present-tense ‘*here is*’ deictic implicit in conventional cinematic monstration [cf. 2.iii] is transformed into the future-

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<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

tense *'here will be'*. Whereas present-tense film narration is expected to offer a vision of things as they are (as they are happening), allowances outside of those obligations are made for the trailer's future-tense promotional rhetoric that gives snapshots of what will come to pass in its full present-tense form. Unbound by the duties to causality and unity, the trailer is free to contract space and time, allowing explosions, fistfights, love scenes, arguments, etc. to be rattled off in mere seconds. Of course, in the feature film such montage structures would be highly confusing, but in the trailer this creates a compact and *coherent enough* image of the narrative buoyed by the amplified senses of suspense, spectacle, and affect that can be achieved with such editorial freedom. I say 'coherent enough' because the trailer, by its very design, frustrates total comprehension. In a trailer, a line given by one character in a specific location can be rejoined by another character in a completely different environment. Although this dialogue works meta-discursively as a replacement for the now-defunct voice-over narration, the trailer offers no contextual diegetic information for either shot (via shot/reverse-shot binaries and such). Thus, the trailer's indeterminacies are extreme compared to those in the feature, as are the cognitive gymnastics the spectator must perform if they are to reconstruct a comprehensible narration and place those characters within an understanding of the *fabula*. The trailer affords just enough clues for the spectator to enact such diegetisation, but it also wilfully conceals crucial information that would empower a generalised shape of the narrative's totality to be created by the majority of spectators (which would naturally abrogate the necessity of attending the show).

Consequently, each spectator creates their own anticipatory diegetic realisation of the film, using their (con)textual knowledge to fill in the trailer's considerable gaps. So, when *Doomsday* was revealed in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice's* second trailer, one could have utilised their familiarity with conventional blockbuster formulae, as well as comic-book lore, to hypothesise that the much-anticipated brawl between Batman and Superman would occur considerably earlier in the film than had previously been implied, that the two would eventually join forces with Wonder Woman in the third-act to fight this new villain (thus forming the Justice League), and that Superman

would likely die at the film's climax—given Doomsday's original appearance as Superman's murderer in DC's 1992 *Death of Superman* comic arc. Such a theorisation, cued by the trailer but by no means confirmed by it, is based fundamentally on the spectator's installation of a hypertextual mesh upon the ad. Defining the semiotic version of hypertext (distinct from the now more common understanding of the term to denote the interconnectivity of webpages via hyperlinks), Genette writes that 'any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary' can be construed a hypertextual bond.<sup>125</sup> Hence, the virtual narrative world the spectator creates by combining the trailer with their expectations and experiences derived from previous textual encounters (i.e., their cinematic competence) is not the same kind of *fabula* constructed in response to a feature, but a conjectural *hyperfabula*.

Hypercontinuity editing, then, can be defined as the mechanism through which a spectator is spurred to create the hyperfabula. Although hypercontinuity shares aesthetic and affective facets with post-continuity, their objectives are innately dissimilar. Where post-continuity sacrifices story in its pursuit of stylistic excess, hyper-continuity instead exploits stylistic excess to instigate the cognitive processes of story construction; whilst deliberately fragmented, hypercontinuity trailers abide by the broad philosophies of continuity (i.e., story comprehensibility) even as they flagrantly abandon its formal components. It is for this reason that Kernan's use of 'discontinuity' is unsatisfactory. Of course, trailer editing reassembles *discontinuous* images into a new linear flow, but the nomenclature implies an opposition to the principles of continuity—an anti-continuity, if you will. This is not the case. Even in the most classical of films, where the editing strictly abides to invisible continuity rules, a cut still requires the spectator to reorient themselves with respect to the new frame. This concretisation of indeterminacies is the central prerequisite for textual construction. Trailers simply amplify the spectator's agency (and encourage their subjectivity) by widening the gaps inherent in

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<sup>125</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 5.

motion picture storytelling. Thus, contrary to Ellis, the narrative image is not strictly speaking a practical aspect of distributors' promotion at all. Disarmed by the trailer narrative's surface absence of rhetorical cajolery, spectators essentially convince themselves to purchase the film-product by crafting their own utopian version of the narrative in an extremely effective/affective process of persuasion-by-proxy. The all-too-common complaint that 'the trailer was better than the film' attests to this. It is not that trailers are, or even can be outside of their immediate music video-esque somatic affect, superior to feature films as a narrative platform: a trailer is only 'better' when one has made it so. And it is on the stratum of the hyperfabula that the commercialised auteur exerts their consummate persuasive influence.

Take, for instance, *X-Men: Days of Future Past's* promotional campaign in 2013/2014. While Fox's *X-Men* franchise enjoyed a considerable amount of success in the early 2000s with the Bryan Singer-helmed *X-Men* and *X2: X-Men United*, Singer's jump to Warners and DC for *Superman Returns* in 2004 meant that a different director had to be brought in to continue the series (who just so happened to be Brett Ratner, whom Singer replaced on the ill-fated *Superman* project). And though Ratner's *X-Men: The Last Stand* in 2006, along with Gavin Hood's subsequent prequel *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* in 2009, was commercially prosperous (*The Last Stand* was the fourth highest grossing film of 2006 with a domestic return of \$234,362,462, *Origins* is 2009's thirteenth highest at \$179,883,157), there was a marked drop in fan enthusiasm for the franchise as a whole—due mostly to the new films' perceived lack of quality compared to their Singer-directed forebears, but also the corresponding shift in interest toward Nolan's *Batman* films at Warner Bros. and Marvel's own burgeoning Cinematic Universe with *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*, which excluded Professor X and co. due to Marvel Comics selling the *X-Men* property's cinematic rights, along with the word 'mutant', to Fox in 1994. Matthew Vaughn's soft-reboot *X-Men: First Class* in 2011 saw a return in critical favour which did not, unfortunately, translate to higher ticket sales: *First Class* was 2011's seventeenth highest grossing film with \$146,408,305 domestic, under Marvel/Paramount's *Captain America: The First Avenger* at #12 (\$176,760,185) and *Thor* at #10 (\$181,030,624). There was an obvious

need for Fox to rescue their floundering franchise, which was especially important in 2013 given that Marvel's Cinematic Universe, now owned and distributed by Disney and produced by Marvel's own proprietary film studio, had a smash-hit with their cross-over *Avengers* mega-picture in 2012 (grossing \$623,357,910 domestic and breaking \$1.5 billion worldwide) and that DC/Warner's were gearing up to jump-start their own Extended Universe with *Man of Steel*. Sony's fumbling of the Spider-Man property (which necessitated a total overhaul in 2011 with *The Amazing Spider-Man* and would eventually lead to Marvel Studios partially re-acquiring the character's film rights in 2015) was warning enough that Fox could not afford another misfire. Re-enter Bryan Singer, licking his wounds after *Jack the Giant Slayer* flopped with only a \$65,187,603 domestic gross against a production budget of \$195 million.

So, looking at the first trailer for *Days of Future Past* in October 2013, we can see Fox cannily crafting the film as a victory lap for Singer by exploiting a time-travel premise to synthesise the franchise's mega-stars most associated with Singer's earlier pictures (Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, and Hugh Jackman) with *First Class*' troupe of up-and-comers Michael Fassbender, James McAvoy and Jennifer Lawrence, whose collective star power had magnified immensely since 2011 with films such as *Shame*, *12 Years a Slave*, *Trance*, *Filth*, *American Hustle*, and *The Hunger Games* series. *Days of Future Past* thereby amalgamated Stewart and McKellen's high-art Shakespearean prestige with Jackman and Lawrence's mass genre appeal and the independent flavour of Fassbender and McAvoy. Yet the predominant focus is placed unswervingly upon Singer, who is granted the trailer's only intertitles: 'FROM BRYAN SINGER | THE DIRECTOR OF THE USUAL SUSPECTS AND X-MEN'.<sup>126</sup> These hypotextual citations are charged with significance. *The Usual Suspects* was Singer's first major success from 1995, an often-imitated cornerstone of the 1990s' auteur-driven independent movement, and its presence here allows Fox to brush over Singer's rather lacklustre directorial career in the late-2000s/early-2010s. Likewise, by only acknowledging the first *X-Men*, the trailer is able to subtly

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<sup>126</sup> 'X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST – Official Trailer (2014)', *YouTube* (29 October 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pK2zYHWDZK0>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:49.

disengage itself from the disappointments of the franchise's post-Singer doldrums (and the second trailer would fortify *Days of Future Past's* association to 'quality' X-Men films by bringing in reference to X2). Consequently, the hyperfabula one is cued to construct by the trailer, grounded firmly in positive Singer-branded hypotexts, establishes a level of reciprocally-defined value for *Days of Future Past* far exceeding its immediate predecessors. The trailer ending with Xavier saying to his younger-self 'please, we need you to hope again' becomes Fox's prayer and promise to the public that they have righted the ship under its returned captain.<sup>127</sup> And considering *Days of Future Past's* worldwide gross of \$747.9 million, trumping rival superhero movies *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (\$714.4 million) and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* (\$709 million), it seems Fox's appeals were successful—particularly when one sees the trailer campaign for 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse* which delightedly announces that it is 'FROM BRYAN SINGER | THE DIRECTOR OF X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST'.<sup>128</sup>

Whilst we can see that the authorial paratext is indeed most powerful, Cornelia Klecker raises an interesting criticism of Genette's 'circular reasoning in terms of the author as the controlling authority of paratexts, on the one hand, while at the same time being fabricated by the very paratexts he or she is supposed to control, on the other.'<sup>129</sup> It is important to reiterate here that directors do not create the paratexts that celebrate their genius. Distributors will either utilise their own in-house marketing teams to create paratexts or contract the production of video advertisements to external 'trailer houses' like Wild Card and posters to ad-agencies such as BLT (both of which were responsible for *Days of Future Past's* promo campaign). Whether a film's creative personnel have much impact on marketing is difficult to say, but there have been some notable instances of recent dissent. Andrew Pulver notes the vexation of directors Alan Taylor and Colin Trevorrow regarding the trailers for their respective films *Terminator: Genisys* and *Jurassic World*: Taylor was furious with his marketing department for spoiling *Genisys's* big twist in the second trailer, by showcasing a scene

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:59.

<sup>128</sup> 'X-Men: Apocalypse | Official Trailer [HD] | 20th Century Fox', *YouTube* (17 March 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfBVIHgQbYk>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:29.

<sup>129</sup> Cornelia Klecker, 'The other kind of film frames: a research report on paratexts in film', *Word & Image*, 31.4 (2015), 402-13 (p. 404).

he had directed ‘with the intention that no one would know’, and Trevorrow expressed similar disappointment in a teaser-spot for *Jurassic World* that misrepresented Bryce Dallas Howard’s character as a misogynist stereotype and failed to indicate that she would be ‘deconstructed as the story progresses.’<sup>130</sup> Similarly, when asked in a video interview how he felt about *Star Trek Beyond*’s trailer—which greatly underscored director Justin Lin’s heritage in the *Fast & Furious* franchise, with its rip-roaring spectacle pushing the more conventional *Trek* characteristics of diplomacy and exploration cleanly out of view—writer/star Simon Pegg can only offer the vow that ‘there’s a lot more to it than that’ and that fans should ‘hang in there [and] be patient’, his face anguish-stricken as if defending the trailer is physically excruciating.<sup>131</sup>

The paratextual assemblage of authorial agency by other invisible agents—occasionally against the will of the empirical ‘author/s’—is an intriguing paradox, and measuring the distinction between projected ‘commercial’ authorship and extractable ‘textual’ authorship is one of the principal objectives of **Chapter Five**’s case studies, but Genette flatly states that he

will not dwell on the publisher’s epitext: its basically marketing and “promotional” function does not always involve the responsibility of the author in a very meaningful way; most often he is satisfied just to close his eyes officially to the value-inflating hyperbole inseparable from the needs of trade.<sup>132</sup>

Although Genette’s overriding auto-centrism retains some applicability to paratexts such as the director’s commentary [cf. **4.iii**], his blanket dismissal of publisher-produced market-paratexts is counterproductive to his goal of establishing how texts are presented. After all, the promotional paratext’s sole purpose is to introduce consumers to the work; that they are not actually created by ‘the author’ in no way impinges their authority.

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew Pulver, ‘Hollywood rebels: why directors are trashing their own films’ trailers’, *The Guardian* (9 July 2015) <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jul/09/jurassic-world-terminator-genisys-trailers-outcry>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 6 of 12; para. 4 of 12.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Simon Pegg reacts to the Star Trek Beyond Trailer’, *YouTube* (16 December 2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2f4aAwa5wdg>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:22.

<sup>132</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 347.

As an alternative to Genette's essentially intentionalist explanation for paratexts' effects, Klecker offers Erving Goffman's pioneering work in frame theory, which has been somewhat underutilised in film criticism (most likely, Klecker speculates, because of the 'various and often contradictory meanings' of the term 'frame' in cinematic studies).<sup>133</sup> While Goffman's model of situational cognitive linguistics bears little apparent relevance to film—being as it is founded upon interrogating the tacit question 'what is it that's going on here?' that individuals work through when orienting themselves to a particular socio-spatial circumstance (which might compel the application of different modes of address, etc.)<sup>134</sup>—Werner Wolf proffers a literary modification of Goffman that proposes frames as 'metacommunicative concepts' that act as "'keys" to interpretation'.<sup>135</sup> Wolf gives an example of such a 'metaconcept' in 'the frame "artwork"', which 'triggers a specific, aesthetic approach [...] and leads to the expectation that an artwork is a meaningful unit, no matter how obscure or fragmented a given work may seem.'<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Wolf points to "'contextual framings" that 'occur in the cultural space "outside" the work in question', identifying film trailers specifically.<sup>137</sup> Erik Hedling takes the baton from Wolf and conducts a frame analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*' three theatrical trailers from the early 2000s but, apart from a note that trailers 'create cognitive schemas to guide the audience's understanding of the ensuing films', his theorisations are little more than a rewriting of Kernan's rhetorical enthymemes already discussed in 3.ii.<sup>138</sup> Whilst I am not altogether convinced that fledgling frame theory offers much that the various brands of cognitive response studied in **Chapter Two** do not, the very idea of cognitive metaconceptual schemata brings

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<sup>133</sup> Klecker, 'The other kind of film frames', p. 405.

<sup>134</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> Werner Wolf, 'Introduction: Frames, Framings and Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media', in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 1-42 (p. 3).

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3; p. 13.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>138</sup> Erik Hedling, 'Framing Tolkien: Trailers, High Concept, and the Ring', in *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*, ed. Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 407-28 (p. 408).



to mind certain features of Bordwellian constructivism that may yet bear fruit: specifically, the ‘primacy effect’ and the ‘fundamental attribution error’.<sup>139</sup>

Firstly, with regards to the primacy effect, David Bordwell outlines a thought-experiment where subjects are given one of the following multiplications and must quickly guess at the resulting number:

$$8 \times 7 \times 6 \times 5 \times 4 \times 3 \times 2 \times 1 = ?$$

$$1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 = ?^{140}$$

Although each calculation bears the same result (40,320), Bordwell finds that those ‘given the first problem tend to give bigger estimates than those given by people who see the second problem’ because ‘the first item or few items in a series tend to form a benchmark for what will follow.’<sup>141</sup>

Continuing, Bordwell says, ‘If someone acts bossy in a meeting, we’re inclined to say that the person has an aggressive nature.’<sup>142</sup> The fundamental attribution error is therefore our ‘tendency to assign behavior to character traits rather than take into account contextual factors.’<sup>143</sup> Whilst Bordwell employs these cognitive schemata to explain our gut-reactions to fictional characters, their applicability stretches far beyond the realm of the *syuzhet* and can help us to cement why auteur paratexts are so overwhelmingly forceful in promotion.

Returning to *Days of Future Past*’s trailer, we can say that Singer’s identification in the intertitles creates a primacy effect for the trailer. By accentuating that it is *authored* by Singer—even though it was actually crafted by other forces—the trailer encourages a fundamental attribution error as we are given no other contextual information that would invalidate such a claim. The trailer promotes a unified vision of *Days of Future Past* by deploying the authorial tag via Singer’s possessory credit, which in turn prompts the application of the interpretive frame ‘artwork’ (remembering the Romantic tenet *art is the product of an artist* and its correlative auteurist maxim *film is a director’s*

<sup>139</sup> David Bordwell, ‘Minding Movies’, *Observations on Film Art* (5 March 2008)

<<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/03/05/minding-movies/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 16 of 41; para. 20 of 41.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 17-18 of 41.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 18 of 41; para. 16 of 41.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 20 of 41.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

medium). Thus cued by the trailer to consider hypotexts such as *The Usual Suspects* and *X-Men*, a nostalgia-ridden hyperfabula is erected for the upcoming film based fundamentally on favourable memories of Singer's previous triumphs, with considerations of Singer's failures post-*X2* and the franchise's later fiascos nullified by their non-attendance. This extremely seductive narrative image of a concrete and complete work of art authenticated by a reliable and relatable artist is the very thing that generates the irresistible urge to consume and essentially operates as its own primacy effect for the film proper. Upon entering the cinema, this cognitive pre-text has already engendered a wealth of expectations for and interpretations of the phantom film. And though the eventual concretisation of the 'real' text could reveal a work that may not necessarily support the paratext's inseminated authorial code, the paratextual primacy effect is so virulent that it takes a great deal of conflicting evidence for us to question whether our initial assumptions were, in fact, misplaced. Regardless of whether one enjoys *Days of Future Past*, no questions are raised as to the validity of Singer's right to authorship: for instance, Chris Cabin<sup>144</sup> and Robbie Collin's<sup>145</sup> negative reviews are irrevocably couched in terms of Singer's complete control of the screen. In short, far from merely offering an affective vestibule or the product's "'consumable" identity', an efficient trailer—via the operations of the paratextual primacy effect—entreats a perfect, crystalline, romanticised actualisation of the text that effectively dictates a film's financial success.<sup>146</sup>

Yet it must be said that Singer's auteur image tendered by *Days of Future Past*'s paratexts is rather simplistic. Likewise with regards to Zack Snyder's accentuation in *Batman v Superman*'s trailers. Yes, the operatic construction of a superhero ensemble recalls *Watchmen*, Wonder Woman's costume bears some resemblance to the eroticised action-girl iconography of *Sucker Punch*, and the final trailer totes the same kind of distorted rock music and ramping slow-motion shots that have been idiotypes

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<sup>144</sup> Chris Cabin, 'X-Men: Days of Future Past', *Slant* (22 May 2014) <<http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/x-men-days-of-future-past>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 5.

<sup>145</sup> Robbie Collin, 'X-Men: Days of Future Past, review', *The Telegraph* (22 May 2014) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/10825791/X-Men-Days-of-Future-Past-review.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 5 of 12.

<sup>146</sup> Barbara Klinger, 'Digressions at the Cinema: Reception and Mass Culture', *Cinema Journal*, 28.4 (Summer 1989), 3-19 (p. 9).

of Snyder's promotional *mise-en-scène* since 300. But such a spectacular visage is a facile façade of the textual concerns that can be read out of Snyder's films (i.e., the fascination with legacy and mythopoeic imagination as well as a somewhat troubling idolism of phallogocentric zealotry). However, as Barbara Klinger states, the marketing industry 'is not primarily concerned with producing coherent interpretations of a film' [*viz.* Ellis' narrative image].<sup>147</sup> Klinger, pointing towards Theodor Adorno's Marxist-inspired musings on cultural economy and commodity fetishism, suggests that the 'film industry's promotional practices are part of a general process within mass culture to commodify goods produced within its system.'<sup>148</sup> Adorno's thoughts on the modern tendency of 'regressive' music consumption—or 'commodity listening'—are worth consideration and can be summarised as follows.<sup>149</sup> The debasement of music into commercialised commodity forms (such as 'light' pop music) engenders a mass 'inattentiveness' and an ignorant predisposition toward its more immediately recognisable elements, such as the bombast of a hit chorus or the idiosyncratic squeal of a Gibson Les Paul pushed through an overdriven Marshall amplifier.<sup>150</sup> Even without the expert knowledge that would allow them to, say, distinguish the aural qualities of a Les Paul from a Fender Telecaster—or even a virtuoso from an average guitarist—the consumer is inculcated into an obsessive fetish of these components, thereby destroying 'the multilevel unity of the whole work and bring[ing] forward only isolated popular passages.'<sup>151</sup> We can plainly see Adorno's misgivings about the commodification of music when he writes: 'A Beethoven symphony as a whole, spontaneously experienced, can never be appropriated. The man who in the subway triumphantly whistles loudly the theme of the finale of Brahms' First is already primarily involved with its debris.'<sup>152</sup>

The same can be said for Hollywood marketing, which mimics Adorno's subway whistler by reducing the symphony of the film to its most familiar and accessible constituents, which breeds a

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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

<sup>149</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 29-60 (p. 35).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

causal loop as 'the most familiar is the most successful and is therefore played again and again and made still more familiar.'<sup>153</sup> The fetishistic distillation of directorial characteristics into a few recognisable and easily diffusible elements precipitates an entire regiment of distinguishable auteur images that, whilst severely elementary, are widely understood by the mass audience and can be therefore utilised as markers for commodity differentiation. Ergo, under this system of auteur fetishism: Michael Bay = explosive infantilism; Terrence Malick = philosophical esoterica; Terry Gilliam = surrealist satire; David Lynch = chimerical horror; Quentin Tarantino = cine-literate ultra-violence; David Fincher = postmodernist cynicism; Christopher Nolan = pseudo-intellectual scientific-realism; Steven Spielberg = spectacular sentimentalism; and on and on. Essentially, the fetishised auteur stands as a signifier of a *sui generis* tonality. That these brandings are shallow shadows is of little concern when their purpose is not to indicate *content* but *value*. Following Adorno, the 'familiarity of the piece is a surrogate for the quality ascribed to it' and to 'like it is almost the same thing as to recognize it.'<sup>154</sup>

Tony Bennett, acknowledging that texts are 'not the issuing source of meaning' but sites 'on which the production of meaning' occurs, writes:

There neither is nor can be a science of value. Value is something that must be produced. A work is of value only if it is valued, and it can be valued only in relation to some particular set of valuational criteria, be they moral, political or aesthetic. [...] Value is not something which the text has or possesses. It is not an attribute of the text; it is rather something that is produced for the text.<sup>155</sup>

Although the Marxist concept of exchange-value has little ostensible pertinence to an experiential medium such as film—the immediacy of which equates to 'pure use value' (indeed, Adorno states that the 'realm of cultural goods [...] appears to be exempted from the power of exchange' [my emphasis])—Hollywood is nevertheless a capitalist business in which commodities are manufactured,

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>155</sup> Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 140-1.

marketed, sold, bought, and consumed.<sup>156</sup> It is at times such as this that we must remember the distinction Finola Kerrigan draws between 'cinema' and 'the film industry'.<sup>157</sup> Thus, quoting Klinger, the process of commodity fetishism, 'as it assigns an exchange-value to the text, acts constitutionally on the text to hypostasize or condense it into a series of foregrounded elements that meet the conventions of consumption.'<sup>158</sup> The creation of a fetishised commercial auteur is one of the principal ways in which distributors ascribe value to their products and whether the director is ultimately worthy of being ordained an auteur is no matter. Much as how 'it is synonymous to have a voice and be a singer' within Adorno's vulgarised music industry, so is it synonymous in Hollywood to have sight and be able to be exalted as a visionary.<sup>159</sup> Unlike food and water, cinematic consumption is not necessary for existence and film advertisers cannot depend upon the basic bodily needs that Gillian Dyer sees as dictating the marketing of other commodities.<sup>160</sup> Consequently, Hollywood promotion must create new needs and desires. This it achieves through the fetishised, reductionist, imagistic paratextual dissemination of the auteur as a *brand*, which figures into a larger network of brand concerns that dictate the operations of the contemporary retail industry at large.

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<sup>156</sup> Adorno, 'Fetish Character in Music', pp. 38-9.

<sup>157</sup> Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, p. 21.

<sup>158</sup> Klinger, 'Digressions at the Cinema', p. 10.

<sup>159</sup> Adorno, 'Fetish Character in Music', p. 36.

<sup>160</sup> Gillian Dyer, *Advertising as Communication* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 6.

### 3.iv – Advertising Attractions

Paul Grainge believes the endemic transition of the globalised post-Fordist production industries' output from 'things' to 'brands', gaining traction most noticeably in the 1990s, was a means by which companies were able to use advertising to 'wilfully occlude' their exploitation of labour forces in the Second and Third World.<sup>161</sup> He writes:

It is the abstractions and power asymmetries inherent within contemporary economic systems—specifically the *obfuscations* of production that come from outsourcing and the *enchantments* of promotion that are driven by the growth in advertising, marketing and product design—that give corporate logos, trademarks and brand names their political potency.<sup>162</sup>

Not only can we see that auteur branding, then, is a rather sly promotional tactic that disguises the industrial origin and fundamental economic purpose of Hollywood pictures, but that branding, as an overall marketing phenomenon, is charged with creating a consumable image markedly distinct from the actual product and production process.

Apple, for instance, are a company somewhat notorious for their poor labour practices which led to seven employees at the Shenzhen warehouse committing suicide in May 2010.<sup>163</sup> Yet despite widespread news-coverage of the deaths, Apple reported a record-breaking third-quarter revenue (\$28.57 billion, up 82%) and net profit (\$7.31 billion, up 125%) in July 2011, with a staggering 142% growth in iPhone sales equating to 20.34 million units moved.<sup>164</sup> Obviously, the negative press had no effect on the desirability of Apple products and this could be in large part down to Apple's commensurate brand identity that makes almost irresistible appeals to individuality, intelligence, creativity, purity, progress—perfectly encapsulated in their erstwhile slogan 'think different'. Grainge calls such brand promotion 'affective *economics*' and looking at how Apple's Elysian sloganeering

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<sup>161</sup> Paul Grainge, *Brand Hollywood: Selling Entertainment in a Global Media Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Gethin Chamberlain, 'Apple factories accused of exploiting Chinese workers', *The Observer* (30 April 2011) <<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2011/apr/30/apple-chinese-factory-workers-suicides-humiliation>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 23.

<sup>164</sup> Steve Dowling, 'Apple Reports Third Quarter Results', *Apple* (19 July 2011) <<https://www.apple.com/pr/library/2011/07/19Apple-Reports-Third-Quarter-Results.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1-3 of 7.

provokes its consumers to worship the brand, it is easy to see how effective affective brand exploitation can be.<sup>165</sup> Apple users are so in love with the company that when co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs died in 2011 they organised a worldwide candlelight vigil (the candles, of course, were digital, projected from the screens of iPads and iPhones); Jobs was not necessarily mourned as a man but a demiurgic brand icon, given that the vast majority of those grieving his loss only knew him through the mediated marketing messages issued by the corporation. Jobs' cultivation as a brand is appreciable in the 'costume'—black turtleneck, blue jeans, and white New Balance sneakers—he began to wear exclusively once he was re-hired as CEO in 1997 (Jobs was originally fired in 1985) and charged with resurrecting the then-wallowing company. In this, Jobs' calcified public image not only formed Apple's mascot (and, in that sense, acted in a similar manner to Mickey Mouse and Ronald McDonald as synergetic fetishised iconography), but the new aesthetic effectively heralded a shift in corporate policy toward a sleeker, more utilitarian product line.

Perhaps the most obvious instance of Apple's branding is the now-epochal \$900,000 advert for the Macintosh that ran during Super Bowl XVIII in January 1984. The ad's unmistakably Orwellian narrative, depicting an unnamed woman as she breaks free from her dystopian fetters and lobs a sledgehammer through a telescreen and its Big Brother-esque apparition, tells us absolutely nothing about the Macintosh as a product. Instead, it proposes abstracted themes of totalitarian oppression under a tyrannical technocracy (potentially a metaphorical representation of IBM's chokehold on the industry) and freedom through libertarianism and individualistic bravery (which one could achieve by purchasing the Macintosh). Furthermore, Apple's 1984 spot, directed by Ridley Scott, provides an interesting, but by no means unique, case of auteurial brand synergy wherein a company exploits the qualitative and aesthetic prestige of an auteur-brand in order to convey those selfsame conceptions of value to their product (much as how *Lost River's* marketing campaign leeches the repute of Refn and Cianfrance [cf. 3.iii]). Look to Wes Anderson's adverts for Prada, Stella Artois,

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<sup>165</sup> Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, p. 30.

American Express, and H&M, as well as Martin Scorsese's \$70 million short *The Audition* that acted as a commercial for the launch of the Macau Studio City casino in 2015, and we can see that Apple's paradigm of auteurist synergy—in which the auteur-brand sanctifies the product and the advertisement further promulgates the auteur-brand—has only propagated in the intervening years.

In fact, by simple virtue of being a 'brand', brands function as strong guarantors of value (just consider the connotations of the term 'brand new'). Given, say, the free choice between a bowl of Tesco's 'own-brand' Choco Snaps and Kellogg's Coco Pops breakfast cereals, it is unlikely anyone would ever choose the former: Coco Pops are a known brand, frequently encountered in television and print advertisements featuring their loveable monkey mascot, with lavish packaging compared to Tesco's pragmatic wrapping that comes with the natural stigma a supermarket brand brings. Yet there is no discernible difference between the two cereals: they look the same, have comparable ingredients and nutritional values, and are extremely difficult to distinguish in terms of taste and texture. If we are to believe the urban legend, they are even manufactured in the same factory. Such is the power of the Coco Pops brand that Kellogg's' changing of the name to 'Choco Krispies' in 1998 was met by public outrage, and an ensuing grassroots campaign caused Kellogg's to revert the brand to 'Coco Pops' in 1999. These brand prejudices, ridiculous though they may seem, are habitual to our behaviour as consumers, with Joanna Phillips-Melancon and Vassilis Dalakas stating that consumers 'define themselves by the brands they consume which become "our brands".'<sup>166</sup> Expressing such brand loyalty, some will only purchase electronics manufactured by Sony while others will refuse to wear anything other than Levi's jeans. Such is the allure of the brand that the process of branding itself has been romanticised by the television series *Mad Men*, wherein the endlessly charismatic adman Don Draper's creation of product identities is dramatically represented as some kind of prodigious talent that instils envy in men and lust in women—and the success of *Mad Men*, together with *Breaking Bad* and *The Walking Dead*, in turn braced network AMC's brand as a 'premium'

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<sup>166</sup> Joanna Phillips-Melancon and Vassilis Dalakas, 'Brand Rivalry and Consumers' Schadenfreude: The Case of Apple, *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 35.2 (2014), 173-86 (p. 175).



exhibitor of high-class television much like HBO, distancing it from its basic cable counterparts ABC and Fox.

Looping back to Hollywood, we can identify these distinctly brand-ish characteristics in the paratextual mechanisms of film advertising. Paramount could have marketed their 2014 *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* reboot on the basis of director Jonathan Liebesman's previous films *Battle: Los Angeles* and *Wrath of the Titans*—both bombastic action movies that suitably reflect *Turtles'* extravagance—but instead opted for a sole focus on producer Michael Bay, thereby inaugurating an associative yoke to Bay's particular brand of metropolitan havoc, sophomoric humour, and CG-charged dynamism popularised by the *Transformers* films (which—apart from *Titanic* at #1, *Forrest Gump* at #4, and *Shrek the Third* at #5—have been Paramount's biggest ever earners). Moving over to Universal, the distributor was presented with a rather unique promotional challenge with their *Steve Jobs* biopic in 2015, considering the widely-publicised Ashton Kutcher vehicle *Jobs* had swung and missed in 2013. Comparing the films' respective posters [fig. 3.29-30], Universal's branding of *Steve Jobs* is brilliantly simple: where *Jobs* employs the gaudy rainbow aesthetics of Apple's 1977 logo (possibly to indicate that it was following an archetypal Bildungsroman that stressed Jobs' early days with Steve Wozniak in his parents' garage), Universal's *Steve Jobs* opts for a minimalist monochromatic style that accurately resembles Apple's current brand identity. By associating itself with the successful and popular contemporary versions of Apple and the turtlenecked Jobs—as opposed to the company's period marked by a cavalcade of misguided failures, as did Kutcher's film—Universal succinctly differentiated and distinguished *Steve Jobs* from the derision of its rival. Furthermore, the poster's uncluttered design (which imitates Apple's promotional aesthetic) allows negative space to draw the eye to its billing, particularly to Danny Boyle, winner of a Best Director Academy Award for *Slumdog Millionaire*, and Aaron Sorkin, who won his Oscar for *The Social Network*. That these accolades are not listed implies both the cultural enormity of each artist (wherein the need for evaluative qualifiers like 'from the creator of *x*' is repudiated) and an intellectual,

sophisticated audience for whom such qualifiers would be redundant. Accordingly, the synthetic hyperfabula their combined credit prompts is unmistakably potent.

That *Steve Jobs* failed to make as big a splash as Universal perhaps hoped it would, even despite a slathering of critical enthusiasm, is testament to the fact that success is never guaranteed in Hollywood and, moreover, the integral need for a strong and unique brand imprint. By the time of *Steve Jobs*' wide-release in late 2015 it was the third Steve Jobs biopic in as many years, following the aforementioned *Jobs* and Alex Gibney's documentary *Steve Jobs: The Man in the Machine*. It is understandable, then, if consumers were suffering from an acute Jobs-fatigue. Turning to one of 2015's more disastrous bombs with an estimated loss of \$120 million, the Wachowskis' *Jupiter Ascending* perhaps offered a vision *too* idiographic. The paratextual citation of 'THE MATRIX TRILOGY' [my emphasis] possibly aroused unpleasant memories of *The Matrix* sequels' cod-philosophical and pseudo-spiritual pomposity that reflected poorly onto *Jupiter Ascending*'s aesthetics, which were patently drawing upon the kind of pulpy sci-fi camp found in the novels of Harry Harrison, Larry Niven, and the like.<sup>167</sup> Obviously there is a fine line to be trod: propose a brand too unfamiliar (*John Carter*) or stigmatised (*Fant4stic*) and the film fails; propose a brand too overworked (*Rush Hour 3*), the film fails; propose a film too divergent from a brand's coded identity (Martin Scorsese's *Hugo*), it fails.

We can link the major increase in Hollywood branding to the emerging conglomerate infrastructure of the entertainment industry in the latter days of the twentieth century, wherein the film studio became only one avenue of the parent company's interests along with record labels, radio stations, publishing houses, newspapers, TV networks, and video game companies. This, Grainge says, placed great emphasis 'on exploiting motion pictures across diversified business structures, [and] helped to reformulate the economic and textual status of film as a commodity.'<sup>168</sup> The golden

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<sup>167</sup> 'Jupiter Ascending – HD Trailer – Official Warner Bros.', *YouTube* (9 December 2013) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoCyL\\_Pqzu8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoCyL_Pqzu8)> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:38.

<sup>168</sup> Grainge, *Brand Hollywood*, p. 47.

egg within this system, he explains, is

the development of megabrand phenomena that can drive synergy across media formats but that can also obscure the concentrated forms of ownership that rightly stir public unease about conglomerate power and its potential impact on frameworks of cultural consumption and political and creative entitlement.<sup>169</sup>

Hence, contrary to popular belief, Hollywood's current superfluity of superhero movies, literary adaptations, sequels, remakes, reboots, spin-offs, cross-overs, video game movies, and franchise films is not necessarily an indicator of some malignant creative bankruptcy. In fact, one need only turn to the conglomerates' arthouse wings—such as Fox Searchlight which distributed *127 Hours*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *Calvary*, *Birdman*, and *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*—to nip that particular idea in the bud. Rather, their dominance is due to the simple fact that they provide the strongest 'megabrands' which travel well across the conglomerates' horizontally-integrated multimedia subsidiaries.

Batman, for example, is one of Time Warner's most lucrative and prevalent brands. Primarily, we have Warner Bros.' live-action Batman films which have provided a rigid and (mostly) dependable economic backbone for the conglomerate since 1989. And while it is obviously important for these films to be successful on their own terms, their success is especially important for the conglomerate because the tentpole Batman movie effectively acts as an advertisement for the various Batman properties it has in its other divisions. Naturally, there are the movies' corresponding action-figures, produced in collaboration with Mattel, along with miscellaneous merchandise (t-shirts, posters, and such) that are branded with, and authenticated by, the films' logos. And, of course, the Time Warner-owned DC Comics' numerous Batman titles have enjoyed a boost in traffic thanks to the brand's cinematic popularity. For example, *The Dark Knight Returns* graphic novel recorded a 161% spike in digital sales after the announcement of *Batman v Superman* at Comic-Con 2013.<sup>170</sup> More than

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>170</sup> Marc Graser, "'Batman: The Dark Knight Returns' Book Sales Surge After Batman vs. Superman Film Announced at Comic-Con', *Variety* (12 August 2013) <<http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/batman-the-dark-knight-returns-book-sales-surge-after-batman-vs-superman-film-announced-at-comic-con-1200577039/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 7.

this, however, are the wealth of Batman cartoons syndicated on Time Warner's Cartoon Network; the animated Batman films produced by Warner Bros. Animation and distributed by Warner Premiere (Time Warner's direct-to-video wing of Warner Home Video); the various Batman video games—Rocksteady's *Arkham* series, Traveller's Tales' *Lego Batman* franchise (which has just received its own film adaptation), and Telltale's serialised *Batman* game—all published by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment; and Warner Bros. Television's *Gotham* series, produced for Fox. Which is all to say that a robust Batman brand in the cinematic marketplace is not only essential to the continued prosperity of Time Warner as an overall conglomerate but also the wellbeing of its partners (i.e., Mattel, Lego, Telltale, etc.) as well as retailers.

Because the mainstream Hollywood feature is depended upon to prop up all these other corporate columns, there is immense pressure on them to generate a massive return on the conglomerate's investment—which extends beyond the umpteen millions of dollars spent on production to the umpteen millions used to promote and distribute the picture. The common-sense economic rule-of-thumb used to dictate that a Hollywood picture's marketing cost was typically half its production budget (so, \$25 million to promote a \$50 million movie). However Pamela McClintock reports that even modest films like *The Fault in Our Stars*, produced for \$12 million, can cost upwards of \$40 million to market and mega-pictures like *Transformers: Age of Extinction* are increasingly taking over \$100 million to publicise.<sup>171</sup> And even though Hollywood is a 'recession friendly industry', the conglomerates nevertheless had less marketplace dollars to compete for after the economic collapse of 2008 when consumers were more concerned with meeting their mortgage payments than seeing *Mars Needs Moms*.<sup>172</sup> Therefore, in order to chase the billion-dollar dragon the conglomerates require a catalogue of well-known and perpetually extendable properties attuned to synergetic diffusion across

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<sup>171</sup> Pamela McClintock, '\$200 Million and Rising: Hollywood Struggles With Soaring Marketing Costs', *The Hollywood Reporter* (31 July 2014) <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/200-million-rising-hollywood-struggles-721818>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 11.

<sup>172</sup> Jörg Finsterwalder, Volker G. Kuppelwieser, and Matthew de Villiers, 'The effects of film trailers on shaping consumer expectations in the entertainment industry—a qualitative analysis', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 19 (2012), 589-95 (p. 589).

their media platforms, galvanised by efficacious and supremely persuasive promotional campaigns. Carolyn Jess-Cooke talks of Hollywood's quasi-Freudian 'profit principle' in which commercial success is 'dependent upon generated patterns of repetition-compulsion.'<sup>173</sup> She writes that 'Hollywood continues to create ways of engaging the spectator within a network of remembering and re-enacting scenarios that are designed to recycle a film's narrative and repeat the spectatorial experience as far as possible.'<sup>174</sup> And it achieves this through its reliance on recognisable, nostalgia-inducing brands. Thus, Conglomerate Hollywood is subjected to a chronic 'labelitis' because those products that sell the most are those branded with elements with which we already have a pre-existing relationship.<sup>175</sup>

Cue the branded auteur, whose fundamental purpose in this system is fourfold: firstly, the attribution of authorship to a 'human' agent helps disguise the conglomerate's ownership and multimedial mediation of the property (even though, as we have already discussed, the nebulous auteur-brand is a fetishised promotional fantasy); secondly, the auteur-brand supplies an aura of authenticity and aesthetic unity to the work, assigning the product a certain weight in value irrespective of its actual qualities; thirdly, the auteur-as-brand acts as an assuring marker of familiarity, thereby encouraging the consumer to invest into the product, emotionally as well as financially; fourthly, the fetishised auteur acts as underwriter for a unique visionary experience. The auteur-brand provides what Kerrigan deems 'marketability' and 'playability': marketability being the pre-release appeal of a commodity; playability, 'how well the film will be received by those watching it.'<sup>176</sup> The auteur-brand's atomic dissipation throughout the promotional lexis is proof enough of its nonpareil marketability and the mass fascination with auteurs is testament to their transcendent playability.

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<sup>173</sup> Carolyn Jess-Cooke, *Film Sequels: Theory and Practice from Hollywood to Bollywood* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 9.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>176</sup> Kerrigan, *Film Marketing*, p. 41.

Assessing Batman's Hollywood history—with each of the franchise's directorial tenures lending the property a specific aesthetic privilege—it is evident that even mega-properties such as his, which one would assume would have no problems with regards to marketability and playability, need the calming presence of an auteur-brand. This is not to imply that Time Warner is particularly trusting with its baby. In fact, Adrian Martin suggests that 'in times of emergency and change, auteurism can just as easily become a rearguard, conservative action.'<sup>177</sup> Martin is talking of critical auteurism in this instance, but his thoughts are equally applicable to the commercial sphere. It would be better, then, to conceive of the auteur's commercial imperium as corporate bet-hedging rather than an endorsement of any kind of creative autonomy. It is not enough anymore for a film to simply possess strong star indicators, as in the Classical period. The last 'pure' star vehicles to break the worldwide top-ten were the Will Smith-starring *Hitch* and the Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt-touting *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, both in 2005, with *Hitch* scraping in at #10 with a gross of \$368.1 million and *Smith* making it to #7 with \$478.2 million. Stars—along with Kernan's other key persuaders, genres and stories—are now subsumed within the larger brand matrix that I call *the cinema of attractors*.

I make no attempt to disguise the term's debt to 'the cinema of attractions' Tom Gunning identified in the early days of silent cinema, with the Lumière brothers' 'actuality' works and Georges Méliès' 'non-actuality' films brought together under 'a conception that sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power.'<sup>178</sup> When Gunning writes that 'story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema', he could just as easily be talking about the current-day Hollywood blockbuster as the pre-1906 films he is actually describing.<sup>179</sup> Without tendering any value judgments about the state of contemporary mainstream movie-making, there is an indisputable tendency towards the exploitation of basic narrative formulae as bases for

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<sup>177</sup> Adrian Martin, 'Possessory Credit', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 45.1 (Spring 2004), 95-9 (p. 97).

<sup>178</sup> Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde', *Wide Angle*, 8.3-4 (Fall 1986), 63-70 (p. 64).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

magniloquent effect-drenched spectacle that cannot be matched by rival media. Ergo, in order to bait spectators toward the multiplex, films are more and more touted as sublime events, 'experiences' that have to be seen (on the largest screen possible) to be believed. This emphasis on the 'big screen' is evidenced by the proliferation of 3D screens—1772 in the UK, as of 2014—as well as more luxurious technologies like IMAX (even though only four of the thirty-four IMAX branded venues in England are equipped with the capacity to actually project 15-perf IMAX format film).<sup>180</sup> This can also be seen in Quentin Tarantino's resurrection of the obsolete Ultra Panavision 70mm format for *The Hateful Eight* which toured as a 'special roadshow engagement' in 2015, complete with a playbill, overture, and intermission. That 'cinema-going has as much to do today with the hospitality industry as it does with the film industry' is manifest in the mounting popularity of premium cinema chains like Everyman, which offers sofa-seating, each with its own dedicated table and wine-cooler, as well as an in-chair waiter service that provides alcohol and hot food right in front of the screen.<sup>181</sup>

Yet spectacle alone does not a billion dollars make. When spectacle becomes democratised, as it has with the relative ease of computer graphics, it can no longer stand as an attraction in its own right. What we are experiencing today is a marketing paradigm in which spectacular properties are plainly constructed to express as many familiar branded 'attractors' as possible. Look to the top-grossing films of 2014 [table 2] and you will see that all of them possess a certain number of these attractors. Note that the only film to break \$1 billion worldwide was *Transformers: Age of Extinction* and it is perhaps no coincidence that this is the only film to boast five strong attractors: one, it is part of a pre-existing franchise, thus has an in-built audience; two, that franchise is adapted from a property that has a variety of other media permutations—cartoons, comic-books, action-figures, video games—so that in-built audience distends even further; three, it has a famous and immediately recognisable star in Mark Wahlberg; four, it has a famous and immediately recognisable executive

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<sup>180</sup> '3D screens—2004 onwards', *UK Cinema association* (n.d.) <<http://www.cinema.uk.org.uk/the-industry/facts-and-figures/uk-cinema-industry-infrastructure/3d-screens/>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>181</sup> Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *21st-Century Hollywood: Movies in the Era of Transformation* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 48.

producer in Steven Spielberg; and five, it has a famous and immediately recognisable director in Michael Bay. Even though the film received a relentless lambasting from the critical community, with Peter Bradshaw calling it ‘all very wearing and very ridiculous’<sup>182</sup> and Robbie Collin deeming the film ‘unabashed junk’,<sup>183</sup> the sheer brute force of these attractors ensured its success and, at the time of writing, *Age of Extinction* stands as the sixteenth highest grossing film of all time.

Title	Worldwide Gross (\$ million)
<i>Transformers: Age of Extinction</i>	1,091.4
<i>The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies</i>	954.8
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	774.2
<i>Maleficent</i>	758.4
<i>The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part I</i>	752.0
<i>X-Men: Days of Future Past</i>	748.1
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	714.8
<i>The Amazing Spider-Man 2</i>	709.0
<i>Dawn of the Planet of the Apes</i>	708.8
<i>Interstellar</i>	672.6

[table 2]

Number 10 on the list, *Interstellar*, is the only film here not to be a sequel, remake, reboot, or in any way associated with a pre-existing intellectual property. While this seems anomalous, *Interstellar* provides a unique case study in the matchless might of a strong auteur-brand. However, it is interesting to note how director Christopher Nolan underwent a noticeable brand reconfiguration for *Interstellar*. Whilst obviously a critical and commercial darling, Nolan’s brand had become intertwined with the high-concept action blockbuster thanks to *The Dark Knight* and *Inception*. If *Interstellar* had been proffered as another *Inception*—which is to say, a complex puzzle film inflected with thriller elements—Nolan’s brand, as was, would have served the campaign perfectly. Yet *Interstellar* (which started life as a Spielberg project in 2006) is marketed as a distinctly grounded

<sup>182</sup> Peter Bradshaw, ‘Transformers: Age of Extinction review—ridiculous fourth outing for Michael Bay’, *The Guardian* (10 July 2014) <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/10/transformers-age-of-extinction-review-michael-bay>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 1.

<sup>183</sup> Robbie Collin, ‘Transformers: Age of Extinction, review: “spectacular junk”’, *The Telegraph* (3 July 2014) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/10931656/Transformers-Age-of-Extinction-review-spectacular-junk.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 7 of 16.



narrative rooted firmly in father-daughter dynamics, its trailers conspicuously coy about its space-bound time-travel facets. This shift from effect to affect is subtly indicated by the paratexts. All of the paratexts for Nolan's pre-*Interstellar* films utilise blocky san-serif fonts like *Franklin Gothic* for **THE DARK KNIGHT RISES** and *Gotham* for **INCEPTION**. *INTERSTELLAR*, on the other hand, uses the comparatively elegant serif typeface *Didot*. As Ingrid Haidegger explains, 'every typeface has what is referred to as a "persona," which may determine the visual tone and character of a text.'<sup>184</sup> Following her idea that sans-serifs 'are generally perceived to be more modern and technical looking than the classical serif fonts', we can see that *Interstellar*'s paratextual typography (hence, 'persona') heralds a sharp shift in Nolan's stylistic/thematic concerns toward a more high-brow aesthetic and essentially his maturation as an artist.<sup>185</sup> *Interstellar*'s financial success would imply that this prospective evolution resonated with the audience and is a prime example of an auteur-brand's singular ability to prop up a film even despite a dearth of franchise attractors. Remember, the two highest worldwide grossing films of all time are *Avatar* and *Titanic*, marketed and bought purely on the prestige of James Cameron's auteur-brand.

As a concluding case study, let us turn to 2014's second highest grossing property, *The Hobbit*, and assess how its trailers bought and positioned its audience by targeting their focus on the attractive Peter Jackson auteur-brand. Naturally, we have a significant foregrounding of Peter Jackson's name as the trilogy's structuring authorial principle [fig. 3.31-32]. Note that J.R.R. Tolkien is not mentioned and that Jackson is clearly demarcated as the director of *The Lord of the Rings* and not, say, *King Kong* or *The Lovely Bones*. By doing this the paratext frames our response to the new *Hobbit* trilogy through the prism of the first three *Lord of the Rings* films—and those films only. The first shot in *An Unexpected Journey*'s first trailer features Elijah Wood and Ian Holm as Frodo and Bilbo Baggins, returning actors playing returning characters on the returning set of Bag End [fig. 3.33-34]. Immediately, the trailer provokes nostalgic memories of *Rings*, yet this is not achieved through the

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<sup>184</sup> Haidegger, 'What's in a name?', p. 431.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 432.

recycling of stock footage: this is brand new footage from the to-be-released film. So that sense of nostalgia one feels upon seeing these characters, a nostalgia borne from *Rings*, is actually, and somewhat paradoxically, nostalgia for something that does not yet exist. Thus begins the extensive paratextual process of transferring *Rings*' qualities (and value) onto *The Hobbit*. The hypertextual matrix between *Hobbit* and *Rings*, and the comforting feeling of familiarity that engenders, is reinforced by Gandalf replicating a famous pose from *The Fellowship of the Ring* [fig. 3.35-36] and the return of Sting, a famous prop from the original trilogy [fig. 3.37-38]. Note here the exactitudes of *The Hobbit's* *mise-en-scène*, how it replicates the *look* of *The Lord of the Rings* almost exactly — something that doubtlessly would not have been so prevalent had Guillermo del Toro directed the new films, as was originally planned.

The short scene later in *An Unexpected Journey's* trailer wherein Bilbo explores the familiar set of Rivendell and interacts with the shards of Narsil — a significant MacGuffin from *The Return of the King* — is noteworthy because it was not included in the final film and would not have served any productive narrative purpose even if it had been (the scene would later make it into the home-video Extended Edition of *An Unexpected Journey* and, indeed, contributes nothing to *The Hobbit's* plot) [fig. 3.39-40]. Instead, the scene serves to pull taut the hypertextual nostalgic knot the trailer has been tying between these new films and the old ones. This trans-trilogy bond is further strengthened by a subsequent sequence in the same trailer where the heroes are caught between two stone giants fighting on the slopes of the Misty Mountains, which aesthetically mirrors an extremely similar set-piece in *Fellowship* where Saruman attempts to bury the protagonists under an avalanche. Again, *The Hobbit* paratext is not necessarily concerned with promoting a coherent original narrative; its overriding focus is on generating that sense of *the familiar*. And this is most patently operative in *The Desolation of Smaug's* trailer which spotlights the returning character of Legolas performing the same kind of acrobatic action moves for which he became popular fifteen years previously. The nostalgic knot is pulled tightest here because the trailer conspicuously steps outside *The Hobbit's* narrative boundaries as circumscribed by Tolkien. Legolas is not a character in Tolkien's novel yet has been

granted central focus here: his predominant visibility buttresses our cognitive association to *Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings* and concurrently separates us from any other version of *The Hobbit* (be it by Tolkien or Rankin/Bass, the studio that created the 1977 animated adaptation).

The compounded effect is not so much one of resemblance, but *replication*. The trailers' primacy effect effectively confirms that these new films are stylistically identical to their forebears (via their continual hypertextual reference to the fetishised minutiae of Jackson's style in those films) and consequently of a similarly identical level of quality. Although Jackson's *Hobbit* films diegetically precede his *Rings* pictures we anticipate them in a post-*Rings* landscape, so it is interesting how *The Hobbit* movies are framed not as adaptations of Tolkien, or even as prequels to the *Rings* films, but as pseudo-remakes of *The Lord of the Rings*. Whether *The Hobbit's* paratexts were accurate in representing the films as Jackson's *Rings* v2.0 is a question we will return to in **Chapter Five** (along with discussion on *Interstellar's* status as a neo-Nolan picture), but the affective marketing of Jackson's brand undoubtedly fulfilled its purpose, resulting in a combined worldwide theatrical gross for *The Hobbit* trilogy of \$2.935 billion—outstripping *The Lord of the Rings'* initial run by \$18 million.

## Chapter Four

# Authoring From the 'Outside'

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### *'Before' the Text, 'After' the Text*

#### 4.i – Locating the Author

Having accepted that a film 'text' is by no means an objective entity and is consequently enslaved to the cognitive processes of concretisation that occur within the psyches of each individual spectator [cf. **Chapter Two**], as well as the fact that promotional paratexts such as trailers and posters can instigate said actualising procedures long before the film's actual release [cf. **Chapter Three**], it follows that mapping a text's ontological perimeters becomes an increasingly difficult proposition. We have considered, in somewhat abstracted terms, how a spectator's cinematic competence and interpretive strategies coalesce to incite a specific articulation of a work's innate potential. Yet such a reading only gives us a text's *synchronic shape* at a given moment; it does not account for textual actualisations fluctuating over time, which I shall call its *diachronic span*. A concretised text is hardly concrete: initial assumptions can be challenged, we may discover fresh meanings upon subsequent viewings or find that there is less than we previously thought, our entire vision of the narrative can even be radically transmuted if viewed from a different angle. Put otherwise, textual actualisation is not a one-and-done operation, but a continual process.

So when does a text actually *begin*? Finola Kerrigan proposes that 'value creation [hence actualisation] begins at the point where consumers become aware of a film, try to make sense of the messages they are receiving from the filmmakers, film marketers and mediated by the press and other film consumers.'<sup>1</sup> While trailers and posters are Hollywood's most overt marketing mechanisms, a cascade of potentially significant paratexts (or what Gérard Genette would call '*epitext[s]*') herald the film's coming and precede its deliverance—such as press releases, news articles, production diaries,

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<sup>1</sup> Finola Kerrigan, *Film Marketing* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2010), p. 10.

and interviews (as well as the consumer discourse that surrounds them).<sup>2</sup> Yet for each spectator that gluttonises such material there is likely a dozen that will not even know of the film's existence until they, say, happen upon the DVD or Blu-ray some months or even years later. This does not necessarily mean that the latter spectators enter the text naïvely or less encumbered by paratextual influences. The packaging and on-disc supplements that surround a film (its '*peritext*') can have a significant impact on the contours of the text's synchronic shape—for both the uninitiated as well as those revisiting a film they saw theatrically.<sup>3</sup> Which brings us to the corollary question: when do texts *end*? I would hazard that they do not 'end' at all. Even if a film is only ever viewed once and does not particularly enthrall the imagination, its actualised form nevertheless enters our experiential encyclopaedia and constitutes a brick in our ever-growing tower of competence, always ready to be called upon and consequently remediated. Likewise, rewatching a film is not a matter of simply replicating the synchronic shape of its initial actualisation. With subsequent viewings, we do not necessarily process the *syuzhet* in the same way as the first. Narrative tension is abrogated by our more complete knowledge of the *fabula* at the outset, which allows a closer attention to the specificities of form or theme; our cinematic literacy may have developed in the interim, facilitating a deeper comprehension of the film's transtextual nods. What results is a *re-actualisation* of the text—a 'new' text, essentially—and this effect compounds with each viewing. Moreover, a text is never recalled in its pure form. Not only can we never fully recreate the psychic landscape that determined the primary actualisation, the textual memory will always be remoulded to some degree to fit within the current cognitive environment. Remembrance is not a straightforward activity akin to pulling a book from a shelf. It is more like drawing water from a continually filling sink: no two handfuls will ever hold the exact same molecules. So we could say that each time we remember a film, we create it anew.

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<sup>2</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

This raises some interesting quandaries with regards to authorship, or, more specifically, how we (are made to) consider textual authority. Jonathan Gray suggests

that a key problem with the theory of the author as controller and creator is a temporal one, wherein texts are erroneously imagined to *be*, rather than imagined to be *becoming*. If we see texts as always in the process of becoming, however, we can not only reframe the traditional author's role in that process in a way that does not allow the figure undue power, but also be encouraged to look for and examine the many other figures in the many other moments that author a text. Asking *when* the author is, in other words, may help us to answer the thornier question of *what* an author is.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst Gray and I diverge slightly in our reasons for locating the 'author' – Gray suggests that the temporality of authorship opens the door for 'authorial clusters' (i.e., marketing teams or special-effect artists) to assert their authority over the text whereas I am not so much interested in the empirical act of creation as the idea of authorship as a discursive impulse that dictates reading – the act of questioning *when* an author is becomes an integral concern once we acknowledge the interminable diachronic dimension of textuality.<sup>5</sup> When do we acknowledge an author and put them to work in shaping our conception of the text? The previous chapter suggested that this is very much a concern of the promotional paratext and now is the time to see it in action with real consumers: **4.ii** surveys Disney's marketing of 2015's *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* with particular interest in how audiences crafted a particular speculative vision of the film in response to the J.J. Abrams auteur-brand. If **4.ii** analyses epitexts, **4.iii** moves over to the peritext in a consideration of the contesting authorial paratexts evident in the *Robert De Niro Collection* Blu-ray box-set released by Warner Home Video in 2012, as well as the transformative power of home-video formats more generally.

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Gray, 'When is the Author?', in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, ed. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 88-111 (pp. 88-9).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

#### 4.ii – A (New) New Hope

If we are to grasp the orgiastic surge of anticipation that preceded *The Force Awakens'* release in December 2015, it is important to consider *Star Wars* not as mere disposable entertainment but an obsession, ideology, and lifestyle for its millions of fans as well as a key-stone of international pop-culture. John C. Lyden even goes so far as to call it a religion, citing the 534 thousand individuals in Canada, Australasia, England, and Wales who identified their faith as 'Jedi' on the 2001 census.<sup>6</sup> Irrespective of whether Jediism is a joke, an expression of anti-theist sentiment, or indeed sincere reverence, the receipts tell the story. The first six *Star Wars* films brought in an adjusted total domestic theatrical gross of \$4.523 billion (unfortunately *Box Office Mojo* does not account for inflated worldwide box-office takings, which would doubtlessly push the figure into double digits). This in itself is astounding, yet Jonathan Chew places *Star Wars'* gargantuan home video revenues at \$5.291 billion and merchandise sales at an estimated \$12 billion which — along with video games, licensing, and miscellaneous products — puts the property's overall value at \$42 billion.<sup>7</sup> In other words, *Star Wars* is worth more than the *Harry Potter* (\$25 billion), James Bond (\$8 billion), and *The Lord of the Rings* (\$6 billion) franchises combined, and even dwarfs the GDP of Jordan (\$35.8 billion) and Paraguay (\$30.9 billion).<sup>8</sup> In this, we could say that *The Force Awakens'* worldwide theatrical gross of \$2.036 billion (the third highest of all time), as well as its estimated 2016 merchandise revenue of \$5 billion, is a consequence of *Star Wars'* nonpareil status as an attractor.<sup>9</sup>

Yet the *Star Wars* brand was anathema to fans and critics throughout the 2000s, with lacklustre prequels *The Phantom Menace*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *Revenge of the Sith* — along with the constant tinkering of *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi* on home-video — souring many on the franchise. A tweet from @\_handz summarises the prevailing attitude toward

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<sup>6</sup> John C. Lyden, 'Whose Film Is It, Anyway? Canonicity and Authority in *Star Wars* Fandom', *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 80.3 (September, 2012), 775-86 (p. 775).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Chew, 'Star Wars Franchise Worth More Than Harry Potter and James Bond, Combined', *Fortune* (24 December 2015) <<http://fortune.com/2015/12/24/star-wars-value-worth/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4-5 of 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 9-10 of 10.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Palmeri et al., 'Star Wars: Return of the Revenue', *Bloomberg* (14 December 2015) <<http://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2015-star-wars-force-awakens-revenue/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 1.

*Star Wars* in 2012: 'I have loved *Star Wars* since I could walk. Me and my dad would always watch it. But George Lucas ruined it now.'<sup>10</sup> @wostry is slightly less measured in his tweet, calling 'anybody getting excited about the *STAR WARS* blu-rays after so much shit from Lucas, [...] a fucking idiot', but it summarily demonstrates the malignant disenchantment rippling through the *Star Wars* coterie.<sup>11</sup> This only intensified when Disney bought Lucasfilm and the rights to *Star Wars* for \$4.05 billion on 31 October 2012. Upon hearing the news @imnotcarmz tweeted, 'I have a huge feeling Disney is going to kill *Star Wars*';<sup>12</sup> @\_amyjc, 'star wars is actually like my most favourite thing ever and Disney are going to ruin it for me';<sup>13</sup> and @maidinaozbek suggested 'im probably not the only starwars fan thats crying right now [sic]'<sup>14</sup>—responses clearly aghast at *Star Wars*' fate under Disney's proclivity for property exploitation (and, indeed, Disney would announce in 2015 their plan to release a new *Star Wars* film every year for the foreseeable future).<sup>15</sup> Obviously there needed to be a severe recoding of the *Star Wars* brand for Disney's new movies to be successful enough to justify their purchase of the franchise and this section will chart the shift in public opinion from the sale of Lucasfilm in 2012 to *The Force Awakens*' eventual release in 2015.

First, however, it is worth revisiting Lyden's notes on *Star Wars*-as-religion, as they proffer valuable insights into the fandom's obsession with the brand. Under his model, the original *Star Wars* trilogy constitutes a canon of Holy Scripture with George Lucas acting as pseudo-Apostle who delivered the Gospel of St. Skywalker to an enraptured world in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>16</sup> From this canon the fan-base erected an entire dogma and mythos against which they defined themselves (much as how Trekkers utilise Gene Roddenberry's liberal philosophy to construct their own personal

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<sup>10</sup> @\_handz's tweet, *Twitter* (3 December 2012) <[https://twitter.com/\\_handz/status/275504409805471744](https://twitter.com/_handz/status/275504409805471744)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>11</sup> @wostry's tweet, *Twitter* (7 January 2011) <<https://twitter.com/wostry/status/23225377912524801>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>12</sup> @imnotcarmz's tweet, *Twitter* (4 November 2012) <<https://twitter.com/imnotcarmz/status/265241431386513408>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>13</sup> @\_amyjc's tweet, *Twitter* (4 November 2012) <[https://twitter.com/\\_amyjc/status/265238460049264640](https://twitter.com/_amyjc/status/265238460049264640)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>14</sup> @maidinaozbek's tweet, *Twitter* (4 November 2012) <<https://twitter.com/maidinaozbek/status/265188127356891136>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>15</sup> Adam Rogers, 'Star Wars and the Quest for the Forever Franchise', *Wired* (December 2015) <<http://www.wired.com/2015/11/building-the-star-wars-universe/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 7 of 55.

<sup>16</sup> Lyden, 'Whose Film Is It, Anyway?', p. 777.



doctrines). Henry Jenkins suggests that fans are 'readers who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests' than those of the lay spectator who approaches works with the comparatively base impulse of simple narrative comprehension.<sup>17</sup> The perpetually-consumed fan-text becomes ritual, with each viewing honing the fan's psychological attention to and emotional dependence on the work's minutiae. Consequently, Lyden sees fans not as 'passive receptacles of the messages of manufacturers to the extent that they interact with the products and interpret them in personal ways.'<sup>18</sup> Moreover, whenever fans (such as those in the international cosplay community The 501<sup>st</sup> Legion) dress up as stormtroopers or play with their action figures, they engage in a unique authoring of their own conception of *Star Wars* that further bolsters their vinculum to the property. Fandom, then, functions as a 'participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts'.<sup>19</sup> Such fan productivity John Fiske calls a 'shadow cultural economy' that, though unrelated to the industrial manoeuvres of Hollywood, possesses its own systems of *semiotic*, *enunciative*, and *textual* production.<sup>20</sup> When a fan uses a text to identify themselves they are enacting semiotic productivity, much as how discussing the text with other fans constitutes enunciative productivity. The textual productivity of fandom takes many forms, ranging from the private creation of stories with one's toys to such fully-fledged fan-films as *Chad Vader: Day Shift Manager*, *Darth Maul: Apprentice*, and *Star Wars Uncut*—which remakes *A New Hope* by splicing together 473 fifteen-second fan submissions ranging from live-action recreations, satiric cartoon skits, to stop-motion set-pieces. And Lucasfilm have largely been supportive of these productivities: since 2002, they have run The Official *Star Wars* Fan Film Awards (save a brief sabbatical between 2012-2015), with its highest honour being the 'George Lucas Selects Award', and have even made the films' sound-effects available online for fans to use in their own works.

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Lyden, 'Whose Film Is It, Anyway?', p. 777.

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p. 46.

<sup>20</sup> John Fiske, 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom', in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 30; pp.37-9.

Whilst this would imply that fandom has increasingly less and less to do with the actual films (and, to be sure, this is true to a degree), the importance of primary scripture and its concordant notion of canonicity became especially important once Lucas began to alter the Original Trilogy with their Special Edition releases in 1997, 2004, and 2011. As both God of the *Star Wars* universe and the self-sanctioned interpreter of its canon, Lucas felt vindicated in making such changes with Lyden quoting him as saying that they allowed him to 'finish the film[s] the way [they were] meant to be when [he] was originally doing [them].'<sup>21</sup> However, as each re-release pushed the films (particularly *Star Wars*, renamed *A New Hope*) further away from their beloved initial forms and Lucas refused to make those originals available on an acceptable home-video format, the devout became increasingly disillusioned with their idol: an interviewee in the 2010 documentary *The People vs. George Lucas* uses suitably religious phrasing to describe Lucas as 'a little devil disguised as a false prophet' whilst another calls him 'the antichrist'. This engendered a different kind of textual productivity, one perhaps not so favoured by Lucasfilm. Team Negative1's *Silver Screen* edition of *Star Wars* comprises a high-quality transfer of a 1977 Spanish 35mm theatrical print that took four years to create with each frame painstakingly photographed by a DSLR. Although efforts were made to digitally remove dirt and damage from the image, Negative1 attempted to preserve the presentation exactly as it would have been seen for the first time. Contrarily, Petr Harmecek's *Despecialized* 'restoration' amalgamates numerous sources—the 2011 Blu-ray, 1993 LaserDisc, various HDTV-rips, and an assortment of frame scans—to create a 'hi-def' facsimile of 1977's *Star Wars* comparable to the HD standards established by modern Blu-ray releases. And both of these versions of *Star Wars* are freely available on file-sharing websites.

Even if we disregard the fuzzy legality of such fan-edits, there are extensive community guidelines on how to actually watch the 'real' films. The *Machete Order*, for example, proposes that one watch the series in the sequence of IV-V-II-III-VI instead of Lucas' official chronology of I-II-III-

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<sup>21</sup> Lyden, 'Whose Film Is It, Anyway?', p. 779.

IV-V-VI that, if followed, ruins *The Empire Strikes Back's* surprise reveal of Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker's familial ties. The Machete Order not only preserves the twist in its original form but streamlines the series by removing the wholly irrelevant *Phantom Menace*, and even refocuses the entire narrative from Vader's fall-and-rise to Luke's more coherent struggle to destroy the Empire (with the prequels operating as a pseudo-flashback and inverted mirror of Luke's journey after the cliffhanger of *Strikes Back*, thus distending the tension leading to the climactic *Return of the Jedi*).<sup>22</sup>

Following comedian Patton Oswalt trumpeting the Machete Order's values on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* and David Pallant writing that 'it has allowed me to overcome my differences with the saga, and appreciate the web of storytelling that George Lucas had spun throughout it', the reorganisation has become immensely popular and is now considered the *de facto* way to watch *Star Wars*.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly there is an authorial tug-of-war between Lucas and the fandom (tidily illustrating the distinction between intentionalism and reader-centrism discussed in **Chapter Two**). On one side, Lucas exercises his prerogative as Creator to make alterations to his works, with advances in technology and access to greater resources enabling him to fully realise his vision. If the latest Special Edition release is truly indicative of his intent, he is in no way obligated to distribute the original version that stands, in this sense, as an incomplete first draft. However, many have noted the hypocrisy of Lucas retroactively distorting film history considering his speech to Congress in 1988 railing against Ted Turner's colourisation of Classical Hollywood pictures, which contributed to the creation of the National Film Registry in 1989—even more ironic is 1977's *Star Wars* being part of the Registry's first wave of inductees and the fact that Lucas has persisted to deny the archive a copy of the film's original print.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there is also the matter of 1997/2004/2011 Lucas' intent not necessarily corresponding with 1977 Lucas [cf. **2.iii**]. At the opposing end, fans assert their right to see

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<sup>22</sup> Rod Hilton, 'The Star Wars Saga: Introducing Machete Order', *No Machete Juggling* (11 November 2011) <<http://www.nomachetejuggling.com/2011/11/11/the-star-wars-saga-suggested-viewing-order/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 14-9 of 66.

<sup>23</sup> David Pallant, 'Would George Lucas approve of the Star Wars Machete Order?', *Den of Geek!* (3 April 2012) <<http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/star-wars/18992/would-george-lucas-approve-of-the-star-wars-machete-order/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 7 of 23.

<sup>24</sup> Germain Lussier, 'George Lucas Speaks Out Against Altering Films in 1988', */Film* (31 August 2011) <<http://www.slashfilm.com/george-lucas-speaks-altering-films-1988/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 5-18 of 21.

the original films in their 'true' form and have taken it upon themselves to act as historical curators in lieu of Lucas on top of their more typical fan activities of ceaseless shadow productivity — thereby, following Lyden, 'creating their own canon'.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Lyden continues,

it is difficult to identify which version of *Star Wars* is the original at this point, given the plethora of versions and the continuing dispute between filmmaker and fans about what constitutes the "canon," and who has the authority to define it.<sup>26</sup>

Although allusions to Catholicism and Protestantism may seem trite, the fracture in the *Star Wars* faith between 'official' and 'radical' canons is by no means inconsequential. Disney's excommunication of all Expanded Universe material such as Timothy Zahn's novels, the comics published by Dark Horse, and video-games like *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* into the out-of-continuity *Star Wars Legends* brand brought such canonicity arguments back to the boil in 2014 and the release of *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* in 2016 would herald the first major contradiction between the Disney and Expanded Universe storylines with regards to the theft of the Death Star plans prior to *Episode IV*.

Yet this tendency is hardly unique to the *Star Wars* clique. Considering the idiosyncrasy of individualistic actualisation and the impenetrability of directorial intention, the chasm between creator- and consumer-textuality is inescapable — the *Star Wars* fandom simply sees this rift writ global. Indeed, this contested sense of ownership goes some distance in explaining the mass disdain towards the prequels: whilst, of course, this can be attributable to the films' wooden acting, hokey writing, slipshod directing, over-emphasis on spectacle, and toyetic *mise-en-scène* perfectly attuned for merchandise synergy (which I would contend are attributes perceptible throughout the Original Trilogy, particularly *Return of the Jedi*), their compounded failure to connect with their audience could be a simple matter of 'new *Star Wars*' not necessarily corresponding with 'my *Star Wars*'. That the prequels' most vocal critics are almost unitarily those who grew up with the 'real' *Star Wars* attests to this. Therefore, coalescing 'new *Star Wars*' and 'my *Star Wars*', whilst concurrently scrubbing out the

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<sup>25</sup> Lyden, 'Whose Film Is It, Anyway?', p. 780.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

prequels' stain, was perhaps the biggest hurdle Disney had to clear in their marketing campaign for *The Force Awakens*.

Before we turn to how this seemingly impossible task was achieved, it is important to make note of my sources for audience data. My primary resource is Reddit, the self-proclaimed 'front page of the internet' which is a hub for the sharing of external webpages with discussion hosted onsite on subject-specific boards or 'subreddits' running the gamut of politics, philosophy, astrophysics, tech news, cat pictures, and professional wrestling. Reddit offers three distinct virtues as a research tool. Firstly, the site attracts a huge amount of traffic with 243,632,148 unique visitors from over 212 different countries in March 2016 *alone*.<sup>27</sup> The main /r/movies subreddit boasts 14,364,434 subscribers, the more bookish /r/TrueFilm is home to 109,122 cinephiles, and the /r/StarWars board has 564,161 members (overshadowing the largest comparable fan-forum at TheForce.net with 265,877 contributors). Moreover, the 'Official Discussion' of *The Force Awakens* on /r/movies reached 42,130 comments, with countless other posts preceding release and continuing to this day, while /r/StarWars ran a series of fifteen separate 'discussion megathreads' from *The Force Awakens'* release on 17 December 2015 to New Year's Day 2016 with a combined total of 78,766 responses. There is an incredible amount of data to parse, which leads to the second boon: Reddit maintains a fully-accessible archive of its content reaching back to the site's creation in 2005. This is a stark contrast to *The Force Awakens'* Message Board on IMDb that only caches the latest 1,680 threads, which accounts for approximately six weeks of discussion. Reddit's archive, on the other hand, allows one to chart audience response from the moment the film was announced, through its various trailers and promotional spots, to release, right to the present moment. Of course, this is of little use for pre-2005 films, but considering that Reddit was the principal location for a lot of *The Force Awakens'* pre-release discussion—even hosting Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions with Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, and

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<sup>27</sup> 'ABOUT REDDIT', *Reddit* (13 April 2016) <<http://www.reddit.com/about>> [accessed 13 April 2016]. [NB: Since drafting this chapter Reddit has changed their 'about section', removing the analytics cited above. A cached version of the quoted webpage can be viewed on the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at the following link: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20160413011025/https://www.reddit.com/about/>>].

Peter Mayhew in the months leading to the film's launch—it offers an unmatched and easy-to-use (unlike Twitter's obtuse archival search functions) vault of consumer information. Thirdly, unlike IMDb's board which is polluted by 'troll' comments regarding, for instance, Carrie Fisher's age and appearance, Reddit's discussion is self-moderated by a voting system where relevant, contributory, and insightful posts are 'upvoted' by other users and those derogatory remarks are correspondingly 'downvoted'—in fact, IMDb's community had become so toxic by February 2017 that the forums have now been permanently closed.<sup>28</sup> Whilst posts on Reddit below a certain score threshold are automatically hidden, this does not necessarily equate to censorship as those posts are still available if one chooses to view them. Essentially, the vote procedure enables a wider spread of conversation where one comment can be indicated as representative of potentially thousands of opinions, freeing up space for other topics to be raised.

Naturally, this is an imperfect system. The sample offered by Reddit is self-selected and it must be said that it is a certain type of person who engages voraciously in online discourse and there is a certain degree of technological literacy that acts as a barrier to inclusion. Whether their views are truly representative of the offline populace is difficult to ascertain as are the demographics of posters that operate under anonymising usernames. Considering this, we should regard the following excerpts as indicative of the *kinds of* discussion anticipating *The Force Awakens* and not a definitive barometer of *the* discussion (if such a thing even exists). That said, by remaining an impartial external observer I avoid polluting the data with personal bias, leading questions, or restrictive local samples. Likewise, asking interviewees to remember their excitement, or lack thereof, for *The Force Awakens* post-release would introduce too many variables (i.e., reactions to the film itself distorting pre-launch memories) to produce reliable data. Jörg Finsterwalder et al.'s study of how audiences react to trailers—which only employed a sample of 'twelve commerce students, six male and six female participants, with an average age of 22.25 years' and found that the 'writer of a film' had 'no effect on

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew Pulver, 'IMDb shuts down its message boards', *The Guardian* (6 February 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/feb/06/imdb-shuts-down-message-boards>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

the participants' expectations' – demonstrates the kind of reductive short-sightedness that can result from such an approach.<sup>29</sup>

So, whilst the earlier tweets implied Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012 and corresponding announcement of a new *Star Wars* trilogy was met by a decidedly negative knee-jerk reaction, the more discursive responses on Reddit reveal some threads of cautious optimism. For example, /u/tahras writes:

Potential for Good:

- It creates distance between the franchise and George Lucas and allows others to expand on the universe [...]
- Disney approaches it the way they have the Marvel movies.

Potential for Evil:

- Disney approaches it as a kids movie and adds more characters like Jar Jar.

[945 points]<sup>30</sup>

Compared to the overwhelmingly rancorous response to Disney's purchase of Marvel in 2009 (where /u/2012ad's comment that Marvel will become 'absolute crap' under the new regime garnered 346 upvotes),<sup>31</sup> reactions to *Star Wars*' sale were positively quaint, with a great deal of this relative calm attributable to the good-will generated by Disney's safe handling of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (remember, *The Avengers* had just been released that summer to gargantuan acclaim) and George Lucas' demotion to 'Creative Consultant' – although /u/Palin05's concern of Lucas' even slight involvement receiving 1,865 points indicates the fan-base's continued suspicion toward their fallen hero.<sup>32</sup> Yet the lack of a cataclysmic backlash could have been due to an endemic apathy, with fans browbeaten by the avalanche of disappointments that characterised the latter years of Lucas' tenure: /u/Wisdom\_from\_the\_Ages writes that 'Disney is [not] inherently bad, it's that Star Wars died with

<sup>29</sup> Jörg Finsterwalder, Volker G. Kuppelwieser, and Matthew de Villiers, 'The effects of film trailers on shaping consumer expectations in the entertainment industry – a qualitative analysis', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 19 (2012), 589-95 (pp. 591-2).

<sup>30</sup> /u/tahras' comment, 'Disney buys Lucasfilms for 4B in Cash and Stock', *Reddit* (30 October 2012) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/12csi3/disney\\_buys\\_lucasfilms\\_for\\_4b\\_in\\_cash\\_and\\_stock/c6u0eje](https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/12csi3/disney_buys_lucasfilms_for_4b_in_cash_and_stock/c6u0eje)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>31</sup> /u/2012ad's comment, 'Disney Buys Marvel. HOLY @#%@#', *Reddit* (31 August 2009) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/comics/comments/9fuad/disney\\_buys\\_marvel\\_holy/c0cm1eu](https://www.reddit.com/r/comics/comments/9fuad/disney_buys_marvel_holy/c0cm1eu)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>32</sup> /u/Palin05's comment, 'If Disney did such a good job with The Avengers, why are people so worried about Star Wars?', *Reddit* (16 November 2012) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if\\_disney\\_did\\_such\\_a\\_good\\_job\\_with\\_the\\_avengers/c72g8ho](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if_disney_did_such_a_good_job_with_the_avengers/c72g8ho)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

the prequels. Seeing it come back to life is akin to seeing a dead relative come back from the grave'<sup>33</sup> and /u/theothergironReddit says 'I'm not worried that **Disney** is making a 7<sup>th</sup> film [...] I'm worried that Disney is making a 7<sup>th</sup> film'.<sup>34</sup> And though /u/Vitalic123 offers a counter-argument—'given that nothing was happening with the IP anyway, I'd like to say: what if it's good? Wouldn't that be cool?'—there is a noticeable tang of crypto-pessimism.<sup>35</sup>

However, this gloominess began to dissipate when J.J. Abrams was announced as the film's director on 25 January 2013: a double surprise given that Abrams flatly refused to direct the film on 26 December 2012 (because as a self-professed fanboy he 'wouldn't even want to be involved in the next version of those things', preferring to 'be in the audience') and, more significantly, was currently in post-production for *Star Trek Into Darkness*—and the long-standing rivalry between *Wars* and *Trek* need not be reiterated here.<sup>36</sup> /u/TheLoveKraken was pleased by the announcement, saying that Abrams 'knows that sort of Lucas/Spielberg sense of fun/adventure/wonder inside and out. I'm suddenly a lot more excited about new Star Wars'.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, /u/NULLACCOUNT was not so enthusiastic:

I'm bummed by this, not because of a dislike for Abrams, but because of what he did to Star Trek. Don't get me wrong, it was a fun movie (I guess), but it really didn't feel like Star Trek to me. He got a lot (or some) of the details right, but missed something about the spirit.

[50 points]<sup>38</sup>

To which, /u/InflatableBombshelte responded:

<sup>33</sup> /u/Wisdom\_from\_the\_Age's comment, *ibid.*,

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if\\_disney\\_did\\_such\\_a\\_good\\_job\\_with\\_the\\_avengers/c72m5n3](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if_disney_did_such_a_good_job_with_the_avengers/c72m5n3)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>34</sup> /u/theothergironReddit's comment, *ibid.*,

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if\\_disney\\_did\\_such\\_a\\_good\\_job\\_with\\_the\\_avengers/c72ghdl](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/13beus/if_disney_did_such_a_good_job_with_the_avengers/c72ghdl)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>35</sup> /u/Vitalic123's comment, 'Disney announces there will be a new STAR WARS film every year starting in 2015', *Reddit* (17 April 2013)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/1ck0lx/disney\\_announces\\_that\\_there\\_will\\_be\\_a\\_new\\_star/c9haamy/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Fantasy/comments/1ck0lx/disney_announces_that_there_will_be_a_new_star/c9haamy/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>36</sup> Jordan Zakarin, 'J.J. Abrams: I Turned Down "Star Wars: Episode VII"', *The Hollywood Reporter* (26 December 2012)

<<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/jj-abrams-declined-star-wars-406369>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 7.

<sup>37</sup> /u/TheLoveKraken's comment, 'J.J. Abrams to Direct Star Wars Ep. VII', *Reddit* (24 Jan 2013)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj\\_abrams\\_to\\_direct\\_star\\_wars\\_ep\\_vii/c82z9nd](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj_abrams_to_direct_star_wars_ep_vii/c82z9nd)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>38</sup> /u/NULLACCOUNT's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj\\_abrams\\_to\\_direct\\_star\\_wars\\_ep\\_vii/c831akj](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj_abrams_to_direct_star_wars_ep_vii/c831akj)> [accessed 13 March 2017].



The funny thing is Trek '09 honestly seems to me like Abrams trying to make his own Star Wars-esque movie, and Trek was the best space adventure franchise he could get at the time.

[42 points]<sup>39</sup>

So whilst die-hard Trekkers were none too thrilled by Abrams' 2009 reboot of *Star Trek*, which pushed its action/adventure elements to typical blockbuster extremes and indeed cribbed many elements from *Star Wars*—i.e., the destruction of Vulcan mirroring the Death Star destroying Alderaan and Kirk's exile to Delta Vega aesthetically matching Luke's adventures on Hoth (with Kirk even being attacked by a furry creature that resembles a wampa)—Abrams' move over to *Star Wars* was, for many, the first piece of unequivocally good news regarding Disney's new galactic venture. And the good news kept rolling with the announcement that John Williams would be returning to score the picture on 27 July 2013, the reveal of the cast ('the best cast we could have hoped for' according to /u/Gameroomvids [486 points]) on 29 April 2014, and the replacement of *Toy Story 3* scribe Michael Arndt with *Empire Strikes Back* writer Lawrence Kasdan on 24 October 2014.<sup>40</sup> This mounting trickle of information made the 35-year-old /u/MFLUDER (and 1189 others, judging from the votes) 'giddy as a school kid'<sup>41</sup> and /u/CharlesChaplined gave voice to 363 fans with, 'I'm glad that Disney has once again proved everyone wrong. They did it with Avengers and they're doing it now.'<sup>42</sup>

Anticipation for *The Force Awakens* truly leapt into hyperspace not with the first trailer on 28 November 2014 as one might assume, but two small videos posted to the official *Star Wars* YouTube channel on 29 May and 21 July 2014 announcing *Force for Change*, a charity initiative supporting UNICEF (which would end up raising \$4.2 million) wherein fans could donate their way into a

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<sup>39</sup> /u/InflatableBombshelte's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj\\_abrams\\_to\\_direct\\_star\\_wars\\_ep\\_vii/c832em6](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/177pxp/jj_abrams_to_direct_star_wars_ep_vii/c832em6)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>40</sup> /u/Gameroomvids' comment, 'Star Wars: Episode VII Cast Announced', *Reddit* (29 April 2014)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star\\_wars\\_episode\\_vii\\_cast\\_announced/ch55dhc](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star_wars_episode_vii_cast_announced/ch55dhc)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>41</sup> /u/MFLUDER's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star\\_wars\\_episode\\_vii\\_cast\\_announced/ch55okm](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star_wars_episode_vii_cast_announced/ch55okm)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>42</sup> /u/CharlesChaplined's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star\\_wars\\_episode\\_vii\\_cast\\_announced/ch55ym7](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/24ae9e/star_wars_episode_vii_cast_announced/ch55ym7)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

sweepstake for a walk-on role in the film.<sup>43</sup> The first spot featured Abrams outlining the program on location at the Jakku marketplace set in Abu Dhabi, whereupon he is visited by a huge animatronic alien (which /u/GreedE says 'Looks like something straight out of Henson's Workshop or the original trilogy) [fig. 4.1]; the second was shot outside of Pinewood Studios in London, with Abrams addressing the camera in front of an X-Wing as a Rebel pilot squeezes past him and climbs into the cockpit [fig. 4.2]. These videos, combined with the announcement that Abrams would be shooting the film on 35mm (along with a sequence in 15-perf 70mm IMAX) and a sizzle reel at Comic-Con 2015 showcasing the extent of its practical effects, caused a tidal wave of hype—arguably more so than the actual trailers. Some examples of the comments these videos generated:

I like how they added that puppet in as like a "yes, we are using practical effects guys"

[936 points]<sup>44</sup>

I'm as excited as everyone else for this – from that example my confidence in the new trilogy has skyrocketed.

[83 points]<sup>45</sup>

I just wanted to chime in to say how cool this is of JJ to do for the fans. What an awesome guy!

[134 points]<sup>46</sup>

Filming on location? Practical effects? In a new Star Wars film?? ...I'm excited now.

[75 points]<sup>47</sup>

The best thing about this video is that everything looks so DIRTY. I'm glad they're bringing back the "lived in" vibe of the original trilogy.

[40 points]<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 'Star Wars: Inspiring Change Around the World', *The Walt Disney Company* (15 December 2015)

<<https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/star-wars-inspiring-change-around-the-world/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 8.

<sup>44</sup> /u/JohnnyReeko's comment, 'A Video Message from JJ Abrams on the set of "Star Wars: Episode VII"', *Reddit* (21 May 2014)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a\\_video\\_message\\_from\\_jj\\_abrams\\_on\\_the\\_set\\_of\\_star/chnhrie](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a_video_message_from_jj_abrams_on_the_set_of_star/chnhrie)>

[accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>45</sup> /u/TheOneTonWanton's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a\\_video\\_message\\_from\\_jj\\_abrams\\_on\\_the\\_set\\_of\\_star/chnjr0](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a_video_message_from_jj_abrams_on_the_set_of_star/chnjr0)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

[accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>46</sup> /u/lomis' comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a\\_video\\_message\\_from\\_jj\\_abrams\\_on\\_the\\_set\\_of\\_star/chnh8bq](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a_video_message_from_jj_abrams_on_the_set_of_star/chnh8bq)>

[accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>47</sup> /u/\_galadorn's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a\\_video\\_message\\_from\\_jj\\_abrams\\_on\\_the\\_set\\_of\\_star/chnhgi2](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/2644sn/a_video_message_from_jj_abrams_on_the_set_of_star/chnhgi2)>

[accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>48</sup> /u/dumbestkiwi's comment, 'J.J. Abrams shows off an X-Wing fighter in new "Star Wars: Episode VII" set video', *Reddit* (21 July 2014)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/2bafhx/jj\\_abrams\\_shows\\_off\\_an\\_xwing\\_fighter\\_in\\_new\\_star/cj3pxvy](https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/2bafhx/jj_abrams_shows_off_an_xwing_fighter_in_new_star/cj3pxvy)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

I'm trying my hardest to be as objective as possible and not just come off as a complete fanboy, but everything they've done so far with unveiling the new films has been nothing short of perfect.

[46 points]<sup>49</sup>

I'm almost looking forward to the behind the scenes dvd as much as the actual film

[664 points]<sup>50</sup>

In my opinion, this is so much better than a trailer. [...] I am so happy to know that a lot of hard work is going into the movie property that I care a lot for.

[1269 points]<sup>51</sup>

In JJ We Trust.

[516 points]<sup>52</sup>

It is worth considering this universal rhapsody in light of Jonathan Gray's idea that 'numerous paratexts create an author figure, surround the text with aura, and insist on its uniqueness, value, and authenticity' [cf. 3.iii].<sup>53</sup> The enthusiasm engendered by these promotional snapshots had little to do with content (indeed, *The Force Awakens'* narrative would remain a secret closely guarded until release) but the *aura* issued by Abrams, particularly his decisions to shoot on film, on location, with practical effects. In this he embodied the diametric opposite of Lucas who exploited the prequels as laboratories for the latest in computerised movie-making technologies: *Attack of the Clones* was the first feature film to be shot on a high-definition digital format, green-screen studios were used extensively throughout the trilogy, and Jar Jar Binks was one of live-action cinema's first photorealistic computer-generated characters. However innovative these films undoubtedly were in laying the foundations for a new mode of cinematic production, /u/TheCodexx says 'shooting

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<sup>49</sup> /u/art36's comment, 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens – Comic-Con 2015 Reel', *Reddit* (11 July 2015) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_comiccon\\_2015\\_reel/cszeby1](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star_wars_the_force_awakens_comiccon_2015_reel/cszeby1)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>50</sup> /u/RememberAttica's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_comiccon\\_2015\\_reel/cszbp7u](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star_wars_the_force_awakens_comiccon_2015_reel/cszbp7u)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>51</sup> /u/Neonxeon's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_comiccon\\_2015\\_reel/csztbtr](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star_wars_the_force_awakens_comiccon_2015_reel/csztbtr)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>52</sup> /u/cptcakes117's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_comiccon\\_2015\\_reel/csztb01](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star_wars_the_force_awakens_comiccon_2015_reel/csztb01)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 82.

digitally and on green-screen is a big part of why the [prequels] were so abysmal. It all was fake.’<sup>54</sup> Abrams’ ostensible return to bread-and-butter filmmaking, then, heralded the renaissance of a more classical aesthetic that accurately reflected the handmade charm of the original films—an aura reinforced by the promise of Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, and Mark Hamill reprising their roles as the Holy Trinity.

Yet *The Force Awakens* would be released with 2,100 CG effect shots compared to *The Phantom Menace*’s 1,900 and did not include a single practical model while *Phantom Menace* had, according to Peter Sciretta, ‘more miniature work than all of the original films combined’; Lupita Nyong’o’s character Maz Kanata turned out to be a fully digital avatar rendered with the same computerised uncanniness as Jar Jar and the location work in Abu Dhabi only accounts for a relatively small segment of the film (the majority of which was shot on Pinewood’s sound-stages with a great deal of green-screen).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, ever since Anthony Dod Mantle won the Oscar for Best Cinematography for *Slumdog Millionaire* in 2008, every film to win the award—save *Inception* in 2010 and *La La Land* in 2017—has been shot digitally. Digital capture technology has blossomed since Lucas shot *Attack of the Clones* on the inferior Sony F900 in 2002, with cameras such as the RED Epic and ARRI ALEXA now capable of a resolution, dynamic range, colour science, and workflow comparable, and in some areas superior, to 35mm film (and the ALEXA 65 Emmanuel Lubezki used for *The Revenant* in 2015 demonstrates that digitally replicating and superseding 65mm stock is a not-too-distant reality). Directors and cinematographers are rapidly converting to digital, with lapsed celluloid loyalist and thirteen-time Academy nominee Roger Deakins citing the ALEXA as ‘the first camera I’ve worked with that I’ve felt gives me something I can’t get on film.’<sup>56</sup> While features are still being shot on

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<sup>54</sup> /u/TheCodexx’s comment, ‘Star Wars Episode VII Will Be Shot On Film’, *Reddit* (23 August 2013) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/1kwrte/star\\_wars\\_episode\\_vii\\_will\\_be\\_shot\\_on\\_film/cbthzhv](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/1kwrte/star_wars_episode_vii_will_be_shot_on_film/cbthzhv)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>55</sup> Peter Sciretta, ‘“Force Awakens” Had More CG Visual Effects Shots Than “The Phantom Menace”’, *Film* (14 January 2016) <<http://www.slashfilm.com/force-awakens-visual-effects/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Sciretta, ‘Roger Deakins on Digital vs. 35mm: “Whether I’ll Shot On Film Again, I Don’t Know”’, *Film* (8 February 2011) <<http://www.slashfilm.com/roger-deakins-digital-35mm-im-ill-film/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3 of 6.

film—Vadim Rizov tallies sixty-four releases in 2015 as being shot (at least partially) on 35mm<sup>57</sup>—the number is unmistakably and dramatically shrinking considering that ARRI, Panavision, and Aaton discontinued production of film cameras in 2011.<sup>58</sup> The capture format becomes less important given the Digital Intermediate post-production process that all effect-heavy films such as *The Force Awakens* now go through (and the film would ultimately be mastered in 2K, slightly higher than the 1080p resolution found on commercial Blu-rays and much lower than the native 'resolution' of analogue 35mm which is estimated to be the equivalent of 20 million pixels or approximately 6.5K).<sup>59</sup> Moreover, it is increasingly difficult to find a venue that actually projects film: Paramount announced in 2014 that they would no longer be distributing film prints with 2013's *The Wolf of Wall Street* being their first digital-only release;<sup>60</sup> 2015 saw the first time the Sundance Film Festival had no 35mm submissions;<sup>61</sup> Disney would eventually distribute celluloid IMAX reels of *The Force Awakens* to only eighteen venues in the United States and Canada.<sup>62</sup> So Abrams' obsequious trumpeting of so-called 'traditional filmmaking' is rather suspect.

It would be somewhat cynical to suggest that these guarantees were counterfeit but they were clearly playing up to misinformed prejudices regarding modern filmmaking practices (caused, in no small part, by the highly-digitised *Star Wars* prequels). In fact, in a response to a VFX break-down reel revealing the extent of CG image-manipulation used in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (another film celebrated for its ostensible return to practical 'in-camera' spectacle), /u/MadlibVillainy is stunned by the fidelity of computer graphics, saying 'The fact that the entire narrow pass in the desert is FX is incredible. I

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<sup>57</sup> Vadim Rizov, '~64 Films Released in 2015 Shot on 35mm', *Filmmaker* (18 February 2016)

<<http://filmmakermagazine.com/97320-64-films-released-in-2015-shot-on-35mm>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 17.

<sup>58</sup> Devin Coldewey, 'The World's Movie Camera Makers Have All Quietly Stopped Production of Film Cameras', *TechCrunch* (14 October 2011) <<http://techcrunch.com/2011/10/14/the-worlds-movie-camera-makers-have-all-quietly-stopped-production-of-film-cameras/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 8.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Langford, *Basic Photography*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: Focal Press, 2000), p. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Helen Alexander and Rhys Blakely, 'That's all, folks: what the end of 35mm film means for cinema', *New Statesman* (8 September 2014) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/08/s-all-folks>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4-5 of 52.

<sup>61</sup> Russ Fisher, 'The Winners and Losers of Sundance 2015', *Film* (3 February 2015) <<http://www.slashfilm.com/sundance-2015-winners/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Mike Sampson, 'J.J. Abrams Shot Part of "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" in IMAX, So Why Aren't Theaters Showing It That Way?', *Screen Crush* (28 October 2015) <<http://screencrush.com/star-wars-the-force-awakens-imax-theaters/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 13.

never would have guessed' [1921 points].<sup>63</sup> Instead I would suggest, following Gray, that the *Force for Change* promos and Comic-Con reel were attempts to foster an aura of *authenticity*. This needs some clarification as it could easily be argued that the most 'authentic' *Star Wars* films are, in fact, the prequels: produced, written, and directed by Lucas with complete autonomy from Twentieth Century Fox. In this sense, given Lucas' complete removal from the proceedings (he would step down as Creative Consultant sometime in 2013, saying 'You go to make a movie, and all you do is get criticized'), *The Force Awakens* is little more than inordinately expensive fan-fiction.<sup>64</sup> Yet the world had utterly denounced 'authentic' *Star Wars*; as stated earlier, the fans wanted 'my *Star Wars*' and Abrams, promising a tactile vision of 'new *Star Wars*' refracted through a reverent replica of the Original Trilogy, offered exactly that. So, much as *The Hobbit's* paratexts offered a product authentic not to Tolkien's novel but Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* [cf. 3.iv], *The Force Awakens* was promotionally constructed to be as authentic to the collective nostalgia for the Original Trilogy as possible. Resultantly, J.J. Abrams became revered as *Star Wars*' Second Coming, its anti-Lucas, with /u/rj20876 suggesting if 'he pulls this off and it is amazing as it looks to be, JJ Abrams deserves to be declared a saint!'<sup>65</sup>

But Abrams was not necessarily praised in the terms of individualistic directorial excellence that characterise more conventional auteurist worship. In fact, the only stylistic quality the majority of online commentators were able to extract from Abrams' films was his extensive use of lens flares in *Star Trek*, and even then very few actually interrogated the function of that aesthetic choice. Simon Pegg offers a passionate defence of Abrams' use of flares — 'Because it draws attention to the fact that we are looking at a filmed event, it actually creates a subliminal sense of documentary realism and makes the moment more vital and immediate' — but acknowledges it has 'become a sort of communal

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<sup>63</sup> /u/MadlibVillainy's comment, 'Mad Max: Fury Road – VFX Before & After', *Reddit* (29 May 2015)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/37s80q/mad\\_max\\_fury\\_road\\_vfx\\_before\\_after/crpf1i4](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/37s80q/mad_max_fury_road_vfx_before_after/crpf1i4)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>64</sup> Joanna Robinson, 'George Lucas Explains Why He's Done Directing *Star Wars* Movies', *Vanity Fair* (18 November 2015) <<http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/11/george-lucas-star-wars-jar-jar-binks>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 4.

<sup>65</sup> /u/rj20876's comment, 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens – Comic-Con 2015 Reel'

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_comiccon\\_2015\\_reel/cszowet](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3cvaf9/star_wars_the_force_awakens_comiccon_2015_reel/cszowet)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

stick to have a crack at JJ with, mostly by people who didn't know what the fuck lens flare was, until someone starting sneering the term all over their blog.'<sup>66</sup> The Abrams-esque lens flare propagated as a pervasive meme with people Abrams-ifying images by drowning them in ostentatious sparkles (such as **fig. 4.3**), which is auteur fetishism in living colour [cf. **3.iii**]. /u/galaxy\_guest goes so far as to call Abrams 'an uninspired storyteller' who is 'more of a DJ who takes old tracks and remixes them' (and this is no more apparent than in *Super 8* which can be summarised as a pseudo-Spielbergian mash-up of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *The Goonies*, and *Cloverfield*). Yet this does not mean that Abrams is wholly bereft of a unique authorial identity. In his talk at the TED2007 conference, Abrams outlined his fascination with a Mystery Box he bought at Lou Tannen's Magic Store in Manhattan as a youngster, which he has never opened:

It represents infinite possibility. It represents hope. It represents potential. And what I love about this box, and what I realize I sort of do in whatever it is that I do, is I find myself drawn to infinite possibility, that sense of potential. And I realize that mystery is the catalyst for imagination. Now, it's not the most ground-breaking idea, but when I started to think that maybe there are times when mystery is more important than knowledge, I started getting interested in this.<sup>67</sup>

Looking to the projects that Abrams has co-created, produced, and directed (*Alias*, *Lost*, *Fringe*, *Cloverfield*, *Mission: Impossible III*, etc.), this idea of the 'mystery box' — that is, the elusive and inscrutable suggestion of content which fans have to piece together for themselves — is suffuse throughout both marketing and narrative. The paratexts for *10 Cloverfield Lane*, for example, only hint towards the locked-room drama concerning Mary Elizabeth Winstead and John Goodman's characters, leaving the film's connection to the larger *Cloverfield* universe open for fevered fan speculation (which generated interest, hence hype, for the film all by itself).

Consequently, it is interesting to consider *The Force Awakens'* marketing through the lens of Abrams' character as a hype-man (though we must be careful not to insinuate that Abrams himself

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<sup>66</sup> Steve Weintraub, 'Simon Pegg Talks STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS, Working on the Huge Practical Sets, Lens Flares, Deleted Scenes, TREK 3, and More', *Collider* (14 May 2013) <<http://collider.com/simon-pegg-star-trek-into-darkness-interview/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 15 of 32.

<sup>67</sup> J.J. Abrams, 'The mystery box', *TED* (March 2007) <[https://www.ted.com/talks/j\\_j\\_abrams\\_mystery\\_box](https://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_mystery_box)> [accessed 13 March 2017] 04:58.

was wholly responsible for it [cf. trailer houses in 3.iii]). None of the trailers—the November 2014 and April 2015 teasers, the Official Trailer released in October 2015—abide by the two-thirds paradigm outlined in **Chapter Three**, instead opting for brief flashes of character close-ups, establishing shots, and high-spectacle punctuated by laconic off-screen dialogue such as 'who are you?', 'I'm no one', and 'I will finish what you started'.<sup>68</sup> Most notably, Luke Skywalker was completely omitted from all print and video paratexts. This, understandably, set the online community ablaze with many cyber-sleuths intricately analysing each shot and line in order to theorise about the potential direction of the film and by so doing constructing a collective bounty of variable hyperfabulae that provided abundant fodder for fan debate. In a knockout one-two promotional combo, *The Force Awakens'* mystery box ensured the intellectual engagement of its audience whilst the fetishised iconography of Han Solo, Chewbacca, and the Millennium Falcon—which cemented the film's aesthetic continuity with the Original Trilogy—guaranteed the fans' emotional investment, with /u/bingonice revealing that her 'husband cried more during this trailer than he did during our wedding' [1616 points].<sup>69</sup> Unlike other trailers, which need to outline their premises and characters in order to buy their audience, all *The Force Awakens'* paratexts needed to achieve was establish Abrams' *Star Wars* as 'my *Star Wars'*. Abrams' mystery box framework proved perfect for this end, implying just enough to win the trust of the disillusioned masses who then proceeded to craft their own speculative versions of the film. And this sense of confidence and good-will was bolstered by Abrams' charitable endeavours with *Force for Change* as well as his public apologies for his addiction to lens flares<sup>70</sup> and overabundance of transtextual references to *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* in *Star Trek Into Darkness*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens Trailer (Official)', *YouTube* (19 October 2015)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGbxmsDFVnE>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:17; 00:00:23; 00:00:55.

<sup>69</sup> /u/bingonice's comment, 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens Trailer #3', *Reddit* (20 October 2015)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3pfpp1/star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens\\_trailer\\_3/cw5xi6s/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3pfpp1/star_wars_the_force_awakens_trailer_3/cw5xi6s/)> [accessed 13 March].

<sup>70</sup> William Bibbiani, 'EXCLUSIVE: J.J. Abrams Apologizes for His Lens Flares', *Crave* (12 September 2013)

<<http://www.craveonline.co.uk/site/569755-exclusive-j-j-abrams-apologizes-for-his-lens-flares>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3-4 of 6.

<sup>71</sup> Jordan Hoffman, '10 Things We Learned From Colbert-Abrams "Star Wars" Talk', *Rolling Stone* (23 November 2015)

<<http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/news/10-things-we-learned-from-colbert-abrams-star-wars-talk-20151123>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 17 of 19.



Of course, with such astronomical expectations the probability for disappointment increases exponentially and *The Force Awakens* is by no means a perfect movie. In fact, it demonstrates that the fetish character of Hollywood's promotional aesthetics has become a central component of contemporary tentpole narrative structure [cf. 5.iii]. Much as *Jurassic World* operates as a quasi-remake of *Jurassic Park*, *The Force Awakens*' story reads like a beat-for-beat redux of *A New Hope*: an orphan on a desert planet encounters a droid who holds a MacGuffin that is pursued by enemy forces; the orphan joins forces with a shady and selfish character — who later attempts to abandon the quest but has a crisis-of-conscience and returns to save the day — and escapes the desert planet on the Millennium Falcon; meanwhile, the enemy forces, led by a powerful dark Jedi, unveil a super-weapon that annihilates a friendly planet; the Rebels undertake a mission to destroy the super-weapon, which is now turning its sights to the heroes' home base, wherein the orphan's mentor is killed by the dark Jedi; having lost their mentor, the orphan becomes Force-sensitive and finds the power to temporarily defeat the villain; finally, the enemy base is destroyed after a trench-run by X-Wing fighters. And, indeed, many of the commenters on the elitist /r/TrueFilm subreddit found this narrative conformity 'embarrassing' and 'lazy'.<sup>72</sup> /u/galaxy\_guest writes that *The Force Awakens* is 'shinier (and hollower) Star Wars, updated for an internet generation, full of meaningless details to fuel fan speculation and open threads to be explained in comics or forums'<sup>73</sup> and /u/Buckaroosamurai complains that the film 'relies on massive shorthand and expects the audience to do all the heavy lifting for its dramatic moments rather than earn them itself.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> /r/shaunny's comment, '[Discussion] J. J. Abrams's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens"', *Reddit* (19 December 2015) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/3xh1zu/discussion\\_jj\\_abramss\\_star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens/cy4kdle](https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/3xh1zu/discussion_jj_abramss_star_wars_the_force_awakens/cy4kdle)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>73</sup> /r/galaxy\_guest's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/3xh1zu/discussion\\_jj\\_abramss\\_star\\_wars\\_the\\_force\\_awakens/cy4m8aj](https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/3xh1zu/discussion_jj_abramss_star_wars_the_force_awakens/cy4m8aj)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>74</sup> /u/Buckaroosamurai's comment, 'Does the great reboot of "The Force Awakens" reflect our stagnant politics?', *Reddit* (25 January 2016) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/42j454/does\\_the\\_great\\_reboot\\_of\\_the\\_force\\_awakens/czbaeda](https://www.reddit.com/r/TrueFilm/comments/42j454/does_the_great_reboot_of_the_force_awakens/czbaeda)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

However valid these criticisms are, these dissenting voices comprise only a tiny fraction of the audience who generally loved the film in spite of, and in some cases because of, its fetishised parallelism to *A New Hope*. For example, /u/deb1359 writes:

I cannot thank J.J. Abrams, Kathleen Kennedy and Disney enough for reinvigorating this franchise for a new generation. They've brought back the charm and magic that's been missing in this franchise since 1983. Simply seeing the Millennium Falcon again was enough to make me tear up, this might have been the most emotional experience I have ever had inside of a movie theatre.

[338 points]<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, considering the responses we have surveyed (which constitute only a minute, but indicative, cross-section of the film's anticipatory discourse), we can see with crystal acuity that an immense sum of *The Force Awakens'* textuality was articulated, mediated, and internalised long before the film was actually seen. *The Force Awakens* is not only a unique case study in the overwhelming power of successful brand marketing, as well as a master-class in how to seduce the disenchanted and placate the apoplectic, but it proves that textual identity is largely solidified by the pre-release publicity of its attractors. The prevailing air of determinism identifiable in the preceding excerpts demonstrates the supreme influence of fetishistic promotional hypernarrative: even with months to wait until ultimate consumption, Reddit's commentators almost unilaterally agreed that Abrams' *Star Wars* was absolutely and unquestionably the series' much-awaited resurrection. Minds had already been made up and interpretations (not so much on narrative specifics but the overall aura of the piece) firmly determined. The promulgation of Abram's auteur-brand secured *The Force Awakens'* financial success: its smashing of numerous box-office records is no surprise given Abrams' renown as a die-hard *Star Wars* fan and the film's paratextual physiognomy as old/real/my *Star Wars* galvanised for a millennial perspective.

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<sup>75</sup> /u/deb1359's comment, '[no spoilers] I am in legitimate tears right now.', *Reddit* (18 December 2015) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/3xbfot/no\\_spoilers\\_i\\_am\\_in\\_legitimate\\_tears\\_right\\_now/](https://www.reddit.com/r/StarWars/comments/3xbfot/no_spoilers_i_am_in_legitimate_tears_right_now/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

### 4.iii – Home Sweet Home-Video

Although it is clearly important we measure the textual impact of those paratexts leading up to opening night, as we have seen with regards to *Star Wars*, there has become an inherent peril in placing too much stock in a film's theatrical exhibition. It must be said that the average film (barring festival screenings and special engagements) only has a theatrical lifespan of about six weeks; whilst high-demand blockbusters like *The Force Awakens*—which lasted 168 days in the domestic market—will obviously enjoy longer runs and undoubtedly be reissued for anniversary events and the like, a great many films can only ever be seen on the big screen in their 'definitive' form during their brief initial release windows. Yet the reality is that, even for the most ardent of cinemagoers, a significant percentage of film consumption now occurs in the living room and it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that a lot of people *only* watch movies at home whether for reasons of cost, convenience, privacy, or comfort. Moreover, some movies are only ever released on home formats. In fact, we could easily say that the home, especially the internet connected one, has supplanted the multiplex as cinema's dominant sphere: in 2015, the North American film industry took \$11.13 billion from the domestic box office,<sup>76</sup> which appears to be an almighty sum until it is put aside the \$18 billion brought in by the home-entertainment sector.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, we need to properly orient ourselves to this domain and consider home-video not as a mere ancillary revenue stream and inferior facsimile of 'real cinema' but a unique medium with a textual ontology entirely its own. So, in order to more fully explore how home formats impact our understanding of cinema, we will analyse how the packaging, programming, and supplements of Warner Home Video's *Robert De Niro Collection* Blu-ray box-set guide us toward certain perceptions of its bundled movies *Heat*, *GoodFellas*, *The Mission*, and *Once Upon a Time in America*. I propose that the box-set offers three (somewhat contradictory) 'authorial' frames through which to read the films: a principal structure built around Robert De Niro, a rather

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<sup>76</sup> 'Box office revenue in North America from 1980 to 2015 (in billion U.S. dollars)', *Statista: The Statistics Portal* (2016) <<http://www.statista.com/statistics/187069/north-american-box-office-gross-revenue-since-1980/>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>77</sup> Andrew Wallenstein, 'Why 2015 Home Entertainment Figures Should Worry Studios', *Variety* (6 January 2016) <<http://variety.com/2016/digital/news/home-entertainment-spending-2015-studios-1201673329/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 16.

subliminal framework promoting Warner Bros. as a studio, and finally an opposing directorial scheme for each picture.

Before we embark on that analysis, however, it is worth assessing the contemporary home-video industry because we are currently in a crucial moment of flux for the studios, where developing technologies are altering both how films are delivered into the home and how we actually consume them. Although the home-video phenomenon began with VHS and LaserDisc in the mid-1970s—and is directly responsible for renovating box-office squibs such as *Blade Runner*, *Spaceballs*, and *The Shawshank Redemption* into cult juggernauts—the degradable low-resolution tape format of VHS, on which films were often cropped/panned-and-scanned for 4:3 CRT television sets, and the cost and physical unwieldiness of niche LaserDiscs (the form-factor of which echoed vinyl records which were being phased out in favour of CDs) prevented either from being a serious mainstream alternative to the theatre. In fact, Derek Kompare posits VHS's temporality as one of the driving factors in the home-video industry's early make-up as a predominantly rental rather than 'sell-through' market.<sup>78</sup> However, the advent of the imperishable and higher quality DVD format in the 1990s and HDTV in the 2000s brought to home exhibition a heretofore unseen audiovisual fidelity which Kompare believes bolstered 'the perceived value of an object [now] meant for permanent ownership and display rather than temporary use.'<sup>79</sup> The qualitative shift from analogue to digital can be seen in what Deborah and Mark Parker identify as 'the bibliographic terminology newly appropriated for DVDs, which present themselves as "special editions" or "anthologies," and that generally divide the film not into "scenes" but into "chapters".'<sup>80</sup> The lavish packaging of said special editions (such as *The Lord of the Rings*' extended releases that include a fold-out presentation case embellished with concept art) enhances their desirability as commodities—with the steelbook being particularly indicative of intransience. The DVD shelf has not only supplanted the bookcase as a central component of the

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<sup>78</sup> Derek Kompare, 'Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconceptualization of Television', *Television & New Media*, 7.4 (2006), 335-60 (p. 348).

<sup>79</sup> Kompare, 'Publishing Flow', p. 348.

<sup>80</sup> Deborah Parker and Mark Parker, 'Directors and DVD commentary: The Specifics of Intention', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 62.1 (Winter 2004), 13-22 (p. 14).

living space but manifested as a kind of status symbol through which one can articulate their class, taste, and economic/intellectual wealth. We could even say that the curation of an idiosyncratic cinematic biome encouraged by digital formats' affordability and catalogue diversity has engendered a pervasive pseudo-cinephilia in everyday consumers who become collectors (hence experts) in whatever happens to be their chosen field of interest, whether that be video nasties or Tom Cruise vehicles. Furthermore, unlike the linear flow of the theatre, digital home-video (even more so than analogue) allows spectators an enhanced agency in how they interact with their films: they can A-B repeat favourite scenes, skip over boring parts with a click of a button, capture perfect freeze-frames whenever the fancy strikes, pause the show to visit the restroom or fridge, and watch in chunks over multiple sittings. We spoke earlier about how spectators are always active participants in actualisation [cf. **Chapter Two**], but home-video affords us an unprecedented control over how the 'work' is presented (or manipulated), which can drastically influence the 'text's' eventual shape. The result is a more dispersed and personalised conception (or, rather, conceptions) of cinema than the homogeneity and hegemony of the studio-supplied multiplex could ever allow.

Barbara Klinger writes that more 'than at any other time in history, [...] these technologies have not only made Hollywood cinema an intimate part of home entertainment but have also greatly enhanced its status as an American pastime.'<sup>81</sup> Yet, while DVD was a definite upgrade over VHS/LaserDisc, it was still a standard-definition format formalised at a time before widescreen LCD/plasma panel technologies were widely available at a reasonable price; although the format promised crystalline picture and dynamic surround-sound audio, more than a few releases (such as the non-anamorphic DVD presentation of *The Abyss*) were plagued by substandard digital transfers with soft, noisy, aliased pictures, muffled sound, and even in some cases incorrect aspect ratios. With high-definition Blu-rays such issues have been largely negated (though not entirely eliminated, as we will soon see) and for the first time home viewing could reasonably approximate a theatrical

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<sup>81</sup> Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 4.

standard: the native resolutions of Full HD television sets, home projectors, and Blu-ray discs (1920 horizontal lines x 1080 vertical lines) are only marginally smaller than the 2K standard of their contemporary mainstream theatrical DCPs (2048 x 1080), and as cinemas have upgraded to 3D and 4K DCI (4096 x 2160) home technologies have kept in step with Ultra HD (3840 x 2160) TVs and Blu-rays. Moreover, we are on the cusp of affordable next-generation High Dynamic Range OLED screens with diagonal widths up to 8ft, meaning that—along with increasingly inexpensive surround-sound systems—replicating the theatrical experience in one's living room is no longer the prerogative of the wealthy enthusiast. Put simply, what (Ultra) High-Definition offers is the perception that one owns not a *copy* of a film—as was the case with VHS and DVD—but *the film* itself, and that is a powerful emotional distinction. For example, the *Dial M for Murder* 3D Blu-ray offers, for the first time, the definitive version of Hitchcock's vision in all its native stereoscopic glory and the cornucopia of 'director's cut' releases undermine the theatrical hierarchy by proposing the home-video version as the 'real' movie as it was supposed to have been.

However, as we transition into the UHD era there is an evident uncertainty about the future of physical media, given the democratisation of high-speed broadband (in the West, at least) and movie streaming services like Netflix which gifts its 93.8 million users unlimited access to its catalogue for a flat monthly fee.<sup>82</sup> The shift towards a chiefly online model of home-entertainment consumption is evidenced not only in the meltdown of such brick-and-mortar specialist physical media shops as Blockbuster, Gamestation, and Virgin Megastores (as well as Netflix's own mail-order rental department) but that Netflix has emerged as a studio in its own right, producing series exclusively for its online platform (*House of Cards*, *Orange is the New Black*, *Marvel's Daredevil*) and funding original films (*Beasts of No Nation*, *The Ridiculous 6*, *Special Correspondents*)—thereby posing a legitimate threat to the monolithic orthodoxy of both traditional cable TV and film distribution networks. Indeed, Netflix and its chief competitor Amazon stepped forth as the biggest buyers at the

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<sup>82</sup> 'Number of Netflix streaming subscribers worldwide from 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2011 to 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2016 (in millions)', *Statista: The Statistics Portal* (2016) <<http://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

2016 Sundance Film Festival with twelve purchases<sup>83</sup> and would go on to earn a combined seventeen nominations at the 2017 Golden Globes.<sup>84</sup> If more evidence of this seismic drift were required we need only look to Screening Room—an in-development venture by Napster tycoon Sean Parker that has received the backing of Peter Jackson, Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Ron Howard, and J.J. Abrams—which will allow home viewers to rent new movies on their theatrical release days for forty-eight hours (with as much as 40% of the £35 fee, which comes with two 'free' cinema tickets, subsidising the theatre industry). Although a similar service, PRIMA Cinema, already exists, each release costing \$500 on top of the platform's entry outlay of \$35,000 secludes access only to the super-rich. Peter Jackson saying that Screening Room 'is very carefully designed to capture an audience that does not currently go to the cinema' and will not lead to 'the cannibalisation of theatrical revenues' is admission enough of the inexorable exodus away from the cinema towards the home.<sup>85</sup>

Of course the mammoth in the lounge is piracy, which became extremely easy and ecumenical with the emergence of the internet and peer-to-peer file-sharing protocols like Usenet and BitTorrent in the late 1990s. Robert Steele, president of Rightscorp, outlines that North American file-sharers transferred 797 petabytes of data per month in 2014 (which, to put it in perspective, is 797,000,000,000 megabytes or the approximate equivalent of 265 billion songs) and domestic home-video revenues—even accounting for those blossoming streaming services—have fallen 30% since 2007.<sup>86</sup> Unlike the analogue age in which pirated movies were generally recorded on poor-quality camcorders from the back of theatres and sold on VHSs at car-boot sales, the move over to digital with DVD meant that 1:1 copies could be ripped to a hard-drive and immediately (and freely)

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<sup>83</sup> Tatiana Siegel, 'Sundance Wrap: Why Netflix and Amazon Dominance Matters', *The Hollywood Reporter* (1 February 2016) <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/sundance-wrap-why-netflix-amazon-860987>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 10.

<sup>84</sup> Matt Brian, 'Netflix and Amazon secure 17 Golden Globe Nominations', *engadget* (12 December 2016) <<https://www.engadget.com/2016/12/12/netflix-amazon-golden-globe-nominations-2017/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 5.

<sup>85</sup> Ben Child, 'Peter Jackson, Steven Spielberg and JJ Abrams "back" Napster founder's Screening Room', *The Guardian* (14 March 2016) <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/14/peter-jackson-steven-spielberg-jj-abrams-screening-room-napster-sean-parker>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3 of 7.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Steele, 'If You Think Piracy Is Decreasing, You Haven't Looked at the Data...', *Digital Music News* (16 July 2015) <<http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/2015/07/16/if-you-think-piracy-is-decreasing-you-havent-looked-at-the-data-2/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 21-26 of 35.

disseminated over the internet. The lightning speeds of broadband now mean that 1080p Blu-ray versions of movies, which are almost always leaked several weeks before the actual discs' street-dates, can be downloaded in a matter of minutes and with ever-cheapening storage one can quite easily accumulate a massive collection of movies with nary a dent on their bank statement.

It is clear, then, that over the previous decade new technologies have been actively challenging those qualitative aspects of digital home-video raised earlier. Resultantly, in order for physical media to be seen as worthwhile in an increasingly cloud-oriented and piracy-ridden landscape, it is necessary for distributors to elevate the status of their products and this cannot simply be achieved with the jump in audiovisual fidelity that comes with each generation as those files can still be streamed or copied at their native resolutions. We could even say that the buffet-table mentality encouraged by Netflix's instantly-accessible library (and the corresponding possibility of illegally downloading any film on a whim) has affected a kind of degradation in the value, if not the quality, of isolated video tracks that now function as a disposable utility like cheap socks, to be worn a few times and quickly discarded. Thus, the onus of value rests squarely on those paratexts such as the commentary and behind-the-scenes documentary Criterion pioneered for the LaserDisc format in the 1980s (which directly contributed to LaserDisc's aura as a superior format—an aura which was transplanted along with the supplements to DVD—as well as Criterion's corporate brand-identity as a premium distributor). That a 'special edition' DVD was typically separated from a standard release on the sole basis of these paratexts and that such 'special features' are now included as standard on Blu-rays is ample proof of their mounting significance. Yet on-disc supplements are hardly the only important paratexts: Keith M. Johnston states that graphic design can 'strongly influence the reader's understanding of the text' and seeks to 'move beyond the notion that packaging is simply a tool to attract consumer interest.'<sup>87</sup> And what is perhaps most interesting, especially so in the context of this

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<sup>87</sup> Keith M. Johnston, 'Reclaiming the "vanilla" DVD: brand packaging and the case of Ealing Studios', *Screen*, 55.1 (Spring 2014), 85-101 (p. 87).



thesis, is how these paratexts principally operate to erect a nimbus of authorial esteem for their parent works.

Turning back to the *Robert De Niro Collection*, we can see that the box's spartan design—dominated by a portrait of Robert De Niro in character as *Heat*'s Neil McCauley aside a cascading large-print 'DE NIRO' (only one of the nine times his name appears on the package's exterior) [fig. 4.4]—leaves absolutely no ambiguity as to who our primary point of contact for the anthology is supposed to be. This may seem a somewhat arbitrary and convenient way to shift old catalogue titles (more on that later), yet the pre-eminence of De Niro's face and name on the box is very direct in its construction of a specialised aura for the set as a whole, one that overrides the individual identities of its films. Indeed, the discs' plastic cases are decorated with the same De Niro-centric design as the cardboard frontispiece rather than their movies' posters—homogenising them under the De Niro umbrella—and the division of the films into Part One (*Heat*, *GoodFellas*) and Part Two (*The Mission*, *Once Upon A Time in America*) intimates a certain linearity to the anthology's 'narrative': an inter-diegetic coherency buttressed by De Niro being the first person we see in *Heat* and the last in *Once Upon a Time in America*. Of course, we could say that the films are simply arranged in reverse chronological order, which is true, but if we follow the *Collection*'s paratextual directives and watch the films in their 'proper' sequence with a magnetic focus on De Niro, they come together to paint a unique thematic tableau encompassing a spectrum of criminality, violence, and redemption.

Part One addresses callous men whose brutal vocations write their own ends: McCauley in *Heat* is a career thief with an ostensible ethics of criminal pragmatism, as well as an eventual shot at freedom and romance, which are all squandered as soon as the opportunity for selfish revenge rears itself; *GoodFellas*' Jimmy Conway, on the other hand, has no pretensions of honour and allows greed-propelled paranoia to push him towards murdering his conspirators in the Lufthansa heist. Where McCauley and Conway are indissolubly committed to their lives in the underworld, De Niro's characters in Part Two are revealed to be penitents hungry for absolution even though they are perhaps more detestable in their actions—*The Mission*'s Captain Mendoza is a slave-trader and

fratricide whilst *America's* Noodles is quick to kill and rape and is seen at his happiest rearranging a nursery full of newborns that will never know their true families. Mendoza attempts to exculpate himself by joining the Jesuits and renouncing that mercenary violence which doomed McCauley and Conway, but this salvation is quickly terminated by the incoming Spanish and Portuguese militaries that force Mendoza to once again take up the sword. Unlike McCauley, who similarly acts as his own hangman by pursuing Waingro, Mendoza chooses violence as a means of altruistic guardianship. His death might render this distinction irrelevant, but Mendoza's selflessness signals a shift in conscience that culminates with Noodles' refusal to kill Max at the climax of *America* even with easy means and plenty of motivation (not to mention permission). Of course, the ambiguity of *America's* opium-addled non-linear *syuzhet* implies that the elderly Noodles' moral rectitude is a fantasy and pseudo-deliverance—the gangster genre, as we know, dictates that criminals do not qualify for happy endings—yet the yearning for such virtuosity, even if it is nothing more than a dream, heralds the psychological/emotional apotheosis of the 'character' we have followed over the last eleven hours. As such, the omnipresence of *Heat's* De Niro on the box's exterior adopts a greater significance. McCauley is the character perhaps most immediately associable with professional criminality, whose story cleanly articulates the incompatibility of violent actions and peaceful living, and by introducing us to the *Collection* through its packaging and programming he effectively frames our reading of the rest of the series through that window (remembering our notes on the primacy effect in 3.iii). Throughout *GoodFellas*, *The Mission*, and *Once Upon a Time in America* we see elements of the McCauley-persona recomposed with different stresses (sociopathy in Conway, honour in Mendoza, a craving for love in Noodles) and the characters' varying ruinations enables one to glean a thematic dialectic in much the same way as a more traditional director-obsessed auteurist analysis: that being a condemnation of the egotistical avarice that manifests in aggression towards others and an indication that salvation, which escapes the characters but may yet be within our own grasp, rests in a love—more a pan-personal humanism than simple romance—that is sought not as a balm for loneliness or

one's guilty conscience nor to satiate sexual desires (which, seen through McCauley, Mendoza, and Noodles, are simply recapitulations of the egocentrism that condones selfish criminality).

However elucidating such a reading may be, it is nevertheless somewhat reductive (as all authorial readings inevitably are): McCauley is only one element in the *Heat* equation, with Al Pacino's Vincent Hanna possessing an equal if not greater importance to the narrative; likewise, *GoodFellas* is Henry Hill's story, not Conway's; Mendoza arguably exists to provide a dramatic challenge to Father Gabriel's faith in God and other people; and it is clear that, above all else, *Once Upon a Time in America* was Sergio Leone's attempt to put an exclamation point on the gangster movie as he did to the Western with the *Dollars* trilogy. Our De Niro reading, though not necessarily representative, is principally a by-product of the box-set's paratextual mechanisms that magnify the films' unifying subterranean meditations on criminal life and ties them into a conceptual unity (whilst concordantly negating their differences in tone, genre, etc.) and is perhaps the most overt example we have touched upon so far of the transformative effect an authorial interpretive strategy can have upon a set of motion pictures. Yet we must be careful in not postulating this as a codex for the entire De Niro oeuvre as the *Robert De Niro Collection*, despite the definitiveness its name insinuates, omits significant entries in the canon—not only De Niro's standout performances in *Raging Bull*, *The Godfather Part II*, and *The Deer Hunter* but also his directorial efforts *A Bronx Tale* and *The Good Shepherd*. Given the spread of distributors these films were released under, their exclusion from the Warner-produced *Collection* is unsurprising. This does, however, shine a light on the *Collection's* selections that reveals its programming to be less thematically-oriented and something more mundanely pragmatic in that Warners' stable of De Niro pictures is relatively small.

Why, then, have a De Niro box-set at all? The easiest answer (as indicated earlier) is that the 2012 *Collection* was designed to combine older library titles into an attractive package wherein the films could mutually enhance the others' desirability. Part One being comprised of *Heat* and *GoodFellas*—well-renowned movies tattooed onto popular culture (*Heat*, for instance, is referenced in the *Peep Show* episode 'Burgling' and the oft-copied *GoodFellas* was Martin Scorsese's mainstream

breakthrough)—allows those films' populist sensibilities to be transferred onto the more contemplative and demanding films of Part Two, which in turn whet Part One with an enhanced artistic edge. Moreover, the releases of *GoodFellas* and *Once Upon a Time in America* contained in the *Collection* would soon be superseded by superior products: a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary remaster for *GoodFellas* in 2015 that remedied the 'compression artefacts, smeared textures, ringing, aliasing, and crush' that haunted the 2007 transfer included in the *Collection* and a complete restoration of Leone's original cut of *Once Upon a Time in America* in 2014.<sup>88</sup> This unmasks Warners' primary purpose with the *Collection*: to bundle together lesser catalogue films in order to maximise their profitability before being outmoded. That the *Robert De Niro Collection* was purchased for £11.99 whilst the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of *GoodFellas* retails for £9.99 attests to the low-budget principle of the box-set (which, furthermore, explains its utilitarian packaging). Thus, the *Collection's* promotion of Robert De Niro becomes less an indication of thematic content and more brutish brand exploitation that leeches the prestige of De Niro's status as a household name in order to engrain its lower-tiered Blu-ray works with a sense of value that translates into an enhanced image of Warner Bros.' other genre entries and, indeed, Warners as a studio. Correspondingly, the simple image of De Niro on the *Collection's* box functions as a surreptitiously powerful method of author-driven paratextual promotion, not only for itself but related Warner Bros. properties that may not have anything to do with De Niro but are nonetheless buoyed by his association with the studio here.

The patchwork constitution of the *Collection* is most apparent in its supplements' De Niro deficiency (not unexpected given *Vanity Fair* profiler Patricia Bosworth's blunt observation in 1987 that De Niro 'despises interviews and rarely gives them').<sup>89</sup> Of course, this only amplifies his mystique and allows the spectator, unfettered by the trappings of trivial gossip, to fully invest in De Niro's *characters* instead of *De Niro* as a celebrity. But the *Collection's* discs being expropriated

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<sup>88</sup> Kenneth Brown, 'GoodFellas Blu-Ray', *Blu-ray.com* (22 February 2010) <<http://www.blu-ray.com/movies/GoodFellas-Blu-ray/7972/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3 of 5.

<sup>89</sup> Patricia Bosworth, 'The Shadow King', *Vanity Fair* (October 1987) <<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/1987/10/robert-de-niro-life-story>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 10 of 135.

wholesale from their standalone counterparts that participate in and, indeed, contribute to a culture of commercial auteurism fractures the illusion that its movies are 'Robert De Niro films'. For as much as the pre-release advertising industry is culpable for the commerce of auteurism it is video that the contemporary auteur truly calls home, the making-of documentary their sanctuary, the commentary their fortress. Giorgio Bertellini and Jacqueline Reich, who believe that home-video has, 'directly or indirectly, expanded films' authorial halo', state that 'As value-adding paratexts, audio and printed commentaries can turn film texts into critical and luxury editions, to be marketed to different levels of cinephilic and commercial consumption.'<sup>90</sup> Additionally, Catherine Grant, paraphrasing Barbara Klinger, writes that DVD supplements function as "'Auteur Machines" [...] potentially engendering different, more comprehensive forms of auteurism than were previously possible.'<sup>91</sup> Although the behind-the-scenes apocrypha bandied by home-video supplements are hardly a new phenomena — Thomas Doherty explains that 'directors have been jabbering about their technique since at least 1930, when a pompous D.W. Griffith waxed portentously to a fawning Walter Huston in a specially filmed prologue to the synch-sound release of *The Birth of a Nation*'<sup>92</sup> whereas Nicola Jean Evans proposes that featurettes have actually been a fixture of mainstream film culture since approximately 1919<sup>93</sup> — DVD and Blu-ray offer an unprecedented *access, immediacy*, and (supposed) *transparency* to a superabundance of such information that essentially situates us within sitting distance of the auteurs, giving, as Matt Hills suggests, audiences the illusion of 'co-watching, or "para-watching" with media professionals.'<sup>94</sup> As James Cameron says in his 2003 commentary for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*'s

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<sup>90</sup> Giorgio Bertellini and Jacqueline Reich, 'DVD Supplements: A Commentary on Commentaries', *Cinema Journal*, 49.3 (Spring 2010), 103-5 (p. 103).

<sup>91</sup> Catherine Grant, 'Auteur Machines? Auteurism and the DVD,' in *Film and Television after DVD*, ed. James Bennett and Tom Brown (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 101-15 (p. 103).

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Doherty, 'DVD COMMENTARY TRACKS: LISTENING TO THE AUTEURS', *Cinéaste*, 26.4 (Fall 2001), 78-80 (p. 78).

<sup>93</sup> Nicola Jean Evans, 'Undoing the Magic? DVD extras and the pleasure behind the scenes', *Continuum*, 24.4 (2010), 587-600 (p. 587).

<sup>94</sup> Matt Hills, 'From the Box in the Corner to the Box Set on the Shelf,' *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 5.1 (2007), 41-60 (p. 53).

Extreme edition: 'I think the value of this is that you've got a stream-of-consciousness document of the people who were creatively responsible for the film.'<sup>95</sup>

Michael Mann's *Heat* commentary is emblematic of this kind of colloquial intimacy. Unlike, say, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* commentary that painstakingly details the convolutions and quarrels of production or John Sturges' intricately didactic walkthrough of *Bad Day at Black Rock*, which Paul Thomas Anderson says is more informative than '20 years of film school', Mann is not so much concerned with cinematic technicalities as the film's verisimilitude.<sup>96</sup> Mann's dry but genial commentary, wherein he almost refuses to acknowledge the fictionality of his characters, becomes something more like a treatise in dramatic anthropology. To illustrate, Mann on Eady:

I hypothesised her coming from a very different background [than the rest of the characters], from the background of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina near Tennessee, which is a very old Scots/Irish/Welsh population of people who were immigrants into those mountain ranges probably in the latter part of the eighteenth century. And there is a great tradition there of music, of furniture and music instrument making, and a very deeply engrained, very high culture that's also to do with design. She got a scholarship out of Appalachia to Parsons and that's where she became a graphic designer. This is the backstory that we made up. And, classically, if she's working in graphic design, where she would get a job to pay the rent would be a bookstore, like Hennessey + Ingalls which specialises in architecture and art books.<sup>97</sup>

This borderline-obsessive attention to miniscule details, which ultimately prove irrelevant to *Heat*'s plot, is characteristic of Mann's commentary that treats even the most inconsequential characters as fully realised human beings and his Los Angeles as a tactile replica of the real city. When Mann speaks of McCauley and Hanna, he more often refers to the real Neil McCauley and the detectives (Chuck Adamson, Dennis Farina, et al.) who inspired Hanna than he does De Niro and Pacino; whilst by no means dismissive of their performances, when Mann describes their scenes he does so not as a filmmaker but a psychoanalyst probing for neuroses, fears, desires. Mann says that *Heat* 'is based on

<sup>95</sup> 'Writer/Director Commentary', *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, dir. James Cameron (USA: TriStar Pictures, 1991) [Blu-ray (Skynet Edition), Optimum Releasing, 2009] 02:32:33.

<sup>96</sup> Kristine McKenna, 'Knows It When He Sees It', *Los Angeles Times* (12 October 1997) <<http://articles.latimes.com/print/1997/oct/12/entertainment/ca-41788>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 17 of 45.

<sup>97</sup> 'Commentary by Director Michael Mann', *Heat*, dir. Michael Mann (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1995) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2012] 00:26:12.

observations. [...] on people I have met, people I've known, people I've sat with and talked to. Thieves, cops, killers. It's not derived from other cinema, it's based on research.'<sup>98</sup> The commentary track is therefore Mann's way of enumerating that research and elevating the film out of its generic vestures and base entertainment values into a truly authentic representation of cop/criminal life.

Yet despite his protestations that *Heat* has no basis in other cinema, Mann cannot help making allusions to his other works. In fact, Mann opens the commentary with a remark that the stop on the Blue Line where McCauley first enters the frame is 'quite coincidentally' where Max and Annie leave the train at the end of *Collateral*, so straightaway we are encouraged to locate *Heat* within the context of Mann's catalogue.<sup>99</sup> More significantly, the terms in which Mann describes McCauley's appearance—he lives 'a life of anonymity: he has grey hair, a grey suit, a white shirt. That makes it difficult for anybody to provide the police with a useful description'—is almost exactly the portrait he paints of Vincent in the *Collateral* commentary.<sup>100</sup> Although the connection is never overtly made in either track, the parallelism in terminology nonetheless draws attention to the parallelism in *mise-en-scène* [fig. 4.5-4.6] which in turn awakens a parallel appreciation of character. Ergo, McCauley is disengaged from the De Niro model proffered by the *Collection* and instead manifests as the archetypal Mann man: an emotionally frigid, isolated, and violent professional whose virtuosic aggression abrogates domestic happiness. Armed with the knowledge of this paradigm and the connotations of the grey suit, Crockett's attire in the opening movements of *Miami Vice* now attracts a semantic charge [fig. 4.7]. We immediately identify him as a recapitulation of Vincent and McCauley's glacial pragmatism (and his seduction by Isabella and the cartel lifestyle is economically articulated through the casualisation of his wardrobe), with *Miami Vice*'s FCD essentially confirming this by blatantly summoning *Heat* in the shot where Crockett turns away from a conversation to sullenly assess the ocean as if suddenly possessed by McCauley's ghost [fig. 4.8-4.9]. So the

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<sup>98</sup> Ryan Lamble, 'Michael Mann's *Heat*: how research created a classic thriller', *Den of Geek* (8 May 2013) <<http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/heat/25530/michael-manns-heat-how-research-created-a-classic-thriller>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 32.

<sup>99</sup> 'Commentary', *Heat*, 00:01:15.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:27:54.

commentaries, in this instance, function as an accelerant to the awareness of Mann's auto-citations, and this is far from his only transtextual foray with *Heat*. Mann's thoughts on Shiherlis being a damaged product of the crooked Folsom microcosm recall his justification for Frank's behaviour in *Thief's* Blu-ray supplements. Similarly, when Mann analyses Shiherlis' feelings for Charlene—'it's as if in his deep inner-self in those moments of quiet at 3am in the morning when he was in some dank cell in Folsom prison and he imagined a woman, this is the woman he was imagining'—he could just as easily be summarising Frank's attraction to Jessie, as relayed in *Thief's* coffee shop scene.<sup>101</sup> The transtextual web Mann weaves throughout the *Heat* commentary—connecting not just to *Collateral* and *Thief* but *Manhunter*, *LA Takedown*, and *The Jericho Mile*—fosters a heightened aesthetic aura for the film, not only validating *Heat* as a distinctly authored work of art but retrospectively canonising it as the apogee of his career-long fascination with criminality.

Considering Mann's self-election as *the* authority on *Heat's* themes and characters, it is difficult to ignore his interpretations. In fact, in the featurette 'Pacino and De Niro: The Conversation', Mann immediately rebukes Executive Producer Peter Jan Brugé's reading that 'in the Pacino character and in the Robert De Niro character you're basically seeing two sides of the same man, and in a way which each overlaps and resonates within the other' by saying:<sup>102</sup>

I never viewed them as flip sides of a coin; I viewed them as kind of antithetical to each other. There are certain qualities that they both had in common and things that they were polar opposites of each other: one of the things that they're different about is that Neil McCauley's a sociopath and that Hanna is *not*.<sup>103</sup>

Roland Joffé's impassioned defence on *The Mission's* commentary track is similarly irresistible:

In a way this is a film that has religion in it, but it's not really about religion—it's about human beings. It's about some human beings who believed in religion but it's a movie about love. And it's a movie about what love is. It's a movie about the pain of love, about the vulnerability of love, about the longing for peace that love can bring or that lack of love can take away.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:22:32.

<sup>102</sup> 'Pacino and De Niro: The Conversation' [Documentary], *Heat*, dir. Michael Mann (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1995) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2012] 00:00:48.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:06.

<sup>104</sup> 'Commentary by Director Roland Joffé', *The Mission*, dir. Roland Joffé (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1986) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2012] 00:20:45.



The two tracks are extremely effective in foisting for each picture the semblance of a definitive meaning, which obviously conflicts with our method that postulates 'meaning' as spectator-centred and inherently indefinite. Whilst our critiques of intentionalism outlined in 2.ii are still very much in place (with the *Collection's* De Niro-heavy paratexts undercutting the monist intentionalist illusion proffered by the commentaries), the persuasive power of Mann and Joffé's commentaries cannot be denied and is a natural consequence of this kind of explanatory authorial discourse. Raili Poldsaar, for example, identifies a certain irony in Michel Foucault—famed for his suspicion toward the supremacy of authors and their certified readings—penning a preface for the English translation of his own *The Order of Things*, which operates somewhat didactically as 'Directions for Use'.<sup>105</sup> Poldsaar writes:

When the author desires to offer his or her interpretation and/or intention as one possible key to reading, he or she is likely to feel compelled to point out that his or her interpretation is not the only or even the best one [...]. Yet, by providing the master key, the author, consciously or unconsciously, also offers a master narrative for interpretation, the truth-value of which is higher than those of the later interpreters and which, therefore, starts to limit the area of possible interpretations. It does not punish, but it certainly disciplines.<sup>106</sup>

Although neither commentary claims infrangible authority—Mann is descriptive and suggestive rather than dictatorial and Joffé starts his track, replete with 'I think[s]' and 'I suppose[s]', with 'to my surprise I'm the director of this movie'—they both consecrate a sort of calcified intentionalism.<sup>107</sup> The author's auditory omnipresence fabricates a membrane of causality through which the image appears whole, homogenised, concrete. The commentary effectively transmits a pre-packaged textual ideal of the film.

The ontological implications of this warrant further investigation. Going beyond the mere intentionalist readings of commentaries conducted by many other critics, Scott Balcerzak assesses his own enjoyment of Jack Nicholson's ruminations on *The Passenger* as 'a more intrinsic pleasure based

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<sup>105</sup> Raili Poldsaar, 'Foucault framing Foucault: the role of paratexts in the English translation of *The Order of Things*', *Neohelicon*, 37.1 (2010), 263-73 (p. 268).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>107</sup> 'Commentary', *The Mission*, 00:00:06.

in how the commentary resituates the cinematic text as time-image, creating a convergence of film and commentary.<sup>108</sup> He writes that, when watching a commentated movie,

the viewer is given a new perception of the sequence that clearly removes it from the diegetic unity of the film. The images as a unified whole still exist on the TV screen [...] The commentary places these images within the context of production, though, reminding me that I am simply watching a film that took a crew and a director to shoot. But along with that particular recontextualization, the commentary also exists within a more complex dialogue with the filmic image, one that challenges the reality and temporality I see onscreen.<sup>109</sup>

Remembering our discussion in 2.iv on how fiction and documentary films are differentiated on the basis of differing modes of spectatorial attention, we can postulate that the presence of what Balcerzak calls a commentary's 'paratextual narrator' enacts a cognitive process of de-diegetisation wherein the artificiality of the narrative world is laid wide open and we suddenly become aware of the borders of the frame.<sup>110</sup> The commentarial voice disrupts the fictional flow of the image by contextualising it in 'real world' terms (Joffé, for instance, speaks of 'Bob' instead of Mendoza) and, with the muting of the diegetic audio track, we are drawn into a closer focus on form, technique, movement, and image abstracted from their story function. Put otherwise, the film's narrative transforms from that of characters, dialogue, and diegesis to authors, direction, and production. As Grant says:

we usually experience filmmakers voicing a narration over their films precisely when we are watching documentaries. The act of selecting the director's commentary turns the "original" (theatrical) experience of watching the film as fiction into one of watching "re-directed", or literally re-performed, as a documentary in which the film's existing visual track is employed as graphic illustration of a teleological story of its own production.<sup>111</sup>

So in this regard we cannot so easily discount intention. The commentated film, after all, is *all about* intention, whether fulfilled or thwarted. But, by that same token, we must be careful not to mistake commentary-intentionalism for film-intentionalism as we are essentially dealing with two distinct

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<sup>108</sup> Scott Balcerzak, 'The Cinephilic Pleasures of DVD Commentary: Watching *The Passenger* (1975) with Jack Nicholson', *Journal of Film and Video*, 66.1 (Spring 2014), 21-38 (p. 23).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>111</sup> Grant, 'Auteur Machines', p. 111.

texts: a pseudo-documentary about intention and a fictional narrative about characters. The commentary is a palimpsestic overlay (sometimes literal in the case of Blu-ray's picture-in-picture capability that superimposes authorial talking-heads over the running film) which recycles the video track in order to create a new intentionalist text. The act of selecting a commentary is like slipping on a pair of infrared goggles: thermal imaging gifts us an alternative view of the world exceeding the natural capacity of our eyes but the visual representation of the IR spectrum is just an artificial facsimile of wavelengths that have been converted into a format that can be perceived by humans, who do not mistake the red-hued landscape for reality. Likewise, the commentary affords us a peek behind the curtain, as it were, and may provide a (subjective) justification for certain aesthetic choices, yet it is nevertheless a distillation of experience, opinion, pseudo-fact, and pseudo-fiction into a constructed narrative that exists fundamentally to entertain and is elementally independent from the film to which it refers. However, the commentated film can represent a significant turning-point in a text's diachronic lifespan, influencing subsequent non-commentated viewings that become polluted by an authorial spectral presence.

Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus propose in their analysis of the *Fight Club* commentary, which they believe works to undermine certain homoerotic readings of the film, that such intentionalism is a means by which sanctioned interpretations can be naturalised.<sup>112</sup> Despite their admitted reliance on Sarris-branded 'interior meaning', I would agree with their broad sentiment but suggest that the intentionalism of commentaries is (slightly) less ideologically Machiavellian.<sup>113</sup> A commentary allows a filmmaker to highlight the aspects of a film which they deem most significant, those elements they strove hardest to perfect, and the themes they sought to evoke through the narrative. This logically boosts our appreciation for the craft, if not our affection for the product. Essentially, the commentary encourages a reciprocal aggrandisement of *film* and *filmmaker*: as the

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<sup>112</sup> Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, 'Hiding homoeroticism in plain view: the *Fight Club* DVD as digital closet', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19.1 (2002), 21-43 (p. 38).

<sup>113</sup> Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, 'The Digital Auteur: Branding Identity on the *Monsters, Inc.* DVD', *Western Journal of Communication*, 69.2 (April 2005), 109-28 (p. 112).

filmmaker explains the inner workings of production and narrative — thereby heightening the film's status as both article and art — they concordantly magnify their own status as artist. Of course, the directors themselves do not typically trumpet their own values, with Joffé being especially self-deprecating. Gérard Genette suggests that such a qualitative apparatus as is found in the home-video commentary 'comes under what Latin rhetoric called *captatio benevolentiae* [a currying of favour], the difficulty of which was fully recognized: for the point is more or less [...] to *put a high value on* the text without antagonizing the reader by too immodestly, or simply too obviously, putting a high value on the text's author.'<sup>114</sup> This, Genette espies, is often achieved through a self-effacing valorisation of 'subject, even if that means alleging, more or less sincerely, the inadequacy of its *treatment*' — thereby explaining Mann's emphasis on research over form and Joffé's extensive politicohistorical pedagogy that rarely touches on, say, shot selection.<sup>115</sup> Such *captatio benevolentiae* Poldsaar notices in Foucault's preface for *The Order of Things*, but says that the 'humility is all-too transparent, of course, and the authorial "I" has made a very obvious appearance at the very beginning of the text' which 'takes firm possession of the text, despite some rhetorical hide-and-seek and stays with us throughout the initial paratextual discourse.'<sup>116</sup> So, even in those tracks in which directors seem allergic to taking credit (like Joffé's *Mission* track and Danny Boyle's commentary for *Steve Jobs* that takes pains to thank seemingly every member of the crew), the personal pronoun nonetheless establishes ownership over the film and correspondingly *auteurises* the speaker.

This coincides with what Brookey and Westerfelhaus call the 'generative function' of home-video supplements that can 'be used to invent an auteur', which is most clearly operative in *GoodFellas* and *Once Upon a Time in America's* commentaries.<sup>117</sup> Whilst Martin Scorsese does contribute to *GoodFellas'* Cast and Crew commentary, his musings on the film — ranging from childhood anecdotes, technical observations on 1.85:1 versus 2.35:1 aspect ratios, and comparisons to Italian

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<sup>114</sup> Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 198.

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

<sup>116</sup> Poldsaar, 'Foucault framing Foucault', p. 268.

<sup>117</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 'The Digital Auteur', p. 115.

films such as Fellini's *Nights of Cambria* and Geremi's *Divorce Italian Style*—are not the most frequent or forceful. The majority of the track is dominated by stars Ray Liotta and Lorraine Bracco, producers Irvin Winkler and Barbara Dafina, editor Thelma Schoonmaker, and writer Nicholas Pileggi—all of whom, consciously or not, work to valorise Scorsese as the singular Creator of *GoodFellas*. For example, Pileggi says:

I am the Von Stroheim of my book. That's my book: I put the music in if I want music, I cast the book. The movie has nothing to do with the book except it is the basis of the movie. But the vision of it and the mood of it and the colour and the *real* casting for the movie—all of that's the work of the director. [...] The film is so clearly the vision of the director. He picks the cast, he picks the movie, he picks the colour and the tone. It is *his* book, it is his painting.<sup>118</sup>

Such auteurisation is hard to argue against when it comes from someone who has direct experience of the director's methods. Similarly with historian Richard Schickel's commentary for *Once Upon a Time in America*. Obviously, given Sergio Leone's death in 1989, any paratextual contribution on his part (outside of stock interview footage) is impossible, but his authorial allure is no less striking on *America's* Blu-ray. In fact, Leone's absence enables a more directly sycophantic and laudatory paratextual aura given that the necessity for self-effacement is nullified. Schickel's commentary is the most outwardly didactic of the *Collection*, not only in providing a trove of generic/textual information but in its mythopoeic exaltation of Leone as a Romantic genius tormented by an ignorant studio that sabotaged his vision.

Whilst it might seem counterproductive for Warners to produce a commentary so disparaging of the studio, Schickel's track works to redress *America's* commercial failure by performing a super-auteurist resuscitation that pinpoints every moment of Leone's brilliance and furthermore functions as quasi-promotion for the then-upcoming director's cut release of the film. Concordantly, we must remember that despite their outward transparency home-video paratexts are no less mediated and moderated by distributors than their pre-release counterparts. Craig Hight suggests that the making-of documentaries (MODs) found on home-video supplements 'conform to

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<sup>118</sup> 'Cast and Crew Commentary', *GoodFellas*, dir. Martin Scorsese (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1990) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2012] 00:15:19.

the agenda of electronic press kits (EPKs)' and 'in fact serve as extended trailers.'<sup>119</sup> In EPKs, Hight writes,

there are no doubts voiced about the creative or (potential) commercial success of the film, no evidence of tensions (creative or otherwise) in its production, little if any exploration of the wider political or economic contexts of its production—in fact, nothing that would disrupt the corporate agenda of the studio that owns the film.<sup>120</sup>

Tom Dorey keenly demonstrates the corporate homogenisation of EPK-tinted MODs in his analysis of *Fantastic Mr. Fox's* video supplements wherein cinematographer Tristan Oliver, who had previously described director Wes Anderson as a 'sociopathic' absent tyrant in a *Los Angeles Times* interview, is projected as being much more congenial to the film's auteur.<sup>121</sup> This, Dorey believes, was Fox Searchlight's 'selective maintenance and promotion of Anderson's auteur vision' and the studio's attempt to whitewash various reports of the film's troubled production.<sup>122</sup> The *Collection's* 'Omnibus: The Making of *The Mission*' is particularly efficient in this kind of image management: not only in its creation of an auteur figure ('Omnibus' narrator is quick to link *The Mission* to *The Killing Fields*, thereby crafting for Joffé the semblance of an auteurist catalogue) but the neutralisation of *The Mission's* potentially controversial production. By continually stressing the care the crew took to avoid the exploitative 'horror[s]' of Werner Herzog's named-and-shamed *Fitzcarraldo* shoot, which also ensconced itself within South American tribal communities, 'Omnibus' paints Joffé as a magnanimous and intensely socially-conscious diplomat not dissimilar to the film's Father Gabriel character.<sup>123</sup> With the encroaching Columbian military taking the place of the Portuguese, the film crew adopting the mantle of the missionaries, and the Waunana tribe acting as proxies for the Guaraní, 'Omnibus' plays out like a light re-telling of *The Mission* only this time with altruism and empathy—embodied by Joffé—saving the day. This transmits to *The Mission* not only a boosted

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<sup>119</sup> Craig Hight, 'Making-of Documentaries on DVD: *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and Special Editions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, 56 (Fall 2005), 4-17 (p. 7).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Tom Dorey, 'Fantastic Mr Filmmaker: paratexts and the positioning of Wes Anderson as Roald Dahl's cinematic heir', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 10.1 (March 2012), 169-85 (p. 169).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>123</sup> 'Omnibus: The Making of *The Mission*', *The Mission*, dir. Roland Joffé (USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1986) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2012] 00:14:14.

contemporary relevance and politicised edge (indeed, Joffé says in 'Omnibus' that 'one hopes the film performs some kind of social function') but moreover an enriched humanist atmosphere for the narrative, made all the more authentic by the casting of real Indians similarly beset by looming imperialist forces.<sup>124</sup> The production-narrative acting as an idealised mirror of the film-narrative transforms 'Omnibus', which documents the Waunana's fight for legal rights and lays bare *The Mission's* politics and thematic concerns, into a powerful cipher for the film proper.

Clearly we are seeing a promotional creep of market-texts into film-texts. Brookey and Westerfelhaus suggest that the home-video extra, given its spatio-temporal proximity to the actual film, 'blurs the distinction between primary and secondary texts as they have been conceived and made use of in the past.'<sup>125</sup> Indeed, Hills questions whether special features are "'inside" or "outside" the symbolic boundaries discursively activated by the DVD's "text-function".'<sup>126</sup> The commentary's palimpsestic qualities, for example, problematise the supposed exteriority of these paratexts that inhabit the same digitised realm as their parent works. It is important to note, then, that DVDs and Blu-rays are not simply reproductions of the theatrical film but unique manifestations of the work, swaddled by a surplus of supplements that, to quote Kompare, 'amplify various elements of their central text, thus producing *new media experiences*' [my emphasis].<sup>127</sup> We could say that supplemental paratexts serve to maintain a continued atmosphere of hype for future audiences and provide additional value for prospective consumers wishing to get the most for their money, and this is true, but their ideological manoeuvres are much more complex and profound. Brookey and Westerfelhaus write:

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:54:57.

<sup>125</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 'Hiding homoeroticism in plain view', p. 22.

<sup>126</sup> Hills, 'From the Box in the Corner to the Box Set on the Shelf', p. 54.

<sup>127</sup> Kompare, 'Publishing Flow', p. 346.

Media conglomerates have a vested interest in maintaining the ideology of the auteur because it facilitates the promotion of their products. [...] DVD-extra text offers those marketing a film an intertextual advantage that significantly increases the chances that promotional tactics will reach their target audience. By collapsing promotion into the product, DVD-extra text can more effectively exploit the ideology of the auteur than is possible through the use of traditional secondary texts.<sup>128</sup>

Although it appears antithetical to include advertising materials in a product that has already been purchased, their marketing value is magnified by the interiority of home-video peritexts where the outward objectivity afforded by their documentary formats effectively masks their promotional responsibilities. For example, 'Made Men: The *GoodFellas* Legacy' collects interviews from a diverse spread of filmmakers like Antoine Fuqua, Jon Favreau, Richard Linklater, and Frank Darabont—all of whom exalt Scorsese's supreme abilities as a cinematic master. Not only does this bolster one's appreciation of *GoodFellas'* influence (which osmotically transfers onto *GoodFellas* itself and greatly influences a purchase of subsequent special editions and releases on future high-definition formats), but the deific image of Scorsese it projects encourages the viewer to seek out other Scorsese-branded videos as well as be more susceptible to Scorsese-centric marketing in the pre-release domain. That this rhetoric is reduplicated on essentially all of Scorsese's home-video releases—with *Hugo's* paratexts being particularly efficient in translating his authorial aura for a younger audience—the cumulative auteur image one receives is overwhelmingly potent, even for those who are altogether unfamiliar with Scorsese's work. Concordant with the auteurist glorification found in the *Collection's* paratextual EPKs is a subterranean de-commodification that strips its products of their commercial impetus [cf. auteur-branding in 3.iv]. Here, art exists for its own sake and artists are free-agents, with the money-end only being mentioned when it provides a sufficient barrier to expression, and can thus be used to bolster the auteur's embattled and isolationist image (as in *America's* paratexts), or a signifier of the auteur's supreme commercial victories.

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<sup>128</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 'Hiding homoeroticism in plain view', p. 24.



Essentially, home-video paratexts are extremely effective in reinforcing that mythological auteurist Romanticism on which the pre-release marketing industry depends when promoting new films. Returning to Brookey and Westerfelhaus:

If the film industry needs to turn out auteurs quickly, then there is little time for a body of work to emerge. DVD extra features, however, allow for the immediate construction of an auteur, with the persona emerging from the features included on the DVD version of a film [as opposed to emanating naturally over a series of narratives]. In this way, DVDs commercially benefit from, and facilitate, the commercial construct of auteur personae.<sup>129</sup>

Of course we must acknowledge that special features play only to a certain specialised audience and that, even within that group, not everyone consumes every supplement on every disc that they own, despite Brookey and Westerfelhaus' claim that 'DVD consumers have an economic incentive to access and view DVD-extra text (it justifies the additional expenditure) and to regard it as a valuable addition to their viewing experience.'<sup>130</sup> Yet author-focused special features may not even need to be viewed for their evaluative effect to be achieved; that a director has been deemed worthy of a commentary may be all that is necessary to auteurise them. For example, the DVD release of *The Core* boasts a commentary by director Jon Amiel which *nolens volens* gifts the film an aura of boosted value (at least, until one listens to the largely facile and denotative audio-track). And that is the fundamental purpose of home-video paratexts: to provide for their parent works *validation* and *authentication*, irrespective of whether those films actually deserve them. Moreover, we have demonstrated that the paratextual manoeuvres of auctorial assembly are engendered long before the movie's disc has been inserted into the player, by the product's packaging. The *Robert De Niro Collection* offers an interesting, but by no means unique, case study in the manifold ways in which home viewing can provide a variety of new textual perspectives for a given work and also gift those works with insuperable author figures.

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<sup>129</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 'The Digital Auteur', p. 115.

<sup>130</sup> Brookey and Westerfelhaus, 'Hiding homoeroticism in plain view', p. 25.

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Part Three

# Authorship in Practice

## Chapter Five

# Use Your Allusion

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### *Studies in Contemporary Blockbuster Authorship*

#### 5.i – Standards and Practices

Over the preceding two chapters we have determined that Hollywood films are subject not only to immense industrial pressures (*vis-à-vis* the explosion of brand franchisement with the conglomeration of the movie studios) but also their commercial responsibilities as merchandise within an entertainment economy that survives by the grace of effective marketing. Furthermore, we have seen how the fetishised auteur-brand has a particularly strong resonance inside this promotional system. Consequently, any reading of contemporary Hollywood film authorship ought to consider that the commodification of film-as-product (and artist-as-product) in the corporate and market spheres may indeed have a bearing on the constitution and content of the artistic sphere itself. Of course, this has always been and will always be the case when it comes to commercial art—even for the supposed ‘indies’ produced by the mini-majors (e.g., Lionsgate), the conglomerates’ art-house divisions (Sony Pictures Classics et al.), and the new breed of independents like Annapurna Pictures and A24—but for mega-budget mass-produced movies designed for mass-consumption it is of especial importance. Classical auteurism might arm us with the tools, such as they are, to identify authorial characteristics within the aesthetic domain yet its microscopic obsession with cinematic high-artistry has forestalled any concentrated investigation into possible alternative forms (and purposes) of authorship; in our current mainstream cinema, the textual manifestation of an authorial signature may not necessarily be proof of divine intervention. Correspondingly, by forsaking the text for the paratext, commercial auteurist writings actually offer few insights into the textuality of Conglomerate-era authorship. My aim, then, is to marry the internal focus of conventional auteurism (remembering the critiques and modifications from **Chapters 1 and 2**) with the external awareness of latter-day author studies. So, where **Part One** considered *how best to conceive of authorship in a model of film spectatorship* in somewhat

hypothetical terms, and **Part Two** explored *how is authorship commercially exploited by the Hollywood marketing system*, we come at last to the key question: *how does authorship work in contemporary Hollywood film?*

In **3.iv** we identified *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* trilogy's promotional paratexts as being particularly forceful with regards to commercial auteur branding and now we turn to assess whether the films themselves can actually support the application of an interpretive authorial strategy and, more importantly, how authorship operates within the texts themselves. Christopher Nolan and Peter Jackson, perhaps the two most celebrated mainstream directorial icons to emerge since the turn of the century, seem ideal candidates for such an analysis. Their films have formed a central column of millennial cinematic culture which can be seen not only in their global box-office revenues—\$4.2bn for Nolan, \$6.5bn for Jackson—but also their memetic dissemination through pop discourse (via affectionate parodies on shows such as *South Park* and fan productions on YouTube like 'FREESTYLE BANE' and 'Teh Lurd of Teh Reings' that re-edit movie footage into comedy vignettes), as well as the reams of both academic<sup>1</sup> and journalistic<sup>2</sup> press that do not hesitate in using the *auteur* tag when discussing the directors. Furthermore, Nolan and Jackson have followed strikingly similar career paths: they made their names carving out an alternative genre niche in their native independent cinemas (*Following/Bad Taste*) which they successfully transported to the Hollywood system (*Memento/The Frighteners*) before being chosen to captain mega-franchises (*Batman/The Lord of the Rings*) that both concretised their artistic reputations, which in turn allowed them to pursue passion projects (*Inception/King Kong*), and spawned new genre paradigms: *The Dark Knight* heralded the aesthetic maturity of the superhero film which has grown into the lynchpin of the multimedial conglomerate entertainment industry [cf. **5.iv**] and *Rings* pioneered a template of phantasmagorical gigantism that engendered a cycle of grandiose fantasy adaptations (*The Chronicles of Narnia, Eragon,*

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<sup>1</sup> Alfio Leotta, *Peter Jackson* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Shone, 'Christopher Nolan: the man who rebooted the blockbuster', *The Guardian* (4 November 2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/04/-sp-christopher-nolan-interstellar-rebooted-blockbuster>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 32 of 58.

*The Golden Compass*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *Warcraft*, etc.). Additionally, both directors have established over their careers a close crew contingent that subsists from project to project, they boast writing credits on all their films, and are the heads of their own production companies (Syncopy/WingNut).

This makes Nolan and Jackson an interesting analytical pair, as do *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit*'s industrial backgrounds that demonstrate the supreme power both directors possess as movie moguls and branded auteurs. For instance: Warner Bros. traded its ownership of *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *South Park*, as well as a stake in a 'to-be-determined A-list Warners property', to secure *Interstellar*'s international distribution rights from Paramount.<sup>3</sup> This, Tom Shone suggests, 'reverses the normal logic by which Hollywood operates.'<sup>4</sup> He explains:

For Warner Bros to hand over the rights to two of its well-known properties, representing money in the bank, for the opportunity to take a spin on an original idea—a film with no sequel potential and few merchandising opportunities [...]—speaks both to the value placed by the studios on Nolan, and also the extent to which he has become a franchise unto himself.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Warners' reported \$745 million investment in *The Hobbit* trilogy—to date, Hollywood's highest ever expenditure on a single project—is a resounding endorsement of Jackson's ability to attract and engage a massive worldwide audience, and this would not be the first time Jackson has received such trust: fresh from *Return of the King*'s clean sweep at the 2004 Academy Awards, Universal granted him an at-the-time record-breaking single-film budget of \$207 million for *King Kong*.<sup>6</sup> This record would remain unbroken until 2016, when, in the wake of *Interstellar*'s success in 2014, Nolan earned a flat \$20 million salary on top of 20% of the total gross for 2017's *Dunkirk*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Borys Kit and Kim Masters, 'Warner Bros. Gives Up "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>" Rights to Board Christopher Nolan's "Interstellar"', *The Hollywood Reporter* (5 June 2013) <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/christopher-nolans-interstellar-warner-bros-562879>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 12.

<sup>4</sup> Shone, 'the man who rebooted the blockbuster', para. 30 of 58.

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

<sup>6</sup> Pip Bulbeck, "'Hobbit' Trilogy Reportedly Cost \$745 Million to Make', *The Hollywood Reporter* (21 October 2014) <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hobbit-trilogy-reportedly-cost-745m>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 1 of 5.

<sup>7</sup> Joe Bel Bruno et al. 'Hollywood Salaries 2016: Who Got Raises (and Who Didn't), from Movie Stars to Showrunners', *Hollywood Reporter* (29 September 2015) <<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/hollywood-salaries-2016-who-got-933037/item/hollywood-salaries-revealed-who-got-933041>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 18.

Yet Nolan and Jackson's biographical similarities do not equate to a cinematic congruity. Nolan's films, for example, embody a rather utilitarian aesthetic—a 'style without style', to quote David Bordwell—in which shots typically fall into one of three regimented categories: the wide establishing shot [fig. 5.1-5.2], the medium close-up dialogue shot [fig. 5.3-5.4], and the extreme close-up insert which draws attention to characters interacting with seemingly innocuous objects (a seahorse, a photograph, a blood-drop on a shirt sleeve, a spinning top [fig. 5.5-5.6]).<sup>8</sup> Such personal effects are of paramount importance in the Nolan *oeuvre* because, as *Following's* Cobb says, characters' possessions form 'a sort of unconscious collection, a display [...] [where] each thing tells something very intimate about the people.'<sup>9</sup> Given that the majority of Nolan's films are psychological thrillers whose dramatic currency is not so much the fear of the bullet but an epistemological anxiety regarding information—Who knows the truth? Who *thinks* they know the truth? What *is* the truth?—the readability of objects is crucial to the development of character and story (quite literally in the case of *The Prestige's* epistolary format). Unlike the arbitrariness of more conventional MacGuffins which serve only to ignite the combustion engine of plot, Nolan's props possess a more concentrated thematic function. In environments so polluted by misinformation and mistrust, ordinary objects offer a supposedly dependable connection to the truth and identity: people can lie, things cannot. As Leonard says at the end of *Memento*, 'we all need mirrors to remind ourselves who we are.'<sup>10</sup> The Pentothal strength (and threat) of these sooth-saying trinkets is evident in Commissioner Gordon's stolen confession letter in *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Insomnia's* subplot following Dormer's shell casing—the only thing implicating him in Eckhart's death which he allows to come to light as a final means of redemption—as well as *Inception's* characters' reliance on 'totems' that tell them if they are in someone else's dream.

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<sup>8</sup> David Bordwell, 'Nolan vs. Nolan', *Observations on film art* (19 August 2012)

<<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/08/19/nolan-vs-nolan/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para 13 of 93.

<sup>9</sup> *Following*, dir. Christopher Nolan (GBR: Momentum Pictures, 1998) [Blu-ray, Criterion Collection, 2012] 00:13:05.

<sup>10</sup> *Memento*, dir. Christopher Nolan (USA: Newmarket, 2000) [Blu-ray (10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Special Edition), Lionsgate Home Entertainment, 2011] 01:50:02.

Yet the solipsistic dread hanging over Nolan's films, expressed most clearly in *Memento* ('I have to believe that when my eyes are closed the world's still here'), problematises the ontological safety these items offer.<sup>11</sup> For example, Leonard copes with his anterograde amnesia via a complex system of notes that are highlighted through the film's numerous inserts, the most frequently seen being his Polaroid of Teddy which is annotated 'DON'T BELIEVE HIS LIES' [fig. 5.7]. Leonard accepts this, as do we, as *prima facie* evidence of Teddy's treachery but never questions the origin of the note, nor does he interrogate the deleted remarks on Natalie's photograph [fig. 5.8]. Leonard, it turns out, is exploiting his own dependence on physical objects to determine what is real in order to program himself into executing a revenge plot against the wrong person. Similarly, Dom and his cohorts 'incept' Fischer by pushing him into a constructed dream scenario wherein the situational context of an object—his childhood pinwheel in his dying father's safe—provokes an extremely powerful catharsis that, to quote Dom, 'will define him [...] [and] may come to change everything about him.'<sup>12</sup> Of course, the reconciliation is fabricated, the emotional weight ascribed to the item—a physical manifestation of Fischer's subconscious yearning for acceptance—a total falsehood. Consequently, props become representative of an objective fallacy which posits that truth, identity, and even reality are unstable and susceptible to perversion by malevolent forces both within and without the characters' psyches. The prosaic Nolan style, then, could be read as a complement to this hypothesis. With little in the way of unmotivated camera movement or the kind of overtly commentative framing and blocking we discussed in 2.iii, the Nolanite narrator offers a view of the world that *appears* to be unmediated. With such exposition-heavy plots, the plain aesthetics allow attention to be directed toward dialogue and performance, but by appropriating a supposed objectivity the Nolan FCD masks its own heavily selective diegetic presentation. If we do not feel as if we are being directed, it follows that we will not grasp when we are being *misdirected*.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 01:49:44.

<sup>12</sup> *Inception*, dir. Christopher Nolan (GBR/USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2010) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2010] 00:44:55.



Misdirection is the keyword for the Nolan filmography, with Thomas Elsaesser slotting Nolan's early pictures within the subcategory of 'mind-game film[s]' he identifies within late-nineties/early-noughties cinema. The mind-game trend, writes Elsaesser,

comprises movies that are "playing games," and this is at two levels: there are films in which a character is being played games with, without knowing it or without knowing who it is that is playing these (often very cruel and even deadly) games with him (or her) [...] Then there are films where it is the audience that is played games with, because certain crucial information is withheld or ambiguously presented<sup>13</sup>

Naturally, the enigmatic qualities of the Nolan film could be ascribed to its dialogue (which can be characterised as oblique, terse, and sometimes abstracted into ostentatious thematic terms), but it is through montage structure that it most successfully manipulates its viewer. Many Nolan films are presented in anachronic order with frequent cross-cutting between disparate timelines that are not always clearly delineated (*viz.* *The Prestige's* hopscotching perspectives) and even those that are not, such as *Insomnia* and the Batman films, feature snap flashbacks to traumatic memories that disrupt the linear diegetic flow. Although Nolan's editing has been criticised by those such as Jim Emerson, who claims the sloppy handling of continuity precepts in *The Dark Knight's* truck chase unveils a technical incompetency, the Nolan grammar, so to speak, is integral to its films' cerebral mechanics.<sup>14</sup> Much as how the films of Nicolas Roeg and Terence Malick utilise montage as a means of exploring subjectivity and temporality, the Nolan cut is not necessarily supposed to be invisible. In fact, the continued spectatorial displacement caused by editorial visibility, as well as the prevailing doubt as to the veracity and import of on-screen data, encourages a hyper-awareness in the viewer who is asked to treat the film very much as a puzzle and work against—or at least suspect—the narration. For instance, by incrementally introducing us to three nested dream-levels in *Inception*, each of which appropriates a vision not dissimilar from reality, the film never offers absolute proof that the top level in which the characters are supposedly awake is actually real. So the spectator is baited to parse the

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'The Mind-Game Film', in *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, ed. Warren Buckland (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 13-42 (p. 14).

<sup>14</sup> Jim Emerson, 'In the Cut, Part I: Shots in the Dark (Knight)', *Vimeo* (8 September 2011) <<https://vimeo.com/28792404>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

screen for clues and attempt to outwit the narrator, which can actually make them more prone to narratorial sleight-of-hand (and such is dramatised in *The Prestige* where Angier's refusal to accept the most reasonable explanation for Borden's trick leads him to self-destruction). Elsaesser suggests that the flourishing of mind-game films indicates that 'the traditional "suspension of disbelief" or the classical spectator positions of "voyeur," "witness," "observer" and their related cinematic regimes of techniques [...] are no longer deemed appropriate, compelling, or challenging enough' for contemporary audiences, and the colossal popularity of Nolan's cinema would seem to confirm this sentiment's resonance with the mass spectatorship who are increasingly willing and able to engage with unorthodox works that demand a more proactive engagement than relatively 'classicist' films (even though, as we discussed in **Chapter Two**, narrative actualisation is never actually passive).<sup>15</sup>

As adaptations of a sacred IP and massive tentpole fixtures that had to appeal to all four quadrants globally, it is somewhat unreasonable to expect *The Dark Knight* films to have the same latitude for cerebral play as *Following* and *Memento*. Yet the Batman trilogy is still noticeably Nolanesque in its grounded pseudo-realistic *mise-en-scène*: unlike their pastel-bright superhero contemporaries, they are caked in grime and mired in harsh shadows. Although patently an affectation in itself, the Nolan FCD's design aesthetic of naturalistic lighting, real locations, and mundane wardrobes augments that sense of uncanny 'reality' we touched upon earlier. And while it would not be wise to disparage the dramaturgical heft of the Nolan *mise-en-scène*—the cool, dull colours and anonymous motel rooms of *Memento* suitably reflect Leonard's disassociation from his environment and *Insomnia*'s constant daylight can be read as a pathetic representation of Dormer's inescapable guilt—its primary function is to unobtrusively present immediately recognisable landscapes that provide staging areas for the dramatic action; similar to Michael Mann [cf. **4.iii**], Nolan is, at least according to interviewer Jeff Jensen, 'zealous about verisimilitude'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Elsaesser, 'The Mind-Game Film', p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Jeff Jensen, 'End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning', *Entertainment Weekly* (23 August 2014) <<http://www.ew.com/microsites/longform/interstellar/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 3 of 28.

Concordant with this front-of-camera obsession with reality comes a general avoidance of digital image manipulation. Although *Inception* does feature digital cities folding over themselves, Nolan's effects are, by and large, created in-camera (a real truck was flipped for *The Dark Knight*, rotating sets were built to emulate *Inception's* shifting gravity) to such an extent that it has become the most outwardly noticeable component of his fetishised brand identity post-Batman. To give an example, the majority of the hype discourse for 2017's *Dunkirk* has focused on Nolan's use of real WWII-era battleships 'because he refuses to use CGI' and this aspect of Nolan's authorial identity may be why he has maintained such a consistent popularity with the supposedly-savvy technophobic film fans who similarly praised J.J. Abrams' anti-digital promotion of *The Force Awakens* [cf. 4.ii].<sup>17</sup> And like Abrams, Nolan is a die-hard disciple of the photochemical process, shooting all of his pictures on film and even pioneering the use of the IMAX format in fiction contexts from *The Dark Knight* onward. But even though Nolan's adoption of IMAX has aligned with a marked upswing in action set-pieces, we are still fundamentally dealing with the same types of simple shots as before. What celluloid affords in this instance is a type of textural (and peripheral, in the case of IMAX) spectacle, a vision of 'the real' defined and made unique by the mass adoption of comparatively 'fake' digital technologies.

Peter Jackson's cinema, on the other hand, has embraced fakery since its inception. *Bad Taste*, *Meet the Feebles*, and *Braindead* all pushed the boundaries of special-effect technologies available within their given budgets and as money became less of a bottleneck with *Heavenly Creatures* and *The Frighteners* Jackson's films have pushed against the boundaries of technology itself, with *The Lord of the Rings* being particularly noteworthy for its confluence of Weta Workshop's mastery in practical effect methodologies ('bigatures', prosthetics, etc.) with Weta Digital's ground-breaking innovations in CGI. Like George Lucas with Industrial Light & Magic, Jackson's ownership of and investment in Weta reveals a prevailing fascination with design and *mise-en-scène*. Where the Nolan picture strives

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob Stolworthy, 'Christopher Nolan using real WWII battleships for Dunkirk because he refuses to use CGI', *Independent* (22 February 2016) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/christopher-nolan-using-real-wwii-battleships-for-dunkirk-because-he-refuses-to-use-cgi-a6888631.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para 1 of 9.

for a semblance of tactile realism, the Jackson movie wishes to provide a vivid escape vessel into worlds far more fantastic than our own (i.e., Borovnia in *Heavenly Creatures*, *The Lovely Bones*' In-Between, Middle-earth, Skull Island). Stylistically, the Jackson narrator works to accentuate this experiential immersion—and the affect of the special-effect—as much as possible: as opposed to Nolan's locked-down and restrictive perspective, Jackson's FCDs move freely, often wildly, on a principle of maximal spectacle wherein wide-angle lenses emphasise visual motion, their enhanced field-of-view and slight barrel distortion lending their subjects a slightly exaggerated appearance. The dynamism of the Jackson frame gives the impression that the vision it affords is only a fraction of a diegesis that cannot be contained by the screen. The difference between the Nolan and Jackson styles is most distinct in their use of establishing shots—compare, for example, the complex half-minute tracking shot following Saruman's crows as they barrel through the pits beneath Isengard culminating in a close-up of Christopher Lee in *Fellowship of the Ring* with the kind of slow and portentous helicopter shots used in *Insomnia* and *Inception*—but a closer analysis of dialogue scenes shows these narratorial principles consistently operative at a micro level.

Denham's introduction in *King Kong* is, dialogically, a rather simple setup: Denham previews an incomplete film to a suite of bored executives that are roused when he proposes to shoot on location at Skull Island (which is then undercut by a producer who misconstrues the project as a crass native exploitation picture, echoing a similar joke from *Forgotten Silver*). The 153-second scene, however, features fifty-four shots with twenty-three unique set-ups, providing a superabundance of narratorial information. Even if we disregard the scene's dialogue we can identify its subject through POV suture and camera movements that revolve around and push towards Denham [fig. 5.9-11]; understand the relationship between the characters via the blocking that pushes Denham to the edge of the ensemble frame [fig. 5.12], isolates him within his own shots [fig. 5.13], and groups the producers together within two-shots [fig. 5.14]; and establish who has control at any given time by the tightness of composition, with the camera tracking in on Denham as he advocates Skull Island to both indicate his passion for the location and foreshadow its dramatic significance [fig. 5.15-16] which

then transitions to a wider framing [fig. 5.17] when he is shot down by an executive who is instead granted the tighter close-up [fig. 5.18]. Contrastively, if we look at Leonard and Natalie's first scene together in *Memento*—which has a similar ASL of approximately three seconds—the conversation is transmitted solely through alternating medium close-ups [fig. 5.19-20]. Although the framing on Natalie does widen out slightly when she playfully mocks Leonard [fig. 5.21] and closes back in when she reveals information about 'John G.' (perhaps as an indication of Leonard's wavering trust levels) the variance in composition is so surreptitious as to be almost subliminal, only noticeable on repeat close-viewings. So whilst both filmmakers broadly abide by the 'amped up' precepts of intensified continuity first noted by David Bordwell [cf. 3.iii], the Jackson FCD utilises editing to stitch together a broad tapestry of different shot-types in order to craft a patent narrative omniscience in which each shot reveals something new about the world and its characters' relations within it whereas the Nolan style works to establish an ostensibly stable conception of the diegesis which can then be quickly interrupted by temporal jumps or (as in the above scene) subjective flashbacks.<sup>18</sup> While neither style can reasonably be described as 'invisible', the Jackson narrator does not seek to wrong-foot its narratee. On the contrary, the bounty of visions the Jackson FCD offers, even in its most outwardly ordinary of scenes, is the means by which it is able to submerge the spectator within its fantastical worlds and ensure their disbelief.

Beyond the obvious predilections for splatstick and juvenile humour we could classify the Jackson style as essentially melodramatic, wherein the combination of energetic and impactful visuals with bombastic, emphatic soundtracks expedites narratorial communication on a more intensely somatic register than Nolan's films. Sarah Kozloff, stripping melodrama of its pejoratives and advancing Linda Williams' critical resuscitation of the form in 'Melodrama Revised', pinpoints a network of melodramatic themes in *The Lord of the Rings* that can be extrapolated onto the larger

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<sup>18</sup> David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2006), p. 120.

Jackson filmography.<sup>19</sup> For example, the melodramatic presentation of ‘characters who embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichean conflicts between good and evil’ is explicit in the unambiguous villainy of *Bad Taste*’s aliens as a warped reflection of capitalistic greed and the depraved lust of *Lovely Bones*’ Harvey as it is in Sauron’s pseudo-fascist desire for power.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the pathos of ‘victim-heroes’ is applicable not only to Frodo (and, to some degree, Gollum) but also *Braindead*’s Lionel along with Pauline and Juliet in *Heavenly Creatures*—each of whom are interestingly subject to overbearing maternal figures (a trope that would later be exploited in *The Frighteners* to disguise Patricia as the film’s ultimate antagonist).<sup>21</sup> However, these broad categories are also extractable from the mass of what Williams calls ‘big screen mega-melodramas’ (comprising such films as *Titanic* and *Avatar*) and are not wholly sufficient to individuate the Jacksonian narrator.<sup>22</sup> Yet if we look at the application of the tenet that melodrama ‘begins, and wants to end, in a space of innocence’ in Jackson’s films we can begin to extract their unique qualities.<sup>23</sup>

Kozloff emphasises the Shire ‘as a bucolic, communal paradise [...] as the vision of innocence the fellowship will be fighting to preserve’ and we can see reduplicated throughout the Jackson catalogue similar idyllic small-town communities beset by nefarious forces the protagonists are tasked with expelling (i.e. Kaihoro in *Bad Taste*, the Wellington suburb in *Braindead*, Fairwater in *The Frighteners*).<sup>24</sup> Although there are variations on this theme—evil is expelled in *The Lovely Bones* more by happenstance than any action of the protagonists, whose dramatic task is not vengeance but acceptance; *Heavenly Creatures*’ Juliet and Pauline become murderers as a response to small-town mores; humans adopt the mantle of *Bad Taste*’s aggressive alien invaders in *King Kong*—the notion of the community as a space where innocence is established and contested is a staple of the Jackson

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Williams, ‘Melodrama Revised’, in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42-88.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Kozloff, ‘*The Lord of the Rings* as Melodrama’, in *From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings**, ed. Ernest Mathijs and Murray Pomerance (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 155-72 (p. 168).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Williams, ‘Mega-Melodrama! Vertical and Horizontal Suspensions of the “Classical”’, *Modern Drama*, 55.4 (Winter 2012), 523-43 (p. 530).

<sup>23</sup> Kozloff, ‘*The Lord of the Rings* as Melodrama’, p. 158.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

narrative toolkit. This idea of community, of friendship and strife among races, genders, and classes (and species, in the case of *Meet the Feebles*) has a particular resonance given New Zealand's diverse racial heritage. Yet what is most curious about Jackson's settings is how they all seem to approximate a kind of romanticised vision of the past, even in those films that are not period pieces like *Bad Taste* and *The Frighteners*. The fetishism of The Beatles, Mario Lanza, vinyl records, Morris Minors, and white-picket fences fixes these films within an amorphous amalgam of the mid-twentieth century (perhaps not coincidentally, Jackson was born in 1961) so 'innocence', in this sense, is intertwined with a strong sense of nostalgia. In this context, *Rings* is doubly reminiscent what with the Shire representing a utopian pre-Industrial England and Tolkien's novel itself being a key text of the 1960s' counter-culture movement.

Further than this, though, is a palpable aura of *cinematic* nostalgia. *Forgotten Silver*, a mockumentary on the lost work of fictional Kiwi cinematic pioneer Colin McKenzie, sees the Jackson FCD mimicking in meticulous detail the developing styles of early Hollywood. Similarly, the home-video release of Jackson's *King Kong* contains a recreation of the fabled spider-pit sequence cut from the original 1933 film with period accurate *mise-en-scène* and stop-motion practical effects. Naturally, the act of remaking *King Kong* itself signals an engagement with, and affinity for, film history, as does *Feebles* as an obscene counterpoint to *The Muppets* together with the genre synthesis of Jackson's horror-comedies that are as indebted to Laurel and Hardy and Abbott and Costello as they are George A. Romero and Alfred Hitchcock. In this regard, *The Lord of the Rings* is at once a resurrection of the classical historical epic—and thereby a consummation of the thwarted production of *Intolerance* pastiche *Salome* detailed in *Forgotten Silver*—and a tribute to the Harryhausen school of creature features. Indeed, Kristin Thompson ascribes *Rings*' widespread popularity beyond the core Tolkien fandom to Jackson's infusion of 'popular-genre conventions' that resonate with various demographics: 'Older audiences could watch Legolas swinging heroically [...] and be reminded of the similar antics of Douglas Fairbanks Sr. or Errol Flynn,' she writes, whilst others may respond to the Asian inflections of Gandalf the White's depiction as the kind of 'white-bearded *sifu*' commonly

found in martial arts period-pieces (with Thompson linking the wizard specifically to *Executioners from Shaolin's* Pai Mai, who would be later paid further homage by Quentin Tarantino in *Kill Bill: Volume 2*).<sup>25</sup> Thus the 'innocence' of the nostalgic Jacksonian melodrama can be read extra-diegetically as a harkening back to earlier forms of cinema whereby a classicism in plot and character construction is filtered through a contemporary approach to spectacle.

Surveying our analyses we can identify significant differences between the Jackson and Nolan narrators, with the former striving to present exciting and emotionally alluring visions of sensational worlds where the latter is more concerned with spectatorial manipulation via story structure. One could even say that Jacksonian neo-classicism, which demands little of the spectator's higher cognitive activities, is the antithesis of the brain-bending postmodernism of Nolan's cinema. Whilst admittedly reductive when put in these terms, such reciprocal definitions can prove helpful when broaching authorial specificities. It is not that Jackson can only be discussed as an aesthete and Nolan as an architect—in fact, Jackson's films only work as melodramas because of their abidance to traditional narrative formulae and the Nolan mind-game, which is predicated upon an interplay between belief and uncertainty in what we are being shown, is enabled by the quasi-realism of its *mise-en-scène*—but it is on these principles that their narrators are most dissimilar and thereby singularised.

By establishing the stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasies of Nolan and Jackson's authorial corpora over the previous pages, we arm ourselves with a robust hermeneutic arsenal for the critical assault against their films. Given that authorial readings are fundamentally exercises in transtextuality, it is essential that one comprehends the semiotic trusses that run throughout an author's canon—not just in how they reinforce each particular text semantically but how those texts coalesce to reveal the essence of an authorial syntax. Should an authorial catalogue receive a new entry, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it will be measured against these benchmarks (presuming,

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<sup>25</sup> Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2007), p. 57; pp. 63-4.



of course, a competent spectator). Simply identifying *Interstellar* as Nolan's and *The Hobbit* as Jackson's triggers predictions as to their configuration, character, and content in a certain correspondence with what has preceded and anticipates the application of an authorial interpretive strategy by bracing the spectator's sensitivity (or perhaps susceptibility) to recognisable cues that act as prompts to conduct a transtextual reading. Speaking of genre, Rick Altman proposes that spectators are 'heavily conditioned by the choice of semantic elements [...], because a given semantics used in a specific cultural situation will recall to an actual interpretive community the particular syntax with which that semantics has traditionally been associated in other texts.'<sup>26</sup> 'This *syntactic expectation*,' he continues, 'set up by a *semantic signal*, is matched by a parallel tendency to expect specific syntactic signals to lead to pre-determined semantic fields.'<sup>27</sup> Taking a set of authorial works as constituting a micro-genre the same is applicable here, so an assessment of *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* in terms of Nolan and Jackson's authorship should therefore be attuned to the syntactic/semantic components detailed in this section being as they act as authorial signifiers and thus indications to consider the films within the textual context of their antecedents.

## 5.ii – Previews and Pre-Views

Hans Robert Jauss writes that the 'interpretive reception of a text presupposes the context of experience of aesthetic perception' and an informed (i.e., historically situated) analysis of *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* can only be truly undertaken when, as Jauss says, 'one has first clarified which transsubjective horizon of understanding conditions the influence of the text.'<sup>28</sup> Firstly, this necessitates an appreciation of what it was to be a Nolan or Jackson film *before* their release, which provides a kind of *textual* 'horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received.'<sup>29</sup> This means that, for example, a retrospective analysis of *Memento*, released in 2000, should

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<sup>26</sup> Rick Altman, 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre', *Cinema Journal*, 23.3 (1984), 6-18 (pp. 16-7).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

not invoke 2010's *Inception* (though an interpretation of *Inception* can, and most likely will, refer to *Memento*), much as how our critique of *Interstellar* will be unaffected by 2017's *Dunkirk* or any Nolan picture that may be made henceforth. Correspondingly, our quasi-synchronic compilation of Nolan and Jackson's authorial idiosyncrasies has omitted *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* as a matter of course. However, whilst the textual horizons detailed in 5.i grant insight into both filmmakers' standards and practices as an inventory of criteria contemporary spectators were likely to refer upon their first encounter with the films, they do not necessarily predict new entries into the canon or sufficiently set the stage for their arrival. Granted, they may offer broad speculative impressions (for instance, the general expectations of *The Force Awakens* some made in light of J.J. Abrams' handling of *Star Trek* in 4.ii), but provide little in the way of specificities. To expand upon that *Star Wars* example, it was only with the *Force for Change* promos, Comic-Con reel, and trailers (as well as interviews with Abrams and, to a lesser degree, George Lucas) that prospective consumers were able to more accurately anticipate *The Force Awakens* both in terms of its countenance as vintage *Star Wars* and narrative constitution as an Abrams-esque mystery box. These paratexts bore a burden greater than the mere generation of interest: they situated their audience in a specific relationship to the upcoming film by means of a carefully constructed hermeneutic gateway that encouraged certain pre-interpretations whilst devaluing others. We previously referred to Altman's conception of semantic/syntactic expectations resulting from syntactic/semantic signals and it is evident that such signals can be issued from sources other than the work in question.<sup>30</sup> An assessment of *The Force Awakens* hence with sole reference to its textual horizon would bypass a great sum of these signals and offer an incomplete vision of both the circumstances that determined the film's form and the 'text' as received by its initial (and primary) audience. Indeed, the reasons behind *The Force Awakens'* composition as *A New Hope* v2.0 only come into focus when we consider the widespread hostility to the prequel trilogy and Disney's purchase of the IP, culminating in Lucas' abdication and the creation of a new story distinct

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<sup>30</sup> Altman, 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre', p. 17.

from his original treatments for *Episodes VII-IX* that was more in line with Disney's aesthetic and franchise-minded business model— aspects utterly untouched by the textual horizon. If, in Jauss' words, we are to 'pose questions that the text gave answer to,' we need to supplement our *textual* horizons with *extra-textual* ones.<sup>31</sup> In other words, before proceeding with an authorial interrogation of *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* it is worth assessing how their authorship was framed in the run-up to their release dates and how this may have shaped how these films were constructed, anticipated, and received.

We have already gone some distance in establishing this with the analyses of both films' trailers in 3.iv, which can be summarised thusly: the *Interstellar* trailer vaunts its film's excellence by proposing it as a watershed in Christopher Nolan's artistic development whilst *The Hobbit* trailers amass their persuasive pull by accentuating how the movies are directed by Peter Jackson, who also directed *The Lord of the Rings*. Trailer surveys such as these may be sufficient in themselves but our investigation into *The Force Awakens* in 4.ii demonstrated the utility of alternative paratexts. So, to concretise *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit*'s extra-textual horizons we will widen our scope beyond the more commonplace marketing materials to see how their promotional messages were fortified and augmented in other media: for *Interstellar* our sights will be set on Nolan's interviews in *The Guardian*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *The Telegraph* surrounding the film's November 2014 release and for *The Hobbit*, the behind-the-scenes production diaries posted to Jackson's personal YouTube and Facebook pages shortly after the start of principal photography in 2011.

Much like Sam Mendes' brief editorial stint at *Empire* which functioned as a thinly-veiled marketing manoeuvre for *Spectre* [cf. 3.i], the interviews conducted by Tom Shone (*Guardian*), Jeff Jensen (*Entertainment Weekly*), and Robbie Collin (*Telegraph*) willingly participate in disseminating the themes of *Interstellar*'s larger promotional campaign. For example, just as the issue of *Empire* worked to establish a particular mystique for Mendes, these articles are quick to construct a heightened

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

individualistic aura for Nolan. Shone opens his piece with a story about a location scouting trip where the crew were hunting a glacier suitable for filming but found themselves blocked by a lake:

“We were all gathered around staring at this lake,” the cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema recalled, “and Chris took his shoes and socks off and just strode into the water, going straight towards that gigantic chunk of ice. Everyone was standing around looking at one another. “What do we do here?” Then everybody starts doing the same—peeling off their shoes and socks and wading in. Nobody thinks that he’s crazy, they just go, ‘OK, this is important, this has to be done.’” [...] “He’s a man on a mission,” Hoytema told me. “He assigns all his time and all his effort to serving that mission.”<sup>32</sup>

Besides the quasi-religious iconography of Nolan leading his disciples into the water, Hoytema’s tale paints Nolan as a selfless and intensely driven professional whose calm captaincy inspires unavailing faith in his company (not unlike the image of Mendes projected by *Empire*). Shone adds definition to the picture when he describes Nolan’s demeanour after their first meeting:

Dressed in his trademark blazer, his shirt collar skewed at the raffish angle of a schoolboy late for rugby practice, Nolan did not seem rattled. Rather, he exuded the unshakeable confidence in his own abilities that you might wish for in the pilot of a 747 you’ve just boarded.<sup>33</sup>

Interestingly, this is a portrait also drawn by Jensen:

He radiates strong, quiet authority and wears his signature business-casual outfit: dress shirt sans tie, khakis, and a sports jacket with deep pockets. Inside, you’ll find pens, notebooks, and a flask of Earl Grey, no milk. (“My assistant director once referred to it as a magician’s coat,” Nolan says.)<sup>34</sup>

The conspicuous humanisation of Nolan as a slightly eccentric yet tenacious commander-in-chief is significant in that it acts as a balm for certain preconceptions regarding Nolan’s character, with Shone explaining that some critics ‘maintain that he is a chilly film-maker, a neatnik showman constructing elaborate puzzles that, once solved, leave little in the way of emotion or life beyond their hermetically sealed borders.’<sup>35</sup> Again, Jensen joins the chorus, bemoaning that ‘Nolan has been tagged as one of those brilliant-but-chilly *auteurs*.’<sup>36</sup> Both seem to be responding to an undisclosed producer who was

<sup>32</sup> Shone, ‘the man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 2 of 58.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 12 of 58.

<sup>34</sup> Jensen, ‘End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning’, para. 4 of 28.

<sup>35</sup> Shone, ‘The man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 32 of 58.

<sup>36</sup> Jensen, ‘End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning’, para. 9 of 28.

once quoted as describing Nolan as a ‘cold guy who makes cold films’.<sup>37</sup> Rectifying this negative impression of Nolan is important for *Interstellar*’s prospects, given its lack of associated IP attractors [cf. 3.iv], and these articles are keen to emphasise just how personal and correspondingly ‘warm’ a project this is for its director.

Shone, for instance, crafts a vision of *Interstellar* that is deeply rooted in Nolan’s family life. His father’s death in 2009 is said to have had a profound impact on the narrative, with brother and co-writer Jonathan Nolan saying that the writing process was shaped by ‘the connection that you have with your parents.’<sup>38</sup> Nolan himself, who admits he feels ‘a lot of guilt’ that production schedules force him to be away from his children for extended periods of time, states: ‘For me, the film is really about being a father. The sense of your life passing you by and your kids growing up before your eyes.’<sup>39</sup> Following this, Shone and Jensen eagerly demystify the connection between the film’s working title, ‘Flora’s Letter’, and Nolan’s daughter, with actress Jessica Chastain (quoted in Jensen) remarking that ‘when [she] figured it out, [she] was incredibly moved’; naturally, the intention is that we see *Interstellar*’s main characters as proxies for Nolan and Flora and the film itself as an intimate declaration of undying love from parent to child.<sup>40</sup> Collin reinforces this in his conversation with Nolan, who says:

There are filmmakers who pride themselves on “one for the studio, one for me”, and I just don’t see it that way [...] I have an opportunity that very few filmmakers get, to do something on a huge scale that I can control completely and make as personal as I want, so I feel a big responsibility to make the most of it.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, Nolan’s personal investment in *Interstellar* is shown to extend far beyond his relationship with his daughter to his own childhood obsessions. Jensen writes that as ‘a space-crazy

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<sup>37</sup> Will Lawrence, ‘Christopher Nolan interview for Inception’, *The Telegraph* (19 July 2010)

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmmakersonfilm/7894376/Christopher-Nolan-interview-for-Inception.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 5 of 20.

<sup>38</sup> Shone, ‘The man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 53 of 58.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Jensen, ‘End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning’, para. 10 of 28.

<sup>41</sup> Robbie Collin, ‘Christopher Nolan interview: “I’m completely invested in every project I do”’, *The Telegraph* (31 December 2014) <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/11317410/Christopher-Nolan-interview-Im-completely-invested-in-every-project-I-do.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 27 of 36.

kid under the influence of *Star Wars*, Nolan cut his teeth shooting Super-8 movies with titles like “Space Wars,” making Hoth-ish ice planets on tabletops out of flour and clay and incorporating footage of NASA rocket launches.’<sup>42</sup> *Interstellar*, he suggests, brings Nolan ‘full circle’ and ‘may have been the movie [he] was born to make’.<sup>43</sup> Of course, similar promotional rhetoric was deployed in service of *Inception* in 2010 when Nolan told *The Los Angeles Times*, ‘I wanted to do this for a very long time, it’s something I’ve thought about off and on since I was 16’, but that hardly diminishes the potency of *Interstellar*’s commercial projection as an impassioned venture for Nolan.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly there is an attempt to foster an identity for *Interstellar* distinct from what the textual horizon of Nolan’s previous films would forecast. Primarily we have an acknowledgement of and definitive step away from the emotional frigidity of Nolan’s other works. Jensen writes that ‘finding new ways to emotionally engage an audience has become increasingly important’<sup>45</sup> to Nolan and the director confesses to Shone that he was ‘shocked to realise how much more emotional this film is.’<sup>46</sup> For our purposes, this move toward a decidedly humanist sentiment that encourages, as Shone says, ‘a more limbic, left-brained response’ is noteworthy because it corresponds with a supposed curtailment of Nolan’s traditional mind-game methodologies.<sup>47</sup> Nolan explains:

What I’ve found is, people who let my films wash over them — who don’t treat it like a crossword puzzle, or like there is a test afterwards — they get the most out of the film [...] I have done various things in my career, including, with *Memento*, telling a very simple story in an incredibly complex way. *Inception* is a very complicated story told in a very complicated way. *Interstellar* is very upfront about being simple as a story.<sup>48</sup>

So where, say, *Inception*’s evasive promotional paratexts fairly warned spectators to doubt and interrogate everything about the film, *Interstellar* is postulated as a much more unchallenging, straightforward experience. Nolan’s shift in aesthetic priorities is also evident in his doubling down

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<sup>42</sup> Jensen, ‘End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning’, para. 12 of 28.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 13 of 28.

<sup>44</sup> Geoff Boucher, ‘“Inception” breaks into dreams’, *Los Angeles Times* (4 April 2010) <<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/apr/04/entertainment/la-ca-inception4-2010apr04>> [accessed 13 March 2017] p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Jensen, ‘End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning’, para. 8 of 28.

<sup>46</sup> Shone, ‘The man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 34 of 58.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 44 of 58.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

on the pursuit of filmic realism: *Interstellar*'s special-effects are putatively so accurate that FX house Double Negative, in collaboration with scientific advisor Kip Thorne, invented new technologies which allowed them to create 'relativistically correct images of black holes and their accretion disks' to such a high degree of precision that they have published a peer-reviewed paper detailing their findings in *Classical and Quantum Gravity* (in what is possibly the first example of cinematic/academic cross-promotional synergy).<sup>49</sup> And corresponding with this redoubled attention to realism comes the promise of enhanced, transcendent spectacle: Jensen reports that *Interstellar* features over an hour of IMAX footage,<sup>50</sup> and quotes Nolan as saying that this 'was the first time where I said, "What is the image? What is the one shot that says everything?"'<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, whilst one may have had a fairly concrete image of what a space-bound time-travel Nolan movie would look like post-*Inception*, these articles work very hard to dispel that conception and erect in its stead the vision of a much grander and prodigious — daresay epochal — work of art. And these mechanisms are no more apparent than in the journalists' intertextual citations. Of course, reference is made to such films as *Memento* and *Inception* but only as a means of establishing comparative difference. When it comes to specifying the films that *Interstellar* is like, the net is cast much wider. As might be expected, there are nods to *2001: A Space Odyssey* aplenty, with Nolan going so far as to say to Collin, 'you can't make a science-fiction film pretending that *2001* doesn't exist.'<sup>52</sup> However, Nolan continues, '*2001*'s relationship with humanity is more philosophical, more abstract. I wanted to embrace the metaphysics but relate it to something more obviously human, like love.'<sup>53</sup> By tackling what he calls 'the biggest mystery of all, which is just living through time', Nolan finds an unlikely compatriot in Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*, which he claims 'is weirdly

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<sup>49</sup> Kip S. Thorne et al., 'Gravitational lensing by spinning black holes in astrophysics and in the movie *Interstellar*', *Classical and Quantum Gravity*, 32.6 (2015), 065001.

<sup>50</sup> Jeff Jensen, 'This week's cover: Your all-access pass to "Interstellar"', *Entertainment Weekly* (15 October 2014) <<http://ew.com/article/2014/10/15/this-weeks-cover-your-exclusive-all-access-pass-to-christopher-nolans-interstellar/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 6.

<sup>51</sup> Jensen, 'End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning', para. 26 of 28.

<sup>52</sup> Collin, 'Christopher Nolan interview', para. 18 of 36.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

doing the same thing in a completely different way.’<sup>54</sup> Moreover, instead of drawing parallels between *Interstellar* and other 21<sup>st</sup> century space dramas like *Sunshine* or *Gravity*, Collin elects to invoke Erich von Stroheim’s lost epic *Greed*;<sup>55</sup> Shone goes even further in soliciting the high-art prestige of Andrei Tarkovsky and Terrence Malick as well as describing Nolan’s imagery as having ‘something of the blurred beauty of a Gerhard Richter painting.’<sup>56</sup>

If *Interstellar*’s paratexts can be defined as an attempt to distance the film from Nolan’s previous works, Peter Jackson’s production diaries for *The Hobbit* can be inversely characterised by their relentless harking back to *The Lord of the Rings*. Just as the *Force for Change* spots allowed Disney/Abrams to swiftly sanctify *The Force Awakens* as ‘my *Star Wars*’ long before any finished footage could be shown to the public, Jackson’s video blogs immediately and firmly locate us within very familiar territory – and much like the *Force for Change* promos, would form a powerful primacy effect for what would follow [cf. 3.iii]. ‘THE HOBBIT, Production Diary 1’, uploaded on 20 April 2011, only a month after the start of principal photography on 21 March, opens with Jackson greeting us inside the Bag End set [fig. 5.22]. He says:

It’s amazing to be back here again. This is Bag End, exactly as it was in *The Lord of the Rings*. It’s actually built in our B Stage here in Wellington, which is exactly the same stage as it was built twelve years ago.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst *The Hobbit*’s first trailer (which would be released in December 2011) begins with Frodo and Bilbo on location at the Hobbiton set in Matamata as a means of establishing *aesthetic continuity* with *Rings* [cf. 3.iv], Jackson introducing the video inside the reconstructed Bag End soundstage in Wellington assembles a *production continuity*. This technique is repeated and its effect reinforced later in the video where Jackson visits the Rivendell set, eyes widened as if awestruck by his own creation [fig. 5.23]. Rivendell, Jackson assures us, is ‘an exact copy of the one that we had in *The Fellowship of*

<sup>54</sup> Shone, ‘The man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 53 of 58

<sup>55</sup> Collin, ‘Christopher Nolan interview’, para. 11 of 36.

<sup>56</sup> Shone, ‘The man who rebooted the blockbuster’, para. 16 of 58.

<sup>57</sup> ‘THE HOBBIT, Production Diary 1’, *YouTube* (20 April 2011) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwYQcKK0Isg>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:04.



*the Ring'*, right down to the chamber where the Council of Elrond took (will take) place [fig. 5.24].<sup>58</sup>

And as Jackson gestures and the camera pans across the stage, we dissolve into footage of the scene as shown in *Fellowship* [fig. 5.25], a rather literal palimpsest in which the ghost of *Rings* fully consumes the screen—a possession facilitated by the omnipresence of Howard Shore's now-legendary *Rings* score which is used liberally throughout the diary to lend associative emotional resonance to such moments as the first appearance of Ian McKellen, Jackson delivering a vivifying pep talk to his cast and crew on the first day of shooting, and the filming of the fateful moment where Bilbo picks up the One Ring in Gollum's cave.

*The Hobbit's* production diary is undeniably effective in evoking a powerful sense of brand nostalgia, yet its affective mechanics are more intricate than the simple brute-force quotation of *Rings* miscellanea. Throughout the video we are shown a technician air-brushing a rack of a prosthetic hobbit feet; a shelf of in-progress dwarf beards at Weta Workshop; Richard Taylor demonstrating a prop bow to Jackson; blacksmiths forging steel swords; Jackson discussing concept art with Alan Taylor, John Howe, and Dan Hennah; actors practising fight choreography and horse riding in 'boot camp'; Jackson assessing a set of clay maquettes and visiting the wardrobe department, which he calls a 'wizard's workshop';<sup>59</sup> engineers constructing animatronics for a goblin face-mask; and the testing of new motion-capture technologies. These are all activities, places, and people that will be instantly and intimately familiar to anyone who has watched the extensive making-of Appendices on the DVD/Blu-ray releases of *The Lord of the Rings'* Extended Editions. Where *The Hobbit's* trailers seduce by summoning memories of the *Rings* films via a replicated *mise-en-scène*, the production diaries exhibit an equally strong stylistic mimicry of *Rings'* celebrated behind-the-scenes featurettes. For example, 'THE HOBBIT, Production Diary 2' features Jackson and co. scouring the New Zealand landscape for shooting locations much as they did for *Rings* in the late 1990s and 'THE HOBBIT, Production Diary 3' attempts to construct the same air of Boys' Own camaraderie for the dwarf cast

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:02:39.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:02:06.

that *Rings'* Appendices created for the fellowship actors a decade previously. Essentially, despite dissimilarities with respect to some of its players, it is the same story told in the same way. Thus the production narrative becomes inexorably entwined with the filmic. There is no doubt that this is Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*; it could not be anything *but* Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*.

Jonathan Gray writes that *Rings'* Appendices functioned to 'enrich the film's quest narrative', resulting in a 'formidable "stacking" [...], so that in addition to being a tale of Frodo, Aragorn, and Middle Earth, it is also one of the cast, the crew, Jackson, and Kiwis.'<sup>60</sup> This, in turn, endowed *Rings* with 'more mythic resonance than any of its competitors mustered' and the exhaustive detailing of the films' seemingly insurmountable simultaneous production (which is portrayed as perilous and fraught a mission as Frodo's quest to Mount Doom) may be one of the major reasons why they, and Jackson, have become so beloved.<sup>61</sup> By conspicuously modelling *The Hobbit's* production diaries on the Appendices, Jackson can not only appeal to a more involved fan-base who likely devoured *Rings'* supplements and concretise *The Hobbit's* genetic compatibility to *Lord of the Rings*—indeed, Jackson would go on to say in an interview with Sheila Roberts that he 'really wanted to be the same filmmaker going back into Middle-Earth, thinking of that six-film series'—but the stylistic emulation of the blogs accelerates the transfer of *Rings'* mythic qualities onto these new films.<sup>62</sup> However, whilst *Rings'* special features achieved this authentication and value magnification *a posteriori*, the so-called 'stacking' of *The Hobbit's* narratives started before the first block of shooting was even completed and continued throughout the production and release of *An Unexpected Journey*, *The Desolation of Smaug*, and *The Battle of the Five Armies*. This recalls Gérard Genette's claim that marketers sometimes 'engage in promotional practices that somewhat anticipate glory by mimicking its effects' [cf. 3.iii].<sup>63</sup> Indeed, we could consider this a paradigmatic example of distributors utilising the unique auteurising

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<sup>60</sup> Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010), p. 92; p. 96.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>62</sup> Sheila Roberts, 'Peter Jackson talks THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY, Coming on When Guillermo del Toro Left, and Post-Converting LORD OF THE RINGS to 3D', *Collider* (14 December 2012) <<http://collider.com/peter-jackson-the-hobbit-48fps-interview/>> [accessed 13 March 2017], para. 32 of 34.

<sup>63</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 39.

capacities of home-video paratexts [cf. 4.iii] to buttress the prestige of their products (and their creators) prior to opening night. Disney's reliance on pre-release behind-the-scenes vignettes for *The Force Awakens* demonstrates that this is becoming a powerful and pervasive promotional tactic. Nonetheless, the *a priori* distribution of materials usually reserved for DVD/Blu-ray special features was as important for *The Hobbit* as Nolan's personalisation would later be for *Interstellar*: after constant delays due to rights issues with the Tolkien estate and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's financial troubles in the late 2000s, which led to original director Guillermo del Toro abandoning the film, it was crucial to project an image of a stable and forward-moving production to an understandably worried audience (even if this was not necessarily the truth [cf. 5.iii]). The video diaries achieved this and moreover succeeded in pre-identifying the films' author as unquestionably *Lord of the Rings'* Jackson—conveniently diverting attention from the more muted response of his post-*Rings* films.

Surveying *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit's* extra-textual horizons, it is evident that both products were positioned outside the linear textual chronology of their authorial predecessors: *Interstellar's* paratexts champion the film as Nolan's aesthetic apotheosis where *The Hobbit's* would rather us forget about *King Kong* and *The Lovely Bones* with their promise that Jackson's return to Middle-earth is also a return to his Oscar-winning form of the early 2000s. Whilst these propositions are fundamentally qualitative and therefore outside our critical jurisdiction, it is still worth contemplating their pre-textual generative influence. Returning to our online audience resources from 4.ii, we can see that prospective consumers largely abided by these paratextual directives in articulating their expectations for the upcoming films. Rather than link *Interstellar* to previous Nolan films, /u/FireLordOzai chooses to draw a line between it and cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema's other work: 'I'm hoping that [*Interstellar*] will remain a social sci-fi much like *Her'*, which is described here as 'increasingly passionate and detailed.'<sup>64</sup> /u/Death\_Star\_ replies that '*Contact* was similar' being as it was,

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<sup>64</sup> /u/FireLordOzai's comment, 'New trailer for Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*', *reddit* (16 May 2014) <[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/25q3rk/new\\_trailer\\_for\\_christopher\\_nolans\\_interstellar/chjnapd/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/25q3rk/new_trailer_for_christopher_nolans_interstellar/chjnapd/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

underneath its science-fiction trappings, a story all about ‘a daughter reconnecting with her “dad.”’<sup>65</sup> In fact, many respondents identified an intersection between *Interstellar* and *Contact* with regards to their father/daughter nuclei—an intertextual bond calcified not only by Matthew McConaughey’s presence in both films but also executive producer Lynda Obst’s, as well as the fact that *Contact* was as indebted to the real-life scientific research of Carl Sagan as *Interstellar* ostensibly is with the work of Kip Thorne. Likewise, enthusiasm for *The Hobbit* was predominantly couched in the prospect of extending the *Rings* experience. /u/TomMoofDavies is excited because ‘*Lord of the Rings* marathons will become ~18 hours long instead of ~11 hours. 18 hours of perfect filmmaking.’<sup>66</sup> Similarly deterministic are /u/beccaonice, who writes ‘I am a huge fan of the LOTR movies. Seeing familiar faces and a general mood and tone is so exciting. I never really thought I’d get to experience that again’,<sup>67</sup> and /u/jesus\_swept, who claims ‘These are the most consistent movies ever, ever.’<sup>68</sup>

Our purpose going forth is not to confirm or deny *Interstellar*’s emotional heft or artistic values nor *The Hobbit*’s quality compared to *The Lord of the Rings*. These are ultimately subjective queries. However, the gleaning of such extra-textual horizons provides a stable baseline from which a critical interrogation of the films can proceed. They identify semiotic hot-points by highlighting those semantic and syntactic sectors in which ‘the author’ is likely to be most active. In essence, they demarcate the films’ aesthetic play-areas and provide an instruction manual on how best to view them. To employ a linguistic analogy, where textual horizons assemble an aesthetic vocabulary or *langue*, extra-textual horizons prime us for a particular *parole*. We could even say that the extra-textual horizon allows us to divine a semblance of intent—not the personal justifications that attract the attention of garden-variety intentionalists but a more institutionally dispersed commercial force

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<sup>65</sup> /u/Death\_Star\_’s comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/25q3rk/new\\_trailer\\_for\\_christopher\\_nolans\\_interstellar/chjrmyn/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/25q3rk/new_trailer_for_christopher_nolans_interstellar/chjrmyn/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>66</sup> /u/TomMoofDavies’ comment, ‘First trailer for the Hobbit’, *reddit* (21 December 2011)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first\\_trailer\\_for\\_the\\_hobbit/c39uy94/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first_trailer_for_the_hobbit/c39uy94/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>67</sup> /u/beccaonice’s comment, *ibid.* <[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first\\_trailer\\_for\\_the\\_hobbit/c39wqj6/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first_trailer_for_the_hobbit/c39wqj6/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>68</sup> /u/jesus\_swept’s comment, *ibid.* <[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first\\_trailer\\_for\\_the\\_hobbit/c39x00u/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/nkrfd/first_trailer_for_the_hobbit/c39x00u/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

deduced from the marketplace positioning of the work (in this sense, it may be wise to differentiate between individual intention and *motivation*). Consequently, we can now make fairly reasonable presuppositions as to how *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* will look in terms of their authorship. To summarise: *Interstellar* is formulated as a *divergence* from the authorial catalogue and *The Hobbit* as a *convergence*. Whether the films succeed in this is, again, mostly a matter of individual opinion; how they utilise authorial techniques and tactics in the pursuit of these goals and the effect that has on the 'text', however, is the focus of the following analysis.

### 5.iii – Lights! Camera! Author?

We can break down our enquiry into two basic questions: *is there an author* and *what does the author do?* Of course, both *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* are the products of multiple human agents working collaboratively toward singular goals. In this regard, these questions are easily answered: there are in fact manifold authors and we can see their names and roles during the end credits of each film. But, to briefly reiterate our argument in **Chapter Two**, a work being authored does not automatically grant it *authorship*. All artworks, large and little, are created by human beings but not every work supports, benefits from, or encourages an interpretation that situates it within the context of a particular textual series. Again, our interest in authorship is rooted in the transtextual junctions between films and not their empirical origins. Thus we are not concerned with flesh-and-blood authors but *implied authors* (put otherwise, not Christopher Nolan and Peter Jackson but 'Christopher Nolan' and 'Peter Jackson'). Following this, we should remember Susan S. Lanser's statement (also cited in **2.iii**) that the implied author is a '*reading effect* [...] that *happens* rather than something that is.'<sup>69</sup> As demonstrated in **5.ii**, each film's promotional paratexts made great strides in fixing for their parent works a specific authorial essence but we must remain conscious of the fact that commercial auteurs are not equivalent to textual implied authors. Granted, a commercial auteur's paratextual attendance may

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<sup>69</sup> Susan S. Lanser, 'The Implied Author: An Agnostic Manifesto', *Style*, 45.1 (2011), 153-60 (p. 154).

encourage the pre-identification of a narrative's implied author but they do not guarantee the applicability of an authorial interpretive strategy; where implied career authors offer hermeneutic matrices, commercial auteurism's only true ambition is to influence marketability (not necessarily playability [cf. 3.iv]) by means of inflating our perception of quality, which it achieves through the forceful installation of aggrandising artwork frames. The marketing machine's sanctification of film-as-autobiography (Nolan/*Interstellar*) and personality cults (Jackson/*Hobbit*) can make difficult a clear-sighted analysis that only invokes 'the author' when it is revealed to be relevant, yet that is arguably its purpose. To quote Lanser, the implied author 'happens in the wake of reading rather than prior to it.'<sup>70</sup> When conducting an authorial analysis it is therefore necessary not to simply default to the name on the poster but to make a concerted effort, as Lanser suggests, in tracing 'the ways in which a reader, even a lone narratologist reader, might go about creating the "implied author" from the intersecting codes and sign systems that comprise the text.'<sup>71</sup> As such, we should upgrade our first question from *is there an author* to *does the text possess syntactic/semantic traits from which we can construct a particular implied authorial presence?* In response to this, we will conduct a diachronic reading of the openings of both *Interstellar* and the first *Hobbit* film, *An Unexpected Journey*. As introductions shoulder the onus of swiftly articulating the identity of their narrative and narration, they are semiotically dense and present a surfeit of data from which we may begin to construct the image of an author.

Indeed, the FCDs of both *Interstellar* and *An Unexpected Journey* work very quickly in dispatching cues that, when recognised, lock the texts within firm authorial arenas. For example, *Interstellar* opens with a simple title screen: a close-up tracks across a bookshelf with the camera's shallow depth-of-field drawing the eye to a model space shuttle that is being slowly buried underneath a flurry of dust [fig. 5.26]. This echoes the similarly silent opening shot of *The Prestige* where the camera floats laterally over a sea of identical top-hats with the same kind of white, serif,

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

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

uppercase title [fig. 5.27]. For a spectator fully acquainted with Nolan's filmography this stylistic reiteration acts as an immediate authorial signal, inviting a comparison between *Interstellar* and *The Prestige*. To be more specific: the spectator is enticed to invest the same amount of intrigue into the bookcase and the spaceship toy as the hats which stand as proof of Nikola Tesla's success in creating a cloning device (thereby acting as a key clue to the film's central mystery) and moreover function as a visual representation of the film's thematic obsession with twins, duplicates, and doppelgängers. The syntactic technique's restatement in *Interstellar* begs comparable semantic questions as to how these seemingly abandoned artefacts fit into the film's larger dramatic framework; even for a spectator with a slighter authorial competence the introductory emphasis on objects harkens back to earlier Nolanite MacGuffins and imbues these props with a thematic weight they would not otherwise have. Instantly, hypotheses are cued, expectations made, and what was a rather basic and brief shot becomes saturated in significance.

However these presumptions are immediately challenged by the FCD cutting to Ellen Burstyn (playing an as-yet unknown character) speaking to an off-screen addressee in a faux documentary setup [fig. 5.28]. By changing the aspect ratio from the anamorphic 2.35:1 of the title shot to a spherical-lensed 16:9 the FCD heralds a shift in diegetic register and Burstyn is joined by interviewees (framed and filmed in an identical style) taken from Ken Burns' 2012 PBS documentary detailing the American Dust Bowl disaster of the 1930s [fig. 5.29]. This marks a drastic stylistic departure in the Nolan filmography whose entries have never utilised documentary mechanics nor drawn footage from other sources. In one sense, by quoting *The Dust Bowl* the *Interstellar* FCD transmits to its own fictive environmental peril an amplified gravitas: rather than rely on speculative scenarios regarding global warming or solar flares like *The Day After Tomorrow* and 2012, *Interstellar's* world is threatened by an ecological catastrophe (the mass extinction of crops caused by over-farming) that has happened before albeit on a much smaller scale. This squares with Nolan's promotional promise of greater realism and the documentary stylistics afford the piece an elevated aura of verisimilitude. Yet the interviews' lack of context incites queries as to the temporal positioning

and relevance of Burns' subjects as well as the heavily made-up and nigh unrecognisable Burstyn. Is the FCD lifting them directly from Burns' film as a means of heterodiegetically expressing the cyclical nature of history—for instance when it highlights Floyd Coen (a farmer from Morton County, Kansas) saying 'when we set the table, we always set the plate upside down' and synthesises this with footage of actor John Lithgow doing just that—or are they all characters within *Interstellar's* diegesis, speaking retrospectively in a film-within-a-film about the events in the 'present' (and therefore a flashforward)?<sup>72</sup> The answer, of course, is the latter and Burstyn is in fact playing an elderly version of protagonist Cooper's daughter Murphy—though at this stage, the spectator is unlikely to know this (barring knowledge from spoilers or repeat viewings), so that curiosity instigated by the title screen is reinforced.

After the elder Murphy says, 'my dad was a farmer, like everyone else back then. Of course, he didn't start that way' (which gives the first hint as to her connection to the story), the FCD segues from the 16:9 TV aesthetic to full-frame 1.43:1 IMAX, again signalling a repositioning of narratorial intonation.<sup>73</sup> We meet Cooper, the film's main character and a NASA pilot, as his aircraft's computer malfunctions on a test flight, causing a crash [fig. 5.30]. Before the plane hits the ground we are once more jerked back to 2.35:1 as Cooper wakes from a nightmare in a darkened bedroom, revealing the crash to be a subjective flashback [fig. 5.31]. The jarring lurch between aspect ratios (made even more conspicuous on home-video where the image is letterboxed to fit the 16:9 dimensions of HDTV) is a notable—perhaps the most immediately identifiable—aspect of Nolan's post-Batman style: home viewings of *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises* are characterised by the frame's constant contraction and dilation as it flits between 4-perf 35mm and 15-perf 70mm IMAX stock, which at the times of their release was a feature unique to Nolan until it was mimicked by other films such as *TRON: Legacy*, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy*. By front-loading the juxtaposition of aspect ratios (as well as mysterious flashforwards and traumatic flashbacks, the

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<sup>72</sup> *Interstellar*, dir. Christopher Nolan (GBR/USA: Paramount Pictures/Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014) [Blu-ray, Warner Home Video, 2015] 00:03:19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 00:01:15.



editorial trademarks of Nolan's earlier works *Following*, *Memento*, and *The Prestige*) the *Interstellar* narrator can cue even those spectators with only the most passing knowledge of Nolan into personalising the narrative's implied author. However when the ten-year-old Murphy, who has come into the room to check on her father, mentions that she thought she heard 'the ghost', this authorial persona is complexified given that Nolan's films do not as a matter of course dabble in the supernatural.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the prospect of a poltergeist haunting the farmhouse is highlighted as being particularly strange, especially once Murphy blames it for pushing the aforementioned model spacecraft from her bookshelf. In the span of less than five minutes, the *Interstellar* FCD—through its replicated shots, emphasis on props, idiosyncratic aspect ratio clashes, and montage-driven temporal jumps—concretises a character for its implied author that largely accords with Nolan's previous works, one which is recognisable to all levels of Nolan's audience. The use of varying fictional registers and possible presence of paranormal activity does indeed signal somewhat of a diversion from the usual course, yet these components are employed to erect a mystery that, at this point at least, looks and moves very much like a conventional Nolan mind-game (problematizing Nolan's earlier claim to Tom Shone that '*Interstellar* is very upfront about being simple as a story' [cf. 5.ii]).<sup>75</sup>

Turning our attention now to *An Unexpected Journey*, we can see similar tactics in play. After the roll of studio banners at the very beginning of the film, the screen fades to black. 'NEW LINE CINEMA AND METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PICTURES PRESENT | A WINGNUT FILMS PRODUCTION' fades in, etched in the selfsame typeface as *The Lord of the Rings'* corporate credits—only this time, instead of the cool blue of *Rings* the words glow golden (apt, considering the story's focus on reclaiming lost treasure) [fig. 5.32-33]. Then we are met by the film's logo, 'THE HOBBIT' [fig. 5.34]—again, in the same handwritten scrawl as 'THE LORD OF THE RINGS' [fig. 5.35]—accompanied by the famous Shire leitmotif used frequently throughout the *Rings* trilogy to underline moments of heightened nostalgic emotion for the hobbits (such as when Frodo calls Sam's salt pouch a 'little bit of

<sup>74</sup> Shone, 'The man who rebooted the blockbuster', para. 34 of 58.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 44 of 58.

home' or when Pippin consoles Merry with 'we've got the Shire' after failing to persuade the Ents to march on Isengard, both in *The Two Towers*). These typographic and auditory allusions to *Rings* instantaneously assemble an evocative bridge between the old movies and this new one. This is only reinforced as the film proper opens with Ian Holm as the aged Bilbo Baggins rummaging through a chest and momentarily glancing at his sword Sting before drawing out what will become the Red Book of Westmarch, which we see him writing at the beginning of *Fellowship of the Ring*. In our analysis of *The Hobbit's* trailers in 3.iv we noted the rigorous precision of their *mise-en-scène* in terms of duplicating the look of *Rings* and we can see this very much in effect here: Bag End, as Jackson promised in the production diary, looks just as it did before; Sting and the Red Book are exact replicas of the props used in *Rings* [fig. 3.33-34; 5.36-37]; Bilbo is even clothed in the same crimson waist-coat we first saw him wearing at the beginning of *Fellowship* [fig. 5.38-39]. *The Hobbit's* aesthetic accordance to *Rings* is cohered further when Bilbo sits down to begin writing the book: the close-up of Bilbo's quill dipping into an inkpot [fig. 5.40], the high angled insert of him writing [fig. 5.41], the dolly shot that frames Bilbo from behind as it floats out of his study into the halls of Bag End [fig. 5.42], and the transition to a sweeping close-up of the map of Middle-earth [fig. 5.43] are all explicit copies of shots seen in *Fellowship* [fig. 5.44-47]. However, where in *Rings* the map shot signalled the end of the prologue, glided westward over the Misty Mountains toward the Shire, and advanced into the tracking shot moving toward Bilbo's study, here we find their order reversed: we retreat from Bilbo, over Middle-earth from the Shire to Dale and Erebor in the east, and into the prologue.

By instigating *An Unexpected Journey* in this manner—rather than, say, launching directly into the prologue which features mostly new locales and characters, introducing us immediately to the younger Bilbo played by Martin Freeman, or even having Bilbo begin his voice-over with 'IN A HOLE in the ground there lived a hobbit' like Tolkien's narrator (though this line does in fact come later, along with a swelling reprise of Howard Shore's Shire theme)—*The Hobbit's* FCD succinctly achieves

two significant objectives.<sup>76</sup> First, it provokes favourable memories of Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* through its typography, music, and *mise-en-scène* and exhorts the spectator to transpose those positive feelings onto *The Hobbit*. Second, by emulating techniques like the homodiegetic voice-over narration and specific shot types/camera movements, it approximates the narratorial slant [cf. 2.iii] of *Rings'* FCD and by so doing adopts its identity. In sum: the stylistic imitation of *The Hobbit's* credits, title, and opening scene concretises its continuity with those earlier pictures and installs for itself a simulacrum of *Rings'* narrator, from which we can extrapolate an identical authorial presence.

Naturally, this process of narratorial authorisation does not end here. For example, *An Unexpected Journey's* prologue structurally and stylistically mirrors *Fellowship of the Ring's*. Where Galadriel relayed a broad history of the War of the Last Alliance at the beginning of *Fellowship*, *Journey's* Bilbo adopts a similar omniscience in sketching the dwarven kingdom of Erebor's opulence, Smaug the dragon's invasion, and the further travails of Thorin Oakenshield's company as they are denied refuge by the elves and forced to wander the wilderness. The prologues' shared foregrounding of battle scenes, emphasis on MacGuffins (the One Ring/the Arkenstone), and their allusive snapshots of the various cultures of Middle-earth solidify a unified point of narratorial origin—as do the FCD's dynamic close-ups and flamboyant aerial establishing shots (for instance, the camera's twisting plunge down the ore pits of Erebor echoes a similar setup in *Fellowship* that demonstrates the vastness of Moria's mines [fig. 5.48-49]). When Bilbo comes to introduce himself into the story, the FCD steps up into a more blatant imitation of *Fellowship* by match-cutting Thorin forging a glowing sword and Gandalf's fireworks exploding in the sky over Old Took's Midsummer's Eve party, where the prepubescent Bilbo is in attendance [fig. 5.50-51]—just as *Fellowship* jumps from Bilbo musing that 'this will be a night to remember' to a similar screen-filling splash of colour [fig. 5.52-53].<sup>77</sup> The wide shots of bright sparkles cascading over the tented field, Gandalf's cries of 'off we go!', and the pseudo-Celtic song 'Flaming Red Hair' are all components borrowed from Bilbo's own

<sup>76</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit: or There and Back Again* (London: HarperCollins, 2013), p. 11.

<sup>77</sup> *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, dir. Peter Jackson (NZL/USA/GBR: New Line Cinema, 2001) [Blu-ray (Extended Edition / Disc 1 of 2), Entertainment in Video, 2011] 00:19:55.

celebrations at the beginning of *Fellowship* [fig. 5.54-55].<sup>78</sup> This, together with the return to ‘present-day’ Bag End and the elder Bilbo, as well as the orchestral recurrence of ‘Concerning Hobbits’ as Elijah Wood’s Frodo nails the ‘NO ADMITTANCE EXCEPT ON PARTY BUSINESS’ sign to the garden gate, situates *An Unexpected Journey* within a tight proximity to *Fellowship of the Ring*—not just aesthetically but diegetically, as this all takes place scant hours before Gandalf arrives for Bilbo’s birthday (and *The Battle of the Five Armies* ends with the wizard knocking on Bag End’s door, closing the circle). It should be noted that *Journey*’s frame narrative conceit is a feature unique to the film; it takes fourteen minutes for the narration to arrive at Gandalf and the younger Bilbo’s first meeting where they debate the semantics of ‘good morning’, which initiated Tolkien’s book.<sup>79</sup> *The Hobbit*’s narrator is not, then, necessarily concerned with relaying a ‘faithful’ adaptation of Tolkien—although there is little in the trilogy, save the Tauriel/Kili/Legolas love-triangle, that cannot be extrapolated from either the source novel or *The Return of the King*’s appendices (even if there are issues with fidelity, as we will soon discuss)—but rather an accurate facsimile of Jackson. And through its continued impersonation of *Fellowship* it accomplishes this handily, leaving the spectator little choice in agreeing that, yes, this most definitely is a ‘Peter Jackson’ *Lord of the Rings* movie.

If we widen our analytical remit to encompass the whole trilogy, we will notice this authorial reinforcement as ubiquitously operative. Taken on a macro level, each *Hobbit* movie broadly mirrors its corresponding *Rings* film. *An Unexpected Journey* cribs the quest beats of *The Fellowship of the Ring* almost verbatim: a hobbit is visited in the Shire and recruited on a grand adventure that takes him eastward to Rivendell for a brief sojourn, after which the band attempts to pass over a mountain but is forced to retreat inside the caves by the weather; here, they encounter a goblin army that pushes them through to the other side of the peak whereupon our heroes are hunted down by a more threatening orc horde until there is a great battle that ends the film (in this, Azog the Defiler stands as substitute for the Uruk-hai captain Lurtz). *The Desolation of Smaug*—which cannily opens with Peter

<sup>78</sup> *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, dir. Peter Jackson (NZL/USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012) [Blu-ray (Extended Edition), Warner Home Video, 2015] 00:09:47.

<sup>79</sup> Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, pp. 14-6.

Jackson reprising his carrot-chomping cameo from *Fellowship*, further cementing his authorial dominion [fig. 5.56-57]—features a perilous trek through a haunted forest before fracturing the narrative into three intercutting threads just as *The Two Towers* did. *The Battle of the Five Armies* is formulated around an immense war between the forces of good and the orcs of Sauron, with the sack of Dale reflecting *The Return of the King's* siege of Minas Tirith and the field skirmish outside the Lonely Mountain acting as a spectacular centrepiece like the Battle of Pelennor Fields (here, chief antagonist Azog now takes the mantle of *King's* orc lieutenant Gothmog). Tightening our vision to more specific scenes, we can also see that *The Hobbit's* stylistic deference to *Rings* is by no means confined to its opening: the suffocating magic shadows that engulf Bag End as Gandalf loses his temper with the dwarves ape a similar lighting effect when Bilbo accuses of the wizard of being a thief in *Fellowship* [fig. 5.58-59]; Gollum's schizophrenia is represented identically to *King* when he argues with his alter-ego Sméagol whilst gazing at his own reflection [fig. 5.60-61]; when trapped by Azog at the end of *Journey*, Gandalf entreats to a moth to summon the Eagles just like when he is held captive at Orthanc in *Rings* [fig. 5.62-63]; and Galadriel adopts a darkened, terrible form when unleashing her full power to banish Sauron much as she does when she momentarily succumbs to temptation in response to Frodo's offer of the One Ring [fig. 5.64-65]. Finally, *The Hobbit* replicates even the more basic syntactic tics of *Rings*, such as when the FCD cuts from a close-up to a much tighter framing mid-sentence for dramatic emphasis: *Fellowship's* narrator does this when Bilbo admits that he does not want to give up the Ring [fig. 5.66-67] and Arwen challenges the Nazgûl to 'come and claim' Frodo at the Ford of Bruinen [fig. 5.68-69];<sup>80</sup> in *The Hobbit*, we see this technique at work when Gandalf reveals he knows Bilbo Baggins by name and that his visit to Hobbiton is not a chance happening [fig. 5.70-71].

Likewise, if we step beyond *Interstellar's* introduction we can find further evidence of its narratorial compliance with earlier Nolan films. Cooper, for instance, is a widower much like the

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<sup>80</sup> *Fellowship of the Ring* (Disc 1 of 2), 01:22:34.

protagonists of *Memento*, *The Prestige*, and *Inception*. Dialogue scenes, such as the heated parent-teacher conference where Cooper discovers that the US government has propagandistically betrayed the moon landing as a conspiracy to divert public attention to more earthly matters, are conducted largely in alternating medium close-ups with little variance [fig. 5.72-5.73]. This scene also evinces the continued reliance on plausible set and wardrobe designs that grounded Nolan's other high-concept pictures; even though *Interstellar* is set far enough in the future to feature sentient robots and manned spaceflights to the further reaches of the solar system, its *mise-en-scène* is decidedly contemporary — note the CRT television set behind Cooper in fig. 5.72 and the utilitarian spacecraft's corresponding lack of technological gimmicks often featured in supposedly 'gritty' science-fiction films, like the virtual-reality Earth Room in the otherwise convincing *Sunshine*. This extends to the FCD's representation of other worlds. Unlike the exotic alien geographies of *Avatar*'s Pandora or *Man of Steel*'s Krypton, *Interstellar*'s three planets — comprised of water, ice, and rock — possess a mundane and somewhat eerie tactility (doubtless a consequence of the location shooting in Iceland and Canada). Additionally, we can distinguish certain stylistic advancements in *Interstellar* that align with Nolan's quoted desire for the 'one shot that says everything'.<sup>81</sup> Whilst the solemn long shot in which the *Endurance* is shrunk to a pinprick against Saturn's colossal surface is indeed awe-inspiring and suitably cinematic [fig. 5.74], the film's real aesthetic innovation comes in how its narrator utilises the exterior shot of the *Endurance* that is rigged to the ship's surface as a visual refrain that ties the spectator into a close, visceral connection with the action, intensifying that spectacular sense of 'the real' issued by the IMAX format and lending further credence to the story as well as its depiction of wormholes and black holes [fig. 5.75-77].

It is manifest that *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* possess the traces of Nolan and Jackson's authorship. Thus we can answer in the affirmative the first question asked at the beginning of this section. For a more conventional auteurist critique, such a catalogue of similarities would be sufficient

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<sup>81</sup> Jensen, 'End Without Infinity Is But A New Beginning', para. 26 of 28.

in anointing an auteur for each film as we can clearly identify their authorial signatures. However, if we are to progress beyond feature-spotting Vulgar imagism [cf. **Introduction**] we must engage with our second question: *what does the author do?* Again, this warrants clarification as we are not questioning Nolan and Jackson's empirical activities but how 'Nolan' and 'Jackson' are put to use, how authorial transtextuality can influence or enhance a spectator's comprehension and enjoyment of the films, and the overall functions of authorship—narrative and otherwise. Ergo, the enquiry morphs into the decidedly more complex *what do the texts do with their authors?*

We previously noted how the *Interstellar* narrator utilised traditional Nolan mind-game tactics to establish a mystery centred on the ghostly presence in the Cooper family farmhouse. By quickly revealing itself to be a Nolanite narrator, the *Interstellar* FCD spotlights the poltergeist's paranormal qualities given their ostensible schism from the conventional guidelines of the Nolan film. Working under an authorial strategy, the spectator is pushed to find a more logical explanation which the narration duly offers by stating that the 'ghost' is in fact a gravitational anomaly used by higher-dimensional bulk beings as a communicative conduit. This leads Cooper to the clandestine remains of NASA, who are preparing to send a scouting ship through a wormhole the bulk beings have created in order to find a new home that will provide sanctuary from the dying Earth. Cooper is recruited on the mission and, before leaving, gives his daughter a wristwatch that matches his own so that they can compare the time slippage upon Cooper's return. Yet, when Murphy realises that Cooper does not know when he will be back, she rejects the watch and pleads her father to stay. He refuses and a book tumbles from the bookcase at the head of Murphy's room, apparently due to the gravitational anomaly. With the mystery allegedly solved (even if the bulk beings' identity remains elusive), the film proceeds on a fairly linear course until an escapade on a water planet orbiting the black hole Gargantua goes awry. Due to Gargantua's immense gravitational pull and the laws of relativity, a few hours on the planet correlates to twenty-three years in Earth-time and the *syuzhet* splits into two interlocking strands: one following Cooper's pursuit of a new home-world and the other concerning the now-adult Murphy as she tries to solve the gravitational equation that will

enable the massive space habitat to leave Earth and save humanity. Whilst this does make room for an interesting comparison between *Inception* and *Interstellar*—where the former’s FCD exploits editing and slow-motion to *dilate* time during the concurrent action scenes across its three dream-levels and the latter inversely utilises montage to *compress* time between Cooper and Murphy’s endeavours—and furthermore conjoins *Interstellar* with works like *Memento* and *The Prestige* that exploit editorial techniques to transmit experiences of temporal subjectivity, the dual-pronged narration has a legibility independent of an auto-centric interpretation.

Thus it seems that *Interstellar*, whilst undoubtedly Nolanesque in its stylistics, may not necessarily benefit from an authorial analysis, in the same way that *The Dark Knight* films are more Batman movies with a Nolan sheen than fully-fledged Nolan pictures. Remember, whilst *Interstellar* may indeed be a ‘personal’ movie for Nolan, its analytical value for us rests in how it narratively harmonises with other works bearing his name. However, when Cooper falls into Gargantua at *Interstellar*’s climax and lands in the Tesseract, a 3D representation of 4D space-time constructed by the bulk beings in order to allow Cooper to understand and explore time as a physical dimension [fig. 5.78], the significance of that introductory shot is finally unveiled. The Tesseract is a matrix composed of scenes from Murphy’s childhood bedroom at all points throughout her occupancy and Cooper is able to look in at specific moments in her life using the bookcase as a window—including his final moments with her before leaving Earth. And when Cooper hammers the wall in frustration at his inability to prevent his past-self from leaving, the aforementioned book falls from the shelf. Thus it turns out that the farmhouse’s gravitational anomaly was in fact a result of Cooper’s present actions in the Tesseract: as gravity travels through space and time, Cooper realises he can manipulate objects within Murphy’s room at any point of her childhood. Furthermore, Cooper understands that the bulk beings are simply extremely evolved humans from the future who have gained control of the higher dimensions and have brought him here not to change his past but to communicate with his daughter and give her the equation she needs to evacuate the people living on Earth. So, after relaying the binary co-ordinates that led him to NASA in the first place (thereby completing the temporal loop),



Cooper encodes the quantum data into the second-hand of Murphy's watch in Morse code—after which he is ejected from the Tesseract and left floating near Saturn whereupon he is rescued by the space habitat containing the elder Murphy played by Burstyn. Cooper finally reunites with his daughter on her deathbed and she tells him she knows he was her 'ghost'.

Consequently, the bookcase and the wristwatch represent a marked evolution in the Nolanite FCD's employment of props. Unlike Leonard's Polaroids or Angier's journal, they do not hold within them some disturbing truth the protagonists are unwilling to face. The watch is particularly significant because it is a material incarnation of Cooper and Murphy's relationship, with Cooper being able to connect with his daughter through this simple object regardless of how far away he may be from her. As Dr Brand says earlier in the film, 'love is the one thing we're capable of perceiving that transcends dimensions of space and time', so the wristwatch does not just signify *time* and *a father's love*, but that a father's love exceeds time (and, indeed, space).<sup>82</sup> The intercutting between Cooper and Murphy noted earlier is therefore more than mere editorial play: it is a stylistic technique specifically designed to eliminate the diegetic distance between the two characters and push them together for this moment of cathartic communion even though, practically, they are separated by decades and light-years. This is augmented when the FCD includes subjective flashbacks with increasing frequency near the film's end. These interruptive vignettes do not function in their typical manner: where *Memento's* flashbacks represented Leonard's trauma as repressed memories burst into waking consciousness, Murphy and Cooper's flashbacks to bittersweet moments they shared emboldens them to push beyond the limits of their own strength. Instead of operating to manipulate or obfuscate, as is wont for the Nolan FCD, *Interstellar's* temporal configurations have a more visceral sentimental bent; relativity, then, is a means to an emotional end. Ergo, *Interstellar*, through its modified utilisation of expected mind-game syntactics (symbolic objects, chronological juxtapositions, unconventional editorial structures), heralds a semantic shift in the Nolan chronology. The early

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<sup>82</sup> *Interstellar*, 01:28:23.

establishment of a supposedly paranormal/extra-terrestrial mystery is in actuality a feint to disguise the film's sentimental core, a cerebral ploy that exploits the spectator's knowledge of Nolan's cinematic tendencies to encourage false expectations, leaving them wide open to emotional attack. *Interstellar*, like so many of Nolan's other films, plays games with its audience: but where *Memento* and *Inception* seek to muddle the mind, *Interstellar* targets the heart.

Moreover, if we accept the commonly held interpretation of Nolan's overall filmography as comprising a meta-cinematic commentary – with Evan Puschak summarily stating in his video-essay on *The Prestige*, 'if there's one fundamental theme that suffuses [Nolan's] entire filmography, it's that cinema, as a shared narrative, can be a hugely powerful cultural force' – we can see that *Interstellar* stands as a capstone on this long-running thematic idea.<sup>83</sup> If *Inception* can be read as a treatise on the filmmaking process (with the group of extractors standing as a film crew and the dreams they create as film sets), *The Prestige* as an exploration of narration as a magic trick (with the tripartite trick structure of pledge-turn-prestige mirroring the conventional three-act narrative), and *Following*, *Memento*, and *The Dark Knight* trilogy as meditations on performance (wherein aspiring writer Bill, insurance salesman Leonard, and billionaire playboy Bruce Wayne each adopt avenging alter-egos distinct from their daily personas), *Interstellar* – specifically Cooper's actions in the Tesseract – adopts a much grander meaning. When Cooper pushes the bookcase in the 'present', the books fall and Murphy records their pattern in the 'past', and adult-Murphy finds that note and reads the Morse sequence 'STAY' in the 'future', the FCD flattens these disparate actions into a contiguous and comprehensible succession of shots whose coherence is solely dependent on the cinematic process of montage [fig. 5.79-81]. Much as how an editor can view time as a physical artefact whilst holding a strip of celluloid (which is a quality unique to the film medium), and moreover manipulate time by splicing two separate shots that may have been filmed months apart into a temporally legible sequence, Cooper can traverse and interact with the entirety of Murphy's childhood from within the

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<sup>83</sup> Evan Puschak, 'The Prestige: Hiding in Plain Sight', *YouTube* (24 February 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d46Azg3Pm4c>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:24.

Tesseract. Cooper's interventions in the past, then, correlate with the editor's activities on the cutting table—indeed, the Tesseract's flowing walls even resemble film passing through a Moviola [fig. 5.82]. Thus, *Interstellar* can be read extra-diegetically in light of Nolan's previous meta-cinematic analogies as a celebration of the connective power of editing. Taking this all into account, *Interstellar* is film that not only supports and encourages an authorial interpretation (which furthermore surreptitiously exploits a spectator's auctorial competence to mislead them), but one that gains exclusive meaning when read within an authorial interpretive context.

It would appear that *The Hobbit* shares this authorial compatibility. Indeed, as we discussed earlier, its narration is undisputedly Jacksonian. Referring to our notes on Jackson's melodramatic idiosyncrasies in 5.i, we can see their elements clearly at work in *The Hobbit*. The story's Manichean conflict is drawn across unambiguous lines separating virtue from villainy, with Smaug embodying capitalistic avarice similar to the aliens in *Bad Taste*, and the victimisation of its heroes is evident in Thorin's descent into 'dragon sickness' (notice how the full extent of Thorin's corruption is indicated in *Five Armies* by his inadvertent quoting of Smaug when he says 'I will not part with a single coin'<sup>84</sup> much as how Bilbo's addiction to the Ring is disclosed by his use of the word 'precious' in *Fellowship*).<sup>85</sup> The thematic focus on *community* is expressed in the divide between dwarven-, elven-, and humankind and the nostalgic yearning for *innocence* is distinct in the dwarves' quest to reclaim their homeland. Moreover, we can quickly spot evidence of Jackson's perennial fascination with cinematic technology in the films' comprehensive use of CGI in places where *Rings* opted for practical techniques (most overtly in the depiction of goblins and orcs [fig. 5.83-84]), as well as *The Hobbit*'s 3D cinematography that utilises state-of-the-art 5K RED EPIC digital cameras shooting in High Frame Rate 48fps (HFR) as opposed to the standard 24fps of 35mm seen in *Rings*. However, despite *The Hobbit*'s almost reverential stylistic obedience to *Rings*, the phenomenological shock of HFR 3D ruptures an aesthetic schism between the two trilogies. In itself, this would be of little consequence—

<sup>84</sup> *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, dir. Peter Jackson (NZL/USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014) [Blu-ray (Extended Edition), Warner Home Video, 2015] 00:54:33.

<sup>85</sup> *Fellowship of the Ring* (Disc 1 of 2), 00:27:32.

especially considering that *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are viewable in 2D 24fps on home-video where they will exist for their remaining lifespans—but it is synecdochic of a wider issue with the films' combined interactions of authorship with narrative.

We could point to *The Hobbit's* battle scenes as emblems of this disunity, being as they are much more reliant on sight gags than those in *Rings* which are unilaterally depicted as harrowing life-or-death exchanges—save the odd quip from Gimli who provides a much-needed pressure valve. *The Hobbit*, however, is populated by an entire troupe of Gimlis and Bombur's sole purpose in its fights (and in fact the films as a whole) is to provide fodder for increasingly inventive visual jokes that exploit his rotund physique. But in truth this actually aligns *The Hobbit* closer with Jackson's filmography, particularly his earlier horror-comedies. Bombur's tumble down the ramp in Goblin Town which flattens a swarm of enemies mirrors a gag in *Meet the Feebles* where Arthur accidentally sends a barrel careening down the stairs, leaving a trail of squished creatures (and this joke would be revisited yet again in *Desolation* when Bombur gets a barrel of his own). Moreover, the Goblin King's whimsical ditty about all the nasty things he intends to do to his dwarf captives would fit snugly in *Feebles'* musical repertoire that, among other things, celebrates sodomy. The Master of Lake-Town glutting on a plate of animal testicles has a grotesque precedent in *Braindead*, where Lionel's putrefying zombie-mother eats an ear that has fallen from her head into her custard, and Lionel's MacGyver-esque ingenuity in using home maintenance tools as murder machines foreshadows the numerous, humorous ways the dwarves dispatch their orc foes in *Five Armies'* great battle. Whilst these components, along with the films' richly saturated colour palette that emphasises the contrast between warm oranges and cool teals, stand starkly opposed to the relatively stately *Rings* (whose aesthetics are contrarily more bleached and weathered), they all contribute in fixing for *The Hobbit* a tonality that suitably matches the light-heartedness of Tolkien's novel—which, it must be remembered, did not share its sequels' portentousness. A case could even be made that *The Hobbit* films represent 'Jackson' far more accurately than *Rings* and concerns of stylistic inconsistency can be neutralised under a consideration of *The Hobbit* as simply Bilbo's exaggerated narration (remembering

the frame narrative construct we discussed earlier). We already have proof of Bilbo's hyperbolic narratorial style in the energetic story he tells the children at his party in *Fellowship* and Gandalf even says to Bilbo in *Journey* that 'all good stories deserve embellishment'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, with *The Lord of the Rings* as 'fact' and *The Hobbit* as 'fable', the aesthetic distinction is justified.

We could end our investigation here and be satisfied with its findings that *The Hobbit's* FCD recalls constituents of Jackson's more blithe style that were somewhat suppressed in *The Lord of the Rings* in order to appropriate its source's tonal characteristics whilst retaining those vital, expected Jacksonian qualities that would ordain it a canonical entry into the cinematic Middle-earth franchise. In this way, *The Hobbit* converges with Jackson's filmography more than the production diaries prophesied. However, that framing conceit which ostensibly solves the films' stylistic issues introduces a host of problems all its own that fractures the coherency of *The Hobbit's* narrative and retroactively threatens the integrity of *Rings'*. If, in fact, the narration is Bilbo's, how is he able to relay scenes in which he was absent? Of course, the dwarves could have told him their side of the story off-screen, which is a reasonable supposition, but what of Gandalf's subplot that confusingly adopts the serious mood of *The Hobbit's* forebears, steeped as it is in Tolkien's Ring lore of which Bilbo is shown to be utterly ignorant? Furthermore, this storyline, which predominantly deals with Sauron, contradicts aspects of *Rings'* narrative: why, for example, is Gandalf shocked to find that Sauron has returned and mustered the Ringwraiths in *Fellowship* when he has already confronted the Dark Lord and his minions in *Desolation* and *Five Armies*? How does the Witch-king stab Frodo with the Morgul Blade at Weathertop when Radagast the Brown took the sword from him in *Journey* and gave it Gandalf, who leaves it in Rivendell? There are even discrepancies if we view the frame narrative with the elder Bilbo in isolation. At the beginning of *Journey*, Bilbo and Frodo explicitly discuss Gandalf's imminent arrival for the party, yet Bilbo acts in *Fellowship* as if his coming is completely unexpected. Furthermore, if Bilbo is writing the Red Book for Frodo, why does he need to explain what a hobbit

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<sup>86</sup> *An Unexpected Journey*, 00:37:27.

hole is when reciting Tolkien's famous introductory description? These could be disregarded as minor blemishes in the grander picture, but they signify a discordance between *The Hobbit* and *Rings*—and 'Jackson's' agency in both texts—that requires further elaboration.

As for why Bilbo repeats Tolkien's introduction with no reasonable narrative motivation, we could say there is sufficient *non-narrative* motivation in that the lines will immediately prickle with gooseflesh the skin of anyone who read and loved the book as a child (here, the weaponisation of Howard Shore's idyllic Shire theme is at its most efficient). We can say much the same for when Bilbo first puts on the Ring in *Journey*—he trips, the Ring flies up out of his hand, it falls down onto his outstretched finger just like with Frodo in *Fellowship* [fig. 5.85-86]—and when Tauriel heals Kili's Morgul wound with Athelas in *Desolation*, whereupon the FCD adopts the dwarf's adoring perspective that basks the elf in a non-diegetic angelic glow much like how Frodo sees Arwen while similarly suffering a Morgul wound (that is likewise being treated by Athelas) [fig. 5.87-88]. These sequences, though comprehensible in basic causal terms, primarily function as hypertextual conduits—but to Jackson, not Tolkien. We need only look at our discussion of *Journey's* initial scenes earlier in this section to see how quickly and how often *The Hobbit's* FCD seeks to break its own diegetic transparency to fortify the spectator's nostalgic remembrance of *Rings* and it continues this with clockwork regularity throughout the trilogy. In some cases, such 'Easter Eggs' are confined to background details—such as when Glóin dons the armour that his son Gimli will later wear [fig. 5.89-90]—but there are many instances when this desire to recall *Rings* completely subjugates *The Hobbit's* narration. We could, on this occasion, point to Gandalf's storyline with all its talk of Dark Lords and magic rings which is not expounded in *The Hobbit's* *syuzhet* (leaving the importance of Bilbo's Ring and its relation to Sauron wholly up to the spectator's prior textual competence), but the most egregious example can be found at the end of *The Battle of the Five Armies* when elf-king Thranduil charges his son Legolas to go north and seek out Aragorn, after which the FCD ushers in a hint of *Rings'* Fellowship leitmotif. For a spectator who came into *The Hobbit* cold, this scene bears absolutely no relevance given its referents (Strider, Arathorn, the Dúnedain, the Fellowship) reside beyond the

boundaries of the films' *fabulae*. But for a spectator whose understanding of *The Hobbit's* *fabula* integrates *Rings* data this scene functions as a strong nostalgic junction to those anterior films, engendering a rush of endorphins that blinds them to the fact that at this point in the timeline Aragorn is only a ten-year-old boy who should still be residing at Rivendell as Elrond's ward and would not earn the reputation Thranduil boasts for at least another decade. Thus, narrative logic and fidelity to Tolkien are sacrificed for the tactical deployment of nostalgia. Like Jackson's other films *The Hobbit* seeks to venerate the triumphs of cinema, but where *The Lord of the Rings* reached back to historical epics, swashbuckling romances, adventure serials, monster movies, war films, and kung-fu pictures to embellish its narrative with *flavour*, *The Hobbit's* sole cinematic referent is *The Lord of the Rings* on which it leans for narrative *sense*—and, as we have seen, that narrative sense is fractured and fallacious.

In summary, *The Hobbit* evinces a sort of ostentatious auteurism that demands a recognition of 'Jackson' via a peculiar kind of auto-fetishisation. That there are two conflicting 'Jacksons' in *The Hobbit*—one slavishly devoted to *Rings*, the other possessing an atavistic aesthetic sensibility—makes an authorial interpretation (like the films themselves) somewhat schizophrenic. It is not that an authorial analysis is impossible or even unsuitable, but that one is to some degree necessary for narrative intelligibility and the texts do not sustain such scrutiny. And whilst a more orthodox Sarrisite critique might proclaim *The Hobbit* a masterpiece due to its semantic/syntactic homogeneity to the authorial canon (and may even trumpet the noted discordance as 'interior meaning' [cf. 1.ii]), those signatures seem to exist solely to divert attention away from deficiencies in the work which lacks an identity outside of its relationship to *Rings*. To synthesise: where 'Jackson' served *Rings*, *The Hobbit* serves 'Jackson' (or, to be more specific, 'Jackson's' *Rings*).

Indeed, this over-authorisation resulted in a less than enthusiastic reception to *The Hobbit*. There is an immense disparity between the critical receptions of both trilogies: using the collated aggregate percentages on Rotten Tomatoes, *Rings* (*FOTR* 91%, *TTT* 96%, *ROTK* 95%) has a 29 point lead over *Hobbit* (*AUI* 64%, *DOS* 74%, *BOTFA* 59%). Additionally, *Rings* was nominated for thirty

Academy Awards and won seventeen whilst *The Hobbit* was nominated eight times and won only one (the Scientific and Technical Achievement Award in 2013). And there are already numerous fan-edits of the movies like the so-called *Tolkien Edit* that slashes the trilogy down to a single four-hour film that excises all the more Jacksonian touches such as Gandalf's entire subplot, Bilbo's frame narrative, and Bombur's visual comedy. It is therefore interesting to note how *The Hobbit's* Appendices strike a more conciliatory tone than the celebratory emphasis of *Rings'* special features. Specifically, *Five Armies'* documentary 'The Gathering of the Clouds' details the immense pressure Jackson was under when making the films. Warner Bros. had locked in a release schedule for *The Hobbit* that did not change when Guillermo del Toro vacated the project after a significant period of pre-production; with only a few months to prepare instead of the three-and-a-half years he had on *Rings*, Jackson, who was working twenty-one frenzied hours a day, frankly admits he 'didn't know what the hell [he] was doing' and was 'just making it up there and then on the spot.'<sup>87</sup> Whilst one could say this lends credence to Pauline Kael's assertion that 'the works in which we are most aware of the personality of the director are his worst films—when he falls back on devices he has already done to death' [cf. 1.ii], *Five Armies'* Appendices mark a significant turning point in the trilogy's diachronic span [cf. 4.i] and a definite shift in fan appreciation for the films as well as their director.<sup>88</sup> In light of the documentary, /u/rawcookiedough writes (to the approval of 839 others), 'I honestly just feel really bad for him watching this',<sup>89</sup> while /u/Xrathe says 'I think it's amazing he managed to finish it and put out a movie that's still half way decent when he clearly was winging it on a day-to-day basis. I think it speaks to the talent of Peter Jackson.'<sup>90</sup> With the villainisation of del Toro and victimisation of Jackson

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<sup>87</sup> 'The Gathering of the Clouds' [Documentary], *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, dir. Peter Jackson (NZL/USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014) [Blu-ray (Extended Edition / The Appendices Part 11: The Gathering Storm), Warner Home Video, 2015] 00:27:46; 00:25:51.

<sup>88</sup> Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares', in *I Lost It at the Movies* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), 264-88 (p. 269).

<sup>89</sup> /u/rawcookiedough's comment, 'Peter Jackson admits he didn't know what he was doing, and didn't have enough prep time for *The Hobbit*', *reddit* (19 November 2015)

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3tdufq/peter\\_jackson\\_admits\\_he\\_didnt\\_know\\_what\\_he\\_was/cx5e5ah/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3tdufq/peter_jackson_admits_he_didnt_know_what_he_was/cx5e5ah/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>90</sup> /u/Xrathe's comment, *ibid.*

<[https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3tdufq/peter\\_jackson\\_admits\\_he\\_didnt\\_know\\_what\\_he\\_was/cx5ep28/](https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/3tdufq/peter_jackson_admits_he_didnt_know_what_he_was/cx5ep28/)> [accessed 13 March 2017].



(which curiously draws Manichean lines between the two belligerents in a quasi-melodramatic structure), the Appendices erect a *third* implied author for *The Hobbit*: not the ‘Jackson’ of *Rings* or the ‘Jackson’ of *Bad Taste*, but a sympathetic facsimile of the real-life Jackson pushed to the extremities of stress, doing everything in his power to guide a sinking ship to shore. Like *Rings’* Appendices, *The Hobbit’s* special features erect the mythopoeic vision of grand quest that irrevocably colours our perception of the films along with our image of the author. That *The Hobbit* failed where *Rings* succeeded is inconsequential. In fact, *The Hobbit’s* doom makes Jackson appear all the more heroic and retrospectively shines *Rings* in a greater light for its ability to survive the pressure-cooker of production. In this way, our extra-textual appreciation of Jackson’s authorship (which we should not forget is still a promotional fantasy) enervates *The Hobbit’s* weaknesses and moreover solidifies *Rings* as sacrosanct—which was arguably the purpose of *The Hobbit’s* textual authorship in the first.

However, lest we regress into exploiting authorship as ammunition for subjective value judgments *à la* classical auteurism, it should be noted that I am not necessarily proclaiming *The Hobbit* an empirically ‘bad’ film (nor *Interstellar* a particularly ‘good’ one)—merely that *Interstellar* withstands a more comprehensive and defensible authorially-situated narrative interpretation than *The Hobbit*. We could, in this instance, quote Hans Robert Jauss in that *Interstellar’s* ‘artistic character’ is determined by the initially-alienating ‘horizontal change’ between ‘the horizon of expectations [cf. 5.ii] and the work’, where *The Hobbit’s* function as “‘culinary” or entertainment art [Unterhaltungskunst]’ is indicated by it

not demanding any horizontal change, but rather [...] precisely fulfilling the expectations prescribed by a ruling standard of taste, in that it satisfies the desire for the reproduction of the familiarly beautiful [...] [and] confirms familiar sentiments[.]<sup>91</sup>

Or we could refer to Thomas Schatz’s thesis on genre life-cycles to assert that *Interstellar* signals that Nolan is entering an ‘age of *refinement*, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form’ and that *The Hobbit* is proof of Jackson’s move into a ‘*baroque* (or “mannerist” or “self-reflexive”)

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<sup>91</sup> Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, p. 25.

stage, when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they themselves become the “substance” or “content” of the work.’<sup>92</sup> But to do so would elide a critical detail that *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit*’s authorship may not be directed toward the same ends.

For example, if we turn to 2016’s *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* — a prequel to the *Harry Potter* series (now situated within the larger ‘J.K. Rowling’s Wizarding World’ universe) directed by *Potter* stalwart David Yates and, interestingly, also distributed by Warner Bros. — we will find *The Hobbit*’s transtextual strategy, built upon the tactical deployment of weaponised nostalgia, actuating at full force. Like *The Hobbit*, *Fantastic Beasts* opens with studio credits stylistically identical to its antecedents: the Warner Bros. shield floats through stormy clouds escorted by John Williams’ immediately identifiable ‘Hedwig’s Theme’, just as in the *Potter* films. Within seconds, the *Fantastic Beasts* FCD forsakes its own narratorial invisibility to cement an obsequious associative bond with *Harry Potter* which is braced by the film’s repeated use of *Potter* musical cues; its scattershot mentions of Dumbledore, Hogwarts, Quidditch, and the Lestrangle family; the fetishised iconography of the Deathly Hallows symbol; the fact that the spells protagonist Newt Scamander uses are only those given sufficient screen-time in the *Potter* series (‘*Alohamora*’, ‘*Accio*’, ‘*Petrificus Totalus*’, etc.); and the use of expository newspaper montages just as in Yates’ own *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Though reputedly a standalone film within the shared Rowling universe, *Fantastic Beasts* hastily redeploys *Potter*’s syntactics not to strengthen its own narrative *per se* but to goad its spectator to reminisce about *Potter* and misappropriate those pleasures as qualities of the film-in-progress. Recalling our discussion on the Pavlovian affect of parasitic promotional paratexts in 3.iii, it is thus apparent that the creep of promotional structures into the actual products themselves noted in 4.iii is much more endemic than first assumed, given that *Fantastic Beasts* is primarily a synergetic advertisement for Warners’ horizontally-integrated *Potter* properties (such as the Warner Bros. Studio Tour in London, the film’s vast merchandise pool, and, of course, *Potter*’s own home-video releases)

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 37-8.

and a narrative second. That the advertisement of the text is principally enabled by its 'author' affords us an alternative explanation for *The Hobbit's* use of 'Jackson'.

'Jackson' is noticeable in *The Hobbit* because *The Hobbit* makes 'Jackson' noticeable. The sheer redundancy of authorial cues produces a vast transtextual system that activates a cognisance of *The Lord of the Rings* at almost every step, for almost every spectator (except those who have no prior experience of Jackson or *Rings*, although it is not unlikely that *The Hobbit's* indicative illusion of depth will spur these spectators into further exploring the franchise). Naturally, this acts as pseudo-promotion for the Hobbiton tour in Matamata now that Middle-earth has become pivotal to New Zealand's tourist industry (Air New Zealand even has *Hobbit*-themed safety videos), but more importantly *The Hobbit's* immense wealth in allusive currency effectively guarantees repeat viewings, home-video purchases, and an engagement with its Extended Editions, which feature even more references to *Rings*, given that no one spectator will be able to join all of its dots in one sitting.<sup>93</sup> Authorial transtextuality, then, is not just the central cog in *The Hobbit's* narrative machinery but a vital component of its commercial strategy, ensuring the films' longevity in the theatrical marketplace and afterlife on ancillary media like DVD/Blu-ray, streaming services, and syndicated TV exhibitions (a quick note of interest: during the drafting of this chapter in January/February 2017, ITV2 somewhat serendipitously ran a weekly series of *Hobbit* screenings that led directly into the *Rings* trilogy, opening the entire story—and its transtextual linkages—to a more casual audience).

So, rather than attempt to wrestle *The Hobbit* into a more traditional conception of film authorship against which it has been shown to be incompatible we can diagnose *The Hobbit's* authorial condition through an elaboration of Umberto Eco's notes on the 'cult movie'.<sup>94</sup> *Casablanca*, Eco writes, has become a cult object because its audience has acknowledged within it a cast of widely recognisable archetypes arranged into a set of "'magic" intertextual frames' that 'provokes in the addressee a sort of intense emotion accompanied by the vague feeling of *déjà vu* that everybody

<sup>93</sup> 'An Unexpected Briefing #AirNZSafetyVideo', *YouTube* (31 October 2012) <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBIRbrB\\_Gnc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBIRbrB_Gnc)> [accessed 13 March 2017].

<sup>94</sup> Umberto Eco, "'Casablanca": Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage', *SubStance*, 14.2.47 (1985), 3-12 (p. 10).

yearns to see again.<sup>95</sup> These intertextual frames, comprised of ‘already recorded narrative situations’, guide the spectator on ‘*inferential walks*’ outside the text.<sup>96</sup> The spectator is led to other films, yes, but also to more transcendent mythic prototypes such as ‘The Magic Key’ (the letters of transit), ‘The Desperate Lover’ (Rick), and ‘The Faithful Servant and his Beloved Master’ (Sam/Rick, whom Eco links to Sancho Panza/Don Quixote).<sup>97</sup> These extra-textual spectatorial quests for ‘analogous “topoi”, themes, or motives’ are not, as Eco says,

mere whimsical initiatives on the part of the reader, but are elicited by discursive structures and foreseen by the whole textual strategy as indispensable components of the construction of the *fabula*.<sup>98</sup>

*Casablanca*, impregnated as it is with these archetypal intertextual frames, is therefore ‘not *one* movie. It is “the movies.”’<sup>99</sup> However, Eco contends that *Casablanca* does not necessarily achieve its mystical sorcery by design; its cult status is a not unwelcome by-product of a unique syncretism of circumstance, personnel, politics, and culture. In a postmodern age, though, Eco decries that movies are being ‘*born in order to become cult objects*’ and that ‘cult has become the normal way of enjoying movies.’<sup>100</sup> We now live in a ‘meta-semiosical [...] cult culture’ awash with self-cultifying artworks created by ‘semiotically nourished authors working for a culture of instinctive semioticians.’<sup>101</sup> Henry Jenkins sees these cultish tendencies as especially prevalent in our current transmedia climate wherein the ‘economic logic of a horizontally integrated entertainment industry [...] dictates the flow of content across media.’<sup>102</sup> Thus, whilst ‘true’ cult films like *Casablanca* reference *exterior* texts, the commodification of cult sees texts increasingly referring to *themselves* (i.e. *The Force Awakens*’ nostalgic evocation of *A New Hope*). The self-reflexive cultification of films, then, serves a critical economic role

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 32.

<sup>97</sup> Eco, ‘Cult Movies’, pp. 8-9.

<sup>98</sup> Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, p. 32.

<sup>99</sup> Eco, ‘Cult Movies’, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), p. 96.

in that a franchise's internal co-dependence secures the reciprocal success of all of its entries and associated products. Moreover, Jenkins writes,

The film's endless borrowings also spark audience response. Layers upon layers of references catalyze and sustain our epistemophilia; these gaps and excesses provide openings for the many different knowledge communities that spring up around these cult movies to display their expertise, dig deep into their libraries, and bring their minds to bear on a text that promises a bottomless pit of secrets.<sup>103</sup>

That this leaves the isolated work rather narratively bereft is a necessary consequence of such contextual consolidation. Yet, as Jenkins suggests, 'the cult film need not be well made [...] [nor] coherent: the more different directions it pushes, the more different communities it can sustain and the more different experiences it can provide, the better.'<sup>104</sup> 'The cult film is made to be quoted,' he continues, 'because it is made from quotes.'<sup>105</sup> We could go further in stating that the cult film exists purely as a platform for quotations and a playpen for the spectator's quotational activities.

Concordantly, *The Hobbit* is noteworthy as it stands at the intersection of various cult phenomena: the literary cult of Tolkien, the cinematic cult of *The Lord of the Rings*, the auteurist cult of Jackson. Its ostentatious authorship, enforced by the tactical blitzkrieg of nostalgic transtextual allusions, supplicates these communities to 'walk' beyond the boundaries of the filmic text and augment the *fabula* with added significance (and pleasure) derived from their knowledge of other texts. Its cultism is not a classification consecrated over years by a fawning fandom like *Casablanca* or, say, the original *Star Wars*, but what Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton call a self-conscious 'performed cultism' (in this sense, it may be best to distinguish 'cult' as an *a posteriori* condition from 'cult' as a *a priori* process).<sup>106</sup> Thus, *The Hobbit* represents the terminal textualisation of fetishistic promotional hypernarrative [cf. 3.iii]. But *The Hobbit* is also embroiled in the wider cult of Hollywood. Mathijs and Sexton note that conceptions of Hollywood-as-cult can be problematic given that its products are concurrently, paradoxically, 'mainstream and marginal, center and periphery', but the self-

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>106</sup> Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema: An Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 224.

cultification of the Hollywood film—the reception of which Mathijs and Sexton state is ‘drenched with a nostalgic yearning for an idealized past, a sense of belonging that can only be located outside of the present reality’—is an essential component of twenty-first century blockbuster aesthetics.<sup>107</sup> Take *Creed*, for example, a soft-reboot/pseudo-remake of the first *Rocky* film (which was also rehashed in 2006’s *Rocky Balboa*) that recasts Rocky in the pedagogic role originally filled by Mickey and, later, Apollo Creed—whose son now stands as the pupil. Staying momentarily with Sylvester Stallone, *The Expendables* series hinges on its audience’s literacy in 1980s’ action-movie clichés. *Jurassic World* is a film explicitly designed to evoke *Jurassic Park* at every turn: notice, for instance, the parallelisms between Claire (*World*) and Grant (*Park*) luring a Tyrannosaurus Rex out of its enclosure with a red flare [fig. 5.91-92]. And, of course, *The Force Awakens* gains its emotional resonance through the redistribution of *A New Hope*’s story, characters, and *mise-en-scène* [cf. 4.ii]. In fact, with a filmography so dependent on spectatorial ‘walks’—*Mission: Impossible III* recycles much of the franchise’s prominent iconographies [fig. 5.93-94], *Super 8* insists on an acknowledgment of Steven Spielberg, *Star Trek Into Darkness* parrots *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*—the performance of cultish transtextuality can be deemed a central component of J.J. Abrams’ authorial identity. So, standing as it does as a signifier for a new mode of cinematic discourse, *The Hobbit* is an integral key text in our current Hollywood environment; that it achieves its cultism through a strategic dispensation of ‘Jackson’ makes an authorial analysis not only wholly valid—irrespective of its lack of resemblance to a conventional auteurist critique—but increasingly relevant to an understanding of contemporary film style.

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

#### 5.iv – Familiarity Breeds Content

Whilst an understanding of *The Hobbit*'s authorship cannot be separated from a corresponding apprehension of the films' commercial burdens, this does not mean that *Interstellar* is unbound by the same obligations. Remember, in 5.i we noted the corporate wrangling for *Interstellar*'s distribution rights so it would be imprudent to presume that the Nolan brand is exempt from the same kind of industrial mediation as *Star Wars* or the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Consequently, *Interstellar* can be read as an attempt to recodify 'Nolan' from its Batman heritage into a more individualistic, expressive, Romantic image that will then serve a promotional function in the marketing of new Nolan pictures, such as the upcoming *Dunkirk* whose advertising campaign seems to be stretching the gap between 'Classic Nolan' and 'New Nolan' even wider than *Interstellar*'s paratexts did in 2013/4. That said, it is clear in the differentiation between *Interstellar* and *The Hobbit* that there are different kinds of authorship—something altogether neglected by auteurism outside of its arbitrary distinction between *auteur* and *metteur-en-scène*—as well as varying types of transtextuality. It is here that I should note that the employment of 'transtext' throughout this thesis instead of the more commonplace 'intertext' has been a conspicuous choice. In this, I follow Gérard Genette whose use of *transtextuality* encompasses a schema of variable textual exchanges, among which *intertextuality* is only one sort. As a means of closing, then, I will expand upon Genette's transtextual categories, in order of increasing spectatorial involvement, and outline how they may be brought to bear upon a consideration of twenty-first century Hollywood authorship [NB: As I have already spoken at great length about *paratextuality* throughout this thesis, particularly in **Part Two**, I will not re-tread those ideas here—for a broad summary of authorial paratextuality, please refer to **Conclusion**].

So our first port of call is, indeed, *intertextuality*, which Genette defines along orthodox Bakhtinian/Kristevan dialogic lines as 'the literal presence (more or less literal, whether integral or not) of one text within another.'<sup>108</sup> We can further define intertextuality as reference to texts outside

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<sup>108</sup> Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p. 81.

the narrative/authorial directory. *Interstellar* is a film replete with intertextuality. Of course, we already have the FCD's quotation of *The Dust Bowl* [cf. 5.iii] but there are also auditory allusions in Hans Zimmer's score. The church organ's arpeggiated Philip Glassisms invoke the empyreal scope of *Koyaanisqatsi* and its ominous swells suitably recall *2001*'s use of Richard Strauss' 'Also Sprach Zarathustra, op. 30'. The junction to *2001* is buttressed by the film's silent, protracted space sequences and the robot TARS' sable columnar construction which summons Kubrick's alien monoliths (TARS even impersonates HAL when he jokingly threatens to eject the crew out of the *Endurance*'s airlock). Moreover, Romilly's visual explanation of wormholes—he folds a piece of paper, pierces it with a pencil, and unfolds to demonstrate how wormholes allow one to hop across space—is almost exactly the same as Dr Weir's in *Event Horizon*. Following Julia Kristeva, such intertextual units can be read 'horizontally' (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as vertically (the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus [sic]).<sup>109</sup> Put otherwise, if a spectator is unaware of *Event Horizon* they will accept the *Interstellar* FCD's quotation as the sole property of 'Nolan' (and to give a concrete example: on my first viewing of *Interstellar*, long before researching the film for this thesis, I did not realise that its interviewees had been taken from *The Dust Bowl* as I had not yet seen the documentary). However, if the spectator acknowledges intertext-as-intertext this activates a certain knowledge scheme derived from their pre-existing textual competence that can be used to direct expectations and interpretations. The pastiche of *Event Horizon* may, upon recalling memories of that film's doomed expedition through a wormhole, entreat the spectator to worry about the *Endurance*'s imminent passage through its own wormhole in *Interstellar*. That such a horror never comes to pass is just another example of the *Interstellar* FCD's many narratorial bluffs.

Yet we must be careful when linking intertextuality to authorship given that, to quote Linda Hutcheon, poststructuralists like Roland Barthes used intertextuality to replace 'the challenged

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<sup>109</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64-91 (p. 66).



author-text relationship with one between reader and text' [cf. 2.i].<sup>110</sup> Indeed, our awareness of *Koyaanisqatsi*, 2001, and *Event Horizon* in *Interstellar* has little to do with 'Nolan'. Concordantly, it may seem provident to ascribe *Interstellar's* intertextuality not to Nolan or 'Nolan' but the wider practices of postmodern production, which, as Hutcheon says, 'poses new questions about reference.'<sup>111</sup> She explains:

The issue is no longer "to what empirically real object in the past does the language of history refer?"; it is more "to which discursive context could this language belong? To which prior textualizations must we refer?"<sup>112</sup>

If all texts are intertexts, intertextuality appears to lose its value as an authorial criterion as only *some* texts, in our eyes at least, will be seen as 'authored' [cf. 5.iii]. Yet *Interstellar's* embedded impression of 2001, which provokes recollections of the anterior text as well as Kubrick's cultural enormity, facilitates the transfer of its referent's qualities onto itself. Intertext, in this instance, serves a qualitative as well as a hermeneutic function, leeching Kubrick's renown and transplanting it onto the narrative's implied Nolan. Intertextuality, then, may not be uniquely authorial, but it can be used to bolster an author's image.

Another of Genette's transtextual categories that possesses a certain pertinence to authorship is *hypertextuality*, defined as 'any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.'<sup>113</sup> Unlike *metatext*, a 'derivation [...] of a descriptive or intellectual kind' that "'speaks" about a second text' — with this thesis, much as all critical writing, being a model of metatextuality — hypertextuality designates a different type of textual relationship.<sup>114</sup> Genette writes that hypertext

may yet be of another kind such as text B not speaking of text A at all but being unable to exist, as such, without A, from which it originates through a process I shall provisionally call *transformation*, and which it consequently

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<sup>110</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 126.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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

<sup>113</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

evokes more or less perceptibly without necessarily speaking of it or citing it.<sup>115</sup>

We have already discussed hypertextuality with regards the trailer's ontological mechanics in **3.iii** and there are clearly hypertextual elements at play in *The Hobbit's* assimilation and mutation of *The Lord of the Rings*, but Genette's division within hypertextuality between 'transformation' and 'imitation' opens the way for our own embellishments.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, I designate under hypertextuality two sub-categories: *autotextuality* and *intratextuality*. Note that I do not necessarily abide by Brian Boyd's description of these terms and instead use them to separate a hypertextuality that *transforms* authorial hypotexts that are not narratively related to the hypertext (autotextuality) and a hypertextuality wherein the hypertext *imitates* hypotexts within its own narrative canon, which may or may not be further conjoined to the hypertext by a shared author (intratextuality).<sup>117</sup>

In its adoption and transformation of the Nolan mind-game syntax, whilst still being wholly narratively independent, *Interstellar* is consequently a case of autotextuality. Moreover we can classify classical auteurism as autotextual criticism. Conversely, *The Hobbit's* reflexive cultism is intratextual. Intratextuality, like intertextuality, is not in itself authorial, and many so-called 'cult' intratexts are not made by those who birthed their hypotexts (i.e., *Jurassic World's* Colin Trevorrow is not Steven Spielberg nor is J.J. Abrams George Lucas) although intratextuality can serve that selfsame parasitical identifying function as intertextuality. In fact, being that intratextuality is much more brutish in its allusive force than intertextuality, that quality transferral seen with *Interstellar* and *2001* is exceedingly more potent in intratextual works. Had *The Hobbit* been made by Guillermo del Toro, it would still have been intratextual (guided by the precepts of conglomerate cult aesthetics), but the introduction of del Toro's own autotextuality would have invariably weakened its connectivity to *Rings*. Thus, *The Hobbit's* almighty autotextual strength works to calcify its intratextuality. So it appears that a text may

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

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>117</sup> Brian Boyd, 'Words, Works and Worlds in Joyce and Nabokov: Or Intertextuality, Intratextuality, Supratextuality, Infratextuality, Extratextuality and Autotextuality in Modernist and Postmodernist Narrative Discourse', *Cycnos*, 12.2 (1995) <<http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1443>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2, para. 11 of 46.

be by turns intertextual, autotextual, *and* intratextual; the types are not mutually exclusive and can quite easily co-exist. As Genette says, 'one must not view the five types of transtextuality as separate and absolute categories without any reciprocal contact or overlapping', and there is indeed a fluidity between transtextual registers: *Interstellar* augments its autotextuality with intertextuality; *The Hobbit* fortifies its intratextuality with autotextuality.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, when I say *Interstellar* is autotextual and *The Hobbit* is intratextual I am simply referring to their dominant hypertextual modality.

Genette's final transtextual category is *architextuality*, 'the entire set of general or transcendent categories—types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres—from which emerges each singular text.'<sup>119</sup> Now, given that all Hollywood films have a taxonomic '*architexture*'—whether in terms of genre (the superhero film), industrial tendency (the prequel, sequel, reboot, remake), or cultural fad (the Young-Adult literary adaptation post-*Twilight*)—just as how all postmodern texts can be said to be intertextual, we must modify this category to make it applicable to our conception of authorship.<sup>120</sup> Therefore I tentatively coin the term *unitextuality* to designate those interconnected works that spring from a unified base of *both* a common narrative and author. Here I depart from Genette who states that architextuality 'involves a relationship that is completely silent' wherein 'the text itself is not supposed to know, and consequently not meant to declare, its generic quality.'<sup>121</sup> My notion of unitextuality instead encompasses those texts that overtly affirm their inclusion within a specific semantic field and to demonstrate the operations of unitextuality I offer a brief overview of perhaps the most dominant authorial force of Hollywood's recent history, which is not a person but a corporate entity: Marvel Studios.

First of all, it would be prudent to differentiate *The Hobbit's* auto-intratextuality from the unitextuality of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. At first glance they seem indistinguishable, but where *The Hobbit* comprises a closed narrative set with *The Lord of the Rings*, Marvel's unitextual

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<sup>118</sup> Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Genette, *The Architext*, p. 82.

<sup>121</sup> Genette, *Palimpsests*, p. 4.

narrative is perpetually distended and dispersed across several individual properties whose autonomy is subsumed under the overarching Marvel brand. Whilst *The Hobbit* is contingent on *Rings*, *Rings* has a self-sufficient existence outside of *The Hobbit*; although the *Iron Man*, *Captain America*, and *Thor* series possess a certain degree of internal coherency when taken on their own, they each figure into one another (via cameos, Easter Eggs, shared MacGuffins, post-credit teasers, and a consolidated stylistic and thematic vocabulary) to construct what Matt Hills terms a *hyperdiegesis*: 'a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension.'<sup>122</sup> To illustrate: 2016's *Captain America: Civil War* obviously necessitates textual comprehension of its direct predecessors *Captain America: The First Avenger* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (that itself has vital narrative components annexed in the *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* TV series), but it also demands an understanding of *Ant-Man*, which introduces Scott Lang into the Universe, and *The Avengers: Age of Ultron*, which explains Thor and Hulk's absence and moreover formulates the guilt that impels Tony Stark to sign *Civil War's* Sokovia Accords. In turn, *Age of Ultron* demands an understanding of *Iron Man 3*, *Thor: The Dark World*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, and *The Avengers* (which in turn demands an understanding of *Iron Man* and *Iron Man 2*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Thor*, and *The Incredible Hulk*).

Thus the Marvel Cinematic Universe's hyperdiegesis constitutes a prime example of Hills' 'endlessly deferred narrative' given that *Civil War* is itself only a stepping stone to *Avengers: Infinity War* in 2018.<sup>123</sup> In a video released to Marvel Entertainment's YouTube channel on 10 February 2017 to celebrate the start of *Infinity War's* principal photography (*à la The Hobbit's* first production diary [cf. 5.ii]), producer Kevin Feige explicates Marvel's narrative sensibility:

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<sup>122</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 104.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

What we always try to do at Marvel Studios, where we're building a Cinematic Universe, is look at the big picture, how can things relate across movies and across years. *Avengers: Infinity War* is the culmination of the entire Marvel Cinematic Universe, as started in May of 2008 with the release of *Iron Man 1*. And it really is an unprecedented culmination of a series of films, interlinked together, which at the time had never been done before. And, for us, the important thing is making it all come together.<sup>124</sup>

Yet despite Feige's assertions that *Infinity War* is the apex of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with a release schedule blocked out until 2019 and germinating plans for a Phase Four set of films (that will inevitably lead to yet another *Avengers* mega-picture), it is not unreasonable to expect that *Infinity War*, while tying up some of the major plotlines of Phases One through Three like Thanos and the Infinity Stones, will introduce new narrative elements which it will then defer to subsequent films.

This, Bart Beaty suggests, creates an intense 'insider/outsider' binary within the Marvel audience.<sup>125</sup> Indeed, *Civil War* is utterly impenetrable for a neophyte Marvel spectator and its 'closed' continuity 'potentially limits the audience but also generates a more affectively engaged one' in its so-called hardcores.<sup>126</sup> This plays into the cultural economy of fandom where, Beaty explains, 'capital is accrued through [...] mastery of the arcane backstories that organize the fictional collaborative worlds inhabited by superhero characters.'<sup>127</sup> The Marvel Cinematic Universe exploits its fandom's insider aspirations by scattering vital story elements across all of its films and this has a patent 'mercantile attraction', to quote Beaty.<sup>128</sup> For example, *Guardians of the Galaxy* was a rather risky venture for Marvel Studios as it was their first project not to feature any of their more prominent attractors [cf. **3.iv**]; unlike Captain America and Iron Man, who have been percolating around the popular consciousness since 1941 and 1963, the Guardians' first print appearance was in 2008 and despite the overwhelming success of superhero movies over the past decade comic-books remain a marginalised, exclusive, niche medium. To demonstrate: in 2015, the overall North American print and digital

<sup>124</sup> 'Action...Avengers: Infinity War', *YouTube* (10 February 2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAOzrChqmd0>> [accessed 13 March 2017] 00:00:58.

<sup>125</sup> Bart Beaty, 'Superhero fan service: Audience strategies in the contemporary interlinked Hollywood blockbuster', *The Information Society*, 32.5 (2016), 318-25 (p. 318).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

comic-book industry, comprising hundreds of lines and thousands of issues from dozens of publishers, had an estimated market size of \$1.03 billion.<sup>129</sup> Contrastively, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, a single film, earned \$459,005,868 domestic in the same year. So to ensure *Guardians'* success, Marvel shrewdly used the film as an expository platform for arch-villain Thanos, who had previously only been seen in *The Avengers* and *Age of Ultron's* post-credit teasers. If a spectator wants the full story, to be 'inside', they must patronise *Guardians* or be relegated to the 'outside'. Furthermore, *Guardians'* critical and commercial windfall—it boasts 2014's third highest worldwide gross [cf. **table 2** in **3.iv**—has turned Star-Lord and Groot into attractors themselves, and a major component of *Infinity War's* hype is now rooted in the ultimate coming together of the Avengers and the Guardians (much as how *The Avengers* promised the first cinematic union of Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and Hulk). Ergo, an actualisation of *Guardians*, and corresponding purchase of its home-video release, is becoming exponentially integral to a complete understanding of the wider Cinematic Universe.

Therefore it is curious to note that whilst television shows, such as HBO's *Game of Thrones*, have adopted an increasingly cinematic aesthetic—with the Miguel Sapochnik-directed *Thrones* episodes 'Battle of the Bastards' and 'The Winds of Winter' standing as watersheds in the form's stylistic ascendancy, the former featuring huge battle scenes usually reserved for big-budget blockbusters and the latter opening with a largely silent eighteen-minute montage as Cersei Lannister executes a plot to murder all of her enemies (with, perhaps, a little intertextual nod to *The Godfather's* baptism sequence)—the unitextual serialisation of the Marvel Cinematic Universe indicates Hollywood's move into a more procedurally televisual practice. Much as how television shows sublimate an assembly of directors and writers underneath a showrunner who stands as the show's 'auteur'—i.e., *Mad Men's* Matthew Weiner, *Breaking Bad's* Vince Gilligan, *Game of Thrones'* David Benioff and D.B. Weiss (who have interestingly taken more and more of *Thrones'* 'authorship' from series creator George R.R. Martin as the seasons have progressed)—Marvel assimilates individual

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<sup>129</sup> 'Comic Book Sales by Year', *Comichron* (n.d.) <<http://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

authorship within its larger brand identity. It should be clarified that while Marvel originally employed directors with a certain individualistic cinematic prestige during its initial Phase of films (Joss Whedon, Kenneth Branagh, Jon Favreau, Joe Johnston), the studio is now much less selective in its directors who are recruited from a wider talent pool: *Winter Soldier*, *Civil War*, and *Infinity War*'s directorial team of Anthony and Joe Russo were previously known mainly for their work on television comedies *Arrested Development* and *Community* as well as the Owen Wilson vehicle *You, Me and Dupree*; *Thor: The Dark World*'s Alan Taylor, who has a long lineage in television with directorial credits for *Oz*, *The Sopranos*, and *Lost*, was drafted from *Game of Thrones*. And this has corresponded with a noticeable stylistic homogenisation within the Cinematic Universe: where Johnston's *Captain America* exudes a similitude to *The Rocketeer*'s nostalgic derring-do and Branagh's *Thor* boasts some minor Shakespearean inflections, *Civil War* demonstrates Marvel's current aesthetic utilitarianism where basic shot/reverse-shot close-up dyads, spasmodic handheld cameras, and rapid-fire editing are the orders of the day. Now, a cynic would attribute this to the films' rushed productions (Marvel releases three films a year) as well as top-down executive interference and would find supporting evidence in Marvel's public disputes with ex-directors Joss Whedon and Edgar Wright—who had been planning an *Ant-Man* film since 2006 but divorced Marvel on 23 May 2014, citing 'differences in their vision of the film', to be replaced by *Yes Man*'s Peyton Reed only two weeks later on 7 June.<sup>130</sup> The cynic would also likely take pains to stress how this formal shift coincided with Disney's purchase of Marvel in 2009. However, putting gossip and inference aside, this aesthetic homomorphism is essential to the Marvel Cinematic Universe's authorial *unitexture*.

Elizabeth Evans suggests that the coherence of transmedia stories, like the Marvel Cinematic Universe, 'emerges from the point of production; more specifically, transmedia texts have a unified "author"'.<sup>131</sup> Hills states that 'it is the *auteur* which acts as a point of coherence and continuity in

<sup>130</sup> Marc Graser, 'Edgar Wright Exits Marvel's "Ant-Man" as Director', *Variety* (23 May 2014) <<http://variety.com/2014/film/news/edgar-wright-exits-marvels-ant-man-as-director-1201190458/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 4 of 11.

<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), p. 31.

relation to the world of the media cult' and, moreover, that auteurism 'brings with it an ideology of quality.'<sup>132</sup> And Martin Flanagan et al. write that 'Marvel channels authorial power into the form that best serves its continuing serial plan: the shared universe.'<sup>133</sup> Although Flanagan and his colleagues are the only ones to speak specifically of Marvel in this instance, these three texts stress the unifying importance authorship has on the integrity of the cult hyperdiegesis. But Marvel's is not the humanistic authorship valorised by auteurism. True, Marvel utilised the individual autotextualities of Whedon and co. in its primary Phase to erect a brand identity, but now that identity has been codified and internalised by the global audience (to whom the term 'Marvel movie' is common parlance), Marvel has adopted a unitextual house style across its entire output. Therefore, as Leora Hadras explains,

The brand identity is derived from the storyworld: its characters, its rules, its aesthetics, its geography, its genre trapping and style all play their part in invoking familiarity in the consumer, and all of these must adhere to a degree of consistency. This is not merely diegetic consistency, but also a stylistic and thematic one.<sup>134</sup>

The influx of TV directors schooled in a medium that champions this kind of top-down executive authorship is thus indicative of Marvel Studios' status as a neo-classical production line akin to 1940s' Warner Bros. [cf. 3.ii]. And much like Warners, who subsumed directors like John Huston into its corporate character, Marvel uses its authorship to legitimate those films bearing its insignia (as such, autotextuality in Phase Three-era Marvel would actually serve to threaten the stability of its Universe's branded unitexture—hence Wright's expulsion). And this is particularly important for Marvel Studios as they do not own the cinematic rights to all of Marvel Comics' characters: Fox has the X-Men and Fantastic Four, Sony *had* Spider-Man. Thus, Spider-Man's inclusion in *Civil War* and introduction into the Cinematic Universe (which, indeed, played a massive role in constructing hype for the film) works to delegitimise Sony's versions of the character and canonise its own: Tom

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<sup>132</sup> Hills, *Fan Cultures*, p. 99.

<sup>133</sup> Martin Flanagan et al., *The Marvel Studios Phenomenon: Inside a Transmedia Universe* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 46.

<sup>134</sup> Leora Hadras, 'Authorship and Authenticity in the Transmedia Brand: The Case of *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*', *Networking Knowledge*, 7.1 (2014), 7-17 (p. 8).



Holland has been crowned as the authentic Peter Parker; Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield are now disgraced as mere pretenders in spandex.

Although the term ‘cinematic universe’ is a novel nomenclature, unitextual hyperdiegeses are not a new phenomenon: literature has, among many others, H.P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos and J.R.R. Tolkien’s legendarium that reaches far beyond *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* to posthumously published works *The Silmarillion*, *Unfinished Tales*, and *The Children of Húrin*; Marvel has itself traded in trans-diegetic narratives since the 1960s with its co-dependent comic-book lines, which, as Beaty points out, provided a template for their own Cinematic Universe;<sup>135</sup> and in film, Kevin Smith has been building his own View Askewniverse since *Clerks* in 1994. But now, with forthcoming Marvel-inspired cinematic universes from all of the major studios—Paramount’s *Transformers/G.I. Joe/Hasbro* combined universe; Sony’s *Men in Black/Jump Street* universe; Universal’s rebooted monster universe that is beginning later this year with the remake of *The Mummy* starring Tom Cruise (not to be confused with Legendary’s *Godzilla v King Kong MonsterVerse*); Disney’s *Star Wars*, which is increasingly looking like a hyperdiegesis what with 2016’s *Rogue One* and the upcoming Han Solo spin-off; and, of course, Warners’ J.K. Rowling’s Wizarding World and their in-progress DC Extended Universe that is shortly receiving its first crossover mega-picture *Justice League* (following hot on the heels of last year’s stage-setting *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*)—an understanding and further interrogation of corporate unitextual authorship is only going to become more germane to contemporary Hollywood cinema over the coming years.

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<sup>135</sup> Beaty, ‘Superhero fan service’, p. 319.

## Conclusion

# The Genius of the System; The System of 'Genius'

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'The key binaries we must move beyond are that of art and promotion, text and ad, show and peripheral. What is an ad, after all, but an attempt to brand something, or, reworded, an attempt to create a text, a narrative for, and an experience of something?'  
Jonathan Gray (2010)<sup>1</sup>

'Auteurism is only useful as a critical tool as long as it generates good, exciting results — helping us to make new discoveries.'  
Adrian Martin (2004)<sup>2</sup>

'Auteurs may exist but they do so by the grace of spectators.'  
Dudley Andrew (1993)<sup>3</sup>

Ever since the auteur revolution of the 1950s, discussions about film art have invariably been discussions about film artists (whether individualistic, 'dead', discursive, implied, or Vulgar). This thesis, through a three-tiered theoretical/industrial/textual analytical framework, has encountered orthodox conceptions of 'the film artist' (i.e., the director-auteur) and found them wanting. As an impartial methodological instrument, auteurism is largely useless. Granted, *Cahiers du Cinéma's* notion of *mise-en-scène* and cine-structuralism's empiricist metamorphosis of authorial thematics still offer some utility, but only when condensed and assimilated into a broader heuristic of narratorial response dissociated from auteurism's traditional evaluative bent epitomised by Andrew Sarris. Mired as it is in a subjectivist quagmire of myopic theoretical tautologies, it would seem sagacious to eject a recalcitrant superannuated auteurism from the critical lexicon. However, 'the auteur' is perhaps more apposite to Hollywood cinema today than it ever was in auteurism's golden years, given that the bottom-up critical cult of auteurism has transmogrified into a top-down pseudo-auteurist cultism in production, promotion, and distribution.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Gray, "Coming Up Next": Promos in the Future of Television and Television Studies', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 38.2 (2010), 54-7 (p. 55).

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Martin, 'Possessory Credit', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 45.1 (Spring 2004), 95-9 (p. 97).

<sup>3</sup> Dudley Andrew, 'The Unauthorized Auteur Today', in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, ed. Jim Collins et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 77-85 (p. 80).

Auteurism is fundamental to twenty-first century Hollywood's continued prosperity. Although Hollywood marketing has always traded in authorial capital to some degree, the movie studios' absorption into global corporations obsessed with brand synergy and art-as-merchandise has apotheosised the auteur as a nonpareil marketplace attraction. Conglomerate Hollywood depends upon a brigade of diverse, diffusible brands that can be arranged and rearranged into a virtually interminable number of permutations. In what I call the cinema of attractors, even megabrands such as Batman may no longer be sufficient to independently support a tentpole: hence the brand-syntheses Batman + Superman + Wonder Woman in 2016's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, Batman + The Joker + The Flash in *Suicide Squad*, and Batman + Lego + Harry Potter + Doctor Who, etc. in 2017's *The Lego Batman Movie*. Yet these brand consortiums are still not enough to mitigate the multi-million-dollar gamble that every mainstream movie now poses. Enter the auteur-brand's soothing hand: *Batman v Superman* and the soon-to-be-released *Justice League* have Zack Snyder, *Suicide Squad* had David Ayer, and *Lego Batman* has Chris McKay, animation co-director of 2014's massively popular *The Lego Movie*. Commercialised auteurism supplies the marketing machine a puissant humanistic echelon of brand icons that can be mobilised to differentiate and aggrandise their products in an overpopulated market and moreover guarantee their requisite familiarity. A director's promotional occupancy—through the exploitation of Romantic and auteurist maxims *art demands an artist* and *the director is the film artist*—essentially confirms the film as the offspring of a singular creative consciousness and not a homogenised corporate commodity; that the film possesses aesthetic/thematic value because it has been attributed to a specific human agent; and that that human agent is remarkable due to their onymity. Alluring fantasies, to be sure, but not exempt from corporate caprice. For example, Ben Affleck (whose 2012 film *Argo* won the Academy Award for Best Picture) was originally slated to write and direct the DC Extended Universe's forthcoming solo Batman film. In March 2016, David Izkoff even quoted Sue Kroll, Warner Bros.' President of

Worldwide Marketing and Distribution, as saying Warners are ‘in the Ben Affleck business.’<sup>4</sup> However, after his Dennis Lehane adaptation *Live by Night* reportedly lost Warners \$75 million in early 2017, Affleck was hastily evicted from the director’s chair and his script discarded.<sup>5</sup> In his place now stands Matt Reeves, a more fiscally reliable ‘brand’ that, while bereft of Affleck’s Oscar boons, bears a not-insignificant weight in cult currency due to the combined renown of *Cloverfield*, *Let Me In*, and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*.

The industrial mediation of authorial personae is readily evident in print epitexts that acculturate precise product identities rooted in an acknowledged source—be that a star, a studio, or, of course, a director. And whilst the past decade has seen the idea of the ‘studio’ (i.e., Marvel) reclaim some of the persuasive might it once possessed in the Classical period, the director-as-brand wields an unassailable aura of authorial individuality. For instance, compare the theatrical release and award-season re-release posters for 2013’s *Gravity*: the former emphasises the film’s high-concept spectacle with imagery of an astronaut marooned in space, its populist appeal cemented by Sandra Bullock and George Clooney’s pre-eminence [fig. C.1]; the latter, which stresses that director Alfonso Cuarón has won a Golden Globe and been Oscar-nominated for ‘THE BEST REVIEWED FILM OF THE YEAR’, shows Bullock curled into a zero-gravity foetal position with the airlock behind her standing as a make-shift womb, thereby symbolising the narrative’s thematic focus on rebirth and engendering a more aesthetically and philosophically profound vision of the film [fig. C.2]. Both paratexts refer to same product but their promotional projections diverge markedly as do the conjectural narrative images they instigate. Where the initial poster’s focus on star-names and spectacle might impel a spectator to link *Gravity* to other disaster movies like *Speed* (Bullock) or *The Perfect Storm* (Clooney) the re-release sheet assembles a much more rarefied vision that elevates *Gravity* out of its base blockbuster values, one accessible even to those consumers unfamiliar with films like *Children of Men*

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<sup>4</sup> David Itzkoff, ‘Ben Affleck’s “Broken” Batman’, *The New York Times* (14 March 2016) <[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/movies/ben-affleck-batman-v-superman-dawn-of-justice-interview.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/movies/ben-affleck-batman-v-superman-dawn-of-justice-interview.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&_r=0)> [accessed 16 March 2016] para. 40 of 63.

<sup>5</sup> Brent Lang, ‘Ben Affleck’s “Live by Night” Flop Results in \$75 Million Loss (EXCLUSIVE)’, *Variety* (26 January 2017) <<http://variety.com/2017/film/news/ben-affleck-live-by-night-flop-1201971025/>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 2 of 6.

or *Y Tu Mamá También*. The fetishisation of Cuarón's award success begets a meta-conceptual 'artwork' frame that activates a certain attitude towards the work which is cognitively consolidated under an apprehension of 'authored' artistic unity; an *artist's a priori* presentation entails the impression that we are also being offered *art*.

The artist need not be identified by a proper name for this effect to be achieved. In fact, there may be institutional determinants which compel a certain authorial obfuscation. Take 2016's *Hacksaw Ridge*, Mel Gibson's directorial comeback after being purportedly 'blacklisted' for a string of controversies in the mid-2000s.<sup>6</sup> As *persona non grata*, identifying Gibson in this instance could have severely impinged the film's commercial prospects. Therefore, *Hacksaw Ridge's* poster proclaims: 'FROM THE ACCLAIMED DIRECTOR OF BRAVEHEART AND THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST' [fig. C.3]— a far cry from 'MEL GIBSON'S APOCALYPTO' in 2006 [fig. C.4] and *The Passion of the Christ*, which was marketed as 'A MEL GIBSON FILM' in 2004 [fig. C.5]. Yet despite Gibson's quasi-anonymity, Summit Entertainment was still able to utilise Gibson's authorial heritage to authenticate and 'authorise' their film. In a somewhat more troubling example, none of *Zero Dark Thirty's* print epitexts personally identify Kathryn Bigelow, opting instead for the non-gendered 'THE ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING [...] DIRECTOR OF *THE HURT LOCKER*' [Fig. C.6]. It seems Columbia were unwilling to risk alienating their target male demographic by acknowledging that a woman could make a 'macho' genre film, irrespective of Bigelow's outstanding twenty-plus-year pedigree in action cinema. Such can be said for *The Hurt Locker* itself, although interestingly its German poster is headed by 'VON DER ERFOLGSREGISSEURIN KATHRYN BIGELOW GEFÄHRLICHE BRANDUNG UND STRANGE DAYS' ['From Kathryn Bigelow, the successful director of *Point Break* and *Strange Days*' – fig. C.7], perhaps indicating a schism between a phallogentric conservative Hollywood and a more progressive European system. Examples such as these demonstrate that commercialised authorship in the American film industry is concerned not with humanistic accreditation but a product profiling driven

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<sup>6</sup> Jason Guerrasio, 'The "Lethal Weapon" writer says Mel Gibson is "blacklisted" in Hollywood', *Business Insider UK* (20 May 2016) <<http://uk.businessinsider.com/shane-black-mel-gibson-is-being-blacklisted-2016-5?r=US&IR=T>> [accessed 13 March 2017] para. 10 of 21.

by autotextual associations. So not only do Hollywood paratexts project a glamorised authorial idyll abstracted from the realities of production, by interrogating how the promotional 'said' works to conceal its 'not-said' we can in turn reveal Hollywood's intrinsic politics, priorities, and prejudices.

Nevertheless, through their enticement of authorised narrative images *Gravity*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, and *Zero Dark Thirty*'s promotional materials enact potent primacy effects in prospective consumers: to respond to these paratexts is to be situated in a particular position that preforms the 'text'. Timothy Corrigan's statement upon discovering the commerce of auteurism in 1990—'An auteur film today seems to aspire more and more to a critical tautology, capable of being understood and consumed without being seen'—has accumulated a wealth of interest in the intervening years as promotional paratexts proliferated along with the internet.<sup>7</sup> The trailer epitext, the nucleus of any given film's promotional campaign, now commands immediate global attention thanks to social media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit as well as portable web devices and 4G mobile networks that enable wireless access to these services at any given moment. The trailer's hypercontinuity editing, which transmits a by-design indeterminate *syuzhet*, elicits the spectatorial creation of a utopian and self-seductive hyperfabula. *Dunkirk*'s trailer (which, at the time of writing, boasts 17,822,081 views) offers a fractured montage of disparate war scenes sequentially incoherent on their own terms: it is only when one recognises Christopher Nolan's name, hears the soundtrack's ticking clock, and consolidates the images within a broad conception of Nolan's sentimentalised post-*Interstellar* temporal tactics that an amorphous recognition of the film-to-be can be made.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the author acts as a unifying signifier for a nostalgically saturated schema of author-branded hypotexts that reflect positively onto the promotional hypertext, giving it its presumptive shape. But these authorial images are purposively rudimentary, assembled by phantom forces to be transmissible across a variety of media and recognisable (not necessarily readable) to the masses. The only requirement to be an auteur-brand in 2010s' Hollywood is that one possesses an identifiable

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy Corrigan, 'The Commerce of Auteurism: A Voice without Authority', *New German Critique*, 49 (1990), 43-57 (p. 50).

<sup>8</sup> 'Dunkirk – Trailer 1 [HD]', *YouTube* (14 December 2016) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-eMt3SrfFU>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

style that can be truncated to a trailer format; advancing Sarris' fusion of quality with aesthetics, the commercialised auteur does not indicate *content* so much as *value*. Thus, in Conglomerate Hollywood's cinema of attractors we not only have Michael Bay, formally distinguished and immediately discernible, but a squadron of Bay-lites like Jonathan Liebesman and Dave Green, whose Bay-produced *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movies licence Bay's branded style, and Bay copycats such as Peter Berg, director of *Transformers* rip-off *Battleship* that flaccidly pastiches the fetishised Bay syntax. Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it is also the surest and safest way for a risk-averse Hollywood to secure an audience.

However influential epitextual trailers and posters are in generating textual gateways, hypothetical (pre-)interpretations, and consumerist urges, the twenty-first century auteur's shrine is the home-video peritext. Situated in the same digital domain as the 'text', behind-the-scenes documentaries and commentaries gift branded auteurs faces, voices, and — most importantly — interpretations. And whilst not all directors exploit these platforms to didactically dictate meaning, their personalised excrescence in a medium that lionises intent nonetheless calcifies their authorial dominion. Within a text's diachronic lifespan, a commentary or making-of documentary can be pivotal in erecting an everlasting authorial identity that forever alters perception and opinion of a film — even if this 'author' carries little interpretive weight. Like their pre-release counterparts, home-video auteurs serve a predominantly value-driven purpose. DVD and Blu-ray 'special features' can transform an underappreciated or little-known director into an auteur and they can even recode an auteur's extra-textual personality and salvage an otherwise disappointing film, as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit's* Appendices did for Peter Jackson respectively. Home-video paratexts concretise an invincible authorial aura for their parent texts by foregrounding a Romanticised production narrative, fostering galvanised auteur-brands which can then be deployed in pre-release promotional programmes. In fact, home-video peritexts' auteurising capacities are so effective that we are now seeing an increasing distribution of epitextual 'production diaries' that adapt MOD/EPK formats to offer a heavily mediated and extremely affective glimpse into in-progress films. Through the use of

such video-blogs constructed specifically to pander to their fandoms, Warner Bros. and Disney were able to enact the processes of authorial value creation and textual actualisation for *The Hobbit* and *Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens* even before the films had begun shooting. Our analysis of online responses to *The Force Awakens'* ad campaign demonstrated that the *Force for Change* promos were probably more instrumental in generating irresistible needs for the film than its actual trailers, so it is very likely this form of promotion will become more central to advertising as distributors attempt to replicate *The Force Awakens'* gargantuan commercial success by mimicking its promotional strategy — and *Avengers: Infinity War's* announcement video shows that the diary epitext is well on its way to becoming the twenty-first century marketing machine's beating heart.

Encountering authorship's promotional function in our current Hollywood system necessitates an understanding of how spectators comprehend texts. Far from the Romantic ideal that postulates textual communication as direct and impervious transmission from source to recipient, this thesis has determined that not only is 'the spectator' to some degree responsible for the coherence of textual 'meaning', but that 'the author' is simply a conceptual impression deduced from the 'text' — which, given the supreme hermeneutic influence of supposedly peripheral paratexts, extends beyond the boundaries of the observable filmic work. Thus, with 'text' as a unique cognitive construct necessarily detached from the objective 'film', authors can infiltrate and integrate from the 'outside'. Useful as this conception undoubtedly is in accounting for our susceptibility to commercialised authorial discourse, it does not in itself explain authorship's narrative function in today's Hollywood. In order to challenge the substance of a commercialised auteurist culture and probe *how authorship works*, this thesis established an interrogative heuristic that examines how narratives effect, and are effected by, the application of authorial transtextuality. This fundamentally narratorial method does not presume that all works possess authorship (even though all works are indeed created by human beings). Instead, it assesses how filmic composition devices (FCDs) constitute cinematic narrators and how those narrators can express coded syntactic and semantic characteristics which may induce the



recognition of a particular implied author. Subsequently, once an authorial interpretation is found to be relevant, attention is directed towards *how* the narration *uses* its author and, most importantly, *why*.

Naturally, not every text has an 'author' and not every authored text uses its author in the same way and for the same purposes. *Interstellar's* autotextuality, *The Hobbit's* intratextuality, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe's unitextuality demonstrate the various ways in which authorship can function as a narrative device. *Interstellar* shows that narratives can manipulate their audiences by exploiting their authorial expectations and, furthermore, that films can possess meanings only attainable through an authorial transtextual reading; *The Hobbit* uses auctorial cues to concretise its audience's nostalgic cognisance of *The Lord of the Rings*, ostensibly fortifying its own narrative; and Marvel Studios is able to ensure its audience's continued investment in its hyperdiegetic Cinematic Universe, even as it delves into ever-more obscure subjects and sources, by consolidating all of its films under an authorised house style that relays a singular endlessly-deferred narrative. Unlike an auteurist critique which would wrench these texts out of their historical/industrial contexts in order to proffer flimsy aesthetical value judgments, our analysis treats authorship as a historically-situated institutional discourse and does not deign to celebrate or denigrate films on the basis of their supposed quality. *The Hobbit* is a revelatory case study not because it is a work of art but because its authorship constitutes a paradigmatic example of twenty-first century 'cult'-blockbuster aesthetics which sees the textual incorporation of paratextual hypernarrative techniques; whilst *The Hobbit's* authorship predominantly functions to erect value, our analysis does not—and that is an important distinction to make. Rather, this thesis has worked to dismantle the mechanisms by which 'value' is created. Indeed, 'Jackson's' authorship cannot be understood without a corresponding understanding of 'his' contemporary film industry, how 'he' works to serve that system, and the impact paratexts had on constructing 'him'—and the same can be said for 'Nolan' and Marvel. So it appears that film audiences are being impelled to approach narratives not as transparent mimesis but conspicuously 'authored' commodities.

Of course, this only explains *Interstellar*, *The Hobbit*, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Although their authorial distinctions neatly demonstrate divergent authorial styles, strategies, and functions from which we may be able to understand the *authoriality* of other film texts, it would be foolhardy to presume that these analyses circumscribe the totality of Conglomerate Hollywood authorship. One of the vagaries of conducting research into a daily developing field is that new and exciting potential case studies inevitably emerge before the ink dries. Nolan and Jackson will undoubtedly have long, illustrious careers and this thesis' analyses will surely grow in significance as their filmographies flourish. Yet the conglomerates' need for a perpetually distended catalogue of auteurs has resulted in a new breed of millennial auteur-brands like Rian Johnson, who has taken the *Star Wars* baton from J.J. Abrams, and Damien Chazelle, now the youngest recipient of a Best Director Oscar whose 2017 musical *La La Land* forms an antinomic binary with 2014's *Whiplash* as a dialectic on relationships and art set against the background of jazz culture. Most notable, though, is Denis Villeneuve, a French-Canadian filmmaker who, like Nolan and Jackson before him, has climbed out of his native independent system (*Polytechnique/Incendies*), past the American mini-majors (*Prisoners/Enemy/Sicario/Arrival*), to the Hollywood tentpole summit (Villeneuve's *Blade Runner* sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, is due out in October 2017 and he is currently working on a remake of *Dune*). Unfortunately, given their nascence, these directors fell outside this thesis' analytical remit, but it is certain that Johnson, Chazelle, and Villeneuve (along with other branded auteurs like *Godzilla/Rogue One's* Gareth Edwards, *Fruitvale Station/Creed's* Ryan Coogler, and *Jurassic World/Star Wars: Episode IX's* Colin Trevorrow) will become as important to Hollywood in the 2020s as Abrams, Nolan, and Jackson have been to Hollywood in the 2010s. Likewise, whilst quasi-authorial critiques of the Marvel Cinematic Universe are being drafted and published as I write, the definitive exegesis of unitextual Hollywood media properties is yet to be conducted. As we are still cresting that trend's wave, which will not crash in the foreseeable future, it is perhaps best that that analysis tarry until we have a more sweeping lay of the land.

Furthermore, given this thesis' focus on spring/summer blockbusters, it has not explored autumn/winter award-season prestige pictures and authorship's promotional/textual function therein. It needs to be established whether authorship is similarly operative in the conglomerates' art-house divisions as it is in its major wings, as well as the domestic/international marketing and reception of British, European, African, Middle-Eastern, Asian, and Australasian cinema. And whilst this thesis has anatomised the essential impulses driving millennial cinematic brand-authorship, whether those imperatives are similarly operative in our current television, literature, and music industries is a question that I have not broached. Yet these are the enquiries that must now be made. Finally, this thesis' theoretical model of spectatorship is purely hypothetical. In order to support my suppositions I have referred to empirical consumers' expectations and opinions as well as preordained intellectual frameworks, but more focused scientific research into this arena needs to be conducted in order to confirm not only this thesis' heuristic as it relates to real-life spectators but also the wider validity of literary cognitivism. This thesis is rooted in theoretical logic. The next step is to test its hypotheses' applicability in the non-academic world.

Put simply, there is still work to be done. But this thesis is not, nor was it ever supposed to be, the last word on authorship in contemporary entertainment culture. Its goal was to update critical perspectives on film authorship and make them applicable to our current commercial/textual landscape. The 'author's' immense visibility and agency in the post-recession Conglomerate Hollywood system necessitates an analytical engagement with authorship regardless of past auteurist quandaries in film studies and corresponding authorial travails in literary criticism. Indeed, this thesis has revealed that systematised authorship has evolved from Corrigan's original conception of the commerce of auteurism into a much more comprehensive and deep-seated socio-economic superstructure I shall now designate *the author-industrial complex*. This network stresses the symbiosis of authorship and industry, textuality and commercialism, fandom and production. Thus, to study authorship in 2010s Hollywood is not to engage necessarily with a Romantic fallacy of singular

genius but, as André Bazin stressed exactly sixty years ago, the genius of the system — which has become a system of fetishised 'genius'.