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The Postmodern Auteur: A Contradiction in Terms?

Matthew Denny

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television Studies

University of Warwick, Department of Film and Television Studies
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DECLARATION

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a new approach to film authorship that is compatible with the postmodern theory of Linda Hutcheon. By taking up, building on, and combining the work of Peter Wollen, Michel Foucault, and Will Brooker I develop a theory of film authorship that moves away from conceptualisations of the author in terms of self-expression and instead conceives of the author as a text. Additionally, I identify four different genres of author-function: The Romantic, modernist, feminist, and commercial genres of author-function. These four genres of author-function provide a framework and critical vocabulary for the accurate description of the ways in which author-texts are constructed. The characteristics of these four genres of author-function are derived from the major trends in theories of film authorship identified in the review of literature. In addition to these genres of author-function, I also develop my own postmodern genre of author-function. The characteristics of this postmodern genre of author-function are derived from the analysis of existing literature on two key directors of postmodern film, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino. In particular, the postmodern genre of author-function adapts and expands upon Peter Brooker's and Will Brooker's affirmative reading of the role played by generic reworking in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The characteristics of the postmodern genre of author-function are further refined through its application as a critical framework in two case studies focusing on Tony Scott and Sally Potter.

Scott and Potter serve as contrasting case studies. In addition to operating in the very different contexts of Hollywood action cinema and art cinema respectively, Scott and Potter occupy very different positions in regards to authorship. The Scott author-text is largely constructed in terms of failed authorship. In contrast, the Potter author-text is apparently more secure in its authorial status. There are, however, a number of overlaps between the Scott and Potter case studies. Firstly, films across both the Scott and Potter oeuvres exhibit stylistic features associated with postmodern film. Despite this, Scott and Potter are not included within the central canon of postmodern cinema, and occupy a more marginal position. The Scott and Potter oeuvres are also characterised as fragmented and fractured rather than in terms of unity. This further limits the possibility of constructing Scott as an auteur and suggests that the Potter author-text is more precarious than at first appears.

The thesis opens with a review of literature tracing the developments of theories of film authorship. The first chapter begins by examining the place of authorship in postmodernism as conceptualised by two key theorists of postmodernism, Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon. This is followed by the development of the new approach to authorship outlined above, and its demonstration through the meta-critical analysis of existing literature on Lynch and Tarantino. This analysis also facilitates the development of the postmodern genre of author-function and provides the initial characteristics of that genre. The postmodern genre of author-function is further refined and tested through the case studies. Each of these case studies follows a similar format, beginning by situating Scott and Potter in their respective contexts. The second stage of the case studies involves determining the genres of author-function in play in the construction of the Scott and Potter author-texts. The final stage of the case study focuses on the analysis of three films by each director from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function in order to determine what readings are yielded by this approach, and how they compare to existing approaches.

The development of a postmodern genre of author-function facilitates a reevaluation of postmodern cinema. The Scott case study demonstrates one aspect of this reappraisal, the reevaluation of texts previously classified as meaningless spectacle in terms of a re-inventive impulse and a critical reworking of genre conventions. The Potter case study demonstrates both the political and critical potential of such a de-constructive engagement with genre, while also showcasing the ways in which adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective allows for texts to be reorganised around a new centre, and for new patterns of meaning and significance to be traced across the oeuvre.

INTRODUCTION

The figure of the author is both everywhere and nowhere in contemporary Film Studies, a tendency particularly evident at the 2015 Film-Philosophy conference on *The Evaluation of Form*. The keynote papers presented by Alex Clayton and Noël Carroll are indicative of a trend of displacing and deferring the author in discussion of the aesthetic evaluation of film. Neither Alex Clayton's 'What is "Aesthetic Suspense"?' nor Noël Carroll's 'The Return of the Idea of Medium Specificity and the Task of Criticism' make direct reference to the figure of the author, and yet both papers are centrally concerned with questions of intention and purpose.¹

Clayton's paper productively takes up and expands upon the notion of 'aesthetic suspense', a theoretical term deployed by Victor Perkins in his analysis of *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954). For Clayton, aesthetic suspense describes those moments in a film 'where style is *almost* at odds with [the] ostensible subject'.² In these moments, the film is poised between excess and restraint. If the style is too excessive, then it no longer serves the subject of the film and may actively work against it. Conversely, if the style is too restrained then the film lacks the ambiguity associated with aesthetic suspense. It is in this hesitation between restrained and excessive stylisation that the figure of the author can be dimly perceived. The too excessive application of style risks disrupting the organic unity of the text by displaying the hand of the creator, the stylistic flourish read as the imposition of an authorial gesture rather than being motivated by the subject of the film. When the style is too restrained, the quality of the film suffers because of the lack of authorial commentary. From this, an idealised image of the author emerges – one just visible enough to add a quantum of ambiguity, but sufficiently

¹ Alex Clayton 'What is "Aesthetic Suspense"?' presented at *Film-Philosophy Conference 2015: The Evaluation of Form*, 20th – 22nd July 2015, St Anne's College, University of Oxford, Oxford and Noël Carroll's 'The Return of the Idea of Medium Specificity and the Task of Criticism' presented at *Film-Philosophy Conference 2015: The Evaluation of Form*, 20th – 22nd July 2015, St Anne's College, University of Oxford, Oxford. Direct quotations are to the relevant abstracts, available from the conference website.

² Alex Clayton, 'Abstract: What is "Aesthetic Suspense"?', <<http://www.film-philosophy.com/conference/index.php/conf/FP2015/paper/view/1239>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

invisible so as not to disrupt the organic unity of the film. This necessary frisson between style and subject (or form and content) particularly recalls Andrew Sarris's work on authorship. For Sarris, the work of an auteur is marked by a productive tension between the film subject and the preoccupations of the director, whereas in the work of the mere *metteur en scene* or genre stylist no such tension exists.³

Like Clayton, Carroll's paper formulates a framework designed to aid critics in the appreciation and evaluation of film. Carroll is especially critical of the use of theories of medium specificity as a framework for the judgement of films. Rather than assessing the success of an artwork according to whether it conforms to the criteria of medium specificity, Carroll's paper proposes an alternative approach, which he terms 'the critical heuristic'.⁴ Central to Carroll's thesis is the notion of purpose. Art is evaluated according to whether it successfully achieves its purpose, whether that purpose is worth achieving, and whether the form of the artwork fits the purpose. The notion of purpose immediately raises questions of intention – how is the purpose of a work to be determined if not in terms of authorial intention? There is also a potential slippage into the realm of self-expression, and the evaluation of a work based upon how successfully it expresses the concerns of its author.

The clear dependence upon – and yet constant deferral of – the figure of the author in these two keynotes speaks to the current status of authorship and auteurism in the field of Film Studies. On the one hand, auteurism is an outmoded or old-fashioned approach and therefore to be avoided. On the other hand, the influence exerted by auteurism (as a foundational approach in the academic study of film) is such that it unavoidably informs even those approaches that are not manifestly concerned with authorship. This tension is borne out in the approaches of Clayton and Carroll, where authorship continues to play an important role in the aesthetic evaluation of film, but does so in a covert or deferred manner.

³ Andrew Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962' in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 35-45, p. 43

⁴ Noël Carroll, 'Abstract: The Return of the Idea of Medium Specificity and the Task of Criticism' <<http://www.film-philosophy.com/conference/index.php/conf/FP2015/paper/view/1238>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

In recent non-academic *cinophilic* writing on film the interplay between theories of authorship and questions of aesthetic value is more overt, particularly in the critical movement referred to as vulgar auteurism.⁵ Film critic Callum Marsh describes vulgar auteurism as a popular movement ‘particularly among young critics’ stating that the term ‘generally refers to unfairly maligned or under-discussed filmmakers working exclusively in a popular mode’.⁶ According to Marsh, vulgar auteurism proposes ‘that despite their commercial intentions and frequent lowbrow sensibility, such filmmakers deserve to be regarded as artists producing coherent bodies of work.’⁷ What is particularly striking about vulgar auteurism is the extent to which it repeats the earlier forays into auteurism of *la politique des auteurs* as practised by the ‘Young Turks’ of *Cahiers du Cinema*. What particularly unites both movements is a concern with identifying art and artists in a context otherwise considered irredeemably commercial and antithetical to the production of art. Despite this similarity, vulgar auteurism is also in some sense a reaction *against* what might be thought of as auteurism proper. The practice of auteurism may originally have served to challenge the accepted boundaries between art and culture; however, the subsequent canonisation of the directors identified as auteurs, and the centrality of the practice to the development of Film Studies as an academic discipline, has merely led to the shifting of the boundaries between art/entertainment and high/low culture. These previously commercial forms now occupy the place of art, in opposition to new forms, such as the blockbuster, resigned to the categories of entertainment and low culture. Vulgar auteurism suggests dissatisfaction with current hierarchies of value, refusing to accept auteurism as the sole preserve of middle- or high-brow culture. Vulgar auteurs use authorship as a means of elevating texts otherwise dismissed as trash to the status of art.

⁵ The term Vulgar Auteurism appears to originate with Andrew Tracy. While Tracy seems to intend the label to be disparaging, while Richard Brody notes the title has been reclaimed by critics choosing to identify as Vulgar Auteurs critics. Andrew Tracy, ‘Vulgar Auteurism: The Case of Michael Mann’, *Cinema Scope*, 40 (Fall 2009), 25 – 30; Richard Brody, ‘A Few Thoughts on Vulgar Auteurism’ <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2013/06/vulgar-auteurism-history-of-new-wave-cinema.html>> [no pagination]

⁶ Calum Marsh, ‘Fast & Furious & Elegant: Justin Lin and the Vulgar Auteurs’, <<http://www.villagevoice.com/2013-05-22/film/fast-and-furious-vulgar-auteurs/>> [no pagination]

⁷ Ibid, [no pagination]

While the rise of vulgar auteurism may seem diametrically opposed to the deferral of authorship in Clayton's and Carroll's keynotes, taken together they are indicative of the marginalisation of authorship in Film Studies. While vulgar auteurism may represent a resurgence of interest in the category of auteur, its status as a fan movement ensures that it remains on the fringes of academic discourse. Interest in authorship is safely bracketed away as the concern of film fandom rather than the academic study of film. The deferral and displacement of the author in mainstream academic writing on film similarly ensures that authorship is held at arm's-length even while the concept continues to exert an influence over the study and appreciation of film.

This thesis represents a re-centring of authorship, and is concerned with exploring the persistence of the author as a marker of aesthetic value despite – or perhaps even *because* – of post-structuralist and postmodern challenges to the category of the author. Additionally, this project also seeks to challenge the characterisation of postmodernism as a purely debased category associated with failed authorship, lack of critical distance, and the negation of (modernist) art. Fredric Jameson's influential conceptualisation of postmodernism is a key point of reference for both of these lines of enquiry. Summaries of Jameson's work frequently emphasises his equation of postmodernism with the death of history; however, this is only one of a series of conceptual deaths he associates with postmodernism and the post-structuralist turn.⁸ According to Jameson, the death of the subject causes a particular dilemma as it also marks the end of the modernist concept of the artist as a unique personality with a 'unique, unmistakable style.'⁹ For Jameson, there can be no author without this expression of personality as unique style and therefore there can be no postmodern author. Furthermore in characterising postmodern style as purely derivative pastiche, postmodernism comes to be

⁸ See Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 44

⁹ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (London: Pluto, 1985), pp. 111 – 125, p. 114

conceptualised in terms of everything that authorship is not, so that the very idea of a postmodern auteur becomes a contradiction in terms.¹⁰

This project aims to open a gap in the current work on authorship and postmodernism in order to formulate an account of authorship equally faithful to the concerns of postmodernism and theories of film authorship. This apparently contradictory pursuit recalls Donna Haraway's characterisation of her approach in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' as faithful blasphemy: an ironic holding together of incompatible positions 'because both or all are necessary or true'.¹¹ The pursuit of paradox is also essential to the work of Linda Hutcheon, whose post-structuralist informed postmodernism plays a central role in this thesis. Furthermore, the line of thinking pursued in this thesis would be impossible without the framework of feminist postmodernism (or postmodern feminism) provided by Haraway and Hutcheon especially, but also Catherine Constable, Roberta Garrett, and to a lesser extent Judith Butler. This project is also indebted to Christine Battersby's tracing of the persistence of the Romantic notion of Genius and its implication for feminist aesthetics in her monograph *Gender and Genius*. This thesis departs from Battersby in maintaining that post-structuralism and postmodernism are compatible with the concerns of feminist aesthetics, and that it is possible to formulate a theory of authorship consistent with both postmodern and feminist theory.

It is appropriate at this juncture to make a brief note regarding vocabulary, and in particular the use of pronouns used to describe the author. Throughout this work, I have kept to a policy of retaining the pronouns originally used by a theorist when referring to or expanding upon their theories. Thus when expanding upon R.G. Collingwood's theories of the artist as spokesman I follow Collingwood in referring to the artist as 'he' and as a 'spokesman' rather than 'spokesperson'. The decision to retain the masculine pronoun rather than insert a more representative (though still not ideal) formulation such as 'he/she' or 's/he' was made in order to

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 16

¹¹ Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 149

reflect the ways in which the use of exclusively masculine pronouns to describe the author serve to construct the author as male, either deliberately or unconsciously.

The thesis begins with a review of literature tracing the development of theories of authorship in Film Studies, paying particular attention to the persistence of the Romantic notion of the author as a self-expressive artist. The role played by authorship in the distinction between categories of art and not-art is of particular concern, as is the use of the author as a marker of aesthetic value more generally. The literature review also considers post-structuralist challenges to the concept of authorship from outside the field of Film Studies, specifically Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' and Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?'. The impact of these theories on approaches to authorship in Film Studies is explored through the examination of Peter Wollen's and Timothy Corrigan's contrasting responses to the post-structuralist turn. This is followed by an examination of the theorisation of authorship in feminist film theory. The literature review concludes with an examination of Will Brooker's taking up and reworking of Barthes's scriptor and Foucault's author-function in order to formulate a post-structuralist theory of film authorship.

The first chapter examines the place of authorship in theories of postmodernism, beginning with Jameson's conceptualisation of authorship in relation to the death of the author. Linda Hutcheon's conceptualisation of postmodernism is presented as an alternative to Jameson's. When distinguishing between different conceptualisations of postmodernism, I take up Constable's terminology of nihilistic and affirmative postmodernism. Following Constable, Jameson's conceptualisation of postmodernism as a debased, imitative, and uncritical form is an example of nihilistic postmodernism whereas Hutcheon's deconstructive, political, conceptualisation of postmodernism is affirmative.¹² Crucial to Hutcheon's conceptualisation of postmodernism is the notion of complicitous critique, which recognises the potential for postmodern works to be critical whilst recognising that they are unavoidably bound up with the

¹² Catherine Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2015), p. 3

subject of their critique.¹³ While Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism is a preferable alternative to Jameson's nihilistic conceptualisation of postmodernism, a concept of postmodern authorship is notably absent. The examination of Hutcheon's and Jameson's conceptualisations of postmodernism is followed by an examination of existing attempts to reconcile theories of authorship and theories of postmodernism in Film Studies.

The remainder of the chapter is concerned with the development of an alternative theory of authorship compatible with Hutcheon's conceptualisation of postmodernism. This alternative approach to authorship entails the careful balancing of a number of disparate theories. Drawing on the work of Brooker, Foucault, and Wollen, I formulate a theory of authorship that combines consideration of the author as text with the identification of different genres of author-function. These genres of author-function are then used as the framework for a meta-critical analysis of existing literature on David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino, key directors associated with postmodern cinema. The aim of this analysis is to examine the ways in which Lynch and Tarantino are framed in relation to both authorship and postmodernism, with the genres of author-function providing a critical vocabulary for the accurate description of the ways in which the Lynch and Tarantino author-texts are constructed. This analysis also contributes to the formulation of an alternative postmodern genre of author-function, taking up and building upon Will Brooker's and Peter Brooker's affirmative re-appraisal of Tarantino in reference to the re-inventive impulse of *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994).¹⁴ The re-inventive impulse associated with the postmodern genre of author-function not only represents an alternative to self-expression but is closely related to the shared de-naturalising impulse of postmodernism and post-structuralism identified by Linda Hutcheon.

The remainder of the thesis is formed of two chapters focusing on the directors Tony Scott and Sally Potter. Scott and Potter have been chosen because they are such clearly

¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 4

¹⁴ See Peter Brooker and Will Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism: Tarantino's Affirmative Action', in *Postmodern After-images: A Reader in Film, Television and Video*, ed. by Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (London: Arnold, 1997), pp. 89 – 100

contrasting directors. Scott is situated in the context of Hollywood cinema, and is an example of a director understood primarily in terms of failed authorship. Potter is situated in the context of art cinema, and unlike Scott is constructed as an auteur; primarily through the framework of feminist and modernist genres of author-function. The construction of Potter is however subject to certain obstacles and challenges, in particular the perception of the Potter oeuvre as in some way broken or fractured, and as such resistant to the unifying role of the author-text. The break in the Potter oeuvre is framed in terms of as a transition from oppositional and political filmmaking to increasingly mainstream strategies. Some critics account for this change by mapping Potter's oeuvre to historic shifts in feminist theory whilst others characterise the transition as a weakening of critique. Amongst the other obstacles facing the construction of Scott as an auteur, the Scott oeuvre is similarly perceived as divided. In the case of Scott, a distinction is made between a potentially artistic 'late period' and a purely commercial 'early period' completely devoid of artistic merit. The identification of a break in the Potter oeuvre means that Potter's status as an auteur is more precarious than it first appears. In the case of Scott it further reduces what little chance there is of constructing Scott as an auteur.

Scott and Potter were also chosen as case studies because of their connection to postmodern film. Cristina Degli-Esposti defines the characteristics of postmodern film as 'strategies of disruption like self-reflexivity, intertextuality, bricolage, multiplicity, and simulation through parody and pastiche'.¹⁵ Referring specifically to Hollywood film, Constable additionally identifies 'self-conscious narration', 'self-reflexive spectacle, and 'abbreviated, artificial characterisation' as key postmodern aesthetic strategies.¹⁶ These stylistic qualities are apparent across the oeuvres of both Scott and Potter, and yet neither is centrally placed amongst the existing canon of postmodern film in the manner of Lynch or Tarantino. The films of Scott and Potter occupy a more peripheral position. Focusing on Scott and Potter as case studies

¹⁵ Cristina Degli-Esposti, 'Postmodernism(s)', in *Postmodernism in the Cinema* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), pp. 3 – 18, p. 18

¹⁶ Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, p. 36

therefore performs a post-structuralist displacement of the margins to the centre, or rather a re-centring on the marginal.

The Tony Scott case study begins by situating Scott in the context of contemporary Hollywood action cinema, and explores the challenges such a context presents to the construction of the Scott author-text in terms of authorship. This involves an examination of the stylistic conventions of action cinema, building upon Geoff King's work on spectacle in New Hollywood cinema. The perceived overlap between the categories of post-classical and postmodern cinema is also examined, as well as the tendency to define both in terms of departures from a Classical Hollywood norm. This analysis, in combination with the work on spectacle lays the foundations for a consideration of why action cinema is classified as a debased mode and the obstacle this poses in terms of authorship. This section ends with an examination of the attempts made by José Arroyo, Richard Dyer, and Lisa Purse to re-evaluate action cinema, before moving on to consider the limited critical literature on Scott. By examining the existing literature on Scott it is possible to determine which genres of author function – if any – are deployed in the construction of the Scott author-text. Additionally, it allows for the identification of recurring stylistic features of the Scott oeuvre that might be better accounted for from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function.

The remainder of the chapter focuses on the analysis of three films – *Déjà vu* (Tony Scott, 2006), *The Hunger* (Scott, 1983) and *Domino* (Scott, 2005) – utilising the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective. Approaching the films in this way draws attention to the ways in which they engage with and rework generic conventions. Additionally, this analysis allows for further refinement of the characteristics of the postmodern genre of author-function, specifically in relation to whether it is necessary for the films comprising a director's oeuvre to demonstrate postmodern ideas in order for the author-text to be constructed according to the postmodern genre of author-function.

The Sally Potter case study follows a similar format to the previous chapter, beginning by examining the art cinema context in which Potter is situated, before continuing to explore the genres of author-function in operation in existing work on Potter and culminating in the analysis of three films. The initial contextualising section of the chapter considers definitions of the category of art cinema provided by David Bordwell and Steve Neale, with particular attention given to the role and construction of the author in art cinema and the differentiation of art cinema from Hollywood cinema. Neale's and Bordwell's conceptualisations of art cinema are compared with more recent work by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, which through their taking up of the work of Barbra Klinger leads to a consideration of the role of the image and spectacle in art cinema. The contextualising section concludes with a consideration of the compatibility of feminist film theory and the feminist genre of author-function with the various conceptualisations of art cinema. The following section examines the existing literature on Sally Potter in order to determine which genres of author-function are deployed in the construction of Potter as an auteur. Although the literature on Potter is more substantial than that on Scott, the majority of critics treat the films in isolation rather than as part of an oeuvre.

The remainder of the Potter case study revolves around the analysis of *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979), *Orlando* (Potter, 1992) and *The Tango Lesson* (Potter, 1997). As with the Scott case study, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective draws attention to the reworking of generic convention across the films that comprise the Potter oeuvre. The analysis of Potter also facilitates consideration of the political dimension of the postmodern genre of author-function, specifically in terms of the deconstruction and de-naturalisation of histories of representation and complicitous critique.

Adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a framework for auteurist analysis represents a shift of critical perspective. This shift of perspective encourages looking at texts in a new way, tracing patterns of influence and emphasis that would not be perceptible if the analysis were focused through the lens of another genre of author-function. The oeuvres of

directors previously only considered in terms of failed authorship can be reconfigured in terms of difference rather than failure, whereas the work of those already understood according to one genre of author-function will shift and coalesce around new points of significance if approached through the postmodern genre of author-function. The Scott and Potter case studies serve to demonstrate not only the application of the approach to authorship outlined in this thesis, but what adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function can bring to the analysis of these texts, the types of reading this encourages, and how these differ from those associated with other approaches to authorship.

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORIES OF FILM AUTHORSHIP

Introduction

This chapter traces the development of theories of authorship in Film Studies, from early theories of authorship and *la politique des auteurs*, to the subsequent taking up of auteurism in America and Britain, as well as structuralist and post-structuralist interventions into the field.¹⁷ The chapter also examines feminist responses to the death of the author, and associated attempts to reclaim the figure of the author in a form more appropriate to the needs of feminist film theory. Throughout this chapter particular attention is given to the persistence of Romantic conceptualisations of authorship, in particular the association of authorship with self-expression. The role of authorship in the broader field of aesthetics is also considered.

Traditional Auteurist Approaches

The first significant contribution to a theory of film authorship is provided by Alexandre Astruc in his 1948 essay ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*’. Astruc charts the transformation of the cinema from fairground attraction and ‘amusement’ to a language.¹⁸ As a language, the cinema becomes a form by which ‘artists can express their thoughts’ or ‘translate their obsessions’ exactly as they would in an essay or novel.¹⁹ Astruc sees cinema as an act of expression ‘just as all other arts have been before it’.²⁰ Direction becomes ‘a true act of writing’, the film author writing with his camera as the literary author does a pen.²¹ Astruc coins the term ‘*Caméra-Stylo*’ (camera-pen) to reflect this.²² Astruc’s concept of the camera-pen is significant for defining cinema as art in accordance with an expressive theory of art and placing the director as the expressive artist at the forefront of this definition. Astruc’s essay thus

¹⁷ Although the term *auteur* is French in origin and means simply ‘author’, it has come to have a very specific meaning as part of the technical vocabulary Film Studies. As such, I choose not to italicise the word as is proper for non-Anglophone words. This is in order to reflect the special meaning of the word in Film Studies, and follows the usage in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008). The related term *metteur en scène* has not been adopted to the same extent, and is represented in italics to reflect this.

¹⁸ Alexandre Astruc, ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Caméra-Stylo*’ in *French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. by Ginette Vincendeau and Peter Graham (London: BFI Publishing, 2009), pp. 31 – 37, p. 32

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35

²² *Ibid.*, p. 32

lays the foundation for auteurism, in particular the auteurist claim that ‘film is an art, and art is the expression of the emotions, experience and “world view” of an individual artist’.²³

Although the most obvious connection between Astruc’s essay and later theories of film authorship is the identification of film as a self-expressive art, ‘*La Caméra-Stylo*’ engages with many of the concerns that shape later discussions of film authorship. For example, by identifying a shift from the role of film as an amusement to its future as an (self-) expressive language Astruc not only defines film as a self-expressive art but makes a distinction between categories of art and entertainment. Distinguishing between the opposed categories of art and entertainment runs throughout discussions of film authorship, and is also a concern of aesthetics more generally; such as the distinction between art proper and craft or pseudo-art in philosopher R.G. Collingwood’s expressive theory of art.²⁴ Collingwood classes ‘amusement’ as pseudo-art, a term used by Collingwood to describe a craft falsely called art.²⁵ Craft is no more than the use of skill to ‘evoke a desired psychological reaction’.²⁶ Art, on the other hand, is the expression of emotion.²⁷

Astruc’s use of the term ‘*avant-garde*’ and his identification of cinema’s ‘new face’ attest to the forward-looking nature of Astruc’s essay.²⁸ Astruc’s scathing observation that only a film critic could fail to notice the changing face of cinema also frames his essay as a shift of critical perspective.²⁹ For Astruc, the old ways of valuing films cannot account for the new cinema of self-expression. The founding films of the new cinema escaped the attentions of critics because their critical perspectives prevented them from perceiving the value in the new films.³⁰ In shifting to an aesthetic based on artistic self-expression, Astruc is able to re-value films that would be otherwise ignored under the former rubric. This redefinition of what is

²³ John Caughie, ‘Introduction’ in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by John Caughie (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 9-16, p. 10

²⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 11, p. 2

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 31

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 32

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 109

²⁸ Astruc, ‘*La Caméra-Stylo*’, in *French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. by Vincendeau and Graham, pp. 31 – 37, p. 31

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 31

considered valuable – what is considered art – is a tendency shared by many of the theories of film authorship analysed in this chapter. Francois Truffaut’s 1954 polemic ‘A Certain Tendency in French Cinema’ is probably the most well-known and strident example.

In ‘A Certain Tendency’, Truffaut attacks the French cinema and the then dominant ‘*Tradition de la Qualité*’ for privileging the *scenarist* or scriptwriter over the director.³¹ As such, films of the tradition of quality are literary rather than truly cinematic.³² Truffaut claims that in such a system, the director or *metteur en scène* merely illustrates an already finished work.³³ In contrast, a true ‘*man of the cinema*’ thinks in terms of *mise-en-scène*: in purely cinematic rather than literary terms.³⁴ By taking manipulation of the *mise-en-scène* to be the true essence of cinematic art, Truffaut reduces the importance of the script in favour of the visual aspects of the film. In doing so Truffaut proposes an aesthetic system attentive to matters of style.

Truffaut’s favouring of *mise-en-scène* over script could be construed as a privileging of form over content or style over substance, another of the binary oppositions that reoccurs in across the theories of film authorship under consideration in this chapter. Whilst Truffaut’s ‘A Certain Tendency’ clearly represents a shift towards the consideration of style as meaningful, content still plays an important role in Truffaut’s aesthetic system. For example, Truffaut’s article is as much an attack on the (lack of) morals of the tradition of quality as it is a call for a new, director led cinema. In particular, Truffaut takes issue with the use of profanity in the name of realism.³⁵ As with Astruc’s camera-pen, the new aesthetic proposed by Truffaut in ‘A Certain Tendency’ is motivated by a desire to classify a preferred type of film as art. This is achieved through opposition to a set of films designated as not-art. For Astruc the opposition is between film-as-amusement and film-as-expression, for Truffaut between the literary and

³¹ François Truffaut, ‘A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema’ in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. by Bill Nichols (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 224 – 236, p. 233

³² *Ibid*, p. 229

³³ *Ibid*, p. 233

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 229

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 231

immoral tradition of quality and the films of the cinematic and moral men of cinema. In this respect, it is particularly telling that Truffaut first uses the term *auteur* to describe a group of directors whose world view contrasts with the ‘immorality’ of the tradition of quality, and which Truffaut deems valuable.³⁶ From the outset, the term *auteur* is not a neutral term designating director-as-author but rather a term already invested with certain value judgements.³⁷

It is perhaps Truffaut’s use of the term world view that leads Edward Buscombe to suggest that Truffaut defines an *auteur* as ‘one who brings something genuinely personal to his subject’.³⁸ Buscombe’s interpretation of ‘A Certain Tendency’ overlooks the fact that Truffaut does not champion the personal unequivocally, but rather champions those directors whose world view aligns most closely with his own.³⁹ However, Buscombe is primarily concerned with ‘A Certain Tendency’ in its historical role as the foundational text of *la politique des auteurs*, the brand of *auteurism* practised by *Cahiers du Cinéma*.⁴⁰ As such it is possible that Buscombe overlooks the nuances of Truffaut’s championing of specific world views in favour of emphasising continuity with the more general championing of personality associated with *la politique des auteurs*. This shift is apparent in André Bazin’s 1957 definition of *la politique des auteurs* as the practice of privileging the ‘personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference’ and the assumption ‘that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next.’⁴¹ Buscombe does also note the influence of ‘*La Caméra-Stylo*’ on *la politique des auteurs*.⁴² Buscombe’s characterisation of *la politique des auteurs* as a championing of cinema as ‘an art form like painting or poetry, offering the individual the freedom of personal

³⁶ Ibid, p. 233

³⁷ Indeed, as Astruc’s article shows, merely to claim the director as author is itself a value judgement, in so much as it partakes of an aesthetic theory that equates art with self-expression

³⁸ Edward Buscombe, ‘Ideas of Authorship’ in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 76 – 83, p. 77

³⁹ See, for example, Truffaut’s criticisms of screenwriters Aurenche and Bost, who Truffaut criticises for investing too much of their own personalities into adaptations of various writers, and thus transforming those adaptations to meet their own ends. Truffaut, ‘A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema’ in *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, ed. by Nichols pp. 224 – 236, pp. 226-228

⁴⁰ Buscombe, ‘Ideas of Authorship’ in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 76 – 83, p. 77

⁴¹ André Bazin, ‘*De la politique des auteurs*’ in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 19-28, p. 25

⁴² Buscombe, ‘Ideas of Authorship’ in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 76 – 83, p. 78

expression' certainly recalls Astruc's claims in '*La Caméra-Stylo*' more strongly than anything in Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency'.⁴³

Buscombe notes that the auteurism of *la politique des auteurs* draws many of its assumptions from Romantic aesthetics.⁴⁴ In particular Buscombe sees the notion of unity in the text produced by the personality of the auteur as central to *la politique des auteurs*.⁴⁵ Buscombe also identifies the distinction between the auteur and *metteur en scène* with the Romantic distinction between 'the artist and ordinary mortals' or 'the genius from the journeyman'.⁴⁶

John Caughie, writing on auteurism more generally but implicitly referencing *la politique des auteurs* and '*La Caméra-Stylo*', also notes the influence of Romanticism. Caughie describes the 'critical revolution' of auteurism as no more than the taking up of the self-expressive Romantic artist, the figure that had 'dominated the other arts for over a century'.⁴⁷

The debt owed by *la politique des auteurs* to Romanticism is clear. According to Romantic aesthetics, artists are valued for their 'capacity to express their own feelings'.⁴⁸ The Romantic author is 'autonomous, original, and expressive'.⁴⁹ The 'originality' of Romantic art is a reflection of the originality of the mind and personality of the artist, not the natural world. As a consequence, 'the uniqueness and individuality of the artist's own character also became aesthetically significant'.⁵⁰ Although Collingwood also defines art in terms of self-expression, his conceptualisation of the self-expressive author departs from the Romantic notion of the self-expressive author in several important respects, which bear consideration in more detail.

In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth provides a description of the process of Romantic self-expression. For Wordsworth, the origin of poetry is 'emotion recollected in

⁴³ Ibid, p. 76

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 78

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 78

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 78

⁴⁷ Caughie, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, pp. 9-16, p. 10

⁴⁸ Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Woman's Press, 1989), p.

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⁴⁹ Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 56

⁵⁰ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, p. 13

tranquillity'.⁵¹ Following Wordsworth, the poet contemplates a particular emotion until a 'kindred' emotion exists in the mind of the poet, and is expressed outwardly as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.⁵² In contrast to Wordsworth, Collingwood does not identify artistic expression as striving towards the expression of a known and specific emotion. According to Collingwood, the artist is aware only of having an emotion, not the specific character of that emotion.⁵³ It is only through the act of expression that the artist becomes aware of what the emotion is, and not before. In this way, the act of artistic expression represents an 'exploration of [the artist's] own emotions.'⁵⁴ Through the act of expression, artists make their emotions clear to themselves and to their audience simultaneously.⁵⁵

Collingwood further departs from the Romanticism in his rejection of the artist as 'a kind of transcendent genius', instead offering an alternative interpretation of the artist as a spokesman for the audience.⁵⁶ Collingwood's artist as spokesman does not express 'his own private emotions [...] but the emotions he shares with his audience.'⁵⁷ Collingwood cites T. S. Eliot as the apotheosis of the author as spokesman, using Eliot's 'The Waste Land' as an example of art as 'the picture of a whole world of men' rather than merely the expression of private emotions.⁵⁸ The role of the artist as spokesman is to say for his audience 'the things it wants to say but cannot say unaided'.⁵⁹ In addition to speaking for the audience, the author as spokesman also tells the audience 'the secrets of their own hearts', even 'at the risk of their displeasure'.⁶⁰ Collingwood's rejection of the figure of the transcendent genius is clear in the relationship between the author as spokesman and his audience. The author as spokesman is at one with his audience, as part of a shared community. He speaks for society as a member of society, subject

⁵¹ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 111

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 111

⁵³ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 109

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 111

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 111

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 311 – 312

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 312

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 334

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 312

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 336

to the same emotions and preoccupations as his audience. The author as spokesman is therefore able to speak for his audience and to articulate and express their emotions because they are also his emotions. Wordsworth's 'Poet' on the other hand, is the very image of the transcendent genius, a superlative being above and apart from the common people, 'endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind.'⁶¹

André Bazin's essay '*De la politique des auteurs*', published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1957, warns against the potential dangers and limitations of treating the personality of the director as a criterion of value. Bazin is particularly wary of the *la politique des auteurs* approach degenerating into an uncritical cult of personality.⁶² Central to Bazin's concerns are the valuation of a name above the objective quality of a film, and lazy assumptions such as 'x is a great director, therefore y must be a great film'.⁶³ Bazin is particularly critical of the negative inflection of this attitude, whereby a 'good' film made by a 'bad' director is deemed a critical contradiction.⁶⁴ Despite these concerns, Bazin finds the 'fertile' results of *la politique des auteurs* to outweigh the 'mistakes' made by some of its more ardent supporters.⁶⁵

Caughie describes the critical shift affected by auteurism as a regressive step, appropriating the Romantic ideal of the artist for a medium in which the concept was least appropriate, at the precise moment of its abandonment by the other arts.⁶⁶ However, like Bazin, Caughie sets aside his concerns in light of the benefits afforded by an auteurist approach. Caughie praises auteurist approaches for occasioning a shift away from traditional film criticism's concern with the 'surface' of popular films and its assumption that the conditions of their production 'prevented them from having depths'.⁶⁷ Auteurism, on the other hand, focused

⁶¹ Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 103

⁶² Bazin, '*De la politique des auteurs*' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 19 – 28, p. 26

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 20

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 20

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 20

⁶⁶ Caughie, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, pp. 9 – 16, p. 11

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 12

on finding ‘the traces of the submerged personality’ of the auteur.⁶⁸ The role of the critic shifted to that of interpreter, tasked with discovering underlying themes and ‘separating the true from the apparent, finding the depth below the surface’.⁶⁹ The opposition between meaningful depth and concealing surfaces in Caughie’s description of auteurism, like that between art and entertainment in ‘*La Caméra-Stylo*’, is a recurrent binary pairing in discussions of auteurism. Another is the opposition of art with the commercial and industrial.

According to Caughie, the contradiction between cinema as art and cinema as a commercial industry had historically not been a particular concern of film theory, as for the most part those films recognised as art emerged from the (supposedly) less industrial national cinemas of Europe and Asia, with a clear opposition between these artistic cinemas on the one hand and the commercial, industrial cinema of Hollywood on the other.⁷⁰ According to Buscombe, *Cahiers* differed from its contemporaries by identifying Hollywood directors as artists, rather than assuming the definition of cinema as a self-expressive art was the exclusive claim of European art cinema. *La politique des auteurs* flagrantly subverts the binary of art and industry, identifying popular Hollywood film-makers as artists and raising mass entertainment to the level of art. In his identification of auteurism as a regressive step back into Romantic aesthetics, Caughie describes cinema as a medium ‘in which an aesthetic of individual self-expression seemed least appropriate.’⁷¹ Later on the same page, Caughie changes tack and warns *against* dismissing auteurism as an escape from realities of film production ‘into the romantic aesthetic of bourgeois criticism’.⁷² While Caughie notes that auteurism was ‘most productive’ in its contradictions and its attempts to confront them, he does not elaborate on the contradiction apparent in applying a Romantic aesthetic to an industrial medium.⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 12

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 12

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 10

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 11

⁷² Caughie’s use of ‘bourgeois’ hints at a Marxist sensibility at play in oppositions such as art/industry and art/entertainment Caughie, ‘Introduction’ in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, pp. 9 – 16, p. 11

⁷³ Caughie, ‘Introduction’ in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, pp. 9 – 16, p. 14

Barry Keith Grant offers an interesting perspective on this dilemma. Grant identifies a perverse logic whereby Hollywood functions as the perfect test case for both the concept of the director-as-artist and film-as-art precisely *because* the industrial nature of Hollywood production is apparently so inimical to artistic production. If the *Cahiers* critics could find an artist in the Fordist assembly line of Hollywood filmmaking, then surely cinema must be an art, and filmmakers artists.⁷⁴ Bazin makes a similar (though less tautological) point, describing *la politique des auteurs* as ‘an essential critical truth’ that the cinema needs more than other arts precisely because the act of artistic creation is so vulnerable in the cinema.⁷⁵ Bazin’s phrase ‘an essential critical truth’ reflects the dual function of *la politique des auteurs* as both an aesthetic theory and a polemic. This can be traced back to both ‘A Certain Tendency’ and ‘*La Caméra-Stylo*’ and their attempts to redraw the boundaries of art and not-art, and to elevate previously under-valued films according to a sympathetic new aesthetic.⁷⁶

Following these early European excursions, auteurism also became a concern of Anglophone film criticism, with Andrew Sarris being the most prominent proponent of auteurism in America. Like Truffaut, Sarris attacks a preference for the literary over the cinematic, although he locates this preference within film criticism rather than production. Sarris argues that the majority of American film criticism is directed towards the script rather than the screen, as most American critics are oriented towards journalism or literature.⁷⁷ By treating the director, rather than the screenwriter, as the author of the film Sarris shifts focus away from the script and back to the screen.

⁷⁴ Barry Keith Grant, ‘Introduction’ in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 1 – 6, p. 2

⁷⁵ Bazin, ‘*De la politique des auteurs*’ in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 19 – 28, p. 28

⁷⁶ Grant suggests a slightly more pragmatic reason for the *Cahiers* critics to champion personal films. Rather than hoping to champion film as an art of self-expression, aspiring filmmakers such as Truffaut were attempting to create conditions more hospitable to the production of less expensive more personal films through their critical writing. Grant, ‘Introduction’ in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 1 – 6, p. 2

⁷⁷ Sarris, ‘Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962’, in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 35 – 45, p. 40

It is through Sarris that *la politique des auteurs* transforms into the auteur theory.⁷⁸

Sarris calls this move an abbreviation of the term, but the shift from *politique* to theory entails a revision and adaptation of auteurism, rather than a simple Anglicisation.⁷⁹ Sarris's choice of the title 'auteur theory' over the more ambiguous but technically correct 'auteur policy' is not accidental. In reworking *la politique des auteurs*, Sarris attempts to produce a more formalised application of auteurism. This is apparent from Sarris's explicit characterisation of his approach as theory.⁸⁰

Sarris sets out three premises of the auteur theory. The first of these is holding the technical competence of the director as a criterion of value. The second premise is presuming the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value, derived from the 'recurring characteristics of style which serve as his signature'.⁸¹ The third premise is a focus on 'interior meaning, *the ultimate glory of the cinema as art*', which is extrapolated from 'the tension between a director's personality and his material'.⁸² Sarris visualises the three premises of the auteur theory as three concentric circles: the outer circle being technique, the middle circle personality and the inner circle interior meaning (Figure 1).⁸³ These circles also represent the three ranks that may be assigned to a director, the ranks of technician, stylist, or auteur.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Caughie states that 'the translation of [*la politique des auteurs*] into "the auteur theory" appears to be the responsibility of Andrew Sarris', Caughie, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, pp. 9 – 16, p. 22

⁷⁹ 'Henceforth, I will abbreviate *la politique des auteurs* as the *auteur* theory to avoid confusion.' Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 35 – 45, p. 37

⁸⁰ Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 35 – 45, p. 42

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 43

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 43

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43

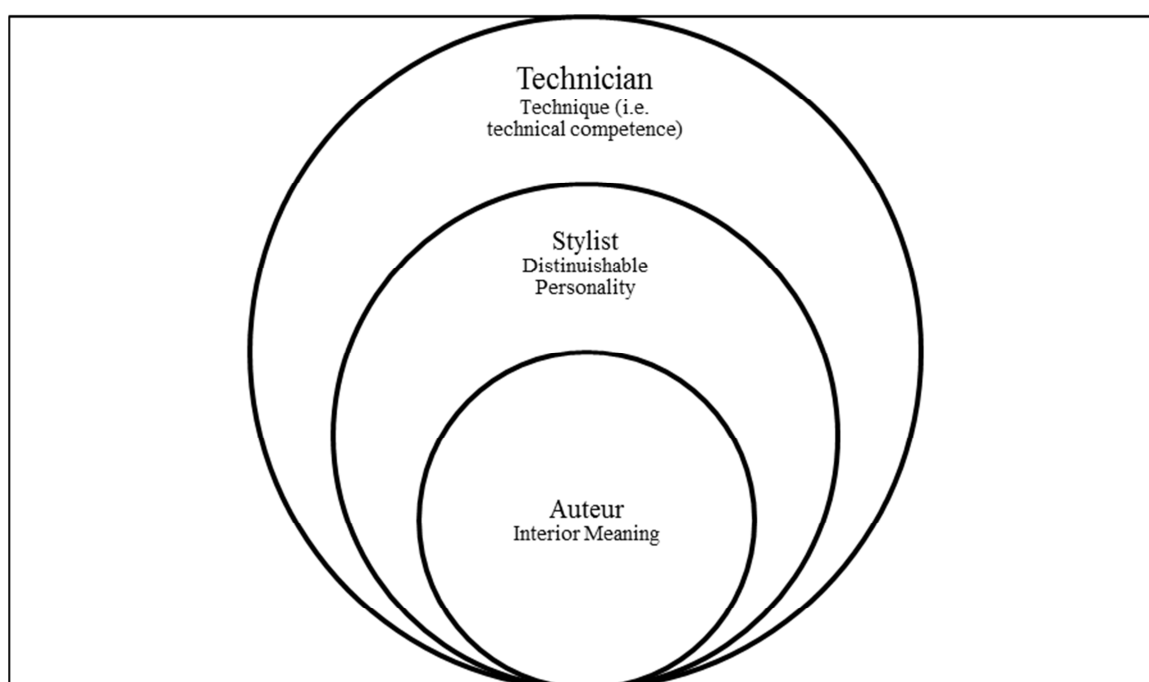


Figure 1: Illustration of the three premises of the auteur theory

Sarris's emphasis on the importance of personality and his linking of personality to the quality that makes cinema an art demonstrates the continued influence of both *la politique des auteurs* and 'La Caméra-Style'. His focus on interior meaning also echoes the Romantic hermeneutics of depth Caughie associates with auteurism.⁸⁵ The Romantic sensibility of the auteur theory is clear in Sarris's suggestion that 'the way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels', and also when describing interior meaning as 'an *élan* of the soul'.⁸⁶ Far from addressing the contradictions involved in applying a Romantic aesthetic to an industrial and collaborative medium, Sarris goes so far as to claim that Hollywood directors are 'superior' to European directors when it comes to expressing personality through visual treatment of the film.⁸⁷ Sarris reasons that whilst a European director may be free to develop his own scripts, most Hollywood films are commissioned and thus the director is 'forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material'.⁸⁸ The implication seems to be that the personalities of European directors are divided between the

⁸⁵ Sarris's metaphorical structuring of his premises as concentric circles, with both interior meaning and the auteur (the highest rank in his pantheon) at their heart, also reflects a sensibility where depth is valued over surface.

⁸⁶ Sarris, 'Notes on the Auteur Theory' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 35 – 45, p. 43

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 43

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 43

literary work of the script and the visual, whereas the Hollywood director deals in the proper cinematic realm of the visual. For Sarris then, the conditions of Hollywood are not inimical to the production of film art but rather are necessary to produce the best artists. Sarris's attention to the visual (style or form) over the literary (content) is interesting in light of his retention of the Romantic hermeneutics of depth and alignment of meaning with interiority. From this we can infer that the director's style (surface) is only significant in so much as it points or is symptomatic of interior meaning (depth).⁸⁹

Like *la politique des auteurs* and 'la Caméra-Style', Sarris's auteur theory seeks to redefine the categories of art and not-art. Sarris's pantheon of directors in *The American Cinema* is a clear example of this function of the auteur theory. Not only does it represent the formation of a canon of cinema, the formation of subsidiary categories reflects further demarcation of what is considered art ('The Pantheon') and what not ('Less Than Meets the Eye').⁹⁰ Sarris's auteur theory faced criticism from his contemporaries, most notably Pauline Kael.⁹¹ Buscombe also criticises Sarris, considering the reliance on personality as the criterion for value to be questionable.⁹² Nonetheless, Buscombe concedes that Auteurism has proven useful as a means for classifying films.⁹³ Responding to critics of the auteur theory, Sarris also maintains that the auteur theory is the most efficient method for classifying cinema.⁹⁴

Regarding the challenge auteurism poses to traditional categories of art, Kael is particularly opposed to the auteurist critics' preference for what she describes as 'trash'.⁹⁵ Kael caricatures auteurist criticism as an embarrassing attempt to lend intellectual respectability to a preoccupation with 'mindless, repetitious, commercial products'.⁹⁶ Kael's argument rehearses

⁸⁹ This is born out in Sarris's category of the stylist – presumably a director with a unique style that does not express a deeper meaning, and thus open to accusations of style over substance.

⁹⁰ For a list of Sarris's categories see the table of contents to Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Direction 1929 – 1968* (Chicago: Da Capo, 1996), pp. 9 – 14

⁹¹ See Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares' in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 46-54

⁹² Buscombe, 'Ideas of Authorship' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 76 – 83, p. 80

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 80

⁹⁴ Andrew Sarris, 'The Auteur Theory and the Perils of Pauline', *Film Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1963), 26-33, p. 28

⁹⁵ Kael, 'Circles and Squares' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, p. 46-54, p. 51

⁹⁶ Kael, 'Circles and Squares' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant pp. 46 – 54, p. 54

the opposition of art to entertainment, and is indicative of the sort of clashes that occur between sensibilities that draw the boundaries between art and not-art differently. Kael's use of 'trash' illustrates the evaluative nature of such oppositions, and frames the opposition of art/not-art in terms of high cultural value versus low cultural. Kael objects to auteurism because it treats low cultural texts as high cultural texts, or worse values low cultural texts above high cultural texts.⁹⁷ In response to this, the editors of British journal *Movie* suggest that Kael does not oppose auteurism but in fact genre films.⁹⁸

Auteurism is inflected slightly differently in Britain in the pages of *Movie*. Ian Cameron, a founding editor of *Movie*, writes that 'the assumption which underlines all the writing in *Movie* is that the director is the author of a film, the person who gives it any distinctive quality it may have'.⁹⁹ Cameron also notes that when director and critic disagree in their interpretation of the film, this does not mean that the critic is wrong as the value of the film depends on the film itself and not the director's intention.¹⁰⁰ In addition Cameron suggests that the approach in *Movie* does not go to the full extremes of *la politique des auteurs*, and that they employ a flexible aesthetic that concedes a good director may make a bad film and vice versa.¹⁰¹ Writing with the other editors of *Movie* in response to criticism from Kael, Cameron describes the auteur theory as a handy rule of thumb for selecting which films its adherents wish to see.¹⁰² The foregrounding by *Movie* and Sarris of this classificatory function serves to neutralise the more contentious aspects of auteurism. However, even in *Movie*'s assertion that the auteur theory is only a way of distinguishing between films, its meaningfulness as a practice relies upon the assumption that films have a distinguishing quality that is solely reliant on the director of that

⁹⁷ Kael actually objects to Sarris's auteur theory on a number of fronts, in particular Sarris's requirement that a director have technical skill, and his assertion that meaning is generated through tension between director's personality and the material. Kael seems informed by a more broadly classical aesthetic, privileging unity and ease of composition over Sarris's Romantic belief in the power of personality to transcend the limits of material. See Kael, 'Circles and Squares' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant pp. 46 – 54

⁹⁸ Ian Cameron *et al*, 'Movie vs. Kael', *Film Quarterly* 17 (Autumn 1963), 57-62, p. 61

⁹⁹ Ian Cameron, 'Films, Directors and Critics', in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 29-34, p. 30

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 30

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 31

¹⁰² Ian Cameron *et al*, 'Movie vs. Kael', *Film Quarterly* 17 (Autumn 1963), 57-62, p. 58

film and not on other classificatory factors such as genre, star, or national cinema. For both Sarris and *Movie*, this distinguishing quality is articulated at the visual level. While Sarris aligns this distinguishing quality with self-expression, it is articulated slightly differently according to the *Movie* method.

This is clear in Victor Perkins's attempt to distance his *Movie*-style approach from the mythology of Romanticism. Perkins warns against the comparison of a director's working conditions with a nostalgic 'garret-and-absinthe' system of production, as the collaborative nature of filmmaking makes it impossible to determine precisely who contributed each idea or effect to a finished film.¹⁰³ For Perkins the collaborative nature of filmmaking ensures the exploration of group concerns rather than the interests of a solitary artist.¹⁰⁴ This implies a source of coherence in popular films very different from 'artistic' self-expression.¹⁰⁵ Rather than classing a good film as one that is the expression of one man's vision, Perkins is more concerned that the film exhibits its own unity. It is unimportant whether that unity was achieved through collaboration and cooperation or whether it was imposed by the director on his collaborators.¹⁰⁶ For Perkins, the significance, coherence, and consistency of meaning of a film are the essential markers of quality. Perkins is not interested in how these relationships are achieved or whether they are intended, only that the film can be shown to embody a consistent meaning through the interpretation of its patterns of actions and images.¹⁰⁷ For Perkins, the proper subject of film criticism is the finished 'movie' as it appears on screen, and not 'film' or 'the stuff that goes through the camera'.¹⁰⁸ Through this analogy, Perkins differentiates between

¹⁰³ V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, (Chicago: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 170

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 176

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 176

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 173

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 173

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 17

an approach concerned with how a film is made, and his interest in what the finished movie means.¹⁰⁹

Nevertheless, Perkins still affords the director an elevated position. It is the director who is in charge of ‘relationships’ and ‘synthesis’ and thus, given the centrality of coherence in Perkins’s aesthetic system, the director is in charge of ‘what makes a film a *film*’.¹¹⁰ This relationship between the director and the essence of a film resembles the Romantic model. Following Romantic aesthetics, directors are self-expressive and film an art of self-expression. Following Perkins, good films are coherent and directors facilitate this coherence. Perkins’s director is however somewhat diminished compared to its Romantic counterpart, the authority of the director no longer that of total creation but ‘sufficient control’.¹¹¹

The concept of authorship proposed by Perkins resembles T. S. Eliot’s characterisation of the artist as a catalyst.¹¹² For Eliot the artist is not self-expressive but rather a medium ‘in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways’.¹¹³ According to Eliot, poetry (and by extension all art) is not the expression of personality and emotion but an escape from personality and emotion.¹¹⁴ Eliot’s rejection of the self-expressive is of a part with his critical project of diverting attention away from the author and towards the text.¹¹⁵ In this way the approach to authorship associated with *Movie* and Perkins marks the beginning of the deferral of the figure of the author.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Perkins’s approach to film has a marked similarity to W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley’s warning against the intentional fallacy in literary criticism. For Wimsatt and Beardsley, the critical evaluation of a poem can be compared to ‘judging a pudding or a machine’: it should be judged only on whether or not it ‘works’, not according to the intentions of the author. Similar to Perkins’s use of the clichéd image of the artist, this comparison of poetry with something as prosaic as pudding serves to undercut the Romantic image of the artist. In addition, Perkins’s assertion that the meaning of a film is dependent on it being coherently organised is similar to Wimsatt and Beardsley’s description of poetry as ‘a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once.’ W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p. 3

¹¹⁰ Perkins, *Film as Film*, p. 184

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184

¹¹² T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 54

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹¹⁶ A more direct line of influence can be drawn between *Movie* and the critical tradition associated with the methods of F. R. Leavis. From Leavis, *Movie* inherits a belief in the organic unity and coherence of the text and the practice of close scrutiny of that text. *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by Caughie, p. 49

There is a certain irony in the fact that film criticism should adopt auteurism at precisely the moment that authorship, and in particular the Romantic author, were being rejected by the other arts and branches of criticism.¹¹⁷ The most influential of these critiques emerged from fields of structuralism and post-structuralism, with the most notorious being Roland Barthes's declaration of the 'death of the Author' in 1968.

The Death of the Author

Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' deliberately echoes Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.¹¹⁸ An understanding of the ways in which Barthes builds on Nietzsche allows for a fuller appreciation of the critical moves made by Barthes in 'The Death of the Author'. For Nietzsche, the death of God represents (amongst other things) the removal of a final, fixed, exterior meaning and value. With the removal of final and fixed meaning, the overman (*übermensch*) is free to create his own values and meaning and the singular truth is replaced by a plurality of equally valid 'truths'. Nietzsche's God is not dead in a simple sense. Rather Nietzsche's God was never 'alive', but a manmade concept. In 'The Four Great Errors' Nietzsche outlines how the metaphysical belief in the-thing-in-itself, *causa prima* or first cause, and the Christian God are in fact errors of reason that confuse cause with effect. It is not God that has created man, but man that has created God. For Nietzsche refusal of the unity implied by God as both first cause and ultimate judgement is a 'great liberation'.¹¹⁹ As such, it is up to man to kill God in order to be free to create his own values and meaning.

Barthes alludes to his debt to Nietzsche in his reference to the 'Author-God' as the source of the 'single "theological" meaning' of the text.¹²⁰ Like Nietzsche's God, the Author-

¹¹⁷ John Caughie, 'Introduction', in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. by John Caughie (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 9-16., p. 11

¹¹⁸ See, Friedrich Nietzsche, '*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1994), pp. 103-439, p. 124 and '*From The Gay Science*' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1994), pp. 93-102, p. 95

¹¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, '*Twilight of the Idols*' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1994), pp. 463 – 563 pp. 492 – 501

¹²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 146

God imposes a limit on the text, in the form of a final meaning.¹²¹ Barthes notes that this imposition ‘suits criticism very well’, which sets itself the ‘important task of discovering the Author’ and thus explaining the text.¹²² The death of the Author-God does away with this fixed meaning and transcendental signified and thus changes the nature of criticism: a text can no longer be ‘deciphered’ only ‘disentangled’. The text is ‘ranged over’, no longer ‘pierced’ by the critic to access the meaning beneath the surface.¹²³ The death of the author is therefore also the ‘death’ of a Romantic hermeneutics of depth. This shift also recalls Nietzsche, and his dissatisfaction with the desire ‘to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons.’¹²⁴ For Nietzsche, the opposition of concealing surface and meaningful depth is replaced by the never-ending play of surfaces.¹²⁵

Like Nietzsche’s God, the Author-God is both something that was never ‘alive’ and something that must first be killed, or as Barthes puts it ‘the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.’¹²⁶ In this respect, Barthes’s essay is more death warrant than death certificate, a call to ‘overthrow the myth’ of the author in order to ‘give writing its future’.¹²⁷ Like the death of God for Nietzsche, the death of the Author for Barthes is not an end in itself but a first step, granting the freedom necessary for the creation of new values. This can be seen in Barthes’s shift from considering the death of the Author to ‘the birth of reader’.¹²⁸ For Barthes, it is the reader and not the author that is the key to the unity of the text: ‘a text’s unity lies not in its origin but its destination’.¹²⁹ Barthes is careful not to merely transfer the

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 147

¹²² Ibid, p. 147

¹²³ Ibid, p. 147

¹²⁴ For Nietzsche, the ‘good reason’ for this concealment is that it conceals the fact there is nothing to conceal. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (ed.) Bernard Williams, (trans.) Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8

¹²⁵ For more on the replacement of depth with a never-ending play of surfaces, see Sarah Kofman’s analysis of the crucial role played by unveiling in Nietzsche’s taking up of the mythological figure Baubô in Sarah Kofman, ‘Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism’, trans. by Tracy B. Strong in *Nietzsche’s New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 175 – 203

¹²⁶ Barthes, *Image Music Text*,, p. 148

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 148

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 148

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 148

qualities of the Romantic author to the reader, making it clear that his reader is merely a point of unity ‘without history, biography, psychology’.¹³⁰

However, Barthes also outlines how the very act of writing itself enacts the death of the author. Far from being the expression of self or personality, writing is ‘the negative where all identity is lost’ and where ‘our subjectivities slip away’.¹³¹ It is not Barthes that kills the author, but the very act of writing: the author ‘enters into his own death’ at the moment ‘writing begins’.¹³² This situation is not new, with Barthes observing ‘no doubt it has always been that way’.¹³³ Barthes observes that the author ‘when believed in’ is taken to precede his work: ‘he is always conceived of as the past to his own book’.¹³⁴ Like Nietzsche’s God, he is alpha and omega, both the creator and final meaning of his creation. Barthes, following Saussure, observes that an author is nothing more than the ‘instance of writing’ in the same way that ‘*I* is nothing other than the instance of saying *I*’.¹³⁵ In place of the author, Barthes refers to this act of writing as the scriptor.¹³⁶ This change in vocabulary reflects Barthes’s key theoretical shift. The term author has an attendant mythology where writing is the self-expression of a being (the author) who both precedes and exceeds what is written. The scriptor does not partake of this mythology. The scriptor is ‘in no way equipped with a being preceding the writing’. The scriptor is ‘born’ with the text.¹³⁷ The author suggests that there is a before and after the act of writing in which the author continues to exist, for the scriptor ‘there is no other time than that of enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*’.¹³⁸

Barthes is nevertheless unable to do away with the author quite as thoroughly he could wish. Even within ‘The Death of the Author’, the author remains a powerful figure. When charting the apparent demise of the myth of the author in French literature, Barthes provides a

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 148

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 142

¹³² Ibid, p. 142

¹³³ Ibid, p. 142

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 145

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 145

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 145

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 145

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 145

catalogue of named authors who apparently ‘loosen’ the sway of the author.¹³⁹ Whilst the scriptor provides us a way of analysing authorship at the level of writing (that is to say, style), Barthes’s model cannot account for the ways in which texts are grouped, and classified according to author.¹⁴⁰ The theory of authorship expounded by Michel Foucault in his lecture ‘What is an Author?’ does account for this.

Foucault is concerned with examining the empty space left by the disappearance of the author, the problems this creates, and in particular those that arise in the use of the name of the author.¹⁴¹ Foucault compares the name of an author to a proper name.¹⁴² Where the proper name moves from discourse to the real person who produced it, the author name remains at the level of the text. Furthermore, the meaning attached to this author name only changes in reference to that corpus of texts attributed to the author, rather than any ‘empirical data’ relating to the actual person.¹⁴³ The author name functions as a means of classification, grouping texts together and differentiating them from each other.¹⁴⁴ Foucault describes this organisation and delimitation of texts as the ‘author-function’.¹⁴⁵ In addition to distinguishing between groups of texts, the author-function also ensures the unity of a disparate group of texts assigned to a single author name. The author function explains the presence of certain features in texts assigned to the same author, and their transformation or distortion over time, through reference to biography, point of view, social position, and so forth. Similarly, any perceived ‘unevenness’ in the texts is ‘ascribed to changes caused by evolution, maturation, or outside influence.’ Finally, the author function neutralises any perceived contradictions in a series of texts.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Ibid, pp. 143 – 144

¹⁴⁰ In its strictest application, Barthes’s model would not even allow for such grouping as it tacitly acknowledges that the author exceeds the text. However Barthes himself clearly does not apply his concept in this strict sense or he would not mention Balzac, Mallarmé and Proust.

¹⁴¹ Michel Foucault, ‘Authorship: What is an Author?’, *Screen 20* (1979), 13-34, p. 17 - 18

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 18

¹⁴³ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 126

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Authorship: What is an Author?’, *Screen 20* (1979), 13-34, p. 19

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 20

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 22

Foucault is attentive to the fact that the concept of the author does not function in the same way or have the same meaning, across all times and cultures. For example, Foucault observes that '[a] "philosopher" and a "poet" are not constructed in the same manner; and the author of an eighteenth-century novel was formed differently from the modern novelist.' Foucault asserts that there are nevertheless 'transhistorical constants in the rules that govern the construction of an author.'¹⁴⁷

As with Barthes's use of the term *scriptor*, Foucault's coining of the term *author-function* reflects a theoretical shift away from the Romantic concept of the self-expressive author. The change in terminology is a necessary step in avoiding the connotations of the word *author*. Like Barthes's *scriptor*, Foucault's *author-function* is not a being, a person in the world. However where the *scriptor* remains resolutely at the level of the text, Foucault is interested in precisely 'the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside and precedes it'.¹⁴⁸ The term *author-function* describes the process within the text and the discourses surrounding the text that sustain this connection. The concept of *author-function* is therefore a very useful tool for describing how different aesthetic systems conceptualise authorship. The implications of Foucault's theory of authorship are more wide ranging than Barthes's, although more amorphous and lacking the polemic vigour of Barthes. This may explain why Foucault's *author-function* does not appear to have been taken up as widely as 'The Death of the Author'.

Barthes and Foucault are situated on the boundary between structuralism and post-structuralism. Andrew Bennett notes that the death of the author was often taken to stand in for the entire project of post-structuralism, with Barthes work also increasingly aligned with the movement.¹⁴⁹ Although a simplification of the movement, the death of the author is nonetheless a key aspect of the post-structuralist turn. Post-structuralism and the critical practice of deconstruction in particular, will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this thesis, but

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 21

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁴⁹ Bennett, *The Author*, p. 10

Bennett's summary of the approach as 'a radical scepticism towards the integrity of a subject's thoughts, meanings, and intentions, or of a subject's ownership of those thoughts, meanings, and intentions' will suffice for now.¹⁵⁰

The scepticism towards the subject and the death of the author has particularly problematic repercussions. As Janet Staiger euphemistically suggests, the death of the author occurs at a 'particularly nonadvantageous' time for certain individuals, in particular women, people of colour, and members of the LGBT community.¹⁵¹ Staiger asserts that authorship is especially important to individuals in 'non-dominant positions', for whom 'asserting even a partial agency may seem to be important for day-to-day survival or where locating moments of alternative practices takes away the naturalized privileges of normativity.'¹⁵² For Staiger, the death of the author deprives such individuals of their voices 'just as we are speaking more loudly'.¹⁵³ This points to a contradiction in post-structuralist discourse identified by David Gerstner. Referring in particular to the reception of Foucault within American academia and activism, Gerstner notes that on the one hand Foucault's 'toppling of methodological hierarchies' is particularly attractive to feminist and post-colonial critics. On the other, the loss of the subject apparently runs counter to 'what was so urgently at stake for these theorists: *bodies*.'¹⁵⁴

Ironically appropriate from a post-structuralist perspective, the death of the author resembles Derrida's concept of the *pharmakon*, something that is simultaneously cure and poison.¹⁵⁵ Cure because the death of the author liberates the text from a fixed and final meaning and unsettles the hierarchy and authority of white, Western, straight, cis-gendered males. Poison

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 10

¹⁵¹ Janet Staiger, 'Authorship Approaches' in *Authorship and Film*, ed. by David A. Gerstner & Janet Staiger (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 27-57, p. 29

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 27

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 29

¹⁵⁴ Gerstner does make clear that Foucault does not eliminate the subject or the body, but is rather concerned how the subject or body is socially constructed. David A. Gerstner, 'The Practices of Authorship' in *Authorship and Film*, ed. by David A. Gerstner & Janet Staiger (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 3-25

¹⁵⁵ In his analysis of the characterisation of writing as a *pharmakon* in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida observes that *pharmakon* can mean both poison or remedy and be 'beneficent or maleficent' either 'alternately or simultaneously'. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 2000), p. 70; see also Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274b – 279a

because it does not allow for the discovery of new authors, and therefore continues to exclude the same groups denied a voice before the death of the author.

The next section traces the impact of the death of the author on the field of Film Studies, presenting two contrasting conceptualisations of authorship that respond to the possibilities and problems presented by the posts-structuralist turn. This is followed by a section exploring the ambivalent relationship between feminist film theory and theories of film authorship. These sections also represent a break away from the broadly historically trajectory shaping the chapter thus far, and instead follow a more thematic organisation.

Reviving the Author

The influence of the death of the author on auteurism is apparent in the work of Peter Wollen, particularly in the revised 1972 version of *Signs and Meaning*.¹⁵⁶ Like Barthes and Foucault, Wollen refutes the notion that authorship (in this case film authorship) is an act of self-expression. Wollen argues that the auteur theory is not the transference to Hollywood cinema of the traditional notions of art ‘rooted in the idea of creativity’ and ‘expression of individual vision’.¹⁵⁷ According to Wollen, the auteur theory argues that any film is ‘a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting one another.’¹⁵⁸ It is not the task of the critic to reveal a coherent message or world-view, but to ‘decipher’ an underlying structure through comparison with other films. This structure is then assigned ‘*post factum*’ to the director ‘on empirical grounds’.¹⁵⁹ Wollen makes a distinction between the director and the structures named after him. Wollen represents the distinction linguistically by enclosing the author’s name in inverted commas when referring to the structure (e.g. ‘Hitchcock’).¹⁶⁰

The structure is associated with a single director, not because he is an expressive artist but because the ‘force of his preoccupations’ allows for an unconscious and unintended meaning

¹⁵⁶ Originally published in 1969, revised with a new conclusion in 1972

¹⁵⁷ Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), p. 168

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 168

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168

to be decoded in the film.¹⁶¹ Wollen also describes the director as an ‘unconscious catalyst’, suggesting his abandonment of the Romantic aesthetic is more in line with Perkins and *Movie* than the more radical dismantling of self-expression put forward by Barthes.¹⁶² Although Wollen’s focus on structures of meaning within the film may have some superficial resemblance to Barthes’s scriptor, Wollen’s director structure merely inverts the traditional relationship of author to text. For Wollen, the text precedes the author, for Barthes the scriptor exists solely within the text, there is no outside.

However, the influence of Barthes (and structuralism more generally) is clear in Wollen’s insistence that there is no true or essential meaning, and as such no ‘exhaustive criticism’ that ‘settles the interpretation of a film once and for all’.¹⁶³ Wollen contrasts this to traditional criticism’s search for the ‘comprehensive code’.¹⁶⁴ The influence of Barthes is also apparent in Wollen’s claim that ‘different codes may run across the frontiers of texts at liberty, meet and conflict within them’ and as such no text is an ‘isolated unity’ and ‘complete in itself’.¹⁶⁵

A productive comparison can also be drawn between Wollen’s director structure and Foucault’s author function. Both Wollen and Foucault concede that there is a relation between a text or group of texts and a unifying function that exceeds it. For both Foucault and Wollen, this function is given the name of the author, although it is to be distinguished from an empirical person with the same name. Wollen’s author structure differs from Foucault’s author-function in being primarily weighted towards the director as structuring unity within the text, whereas the author-function is weighted towards the director as structuring unity across texts. However, this difference is only a matter of degree. The two concepts are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary: Wollen’s ‘author’ structure understood as the micro-level operation of Foucault’s macro-level author-function. There is however a key difference in that Wollen

¹⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 168 -169

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 168

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp. 169 - 170

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 170

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 170

ultimately assigns the structure to an empirical person whereas Foucault is more rigorous when distinguishing between the author-function and the person of the same name.

Buscombe is critical of Wollen's approach, questioning the appropriateness of applying a form of analysis developed for forms of communication that are 'entirely unconscious such as dreams, myths and language itself' when not all the decisions governing the making of a film will have been unconscious.¹⁶⁶ Buscombe gives the example of Hitchcock choosing specific camera angles for expressive effect as a decision that is far from unconscious.¹⁶⁷ Buscombe also questions the exact distinction between the director and the structure sharing his name, asserting that there must be some overlap.¹⁶⁸

For Wollen, the auteur theory is not limited to acclaiming the director as the main author of the film but rather 'implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none have been before'.¹⁶⁹ This not only alludes to the identification of auteurs in Hollywood rather than European and Japanese art cinema by the *Cahiers* critics but also suggests that an 'author' can be identified in any film text. Lapsley and Westlake identify a similar potential in Wollen's method. Rather than revealing the personal expression of a Romantic artist, auteur-structuralism 'would reveal in *any* oeuvre an objective structure that generated its characteristic meanings, patterns and intensities'.¹⁷⁰ The authors identified by structuralism are not empirical directors but rather refer to the function of unifying meaning in the text.

Charles Eckert classifies Wollen's auteurism as an example of auteur-structuralism, a movement identified by Eckert which centres on a number of British critics including Wollen, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Jim Kitses. All had published texts utilising a structuralist approach adapted from Levi-Strauss's structural studies of myth. In addition, the group shared

¹⁶⁶ Buscombe, 'Ideas of Authorship' in *Auteurs and Authorship*, ed. by Grant, pp. 76-83, p. 81

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 81-82

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 81

¹⁶⁹ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 77

¹⁷⁰ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 126, p. 109 emphasis added

connections to *Screen* and the BFI education department.¹⁷¹ This identification should be taken with a pinch of salt, as the article in which Eckert coins the term auteur-structuralism is critical of both auteurism and structuralism. Eckert argues that it is wrong to see a director's work as unified, as this ignores the evolution of a director's work over time. Eckert contends that if the work of a director is more evolutionary than unified, then a structuralist approach must necessarily be inappropriate; as structuralism favours 'synchronic studies of motifs and forms over evolutionary schemes'.¹⁷² What Eckert's criticism ignores is that one of the strengths of employing a structuralist approach is precisely that a synchronic investigation of a director's films avoids teleological readings of a director's work in terms of an inevitable decline or improvement. It is also not the case that structuralism only identifies similarity. Writing on the auteur-structuralist approach, Lapsley and Westlake stress that it is crucial to be aware not just of repetitions but of differences, and that it is not enough to simply identify the features which give all the films of a certain director consistency or coherence.¹⁷³ For Wollen, the constant repetition of a core of basic motifs without variation is the mark of a lesser auteur, whilst the better directors are defined in terms of shifting relations, 'in their singularity as well as their uniformity'.¹⁷⁴ Despite these contentious beginnings, the name auteur-structuralism has stuck as a way of describing approaches that combine auteurism and structuralism.

Following Lévi-Strauss's approach to the study of myths, auteur-structuralism emphasises the importance of approaching an author's work in its entirety. According to Robert Stam, this is essential for structuralist approaches as it is only by studying the whole oeuvre that the underlying structure can be perceived. This is due to the dynamic nature of the elements that comprise the structure. The meaning of each individual element is determined by other elements

¹⁷¹ Charles W. Eckert, 'The English Cine-Structuralists' in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 101-109, p. 102

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 108

¹⁷³ Lapsley and Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, p. 109

¹⁷⁴ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 104

in the global structure; each new film causing the elements to enter into new relationships and thus signifying something different.¹⁷⁵

The structuralism that underpins Wollen's auteurism distinguishes it in practice from the other examples of auteurism discussed here. Auteur-structuralism is attentive to the thematic elements of a film text. The unity of author structure accounts for the recurrence (or transformation) of those themes. Other variations of auteurism, in particular the *Movie* method, are attentive to the *mise-en-scène* and stylistic elements. Continuity and changes in style are accounted for by the unity of the director – either as personality or catalyst.¹⁷⁶ Auteur-structuralism also differs from other variations of auteurism in that it does not use the figure of the author to make an evaluative distinction between art and not-art. Rather than using the figure of the artist to secure the status of a particular group of films as art, auteur-structuralism instead focuses on how meaning is generated within a text. The primary concern of auteur-structuralism is not the status of cinema as art but films as meaningful structures. Auteur structuralism is not without an evaluative aspect however, with Wollen retaining the categories of *metteur en scène* and auteur, as well as Sarris's distinction between the *metteur* as a mere (formal) stylist and the auteur as meaningful artist.¹⁷⁷ Wollen also distinguishes between auteurs, concluding that Ford's work is 'richer' than that of Hawks.¹⁷⁸

Auteur-structuralism is one example of an attempt to resolve the problem, identified by Foucault, of the relation of text to author. An alternative solution is offered by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam*. Published in 1991, Corrigan's book charts the changing economic, technological, and aesthetic aspects of filmmaking from 1967 to 1990.¹⁷⁹ This period is characterised by the shift from a classical Hollywood aesthetic to post-classical and blockbuster filmmaking. The period is also associated

¹⁷⁵ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 109

¹⁷⁶ This distinction is noted by both Wollen and Caughie. Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 78; John Caughie, 'Introduction' in *Theories of Authorship*, ed. by Caughie, p. 12

¹⁷⁷ Wollen, p. 78

¹⁷⁸ Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, p. 102

¹⁷⁹ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1

with the rise of postmodernism, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Responding to these cultural and theoretical shifts, Corrigan offers a theory of authorship diametrically opposed to that of Wollen.

Corrigan observes that despite repeated challenges to the ‘myths of expressivity’ associated with auteurism; the concept of the auteur survives as a ‘critical concept’ bound to marketing and distribution, and as a ‘*commercial strategy*’ for organising audience reception.¹⁸⁰ According to Corrigan, the figure of the author ‘rematerializes’ in the nineties and eighties ‘as a commercial performance of *the business of being an auteur*’.¹⁸¹ Corrigan suggests that the function of auteurs is now chiefly extra textual; it is their commercial status that is of the most importance.¹⁸² Corrigan distinguishes the ‘auteur-star’ from earlier ‘avatars of auteurism’ such as Welles.¹⁸³ These so-called ‘textual auteurs’ owed their celebrity to ‘a certain textual distinction’.¹⁸⁴ For Corrigan’s auteur-star, the text is no longer central as the auteur is increasingly situated along extratextual lines where the auteur is meaningful only as promotion for a group of movies, ‘often regardless of the filmic text itself.’¹⁸⁵ For Corrigan, the auteur does not merely precede the film as the source of meaning but rather *replaces* the film as both source and site of meaning. According to Corrigan, the auteur film aspires to ‘a critical tautology of being understood and consumed without being seen.’¹⁸⁶ The pleasure of responding to a Spielberg film lies in already knowing the meaning of the film in the public image of the creator that precedes it.¹⁸⁷ Although Corrigan’s auteur-star exists ‘before, after, and outside’ the film text, he is clearly not the Romantic self-expressive author, nor even the diminished auteur as catalyst.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁰ Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls*, p. 103

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 104

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 105

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 105

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 106

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 106

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 106

Corrigan frames his theory of contemporary authorship as a way to discuss authorship free from the ‘traditional authorities and mystifications’ associated with the figure of the (Romantic) author. Corrigan even claims that viewers should find pleasure in being able to adopt and engage with ‘one more text that surrounds a movie’.¹⁸⁹ This presents the commerce of auteurism as not only an escape from outmoded Romantic aesthetics, but as an enrichment of meaning. This certainly compares favourably to Barthes’s death of the author, which avoids the problems of self-expression at the expense of the potentially rich extratextual information associated with the author. However, Corrigan’s approach merely inverts that of Barthes, and is the poorer for it. Whilst Corrigan acknowledges the director as a potential site of meaning, he does so by precluding the text from being meaningful. Rightly then does Corrigan claim ‘it is the text that may now be dead.’¹⁹⁰ The author-star is not a supplement to the meaning of the film, but in fact the source and end of all meaning. Corrigan’s commerce of auteurism is the return of the Author-God as alpha and omega, but he is a God without a creation.

Authorship and Feminist Film Theory

Theories of authorship occupy an ambivalent position within the field of feminist film theory. Maggie Humm identifies the search for a feminist theory of authorship and ‘the assignment of a woman’s signature to media products’ as key aims in the project of feminist aesthetics.¹⁹¹ Anneke Smelik grants authorship similar status, emphasising the political importance of maintaining that the gender of the filmmaker is a matter of theoretical significance.¹⁹² However, while authorship may be the ‘aspect of film theory that most directly affects women filmmakers’, according to Angela Martin authorship also contributes to ‘the omission of women’s films from circulation and from film theory.’¹⁹³ For Martin, this stems from the focus on male filmmakers in the foundational theory informing the study of film, with

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 136

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 106

¹⁹¹ Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 9

¹⁹² Anneke Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1998), p. 28

¹⁹³ Angela Martin, ‘Refocusing Authorship in Women’s Filmmaking’ in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. by Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), pp. 29 -37, p. 29

Martin adding that even feminist film theory is characterised by a similar focus on the work of male directors.¹⁹⁴ Barbara Koenig Quart echoes this sentiment, adding that feminist film theory methodologies are better suited to responding to ‘male directed Hollywood films’ than to analysis of the work of female directors.¹⁹⁵

Clear connections can be drawn between Smelik’s drawing attention to the theoretical importance of gender and the claims made by Martin and Quart. Both Martin’s and Quart’s observations regarding the methodological and theoretical bias in favour of the work of male filmmakers are underpinned by a theoretical framework that frames the gender of the author as a significant factor determining the nature of a work. This in turn means that there will be significant differences between works produced by authors of different genders, to the extent that a critical framework developed to elucidate the work of male authors cannot account for the work of female authors.

This position also informs Martin’s rejection of the auteur theory. The auteur theory cannot account for the work of female directors because female directors are not the ‘unconscious industry hacks or jobbing directors’ the auteur theory supposedly requires.¹⁹⁶ According to Martin, female directors are not unconscious hacks but ‘*thinking* filmmakers’, working outside of the Hollywood mainstream.¹⁹⁷ In other words the auteur theory cannot properly account for female filmmakers because it is developed in relation to the work of male filmmakers whose production contexts and creative methods differ significantly from that of female filmmakers. While it may be true that the majority of female filmmakers work in independent rather than Hollywood cinema, Martin’s opposition of these two fields in terms of thinking/unthinking is also a distinction between categories of art and not-art built upon the opposition between art and commerce. Following Martin, the Hollywood cinema is an entirely

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 29

¹⁹⁵ Barbara Koenig Quart, *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (London: Praeger, 1988), p. 11

¹⁹⁶ Martin, ‘Refocusing Authorship in Women’s Filmmaking’, in *Women Filmmakers*, ed. by Levitin, Plessis, and Raoul, pp. 29 – 37, p. 32

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 32

commercial (masculine) space of unconscious hacks, whereas the independent cinema is a purely artistic space of thinking directors: a space of self-expression.

Martin is not alone in associating female filmmakers with production contexts outside of the Hollywood system. Karen Hollinger, for example, classifies adopting a position outside of the (industrial) Hollywood mainstream as a political move, less to do with securing a space for self-expression and more with attacking a system that oppresses and excludes women.¹⁹⁸ Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman also seek to dissociate female directors from the Hollywood mainstream, associating female directors with the ‘artisanal conventions’ of experimental filmmaking.¹⁹⁹ Petrolle’s and Wexman’s characterisation of the work of female directors as artisanal operates according to the opposition of art/commerce in order to open a space of pure art for female directors in which self-expression is possible; the term artisanal suggesting a more hands on approach with pre- or anti-industrial overtones. However, artisanal also recalls the opposition between the artisan and the artist – and with it a tradition of excluding women from the field of art by restricting women’s work to the category of craft.²⁰⁰ Petrolle’s and Wexman’s taking up of the artisanal is therefore potentially problematic, as whilst it grants privileged status to a field in which women have traditionally been celebrated, it does so without addressing how such celebration may also mask the fact of women’s exclusion from the field of art proper.²⁰¹

Both Martin’s thinking director and Petrolle’s and Wexman’s artisanal director draw on the Romantic notion of the author as self-expressive artist. The identification of female directors as self-expressive artists is attractive to feminist film theory, as it responds to what Humm

¹⁹⁸ Karen Hollinger, *Feminist Film Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 234

¹⁹⁹ Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, ‘Introduction: Experimental Filmmaking and Women’s Subjectivity’ in *Women & Experimental Filmmaking*, ed. by Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 1-17, p. 2

²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the term craft recalls Collingwood’s categories of pseudo-art, to be distinguished from art proper. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 2

²⁰¹ Cynthia Freeland addresses some of these issues in the chapter ‘Gender, Genius, and Guerrilla Girls’ of *But is it Art?* Of particular note is Freeland’s examination of textile arts and quilting in relation to categories of art and craft. Freeland observes the tendency for women’s textile art displayed in art galleries to be celebrated only as anonymous craft. Whilst valued as aesthetic objects, the anonymising of these works precludes them being celebrated as the products of an artist and therefore as art. Cynthia Freeland, *But is it Art?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 140

describes as ‘a fundamental feminist attachment to the lived and individual experiences of women’.²⁰² However, Humm also notes that the Romantic concept of artistic individualism that underpins notions of authorship as self-expression is undermined and challenged by the feminist position that ‘art is socially constructed’.²⁰³ For Humm, the attempt to formulate a feminist theory of film authorship is caught in a double-bind between the rejection of the Romantic concept of authorship as theoretically unsound (or politically damaging) and the feminist need to foreground the (traditionally excluded) lived experience of women.

The dilemma highlighted by Humm is borne out in the ways feminist theories of authorship take on and rework the Romantic notion of the self-expressive author; sublimating or deferring the more undesirable aspects while foregrounding those that best serve the requirements of feminist aesthetics. For example, Humm’s own taking on of the concept of ‘gendered signatures’ from feminist literary theory clearly treats the gender of the filmmaker as significant, recalling Smelik’s remarks on the importance of authorship to feminist aesthetics noted at the start of this section.²⁰⁴ Similarly, Kaja Silverman’s emphasis on the psychoanalytic dimension of auteur-structuralism in her reworking of Wollen’s approach to authorship refocuses attention to the traces of authorial subjectivity. Silverman describes her approach in terms of opening a theoretical space ‘from which it might be possible to hear the female voice speaking’.²⁰⁵ Both Humm and Silverman’s approaches to authorship posit an author that precedes the text as generative source, with the nature of the text determined by the gender or the unconscious desires of the author respectively. While this recalls the Romantic figure of the author as self-expressive artist, the terms gender and unconscious suggest a shift away from Romantic notions of the self to a more contested and conflicted conceptualisation.

Petrolle’s and Wexman’s feminist theory of film authorship also involves a reconceptualization of self-expression. Petrolle and Wexman reject the Romantic notion of

²⁰² Humm, *Feminism and Film*, p. 10

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 10

²⁰⁴ Humm, *Feminism and Film*, p. 110

²⁰⁵ Kaja Silverman, ‘The Female Authorial Voice’ in *Film and Authorship*, ed. by Virginia Wright Wexman (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 48-75, p. 50

authors as ‘originary geniuses’, preferring instead to approach directors as ‘psychic scribes possessing a gendered consciousness’ or as ‘social conduits with privileged access to the oppositional discourses invisible to the mainstream’.²⁰⁶ The description of filmmakers as conduits recalls Collingwood’s notion of the artist as spokesman. However, where Collingwood sees the artist as spokesman for an epoch or generation, Petrolle’s and Wexman’s focus on gender positions the author as representative of a more specific and select community than Collingwood’s ‘whole world of men’. Furthermore, the framing of the author as conduit in opposition to the mainstream implies a political dimension to the author’s role as spokesperson, representing a community that would otherwise have no voice and would be invisible. The role of the author as representative for invisible or marginalised groups is also of interest to Smelik, who stresses the importance of recognising the author as ‘gendered, racialized and politicized’.²⁰⁷

Smelik also draws attention to the ways in which authorship can actually contribute to this marginalisation. In particular, Smelik finds that the auteur theory’s focus on individual genius ensures that the concept of the auteur is inherently masculine, and that the reliance of auteurism on Romantic authorship precludes female authorship.²⁰⁸ Smelik’s association of Romantic authorship with masculinity is indicative of a key feminist challenge to the supposed universality of the transcendent genius. The notion of a universal subjectivity is also problematic because it obscures or excludes the specificity of particular experiences and subjectivities. This is completely contrary to key concerns informing the feminist theories of film authorship explored in this section. Both the project of representing the lived experience of women and the call to maintain the gender of the author as theoretically significant represent a rejection of notions of the universal and transcendent in favour of specific and localised identities. Gender difference is only one of many factors obscured or excluded in the figure of

²⁰⁶ Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, ‘Introduction: Experimental Filmmaking and Women’s Subjectivity’ in *Women & Experimental Filmmaking*, ed. by Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), p. 1-17, p. 2

²⁰⁷ Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked*, p. 32 - 33

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 31

the transcendent genius as a universally representative subject. Smelik's call to reconfigure the author as a gendered, racialized, and politicised figure is attentive to this issue, reflecting a move to considering authors as possible of representing a myriad of differentiated and specific identities.

The rejection of the universal, transcendent, and totalising in favour of multiplicity is also an aspect of post-structuralist theory. However, Smelik notes that the post-structuralist rejection of the Romantic author is of little help to the construction of a feminist theory of authorship, as it precludes the existence of *any* author. This leads Smelik to consider whether the concepts of Romantic author and death of author/subject might actually be 'two sides of the same coin', as in both cases certain subjectivities are either excluded or declared void.²⁰⁹

Smelik is not alone in identifying the legacy of Romantic authorship as an obstacle to female authorship. Expanding beyond film to the broader field of feminist aesthetics, Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius* is particularly concerned with the exclusion of women from categories such as artist, author, or genius. The problems generated by the persistence of the Romantic concept of authorship are implied in Battersby's observation that the current criteria for artistic excellence 'have their origins in theories that specifically and explicitly denied women genius.'²¹⁰ This is evident in Romanticism's investment of the male genius with qualities previously despised and devalued as 'feminine'.²¹¹ Although the category of feminine takes on new and positive connotations with Romanticism, this is only the case when the category is applied to males.²¹² The great Romantic artist is a '*feminine male*', never a woman.²¹³ In such a way, women are excluded from the category of genius, artist, or author. Battersby's work has far reaching consequences, and although Battersby does not discuss authorship in the context of film, her findings suggest that the persistence of Romanticism in auteurism is not simply the persistence of an outmoded or unfashionable aesthetic of self-

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 31

²¹⁰ Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, p. 15

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 35

²¹² Ibid, p. 7

²¹³ Ibid, p. 7

expression, but the persistence of a vocabulary for valuing art that implicitly excludes female artists.

Post-structuralist Authorship and Film

The figure of the Romantic author has been a central concern of every theory of authorship discussed thus far, most obviously with Astruc, Truffaut, Sarris and *la politique des auteurs*. However, even those theories seeking to distinguish themselves from the concept of the self-expressive Romantic artist are shaped and determined in opposition to the Romantic author. The Author-god Barthes seeks to inhume is the very picture of the Romantic author. Even Corrigan's commercial auteur-star exists on a continuum with the Romantic author, representing exactly the sort of cult of personality Bazin feared *la politique des auteurs* would become. Corrigan's commercial auteur replaces self-expression with expression of self, but the system that allows for the personality and person of a director to be meaningful has its roots in Romantic aesthetics. It is tempting in this respect to adopt a hauntological vocabulary and proclaim 'The Undeath of the Author', charting the persistence of the Romantic author as a ghostly trace. To do so would be to ignore the continued vitality of the figure of the author in both popular and academic discourse. As Battersby vividly states, while academia may 'pretend that Romanticism is a disease cured by the hygiene of history [...] in popular culture we find the old vocabulary, and the figure of the artist as hero, as alive and well as ever.'²¹⁴

Will Brooker also notes the persistence of Romantic authorship. Brooker acknowledges that although the figure of the author 'as an individual who governs the sole meaning of a text' has been the subject of academic debate and challenge for some 50 years, authorship remains 'a powerful device' in film production and the structuring of popular reception.²¹⁵ Far from being abandoned, the Romantic model of authorship 'remains useful and valuable – within the popular discourse of promotion, journalism and reception among a more general, non-academic

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 15

²¹⁵ Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 3

audience.’²¹⁶ Although authorship is not the central focus of Brooker’s *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-First Century Batman*, he does devote a chapter to the detailed examination of the interplay between authorship and the Batman franchise.²¹⁷ Brooker’s approach to authorship is compelling, as rather than simply discarding the Romantic model of authorship as incorrect, popular or non-academic Brooker seeks to examine the continuing role of the Romantic model alongside other models such as auteur-structuralism in shaping contemporary discourse surrounding authorship. Through his case study of Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins* (2005) and *The Dark Knight* (2008), Brooker aims to identify how discussion of authorship ‘in popular conversation about cinema’ has shifted away from discussions of the psychology of a flesh-and-blood director towards ‘a more auteur-structuralist concern with recurring themes and motifs.’²¹⁸ Brooker examines the paratexts accompanying Nolan’s first two Batman films – including trailers, posters, press releases, journalism, DVD extras, published screenplays, novelizations, comic adaptations, and even titles – to gauge the extent to which Nolan is presented as an author.²¹⁹

Examining the trailer for *Batman Begins*, Brooker notes that there is no mention of Nolan as director. Brooker compares this to the trailers for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Tim Burton, 2005) and *King Kong* (Peter Jackson, 2005), which mention their respective directors within the first few minutes of the trailers. Brooker suggests that the trailers for *King Kong* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* demonstrate Foucault’s author-function: ‘the names are not used to refer so much to the real individuals or their biographical histories but as an indicator of brand values and a guarantee of quality and status.’²²⁰ Surveying reviews of *Batman Begins*, Brooker notes that Nolan is viewed more ‘as an editor of existing Batman

²¹⁶Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 9

²¹⁷ I follow Brooker in italicising the word Batman only where it appears as part of the title for a particular film or comic book, such as *Batman Begins*, and not when used more generally to describe the Batman franchise

²¹⁸ Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 9

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 10 see pages 10 – 34 for Brooker’s method applied to *Batman Begins*, *The Dark Knight*, and *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006).

²²⁰ Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 11

meanings and a recycler of previous texts' than the traditional image of auteur as creator.²²¹

Brooker describes these attempts to deal with the lack or marginal presence of a distinct author as post-structuralism 'lite', which he aligns with Barthes's concepts of authorship.²²²

Brooker's analysis of authorship is intriguing, as it enacts a number of transformations to the concepts of the Romantic author, author-function, and scriptor in an attempt to render them compatible and thus integrate them into an adapted form of auteur-structuralism. Firstly, Brooker's description of the Romantic author as a useful device deployed in marketing should be distinguished from the Romantic theory of authorship. The Romantic theory of authorship defines the author as the creative source of his art, and the work of art as a form of self-expression. What Brooker suggests is the use of the vocabulary and mythology associated with the Romantic author as a promotional tool, as a way of adding value. It is the use of 'Romantic author' as what Collingwood describes as a 'courtesy title'.²²³ Courtesy titles or meanings allude to the fact words are 'never used without some practical and emotional colouring', and courtesy titles reflect the emotional use of words to invest that which is being described with the qualities the courtesy title connotes.²²⁴ The sense of the Romantic concept of authorship alluded to by Brooker is clearly more complex than the simple one-to-one exchange of the phrase 'Romantic author' for 'director', and rather implies the deployment of an entire lexicon associated with Romantic authorship. Identifying the use of the Romantic author as courtesy title in promotional material therefore requires close attention to connotative meanings of words and images.²²⁵

Brooker's theory of authorship therefore follows auteur-structuralism in treating the author as a structure rather than as flesh and blood person. Brooker departs from auteur-structuralism in his examination of how promotional material contributes to the author structure,

²²¹ Ibid, p. 17

²²² Ibid, p. 17

²²³ Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 11

²²⁴ Collingwood also allows for the possibility of discourtesy titles, where a negative connotation is desired
Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, p. 9

²²⁵ A project not unlike that adopted. by Barthes in *Mythologies* Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Siân Reynolds (London: Vintage Books, 2009)

and in his identification of the author structure as a site of meaning in itself in addition to its unifying function. In this way Brooker's theory of authorship echoes Foucault's author-function. Brooker's opposition of a Romantic concept of authorship to a more structuralist concept is in effect an opposition of two different types of author-function, one characterised by the vocabulary of Romantic authorship and another discussing authorship in terms more in keeping with the terminology of auteur-structuralism.

Although Brooker correctly identifies the main purpose of the author-function as 'a way of categorising and distinguishing texts' and as providing 'a kind of branding, a guarantee of status', he problematically uses scriptor and author-function as oppositional terms.²²⁶ Brooker positions the scriptor – defined as 'more an editor and recycler than traditional creator'²²⁷ – in opposition to the 'commercially powerful' author-function.²²⁸ Brooker's opposition of scriptor and author-function in this manner overlooks the fact that the defining characteristic of the scriptor is that it does not, cannot exceed the text as it refers only to the act of writing.²²⁹ The scriptor cannot be named in the way the structures of auteur-structuralism are assigned the name of a director, as the director-name exceeds the text and has an existence exterior to the moment of writing. The opposition of scriptor to author-function also implies that the two describe magnitudes of the same phenomena, in the way that hot and cold are both descriptions of temperature. This is not the case. The author-function describes the process whereby the author name functions as a unity within and across texts attributed to that author. The scriptor refers only to the moment of writing. They are temporally and spatially differentiated concepts, the author-function exists both at the moment of writing and extends beyond it, is both interior to

²²⁶ Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 7

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17

²²⁹ Later, in *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes describes the 'institution' of the author as 'dead' and with it the 'civil status' and 'biographical person' of the author, implying that the scriptor refers to neither the author as self-expressive subject (biographical person) nor to some organising author-function (civil status). Barthes does 'desire' an author, but as a 'figure' of authorship located 'in the text' and that is neither the 'representation' nor 'projection' of an author. Although the term author is used, it is clearly the concept of scriptor being described. Barthes also suggests that this figure of authorship requires the reader as much as the reader requires the author, implying that the 'author' and 'reader' are mutually constructed figures, further suggesting that the scriptor exists precisely at the moment of 'writing' (which for Barthes is also the moment of reading). Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 27

the text and exterior to it. The two terms cannot be opposed in a ranking system as Brooker's use implies, a scriptor is not a 'weak' author-function, nor an author-function a 'strong' scriptor. The author-function alone accounts for variations in the relative value associated with different author names; there is no need for the additional term scriptor.

Brooker also presents the author-function as something that develops over time. He suggests that Nolan's authorship is not 'fully-fledged' at the time of *Batman Begins*, suggesting the status of author is something to be attained.²³⁰ This can be seen in Brooker's tracing of Nolan's career from *Batman Begins* to *Inception* (Nolan, 2010), and Nolan's progress from anonymous 'scriptor' to powerful 'author-function'. Brooker suggests that the paratexts surrounding *Batman Begins* present Nolan as scriptor. Nolan's presence on the DVD extras alongside other potential authors suggesting the construction of the director in terms of Brooker's characterisation of the scriptor as 'an editor with the task of patching together a narrative from multiple quotations and previous references, rather than the sole creator of traditional auteur criticism.'²³¹ With *Inception* by contrast, Brooker proclaims 'Nolan's author-function had arrived: it had evolved into a powerful, unambiguous stamp of quality and guarantee of values.'²³²

Although Brooker's tracing of the changing value ascribed to 'Nolan' historically across the Nolan oeuvre is accurate, it is wrong to describe this as a trajectory from 'scriptor' to 'author-function'. Nolan does not attain the status of 'author-function', rather the author name 'Nolan' begins to signify differently within the institution of authorship.²³³ Provided Nolan is identified as the author of the text, the anonymous 'Nolan' of *Batman Begins* is as much an author as the 'Nolan' recently canonised by the BFI with his own film season, although clearly

²³⁰Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 9

²³¹Ibid, p. 21

²³²Ibid, p. 34

²³³ Although Brooker is correct to identify Nolan's absence from promotional material, he is nonetheless identified as the film's director on websites such as The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), whilst his presence on the DVD extras for *Batman Begins* amongst several other potential authors demonstrates his operation within the institution of authorship.

the name 'Nolan' signifies differently as a marker of value at different points in his career.²³⁴

Although Brooker's categories of scriptor and author-function are inaccurate, his analysis of Nolan clearly demonstrates how different vocabularies are deployed to suggest variations in author-function.

Despite referring to both scriptor and author-function, Brooker's approach really only operates at the level of author-function as defined by Foucault. Although I disagree with Brooker's terminology, his approach is valuable nevertheless for demonstrating the fruitfulness of applying Foucault's concept of the author-function to the study of film. In particular, Brooker's approach is valuable for providing a methodological framework for the application of Foucault's more abstract theory. The most useful aspect of Brooker's approach is his consideration of the ways in which the author is used as a marker of value in promotional material and the ways in which the author structure is instilled with value.

Brooker is primarily concerned with the meanings of the author rather than the relation between film text and author, as shown by his focus on how promotional material, rather than the films themselves, constructs the meaning of the author. In this respect, Brooker can be compared to Corrigan, although Brooker's approach should be distinguished from the nihilism of Corrigan's. Whilst Brooker may focus on extratextual material, it seems unlikely that he would claim that interpretations of 'Nolan' replace any need to interpret *The Dark Knight*. Both Brooker and Corrigan's conceptualisations of authorship are formulated in response to the death of the author and other theoretical shifts associated with the post-structuralist turn. Brooker's response is greatly informed by post-structuralism and associated continental thought, evident in his taking up of Foucault in relation to authorship. Derrida is also an important influence throughout *Hunting the Dark Knight*, particularly in Brooker's deconstructive readings of

²³⁴ The BFI devoted their July 2012 lead season at BFI Southbank to the films of Christopher Nolan, running from the 1st – 22nd of July and encompassing the UK theatrical release of *The Dark Knight Rises* (Christopher Nolan, 2012) on the 20th July 2012. An online press release for the season describes Nolan as 'one of Hollywood's most powerful and influential directors'. *Christopher Nolan Season at BFI Southbank July 2012*, <http://www.bfi.org.uk/sites/bfi.org.uk/files/downloads/bfi-press-release-christopher-nolan-season-at-bfi-southbank-in-july-2012-06-06.pdf> [accessed 3rd December 2015] p. 1

Batman and his definition of Batman as palimpsest.²³⁵ From a post-structuralist perspective, the death of the author (or the Enlightenment subject, or God) is a liberating moment, enabling a number of previously prohibited theoretical moves and offering potential for feminist, post-colonial, queer, and other previously suppressed discourses.

Corrigan on the other hand, although specifically writing in response to the perceived shift to post-classical and postmodern filmmaking, is informed by a theoretical discourse that frames the death of the author rather differently. The post-structuralist turn is taken to mean the end of meaning rather than as the opportunity to create new meaning. An example of this perspective is Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism. Not only does Jameson's account inform Corrigan (and indeed much writing on film and postmodernism), Jameson asserts that the death of the author and the rise of postmodernism are causally related. The following chapter will explore the place of the author in theories of postmodernism; beginning with an examination of the contrasting conceptualisations of postmodernism provided by Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon.

²³⁵Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 106

CHAPTER 1: LOCATING THE POSTMODERN AUTEUR

Introduction

This chapter explores the extent to which authorship is in play, albeit covertly, in theories of postmodernism, beginning with Fredric Jameson's thesis that the death of the subject and rise of pastiche render authorship impossible in the postmodern era. Linda Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism is presented as a preferable alternative to Jameson's nihilistic postmodernism.¹ The chapter then considers existing attempts to reconcile authorship and postmodernism, before proposing a theory of authorship compatible with Hutcheon's postmodernism. This theory of authorship builds on the theories of Brooker and Foucault outlined in the previous chapter, and combines consideration of the author as text with the identification of different genres of author-function. Finally, I demonstrate how these genres of author-function operate in the critical literature on two key postmodern directors, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino, and make the case for establishing an additional postmodern genre of author-function, grounded in affirmative conceptualisations of postmodernism.

Fredric Jameson: Death of the Author, Pastiche, and Nihilistic Postmodernism

The conceptualisation of postmodernism provided by Fredric Jameson explicitly links the death of the author with the rise of a postmodern aesthetic. For Jameson, there are two key interrelated elements of postmodernism that signal the impossibility of authorship: the 'death of the subject'² and the replacement of parody with pastiche.³

Jameson observes a consensus across disciplines acknowledging the death of the 'individualist subject'.⁴ Jameson identifies two theoretical positions regarding the death of the subject; an orthodox position that treats the death of the subject as the loss of a once viable category, and a more 'radical' post-structuralist position that asserts the subject never existed in

¹ In distinguishing between affirmative and nihilistic strands of postmodern theory, I follow Catherine Constable's use of these terms in *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2015)

² Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 114

³ *Ibid.*, p. 113

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114

the first place.⁵ For Jameson, the relative merits of each position are less important than the ‘aesthetic dilemma’ posed by the death of the subject.⁶ This ‘dilemma’ is the challenge posed by the death of the subject to modernist theories of art.

According to Jameson, the death of the subject means the loss of the ‘ideology of the unique self’ that informed the ‘stylistic practice of classical modernism’.⁷ For Jameson, the modernist aesthetic is ‘organically linked’ to notions of a unique self and unique personality, which generates a ‘unique vision of the world’ and forges its own ‘unique, unmistakable style.’⁸ Following the death of the subject, it is no longer possible to produce art according to the modernist model ‘since nobody has that kind of unique, private world and style to express’.⁹ This is the root of Jameson’s aesthetic dilemma: if the expression of a unique personality is no longer possible, ‘then it is no longer clear what the artists and writers of the present period are supposed to be doing.’¹⁰

Jameson’s sketch of modernist aesthetics clearly partakes of a definition of art as self-expression. Jameson’s valorisation of unique personality is more in keeping with Romantic models of authorship than the more circumspect treatment of self-expression in Eliot and Collingwood’s modernist definitions. However, there are echoes of Eliot’s suggestion that ‘only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things’ in Jameson’s claim that the traditional modernist experiences of *anomie* and anxiety are only possible with ‘a self present to do the feeling.’¹¹ Jameson asserts that these experiences are impossible under postmodernism, as the loss of the subject is also the loss of feeling.¹²

Jameson makes this observation after considering ‘the problem of expression’, which depends upon notions of the subject as container ‘within which things felt are then expressed by

⁵ Ibid, p. 114

⁶ Ibid, p. 115

⁷ Ibid, p. 115

⁸ Ibid, p. 114

⁹ Ibid, p. 115

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 115

¹¹ Eliot, *The Sacred Wood*, p. 58; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 15

¹² Jameson describes this characteristic aspect of postmodernism as ‘the waning of affect’ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 15

projection outward.¹³ Jameson associates the opposition of inside/outside with the (Romantic) hermeneutics of depth, and suggests the post-structuralist critique of depth models is a ‘very significant symptom’ of postmodernism.¹⁴ According to Jameson, Postmodernism is characterised by the abandonment of depth (models) in favour of multiple surfaces.¹⁵ If all is surface, then distinctions between inside/outside and surface/depth are no longer valid. As such, the tension between the inner and outer required for artistic expression is impossible.¹⁶

Jameson illustrates the aesthetic repercussions of the postmodern abandonment of depth through comparison of Van Gogh’s *A Pair of Boots* and Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes*. For Jameson, reception of *A Pair of Boots* requires a ‘two-stage or double-level’ process.¹⁷ Van Gogh’s painting operates according to a depth model of hermeneutics whereby the (surface) appearance of the painting is merely a ‘clue’ to or ‘symptom’ of the work’s true meaning.¹⁸ Jameson’s suggestion that the deeper meaning of the work ‘replaces’ the painting ‘as its ultimate truth’ implies that the visual experience of the art work is of secondary value, with the true worth of the piece residing in the apprehension of the hidden meaning.¹⁹ The Warhol piece, on the other hand, is characteristic of the ‘flatness or depthlessness’ that is for Jameson ‘the supreme formal feature’ of all postmodernisms.²⁰ As such, *Diamond Dust Shoes* resists the double-level process of reading. According to Jameson, Warhol’s piece does not point to anything beyond itself and so the ‘hermeneutic gesture’ is doomed to remain incomplete, stuck at the surface level.²¹

The vocabulary used by Jameson in his analysis of *Diamond Dust Shoes* suggests that he is performing the sort of hermeneutic reading rendered impossible by postmodernism with

¹³ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 15

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 12

¹⁶ In addition to the loss of the inside/outside opposition, Jameson catalogues four other depth models repudiated by contemporary theory: the dialectical model of essence/appearance, the Freudian model of latent/manifest, the existential model of authentic/inauthentic along with the linked opposition alienated/disalienated, and the semiotic opposition of signifier/signified; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 12

¹⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 6

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 8

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 8

Jameson claiming the piece takes the already ‘debased and contaminated’ advertising images and strips away the coloured surface ‘to reveal the deathly black-and-white substratum of the photographic negative which subtends them’.²² Thus, rather than reveal some concealed meaning, the gesture of ‘stripping away’ in *Diamond Dust Shoes* merely points to the processes of its own creation, the negative of the photograph. Jameson therefore appeals to a depth model in this instance to demonstrate that postmodern texts *lack* depth, and to emphasise how truly debased postmodern art is. Jameson compares *Diamond Dust Shoes* unfavourably to *A Pair of Boots*, in which Van Gogh transforms ‘a drab peasant object world into the most glorious materialization of pure colour’.²³ Jameson describes this transformation as a ‘Utopian gesture’ that ‘opens a new Utopian realm of the senses’ outside of capitalism, or which at least constructs a ‘semiautonomous’ visual space by utilising the fragmentation enforced by capitalism’s division of labour.²⁴ *Diamond Dust Shoes* on the other hand, inverts the utopian gesture of *A Pair of Boots*.²⁵ This suggests that the problem with postmodern works is not that they resist hermeneutic analysis *per se* but that such a reading reveals the absence of a (modernist) utopian dimension in postmodern art. Furthermore, whilst Warhol’s piece may offer ‘decorative exhilaration’ it lacks the seriousness Jameson associates with modernist art, amounting to no more than ‘gratuitous frivolity’.²⁶

Although not stated explicitly by Jameson, the loss of the utopian dimension in art is a direct consequence of the death of the subject. The utopian gesture of *A Pair of Boots* is the product of Van Gogh’s transformative use of colour; in other words his unique and unmistakable style. Following Jameson, the death of the subject renders such unique style impossible. Without the transformative power associated with the unique style and will of the artist, the utopian gesture of art is no longer possible.

²² Ibid, p. 9

²³ Ibid, p. 7

²⁴ Ibid, p. 7

²⁵ Ibid, p. 9

²⁶ Ibid, p. 10

In addition to the loss of the utopian aspect of art, the shift to postmodernism prompted by the death of the subject and loss of unique style also contributes to the replacement of parody with pastiche.²⁷ Like parody, pastiche involves the imitation or ‘mimicry’ of other styles, particularly their ‘mannerisms and stylistic twitches’.²⁸ Two preconditions are required to sustain Jameson’s definition of parody: firstly, it must be possible to cultivate a unique and individual style; secondly, there must be a linguistic norm from which these styles deviate.²⁹ Parody mocks the original by seizing on the particular ‘idiosyncrasies and eccentricities’ of a unique style in order to reveal ‘their excessiveness and eccentricity’ compared to the linguistic norm.³⁰ Pastiche emerges with the loss of the linguistic norm, which in turn makes the practice of parody impossible.³¹

Ironically, the loss of the linguistic norm is the result of the increased fragmentation of style associated with the modernist compulsion to create a unique and personal style.³² In the postmodern world, each group speaks a private language and every profession has its own jargon to the extent that there is no longer a linguistic norm against which ‘private languages and idiosyncratic styles’ could be ridiculed.³³ For this reason, pastiche lacks the ‘satirical impulse’ of parody, as there is no longer the ‘latent feeling’ that there is something ‘normal’ compared to which the imitated style is comic or excessive.³⁴ This leads Jameson to describe pastiche as ‘blank parody’.³⁵ While both parody and pastiche are imitative, Jameson defines pastiche as the ‘neutral’ practice of such mimicry.³⁶ Parody and Pastiche can therefore be

²⁷ Ibid, p. 16

²⁸ Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 113

²⁹ The opposition between unique style and linguistic norm sustains a number of other oppositions; such as those between realism/modernism, poetry/prose, and literature/discourse. Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 113

³⁰ Jameson, ‘Postmodernism and Consumer Society’, in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 113

³¹ Ibid, p. 114

³² Ibid, p. 114

³³ Ibid, p. 114

³⁴ Ibid, p. 114

³⁵ Ibid, p. 114

³⁶ Ibid, p. 114

distinguished in terms of purpose. Where parody mimics a style in order to ridicule its deviations from the norm, pastiche merely uncritically copies that style.³⁷

Jameson's distinction between critical parody and uncritical pastiche echoes a similar distinction he makes between modernist and postmodern practices of quotation. Modernist works remain distinct from the commercial forms and mass cultural texts from which they quote. In postmodern works, these mass cultural texts are incorporated in the work in a way that blurs the distinctions between high art and mass culture.³⁸ Furthermore, in utilising the themes and techniques of advertising, postmodern texts become advertisements themselves; lacking any critical distance from the capitalist system, they simply become expressions of it.³⁹

It is this lack of distinction and of critical distance that most disturbs Jameson 'from an academic standpoint', as the blurring of boundaries between high- and low-culture goes against the traditional academic interest 'in preserving a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism'.⁴⁰ In this, Jameson manifests a particularly modernist preference for clear distinctions between opposing fields such as art/commerce, elite/popular, and modernism/postmodernism. Jameson further distinguishes postmodernism from modernism in his association of postmodernism with the 'failure of the new'.⁴¹ Jameson argues that artists of the present day cannot 'invent new styles and worlds' because 'the most unique ones have been thought of already'.⁴² Even if the death of the subject had not already rendered the creation of a unique style impossible for postmodern artists, they would find the last of the unique styles already accounted for by the modernist aesthetic tradition.⁴³ Herein lays the answer to Jameson's question regarding what the artist does if self-expression is no longer possible. Unable to express themselves through a unique style, unable to create transformative and

³⁷ An additional, unmentioned, function of parody is that it proclaims its status as copy and therefore reinforces the status of the unique style it mimics as original.

³⁸ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 112

³⁹ Catherine Constable, 'Postmodern Cinema', in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Film Theory*, ed. by Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 376 – 382, p. 379

⁴⁰ Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Foster, pp. 111 – 125, p. 112

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 116

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 115

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 115

utopian art, unable to create a new style, unable even to properly critique or parody an existing style; postmodern artists can only practice pastiche. As Jameson puts it, when ‘stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles’.⁴⁴

From the perspective of Film Studies, Jameson’s most influential example of the workings of pastiche is his definition of the ‘nostalgia film’.⁴⁵ A nostalgia film may either replicate a particular generational moment from the past, such as *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973), or reinvent ‘the characteristic art objects of an older period’ in the manner of *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977).⁴⁶ Jameson also cites *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981) as an example that does both.⁴⁷ Jameson also notes that the style of the nostalgia film has begun ‘colonizing’ films with contemporary settings, giving *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) as an example.⁴⁸ Jameson observes that although the film is ostensibly set in the Eighties, elements such as the small-town setting and art deco title sequence ‘make it possible to receive this too as a nostalgia work – as a narrative set in some indefinable nostalgic past, an eternal ‘30s, say, beyond history.’⁴⁹

The nostalgia film also demonstrates another of the key losses or deaths Jameson associates with postmodernism, the death of history; at least in its ‘strong modern post-eighteenth-century sense’.⁵⁰ Jameson describes the postmodern sense of history as an inversion of Plato’s fable of the cave.⁵¹ Rather than ‘looking directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent’, cultural production has retreated back within the mind and ‘trace[s] its mental images of the world in its confining walls.’⁵² For Jameson, this retreat back into images renders

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 115

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 116

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 116

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 117

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 118

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 118

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 284

⁵¹ Ibid; see also Plato, *The Republic*, 514a – 521b, but especially 514a – 515d

⁵² Ibid, p. 118

true history unobtainable: ‘we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach.’⁵³

Jameson ends his early foray into the postmodern by speculating on whether postmodernism retains any of modernism’s subversive and oppositional characteristics, or whether it merely reproduces and reinforces ‘the logic of consumer capitalism’.⁵⁴ Later, Jameson hesitantly proposes a category of postnostalgia film, films that process the past in a ‘properly allegorical’ way.⁵⁵ This allegorical processing of the past distinguishes the postnostalgia film from the nostalgia film. Nevertheless, Jameson claims that it is only due to the ‘training’ provided by the ‘formal apparatus’ of nostalgia films that the ‘more complex postnostalgia statements’ become possible.⁵⁶ Jameson’s invention of the category of postnostalgia film does not; however, suggest that postmodern works are capable of making the kind of critical statements Jameson classes as the sole preserve of modernist art. Rather, the postnostalgia film represents Jameson’s desire to locate something meaningful beyond or after postmodernism. It is telling that Jameson must create a new category of postnostalgia film, rather than allowing that the allegorical processing of history may be a feature of nostalgia films. To do so would contradict Jameson’s definition of postmodernism as meaningless, purposeless, and complicit. This is evidence of the same broadly Marxist logic that informs Jameson’s definition of postmodernism. For Jameson, while change may emerge from within the system, its purpose is to create a new space outside of the confines of that system.⁵⁷ This is clear in Jameson’s description of the utopian dimension of *A Pair of Boots*, which utilises the fragmentation resulting from capitalism’s division of labour to create a utopian space of the

⁵³ Ibid, p. 118

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 125

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 287

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 287

⁵⁷ See for example the claim in *The Communist Manifesto* that the proletariat ‘cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation’ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ‘The Communist Manifesto’ in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* ed. by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 231

senses.⁵⁸ The postnostalgia film utilises the formal features of the nostalgia film, but is able to create a new space outside of postmodernism where the properly allegorical processing of history is once again possible.

As noted earlier, Jameson's writing on postmodernism is characterised by a desire to maintain discreet boundaries and oppositions. For Jameson, postmodernism is troubling because it represents the breaking down of all the boundaries Jameson values. In opposition to postmodernism, Jameson establishes a Marxist-modernism where boundaries may be contested but nevertheless retain their integrity. This can be seen in Jameson's figuring of the modernist subject as the last bastion against the complete fragmentation of postmodernism rather than the more usual understanding of modernism as the source of this increased fragmentation. In many ways, Jameson's characterisation of postmodernism as marking the end of critique and as incapable of subversion serves to reinforce Jameson's definition of Marxist and modernist art as meaningful and oppositional. In this way, Jameson's definition of postmodernism rehearses the oppositions of art/not-art seen in the previous chapter, with postmodernism unequivocally occupying the position of not-art.

By opposing modernism and postmodernism in this way, Jameson depicts a narrative of decline whereby meaningful modernism is eclipsed by meaningless postmodernism. Jameson is not alone in characterising postmodernism as a downward trajectory centred on loss.⁵⁹ Jean Baudrillard, for example, repeatedly evokes the image of a downward spiral or vortex in his depiction of postmodernism, which is centrally organised around the loss of reality and its

⁵⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 7; Compare with the claim by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* that modern industry 'cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers', Marx and Engels, 'The Communist Manifesto' in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* ed. by McLellan, p. 231

⁵⁹ A recent exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum presents a similar narrative, charting the decline from a utopian and rebellious high-art postmodernism to a complicit and empty pop-cultural postmodernism exemplified by post-punk and New Wave music and fashion. The exhibition suggests that postmodernism loses its relevance as it becomes absorbed into the capitalist system of production in the nineties. The exhibition ends with an indictment of money grubbing pop-postmodernism. In what could be interpreted as a stunningly ironic postmodern move; the exhibition opens directly into a gift shop where patrons can buy reproductions of the postmodern artworks displayed in exhibition (many of which are not in fact the original artworks but are themselves replicas) *Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970-1990* open 24.09.11 – 15.01.12

replacement with hyperreality.⁶⁰ The taking up of theorists such as Jameson and Baudrillard has ensured the dominant conceptualisations of postmodernism in Film Studies also centre around meaninglessness, complicity, loss, and death.⁶¹ Catherine Constable suggests that part of the attractiveness of such theories is that the opposition of modernism/postmodernism is easily mappable onto existing oppositions operating in film theory and history, such as classical/post-classical and narrative/spectacle.⁶² However, as Constable observes elsewhere, such a definition of postmodernism ‘is a self-fulfilling prophecy’, effectively limiting ‘what the viewer is prepared to see in any given postmodern film.’⁶³ Constable proposes an alternative to this ‘rhetoric of nihilism’, favouring an approach that draws upon ‘affirmative postmodernisms’ such as those of Linda Hutcheon.⁶⁴

Linda Hutcheon: De-naturalisation, Complicitous Critique, and Affirmative Postmodernism

Both Jameson and Hutcheon conceptualise postmodernism in relation to the series of critical ‘deaths’ enacted by post-structuralism. As outlined above, Jameson’s Marxist-modernist approach leads him to frame these deaths nihilistically. Hutcheon however approaches postmodernism from a perspective informed by post-structuralist theory, a perspective with a very different set of critical preferences. Jameson’s Marxist-modernism seeks to maintain boundaries and oppositions, and laments the confusion of boundaries brought about by postmodernism; conversely, a post-structuralist perspective strives to challenge boundaries and oppositions, revelling in the collapse and confusion of boundaries. Hutcheon’s postmodernism

⁶⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans by Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1994), especially, p. 83, pp. 149-154

⁶¹ For a more detailed overview of the impact of Baudrillard and Jameson on film, see Catherine Constable, ‘Postmodernism and Film’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 43 – 61

⁶² Catherine Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood’s Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 43 – 61, p. 43

⁶³ Constable, ‘Postmodern Cinema’, in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Film Theory*, ed. by Branigan and Buckland, pp. 376 – 382, p. 381

⁶⁴ Constable, ‘Postmodernism and Film’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Connor, pp. 43 – 61 pp. 53 – 54

is most closely associated with deconstruction, a post-structuralist practice emerging from the work of Jacques Derrida.

Deconstruction is primarily concerned with challenging and investigating the ‘classical philosophical oppositions’ that structure western thought.⁶⁵ Such oppositions (e.g. presence/absence, male/female, speech/writing) are not neutral, but rather exist in a ‘violent hierarchy’.⁶⁶ According to Derrida, the practice of deconstruction is a ‘double gesture’.⁶⁷ The first phase of this gesture involves overturning the opposition in order to demonstrate its hierarchical nature.⁶⁸ To remain in this phase is to merely substitute one hierarchical binary for another and therefore to continue to operate in terms of binary opposition.⁶⁹ The second phase introduces a new term that inhabits both sides of the opposition, disorganising and resisting the opposition without ever resolving it.⁷⁰ Derrida describes such terms as ‘undecidables’.⁷¹ The undecidable is *neither* one side of the binary *nor* the other whilst simultaneously being *either* one side *or* the other.⁷² To return to an example from the previous chapter, the *pharmakon* is *neither* poison *nor* cure, whilst simultaneously *either* poison *or* cure.⁷³ The undecidable thoroughly problematizes the boundary between opposing terms, challenging the notion that such terms are discrete, enclosed, and bounded. As Elizabeth Grosz summarises, the undecidable ‘confounds binary logic’ through participation in both terms of the binary.⁷⁴ Deconstruction both overturns the hierarchical opposition and simultaneously disorganises the ‘inherited order’ of the system of opposition.⁷⁵

⁶⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 38

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38 – 39

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 40

⁷³ See p. 33 of this thesis

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (London: Allen & Unwen, 1989), p. 30

⁷⁵ Derrida, *Positions*, p. 39

For Hutcheon, the post-structuralist practice of deconstruction is inseparable from what she describes as the ‘de-doxifying’ impulse of postmodern art and culture.⁷⁶ In coining the term de-doxifying, Hutcheon plays on Barthes’s notions of *doxa* and *para-doxa* from *The Pleasure of the Text*.⁷⁷ Elsewhere Hutcheon describes this de-doxifying impulse more straightforwardly as a ‘de-naturalising critique’.⁷⁸ The de-naturalising impulse of postmodernism is apparent in its concern with pointing out that what we consider natural is in fact cultural: ‘made by us, not given to us’.⁷⁹ In particular the self-reflexive and parodic art of postmodernism underlines the realisation that all cultural forms of representation, high or low, are ‘ideologically grounded’.⁸⁰ The de-naturalising impulse of postmodernism therefore echoes deconstruction’s demonstration of the violently hierarchical properties of binary oppositions, in that both are concerned with challenging the perceived neutrality of representation and (philosophical) language.

By identifying the de-naturalising impulse of postmodernism and aligning it with deconstruction, Hutcheon is able to counter the claim that postmodernism is ‘disqualified’ from political involvement because of its appropriation of existing stories and images.⁸¹ Contrary to Jameson, Hutcheon argues that postmodernism *is* capable of critique, albeit a ‘strange kind of critique’.⁸² Postmodern critique is strange because it is unavoidably complicit, bound up with the object of its criticism.⁸³ This is a marked departure from Jameson’s notion of critique founded on Marxist-modernist requirement of critical distance. Moreover, Hutcheon asserts that postmodernism rejects the modernist urge for closure and distance (upon which Jameson’s notion of a critique depends), along with the unexamined modernist assumptions regarding

⁷⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 4

⁷⁷ In *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), *doxa* is referred to as both ‘opinion’ (p. 18) and as ‘nature’ (p. 28), *paradoxa* is ‘dispute’ (p. 18) while ‘*paradoxical* formulae’ are ‘those which proceed literally against the *doxa*’ (p. 54); in ‘Change the Object itself: Myth Today’ Barthes aligns *doxa* with his concept of myth and the ‘overturning of culture into nature’ and the rendering of the purely contingent as ‘Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion’. Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 165

⁷⁸ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 3

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 2

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 3

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 3

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 4

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 4

‘artistic autonomy, and the apolitical nature of representation’.⁸⁴ A similar suspicion is evident in the deconstructive impulse of post-structuralism. The complicitous critique of postmodernism recognises the impossibility of escaping implication in what it nevertheless seeks to analyse and undermine.⁸⁵ In light of this, Hutcheon offers a general definition of postmodernism as ‘the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, *without relinquishing the power or will to intervene critically in it.*’⁸⁶

The most marked difference between Hutcheon and Jameson is their very different conceptualisations of parody. Hutcheon retains the term parody rather than follow Jameson in describing ‘postmodern ironic citation’ as pastiche; although she notes it is uncommon for commentators on postmodernism to use the word parody.⁸⁷ Hutcheon’s retention of the term parody reflects her desire to revalue postmodern intertextuality and avoid the associations implied by the term pastiche. Hutcheon’s concept of postmodern parody challenges the criticisms of postmodern works as offering nothing more than ‘a value-free, decorative, de-historicized, quotation of past forms’, suggesting instead that through irony postmodern works offer a de-naturalizing form of acknowledging the history and politics of representation.⁸⁸

The political potential of postmodern parody emerges from the ironic and paradoxical nature of postmodern art. According to Hutcheon, postmodern parody performs ‘a paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions’.⁸⁹ Elsewhere, Hutcheon describes the ‘ironic representation’ of postmodern parody as ‘doubly coded’, meaning that it ‘both legitimizes and subverts’ that which it parodies.⁹⁰ Hutcheon takes up the term double-coded from Charles Jencks’s work on postmodern architecture. Jencks uses the term to describe the non-hierarchical combination of modern and traditional styles or techniques in postmodern architecture.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 99

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 4

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 26 emphasis added

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 94

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 90

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 14

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 101

⁹¹ Charles Jencks, *What is Post-modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1996), p. 30

Although Hutcheon rescues postmodern parody from ‘the ahistorical and empty realm of pastiche’ she nonetheless sets up a distinction between postmodern works and other ‘nostalgic’ practices evident in contemporary culture that lack the deconstructive and critical irony of postmodern parody.⁹²

Hutcheon’s identification of postmodernism as paradoxically installing and subverting, as double-coded, and as de-naturalising problematizes the straightforward association of postmodernism with a series of critical deaths evident in Jameson. Hutcheon asserts that, contrary to the ‘standard negative evaluation’, postmodernism does not claim that everything is ‘empty’ at the centre but rather interrogates and calls in to question the politics and power of that centre.⁹³ Put another way, acknowledging that something – history, truth, the subject, reality, etc. – is constructed and cultural is not the same as declaring that such a thing does not exist. Hutcheon elaborates on this in reference to both reality and history, responding to Baudrillard and Jameson respectively. According to Hutcheon, postmodernism makes representation ‘into an issue’ and so questions our assumptions about the supposed transparency and naturalness of representation.⁹⁴ Hutcheon claims that Baudrillard’s account of the replacement of the real by a simulacrum of the real (a representation without referent) partakes of a ‘metaphysical idealism’ in its nostalgia for a supposed period in which representation was natural and transparent but which is now lost.⁹⁵ On the contrary, ‘there is nothing natural about the “real” and there never was’.⁹⁶ It is not possible to have ‘unmediated’ access to reality, nor was it ever possible to access the real ‘except through representations’.⁹⁷ For Hutcheon, postmodernism is not the ‘degeneration’ in to hyperreality described by Baudrillard but rather ‘a questioning of what

⁹² For example, Hutcheon describes television as ‘pure commodified complicity, without the critique needed to define the postmodern paradox’. Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 10

⁹³ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 38

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 32

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 33; see also Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6 Hutcheon’s reading of Baudrillard does not take account of the possibly ironic and parodic undertones of Baudrillard’s charting of ‘The Precession of Simulacra’, which deliberately echoes Nietzsche’s own ironic and provocative use of such genealogical lists, in particular ‘How the “True World” Finally Became a Fable’ in *Twilight of the Idols*; See Nietzsche, ‘*Twilight of the Idols*’ in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Kaufmann, pp. 463 – 563 pp. 485 – 486

⁹⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 33

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 33

reality can mean and how we come to know it'.⁹⁸ Hutcheon describes a similar relation to history, noting that it is only possible to know the past through its texts, discourses, and the traces of historical events.⁹⁹ In postmodern texts, 'the representation of history becomes the history of representation'.¹⁰⁰ Hutcheon once again draws on the notion of postmodernism as complicitous critique, noting that while it is impossible to escape the history of representation, it is possible to critique it through parody and irony.¹⁰¹

Hutcheon criticises Jameson for lamenting the loss of history whilst simultaneously 'dismissing as nostalgia the only kind of history we may be able to acknowledge'.¹⁰² Hutcheon extends her criticism of Jameson in to a discussion of postmodern film. Hutcheon links Jameson's condemnation of Hollywood for its 'wholesale implication in capitalism' with a distrust of irony and ambiguity that blinds him to the 'potentially positive oppositional and contestatory nature of parody'.¹⁰³ Hutcheon identifies postmodern film with the practice of complicitous critique; noting that postmodern film does not and cannot deny its implication in capitalist modes of production, but rather 'exploits its "insider" position in order to begin subversion from within'.¹⁰⁴

Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation provides a valuable alternative to the dominant nihilistic postmodernism operating in the field of Film Studies.¹⁰⁵ While Hutcheon contests Jameson's association of postmodernism with the loss of critique and history, she does not address Jameson's outlining of the impossibility of postmodern authorship. This seemingly leaves little hope for a conceptualisation of postmodern authorship, caught between the author's absence in Hutcheon and the death of the author in Jameson. Although Hutcheon does not directly address the issue of authorship, there is nothing in her conceptualisation of

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 34

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 36

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 58

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 58

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 113

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 114

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 114

¹⁰⁵ See also Catherine Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2015), pp. 80 – 87

postmodernism that suggests the impossibility of a postmodern theory of authorship. As has been shown, the de-naturalising process of postmodernism does not ‘do-away’ with the object of its de-naturalisation, but rather acknowledges it as a cultural, constructed, and historically determined concept. If Hutcheon is able to retain a category like the subject – albeit a contested, constructed, and decentred notion of the subject – then why not the author?¹⁰⁶

Auteurism and Postmodernism

Despite the dominance of Jameson, the author is not absent from discussions of postmodern film – Corrigan’s concept of the commerce of auteurism examined in the previous chapter being but one example. Kenneth Von Gunden also allows for the possibility of postmodern authorship, classifying the ‘movie brats’ Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Brian De Palma, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese as postmodern auteurs.¹⁰⁷ However, neither Von Gunden’s theory of authorship nor his conceptualisation of postmodernism is particularly rigorous. For postmodernism, Von Gunden takes the concept of pastiche from Jameson (with all its negative associations), but associates the movie brats with postmodernism primarily because they belong to a ‘postmodern generation’ granted access to old movies on television.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, Von Gunden suggests that the film school background of the movie brats provides them the basis for producing pastiches, the ability to create a pastiche requiring a close study of the original.¹⁰⁹ In accordance with the dominant nihilistic conception of postmodernism, Von Gunden laments that ‘too many of the postmodern generation [...] have *no* other references except what they’ve gleaned from TV and film’.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, whilst the movie brats might ‘raid’ the narrative structure and visual styles of ‘genre films and classics alike’ they often overlook elements such as ‘humanity and warmth.’¹¹¹ Von Gunden clearly

¹⁰⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 38

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth Von Gunden, *Postmodern Auteurs: Coppola, Lucas, De Palma, Spielberg, and Scorsese* (Jefferson: MacFarland, 1991), p. 1

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165

frames pastiche as debased copy, going so far as to claim that the only lesson some directors learned from film school was ‘the triumph of style over substance.’¹¹²

Von Gunden’s treatment of authorship is similarly problematic. Von Gunden is markedly more interested in the birth of the reader than the death of the author, using Barthes as a jumping off point to introduce reader response theory without addressing the ways in which Barthes demonstrates the concept of authorship to be untenable.¹¹³ Von Gunden’s lack of engagement with Barthes is apparent in his preservation of intention, to the point of claiming that the ‘more debateable properties’ of auteurism can be avoided by accepting the auteur theory on a ‘limited basis’ acknowledging that authors ‘*intend* certain effects’.¹¹⁴ This is not so much accepting auteurism on a limited basis as dismissing all but the essential aspect of self-expression!

The version of auteurism proposed by Von Gunden is clearly incompatible with postmodernism as conceived by either Jameson or Hutcheon. Noël Carroll’s essay ‘The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)’ is a far more productive exploration of the potential overlap between auteurism and postmodernism. Although Carroll does not align the aesthetic practices he identifies with postmodernism, and only mentions postmodernism in a footnote, what Carroll identifies as allusion coincides with the postmodern citational practices identified by Jameson and Hutcheon.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Carroll’s work on allusion has subsequently been incorporated into the definition of postmodern cinema within Film Studies.¹¹⁶

Carroll defines allusion as the quotation, reworking, and memorialisation of past genres.¹¹⁷ While this definition bears some resemblance to that of pastiche, Carroll sees allusion to film history as ‘a major expressive device’ used by directors in order to comment on the

¹¹² Ibid, p. 167

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 19

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 19

¹¹⁵ Noël Carroll, ‘The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)’, *October* 20 (Spring, 1982), 51-81, p. 70 n. 14

¹¹⁶ Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, pp. 27 – 29

¹¹⁷ Noël Carroll, ‘The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)’, *October* 20 (Spring, 1982), 51-81, p. 52

film.¹¹⁸ Allusion is not understood as plagiarism or derivativeness ‘but as part of the expressive design of the new films’.¹¹⁹ In addition to allowing for the expressive potential of allusion, Carroll explicitly aligns allusion with auteurism.¹²⁰ According to Carroll, the adoption of auteurism fostered an unprecedented awareness of film history in a segment of the film audience.¹²¹ Carroll describes allusion as a two-tiered system catering to both the film-literate audience – able to discern ‘the art film in the genre film’ – and the more ‘adolescent clientele’ who enjoy the ‘genre film pure and simple’.¹²² Carroll compares this two-tiered system to the double-coding of postmodern architecture.¹²³ However, unlike the double-coding of postmodern architecture identified by Jencks, Carroll’s two-tiered system of allusion retains a hierarchical bias; evident in the term ‘tiered’, but also implied by the opposition of literate and adolescent audiences.

Carroll suggests that the practice of allusionism is a condition of the post-seventies auteur. According to Carroll, the modern auteur must rework existing genres ‘in order to generate expression through the friction between the old and new’.¹²⁴ Carroll identifies two modes in which the post-seventies auteur can engage with genre through allusion: genre reworking and genre memorialisation. A director engages in genre reworking by altering the ‘rhythm, characters, [and] plot structures’ of a traditional genre such as the western or horror film, with these changes taken to be the personal stamp of the auteur.¹²⁵ Genre memorialisation is the ‘loving evocation [...] of the way genres were’, through imitation and exaggeration.¹²⁶ A genre memorialisation like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is not a perfect copy of the ‘B cliff-hanger’ serials it emulates, but is instead a better version of its referents: more lavish, with more action,

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 52

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 52

¹²⁰ Ibid, p. 54

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 54

¹²² Ibid, p. 56

¹²³ Ibid, p. 70 n. 14

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 57

¹²⁵ Ibid, pp. 56 – 57

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 62

and more adventure.¹²⁷ Whilst genre memorialisation still utilises allusion, it does not subvert or comment upon the original.¹²⁸ Although Carroll is not critical of genre memorialisation *per se*, he observes that such memorialisation runs the aesthetic risk of becoming nothing more than ‘a tawdry genre rerun’.¹²⁹ This suggests that Carroll identifies genre memorialisation as an uncritical form of allusion because it too closely resembles the object of its mimicry, and is at worst indistinguishable from it. From a Jamesonian perspective, this implies that exaggeration is not a valid form of critique because it fails to meet the criteria of distance Jameson associates with proper modernist critique. A contrary conceptualisation of the critical potential of exaggeration can be found in Mary Ellmann’s argument for the ‘explosive tendency’ of stereotypes. According to Ellmann, each stereotype has a limit and will ‘explode’ when ‘swelled’ to it. This results either in the ‘total vulgarization’ of the stereotype or ‘a reorganisation of the advantage, now in fragments, about a new center [sic] of disadvantage’.¹³⁰

Carroll aligns allusion with the shift in Hollywood cinema of the sixties away from the classical realist style towards a style that ‘explored the expressive potentials of shamelessly aggressive and conspicuous displays of technique.’¹³¹ The practice of allusion evolves out of this growing concern with style, which encouraged both the study of specific styles and the possibility of ‘quoting them outright.’¹³² Carroll states that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the use of allusion or the increased sensitivity to style it accompanies.¹³³ However, as Constable observes, Carroll insists that ‘true expressive allusionism is bound up with a distinctive utopian social project.’¹³⁴ Early allusion is an interaction with the utopian project of the sixties and early seventies: the creation of brand new ‘common culture’ tailor made for the

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 62

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 62

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 6

¹³⁰ Mary Ellmann, *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 131 quoted in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 37

¹³¹ Noël Carroll, ‘The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)’, *October* 20 (Spring, 1982), 51-81, p. 78

¹³² Ibid, p. 79

¹³³ Ibid, p. 79

¹³⁴ Constable, ‘Postmodern Cinema’, in *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Film Theory*, ed. by Branigan and Buckland, pp. 376 – 382, p. 337

post-war generation.¹³⁵ Carroll sees early allusion as ‘an expression of [...] utopian urgency’ as part of an attempt to create a new community ‘with film history supplying its legends, myths, and vocabulary.’¹³⁶ Without this prospect for utopia, allusion deteriorates into nostalgia, affectation and self-deception.¹³⁷ Although Carroll initially provides an affirmative account of postmodern citational practices, he ultimately succumbs to the same narrative of decline common to both Jameson’s conceptualisation of postmodernism and the orthodox accounts of Hollywood cinema’s transition from an artistic and political Renaissance in the sixties to a debased and hollow form in seventies and eighties.¹³⁸

Even critics not directly concerned with authorship tend to discuss postmodernism in relation to a limited corpus of directors. For example, M. Keith Booker regularly refers to the works of a select corpus of directors drawn from both Hollywood and international art cinema in his survey of postmodern cinema, despite the clear influence of Jameson on his understanding of postmodern film. In particular, Booker makes repeated reference to the work of Woody Allen, Robert Altman, Tim Burton, David Cronenberg, David Lynch, Brian DePalma, Quentin Tarantino, and the Coen Brothers. Booker also follows Jameson in finding most postmodern texts superficial, with the films of Tim Burton presented as the epitome of postmodern superficiality.¹³⁹

Booker does attempt to work through the contradictions attendant on his desire to retain a category of authorship alongside his taking up of Jameson. Conceding that the advent of

¹³⁵ Noël Carroll, ‘The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)’, *October* 20 (Spring, 1982), 51-81, p. 79

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79

¹³⁸ This is explored in more detail in the following chapter. For accounts of the transition from Hollywood Renaissance to contemporary blockbuster see Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (London: Tauris, 2002), and Peter Kramer, ‘Post-classical Hollywood’, in *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, ed. by John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 289 – 309 ; for a compelling analysis of the differing construction of the Hollywood Renaissance and contemporary blockbuster period in terms of cultural value, see Elissa Nelson, ‘Beneath the Surface and the Excess: An Examination of Critical and Aesthetic Attacks on Films of the 1980s’, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 46:5, (2013), 1029 – 1050; for an example of the mapping of a postmodern narrative of decline to this transition see Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, pp. 4 – 5; for a critique of this tendency see Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, pp. 5 – 38

¹³⁹ This is particularly apparent in Booker’s scathing analysis of Burton’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* M. Keith Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood: What’s New in Film and Why it Makes Us Feel So Strange* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007) pp. xi - xvi

postmodernism means that the cultivation of a unique voice is no longer possible, Booker claims that postmodern artistic creativity instead ‘resides [...] in the clever appropriation and assembly of the styles of others, while individual films themselves have an assembled, fragmented quality.’¹⁴⁰ Booker’s description of postmodern citation appears to lack the negative associations of pastiche, yet is still quite some way from Hutcheon’s affirmative conceptualisation of postmodern parody. Booker’s attempt to address the absence of the utopian dimension in postmodern art is less fruitful. Booker contrarily asserts that the ‘cultural hegemony’ of capitalism is ‘incomplete’ and that ‘there are always cracks and fissures through which alternative ideologies can potentially shine through.’¹⁴¹ Booker’s claim that the fragmentation of capitalism creates space for alternative ideologies recalls Jameson’s notion of the utopian, but transplants it to a situation where Jameson explicitly states it is no longer possible. Furthermore, the suggestion that late capitalism is *not* a totalising and inescapable force is completely at odds with Jameson. Booker goes on to claim that whilst he does not predict an imminent ‘explosion of radical utopian energy in commercial film’ it is up to the astute viewer to read such films ‘in an enlightening and liberating way, toward a day when true enlightenment and liberation might become a concrete possibility.’¹⁴² The liberated and enlightened reading practices Booker calls for are somewhat at odds with those demonstrated by Booker preceding his conclusion. On the whole, Booker’s analysis follows Jameson in explicating the short-comings of postmodern aesthetics, such as the substitution of superficiality for depth. Booker’s conclusion not only contradicts the practice of the preceding chapters but operates in direct opposition to postmodern theory; the language of enlightenment and liberation instead recalling the teleology of Enlightenment progress and Marxist revolution. Booker’s identification of the utopian aspect of postmodernism can therefore be seen as a transformation of postmodernism into modernism.

¹⁴⁰ Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood*, p. 188

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 189

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 189

Roberta Garrett also notes an auteurist trend in discussion of postmodern film, particularly in relation to the films of ‘cultish experimental directors’ such as Scorsese, David Lynch, Michael Mann, David Fincher, and Quentin Tarantino.¹⁴³ Garrett makes particular note of the similarity between the accounts praising David Lynch as an ‘innovative alternative’ to mainstream blockbuster filmmaking and the later critical reception of Tarantino.¹⁴⁴ Garrett observes that these texts tend to be ‘associated with violence and the young male audience’, and regrets the common conflation of postmodernism with a particular brand of ‘nasty’ postmodern cinema featuring violence, derogatory treatment of women, and the depiction of a male criminal subculture arising from the almost exclusive association of postmodernism with a particular set of directors.¹⁴⁵ Garrett seeks to challenge the definition of postmodern cinema as ‘anarchic, cultish and masculine’, but does so through an appeal to genre, rather than auteurism; identifying a parallel tradition of the postmodern chick flick.

Booker and Garrett’s writing on postmodernism would not be readily classified as auteurist, both being primarily concerned with exploring postmodern cinema as a mode or cultural dominant. Yet both critics rely on the organising function of auteurism, their catalogues of postmodern cinema ordered in reference to named directors. This reliance on auteurism, even in so limited a sense, is indicative of the centrality of auteurism to the practice of Film Studies. The persistence of the director as a classificatory category goes some way to explain an approach such as Von Gunden’s, content to leave the potential incompatibility of auteurism with postmodernism unexamined. While such unsatisfactory approaches are to be avoided, auteurism is so entwined with the practice and vocabulary of Film Studies that simply discarding it would be impossible as well as undesirable.

This presents particular difficulties when studying postmodern cinema. The depth model required to sustain the Romantic model of authorship is incompatible with both Jameson and

¹⁴³Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 6

¹⁴⁴Ibid, p. 6

¹⁴⁵Ibid, p. 5

Hutcheon's conceptualisations of postmodernism. However, as noted in the section on Hutcheon, there is potential to retain the category of the author. Doing so requires a reconceptualization and de-naturalisation of authorship that acknowledges it as a cultural, constructed, and historically determined concept.

The Author as Text and Genres of Author-function

As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, theories of authorship built upon the Romantic model posit the author as a self-expressive subject. Even modernist models of authorship such as those of Eliot and Jameson depend upon this notion, albeit presenting an altered sense of expression and more contested, fragmented notion of the subject. Corrigan and Barthes's theories of authorship merely operate in a binary logic of opposition with the Romantic model of authorship. In negating the Romantic author they nevertheless inadvertently sustain that model. As both Nietzsche and Derrida demonstrate, while negation and inversion are necessary steps in the creation of new values and meaning, they are not sufficient conditions for the creation of new values or meaning.¹⁴⁶ The notion of the author as a structure proposed by auteur-structuralism is a more useful first step in moving away from the notions of the author as expressive subject. An understanding of the author as structure rather than expressive subject is clearly the starting point for Brooker's post-structuralist inspired approach to authorship. Brooker's taking up of Foucault's author-function lends an additional dimension to his approach absent from auteur-structuralism; a way of productively analysing the ways in which specific author structures interact with and are sustained by different cultural discourses of authorship.

The term structure, however, seems inadequate for the concept of authorship that emerges from Brooker's analysis. The author is more than just a neutral frame imposing unity across a set of texts and within individual texts; the author is a site of meaning in itself, the meanings associated with the author both governing and governed by the meanings of the film

¹⁴⁶ For more on the links between Nietzsche and deconstruction, see Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 54 – 73

texts in a two-way exchange. It seems appropriate then to consider the author not as (merely) a structure but (also) as a text.

Brooker is primarily concerned with the ways in which the author-text is constituted through extratextual material (promotional material, interviews, DVD extras, even biographical information), and is less attentive to the ways in which the author-text is also written by the film texts. Supplementing Brooker with the methodology of auteur-structuralism compensates for this lack: the recurrent themes and motifs drawn from the films translate to preoccupations in the author-text, whilst recurrent stylistic elements become the signature style.

The relation between the author-text and film texts is neither static nor linear, but dynamic and multi-dimensional. While the author-text serves to frame reception of the film texts, each new reading of a film text contributes to the construction of the author-text; refocusing and reframing the author-text in relation to a reading of that film. This refocused author-text provides a lens through which to re-read the film texts, providing a new point of focus from which to discern new patterns of meaning across the oeuvre. Rather than the hierarchical opposition of creator to creation, both film text and author-text exist in a closed loop, neither one generating the other but rather each created by and creating the other simultaneously and continuously.

The concept of the author-text recognises that the category of the author is not natural but cultural, constructed through discourse and convention. Brooker's analysis of the press kit for *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006) points to some of the ways in which the author-text is imbued with particular meanings. Brooker observes how the description of Nolan's film career in the press release is

'constructed as an echo of Bruce Wayne's path towards becoming Batman, described in a language of rigorous, physical struggle [...] while equally subtle associations [...] portray the director as a magician, like the protagonists of *The Prestige*.'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 34

The vocabulary of physical struggle suggests both the Romantic notion of artistic struggle and a sort of rugged masculinity. Brooker also observes a metaphor of filmmaker as magician, but does not investigate the implications of this language. Both metaphors confer specific meanings and values on the author-text, which are retained in reference to subsequent films, as demonstrated by the retention of 'Batman' meanings (physical struggle etc.) alongside the 'magician' meanings of the current film.

The use of specific phraseology to confer meaning to the author-text recalls both Battersby's remarks regarding the persistence of the vocabulary of Romanticism and Collingwood's concept of courtesy titles. What Brooker's analysis shows is that courtesy meanings used to add value to the author-text are not limited to investing the author-text with the meanings and cultural value associated with the Romantic author. This should be considered in light of Foucault's observation that the author-function is not uniform across cultures or discourses, meaning that the author-function in poetry, for example, will differ to that of medicine. Taking up and developing Foucault's notion of different author-functions facilitates the creation of a typology of authorship for accurately identifying and describing the different types of authorship operating in the field of Film Studies.

These various styles of author-function might be termed genres of author-function, in keeping with the analogy of the author-text. Battersby and Brooker's identification of the persistence of Romantic authorship can therefore be seen as the persistence of the Romantic genre of author-function. Where Brooker describes the use of the Romantic author as a useful device in film promotion, he is describing the deployment of particular tropes of the Romantic genre of author-function. Astruc's description of the director as self-expressive artist deploys the Romantic genre of author-function; while Barthes's death of the author is a refusal of it.

Like filmic genres, genres of author function are determined through the varied discourses of publicity, promotion, and reception, defined by Steve Neale as an 'inter-textual

relay'.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, the process of identifying a film genre according to recurring thematic or iconographic features can be used to identify which genre of author-function is being deployed. For example, just as the presence of stock-characters such as the *femme fatale* or gunslinger would indicate a film noir or western, so allusion to the figure of suffering artist indicates the deployment of the Romantic genre of author-function. Analysis of the various theories of authorship surveyed in the previous chapter indicates the existence of a number of genres of author-function beyond the Romantic. These genres of author-function can be easily differentiated through their differing treatment of self-expression. In addition to the uncomplicated self-expression of the Romantic genre of author-function, we can identify the more nuanced construction of author as catalyst or spokesman in Eliot and Collingwood, which I designate the modernist genre of author-function. Jameson's Marxist inflected modernist theory of authorship also contributes to the formulation of the modernist genre of author-function, modifying it in ways discussed below. At the other extreme of the spectrum is Corrigan's auteur-star, which I term the commercial genre of author-function.

Both the Romantic and the modernist genres of author-function are underpinned by theories of authorship that conceive of the author as more or less universally representative; either as transcendent genius or as the spokesman for an epoch or generation. While the modernist genre of author-function may build on Collingwood's rejection of the transcendent and transhistorical genius of Romanticism in favour of a more historicised figure, it is important to acknowledge the implicit and unexamined maleness, straightness, and whiteness of that figure. As the theories of feminist authorship considered in the literature review demonstrate, the framing of such identities as universal problematically obscures the specifics of gendered identity key to feminist aesthetics. The exclusion of gender by the other genres of author-function points to the necessity of designating a feminist genre of author-function that maintains gender as a category of theoretical significance. For the feminist genre of author-function, the

¹⁴⁸ Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2

author is conceived as a representative and spokesperson for a community that share a specific gendered identity, that may or may not intersect with other identities such as class, race, and sexuality. This acknowledges Smelik's call to recognise the author not as gendered alone, but also racialized and politicised.

The genres of author-function also reflect differing attitudes to the distinction between art and not-art, and the place of art in relation to entertainment or commerce. For the Romantic genre of author-function, art and artists exist apart from the mundane concerns of the commercial. Art is for art's sake and artists are bohemian outsiders a breed apart from the common man. Following Jameson, the modernist genre of author-function requires art to maintain an appropriate critical distance from the popular and the commercial. The artists of the modernist genre of author-function are not transcendent geniuses. For the feminist genre of author-function, art is oppositional and distinguished from ideologically complicit entertainment. In stark contrast to the other genres of author-function, the commercial genre of author-function is centrally concerned with commerce rather than art.

Each genre of author-function is also associated with a different notion of the purpose of art. For the Romantic genre of author-function, self-expression is both the root and purpose of art, with the added conditions that such expressions be authentic and original. Following Jameson, the modernist genre of author-function retains the requirements of authenticity and originality as the compulsion to create a unique voice, with the added conditions of critique and the achievement of a utopian social project. Following Collingwood, the modernist genre of author-function also sustains the belief that a text must speak to something greater than itself or the author, revealing and reflecting the preoccupations and desires of a generation or epoch; a condition also implicit in Jameson. For the feminist genre of author-function, the purpose of art is to reflect and make visible the lived experiences of those that would otherwise be invisible or marginalised. For the commercial genre of author-function, the primary task of an auteur is not

even necessarily to make films, but to sell them, and as such the purpose of art according to the commercial genre of author-function is to make money.

This close association with considerations of the purpose of art is a peculiarity of genres of author-function, distinguishing them from literary or filmic genres. Genres of author-function perform both a categorising and a critical function; each genre is both a label for a particular type of authorship, and a description of an aesthetic perspective. This reflects the traditional use of authorship in criticism as a way of distinguishing between categories of art and not-art. Texts that meet the requirements of a particular genre of author-function are categorised as authored art while those that do not are condemned to the category of authorless not-art. Jameson's condemnation of postmodernism for failing to meet the requirement of a modernist genre of author-function is an obvious example of this function of authorship.

Jameson's condemnation of postmodernism also implies the existence of a further category of failed authorship, a non-author, reminiscent of the figure of the *metteur en scène*. The non-author is the bad-twin that sustains the figure of the author. The qualities of the non-author will differ according to the requirements of the different genres of author-function. For the Romantic genre of author-function the non-author will not be self-expressive, for the modernist genre of author-function the non-author will lack critical distance. A hierarchical binary is therefore established with the qualities of the chosen genre of author-function occupying the favoured position and those associated with the non-author on the other. In this way the non-author 'proves' the superior status of the chosen genre of author-function. Again, Jameson's opposition of the modernist author and postmodernism is the clearest example of this. Not only does Jameson demonstrate the superiority of the modernist genre of author-function, he goes so far as to align the postmodern non-author with the death of the author.

As the reference to Jameson suggests, this leads to potential difficulties when dealing with postmodern texts that challenge Romantic and modernist aesthetics. This raises particular problems for auteurist critics writing on directors associated with postmodern cinema, either

having to find ways to justify classifying the director according to the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function, or else being forced to resort to the vocabulary of the commercial genre of author-function, it being the only genre of author-function readily compatible with postmodern texts. If sufficient justification cannot be found for constructing the author-text in relation to any genre of author-function, the only remaining outcome is association with the category of non-author. Such an outcome is clearly undesirable.

The remainder of this chapter will analyse the critical writing on two key directors associated with postmodern cinema, David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino. These directors represent limit cases in the border war between authorship and postmodernism, and therefore serve as a useful demonstration of the difficulties outlined in the previous paragraph. Lynch, whilst being associated with postmodernism, is readily discussed in terms of the traditional romantic and modernist genres of author-function. Lynch therefore represents a relatively secure author who is nonetheless associated with postmodernism. Tarantino on the other hand is all but synonymous with postmodern cinema. However, whilst Tarantino is a particularly visible and vocal example of the business of being an auteur, he has less access to the traditional Romantic and modernist genres of author-function.

The examination of the literature on Lynch and Tarantino also demonstrates the kind of meta-critical analysis made possible by the shift to considering authorship in terms of author-text and genres of function. In particular, the genres of author-function provide a framework and vocabulary for the accurate description of the various ways in which the Lynch and Tarantino author-texts are constructed. This in turn enables consideration of the ways in which the aesthetic preferences informing these constructions – such as originality, self-expression, or critical distance – influence the conceptualisations of postmodernism operating in the Lynch and Tarantino literature.

David Lynch and Quentin Tarantino: At the limits of Authorship and Postmodernism

When considering Lynch as an auteur, a number of critics discuss Lynch's films in terms of self-expression, with Michael Atkinson's analysis of *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986) the most extreme example. According to Atkinson, *Blue Velvet* is not only a 'personal' film, but a film so self-evidently a personal film that 'even the most dubious auteur-theory agnostic' must 'acknowledge its intimate relationship with its writer/director, and the fact that it could never have been made by anyone else.'¹⁴⁹ Atkinson's claim that no one but Lynch could have made *Blue Velvet* clearly frames the film as an expression of David Lynch – an artistic representation and expression of the artist's personality. Supporting the classification of Lynch's films as expressions of Lynch's self, Atkinson suggests that viewing Lynch's film and biography in relation to one another reveals 'perhaps the most unselfconscious, unironic, genuine merging of man and medium the movies have yet seen.'¹⁵⁰ The uncomplicated link between artist and work suggested by Atkinson is a clear example of the Romantic genre of author-function. Kenneth Kaleta also classifies Lynch's films as self-expressive, although he suggests that Lynch's 'more commercial works' provide less overt evidence of Lynch's self-expression than his independent debut *Eraserhead* (1977).¹⁵¹ This suggests a degree of play within the Romantic genre of author-function, allowing for degrees of self-expression rather than a dichotomy between expressive and not expressive.

Kaleta's deployment of the Romantic genre of author-function is intriguing, as he presents a slight narrative of decline (Lynch exchanging the independent cinema's pure self-expression for diluted commercial cinema) without departing from the Romantic genre of author-function. In this way, Kaleta is able to reinforce Lynch's status as self-expressive artist even as it is undercut. While the shift to more commercial cinema ostensibly marks a decline in self-expression, the very fact that Lynch's films are still noticeably self-expressive (albeit less

¹⁴⁹ Michael Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, BFI Modern Classics (London: BFI, 1997), p. 13

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 13

¹⁵¹ Kenneth C. Kaleta, *David Lynch* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 15

noticeably so than *Eraserhead*) in an environment supposedly antithetical to self-expression increases Lynch's stature as a self-expressive artist, rather than diminishes it. This recalls the logic of *la politique des auteurs*, where finding self-expressive artists in commercial cinema confirms that cinema is a self-expressive art. Furthermore, Hollywood directors are remarkable artists, able to create art in spite of the limitations imposed on them. This sort of proof through adversity is particularly apparent in Erica Sheen's work on Lynch.

For Sheen, Lynch is a director many critics and 'film buffs' want to describe as an auteur.¹⁵² Following Sheen, the fulfilment of this desire is problematic, due to the contradiction between the 'classical concept of the auteur' and the realities of 'New Hollywood Production deals.'¹⁵³ Lynch cannot be an auteur because the systems sustaining the category of auteur no longer exist. Sheen echoes Jameson in opposing an older, lost artistic epoch (classical cinema and modernism respectively) associated with authorship to a new, compromised form (post-classical cinema and postmodernism) where authorship is no longer possible. In spite of this, Sheen still manages to present Lynch as an auteur. Somewhat perversely, Sheen does this through a detailed analysis of the production history of *Dune* (Lynch, 1984), a film described by Martha Nochimson as 'the only Lynch film about which there is valid general agreement that it doesn't work'.¹⁵⁴ Sheen's analysis seeks to reassess the classification of *Dune* as a failure and takes the production history of *Dune* as a 'paradigm of Lynch's often difficult and always critical relations with the film industry'.¹⁵⁵ By describing Lynch's relationship to the film industry as critical and antagonistic, Sheen covertly appeals to the modernist genre of author-function. Sheen's analysis of *Dune* exemplifies the obsession with boundaries and border conflict associated with the modernist genre of author-function, in particular the boundary

¹⁵² Erica Sheen, 'Going Into Strange Worlds: David Lynch, *Dune* and New Hollywood' in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 35 – 47, p. 40

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 40

¹⁵⁴ Martha, P. Nochimson, *The Passion of David Lynch: Wild at Heart in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas, 2003), p. 123

¹⁵⁵ Sheen, 'Going Into Strange Worlds' in *The Cinema of David Lynch*, ed. by Sheen and Davison, pp. 35 – 47, p. 36

between art/commerce. Sheen's examination of the negotiations between Lynch's directorial (artistic) autonomy and the (commercial) pressures of the production company – such as the reduction of *Dune's* five-hour runtime to a theatrical cut of 137 minutes – emphasises the battle for dominance between the fields of art/commerce.¹⁵⁶ Most interesting about Sheen's choice of *Dune* is that it demonstrates that 'winning' the conflicts is unnecessary, what matters is the evidence of conflict and oppositions. Art is not overwhelmed by its binary opposite commerce; in fact the category of commerce constructs and sustains the category of art. Sheen is therefore able to reframe the failure of *Dune* as evidence of Lynch's struggle against commerce (and thus confirmation of his authorial credentials) rather than as evidence of the impossibility of authorship.

Not all constructions of Lynch's authorship are as oblique as Sheen's, with most falling somewhere between the subtlety of Sheen and the forthrightness of Atkinson. For example Anne Jarslev, discussing the tactile quality of Lynch's work, describes Lynch as investing the camera 'with the kind of bodily, tactile quality which characterises the hand that carries the painters brush'.¹⁵⁷ There are clear echoes of Astruc's *Caméra-Stylo*, the painters brush taking the place of the poet's pen as metaphor for self-expression. The brush is an apt symbol for Lynch's self-expression as it reflects his training in the fine arts. Allusions to Lynch's background as a painter abound in auteurist literature on Lynch, either through direct reference

¹⁵⁶ Sheen, 'Going Into Strange Worlds' in *The Cinema of David Lynch*, ed. by Sheen and Davison, pp. 35 – 47, p. 40

¹⁵⁷ Anne Jarslev, 'Beyond Boundaries: David Lynch's Lost Highway' in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 151-163, p. 154

to his time at art school or, through comparison of Lynch to other artists; chiefly Francis Bacon, Jackson Pollock, and Edward Hopper.¹⁵⁸

Such references appear to serve a dual function. In one sense, discussing Lynch in relation to these artists suggests Lynch shares kinship with this elect group and is like them a self-expressive artist. References to artists are therefore an appeal to the Romantic genre of author-function. In another sense, through comparison with the likes of Bacon, Lynch becomes an ‘Artist’ in the specific sense that painters and sculptors are artists, not merely in the general sense that artists, poets and composers are all self-expressive artists. Furthermore, discussion of Lynch’s films in relation to painting suggests that there is something painterly about Lynch’s films. This sense of Lynch-as-artist is central to Allister MacTaggart’s approach in *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory*, the title hinting at the various hierarchical oppositions caught up in the classification of Lynch’s films as paintings. In particular, the challenge posed by film painting to film theory appears to be an opposition of feeling and thinking, with feeling being the favoured term. For MacTaggart, recognising Lynch’s films as painting ‘helps to place the films within a fine art context and sensibility’, a move MacTaggart asserts is essential for critical analysis of Lynch’s work.¹⁵⁹ This is borne out in MacTaggart’s observation that Lynch’s films emphasise the visual over ‘narrative and generic structures’.¹⁶⁰ The construction of Lynch as Artist also serves as a way of distinguishing Lynch from the mainstream. MacTaggart’s identification of Lynch’s preference for the visual over narrative neatly demonstrates the identification of a unique style that differs from the norm.

¹⁵⁸ For reference to Lynch’s artistic training see Allister MacTaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), p. 12; Michelle Le Blanc and Colin Odell, *The Pocket Essential David Lynch* (Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2000), p. 7; Kaleta, *David Lynch*, p. 3. For reference to specific artists see Nochimson, *The Passion of David Lynch*, p. 7; Jana Evans Braziel, “‘In Dreams...’: Gender, Sexuality and violence in the cinema of David Lynch’ in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, (eds.) Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 107-118, p. 108; Greg Haigne, ‘Weird or Loopy? Specular Spaces, Feedback and Artifice in Lost Highway’s Aesthetics of sensation’ in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 136 – 150, p. 139

¹⁵⁹ Allister MacTaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch: Challenging Film Theory* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), p.

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¹⁶⁰ MacTaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch*, p. 12

The sense of Lynch as oppositional, outside of the mainstream, and possessing a unique style distinct from the norm are indicative of the modernist genre of author-function. Kaleta's observation that it is possible to describe the world outside of Lynch's films as like 'something out of David Lynch' recalls Jameson's thoughts on how the unique styles of modernist authors can be parodied because of their deviation from a perceived norm.¹⁶¹ Building on this, the notion that a place, person, event, or text can be described as 'something out of David Lynch' or as Lynchian cements Lynch's status as an artist in accordance with the modernist genre of author-function, the transformation of Lynch's name in to an adjective proof of that name's association with a unique style.

However, there is a sense that Lynch's films are aligned with painting for reasons other than simply to champion his unique style. With the modernist genre of author-function, there is a danger that the unique style of the artist deviates from the norm to such an extent that it no longer meets the requirements of art. The style is no longer unique but rather excessive or decadent. The alignment of Lynch with the fine arts secures against this eventuality, suggesting a more appropriate norm against which to judge Lynch's films. Rather than being judged against the norm of narrative driven cinema, Lynch's films are considered in terms of imagistic painting.¹⁶² This is the approach taken by MacTaggart. The association of Lynch with literary movements such as Romanticism and the gothic, and authors such as Edgar Allen Poe perform a similar function in aligning Lynch with a particular style and type of narrative.¹⁶³ This strategy

¹⁶¹ Kaleta, *David Lynch*, p. ix

¹⁶² This rather interestingly posits post-classical cinema as narrative driven, contrary to the orthodox belief that contemporary cinema is dominated by spectacle, not narrative. However, it would be inappropriate to describe Lynch's works as 'narrative driven'. Even with films supposedly organised around a detection plot like *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2001) seem indifferent to narrative convention. *Twin Peaks* (1990 – 1991) shows particularly flagrant disregard for its detection narrative, heaping mystery upon mystery and continuing for an entire season after revealing Laura Palmer's killer! More likely Lynch's films and contemporary cinema more generally are considered in opposition to classical Hollywood cinema. Lynch's deviation from classical Hollywood is deemed artistic, whereas the replacement of narrative with spectacle is merely excessive.

¹⁶³ For Romanticism, see Michel Chion, *David Lynch* (2nd edition) trans. by Robert Julian (London: BFI, 2006), p. 150. For the gothic, see John Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch* (London: Letts, 1993), p. 5. For Poe, see Steven Jay Schneider, 'The Essential Evil in/of *Eraserhead* (or, Lynch to the Contrary)' in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 5 – 18, p. 13; Michel Chion, *David Lynch* (2nd edition) trans. by Robert Julian (London: BFI, 2006), p. 150; Kaleta, *David Lynch*, p. 136

prevents classification of Lynch's films as not-art by responding to an acknowledged peculiarity in the films, accounting for the strangeness of Lynch's films compared to a perceived norm by encouraging comparison with a range of texts that exhibit similarly strange or deviant qualities.

Strangeness is not only a characteristic of Lynch's films, but also his public persona. Greg Haigne captures Lynch's apparent oddness wonderfully, claiming 'references to David Lynch in the mainstream press almost without exception describe him as being somewhat less than normal.'¹⁶⁴ However, it is through reference to Lynch's persona and biography that the strangeness of Lynch's films is not only made safe but co-opted as a marker of his status as auteur. This is achieved by classifying Lynch's strangeness as symptomatic of his being an artist. Michelle LeBlanc and Colin Odell observe that 'Lynch's career is burdened with anecdotes about eccentric behaviour and strange ritual'.¹⁶⁵ According to LeBlanc and Odell this is only to be expected, as artists differ from the norm and are considered odd, amusing, or scary – with Lynch being 'all three'.¹⁶⁶ LeBlanc and Odell's identification of eccentricity as the mark of an artist partakes of a well-established myth of authorship, that of the bohemian artist. Artists are deemed a breed apart, not confined by the staid conventions of society. This mythologizing sustains the opposition of art/commerce (or art/mundane world) favoured by the Romantic genre of author-function. LeBlanc and Odell only discuss the strangeness of Lynch in the general sense that eccentricity is the sign of an artist. There is however a notable congruence between the unusual behaviours reported (such as allegedly dissecting a cat to study its textures) and the 'strangeness' of Lynch's films.¹⁶⁷

Alexander also appeals to the image of the artist as separate, as in the world but not of it, although inflected in a manner more suitable to the modernist genre of author-function.

Alexander notes that while Lynch 'uses quintessentially American settings and characters', they are subject to 'the eye of the estranged artist' and as such appear 'through a lens distorted by an

¹⁶⁴ Haigne, 'Weird or Loopy?' in *The Cinema of David Lynch*, ed. by Sheen and Davison, pp. 136 – 150, p. 136

¹⁶⁵ Le Blanc and Odell, *The Pocket Essential David Lynch*, p. 8

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8

¹⁶⁷ This anecdote is reported in Eric G. Wilson, *The Strange World of David Lynch: Transcendental Irony from Eraserhead to Mullholland Dr.* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 29

outsider's perspective'.¹⁶⁸ Alexander contrasts the image of Lynch as estranged artist to the 'All-American Boy' image cultivated by Lynch. Lynch may be the product of the rural small-town America depicted in *Blue Velvet*, *The Straight Story* (Lynch, 1999), and *Twin Peaks* (1990 – 1991), but his identity as artist grants him critical distance from this, allowing him to comment on it critically and draw out its dark underbelly, as exemplified in *Blue Velvet*. Despite this distance, Lynch maintains his rural Pacific Northwest persona, at odds with his artist persona, suggesting a personality in conflict, estranged from itself. This implies that Lynch is in some sense distanced from *himself* and thus constructs the Lynch author-text in terms of critical distance associated with the modernist genre of author-function.

The famous description of Lynch as 'Jimmy Stewart from Mars', attributed to Mel Brooks, reflects the opposition of homeliness and estrangement. The description of Lynch as Martian clearly evokes the outsider status of the artist, while the reference to James Stewart recalls the actor's earnest, homespun, all-American persona used to great effect in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (Frank Capra, 1939). The reference to Stewart also recalls Stewart's characters in *Rear Window* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) and *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958); outwardly normal men overcome by obsession on discovering the darker side of American life. The Stewart comparison therefore encapsulates both the homeliness associated with the Lynch author-text and the sense of estrangement and *unheimlich* qualities.¹⁶⁹

Geoff Andrew also cultivates the image of Lynch as estranged artist and outsider, but does so by appealing to artistic figures within the film industry rather than fine arts or literature. Andrew aligns Lynch with a 'maverick tradition' of cinema, reaching across the history of cinema and including directors such as Erich von Stroheim, Josef von Sternberg, Orson Welles,

¹⁶⁸ Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch*, pp. 4 – 5

¹⁶⁹ Commonly rendered in English as 'uncanny', David McClintock suggests that the opposition homely/unhomely is 'etymologically and morphologically' comparable to Freud's opposition of *heimlich/unheimlich* (if not semantically equivalent). To my mind, this rendering is particularly fitting when applied to Lynch. See Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McClintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p. lxiii

Nicolas Ray, Douglas Sirk, Sam Fuller, and John Cassavetes.¹⁷⁰ Andrew defines mavericks as filmmakers who ‘one way or another stand outside the commercial mainstream.’¹⁷¹ Andrew’s ‘one way or another’ is a crucial modifier, allowing his maverick tradition to include both ‘genuine independents’ and directors working with the backing of Hollywood studios ‘but whose films [...] betoken a forceful individuality, an artistic sensibility’ which sets them apart from commercial Hollywood.¹⁷² Andrew also makes exception for auteurs from the studio era like Hitchcock who ‘remained fiercely independent figures’ despite working in the studio system.¹⁷³ The distinction between mainstream and maverick is not a tangible, measurable distinction, but intuitive: ‘you just feel it in your bones whether someone is a maverick’.¹⁷⁴ Andrew’s category of the maverick thus recalls the romantic notion of the genius as self-evidently distinct from normal mortals. In the same way that one is born a genius rather than becoming one through practice, one either is or is not a maverick. The term maverick also recalls the Romantic image of the artist as rebel, with all its masculine associations. Despite this strong association with the Romantic genre of author function, Andrew’s maverick also tends to slide toward modernist genres of author-function, drawing upon many of the tropes associated with the modernist genre of author-function, such as requirement of cultivating critical distance and a unique style distinct from the norm.

Andrew’s category of maverick director also navigates the strangeness of Lynch’s films and the Lynch persona. Andrew remarks that Lynch’s ‘apparent disregard for the conventions of plot, characterisation, theme and even meaning make it difficult to fathom how he could have achieved the popularity he has.’¹⁷⁵ By defining Lynch as a maverick, Andrew positions Lynch outside the constraints of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking and thus places Lynch’s films apart from conventional Hollywood aesthetics. Andrew’s claim that Lynch is more concerned

¹⁷⁰ Geoff Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise: Maverick Film-makers in Recent American Cinema* (London: Prion Books, 1998), p. 3

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 5

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 3

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 39

with ‘creating strange worlds, unsettling moods and bizarre images’ than with linear narratives and rounded ‘real’ characters is a plea to judge Lynch according to an aesthetics that values mood, images, and the creation of other worlds, rather than the supposed Hollywood norm. Like the characterisation of Lynch as Artist (and his films as paintings), Andrew’s identification of Lynch as maverick serves both to mark Lynch as an outsider and to suggest a more sympathetic aesthetic framework for appreciation of Lynch’s films. Both are clear instances of the use of particular genres of author-function to counteract the potential identification of a set of texts as not-art.

It is in trying to account for the ways in which Lynch’s films differ from the apparent stylistic norm of mainstream filmmaking that the tension between authorship and postmodernism is most apparent. Due to the dominance of nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism, any identification of Lynch’s films as postmodern is deemed tantamount to an identification of Lynch’s films as not-art – an unfavourable outcome for auteurist critics of Lynch. Identification of Lynch as an author is therefore not only deemed preferable to an identification of his films as postmodern, the two are considered contradictory and incommensurable.

Despite this, there are critics willing to claim Lynch’s films as postmodern, such as Jana Evans Braziel who opens her chapter by straightforwardly describing Lynch as a ‘postmodern film director’.¹⁷⁶ This notwithstanding, there are yet more critics who strive to differentiate Lynch from any postmodern tradition. MacTaggart, for example, claims the bringing together of high and mass culture in Lynch’s work aligns him with 17th century baroque artists.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, it is Lynch’s bridging of fine art and Hollywood that ‘allows us to extend our thinking about these films beyond the narrow confines of postmodern critical discourse in which his output has often been contained and constrained.’¹⁷⁸ Elsewhere, MacTaggart asserts that

¹⁷⁶ Braziel, “‘In Dreams...’” in *The Cinema of David Lynch*, ed. by Sheen and Davison, pp. 107 – 118, p. 107

¹⁷⁷ MacTaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch*, p. 162

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 162 – 163

Lynch's films are better understood according to the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis than postmodernism, a sentiment echoed by Sam Ishii-Gonzales.¹⁷⁹ In a similar vein, Nicholas Rombes observes that the eighties setting of *Blue Velvet* is 'haunted by signs from the past', but that he disagrees with the orthodox reading of the film as a postmodern 'ahistorical fantasy landscape'.¹⁸⁰ The identification of Lynch's films as psychoanalytic rather than postmodern also serves to align with Lynch a theoretical framework that depends upon depth models rather than one that allegedly renounces them.¹⁸¹

Yet further issues arise from the application of the term postmodern as a straw man against which Lynch's films can be favourably compared. This leads to some particularly opaque statements, such as Atkinson's claim that *Blue Velvet* 'is truer to Lynch's unironic, childlike view of life than post-modern theory permits' because it is 'remarkably free of judgements, and therefore "placements" of blame, culpability or oppressive intent.'¹⁸²

Atkinson's characterisation of postmodern theory as judgemental is peculiar and not easily attributable to any major conceptualisation of postmodernism. Atkinson's notion that postmodern theory is associated with the assignment of blame and identification of oppression could be an acknowledgement of the deconstructive impulse of postmodernism, but Atkinson seemingly frames this negatively in opposition to an unironic childlike innocence. Atkinson therefore appears to avoid postmodernism not because postmodernism is meaningless but because it is overly critical, or perhaps cynical. It also suggests a tacit conservatism on Atkinson's part, and an unwillingness to find anything subversive in *Blue Velvet*.

¹⁷⁹ MacTaggart, *The Film Paintings of David Lynch*, p. 163; Sam Ishii-Gonzales, 'Mysteries of Love: Lynch's *Blue Velvet*/Freud's Wolf Man' in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, (eds.) Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 48-61, p. 59

¹⁸⁰ Nicholas Rombes, '*Blue Velvet* Underground: David Lynch's Post-Punk Poetics' in *The Cinema of David Lynch: American Dreams, Nightmare Visions*, (eds.) Erica Sheen and Annette Davison (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 61-76 pp. 67 – 68

¹⁸¹ Fred Pfeil offers an interesting alternative to psychoanalytic readings of Lynch. For Pfeil *Blue Velvet* is a postmodern film that presents its oedipal narrative in so overt and so obvious a way that it becomes surface. By rendering its oedipal narrative as surface, *Blue Velvet* radically subverts the depth model of psychoanalysis. Fred Pfeil, 'Home Fires Burning: Family Noir in *Blue Velvet* and *Terminator 2*' in *Shades of Noir* (ed.) Joan Copjec (London: Verso, 1993), pp. 227-259

¹⁸² Michael Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, p. 71

Rather than contrasting postmodernism unfavourably with an alternative approach deemed better suited to Lynch's films, Bret Wood discusses Lynch's films in terms of differently valued postmodernisms. For Wood, Lynch is a 'noteworthy film-maker' set apart from 'tired self-referentiality' and 'empty post-mod homages' of contemporary cinema.¹⁸³ The term 'post-mod' is clearly meant pejoratively, a short hand used to conjure up all the negative associations of nihilistic postmodernism. However, Wood later compares furniture designed by Lynch as resembling 'postmodernist' Italian pieces where postmodernism evidently has an entirely different quality.¹⁸⁴ This reflects the quite different associations postmodernism has in fields outside of Film Studies, and suggests that any lingering negative associations postmodernism might have are eclipsed by the cultural cache afforded by Italian designer furniture.

According to Wood, Lynch's films are distinct from empty post-mod cinema because they explore 'eerie convergences of opposite extremes' and overlapping of binary oppositions.¹⁸⁵ These characteristics could just as easily be cited as evidence for classifying Lynch's films as postmodern, particularly following Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism. This is typical of approaches seeking to differentiate Lynch's films from a straw man postmodernism. Critics go to great lengths describing the ways Lynch's films are not postmodern, only to present a reading of the films that clearly conforms to readily available definitions of postmodernism. For instance, many critics remark upon the blurring of high and mass culture in Lynch's work in terms comparable to Carroll's work on allusion.

Kaleta describes Lynch's balancing of the commercial and artistic needs of film and characterises Lynch as an avant-garde filmmaker producing commercial films. He is quick to add that this is not 'the evangelizing mission of an elitist.'¹⁸⁶ Alexander also describes this balancing act, observing that Lynch's films 'transgress the conventions of the Hollywood film,

¹⁸³ Bret Wood, 'Organic Phenomena: Paintings and Photograph' in David Hughes, *The Complete Lynch* (London: Virgin Publishing, 2001), pp. 257-264 [originally published in *Arte Papers Magazine*], p. 257,

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 257

¹⁸⁶ Kaleta, *David Lynch*, p. 157

yet remain attuned to its commercial demands.’¹⁸⁷ Lynch’s films have elements of art films – his ‘ironic use of cliché, his emphasis on motif, mood and texture as opposed to a linear narrative’ and yet he has appeal outside of the art-house circuit, ‘treading the fine line of commercial appeal and art-house critical acceptance.’¹⁸⁸ A similar sentiment is expressed by Atkinson, who describes *Blue Velvet* as a Hollywood studio film ‘as radical, visionary and cabalistic’ as an avant-garde film and as ‘an American “art film” by Hollywood’s only reputable “art film” director’.¹⁸⁹

LeBlanc and Odell’s exploration of the pleasures and benefits of watching David Lynch comes closest to Carroll, suggesting that ‘Lynch represents the perfect blend of the intellectual and the mundane’ and that his films can be appreciated on either level.¹⁹⁰ On the one hand, Lynch’s films can be enjoyed at a visceral or sensual level, with viewers encouraged to simply enjoy the ride: ‘There are a lot of strange things to see [...] it’s an emotional journey.’¹⁹¹ Lynch also offers more cerebral pleasures, including both the joy of attempting to unravel mysteries and the opportunity to ‘get all analytical and wobble on about psychoanalytic structures and semiotics’.¹⁹² However, the opposition of mind and body evident in LeBlanc and Odell’s analysis suggest a more traditional depth model than Carroll’s two-tiered system of allusion. Rather than opposing mind/body, Carroll’s system suggests two tiers aimed at differently competent viewers: one literate in the conventions of genre, the other having an encyclopaedic knowledge of film history and styles. Both tiers are concerned with the mind and therefore avoid any notion of the visceral or bodily altogether.

Odell and LeBlanc are also distinguished from Carroll in not being overly concerned with intertextuality. Kaleta is interested in this aspect of Lynch’s films, claiming that Lynch ‘knows, loves, and uses film history and its conventions’ and describing Lynch as both an

¹⁸⁷ Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch*, p. 11

¹⁸⁸ Alexander, *The Films of David Lynch*, p. 11

¹⁸⁹ Michael Atkinson, *Blue Velvet*, p. 8

¹⁹⁰ Le Blanc and Odell, *The Pocket Essential David Lynch*, p. 14

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 14

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 14

imitator and an innovator.¹⁹³ According to Kaleta, Lynch's evocation of a cinematic past in *Blue Velvet* prompts viewers to 'nudge the person next to us and pronounce our regrets: "They don't make them like this anymore".'¹⁹⁴ Such a response recalls Jameson's concept of pastiche, the point being that Lynch *does* 'make them like this', nostalgically resurrecting dead styles free from satirical comment. Unlike Jameson, Kaleta does not associate such resurrection with any great moral and aesthetic demise, but nor does he suggest that *Blue Velvet*'s engagement with past forms of representation is potentially political in an echo of Hutcheon. It seems that for Kaleta the only function of *Blue Velvet*'s intertextuality is the pleasure of recognition, with no sense that the recognition of allusion contributes to the richness of the text, as is found in Carroll.

There are those however, for whom Lynch is resolutely not postmodern. Nicolas Rombes, in particular, is concerned with differentiating Lynch from a postmodernism that he conceives as incapable of sincerity. Rombes observes that audiences assume that Lynch's films must have the same deconstructing impulse demonstrated in the 'pronounced parody' of the Coen Brothers or the 'deconstructing mock nostalgia' of John Waters.¹⁹⁵ He goes on to claim that the 'aw-shucks' sincerity of Jeffry Beaumont and Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) 'in the face of unspeakable monstrosities and violence' could be forcibly read as 'some kind of Quentin Tarantino-esque hip, postmodern irony', but notes that *Blue Velvet* 'is never as excessively self-aware as a Tarantino film.'¹⁹⁶ Examining these claims, it appears that Rombes draws attention to surface similarities between the films of Lynch and other directors associated with the postmodern, only to then paradoxically assert Lynch's difference from them. This circular reasoning is particularly apparent in his claim that 'Lynch's work confounds the

¹⁹³ Kaleta, *David Lynch*, p. xi

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 90

¹⁹⁵ Rombes, 'Blue Velvet Underground' in *The Cinema of David Lynch*, ed. by Sheen and Davison pp. 61-76, p. 66

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 69

orthodoxies of postmodern irony even as it has become a canonical representation of that irony, playing the serious so seriously that audiences assume the film must be parodic'.¹⁹⁷

Rombes's setting *Blue Velvet* apart from formally similar postmodern films resembles Jameson's distinction between nostalgia and postnostalgia films. The assumption that the serious can only be read as parodic is of particular concern for Rombes, echoing Jameson's lament for the death of modernist parody in the face postmodern pastiche. Rombes describes this as 'the problem of irony in an already ironised culture'.¹⁹⁸ Rombes argues that 'in an already-deconstructed culture [...] irony and parody no longer function as sharp weapons of critique because they are already everywhere.'¹⁹⁹ This also echoes Jameson's definition of pastiche, Rombes concept of an already ironised culture recalling the loss of a linguistic norm that renders parody, critique, and the cultivation of unique style impossible.

Rombes suggests that Lynch's films offer a way out of a culture of meaningless irony and 'a glimpse of what possibly lies ahead, after postmodernism', the sincerity of *Blue Velvet* contrasting to the 'ironic artificialness' and knowing cynicism of postmodernism.²⁰⁰ Rombes observes that the orthodox positions regarding Lynch conform to a binary positing Lynch's films as either ironic and subversive, or not ironic and therefore complicit in the reactionary nostalgia of the Regan era.²⁰¹ According to Rombes both of these positions are inaccurate as Lynch's films, particularly *Blue Velvet*, offer a non-binary third way. Rombes claims that the central question of the film – 'how to account for evil in a world that no longer recognises it' – is asked both seriously and playfully.²⁰²

Rombes goes on to suggest that, aware of the two potential registers, the film opts for neither and both: 'thus showing us an early glimpse of a sensibility emerging out of the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 62

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 70

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 70

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 69

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 70

²⁰² Ibid, p. 70

postmodern.'²⁰³ Rombes sees Lynch as among the first to 'move beyond postmodernism's ironic, parodic appropriation of historical genres and narrative conventions' and marks *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1992) as a successor due to its acknowledgement of 'the constructedness not only of identity, but of genre as well [...] without the self-satisfied, distant, ironic positioning that characterises classic 1980s postmodern films'.²⁰⁴ The characteristics of Rombes's category of post-postmodern films, such as refusal of binaries and de-naturalisation of categories such as identity and genre, are readily identifiable as characteristics of Hutcheon's affirmative postmodernism. Rombes may be unfamiliar with this conceptualisation of the postmodern, or perhaps the dominance of nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism is such that an affirmative postmodernism is simply something inconceivable. Whatever the case, it is both ironic and frustrating that Rombes should attempt to escape the tyranny of postmodernism using an approach that could be described as postmodern.

However, for all that Rombes's vocabulary grants his approach a passing similarity to Hutcheon's postmodernism, Rombes's practice is not commensurate with his theory. For example, whilst Rombes claims to identify a non-binary solution in *Blue Velvet* to the opposition of irony and sincerity, his reading of the film predominately foregrounds the sincerity of the film, rather than illustrating how the film asserts a position that is both and neither. Rombes's reading of *Blue Velvet* reveals not a shift towards a post-postmodernism, but rather a retreat into a pre-postmodern of uncomplicated sincerity. For Rombes, postmodernism is merely a straw man representing irony and cynicism and opposed to sincerity, which he privileges and associates with Lynch.

This analysis of the critical literature on Lynch demonstrates the dominance of nihilistic conceptualisation of postmodernism; not so much as the explicit taking up of Jameson or Baudrillard but in a general shared assumption that postmodernism is something to be avoided, a category denoting failure, the opposite of art. The reasoning behind this assumption is varied

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 70

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 72

and sometimes contradictory (Atkinson's implication that postmodernism is too critical comes to mind), what unites critics is the belief that Lynch must be saved from the taint of postmodernism – even if it isn't entirely clear what postmodernism is. The need to dissociate Lynch from postmodernism seems less to do with any notion that theories of postmodernism and authorship are potentially incompatible, and more to do with the overwhelming belief in the bankruptcy of postmodernism. Indeed, Lynch seems to be presented as auteur in order to mitigate the misidentification of his films as postmodern. The opposition of authorship and postmodernism remains a metonym for the opposition of art/not-art, but for different reasons.

In order to hail Lynch as an auteur, critics first find it necessary to disassociate him from postmodernism, even if the formal features of his films suggest he can be identified as postmodern. These formal features cannot be simply ignored, as it is these very features that contribute to the unique style of David Lynch. Instead, critics must look for alternative ways of justifying and revaluing Lynch's style, something achieved through reference to Lynch's biography and to a carefully selected range of intertexts that allow for the reframing of the Lynch author text in line with the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function. This reframing is possible because there are details in the Lynch biography that are easily shaped to suit these genres of author-function. In considering the critical literature on Quentin Tarantino, it will become apparent that such reshaping is not always possible, and that the Tarantino text only has limited access to the more debased commercial genre of author-function.

The difficulty of constructing a Tarantino author-text in accordance with existing genres of author-function is borne out in the alignment of Tarantino with the seemingly contradictory figures of 'film geek' and 'rock star'.²⁰⁵ Although not always described in these exact terms, there is a tendency throughout the Tarantino literature to describe the director in terms of film-fandom or Stardom and celebrity status.

²⁰⁵ I take these terms from Paul A. Woods, who in his introduction to *Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files* characterises Tarantino as a 'film-geek' who has attained 'rock-star' status. Paul A Woods, 'Introduction', in *Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files*, ed. by Paul A. Woods (London: Plexus, 2000), pp. 5 – 7, p. 5

References to Tarantino's celebrity status, such as Jim Smith's description of Tarantino as the 'director as superstar', are clearly deployments of the commercial genre of author-function.²⁰⁶ Tarantino's celebrity status derives from his visibility, with Smith citing Tarantino's appearance as Mr Brown in *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992) and his 'sudden omnipresence' on talk-shows and in magazines concerned with celebrity as the reason behind the director's elevation to the status of star.²⁰⁷ While the image of Tarantino as star deploys the commercial genre of author-function, any straightforward alignment with this genre is complicated by the combination of the image of Tarantino as star or celebrity with the seemingly opposed image of Tarantino as fan or film geek. Jeff Dawson plays on this apparent contradiction by feigning puzzlement that the name of a 'film geek from nowhere' should suddenly become 'an instant branding for all things cool'.²⁰⁸

The characterisation of Tarantino as fan places Tarantino on a continuum with his fans, and serves to construct the Tarantino author-text in terms of proximity rather than distance. Geoff Andrew finds such proximity troublesome. Andrew observes that Tarantino has done nothing to 'hide the fan-boy side of his personality', and that the director is as obsessive and nostalgic regarding the 'ephemera of modern culture' as his audience.²⁰⁹ Tarantino therefore not only lacks critical distance from the 'ephemera' he quotes in his films, but also lacks distance from the consumers of his films.²¹⁰ Tarantino thus lacks both the critical distance of the modernist genre of author-function and the bohemian, outsider sensibility of the Romantic artist.²¹¹ The inability to construct the Tarantino author-text according to the requirements of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function suggests that the Tarantino author-text is

²⁰⁶ Jim Smith, *Tarantino* (London: Virgin Books, 2005), p. 3

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 2

²⁰⁸ Jeff Dawson, *Tarantino: Inside Story* (London: Cassel, 1995), p. 12

²⁰⁹ Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise*, p. 316

²¹⁰ Andrew's use of the word 'ephemera' is telling, suggesting that Tarantino's interests are both light-weight and disposable. It is not only the manner in which Tarantino quotes that is problematic, but what he quotes from: modern ephemera rather than the monumental and durable Hellenic Classics favoured by Eliot, for example. Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise*, p. 316

²¹¹ The homespun rural persona of Lynch seems not to detract from his 'specialness' to the extent that characterisation of Tarantino as fan and film geek does; possibly because the type of rural Americana Lynch is associated with is itself a marker of 'specialness'. The eccentric rural communities represented in *Twin Peaks* and *The Straight Story* would seem to confirm this.

limited to the commercial genre of author-function. However, the extent to which the commercial genre of author-function also requires the director to be perceived as distant or distinct from the audience is debateable.²¹² Presumably the director must be understood as having some special status if they are to act as a brand with which to sell films. If this is the case, then the Tarantino biography lacks sufficient evidence of distance to allow construction of the Tarantino author-text according to *any* existing genres of author-function and must therefore be relegated to the debased category of non-author.

The characterisation of Tarantino as star or celebrity might provide sufficient grounds for the construction of the Tarantino author-text in terms of distance. However, as noted earlier this characterisation of Tarantino is always accompanied by contradictory references to Tarantino as fan; the proximity associated with this characterisation undermining any potential association with distance. Brooker and Brooker are attentive both to the oppositional quality of the categories star and fan, and to their apparent inseparability in the Tarantino author text. This is demonstrated in their description of Tarantino's media image as 'a portrait of the artist as a young fan' and in the list of seemingly contradictory honorary titles such as 'the slacker as auteur' and the 'videoshop salesman who made it'.²¹³ Each of these examples operates according to an opposition of professionalism and artistry on the one hand (artist, auteur) and amateurism and ordinariness on the other (fan, slacker). These oppositions demonstrate the co-dependency of the images of Tarantino as star and as fan. The image of Tarantino as star or celebrity cannot be mobilised in terms of distance because it is always already implicated in the image of Tarantino as fan, and thus with proximity.

²¹² Richard Dyer's work on the star image could provide a productive starting point for further enquiry into the specific characteristics of the commercial genre of author-function, particularly in relation to the role of distance. Dyer's suggestion that stardom combines the ordinary with the special, and that a central question of stardom concerns whether stars are 'just like you or me' (ordinary) or whether 'consumption and success' make them different (special) seems a promising starting point. It is however unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis to follow this line of enquiry in sufficient detail, my primary concern being to establish a postmodern genre of author-function. Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1990), pp. 39 – 49

²¹³ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmoernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker, pp. 89 – 100, p. 89

The manner in which the status of Tarantino as star is contingent upon the perception of Tarantino as fan can be seen in Andrew's observations regarding fan attitudes to Tarantino. Andrew claims that because Tarantino 'comes across as a filmmaker of and for the people' he is held to be 'a cult hero of almost God-like status' by his 'more impressionable fans'.²¹⁴ This presents a paradox: because Tarantino's fans recognise him as one of the people, they take him to be a hero. Andrew finds this to be a case of mistaken identity and faulty reasoning, implied by his characterisation of the fans as impressionable. Following Andrew, these fans have fallen for slight-of-hand and circular reasoning – the author-as-hero should be distinct from the masses, not one of them. Andrew's reasoning becomes clearer when we recall his category of the maverick – a clear evocation of the image of author as outsider – as deployed in relation to David Lynch. If Tarantino is one of the people, he by definition cannot be an outsider or maverick. Both the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function depend on the notion of the author as outside or distinct from the masses, exemplified in the characterisation of Lynch as either bohemian outsider or detached social critic noted previously. Even the modernist notion of author as spokesman suggests that the author occupies the position of first among equals, elevated above those he speaks for by virtue of being the one that speaks.

The Tarantino author-text falls foul of the hierarchical binary outside/inside. Aligned with the unfavourable category of inside, the Tarantino author text fails to meet the requirements of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function and once again faces classification as non-author or at best in accordance with the commercial genre of author-function. Whilst the insider status of the Tarantino author-text may be antithetical to the distanced critique appropriate to the modernist genre of author-function, it is important to note that this is not the only form of critique. Hutcheon's category of complicitous critique, for example, allows for the possibility of critique from an insider position. However, neither the Romantic nor modernist genres of author-function allow for this possibility – except in the limited sense related to the

²¹⁴ Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise*, p. 316

author-as-spokesperson – continuing to conceptualise the insider position as a failure of artistic and critical distance.

Andrew further cements the insider status of the Tarantino author-text by making note of Tarantino's 'deliberate engagement with tradition'.²¹⁵ While reference to tradition could be said to add prestige to the Tarantino author-text (as such comparisons do with Lynch), here it serves both to construct Tarantino as insider and to undermine any notion of originality. By working within tradition, Tarantino lacks both the self-expressive qualities of the Romantic genre of author-function and the modernist genre of author-function's requirement for a unique voice.²¹⁶ Andrew very deliberately constructs the Tarantino author-text in terms of the non-author, even referring to Tarantino as a *metteur en scène*.²¹⁷

Andrew's reference to Tarantino's 'more impressionable fans' raises questions as to which discourses can legitimately construct the author-text. The illegitimacy of fan discourse is also an issue in Dana Polan's writing on Tarantino, with Polan suggesting a clear hierarchical opposition between fan readings of postmodern texts and critical analysis of modernist texts.²¹⁸ Like Andrew, Polan dismisses fan readings as ill-founded or mistaken.²¹⁹ Brooker and Brooker present a far more sympathetic reading of fan culture, using an analysis of fan engagement with Tarantino's work as the jumping off point for their affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism.²²⁰ Brooker and Brooker wryly observe that the interpretative activity of fans

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 316

²¹⁶ In terms of the Romantic genre of author-function, consider the Romantic opposition to enlightenment neo-Classicism. Romantic art should be self-expressive, not slavishly conform to pre-prescribed rules.

²¹⁷ Andrew describes Tarantino as a *metteur en scène* or genre stylist 'whose films are largely inspired by other films' rather than an auteur 'with a persuasive, coherent world-view or with an interest in radically transforming film syntax'. Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise*, p. 324

²¹⁸ Dana Polan, *Pulp Fiction* (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 80 – 81

²¹⁹ For example, Polan dismisses the willingness of fans to treat the suitcase in *Pulp Fiction* in the same way as legitimate critics treat the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), noting that such interpretations don't 'qualify as the sort of deep interpretation modernist art is often subjected to'. Polan, *Pulp Fiction*, p. 80

²²⁰ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, pp. 91 – 93

are 'only a film's width away from the erudition of literary scholarship' and that therefore such activity is 'an active and producerly reading' of the texts.²²¹

As Brooker's and Brooker's observation regarding the similarity between academic analysis and fan readings suggests, the opposition critic/fan is both constructed and hierarchical; with the category critic occupying the position of favour. This hierarchy reflects the differing degrees of cultural capital associated with the critic or the fan. By presenting fan discourse as illegitimate, Andrew and Polan are able to present their own readings of Tarantino as both legitimate and correct. The legitimacy of the critic or academic is also secured through institutions such as publishing, journalism, and academia; with fan activity taking place outside of these legitimising institutions. Here the binary inside/outside is reversed so that inside (or inclusion) becomes the privileged term and outside (or exclusion) is unfavourable. The hierarchical ranking of critic and fan in terms of cultural capital also raises issues of taste, in particular the opposition of low-brow to middle-brow. This in turn suggests a class dimension at work in the opposition of critic/fan. Class is however strangely absent as a factor in the construction of the Tarantino author-text. While the biographical detail of Tarantino's previous employment in a video rental store is frequently mobilised in order to align Tarantino with a specific film fan community, the class implications of this detail are either ignored or register only in terms of the illegitimacy of fan discourse compared with academic discourse noted above. Appeals to the American Dream narrative in descriptions of Tarantino's rise to fame also serve to prevent the mobilisation of the Tarantino biography in terms of class identity, as it is a narrative designed to construct social class as irrelevant with respect to potential success.

By comparing Tarantino with Lynch, it becomes clear how notions of class are also deferred in discussions of taste and cultural capital. The references to Lynch's training in the fine-arts, and discussion of Lynch's films in relation to painting and the work of other artists associates Lynch with middle-brow or even high-brow taste. The details of the Tarantino

²²¹ Ibid, p. 93

biography do not facilitate any such associations. Even references that might allow the Tarantino author-text to escape low-brow associations are neutralised by the limiting effect of association of Tarantino with the category of fan. For example, Andrew compares Tarantino's aesthetic to the early work of Jean Luc Godard. However, rather than serving to bolster the artistic merit of the Tarantino author-text in the way that comparison to artists does for Lynch, Tarantino merely emerges as fan and copyist.

Andrew frames Tarantino as fan by referring to Godard as Tarantino's hero.²²² While Andrew describes Godard's use of quotation as a '(self)conscious interrogation of genre' reflecting Godard's 'love hate attitude to Hollywood', Tarantino's method is discussed in terms of the pleasure provided for audiences in trying to spot and identify his references.²²³ Although Andrew makes clear that such quotation is not to be understood as plagiarism, the presentation of Tarantino's style as an uncritical imitation of an existing style particularly recalls the failure to quote correctly associated with pastiche and Jameson's category of the postmodern non-author.

Tom Charity attempts to avoid the construction of the Tarantino author-text in terms of the postmodern non-author by creating an alternative category of non-author against which the Tarantino author-text is favourably compared. This function is fulfilled by the term Tarantinoesque, described by Charity as 'a critical shorthand for hackneyed, would-be-hip, low-budget crime thrillers.'²²⁴ Charity's use of Tarantinoesque is therefore markedly different to the use of the term Lynchian discussed earlier. While both terms attest to the unique and identifiable styles of their namesakes, Charity claims that the Tarantinoesque actually describes poor imitations of Tarantino's style. According to Charity, Tarantino's imitators fail to replicate the 'virtuoso story structures' or the 'insightful' casting of Tarantino and instead pepper their

²²² Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise* pp. 316 – 317

²²³ Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise* pp. 316 – 317

²²⁴ Tom Charity, 'Fun Lovin' Criminals', in *Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files*, ed. by Paul A. Woods (London: Plexus, 2000), pp. 152 – 160,, p. 152

films with ‘has-been actors, gratuitous pop banter and fashionably ironic violence.’²²⁵ By presenting the Tarantinoesque as a poor copy, Charity seeks to position Tarantino as both original and superior. Furthermore, the suggestion that Tarantino has a unique style that can be replicated (however poorly) constructs the Tarantino author-text according to the modernist genre of author-function. His imitators, on the other hand are constructed in terms of imitation and pastiche, and relegated to the category of postmodern non-author.

Charity’s approach faces several obstacles that prevent Charity from effectively distancing Tarantino from the Tarantinoesque. Most obviously, the retention of the label ‘Tarantino’ in Tarantinoesque suggests an uncomfortably close association between the two. Furthermore, if the Tarantinoesque is an imitation of Tarantino, no matter how imperfect, it must be replicating some (perceived) quality of the Tarantino film texts. Charity attempts to overcome these obstacles in his classification of *Jackie Brown* (Tarantino, 1997) as a deliberately anti-Tarantinoesque film. By classifying a Tarantino film as anti-Tarantinoesque, Charity attempts to combat the close association between the two. The qualities Charity associates with *Jackie Brown* become the qualities of the true Tarantino text, while their unfavourable opposites are the characteristics of the debased Tarantinoesque text. For example, Charity is amongst a number of critics who praise *Jackie Brown* for being a mature film.²²⁶ This serves to construct the Tarantinoesque in terms of the opposite, as immature or juvenile.

By redefining the Tarantino author-text in relation to his reading of *Jackie Brown*, Charity exploits the feedback-loop relation between film texts and author-texts. Through his interpretation of a particular film text, Charity seeks to invest the Tarantino author-text with specific qualities which in turn inform the reading of subsequent films and re-reading of previous films. The foregrounding of maturity in *Jackie Brown* invests the Tarantino author-text with the quality of maturity, in turn permitting the identification of maturity as a quality across

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 152

²²⁶ Paul A Woods, ‘Introduction’, in *Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files*, ed. by, Paul A. Woods (London: Plexus, 2000), pp. 5 – 7, p. 7; Charity, ‘Fun Lovin’ Criminals’, in *Quentin Tarantino: The Film Geek Files*, ed. by, Woods, pp. 152 – 160, p. 155; Andrew, *Stranger than Paradise*, p. 337; Smith, *Tarantino*, p. 192

film texts associated with the Tarantino author-text. This strategy can be understood in terms of the identification of major and minor works. The status of a film as a major or minor work indicates the potential it will have to alter the author-text, with major works exerting greater influence than minor ones. The films selected as major or minor works will therefore vary according to the ways in which a particular critic wishes to construct the author-text. For example, Edwin Page's less than enthusiastic reading of *Jackie Brown* implies his classification of the film as a minor text.²²⁷ His characterisation of *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (Tarantino, 2003) as a return to form not only suggest its role as a major work in Page's construction of the Tarantino text, but that Page seeks to foreground precisely the qualities Charity hopes to disassociate from the Tarantino author-text.²²⁸

The effectiveness of this strategy is limited by available textual evidence. While the identification of a particular theme or quality in one film encourages the identification of that theme or quality across texts (as evidence of self-expression, unique style, or authorial preoccupations depending on critical perspective), there must be sufficient textual evidence to support that claim.²²⁹ For example, the suggestion that Spielberg films share a common theme in the representation of families is convincing, the suggestion that they are unified through their interest in the representation of sharks is less so.²³⁰ Charity's redefinition of Tarantino in terms of maturity is unconvincing in this respect, as there is limited textual evidence beyond *Jackie Brown* that suggests maturity to be the unifying quality across the Tarantino filmography.

Charity's use of the term maturity as a marker of value indicates the adoption of a critical perspective informed by the modernist genre of author-function and associated modernist or humanist aesthetics. Charity's attempt to construct the Tarantino author-text in these terms fails

²²⁷ Edwin Page, *Quintessential Tarantino* (London: Marion Boyers, 2005), p. 15

²²⁸ Page, *Quintessential Tarantino*, p. 15

²²⁹ Derrida also notes that while the critic unavoidably adds to that which he reads, one who feels 'authorized merely to add on; that is add any old thing [...] would add nothing: the seam wouldn't hold.' The act of reading-as-writing is not a licence to reshape the text as the critic sees fit. There must be some justification for the reading. Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 64

²³⁰ A modification of 'shark' to 'the monstrous' or 'conflict between civilisation and nature' or 'encounters with an inhuman Other' would potentially provide a more convincing reading.

because the postmodern aesthetic strategies of the Tarantino film texts – intertextuality, foregrounding of style, and playful irony – are at odds with modernist and humanist aesthetics that favour maturity – and associated terms such as seriousness, restraint, and depth – as markers of value. Peter and Will Brooker make a similar observation regarding the hostility to Tarantino films and postmodern texts more generally emerging from ‘a beleaguered humanism and organicist aesthetic’.²³¹ Charity’s foregrounding of maturity should be understood as a failed attempt to construct the Tarantino author-text according to the modernist genre of author-function.

In a similar vein to Charity’s identification of the Tarantinoesque, Paul Woods and Dana Polan both note a slippage between the terms Tarantino and postmodernism.²³² The result of this is that postmodern cinema begins to be defined exclusively in relation to Tarantino’s style. Aspects of Tarantino’s films that have no relation to postmodern aesthetics (such as violence, crime, and depiction of male gang culture) are mistakenly identified as the defining features of postmodernism; not because any strong link can be drawn between these features and postmodern theory, but because of their coincidental presence in films that also feature properly postmodern aesthetic features and themes such as intertextuality, irony, and self-referentiality.²³³

The treatment of Tarantino as a synonym for postmodernism is troubling for those critics seeking to distance Tarantino from any association with postmodernism. According to Aaron Barlow, for example, Tarantino is decidedly *not* postmodern. Unfortunately for Barlow, Tarantino is ‘absolutely’ associated with postmodernism simply because postmodernism is ‘an easy catch-all-phrase for that which is new and [...] we don’t completely understand’.²³⁴ Barlow’s suspicion of postmodernism is clear from his use of scare quotes, while his dismissal

²³¹ They also observe that ‘this perspective requires its bad twin to sustain it’ and that critics find this in Tarantino and postmodernism. Brooker and Brooker, ‘Pulpmodernism’, in *Postmodern After-Images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89-100, p. 90

²³² Woods, ‘Introduction’, in *Quentin Tarantino*, ed. by Woods, pp. 5 – 7, p. 5; Polan, *Pulp Fiction*, p. 71

²³³ Slippages of this kind are of particular concern for Garrett, who notes that ‘the overwhelming emphasis on particular kind of swaggering, nasty filmic postmodernism has skewered debates on postmodernist cinema, binding the understanding of a range of postmodernist aesthetic strategies to closely to male-oriented genres.’ Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 7

²³⁴ Aaron Barlow, *Quentin Tarantino: Life at the Extremes* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), p. 5

of postmodernism as a catch-all phrase to describe something not properly understood implies a refusal to acknowledge postmodernism as anything but a meaningless jargon word. This sentiment is also apparent in Barlow's characterisation of postmodernism as a term of last resort, deployed only when the critic 'give[s] up' on a work and so dismisses it as postmodern.²³⁵ Following this, Barlow muses that when calling Tarantino postmodern, critics do so with a smile 'to hide our confusion, our suspicion that we are missing something.'²³⁶ Rather than engage with postmodernism, Barlow simply dismisses it suggesting that those that use the term do not fully understand it, or have failed to properly understand the work they apply it to. For Barlow the identification of a work as postmodern is never a positive act, it is always arrived at through the logic of negation.²³⁷ This strongly identifies Barlow's concept of postmodernism with Jameson's postmodern non-author, the debased category that remains when artistic endeavour is no longer possible.

Despite his dismissal of postmodernism, Barlow cannot avoid acknowledging the similarities between Tarantino's style and the aesthetic features of postmodernism. Barlow confronts this problem through an analogy, comparing Tarantino to Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship, attentive to the siren song of postmodernism but not succumbing to its seduction.²³⁸ For Barlow, the crucial distinction between postmodernism and Tarantino is that Tarantino

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 2

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 2

²³⁷ The belief that postmodern critics do not truly comprehend postmodernism, or that the system itself is no more than contradictory and poorly conceptualised jargon is a running theme of Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*. Like Barlow, Eagleton's suspicion of postmodernism (and to a large extent post-structuralism) is compounded by an inaccurate and incomplete understanding of postmodern theory. See, for example, Eagleton's misidentification of the de-naturalising impulse as an anachronistic hostility towards 'nature' in the Romantic sense; rather than as deconstructive impulse that seeks to demonstrate that those categories believed to be natural are rather constructed. Ironically, the Romantic category of nature is a particularly good example of such *doxa*, a constructed ideal of Sublime 'nature' opposed to Enlightenment ideals of nature as something to be tamed. See Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 50

²³⁸ Adorno and Horkheimer make use of the analogy of Odysseus and the sirens throughout *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, although J. M. Bernstein suggests that for them the siren song represents the pleasures of high art 'bought at the price of the exclusion of the lower classes', rather than seduction of the culture industry as seems to be implied by Barlow's usage. See Barlow, *Quentin Tarantino: Life at the Extremes*, p. 3; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. By John Cumming (London: Verso, 1986), p. 32, p. 43; and Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. by J. M. Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 6–7

remains concerned with the real world rather than just making ‘movies about movies’.²³⁹ This is clear in Barlow’s classification of *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino, 2010) as more deserving of the descriptor postmodern than any other Tarantino film; followed by the assertion that the film is not ‘about movies’ but rather ‘the ways we use movies to develop more fully our understanding of our cultural histories and assumptions.’²⁴⁰ Barlow’s reading of *Inglourious Basterds* demonstrates the limitation of nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism, as well as the strain involved in constructing and policing a boundary between Tarantino and postmodernism.

Despite *Inglourious Basterd*’s similarities to Barlow’s definition of postmodern film, Barlow’s use of postmodernism as bad-twin means that identification with postmodernism is unfavourable, and must be avoided. Ironically, the way in which Barlow reframes the film’s engagement with history echoes Hutcheon’s conceptualisation of the manner in which postmodern texts engage with history. Despite this potential overlap, such an affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism is not open to Barlow, because of his use of postmodernism as bad twin. The similarity of *Inglourious Basterds* to postmodern film cannot be adequately overcome, with the unsatisfactory result that *Inglourious* remains tainted by its proximity to Barlow’s debased category of postmodernism. As with Charity’s attempt to redefine the Tarantino author-text in terms of maturity, Barlow’s attempts to resist classification of Tarantino as postmodern is unconvincing.

Dana Polan’s monograph on *Pulp Fiction* for the BFI Modern Classics series demonstrates an additional limitation of nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism. Contrary to Barlow, Polan celebrates the postmodern qualities of *Pulp Fiction*. However, Polan’s notion of postmodernism is limited to nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism and closely resembles the characterisation of postmodernism as bad-twin and category of non-authored not-art. Polan’s approach relies on the hierarchical opposition of meaningful modernist

²³⁹ Barlow, *Quentin Tarantino: Life at the Extremes*, p. 3

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 142

art and meaningless postmodern entertainment. Polan's claims that those who like *Pulp Fiction* do so 'because it doesn't seem to have anything to say and renders cinematic experience as pure play' while others dislike it for the very same reasons are an exemplary instance of Polan's deployment of this binary.²⁴¹ Rather than disrupting the binary through the double process of deconstruction, Polan merely inverts it; favouring meaninglessness and continuing to operate within the logic of the binary. This denies *Pulp Fiction* the potential to be meaningful rather than challenging and redefining what it is to be meaningful. By continuing to operate according to a binary opposition of meaningful/meaningless and modernist/postmodern Polan perversely presents *Pulp Fiction* as inferior to modernist texts.

Polan's retention of this hierarchical binary opposition is clear in his explanation of the differences between modernist and postmodern art. Polan claims that modernist experimentation with narrative makes 'meaningful points' and that modernism 'quests after meaning even if it imagines that that meaning is not accessible.'²⁴² Postmodern art, on the contrary, 'is not seen to be meaningful' but 'simply to *be seen* – to be experienced in its sheer dazzle, to be lived in the superficiality of its affective sights and sounds.'²⁴³ Polan's alignment of modernism with a tragic quest for meaning and postmodernism with meaningless dazzle recalls Jameson's characterisation of modernist versus postmodern art.²⁴⁴

Polan differs from Jameson in his classification of postmodernism as an affective appeal to the senses. For Jameson, postmodernism is identified with the waning of affect, not its increase.²⁴⁵ In this respect Polan typifies the collapse of the categories of postmodern and post-classical in Film Studies. Post-classical aesthetics are constructed in opposition to classical aesthetics through association with an apparent increase in spectacle at the expense of

²⁴¹ Polan, *Pulp Fiction*, p. 7

²⁴² Ibid, p. 79

²⁴³ Ibid, *Pulp Fiction*, p. 79

²⁴⁴ Polan's use of the term 'dazzle' recalling in particular Jameson's description of *Diamond Dust Shoes* in terms of 'decorative exhilaration' Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 10

²⁴⁵ Generally speaking, Jameson's identification of the waning of affect is closely related to the death of the subject, and can be generalised as the loss of those experiences associated with the sense of the subject as monad-like container. This notably includes sense of time and experience of alienation, but could be extended to the realm of the emotions and those experiences peculiar to the body as explored in Affect Theory. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 10 and pp. 23 – 24

narrative.²⁴⁶ In Polan, this takes on the distinct form of a mind/body divide, with meaningful modernism aligned with more cerebral pleasures and postmodernism merely offering sensual thrills. This opposition is most readily apparent in Polan's comparison of the experience of watching *Pulp Fiction* to 'visiting a theme park'.²⁴⁷ Polan extends his theme park metaphor, claiming that 'on the narrative ride' the spectator does not look for meaning but rather to 'have an experience, to luxuriate in sensations.'²⁴⁸ Meaning is directly opposed to sensation and *Pulp Fiction* resolutely classified as something not to be interpreted, a categorisation also borne out in Polan's claim that one doesn't interpret Disneyland but simply lives it.²⁴⁹

Polan further deviates from orthodox models of postmodernism in his suggestion that dislike for *Pulp Fiction* may not only stem from the film's meaninglessness but because the film conceals 'some real political issues [...] behind a seductive veneer of spectacle.'²⁵⁰ Polan therefore rehearses the familiar suspicion of concealing surfaces, but in doing so constructs *Pulp Fiction* according to a hermeneutics of depth incompatible with his identification of the film as postmodern. Rather than challenge the identification of *Pulp Fiction* as concealing surface, Polan instead follows the course outlined above and proposes that *Pulp Fiction* is utterly meaningless. This however only serves to perpetuate the identification of *Pulp Fiction* with a depth model of hermeneutics. Rather than a surface concealing hidden meaning, it is a surface concealing nothing. Following this model, Polan is able to distinguish between modernist films and postmodern films, despite their surface similarities. For example, whilst Polan concedes a surface similarity between *Pulp Fiction* and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) – both films experiment with fractured chronology – *Pulp Fiction* can only be 'a game' or 'light puzzle' rather than 'a discourse on [...] perspectives of knowledge' and 'the relativity of human understanding.'²⁵¹ The surface of modernist films is constructed as a vessel containing meaning

²⁴⁶ This is explored in more detail in the net chapter. See also King, *New Hollywood Cinema*

²⁴⁷ Polan, *Pulp Fiction*, p. 76

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 77

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 77

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 7

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 81

whereas the postmodern film is merely an empty container. Through his strict adherence to the binary of meaningful modernism/meaningless postmodernism (and an associated retention of modernist aesthetic values), Polan unhelpfully constructs the Tarantino author-text in terms markedly similar to Jameson's postmodern non-author.

An alternative to Polan's approach can be found in Ed Gallafent's work on Tarantino. Gallafent also seeks to demonstrate the worth of Tarantino's films, but classifies Tarantino as modernist rather than postmodern. In doing so, Gallafent clearly constructs the Tarantino author-text according to the modernist genre of author-function. The advantage of Gallafent's approach is that he does not approach this construction by negating the identification of Tarantino as postmodern, but rather by affirmatively identifying Tarantino as a modernist instead. As such, Gallafent has no need for a straw-man postmodernism to act as bad-twin to his modernist reading. According to Gallafent, Tarantino is an American Modernist in the sense defined by Stanley Cavell: an artist 'whose discoveries and declarations of his medium are to be understood as embodying his effort to maintain the continuity of his art with the art of his past'.²⁵²

For Gallafent, Tarantino's films are modernist, rather than postmodern, because the films retain a sense of the past absent from postmodernism. According to Gallafent, Tarantino's characters do not, indeed cannot, lose a sense of the past, the central question of Tarantino's characters being 'what they will do in the present with this fact of possession by the past'.²⁵³ Elsewhere, Gallafent claims that Tarantino's use of contemporary settings invites contemplation of the continuity between the present and 'past worlds' where 'certain values and fantasies' could still be asserted, whilst recognising the loss of those past worlds and the impossibility of reconstituting them.²⁵⁴ Gallafent complicates this otherwise straightforwardly modernist lament for lost value by suggesting that these past worlds already contain within them 'their own

²⁵² Edward Gallafent, *Quentin Tarantino* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2006), p. 7

²⁵³ Gallafent, *Quentin Tarantino*, p. 3 It would be interesting in this respect to know Gallafent's views on Tarantino's recent, more overtly historically minded work such as *Inglorious Basterds* and *Django Unchained* (2013), and *The Hateful Eight* (2015)

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7

recognition of loss, of the impossibility of reconstituting a still earlier, imagined world.'²⁵⁵

Despite coming at Tarantino from the perspective of modernist aesthetics, Gallafent's later remarks on Tarantino and history exhibit some parallels with Hutcheon's de-naturalised model of history. Moreover, Cavell's definition of modernism as an attempt to maintain continuity with the art of the past that informs Gallafent's analysis has a strong resemblance to Hutcheon's definition of postmodern parody as the double-voiced installing and subversion of convention, inspired in turn by the Jencks's identification of postmodern architecture as double-coded.

This suggests the permeability between the boundaries of modernism and postmodernism, a permeability that the use of postmodernism as bad-twin seeks to resist and must not acknowledge if the distinction between categories is to remain meaningful. Where postmodernism is not a debased category to be avoided, such permeability is less problematic. Determining whether a film is modernist or postmodernist is not a case of identifying some essential quality that makes it so. Rather the critic will emphasise and arrange the details of the text according to her chosen critical framework. In choosing between critical frameworks, it is not a case of determining between good/bad or correct/incorrect but which reading is most useful and most convincing.

In a refreshing contrast to the association of postmodernism with the category of non-author, Edwin Page identifies Tarantino as both an auteur and as postmodern.²⁵⁶ However, Page's acclamation of Tarantino as author depends upon his reading of Tarantino's films according to a model of concealing surface and meaningful depth; evident in his claim that while Tarantino's films may appear to be 'shallow shoot-emups' on the surface they actually contain 'hidden depths'.²⁵⁷ More problematically, Page constructs postmodernism as a depth model of

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 7

²⁵⁶ Page's definition of auteurism as a 'specific style of cinematic entertainment' and a 'brand of movie' is interesting for its conflation of the vocabulary of the modernist genre of author-function with the commercial in its slippage from style to brand. This is more reflexive of Page's generally more accepting attitude to the commercial nature of Tarantino's films than a belief that Tarantino is involved only in the business of being an auteur. Page, *Quintessential Tarantino*, p. 22

²⁵⁷ Page, *Quintessential Tarantino*, p. 21

hermeneutics, confusing the de-naturalising impulse with a process of unveiling.²⁵⁸ A similar issue arises from Page's suggestion that Tarantino's use of self-reflexivity serves to remind the audience 'that he has created [the film], that it is not real.'²⁵⁹ Page frames self-reflexivity as the shattering of illusion, and thus maintains a binary opposition of truth/fiction. Furthermore, the revelation of the films as 'created' immediately invokes its creator, the man behind the curtain. This in turn sets up a relation between creator and creation that evokes the image of the author-God, readily associated with the Romantic genre of author-function. Page's identification of Tarantino therefore recalls the unsatisfactory attempts to reconcile authorship and postmodernism explored earlier in this chapter. It is only through a mutation born of misunderstanding that postmodernism can be made to accommodate the depth models of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function.

The literature on Tarantino reflects the difficulty of creating an author-text when the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function are inaccessible. Tarantino's biography lacks the sort of details that allow for the Lynch author-text to be constructed according to the metaphors and mythology of the artist, and thus in accordance with the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function. This suggests that the construction of the author-text is not a free-for-all but must be grounded in either biographical or filmographical detail if it is to be deemed convincing. Lynch's art school training allows for the mobilisation of a range of metaphors, imagery, and references that Tarantino's tenure as an autodidact video store clerk does not. Rather than providing material that can be mobilised in terms of distance, the Tarantino biography only signifies in terms of proximity. Worse still, the Tarantino author-text is tainted through association with the postmodern non-author. Where the construction of Lynch as artist mitigates the 'harmful' association with postmodernism, the Tarantino author-text has no such recourse.

²⁵⁸ For example, Page argues that by making gangsters talk like ordinary people, Tarantino breaks with generic representations of gangsters and shows past representations to be 'unrealistic stereotypes' and 'comments on society's own stereotypical branding of people because of what they wear or what they do and it tries to get us to see beyond these restrictive boundaries to what lies beneath.' Page, *Quintessential Tarantino* pp. 43 – 44

²⁵⁹ Page, *Quintessential Tarantino*, p. 7

As noted earlier in this chapter, the move to considering the author as text is an attempt to present a reconceptualised, de-naturalised notion of authorship compatible with postmodern theory. As the examination of the literature on Lynch and Tarantino demonstrates, this move alone is not sufficient if one wishes to affirmatively identify a director as postmodern. The dominance of nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism (or in some cases the less than rigorous conceptualisation of postmodernism) contributes to the general sense that postmodern texts are complicit, unoriginal, and without meaning. For many critics 'postmodern' is a label to be resisted, whilst the category author persists as a marker of value. This in turn contributes to the use of postmodernism as bad-twin to authorship, modernism, and other critically favoured terms; as well as the alignment of postmodernism with the category of non-author.

In order to overcome these obstacles, and in particular the association of postmodernism with non-authored not-art, an alternative postmodern genre of author-function is required, one reflecting affirmative conceptualisations of postmodernism rather than the nihilistic conceptualisations associated with the postmodern non-author.

The postmodern genre of author-function

A postmodern genre of author-function informed by affirmative accounts of postmodernism not only allows for consideration of the author in the context of postmodernism, but has the beneficial secondary effect of allowing for postmodern film to be seen as meaningful. Although not amounting to a postmodern theory of authorship as such, nor indeed strictly framed in terms of authorship, Peter and Will Brooker's highly sympathetic and affirmative reading of *Pulp Fiction* provides an initial indication of what the tropes of a postmodern genre of author-function might be.

The primary focus of Brooker's and Brooker's article is a critical reassessment of *Pulp Fiction*. They do not, however, approach the film in isolation, and a subtle auteurist perspective pervades their article. Brooker and Brooker begin with some remarks on Tarantino's status as an auteur. They note that the 'Tarantino phenomenon' is inspired not only by his own films, but

also those films where Tarantino has received credit for screenplays or as producer.²⁶⁰ Brooker and Brooker also note that the release of *Pulp Fiction* renewed interest in *Reservoir Dogs* and the other Tarantino ‘spin-offs’.²⁶¹ This is chiefly of interest for the ways in which it frames *Pulp Fiction* as part of a larger network of texts coalescing around the name ‘Tarantino’. Brooker and Brooker trace certain trends in the critical writing on Tarantino, including the dismissal of Tarantino’s work as an example of meaningless and symptomatic postmodernism; critical praise for Tarantino’s work as empty and meaningless; and the classification of Tarantino’s films according to an ‘aesthetic of violence’.²⁶² Brooker’s and Brooker’s presentation of this material implies that the journalists and critics quoted also approach Tarantino and *Pulp Fiction* from an auteurist perspective, their experience of *Reservoir Dogs* and the Tarantino scripted *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994) informing their reception of *Pulp Fiction*.

Brooker and Brooker find these approaches to be unsatisfactory and limiting. According to Brooker and Brooker, existing thinking about Tarantino’s films solely in terms of violence does not account for the differing ways violence is articulated across Tarantino films, nor its differing functions.²⁶³ Similarly, Brooker and Brooker argue that it is unhelpful to associate Tarantino’s films and postmodernism in general with ‘the amoral, superficial, and self-referential portrayal of violence.’²⁶⁴ A particular flaw in such approaches is that they overemphasise violence at the expense of those aspects of the films which, according to Brooker and Brooker viewers most immediately respond. According to Brooker and Brooker it is not the

²⁶⁰ Brooker and Brooker, ‘Pulpmodernism’, in *Postmodern After-Images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89-100, p. 89 At the publication of Brooker and Brooker and Brooker’s article this includes screenplays for *True Romance* (Tony Scott, 1993) and *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stoner, 1994), and an associate producer credit for *Killing Zoe* (Roger Avary, 1993). Tarantino has subsequently received writing credits for *From Dusk Till Dawn* (Robert Rodriquez, 1996) and has received producer credits on numerous features. Notably, in addition to being credited as producer for *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005), Tarantino’s name appeared prominently in the marketing of the film, in the form of the epigram ‘Quentin Tarantino presents’, as was the American theatrical release of *Hero/ Ying xiong* (Yimou Zhang, 2002). *The Man with the Iron Fists* (2012), directed by Robert Fitzgerald Diggs from a screenplay by Tarantino protégé Eli Roth was also marketed under the ‘presents’ heading. Diggs is better known by stage name RZA, and is responsible for the orchestration and organisation of the *Kill Bill* soundtracks. The use of Tarantino’s name as a marketing tool for films not directed by Tarantino represents a rather extreme deployment of the commercial genre of author-function.

²⁶¹ Brooker and Brooker, ‘Pulpmodernism’, in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 89

²⁶² Ibid pp. 89 – 91

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 91

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 91

scenes of violence that have most appeal, but the ones dealing with relationships and style.²⁶⁵

Brooker and Brooker assert that *Pulp Fiction* is not nihilistic, vacuous, and self-enclosed but affirmative and revaluative.²⁶⁶ Demonstrating this requires the adoption of a new critical perspective that, amongst other things, considers *Pulp Fiction*'s relation to the aesthetic features of postmodernism and thinks 'with more discrimination and subtlety' about those features.²⁶⁷

This rejection of existing critical approaches grounded in humanist aesthetics amounts to a rejection of the modernist genre of author-function as a framework appropriate to the analysis of a postmodern text. Furthermore, while Brooker and Brooker single out *Pulp Fiction* in particular as affirmative, they note that it is not so 'in isolation'.²⁶⁸ This may refer to postmodern film more generally, but can be read more convincingly as applying to Tarantino's oeuvre in particular. Brooker's and Brooker's revaluation of *Pulp Fiction* therefore potentially serves as a framework through which to mount a reappraisal of Tarantino's other films in the terms dictated by their analysis of *Pulp Fiction*.²⁶⁹ This exploits the same relationship between author-text and film text that Charity attempts to use when reframing the Tarantino author-text in terms of maturity via a re-reading of *Jackie Brown*. Brooker's and Brooker's attempt to revalue *Pulp Fiction* is more convincing than Charity's, being better supported by textual evidence across films than Charity's desire to construct Tarantino in terms of maturity. It is desirable at this juncture to examine Brooker's and Brooker's reading of *Pulp Fiction* in more detail, noting those aspects which might usefully be extrapolated upon in the formation of a postmodern genre of author-function.

Central to Brooker's and Brooker's reappraisal of Tarantino's postmodernism is their reading of *Pulp Fiction* as a narrative of 'reinvention and rebirth', with the scene of Mia's (Uma Thurman) 'resurrection' by hypodermic needle taken as 'the most graphic illustration' of this

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 91

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 92

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 91

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 92

²⁶⁹ The pair's brief analysis of *Reservoir Dogs* and use of the term 'Tarantino's postmodernism' hints at this potential, but such an application is beyond the immediate scope of the article. Ibid pp. 91 – 97

theme.²⁷⁰ Brooker and Brooker offer this reading as a counter to interpretations of the scene as evidence of Tarantino's portrayal of graphic violence.²⁷¹ Any reading that interprets this scene as *only* a portrayal of graphic violence (for it is, undeniably, violent) has failed to acknowledge the revaluative aspect of the scene. For example, the scene is very clearly an inversion of a stock situation in which stabbing a woman in the chest results in life, rather than death (the mime of repeated stabbing recalls *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960), for example).²⁷² The scene also recalls the act of staking a vampire, again inverted so that the victim is not slain but resurrected.²⁷³ This theme of reinvention and rebirth extends to Tarantino's use of intertextuality. According to Brooker and Booker, Tarantino does not 'merely repeat nor pastiche the conventions of pulp cinema' but rather '*reinvents and extends* these conventions' and 'gives them new life'.²⁷⁴ The affirmative aspect of Tarantino's intertextuality is clear in Brooker's and Brooker's reference to new life, a direct opposition to Jameson's association of pastiche with an appetite for 'dead styles'.²⁷⁵

Brooker and Brooker refute interpretations of *Pulp Fiction*'s narrative as 'pointlessly circling or enclosing'.²⁷⁶ Even Vincent (John Travolta), the character unable to sufficiently reinvent himself, is not entirely trapped by the film's structure. As Brooker and Brooker observe, Vincent's story may be entirely enclosed, but the effect of this 'is not to encircle or eliminate [Vincent] but to foreground and literally enliven him.'²⁷⁷ By returning to a point before Vincent's death, the film's narrative is able to suggest the reinvention and rebirth that Vincent is unable to achieve personally. Brooker and Brooker see the return to the diner at the

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 97

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 97

²⁷² See also Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, p. 78

²⁷³ To my mind the scene is particularly reminiscent of the staking of Helen Kent (Barbara Shelley) in Hammer's *Dracula Prince of Darkness* (Terrence Fisher, 1966). Where the stake transforms Helen from struggling vampire to peaceful corpse, the adrenaline shot takes Mia from peaceful coma to struggling life

²⁷⁴ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 96

²⁷⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 297

²⁷⁶ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 97

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 97

end of *Pulp Fiction* as the return to Vincent's 'most potentially self-transformative moment', the film resurrecting Vincent 'to consider from a new angle what might have been.'²⁷⁸

Whilst not explicitly stated in these terms, Brooker's and Brooker's analysis of *Pulp Fiction*'s narrative recalls a Nietzschean model of repetition in difference.²⁷⁹ The model of repetition in difference is an open circle, which offers the possibility of a different pattern being traced with each return.²⁸⁰ It therefore incorporates a 'temporal aspect' whereby the artistic perspective (re)shapes and (re)orders elements from past and future, 'selecting and foregrounding specific features in order to construct patterns across time'.²⁸¹ Experiencing a shift of perspective makes it possible to trace a new path. In *Pulp Fiction*, the possibility for such perspectival shifts is signalled to the audience by moments such as lines of dialogue repeated from the first diner scene differing in the second. The link to Nietzsche is particularly apt in the context of this chapter, as the concepts of repetition in difference and perspectival shift are closely tied to the opposition of nihilism and affirmation in Nietzsche's philosophy.²⁸² For Nietzsche, nihilism is the result of being stuck in the no-saying or negational phase of value creation.²⁸³ Whilst it is necessary to first negate old values, new values can only be created

²⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 98 – 99

²⁷⁹ Repetition in difference is otherwise known as eternal recurrence or return in difference. See Sarah Kofman, 'Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism', trans. by Tracy B. Strong in *Nietzsche's New Seas: Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 175 – 203; For more on the connection between Nietzsche and Brooker and Brooker, see Constable, *Postmodernism and Film* pp. 76 – 80

²⁸⁰ See Kofman, 'Baubô: Theological Perversion and Fetishism', in *Nietzsche's New Seas*, ed. by Gillespie and Strong pp. 175-203, p. 105

²⁸¹ Catherine Constable, *Thinking in Images: Film Theory, Feminist Philosophy and Marlene Dietrich* (London: BFI Film Institute, 2005), p. 105

²⁸² For Nietzsche, the affirmation of eternity as whole is dependent upon a perspectival shift, the recreation of 'it was' as 'Thus I willed it! Thus I shall will it!', Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Kaufmann, pp. 103 – 439, p. 310

²⁸³ See for example, the allegorical figure of the Shadow in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who 'broke whatever [his] heart revered' and 'unlearned faith in words and values and great names'. The Shadow is an unhappy figure. Serving as Zarathustra's doppelgänger, the Shadow is a thin and hollow ghost 'without any goal'. Only capable of negating without affirming, the Shadow is unable to create new meaning. Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Kaufmann, pp. 103 – 439 pp. 384 – 387; For an account of how Nietzsche's relation to postmodernism, and in particular Nietzsche's use of allegorical figures such as the Shadow, see Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, pp. 46 – 46

through affirmation.²⁸⁴ The opposition presented in this chapter between nihilistic and affirmative postmodernisms can therefore be classified as Nietzschean.²⁸⁵ From a nihilistic perspective, the post-structuralist turn is framed as signalling the end or death of categories such as the subject, the author, history, objective truth, and metaphysics. In opposition to this, an affirmative perspective conceives of the post-structuralist turn not as an end but an opportunity to create new meaning. Following Hutcheon, postmodernism does not mark the end of history or reality, but rather the end of particular *types* of history and reality. These categories are not dead, but rather deconstructed, decentred, and reconfigured.

Brooker's and Brooker's affirmative framing of postmodern aesthetics in terms of reinvention and revaluation represents a valuable intervention when considering the potential for postmodern authorship. The undercurrent of auteurism evident throughout the piece comes to a head in the penultimate paragraph, where Brooker and Brooker refer to 'Tarantino's world' and elevate their reading of *Pulp Fiction* to a general description of style and themes evident across Tarantino's films.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, the ways in which Tarantino represents a new kind of authorship is hinted at through the description of Tarantino assembling 'newly woven' narratives from a broad selection of 'cinematic motifs and cultural styles'.²⁸⁷ The metaphor of weaving implies a mode of creation quite distinct from self-expression, positioning the author as a selector and compositor of various threads. These threads are drawn together and interwoven to produce new patterns and textures. The image of weaving recalls Barthes's characterisation of reading as the act of running a thread rather than the piercing of surfaces associated with

²⁸⁴ In the parable of the three metamorphoses, the lion is associated with a 'sacred "No"', which is used in 'the creation of freedom for oneself for new creation' but is not sufficient for the creation of 'new values'. For Nietzsche, the 'game of creation' requires a 'sacred "yes"', associated with the figure of the child. Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. by Kaufmann, pp. 103 – 439, p. 139

²⁸⁵ In categorising conceptualisations of postmodernism as either affirmative or nihilistic, I follow Constable's taking up of these Nietzschean concepts in relation to postmodernism. See Constable, *Postmodernism and Film* pp. 39 – 47, especially, p. 45

²⁸⁶ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 99

²⁸⁷ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 99

depth models of hermeneutics.²⁸⁸ Derrida also favours textile metaphors when discussing the role of a critic, in particular characterising each (re)reading as the addition of a new thread.²⁸⁹ Additionally, Brooker's and Brooker's descriptions of postmodern intertextuality foregrounds its transformative and enlivening potential, bolstered by reference to Tarantino's recycling of the waste products of the past in order to put them 'to new creative advantage'.²⁹⁰ This is carried forward in the description of 'open narratives' that 'bring life to the dead', a reference to Vincent in *Pulp Fiction* but also surely a challenge to the too familiar association of postmodernism with death.²⁹¹

The perspectival shift from nihilistic to affirmative conceptualisations of postmodern aesthetics enacted by Brooker and Brooker is a necessary first step to the rehabilitation of the Tarantino oeuvre. However, it is the implicitly auteurist impulse of Brooker's and Brooker's reading of *Pulp Fiction* that allows for the expansion from an affirmative reading of a single text to the reframing of all other texts of the Tarantino oeuvre as potentially valuable. The unifying function of authorship frames *Pulp Fiction* in relation to all other film texts organised under the Tarantino name. This is not to say that individual film texts function as parts of a whole, but rather that each film text exists in a shifting and multi-dimensional relation to each other, where it is possible to map the relationships between films according to recurrences of form or meaning. Extending Brooker's and Brooker's approach beyond the reading of a single text to the reappraisal of an oeuvre requires a two stage process. Firstly a shift of perspective allows for the identification of particular features in *Pulp Fiction* as valuable. These features then inform the subsequent mapping of the oeuvre, with routes plotted between films according to the prevalence of those features. This should be differentiated from the imposition of a master code or identification of an interpretive key that privileges *Pulp Fiction* as some Ur-text. *Pulp*

²⁸⁸ Barthes, *Image Music Text*, p. 147

²⁸⁹ Both Derrida and Barthes also take advantage of the play on text (*texte*) and textile (*textile*) that the weaving metaphor encourages. Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp. 63 – 64

²⁹⁰ Brooker and Brooker, 'Pulpmodernism', in *Postmodern After-images*, ed. by Brooker and Brooker pp. 89 – 100, p. 99

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 99

Fiction is not a lone centre from which connections are traced outward, but one of many centres from which routes can be plotted. I conceive of the oeuvre as a protean and shifting unity, across which multiple paths of influence can be traced in a multidirectional, intersecting, and overlapping network.

Building upon the characteristics identified above, a working definition of a postmodern genre of author-function emerges. Firstly, the postmodern genre of author-function finds value in reworking, repetition, and parody rather than originality and authenticity. Meaning is produced through the weaving together of intertexts, the meanings of those texts reconfigured through their combination or juxtaposition with other texts. Secondly, the postmodern genre of author-function is one grounded in postmodern aesthetics of de-naturalisation and deconstruction rather than self-expression.

Brooker's and Brooker's association of the intertextuality of *Pulp Fiction* with a deconstructive impulse echoes Hutcheon's alignment of postmodernism with deconstruction and the potential for complicitous critique and political engagement.²⁹² Complicitous critique reframes the insider position as a viable platform for critique, allowing for the potential of criticism from within. This is directly counter to the privileging of an outsider position in terms of critical distance associated with the modernist genre of author-function, but also challenges the requirement for the artist to occupy a pure space outside of the commercial associated with the Romantic genre of author-function.

The benefit of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective for analysis of a director such as Tarantino, excluded from the categories of authorship, art and even meaningfulness, is clear. However, the perspectival shift enabled by the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function can also be beneficial to directors already identified as authors according to Romantic or modernist genres of author-function such as Lynch. The shift of perspective emphasises aspects of their work previously obscured, leading to the

²⁹² Ibid, p. 95

identification of different films as major and minor works, and therefore enabling the tracing of alternative patterns and associations across the oeuvre.

The subsequent chapters will employ the theory of authorship outlined in this chapter in analysis of Tony Scott and Sally Potter; directors associated with mainstream Hollywood cinema and international Art cinema respectively. Whilst the rationale for selecting Scott and Potter as case studies will be explored in greater detail in the relevant chapters, it is nevertheless useful at this point to set out some of the reasoning behind the selection. A key factor determining the selection is the need to test and refine the postmodern genre of author-function in relation to the broadest possible definition of postmodern cinema. The characteristics of the postmodern genre of author-function have been determined in relation to Quentin Tarantino, who like David Lynch is counted among the limited corpus of postmodern directors such as those identified by Booker and Garrett. Despite their differences, these directors are for the most part positioned at the boundary between Hollywood and independent cinema proper. By focusing on directors associated with mainstream Hollywood and Art cinema, these case studies demonstrate the potential that adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy has for expanding and redefining the field of postmodern cinema.

In addition to being associated with the traditionally opposed categories of mainstream Hollywood and Art cinema, Scott and Potter are also starkly opposed in terms of their access to existing genres of author-function, much as Lynch and Tarantino are similarly opposed. Potter's association with Art cinema potentially grants access to the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function whereas Scott's access is presumably more precarious. Gender plays a role in complicating this access. Potter's status as a woman potentially limits her access to the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, something that the feminist genre of author-function takes in to account and attempts to address. Interestingly, Scott's gender does not guarantee his authorial status, and his access to the modernist and Romantic genres of author-function are limited in other ways that will be explored in greater detail in the course of the case

study. Thus in addition to representing a broad spectrum in relation to the field of postmodern cinema, the choice of Scott and Potter as case studies allows for the exploration of the usefulness of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy for the work of directors relatively securely constructed as auteurs as well as for those without access to the other genres of author-function. These contrasts are a significant factor in the selection of Scott and Potter as a pair of case studies over other potential candidates where the desired contrast between case studies would be less overt.

The analysis will be constructed in two stages. Firstly, the critical vocabulary of the genres of author-function will be used to explore how authorship operates in the existing literature on the director in question, as well as in the context in which that director's work is typically received. This allows for consideration of the ways in which existing readings have been shaped by either the Romantic, modernist, feminist, or commercial genres of author-function. Following this, the postmodern genre of author-function will be adopted as a critical framework through which to analyse a selection of film texts from each director's filmography in order to explore the sorts of reading adopting this framework produces. This allows for consideration of what adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective brings to the study of Scott and Potter, by comparing existing readings with the range of alternative readings made possible by adopting the postmodern genre of author-function.

CHAPTER 2: TONY SCOTT

Introduction

This chapter demonstrates the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy in relation to the oeuvre of a contemporary mainstream Hollywood director; using Tony Scott as a case study. The identification of Scott as a suitable case study is based on a number of criteria. Firstly, and most importantly, I believe that the films of the Scott oeuvre demonstrate the re-inventive impulse of postmodern art, the presence of which is essential in order to justify the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy. Secondly, Scott is closely associated with the resolutely commercial and artistically denigrated blockbuster action cinema that emerged as an increasingly dominant mode in Hollywood cinema from the eighties onward. Scott's implication within the commercial and aesthetic systems of mainstream Hollywood serves as an obstacle to the construction of Scott as an auteur. Scott lacks the outsider sensibility or critical distance required to construct the Scott author-text according to the critical perspective of either the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function. Furthermore, the entrenchment of Scott within the Hollywood mainstream is evidence of an insider position incompatible with Romantic or modernist genres of author-function but which is compatible with the postmodern genre of author-function and the associated concept of complicitous critique. This makes Scott a suitable case study for demonstrating the utility of the postmodern genre of author-function and the potential for re-evaluating the oeuvre of a director dismissed as a non-author that adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy enables.

It is the difficulty of constructing the Scott author-text according to the critical perspectives of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function that makes Scott a particularly useful case study. It is also the reason for selecting Scott over other notable directors associated with postmodern cinema, such as Cronenberg, Fincher, Verhoeven, and the Coen Brothers. While the films of these directors are readily identifiable as postmodern, their

positions on the boundary of Hollywood grant them a modicum of critical distance that can in turn be leveraged in order to justify the construction of an author-text from the perspective of the modernist or even Romantic genre of author-function. Cronenberg and Verhoeven in can readily be approached in this way, due to the overly satirical impulse of films such as *Shivers* (David Cronenberg, 1975), *Videodrome* (Cronenberg, 1983), *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987), and *Starship Troopers* (1997).²⁹³ This position on the boundary between Hollywood and independent cinema proper does not prohibit the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy when examining the oeuvres of these directors, and indeed both Lynch and Tarantino are also associated with this boundary position. Scott has been chosen over these directors because they (like Lynch) potentially have access to either the modernist or postmodern genres of author-function depending on the perspective adopted, whilst Scott (like Tarantino) does not have access to any genres of author-function, except potentially the commercial or postmodern genres of author-function.²⁹⁴

Amongst the directors referenced by Garrett and Booker, Tim Burton stands out as a strong candidate for consideration alongside Scott as a potential case study. Burton is arguably more closely aligned to the mainstream than any of the other directors mentioned thus far, and the films of the Burton oeuvre are (for Booker at least) indicative of postmodern superficiality.²⁹⁵ The re-inventive impulse associated with the postmodern genre of author-function is readily apparent across the films of the Burton oeuvre in the reworking of the conventions of Universal horror films and German expressionism, fifties science-fiction, the fairy tale and gothic literature, as well as representations of small town America and, with *Ed Wood* (Burton, 1994) in particular, film history. However, existing alongside the re-inventive impulse is a persistent concern with the outsider and eccentricity. While distinct from similar

²⁹³ The satire of *Starship Troopers* is perhaps so overt as to be rendered surface, much as Pfeil says of the oedipal 'subtext' of *Blue Velvet*. Pfeil, 'Home Fires Burning' in *Shades of Noir* (ed.) Copjec, pp. 227-259

²⁹⁴ It should be noted that whilst both Scott and Tarantino suffer from a perceived lack of critical distance, in Tarantino's case this stems from an assumed lack of distance from his fans and the material he quotes whereas Scott's insider status stems from his entrenchment within the Hollywood system.

²⁹⁵ See Booker, *Postmodern Hollywood*, pp. xi – xvi

concerns evident in the Lynch oeuvre, this thematic preoccupation can nevertheless be leveraged in a similar way in order to construct the Burton author-text from the perspective of the Romantic or modernist genre of author-function, depending on how it is read. Thus with Burton, as with Lynch and the other directors discussed above, there is potential to construct the author-text according to either the modernist or postmodern genres of author-function depending on the reading strategy adopted by the critic, whereas Scott cannot because of the perceived lack of critical distance.

In terms of complicity and lack of critical distance, Michael Bay is also a strong candidate as an alternative case study. However, while Bay is similar to Scott in regards to being fully implicated in (if not epitomising) the commercial and aesthetic standards of the Hollywood mainstream, the films of the Bay oeuvre do not display the requisite re-inventive characteristics to justify adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy. This absence is apparent if one compares the treatment of both history and the conventions of the historical film in *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay, 2001) to the historical films of Tarantino or the Coen Brothers.²⁹⁶ While *Pearl Harbor* is clearly working within a specific tradition, it is not questioning or reworking it sufficiently to be identified as complicitous critique. Apart from Bay, all of the alternative directors mentioned could be approached using the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy. They have been excluded because they can also be approached using other genres of author-function. Both Bay and Scott are deemed to be equally entrenched in the Hollywood system, and thus dismissed as non-authors according to the criteria of the Romantic and Modernist genres of author-function. However, the Bay oeuvre does not demonstrate evidence of a re-inventive impulse and therefore cannot be revaluated by adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy. Indeed Bay is perhaps the epitome of the commercial genre of author-function. I contend that the films of the Scott oeuvre

²⁹⁶ The Tarantino films that engage with and rework history and the conventions historical films include *Inglourious Bastards* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012), and *The Hateful Eight* (2015). Notable examples from the Coen Brothers oeuvre include *Miller's Crossing* (Joel Coen, 1990), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Joel Coen, 2000), and especially *The Hudsucker Proxy* (Joel Coen, 1994). Both *Barton Fink* (Joel Coen, 1991) and *Hail Caesar!* (Ethan and Joel Coen, 2016) are concerned with the history of Hollywood.

do feature examples of re-invention characteristic of the postmodern genre of author-function. Where the adoption of other genres of author-function would lead to the classification of Scott as a non-author, it is possible to adopt the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy to re-evaluate the Scott oeuvre.

Having considered these alternatives, Scott has been selected as the case study for this chapter because the Scott author-text and oeuvre present the best opportunity for demonstrating the potential of adopting the postmodern-genre of author-function as a reading strategy to re-evaluate a director previously dismissed as a non-author according to the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function.

Tony Scott's suicide on the 19th August 2012 has an inevitable effect on this chapter, as it will do on the perception of Scott's career – now with a definitive end point in *Unstoppable* (Tony Scott, 2010). Any consideration of Scott's career now takes on the form of retrospective. Scott's obituaries present a strikingly cohesive image of the director; all categorising Tony Scott as a director of action films and nearly all referencing Scott's brother Ridley. *The New York Times* describes Scott as a director of 'exuberant action films',²⁹⁷ while Josh L. Dickey, writing for *Variety*, remembers Scott as 'one of Hollywood's most energetic blockbuster stylists'.²⁹⁸ Dickey observes that Scott 'even' gained 'an ardent critical following'; the 'even' perhaps suggestive of surprise.²⁹⁹ *The Telegraph* obituary lacks even the circumspect praise of *Variety*, describing Scott as 'a director with little interest in ideas or morality' who nonetheless 'created a visual sheen that lingered in the memory long after narrative and characters were forgotten.'³⁰⁰ The reference to visual sheen is also reminiscent of Jameson's disparaging analysis of *Diamond Dust Shoes*, and clearly engages with similar hierarchical oppositions of style/substance and

²⁹⁷ Michael Cieply and Brooks Barnes, 'Tony Scott, Director Versed in Action, Dies at 68', *Arts Beat* <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/20/director-tony-scott-jumps-to-his-death-from-los-angeles-bridge/?_r=0> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

²⁹⁸ Josh L. Dickey, 'Hollywood mourns prolific helmer' <<http://variety.com/2012/film/news/hollywood-mourns-prolific-helmer-1118058051/>> [accessed 3rd December] [no pagination]

²⁹⁹ Dickey, 'Hollywood mourns prolific helmer' <<http://variety.com/2012/film/news/hollywood-mourns-prolific-helmer-1118058051/>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁰⁰ Anonymous, 'Tony Scott' <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9486824/Tony-Scott.html>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

form/content. Scott's films are framed as stylish but superficial, with no depth or meaningful content. The same piece makes reference to Scott's background in advertising, and suggests that Tony 'followed' his older brother 'Sir Ridley' to Hollywood.³⁰¹ This serves both to emphasise Tony's commercial sensibility and to frame him as less successful and respectable than his brother. This sentiment is echoed by the BBC, reporting that Ridley had 'bigger hits' and earned 'a level of critical respect' and three Academy Award nominations for best-director.³⁰² The writer adds that 'critics were harsher on Tony's films, accusing him of emphasising style over substance' and noting Scott was never nominated for an Oscar.³⁰³

The obituary in men's style magazine *GQ* is more positive, claiming Scott 'made blockbusters one could believe in' and describing Scott's 'specialism' as 'gutsy, action-laden popcorn fodder' embellished with power chords and 'the occasional montage'.³⁰⁴ This is an incomplete characterisation of Scott's style, heavily dependent on *Top Gun* (Scott, 1986) and far less applicable to the melancholic contemporary western *Revenge* (Scott, 1990) or *The Fan's* (Scott, 1996) essay on male obsession. It describes not so much Scott's style as it does the style spawned by the success of *Top Gun*. As John Patterson of *The Guardian* puts it, 'Scott essentially invented the modern action movie' and Scott's style 'became the house style of the Simpson-Bruckheimer ascendancy'.³⁰⁵ The *Time Out* obituary presents a more complex overview of Scott's career than *GQ*, addressing how Scott's influence on the contemporary action film has to some extent obscured his other achievements. Thus the writer observes that Scott became synonymous with 'overblown, overpriced multiplex fare'.³⁰⁶ The writer concedes that this may describe Scott's 'weaker' films, but claims that Scott's 'finest work displays the

³⁰¹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁰² Anonymous, 'Obituary: Tony Scott', <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19316140>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁰³ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁰⁴ Andy Morris, 'Tony Scott: A Tribute', <<http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/comment/articles/2012-08/20/tony-scott-director-tribute>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁰⁵ John Patterson, 'Tony Scott: Days of Thunder', <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/aug/20/tony-scott-days-of-thunder?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁰⁶ Anonymous, 'Tony Scott Obituary', <<http://www.timeout.com/london/film/tony-scott-obituary>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

hand of a master of cinematic spectacle and by-the-throat intensity'.³⁰⁷ The writer's suggestion that Scott's films are of varying quality is an interesting indication of a potential obstacle preventing the identification of Scott as an auteur. An uneven oeuvre is perhaps an indication that the author-text, for whatever reason, cannot sufficiently fulfil its unifying function and thus the film texts never coalesce as an oeuvre. In this case the films may be grouped under some other organising principle, such as Star, national cinema, or as in this case genre. Will Brooker notes a similar process at work in the promotional material for *Batman Begins*, with the film identified as a Batman adaptation rather than a Christopher Nolan film.³⁰⁸

Another interesting aspect of the *Time Out* article is that both the weaker films and finest works are clearly framed in terms of blockbuster spectacle and mainstream action cinema. Following *Time Out*, the divide in Scott's oeuvre is not between non-authored action films and more artistic and respectable authored films. Rather the divide appears to be between action films of differing quality. Scott may remain firmly ensconced within the action cinema mode, but he is nevertheless presented a 'master' of that mode and potentially, perhaps, an auteur in that context. This chapter will begin by examining the action cinema mode, and exploring how Scott's placement in this context affects Scott's eligibility for auteur status. The second section addresses more directly the strategies employed by those seeking to identify Scott as an auteur, culminating in an analysis of *Crimson Tide* (Scott, 1995). The remainder of the chapter will explore the advantages of identifying Scott as a postmodern auteur, and the benefits of examining his work in an authorial context. This will entail building upon the approach suggested in the previous chapter in reference to Brooker's and Brooker's reading of *Pulp Fiction*; using the analysis of *Crimson Tide* as a lens through which to analyse a selection of Scott's films.

Context: New Hollywood, Post-classical Style, and Action Cinema

³⁰⁷ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁰⁸ Brooker observes that Nolan's role as author is 'not turned up loud in the mix of meanings around *Batman Begins*' Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*, p. 16

Despite the apparent ubiquity of action cinema, the features that constitute an action film remain poorly defined. As José Arroyo observes, while action cinema has become almost synonymous with Hollywood cinema, the films have received little critical attention.³⁰⁹ While the situation may have improved somewhat since the publication of Arroyo's collection, action cinema remains a relatively ill-defined category. One reason for this may be that contemporary Hollywood action cinema is not a discrete and bounded category. While historically the use of action as spectacle was tied to particular genres, this is not the case with contemporary Hollywood cinema.³¹⁰

Another possible reason for the lack of critical interest in action cinema might be its close association with the commercial. As Arroyo observes, 'the action/spectacle mode [...] is widely seen as mass culture at its most crudely capitalistic', its sole purpose being 'the exchange of affect for cash.'³¹¹ Action cinema clearly falls foul of the hierarchical binary of art/commerce. Scott's association with this commercial mode is one explanation for his exclusion from the category of auteur. Unlike Lynch, who is perceived as working on the fringes of Hollywood, Scott is regarded as being firmly placed at the centre of Hollywood's industrial and commercial system and thus clearly not the bohemian outsider of the Romantic genre of author-function, nor the distant and critical outsider of the modernist author-function.

However, as *les politique des auteurs* and Sarris's auteur theory demonstrate, association with an industrial and commercial mode does not necessarily preclude a director from being an auteur. The commercial aspect of action cinema is therefore only a partial explanation, suggesting it is some other quality of action cinema that precludes Scott from identification as an author. Arroyo's identification of action cinema as a 'mode' may be instructive in this respect, suggesting we might usefully consider action cinema as a style of filmmaking, specifically as an example of post-classical Hollywood style. This shift in focus allows us to consider whether

³⁰⁹ José Arroyo, 'Introduction' to *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), pp. vii – xv, p. viii

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. vii

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. ix

there is something in the formal properties of action cinema that discourage the identification of Scott as an auteur.

Geoff King notes that in ‘style oriented’ accounts of Hollywood cinema, the term ‘post-classical’ is often favoured over New Hollywood’.³¹² Post-classical style is characterised as a series of departures from classical Hollywood style. Accounts of post-classical style are therefore indebted to Bordwell’s theory of classical Hollywood style, and the dominance of classical continuity editing in the films of the studio-era.³¹³ Following Bordwell, King notes that classical continuity editing is designed to be invisible, with emphasis placed on ‘narrative events’ rather than ‘the construction of sound and images’.³¹⁴ This suggests that the post-classical departures from classical style must include techniques that draw attention to the construction of the image.

According to King the first departures from classical style are evident in certain films of the Hollywood Renaissance, inspired by the style of the French New Wave.³¹⁵ This is followed by the more recent contemporary blockbuster format, whose stylistic departures from classical aesthetics come not from European art cinema but are inspired by the ‘the rapid cutting and “shallow” imagery of advertising or MTV.’³¹⁶ Furthermore, the desire to produce ‘a spectacular big-screen experience’ is deemed to ‘herald the demise of the narrative coherence said to characterise classical Hollywood’.³¹⁷ Considering these categories critically, it is apparent that these two modes of stylistic departure are clearly distinguished in terms of their cultural value: the New Wave inspired style of the Hollywood Renaissance is framed as a high-cultural, artistic departure; whereas the later blockbuster format is not only low-cultural, but shallow and

³¹² King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 3

³¹³ See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially, David Bordwell, ‘Part One: The Classical Hollywood, 1917 – 60’, pp. 1 – 84

³¹⁴ King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 4

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5

commercial, as well as being guilty of favouring spectacle over narrative. Contemporary action cinema is associated with the second category.

Following King, the stylistic features of contemporary Blockbuster cinema can be further categorised as either contemplative or explosive forms of spectacle. King associates contemplative spectacle with the use of longer shots, intended to emphasise the ‘reality’ of onscreen events.³¹⁸ Contemplative spectacle encourages viewers ‘to sit back and admire from a distance’.³¹⁹ In contrast, explosive spectacle is designed ‘to draw the viewer further in to the experience’.³²⁰ According to King, explosive spectacle is characterised by rapid editing and a dynamic of movement toward the viewer in both individual shots and through montage effects.³²¹ Indeed it is this rapid forward movement that leads King to describe this style as explosive. King provides further elaboration on the formal properties of explosive spectacle through analysis of an explosion in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1996). King notes that cuts tend to be made on movement, and that while the ‘sequence is rapid and compressed’ overall, individual moments are extended in time. For example, the presentation of the explosion through a rapid sequence of shots from a variety of angles makes it appear as if the explosion is happening more than once.³²²

The speed of editing and the element of ‘temporal overlap’ leads King to compare explosive spectacle to the montage effects of Soviet cinema.³²³ In contrast, the ‘more “literal” staging’ of contemplative spectacle is aligned with Bazinian preference for realism and the preservation of spatial unity.³²⁴ King adds that what is at stake in deployment of one or other mode is not ‘any abstract “essence” of cinema’ but a choice between approaches dependent on context. While King seemingly seeks to present the two techniques as distinct approaches

³¹⁸ Geoff King, *Spectacular Narratives* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), p. 95

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 95

³²⁰ Ibid, p. 95

³²¹ Ibid, p. 94

³²² Ibid, p. 94

³²³ Ibid, p. 94

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 96; see also Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 50

nonetheless equal in value, the opposition is implicitly hierarchical. This is apparent in King's addition of a caveat to his comparison of explosive spectacle to Soviet montage, claiming that action film audiences 'are not seeking to be awoken to some new understanding of the world [...] but to be stimulated physically for its own sensuous pleasure.'³²⁵ Action cinema is therefore guilty of misappropriating the techniques of Soviet montage cinema, using them as a prompt to bodily pleasure rather than political awareness and action.

King's distinction between contemplative and explosive spectacle partakes of a number of hierarchical oppositions, in particular an opposition between mind/body. Explosive spectacle provides purely bodily thrills while the label 'contemplative' clearly indicates a more cerebral engagement. A useful comparison can be drawn with the privileging of critical distance associated with the modernist genre of author-function. Contemplative spectacle encourages viewers to sit back and contemplate, and therefore is associated with a distanced and cerebral engagement. Explosive spectacle, on the other hand, is associated with closeness, with being drawn in, with passivity, and with bodily thrills.

Considering the stylistic features of action cinema in relation to the categories of contemplative and explosive spectacle, and in the broader context of post-classical style, it is clear that action cinema falls foul of a number of hierarchical binary oppositions. Firstly, as an example of post-classical style, contemporary action cinema is aligned with the low cultural and commercial blockbuster rather than the high cultural and artistic films of the Hollywood Renaissance. Even when compared with other types of spectacle, the explosive spectacle is presented as the least respectable form, associated with unthinking bodily pleasure rather than the cerebral critical distance of contemplative spectacle. Understood in terms of these oppositions, Contemporary Action Cinema comes across as a particularly debased form.

In addition to these oppositions, there is an associated dynamic of critique and complicity. For example, King observes that the stylistic departures from classical Hollywood

³²⁵ King, *Spectacular Narratives*, p. 99

style in Hollywood Renaissance films ‘carry a serious and radical potential’.³²⁶ The films therefore gain artistic credibility through their oppositional stance to the mainstream. The later Blockbuster period is seen as ideologically complicit in comparison; as suggested by Elissa Nelson’s claim that the films of the Eighties are criticised for the perceived close ties between the films of the period and the Regan-era government. Further to this, the Eighties see the rise of neo-conservatism in contrast to the more liberal Sixties and Seventies.³²⁷

The hierarchical binary oppositions art/commerce and critique/complicity are familiar from the earlier analysis of both authorship and postmodernism, and their recurrence here is highly suggestive that what is at stake in the opposition of Hollywood Renaissance and Contemporary blockbuster cinema is precisely issues of authorship. Nelson makes this connection explicitly; claiming that the negative perception of eighties Hollywood cinema derives from the persistence of the Romantic notion of authorship cultivated by the independent production of the Hollywood Renaissance and the modernist ideals of the distinction between art/commerce and high/low art.³²⁸

The structuring opposition of modernism and authorship on the one hand, and postmodernism and pastiche on the other is borne out in King’s introductory overview of the opposing ways in which New Hollywood cinema has been conceptualised:

‘Unsettling departures from “classical” Hollywood style, or superficial glitz and over-insistent rhetoric drawn from advertising and MTV? Filmmakers as visionary artists, or as emptily stylish raiders of the cinematic past? “Modernism” or “Postmodernism”?’³²⁹

This overview could serve just as well as a summary of Jameson’s position regarding authorship, modernism, and postmodernism as it does the conceptualisation of New Hollywood cinema. The relative cultural value of the Hollywood Renaissance and contemporary blockbuster cinema are therefore closely tied to the modernist genre of author-function. The Hollywood Renaissance provides all the necessary conditions for authorship, whereas the

³²⁶ King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 38

³²⁷ Elissa Nelson, ‘Beneath the Surface and the Excess: An Examination of Critical and Aesthetic Attacks on Films of the 1980s’, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 46:5, (2013), 1029 – 1050, p. 1030

³²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 1035 – 1036

³²⁹ King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 1

directors of contemporary blockbuster cinema are limited to pastiche – the raiding of the cinematic past. Where the Hollywood Renaissance is clearly aligned with the modernist genre of author-function, contemporary blockbuster cinema is condemned to playing the role of (postmodern) bad twin through alignment with the postmodern non-author.

A number of critics have sought to address the limitations placed on action cinema by these hierarchical binary oppositions, with particular emphasis placed on the mind/body opposition and related pairings of cerebral/sensual and active/passive. Richard Dyer, in his essay on *Speed* (Jan de Bont, 1994) is particularly concerned with interrogating the negative associations of passivity and bodily thrills. While Dyer does not refute the passivity of the audience watching *Speed*, he does provide a novel explanation for why passivity is coded negatively, and a reasoned defence of passivity as a position. Dyer finds it problematic that ‘cultural pleasures’ are mapped according to the presumed sexual roles in heterosexual relationships; creating a hierarchical binary in terms of active/passive. The active is coded as positive and masculine, because the performance of the active male coital role realises ‘proper’ gender identity.³³⁰ Dyer observes that this sexual dynamic is then extrapolated to apply to all pleasures, to the extent that ‘the worst thing imaginable is [...] to lie back and enjoy it.’³³¹ Dyer contends that passivity is a valid form of pleasure, and it is only the dominance of a criteria of taste based on a homophobic, hetero-normative view of sexual pleasure that presents passivity as perverse.

Returning to the action film, Dyer observes a ‘delicious paradox’ in the enjoyment of action films; the audience identifying with the active hero, but doing so in a state of passivity.³³² For Dyer, the perfect metaphor for action film viewing is fellatio. Dyer wryly observes that while the recipient is passive, they ‘cherish the illusion’ that their masculinity is not threatened by this passivity – despite the other person ‘doing the work, really being active. So it is with

³³⁰ Richard Dyer, ‘Action!’, in *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 17 – 21, p. 20

³³¹ Ibid, p. 20

³³² Dyer, ‘Action!’, in *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, ed. by Arroyo, pp. 17 – 21, p. 21

action movies.³³³ Dyer's proverbial style is pleasingly provocative, but its playfulness serves as a serious interrogation of the role hierarchical binaries play in structuring taste and perception. Dyer's persuasive analysis of the hierarchical nature of the binary pairing active/passive is a useful exploration of why the action film occupies the debased cultural position it does. Moreover, Dyer's challenge to the accepted value of passivity provides an alternative metaphor of bodily pleasure, which could provide a useful insight into the pleasures of the action film. A potential limitation of Dyer's approach is that it merely inverts the binary of mind/body to favour the body without destabilising the logic of binary opposition, as is the case with Polan's privileging of meaninglessness in his analysis of *Pulp Fiction*. An alternative to merely inverting the opposition of mind and body is to adopt an approach where the relationship between mind and body is conceptualised differently.

This sentiment informs Arroyo's article on *Mission: Impossible* (Brian De Palma, 1996), in which Arroyo suggests that the film exceeds the limits of aesthetic criticism and vocabulary, leading to their dismissal as 'popcorn.'³³⁴ Arroyo observes that *Mission: Impossible* doesn't fit into traditional discourses of aesthetics because the film lacks 'coherence, balance, internal consistency and more importantly, depth'.³³⁵ Arroyo therefore implicitly constructs these traditional discourses as (Neo-) classical. It is not surprising then that Arroyo should turn to Romanticism as an alternative aesthetic framework, specifically through an appeal to the sublime. In particular Arroyo appears to be taking up and reworking aspects specific to Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime.³³⁶

I identify Arroyo's sublime as a reworking of the Burkean sublime because both are primarily concerned with the effects of the sublime on the body. At the core of Burke's sublime

³³³ Ibid, p. 21

³³⁴ José Arroyo, 'Mission: Sublime', in *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 21 – 25, p. 22

³³⁵ Specifically the emphasis on balance, coherence, and consistency. The persistence of depth as a marker of quality is explored at length in this thesis. José Arroyo, 'Mission: Sublime', in *Action/Spectacle Cinema*, ed. by José Arroyo (London: BFI, 2000), pp. 21 – 25,, p. 22

³³⁶ As opposed to the sublime of Kant or Lyotard. It is through Lyotard's taking up of Kant's sublime that the concept of the postmodern sublime emerges. The Burkean sublime is not taken up by postmodernism, except in the very loose sense that it can be considered influential to Kant.

is an attempt to explain ‘why the body is at all affected by the mind, or the mind by the body’.³³⁷ Burke clearly conceives of an interplay between mind and body, with each capable of affecting the other. Importantly, Burke frames this relationship as non-hierarchical, with experience of the Sublime initiated equally either by the operation of the mind or the body’.³³⁸ While the application of the Sublime to action cinema is intriguing, Arroyo does not develop this theme, even to the limited extent that I have done here.

Lisa Purse’s taking up of phenomenological film theory represents a more extensive example of the attempt to renegotiate the mind/body binary through the adoption of an alternative critical perspective. Purse sees the action film as defined by ‘its persistent and detailed attention to the exerting body’.³³⁹ The connection to action cinema and the body is not limited to depictions of bodies on the screen, with Purse observing that action films address ‘the spectator’s sensorium *as well as his or her rational faculties*, encouraging an embodied response to the spectacle of embodied empowerment playing out on the screen.’³⁴⁰ This dual address to both ‘sensorium’ and ‘rational faculties’ recalls my reading of Arroyo’s sublime through Burke: both imply that the bodily response to the action film accompanies the mental rather than supplanting it, although it is still the embodied experience that is the special quality of the action film.

³³⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 117

³³⁸ Ibid, p. 121

³³⁹ Lisa Purse, *Contemporary Action Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 2; With such placed emphasis on the body, it is possible that action cinema belongs to what Carol Clover has termed body genres. Body genres are the most disreputable film forms, the slasher film and pornography, with Linda Williams appending Melodrama to Clover’s original list. Williams notes that while other genres portray sensationalised bodies, body genres are denigrated because of the perception that the spectator is caught up in involuntary mimicry of the sensation onscreen. Crucial to Williams’s conception of the body genre is that body displayed is female. This is less prevalent in action cinema, and action cinema remains an uneasy fit with the body genre. That being so, the connection between low cultural value and films which display and act on the body is useful in considering the low cultural value of action cinema. Lisa Purse also explores the connection between Body Genres and the action film. See Carol J. Clover, ‘Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film’, *Representations*, 20 (Autumn 1987), 187 – 228; Linda Williams, ‘Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess’, *Film Quarterly*, 44:4 (Summer 1991), 2-13; Purse, *Contemporary Action Cinema* pp. 43-44

³⁴⁰ Purse, *Contemporary Action Cinema*, p. 3 emphasis added

According to Purse, the spectator's engagement with action films manifests physically, emotionally, and mentally.³⁴¹ Purse also notes, however, that writers have struggled to articulate this 'vivid experience' of viewing 'spectacles of active bodies'.³⁴² Purse finds the solution to this problem in phenomenological film theory. Purse finds in the phenomenological approach a productive alternative to approaches that construct filmgoers as 'passive receptacles for cinematic information', and instead enables filmgoing to be pictured as 'a lively encounter in which the spectator has an embodied response to onscreen stimuli'.³⁴³ By figuring spectator experience as 'embodied' Purse takes up the 'basic principle' of the phenomenology: that 'our perception of the world, like our material existence in the world, is always already embodied.'³⁴⁴ Rather than conceiving of the mind and body as divided, Purse suggests that there can be no experience purely of the mind; it is always already 'mediated' by the body. This both resembles and goes beyond my reading of the interplay of mind and body in Burke's sublime; implying not just a simple dialogue between the two but an overlapping. This sense of embodied experience is crucial to Purse's understanding of how action films generate meaning. In reference to the *parkour*-inspired action sequence in *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006), Purse proposes that phenomenological film theory explains the obvious (and less obvious) moments of outward bodily reaction to onscreen events.³⁴⁵ According to Purse, these physical reactions allow us to experience 'some of what that "being in the film world" might feel like' through the process of our bodies 'fleshing out' the situations depicted on screen.³⁴⁶

Following Purse, the physical thrills offered by the action film are not merely cheap sensory pleasures, but are in addition a strategy of meaning generation. The embodied experience of the action spectator can be seen as the development of a visceral lexicon through which the action film can be understood. This is implied in Purse's claim that the 'sensory

³⁴¹ Ibid, p. 41 emphasis in text

³⁴² Ibid, p. 41

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 43

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 42

³⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 43

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 43

impressions' of earlier action sequences in *Casino Royale* 'contribute to our intellectual and corporeal responses to Bond's later attempts to negotiate the narrative's obstacles and bring narrative resolution.'³⁴⁷ Meaning in the action film is conveyed not just through dialogue, the visual, and the soundtrack but also through the film's ability to provoke embodied engagement with the film.

Purse's approach to action cinema is invaluable in overcoming the limitations imposed by the hierarchical opposition mind/body. Furthermore Purse's move to considering embodied experience indicates a productive alternative to the opposition of distance/proximity and sensory pleasure/cerebral engagement associated with the categories of contemplative and explosive spectacle; suggesting the engagement of both mind and body simultaneously. However, Purse's approach is less obviously helpful in addressing the other hierarchical binaries associated with action cinema as an example of post-classical filmmaking. Crucially, it is these hierarchical binaries that are most significant in relation to authorship. In particular, the opposition of critique/complicity evident in the opposition of the Hollywood Renaissance and contemporary blockbuster and the privileging of critical distance implied by contemplative spectacle serve to frame action cinema within an aesthetic system aligned with the modernist genre of author-function. Within this system action cinema is reduced to the category of not-art, and thus Tony Scott can at best be classified as a *metteur en scene*. Nevertheless, there are those who have attempted to identify Scott as an auteur, or at the very least to discuss his films in the context of authorship. These attempts will be analysed in the following section.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 51

Tony Scott and Genres of Author-function

By far the most sustained analysis of Scott's work is the MUBI Notebook project *Tony Scott: A Moving Target*, curated by Daniel Kasman and Gina Telaroli. Describing the project, Kasman observes that while the aim was for each participant to analyse a key scene, the contributors seem inevitably drawn to including overviews of Scott's career.³⁴⁸ For Kasman, this tendency indicates that Scott's films 'as a subject "necessitate" a particular kind of address'.³⁴⁹ Although not stated explicitly, it seems clear that the particular address Kasman refers to is auteurist. The dedication of the project to the work of a single director immediately frames it in auteurist terms and posits the director as an organising and unifying principle. This in turn entails the consideration of the director's work as an interconnected whole where the meaning and significance of stylistic or thematic elements is not determined (solely) in isolation but through association and comparison with elements across the breadth of the director's oeuvre. Kasman's claim that Scott's films necessitate such an approach suggests that the significance and value of each film cannot be discerned in isolation, only in relation to other texts. There is also the implication that previous readings have undervalued Scott's films because they have failed to take this in to account.

While Kasman emphasises the importance of approaching Scott's films in the context of a wider filmography, the uneven and divided quality of Scott's oeuvre appears to problematize this approach. Kasman identifies a tendency for contributors to focus on Scott's later films at the expense of 'some of the director's most iconic and brazenly commercial works'.³⁵⁰ Kasman provides a possible explanation for the seeming lack of interest in films such as *Top Gun* and *Days of Thunder* (Scott, 1990), suggesting that unlike Scott's later 'more ambitious works' these films simply reflect the dominant mode of Hollywood filmmaking at the time of their

Daniel Kasman, 'Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement A', *Tony Scott: A Moving Target - Movement A* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a>> [accessed 3rd October] [no pagination]

³⁴⁹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁵⁰ Ibid, [no pagination]

production.³⁵¹ Unpacking Kasman's claim, it seems the early films are discounted because they are indistinguishable from other films of the period or genre and therefore lack evidence of unique voice and self-expression because they are not distinct from the norm. Scott's later films, in comparison, are set apart from the norm by virtue of their ambition, and may therefore demonstrate sufficient evidence of unique style or self-expression to be classified according to the Romantic or modernist genre of author-function. Christoph Huber and Mark Peranson conceptualise the divide between Scott's late and early periods in similar terms, specifically as a hierarchical opposition of meaningful substance to meaningless style. The pair concede that Scott's later works following *Crimson Tide* are 'interesting', but dismiss Scott's early works as 'kind of empty', albeit 'awesome looking'.³⁵²

Christopher Small refutes the treatment of Scott's filmography as 'an oeuvre divided', instead claiming that Scott's films 'reveal their similarities and differences in an interesting push-pull of conflicting visuals and thematics'.³⁵³ However, for all that Small claims to treat Scott's oeuvre as unified and equally worthy of attention, his comparison of *Man on Fire* (Scott, 2004) with *One of the Missing* (Scott, 1968) merely draws a connection between the already privileged late period and Scott's earlier British films – neatly excluding the debased 'early' blockbuster period. While Scott's two British films may qualify as neglected, they are not denigrated in the same way as the blockbuster films and can in fact be easily assimilated in to the highly respectable category of art cinema.³⁵⁴ This suggests that the division of Scott's filmography is not a question of chronology – Scott's British films are made before those of the so-called early period – but rather of perceived artistic merit. The division is between those that

³⁵¹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁵² Mark Huber and Christoph Peranson, 'World out of Order: Tony Scott's *Vertigo*', *Cinema Scope* <<http://cinemascope.com/cinema-scope-online/world-out-of-order-tony-scotts-vertigo/>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁵³ Christopher Small, '5A: The Two Tonys (*One of the Missing*)' in *Tony Scott: Moving Target – Movement A*, <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a#5A>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁵⁴ One explanation for the exclusion of *One of the Missing* and *Loving Memory* (Tony Scott, 1970) from Scott's filmography is that at twenty-seven and fifty-two minutes respectively, neither film quite qualifies as a feature. This brings to mind Foucault's question in 'What is an author?' regarding which texts are properly attributed to an author, and which of those texts comprise the author's oeuvre. Do we consider Scott's filmography to include only feature films, or does it extend to shorts; television episodes; music videos; and adverts?

can be more readily classified as authored art according to the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function and those that cannot. Emphasising the perceived division in Scott's filmography can therefore be interpreted as an attempt to bolster Scott's eligibility for auteur status by excising from his filmography those films that would prevent such a classification. This is undesirable as it is clearly at odds with the organising and unifying function of the author and thus undermines the attempt to construct Scott as an auteur.

A further obstacle to the classification of Scott as an auteur is the difficulty of constructing the Scott author-text in terms of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function. While Scott's biography does feature elements which could be mobilised to construct a Scott author-text along the same lines as Lynch – Scott studied fine arts at several institutions including the Royal College of Art – these elements are seemingly overwhelmed by the wealth of anecdotal and biographical material encouraging the construction of the Scott author-text in terms of a macho man-of-action and thrill seeker rather than the figure of the artist. For example many critics make reference to Scott's fondness for fast cars and motorcycles, his love of climbing and annual holidays to the Alps. Unlike the figure of the artist, the man-of-action cannot be as readily aligned with either the Romantic or modernist genre of author-function. It cannot be mobilised in terms of bohemian outsider status or modernist critical distance. Joseph Bevan makes reference to Scott's 'unapologetic loads-a-money capitalism, all fast cars, cigars, and trophy wives', a description suggesting an overlap between the markers of the macho man-of-action and the trappings of mainstream consumerism.³⁵⁵ Bevan goes on to describe Scott as a 'filmmaker uncomfortably close to the establishment' making reference to Scott's adverts for the U.S. Army and the 'supreme recruitment video' *Top Gun*.³⁵⁶ The man-of-action is not necessarily a conservative figure – Coleridge, Byron, and Hemingway combine machismo with the anti-establishment outsider status of the bohemian artist – but this is clearly not so in the case

³⁵⁵ Joseph Bevan, 'Man on Fire: Tony Scott', <<http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/man-fire-tony-scott>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁵⁶ Bevan, 'Man on Fire: Tony Scott', [no pagination]

of Scott.³⁵⁷ This may be because the qualities of the macho man-of-action identified with the Scott author-text corresponds with the values of mainstream Hollywood. This seems to be the suggestion of *The Telegraph* in its characterisation of Scott as ‘that rarest of beasts: A British filmmaker with a blockbuster reputation’.³⁵⁸ The writer seems to refer not only to Scott’s reputation for making blockbuster films, but for living his life *as* a blockbuster film; noting that Scott ‘lived in Hollywood, collected Ferraris and Harleys and hustled through relationships’.³⁵⁹ The writer further suggests that this behaviour ‘alienated the sensibilities’ of Scott’s ‘European peers’, suggesting that this lifestyle was sufficient to efface Scott’s Britishness, rendering him a purely Hollywood director and preventing the mobilisation of his emigre status in terms of critical distance or outsider sensibility.³⁶⁰ Where the Lynch author-text perfectly fits the image of either alienated modernist critic or bohemian artist depending on emphasis, it would seem the Scott author-text perfectly fits the expected image of a contemporary Hollywood director, and thus the very embodiment of the commercial and sensory rather than artistic and cerebral. One advantage of approaching Scott through the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function is that it substitutes complicitous critique for critical distance and so does not have the same outsider requirements of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function.

This congruence also carries over in to the relationship between Scott author-text and the film texts, with Ignatiy Vishnevetsky finding it unsurprising that a director famous for his ‘intense work ethic and love of rock-climbing’ should want to make ‘movies about hard-working professionals who find themselves in dangerous situations.’³⁶¹ The easy fit between the man-of-action image and the majority of Scott’s films suggest why these aspects of the Scott

³⁵⁷ While these writers may be considered revolutionary in terms of their political attitudes and literary practices, it should be noted that this hardly extends to their gender politics.

³⁵⁸ Anonymous, ‘Tony Scott’ <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9486824/Tony-Scott.html>> [no pagination]

³⁵⁹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁶⁰ ‘European’ is seemingly chosen over ‘British’ as it has stronger connotations of artistry and old world charm in the face of brash commercial America. Anonymous, ‘Tony Scott’

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9486824/Tony-Scott.html>> [no pagination]

³⁶¹ Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, ‘Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter’, *Notebook* <<http://mubi.com/notebook/posts/smearing-the-senses-tony-scott-action-painter>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

biography should be emphasised over those that could be mobilised in terms of the figure of the artist. The construction of the Scott author-text in terms of the figure of the man-of-action cannot however adequately account for all of Scott's films. Bevan notes the incongruity between this construction of the Scott author-text and *Loving Memory* (Scott, 1970), remarking that it is 'not a film you'd associate with its maker'.³⁶² Bevan sketches an imagined alternate career for Scott following in the vein of *Loving Memory*, but suggests that 'one suspects the Tony Scott who directed *Top Gun* and *Déjà vu* would have found this alternative future just a little bit dull.'³⁶³ For Bevan, *Loving Memory* stands as testament to the artistic potential of Scott had he 'not followed his elder brother Ridley into the worlds of advertising and then Hollywood'.³⁶⁴ Bevan's treatment of *Loving Memory* and his sketch of an alternate Scott point to some of the ways in which the image of the artist persists as a trace in the Scott author-text. Where the figure of the artist is essential to the Lynch author-text, it is merely supplementary to the Scott author-text, an addition that nonetheless signals the incompleteness of the text were it to be left out.³⁶⁵ It's also potentially disruptive, challenging the unified image of Scott as a commercially minded, macho, thrill seeker producing commercial, macho, thrilling films.

Despite the dominance of the man-of-action construction of the Scott author-text, there are critics who attempt to construct the Scott author-text in relation to the figure of the artist, doubtless because this is the only option available to those wishing to identify Scott as an author according to the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function. Vishnevetsky observes that the critical rehabilitation of Scott has focussed on 'Scott as an artist: his collage editing aesthetic, his playful and expressive use of super-saturated colour, his fondness for

³⁶² Bevan, 'Man on Fire: Tony Scott'

³⁶³ Bevan, 'Man on Fire: Tony Scott'

³⁶⁴ Bevan, 'Man on Fire: Tony Scott' A recurring feature of obituaries for Tony Scott is a quote from Ridley convincing Tony to make the move to advertising. Ridley is quoted as saying "'Don't go to the BBC, come to me first.'" I knew that he had a fondness for cars, so I told him, "Come work with me and within a year you'll have a Ferrari." And he did!'. Quoted in Joel McIver, 'Tony Scott Obituary', <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/aug/20/tony-scott>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁶⁵ According to Jonathan Culler, the supplement is 'an inessential extra, added to something complete in itself, but the supplement is added to complete, to compensate for a lack in what is supposed to be complete in itself.' The term supplement, which Derrida derives from Rousseau, is one of a number of Derrida's undecidables; including key terms such as trace and *differance*. See Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 102 Norris, *Deconstruction*, p. 32

abstraction'.³⁶⁶ Elsewhere, Vishnevetsky himself makes reference to the 'incongruous Rembrandt lighting' in *Beverly Hills Cop II* (Scott, 1987) and suggests Scott's 'collage aesthetic' demonstrates the influence of Scott's 'favourite' artist, Robert Rauschenberg.³⁶⁷ Curiously, all of these references are to the style of Scott's films, suggestive of an 'artistic' quality at odds to the image of Scott and his films conjured by the more-Hollywood-than-Hollywood man-of-action constructions of the Scott author-text. As the analysis of Lynch in the previous chapter suggests, comparisons to artistic intertexts such as those suggested by Vishnevetsky must be justified by either textual or biographical evidence to be convincing. Vishnevetsky bolsters his reading with oblique reference to Scott's fine arts training, suggesting that Scott 'never stopped painting' and thus constructing Scott's film career as a continuation of his art rather than a diversion or perversion.³⁶⁸ However, Vishnevetsky does not appear to mobilise Scott's connection to the fine arts in terms of self-expression. Rather, Vishnevetsky's references to particular artists and additional descriptions of Scott's expressionist, impressionist, and Pop Art tendencies imply an intertextual relationship with the history of art; Scott adopting styles associated with particular artists or schools as he sees fit. This frames Scott's style in terms of postmodern quotation and resurrection of dead styles rather than self-expression.

While Vishnevetsky's appeal to the painterly aspects of Scott's work steers clear of notions of self-expression, C. Mason Wells attempts to construct Scott as an auteur in precisely these terms. Wells argues that while Scott's 'orgiastic' late style is 'certainly not subtle [...] it's undeniably *his*'.³⁶⁹ This is seemingly a straightforward appeal to the modernist genre of author-function. In conceding that Scott's work is not subtle, Wells frames Scott's style in reference to a stylistic norm in which subtlety is favoured. While Scott's style may depart from the norm, it

³⁶⁶ Ignatiy Vishnevetsky, '1B: Heading into Twilight (*Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*)' in *Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement A* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a#2A>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁶⁷ Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁶⁸ Ibid [no pagination]

³⁶⁹ C. Mason Wells, '8A: Ashes of Time (*Man on Fire*)', *Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement A* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a#8A>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

is undeniably and uniquely his and therefore an example of the cultivation of unique and personal style favoured by the modernist genre of author-function. Jim Emerson, in an article comparing the films of Tony Scott and Christopher Nolan, also deploys the criteria of uniqueness associated with the modernist genre of author-function. Emerson is however far less positive in his appraisal of Scott, grudgingly conceding that Scott's style is 'at least recognisably Tony Scott-ish'.³⁷⁰ Emerson's treatment of uniqueness suggests that the cultivation of a unique and personal style may be a necessary though not sufficient criteria for the modernist genre of author-function. Following from the analysis of Tarantino in the previous chapter, I would posit that only certain styles, or styles in the service of particular themes, are acceptable unique styles. This is borne out in both the privileging of maturity in relation to *Jackie Brown* and the criticisms of Tarantino's work according to a humanist aesthetic, identified by Brooker and Brooker. This tendency can be traced all the way back to Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema', and his preference for directors whose world views most closely aligned with his own. In the case of Scott, the issue seems to be that his unique style is deemed in some way inappropriate or more precisely, excessive.

The terms excess and excessive convey both the sense of an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable and lack of moderation. Thus the term easily slips from simply designating a greater-than-needed quantity to suggesting a breach of rules, taste, or even morality. Scott's films are conceived of as excessive in both senses of the word. Gina Telaroli describes Scott's style as an 'overabundance' of text, sound, and images, while Manohla Dargis, in a piece describing Scott as 'A Director Who Excelled in Excess', characterises Scott as a 'maximalist' who 'used a lot of everything in his movies: smoke, cuts,

³⁷⁰ Jim Emerson, 'Films on Fire: Tony Scott and Christopher Nolan', *Scanners* <<http://www.rogerebert.com/scanners/films-on-fire-tony-scott-and-christopher-nolan>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

camera moves, color [sic]'.³⁷¹ Wells's description of Scott's late style as 'orgiastic' also serve to frame it in terms of excess, as does Vishnevetsky's claim that critics failed to appreciate Scott because 'there was just too *much* of him.'³⁷² While all of the critics listed above treat Scott favourably, they all tacitly acknowledge that the excessiveness of Scott's style presents an obstacle to critical appreciation, because the too-muchness of Scott's films exceed the limits of good taste.

This is clearly the view taken by Emerson, who notes that a common criticism of Scott's films is 'that they are jam-packed with superfluous frippery'.³⁷³ While Emerson concedes that the 'self-conscious excess' of Scott's films 'could be glorious', he subsequently characterises Scott as an 'anti-stylist'.³⁷⁴ According to Emerson, the anti-stylist pushes style 'out of an organic context [...] to an absurd extreme beyond parody'.³⁷⁵ This suggests that there is a certain tasteful amount of style which is acceptable, but Scott's style exceeds this (i.e. is excessive). That Scott's style should be 'beyond parody' also suggests that excess is not a valid form of critique. In this respect excess resembles exaggeration; which, as discussed in the previous chapter, fails to meet the criteria of distance associated with proper modernist critique. With regards to unique style and the modernist genre of author-function this implies that there is a point at which departures from the stylistic norm no longer qualify as the artistic departures of unique voice and become excessive, meaningless, not-art. Both Wells and Vishnevetsky touch upon the notion of acceptable and unacceptable departures from the stylistic norm, with each of them remarking that while a long take remains a marker of artistic value, an excess of rapidly

³⁷¹ Gina Telaroli, 'Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement B', *Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement B* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-b>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]; Manohla Dargis, 'A Director Who Excelled in Excess', <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/movies/tony-scott-made-movies-as-a-maximalist.html?_r=0> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

³⁷² Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁷³ This description is itself pleasingly excessive, the combination of 'superfluous' and 'frrippery' redundant as frippery is by definition superfluous, merely decorative rather than substantial. Emerson, 'Films on Fire: Tony Scott and Christopher Nolan', *Scanners*, [no pagination]

³⁷⁴ Emerson, 'Films on Fire: Tony Scott and Christopher Nolan', *Scanners*, [no pagination]

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, [no pagination]

edited shorter shots does not.³⁷⁶ There are notable parallels here with King's contemplative and explosive forms of spectacle. An excessively long take can be assimilated within a Bazinian realist aesthetic and is therefore deemed less of a departure from classical Hollywood styles than an abundance of shorter shots.

What constitutes an acceptable departure from the norm and what is deemed merely excessive is context dependant. Vishnevetsky demonstrates this through a comparison of Tony Scott with Michael Mann and Claire Denis. Vishnevetsky groups these three directors based on their shared penchant for abstraction.³⁷⁷ Vishnevetsky finds Scott to be a 'harder sell' than the either Mann or Denis, arguing that these directors 'have a firm enough grounding in either Hollywood or "art film" tradition for their most abstract moments to register as clear directorial gestures.'³⁷⁸ In other words, the Mann and Denis author-texts can be constructed in terms of the modernist genre of author-function because their stylistic departures from the norm (in the form of abstraction) do not exceed the limits of good taste set out by their respective aesthetic contexts. Scott's abstraction exceeds these limits and is therefore excessive.

Mann and Scott share the same mainstream Hollywood context, suggesting that Scott's abstraction must unacceptably differ from that of Mann. Vishnevetsky's comparison of Scott's 'late-period style' to avant-garde or experimental filmmaking gives some indication of why Scott's abstraction is unacceptable within the context of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Mann's abstraction remains sufficiently within the formal vocabulary of Hollywood cinema. Mann is thus abstract enough in order to have a unique style, but not so abstract as to be breaking the rules of Hollywood filmmaking. In contrast, Scott's abstraction is associated with a mode other than that in which he purports to be working. This results in what Vishnevetsky describes as 'cognitive dissonance', implying a mismatch between Scott's avant-garde style and

³⁷⁶ Wells, '8A: Ashes of Time (*Man on Fire*)', *Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement A*; Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁷⁷ Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁷⁸ Ibid, [no pagination]

mainstream Hollywood context and subject matter. Scott's style is avant-garde, and yet his films are 'identifiably "popular" and not personal'.³⁷⁹

While Vishnevetsky's comparison between Denis, Mann, and Scott is presented as an analysis of the conditions preventing identification of Scott's films as art and Scott as an auteur, it also allows for Vishnevetsky to covertly bolster Scott's artistic credentials by aligning Scott's style with artistic and personal avant-garde filmmaking rather than the commercial popular entertainment of Hollywood. This can be seen as an extension of Vishnevetsky's strategy of drawing comparisons between Scott's style and various schools of painting. In this way, Vishnevetsky cunningly extricates Scott from the non-artistic, non-authored context of mainstream Hollywood action cinema and aligns Scott with the more securely artistic avant-garde. This move is more convincing in relation to the excesses of Scott's late style than his early films. Scott's late style is excessive in the sense that it inappropriately exceeds the vocabulary of mainstream action cinema. Scott's early style is excessive in the sense that post-classical style more generally is deemed excessive in relation to the norm of classical Hollywood style. In this respect Vishnevetsky's reframing of Scott's style in relation to avant-garde filmmaking is apparently an appeal to the modernist genre of author-function in terms of a unique style that differs from the norm.

However, Vishnevetsky swiftly reasserts Scott's popular credentials, claiming him as 'a popular artist' and making it clear that Scott 'wasn't a stealth intellectual'; as if wary of making Scott out to be something he is not.³⁸⁰ For Vishnevetsky, Scott is resolutely not a subversive filmmaker and 'no amount of minute subtextual analysis is going to turn him into Paul Verhoeven.'³⁸¹ Despite his claims for the avant-garde and artistic qualities of Scott's work,

³⁷⁹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁸⁰ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁸¹ Ibid, [no pagination]

Vishnevetsky very deliberately resists construction of the Scott author-text in terms of critical distance and thus the modernist genre of author-function.³⁸²

Vishnevetsky's association of 'intellectual' with 'subversive' suggests a form of filmmaking in which mainstream Hollywood style is adopted satirically, in order to offer that mode up for critique. In this case, Verhoeven is an apt choice of example. While Vishnevetsky does not perceive Scott's films as functioning in this way, neither does he see Scott's films as examples of the opposite extreme – as empty displays of meaningless style. This is clear from Vishnevetsky's disparaging attitude to 'half-hearted defenses [sic]' of Scott's style as 'visual candy', 'pure color [sic]' or 'style-for-the-sake-of-style-get-over-it-and-have-some-fun-why-don't-you'.³⁸³ While Vishnevetsky may avoid the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, he is also dismissive of approaches that merely invert the binary logic of those approaches without disrupting it. Rather than conceiving of Scott's films as either purely meaningful art or entirely meaningless entertainment, Vishnevetsky instead suggests that Scott's work is most accurately described 'not as "art" but as "entertainment informed by art"'.³⁸⁴

For Vishnevetsky, 'the things that make Scott's films compelling as art [...] are there to, first and foremost, *make an entertaining movie*'.³⁸⁵ Vishnevetsky therefore presents a pleasing solution to the problems posed by the supplemental artistic elements of the Scott author-text, by treating the artistic elements precisely *as* supplementary. Neither over-emphasising the importance of the artistic elements of the Scott author-text nor attempting to excise them by focusing solely on the mainstream Hollywood aspect of the Scott persona, Vishnevetsky treats the artistic elements as both additional and essential to the main 'function' of Scott's films 'as *entertainment*'.³⁸⁶ Vishnevetsky develops this concept in relation to Daniel Kasman's

³⁸² Vishnevetsky's similar rejection of the connotations of self-expression and the Romantic genre of author-function usually implied by reference to the fine arts was noted earlier.

³⁸³ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁸⁴ Ignatyi Vishnevetsky, '1B: Heading into Twilight (*Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*)' in *Tony Scott: A Moving Target – Movement A* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a#2A>> [accessed 3rd December]

³⁸⁵ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁸⁶ Ibid, [no pagination]

contribution to the *Moving Target* project, which precedes Vishnevetsky's own contribution. Vishnevetsky praises Kasman for demonstrating that *Crimson Tide* is not merely 'an entertaining thriller with expressionistic flourishes' but is rather 'an entertaining thriller *because* of its expressionist flourishes.'³⁸⁷

Kasman charts a number of ways in which the more artistic aesthetic strategies of *Crimson Tide* contribute to its function as an entertaining thriller, specifically the contribution made by lighting to both mood and the delineation of different locations within the submarine.³⁸⁸ However, the most compelling aspects of Kasman's article are the links he draws between *Crimson Tide* and Scott's later work. For Kasman, a central concern of Scott's later films is the potential for technology to provide a 'tenuous connecting handhold' in the face of increased fragmentation of time and space. While Kasman identifies *Crimson Tide* as belonging to an earlier phase in Scott's career, he claims that it is possible to identify the emergence of Scott's later concerns in the film. Kasman's reading of *Crimson Tide* is a compelling example of the reorganisation of an oeuvre around a new centre of meaning. Kasman's reading elevates *Crimson Tide* to the status of major work, both the point of focus around which Scott's filmography pivots and the lens through which to read Scott's later works. However, it is as a result of viewing *Crimson Tide* through the lens of Scott's later works that Kasman is able to remap the patterns of meaning in the film in accordance with the themes and concerns Kasman identifies with Scott's later work. This suggests a shifting and multi-dimensional network of relations rather than a linear relationship with a definitive point of origin.

According to Kasman, Scott's 'later conceptual interests' are 'crystalized' in the sequences where Scott emphasises the crew's reliance on technological prosthesis – sonar, radio communication – to perceive 'events happening outside of their actual biological range of

³⁸⁷ Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁸⁸ Daniel Kasman, '1A: Three Dimensional Threat Space (*Crimson Tide*)' in *Tony Scott: A Moving Target - Movement A* <<https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/tony-scott-a-moving-target-movement-a#1A>> [accessed 3rd December 2015] [no pagination]

perception'.³⁸⁹ Kasman is particularly intrigued by the ways in which the perception of external threats is mediated through technology. For example, Kasman charts the process whereby a crewmember responds to an 'abstract' representation on a sonar screen, and then communicates his reading of this image to his commanding officer via the radio. Having interpreted this message, Lt. Commander Hunter (Denzel Washington) orders the men in front of him to change course. Kasman finds it both bizarre and compelling that these actions should take place in response to an 'abstract representation' rather than a 'material threat'; and that they should be carried out 'via remote communication over disparate spaces'.³⁹⁰ What Kasman seems to identify as strange about the sequence is the replacement of reality with representation. It's possible that Kasman overemphasises his apparent bafflement in the breakdown between the proper relation of representation to reality in order to draw attention to the device, as he also observes that the 'strangeness' of these events is 'rationalized' in relation to the submarine genre.³⁹¹

Rather than suggesting that the demands of genre impose a limit on Scott's thematic concerns, Kasman's reading of *Crimson Tide* suggests that the conventions of the submarine film enable and perhaps even instantiate Scott's thematic interests. Describing the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of Scott's later work, Kasman claims that 'all it takes is the setting and the genre of the submarine movie to bring it out of him', drawing a firm connection between the generic conventions of *Crimson Tide* and the interest in the potential for technology to bridge time and space in Scott's later works. Kasman makes a similar point in relation to *Enemy of the State* (Scott, 1998), which for Kasman marks the 'break' between Scott's early and late periods even more so than *Crimson Tide*. By introducing this reading of *Enemy of the State*, Kasman pushes the patterns of the Scott author-text in to play once again, shifting to form a new unity mapped according to *Enemy of the State*. This change in focus allows Kasman to introduce the

³⁸⁹ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁹⁰ Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁹¹ Ibid, [no pagination]

consideration of Scott's late style in relation to theme and genre in a way not possible with *Crimson Tide*. Kasman claims that the film's subject of paranoid conspiracy and surveillance technology:

'freed the director's form to move faster, overlap spaces and time, redistribute perspective, intensify the separation and attempted unification between what's happening in the world and what's happening in that same world as seen from elsewhere'.³⁹²

This description of Scott's later style suggests some ways in which the thematic interest in the potential for technology to bridge time and space might be expressed stylistically; something echoed in Kasman's observation that the character's use of technology in *Crimson Tide* as an aid to 'stitching together a discernible reality' is analogous to Scott's method of filmmaking, with editing artificially unifying 'fragmented spaces and psyches'.³⁹³ Furthermore, the qualities of moving faster, overlapping space and time, and the redistribution of perspective also echo King's description of explosive spectacle. The freedom to 'move faster' reflects the rapid editing and shorter shot lengths of explosive spectacle. King's identification of temporal overlap as an effect of the montage editing of explosive spectacle resonates with both the overlapping of time and space and the redistribution of perspective identified by Kasman, in the sense that explosive spectacle represents the same event through a multiplicity of angles and positions so as to appear to be happening more than once. In addition to suggesting an overlap in time and space through the conventional means of juxtaposing scenes through montage editing, Scott's films from *Man on Fire* onwards employ techniques that overlap images *within* the same scene. In this respect Scott's late style can be understood as an intensification and exaggeration of an already intensified form.

Kasman's reading of *Crimson Tide* and his framing of the developments in Scott's style in relation to *Enemy of the State* are indicative of some of the ways we might begin to think of Scott in relation to the postmodern genre of author-function. From this perspective, Scott's later style can be seen as a reinvention and reworking of the conventions of explosive spectacle

³⁹² Ibid, [no pagination]

³⁹³ Ibid, [no pagination]

through exaggeration and intensification. The effect of exaggeration is both deconstructive and self-reflexive. In this instance, Scott's intensification of the overlapping tendency of explosive spectacle serves to foreground the status of the image as constructed rather than natural. It also serves to draw attention to the effects of the stylistic conventions of explosive spectacle; for example the ways in which the montage editing of explosive spectacle represents the relation between time and space, and how this differs from more naturalistic representations that seek to maintain a unity of time and space. Vishnevetsky identifies something of this sort in his claim that Scott is concerned with portraying '*a perspective beyond the senses [...] only visible through the camera and through editing*'.³⁹⁴ Kasman notes a less overt version of this process in his observation that the piecing together of the disparate spaces of the submarine through technology in *Crimson Tide* reflects Scott's own artificial piecing together of time and space through editing.³⁹⁵ Building on this, we might reverse Kasman's observation that the generic conventions of the submarine film serve to rationalise and contain the stylistic and thematic concern with technology's potential to bridge time and space characteristic of Scott's later films. Rather, by making the reliance on technology overt, *Crimson Tide* denaturalises the conventions of the submarine film to such an extent that Kasman finds himself questioning the apparent strangeness of such conventional moments as the response to a threat identified on sonar.

This leads neatly to consideration of Scott's engagement with genre. In order for engagement with genre to qualify as evidence of the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function, it is necessary to rework genre conventions rather than merely deploy those conventions. The de-naturalising representation of technology in *Crimson Tide* goes some way to meeting this requirement, although this can be expanded further. Building on Kasman's reading of *Crimson Tide*, the almost fetishistic attention to the role of technology in the film serves both to draw attention to the mediating role of technology and to foreground the act of

³⁹⁴ Vishnevetsky, 'Smearing the Senses: Tony Scott, Action Painter', [no pagination]

³⁹⁵ Kasman, '1A: Three Dimensional Threat Space (*Crimson Tide*)' in *Tony Scott: A Moving Target - Movement A*, [no pagination]

interpretation in making sense of these mediated representations. Kasman explores this in relation to the act of reading the sonar, but does not go beyond this to explore the ways in which the central conflict of the film is also an issue of interpretation.

The plot of *Crimson Tide* hinges on Captain Ramsey (Gene Hackman) and Lt. Commander Hunter's differing interpretations of a truncated order received as their submarine loses communication with the surface due to a damaged radio antenna. For Hunter, this unfinished communication is *either* a potential confirmation of orders *or* an order to stand down. It is also simultaneously *neither* confirmation *nor* refutation of the order. Ramsey, on the other hand, decides to ignore the new message and carry out the last decipherable order and launch the payload. For Hunter the indecipherable message is a problematic undecidable, whereas for Ramsey it is merely meaningless and thus ignorable.

The clash between Ramsey and Hunter is therefore not simply a clash between differing interpretations of the unfinished communication: it is a disagreement over whether the communication *should* be interpreted, rather than over *how* it should be interpreted. This is also in some respects a debate about the nature of reality, a reading encouraged by the foregrounding of technologically mediated representations of reality.³⁹⁶ Ramsey's refusal of the validity of interpretation is indicative of a belief in the objective nature of reality. Hunter's insistence on the importance of interpretation suggests an alternative conceptualisation of reality. Crucially, the focus on mediating technologies supports Hunter's conceptualisation of reality, which serves to reinforce Hunter's status as hero rather than treasonous mutineer – assisted in no small part by the qualities of charisma and decency associated with the Washington star persona.³⁹⁷

This should not however be interpreted as an opposition of objective to subjective reality. A more fitting model would be the Nietzschean conceptualisation of reality as perspectival. This not only reflects the film's commitment to the presentation of reality as

³⁹⁶ It is perhaps taking this reading too far to draw comparisons with Plato's fable of the cave, although the setting of the submarine – in particular its isolation from the external world and the crew's reliance on mediated representations of reality – does allow for the dramatization of similar ideas.

³⁹⁷ Cynthia Baron notes that Washington is associated with qualities of 'integrity, personal appeal and self-possession'. Cynthia Baron, *Denzel Washington* (London: British Film Institute, 2015), p. 7

mediated, but also acknowledges that Ramsey's belief in objective reality and his associated decision to ignore the fragmentary communication is as much an act of interpretation as Hunter's. According to a perspectival model, each individual shapes the world according to their own perspective. There is therefore no longer any singular objective truth and reality but rather a multitude of equally valid perspectives and a plurality of possible truths. Every perspective is also an act of interpretation since, following Nietzsche, every individual arranges and simplifies the 'chaos of sense impressions' as a more easily comprehend 'appearance' according to their perspective.³⁹⁸ The raw material perceived by the senses (i.e. the sense data) has no inherent value or meaning, rather value and meaning is instilled in it by man.³⁹⁹

The perspectival clash between Ramsey and Hunter also demonstrates that perspectives are always evaluative, with each man shaping appearances according to their values. In a conversation over dinner with the other officers, Ramsey and Hunter come to a disagreement over their divergent value systems. Ramsey, a veteran of the Cold War, has been trained to be ruthless and always ready for conflict. Hunter, on the other hand, is a new class of officer, trained to think rather than fight. To paraphrase Ramsey, when provided with a target and a button, all the Navy required of him was that he would know when to push it. When it comes to Hunter, it seems the Navy requires him to know why. Ramsey believes that wars are won through the total annihilation of the enemy; Hunter believes that 'in the nuclear world, the true enemy is war.' It is these value systems that in turn inform their perspectives; Ramsey seeing the truncated order as a call to arms that must be acted on immediately and without question, Hunter seeing it as a puzzle to be solved. Great urgency and immediacy are lent to the resolution of these otherwise dry philosophical issues in *Crimson Tide*, as the fate of the world will be determined by which perspective prevails. Even then, it is no simple distinction between war and peace; but rather a distinction between the certainty of mutually assured destruction that

³⁹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), pp. 305 – 307

³⁹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff, ed. by Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 171

accompanies Ramsey's perspective, and the *uncertainty* that characterises Hunter's. Ascribing to Hunter's perspective still allows for the possibility that the order to launch the missiles was not a drill, and thus there is still the potential for nuclear war.

Following this reading, *Crimson Tide*'s engagement with genre can be classified as a postmodern reworking because it mobilises the tropes of isolation and technological communication in the service of a philosophical debate, while still performing their more typical role in building narrative tension. Interestingly, the answers to the philosophical dilemma provided by *Crimson Tide* – that reality is perspectival and always already mediated – are compatible with postmodern theory; recalling Hutcheon in particular. This raises an important question regarding the requirements of the postmodern genre of author-function: is it necessary for the film texts to demonstrate postmodern ideas in order for the author-text to be constructed according to the postmodern genre of author-function? Similarly, should the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function require film texts to engage in identifiably Romantic or modernist concerns?

Returning to the examples of Lynch and Tarantino is helpful in this respect. One reason the Tarantino author-text is excluded from the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function is that the film texts fail to engage with themes appropriate to Romantic and modernist art. Lynch is a more complex case, although the debate as to whether *Blue Velvet* is sincere or ironic can be understood in these terms. If it is sincere, then it is compatible with Romantic or modernist theory and therefore the Lynch author-text can be constructed in those terms. If it is not sincere, then it cannot.

Returning to *Crimson Tide*, it is now possible draw together a number of elements indicating the potential for considering the Scott author-text according to the postmodern genre of author-function. Firstly, a deconstructive and self-reflexive engagement with the action cinema mode (particularly through the exaggeration of explosive spectacle) suggesting a complicitous critique of action cinema from within. Secondly, the re-inventive impulse

associated with the postmodern genre of author-function is evident in the reworking of generic conventions. Finally, a potential thematic concern with postmodern concepts such as the notion of reality as always already mediated suggests a possible expansion to the criteria of the postmodern genre of author-function.

Building on the approach outlined in the previous chapter, I will proceed to analyse a selection of films with reference to the above criteria. Through this analysis, I will not only demonstrate the ways in which Scott's films can be read according to the critical framework of the postmodern genre of author-function, but also illustrate what is gained from considering Scott's work from an auteurist perspective. Additionally, these readings of Scott's films will assist in further determining the characteristics of the postmodern genre of author-function; adding to those already established in relation to Lynch and Tarantino.

Case Studies: *Déjà Vu*, *The Hunger*, and *Domino*

Rather than moving chronologically through the Scott filmography, these case studies begin with *Déjà Vu* (the penultimate film text in the Scott filmography), before going back to *The Hunger* (the first feature length film text in the filmography), and finally moving forward to *Domino*. This approach allows for the demonstration of two aspects of the author-text approach. Firstly, it frames the film texts in a synchronic rather than diachronic relationship, and is concerned with the film texts as a working system unified by the author-text at the point of analysis, rather than tracing development over time. This is essential for the second aspect of the author-text approach, the critic's use of her reading of a particular film text as a starting point from which to trace new patterns and resonances across texts, remapping the oeuvre and re-centring it around a new point of influence. Indeed, while *Déjà Vu* is the starting point for my analysis, my reading of it is informed by my reading of *Crimson Tide*, which is in turn influenced by Kasman's reading of both *Crimson Tide* and *Enemy of the State* in relation to Scott's later films. Foregrounding the synchronic nature of the analysis in this way recognises that to examine a film from an auteurist perspective is to see it as part of a system of relations

unified by the author-text. The meaning of the film text is therefore not discrete and bounded but rather determined in relation to the other film texts. In this respect *Déjà Vu* is a particularly apt text with which to begin, as re-inventive impulse associated with the postmodern genre of author-function manifests not only in the reworking of the conventions of explosive spectacle and action cinema but also in the reworking of the stylistic conventions associated with Scott's later style.

As with *Crimson Tide* and *Enemy of the State*, the reworking of generic conventions in *Déjà Vu* is closely tied to the representation of audio-visual technology. However, while the earlier films feature largely real world and contemporary technology; the central time window of *Déjà Vu* is overtly science-fictional.⁴⁰⁰ The science-fiction and time-travel elements of the plot allows for a much more literal exploration of the power of technology to bridge fragmented time and space. The time window and the visual vocabulary associated with it play a central role both in the film's self-reflexive engagement with the stylistic conventions of the later Scott film texts and the conventions of action cinema more generally.

The time window is first encountered by both the viewer and the film's protagonist, ATF officer Doug Carlin (Denzel Washington), when Carlin is selected to assist an FBI team in the use of state of the art surveillance equipment to investigate a terrorist attack on a New Orleans ferry. While the leaders of the team – Agent Pryzwarra (Val Kilmer) and Dr Alexander Denny (Adam Goldberg) – initially inform Carlin that the technology is merely pre-recorded surveillance footage, a number of idiosyncrasies in the 'footage' cause Carlin to question the nature of what he is seeing. Carlin first draws attention to the team's apparent ability to reframe footage that is pre-recorded. Carlin is told that the reframing is possible because the footage is a 'digital recreation' combining the footage from at least four satellites in a 'single trailing moment of now, in the past'. This however takes four-and-a-half days to render, making it impossible to move forward or backwards through the footage. Carlin challenges this claim,

⁴⁰⁰ The surveillance technology of *Enemy of the State* may just push beyond the realms of the possible for its late nineties release date, but is nevertheless considerably more plausible than the time-travel technology of *Déjà Vu*

noting that as the team reframe the footage it increases in frame-rate and therefore is seemingly fast-forwarded. Carlin is told that despite appearances, the speed of the footage does not change; the apparent increase in frame rate representing an accelerated change in position. The team can change location as swiftly as they want, but the moment depicted on screen is always four-and-a-half days in the past. In response to this ‘technobabble’ exposition, Carlin laughs disarmingly at his own ignorance and continues with the task in hand.

The quirks in the time window’s visual vocabulary picked out by Carlin also happen to be stylistic conventions associated with Scott’s later style, in particular the use of accelerated frame rates. In a playfully self-reflexive move, the aspects of the time window which prompt Carlin to believe that what he is watching is not a film are the aesthetic markers associated with Tony Scott films. This self-reflexive play works because the most excessive departures from classical Hollywood style associated with Scott’s later films are for the most part confined to the representation of the time window, and are therefore largely distinct from the diegesis of the film. This includes not just the representation of events within the time window but also the representation of the time window within the diegesis. For example the presentation of the time window as a frame-within-the-frame (Figure 2) recalls similar compositions from *Enemy of the State*, *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3* (Scott, 2009), and *Unstoppable*. Furthermore, the presentation of the time window as a frame-within-the-frame allows for the construction of Carlin as an audience surrogate, through the use of shots situating Carlin ‘between’ the time window and the audience, seated with his back to the viewer and gazing at the time window (Figure 3). Carlin’s role as audience surrogate will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

A more overt instance of the film’s representation of the time window through the stylistic conventions of Scott’s later films is in the use of doubled and layered images when Carlin instructs the team to investigate the home of Claire Kuchever (Paula Patton). Claire is believed to be one of the victims of the ferry bombing, but is singled out by Carlin because of

the location in which her body is found. Autopsy evidence later suggests Claire had been held captive prior to the explosion, presumably by the bomber. Over the course of the investigation, Carlin falls in love with Claire and becomes increasingly convinced that it is possible to use the technology of the time window to save her and prevent the bombing. The growing connection between Carlin and Claire is dramatized through a layering technique that recalls the use of double-exposure and post-processing effects in *Man on Fire* and *Domino*.⁴⁰¹

In addition to establishing the romantic connection between Claire and Carlin, the sequence also introduces the film's concern with bridging discontinuous spaces and times, as well as dissatisfaction with the position of distant spectator. The former recalls Kasman's and Vishnevetsky's observations regarding Scott, while the latter has particular bearing on the film's engagement with action cinema. The privileging of involved closeness over distanced observation is first hinted at in Carlin's move from a seated spectator position to an active one, standing up and moving toward the screen (Figure 4). Later in the sequence, when Claire moves out of shot Carlin asks the team to follow her. As the order is carried out, Carlin is depicted standing in front of the time window, slightly out of scale with the images on screen but positioned as if he were walking through Claire's house rather than watching the movement on the screen (Figure 5). When considered in terms of the hierarchical binaries of active/passive and distance/proximity that inform the opposition of contemplative and explosive spectacle, Carlin's spectator position in this sequence represents a confusion of boundaries. On the one hand Carlin is displaying an active engagement in the image (even before standing up, he is actively reading the image for clues) and yet this active engagement isn't motivated by critical distance but a desire to get closer. Furthermore, in Carlin's decision to focus on Claire, he has already moved the scope of the investigation from abstract overview to the personal.

After following Claire through the house, Carlin is dwarfed by a close-up image of Claire looking out from the screen (Figure 6). This cuts to a shot taken from the other side of

⁴⁰¹ The effect is achieved by alternative means in *Déjà Vu*, with shots taken through the time window prop, a glass screen on to which footage was projected.

the glass on which Claire's image is projected, creating a shot-reverse shot structure and layering the image of Claire over Carlin (Figure 7). This is followed by an image of Carlin in close-up, bringing Claire and Carlin closer together in scale but blurring her image (Figure 8), making her both attainable and yet unattainable, closer and yet further away. This shot structure creates the illusion of interaction between Carlin and Claire, and establishes the grounds both for Carlin's romantic interest in Claire and his belief that the time window can facilitate a two way interaction. Carlin's romantic interest in Claire is represented in a conventionally voyeuristic manner. The shot-reverse-shot structure of the sequence may give the illusion that Carlin and Claire share a reciprocal gaze, but Claire is unaware of Carlin's presence and remains the object of his gaze. The sequence also relies upon the clichéd presentation of woman as simultaneously attainable and unattainable, as it is this tension and undecidability that motivates Carlin to attempt to overcome the boundary between past and present, and starts him on his trajectory towards active involvement.

The music in the sequence serves to underscore both Carlin's attachment to Claire and the sense of loss that permeates the film. The tone of the piece is elegiac, the melody carried by a lone acoustic guitar that suggests both a serenade and a lament. The team consistently assure Carlin that the time window is strictly one way and that they can see Claire but she cannot see them. However, Carlin's interaction with the image demonstrates that he believes the divide between himself and the image can be breached. He later proves this, shining a laser pointer at the screen, which Claire then sees in her apartment four days in the past. Convinced by this, the team later attempt to send back a note revealing the identity of the terrorist, and finally send Carlin himself.

Michael J. Anderson understands Carlin's belief in the interactive quality of the time window in relation to the figure of the rube and the 'rube film'.⁴⁰² According to Anderson, Carlin is the classic rube, the 'proverbial [...] spectator who confuses the ontological status of persons and objects' depicted on film.⁴⁰³ Anderson contends that Carlin's attempts to interact with the time window image 'transgresses the norms of classical cinema' and so demonstrates Carlin's suppression of his empirical knowledge that Claire is dead, something Carlin knows first-hand based on his encounter with Claire's corpse.⁴⁰⁴ Anderson argues that Carlin mistakenly perceives the images of the living Claire in the time window to be surveillance imagery of the present, and that this causes him to doubt his physical experience of holding-hands with Claire's corpse. For Anderson, the fact the image responds to Carlin's interaction with the laser pointer undercuts the 'documentary' status of the image, which Anderson claims should lead Carlin to understand that the time window is 'a fictional world' and not an 'indexical (unmediated) recreation of a past time'.⁴⁰⁵

Anderson's reading is problematic, as it misrepresents both the nature of the time window and also Carlin's response to it. While the team may initially lead Carlin to believe that the time window is a recreation of the past, it is in actuality neither this nor a 'fictional world' as Anderson claims. The ability of the laser pointer to breach the time window implies that the 'images' of the time window are both permeable and interactive. If the time window were merely a documentary recording or a (recorded) fiction as Anderson claims, this action would not be possible. Furthermore, while Carlin may briefly entertain the notion that the images of Claire apparently alive and well in her apartment are captured in the present rather than the past,

⁴⁰² Anderson takes up Thomas Elsaesser's definition of the 'rube' film as a film that presents a film within the film that a simpleton or rube from the framing film attempts to interact with because they do not understand that 'film images are representations to be looked at rather than objects to be touched'. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Discipline through Diegesis: The Rube Film between "Attraction" and "Narrative Integration"' in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 205 – 223, p. 211 – 212 quoted in Michael J. Anderson, 'Resurrecting the Rube: Diegesis Formation and Contemporary Trauma in Tony Scott's *Déjà Vu*', *Film Criticism*, 33:2 (Winter 2008 - 2009), 2-22, p. 22

⁴⁰³ Michael J. Anderson, 'Resurrecting the Rube: Diegesis Formation and Contemporary Trauma in Tony Scott's *Déjà Vu*', *Film Criticism*, 33:2 (Winter 2008 - 2009), 2-22, p. 11

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11

he discards this interpretation when presented with evidence to the contrary. While enraptured by the images of Claire, Carlin is interrupted by a phone call from a colleague currently investigating Claire's house. Carlin asks his colleague to describe what he can see, presumably to confirm that Claire (or perhaps a double) is not present in the house. Carlin's colleague informs him that the only people present are other male ATF investigators. Faced with this apparently trustworthy evidence, Carlin must concede that what he is seeing really is an image from the past.⁴⁰⁶ On seeing the images of a living Claire, Carlin is faced with two equally improbable possibilities: either he is the victim of an elaborate and morbid practical joke along the lines of *Vertigo*, or he really is seeing images of a Claire recorded in her home by at least four orbiting satellites, which were fortuitously observing her at the time. As both are unlikely options, Carlin is therefore justifiably suspicious of the time window's images. Carlin's suspicion is evident from his first encounter with the time window, as demonstrated by his drawing attention to the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the time window. This also demonstrates Carlin's familiarity with the way in which surveillance technology works, and his growing realisation that what he is presented with is not a filmed image but something else.⁴⁰⁷ Importantly, Carlin's attempt to interact with the image suggests not his inability to distinguish between representation and reality but a scepticism born of professional knowledge. Carlin is not fooled by the image; he distrusts it.

Given the self-reflexive engagement with Scott's style upon which the presentation of the time window depends, it is significant that Anderson specifically frames his reading of *Déjà Vu* as an analysis of the film in isolation from Scott's other works.⁴⁰⁸ Where Anderson does make reference to the growing auteurist interest in Scott, he does so in order to legitimise his analysis of *Déjà Vu* as a theoretical engagement with 'a recognised object of film art, rather than

⁴⁰⁶ At this point in time, Carlin still believes this to be a recording of past events, rather than a window in to the past

⁴⁰⁷ Carlin's familiarity with surveillance footage is indicated early in the film, where he and Agent Donnelly (Mark Phinney) examine footage from the Crescent City Bridge. Carlin is able to identify the suspicious activity of the as yet unidentified bomber as he stands on the bridge moments before the blast.

⁴⁰⁸ Michael J. Anderson, 'Resurrecting the Rube: Diegesis Formation and Contemporary Trauma in Tony Scott's *Déjà Vu*', *Film Criticism*, 33:2 (Winter 2008 – 2009), 2 – 22, p. 3

with cultural detritus.’⁴⁰⁹ Anderson’s reading of *Déjà Vu* therefore makes use of the legitimising function of authorship without engaging with the ways in which an auteurist perspective frames film texts as part of a larger oeuvre. In this respect it recalls the commercial genre of author-function in that the work is seen as valuable simply because it bears the name of an author. The benefits of adopting the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function are clear in comparison. From this perspective, *Déjà Vu* is not an isolated text but read in relation to a number of other texts. Read in this way, it is possible to trace shifting patterns of connections across texts, encouraging readings that would not be otherwise possible. For example, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective enables us to move beyond Anderson, facilitating the reading of the stylistic vocabulary of the time window as a self-reflexive engagement with Scott’s style and thereby highlighting Carlin’s role as suspicious spectator.

Far from presenting Carlin as a Rube, *Déjà Vu* presents Carlin up as an exemplary film viewer. Carlin is chosen by Agent Pryzwarra for his ability to look at a crime scene once and spot clues that another agent would not. Carlin is not just able to spot elusive clues in the time window; he has a better grasp of the potential of the time window as a ‘medium’ than its own creators. On discovering the truth of the time window, Carlin asks whether Claire is alive or dead. This is a complex metaphysical question that opens up the discussion of conflicting theories of time, causation, and parallel universes that are key components of any time-travel narrative.⁴¹⁰ As expert film analyst, Carlin acts as a surrogate for the viewer; training them in how to read the film image for clues in the manner he interprets the images of the time window. Without the ability to pause or rewind, the act of viewing the time window is closer to that of cinematic viewing than it is to home viewing. There are a number of paradoxes in the film presented as clues for the attentive viewer, such as Carlin’s fingerprints being found at Claire’s

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 3

⁴¹⁰ The implication seems to be that in the past-present depicted in the time window, Claire is not-yet-dead but in the present of the diegesis she is dead. Carlin takes this to mean that it is possible to save her, and the conclusion of the film proves him right.

house and the fridge-magnet message 'u can save her' which Carlin leaves himself as a clue after travelling back in time. These clues are not presented in the time window, but in the framing film. The first is reported to Carlin over the phone, the second Carlin experiences first hand when he investigates Claire's house. *Déjà Vu* is therefore reflexively presented as a text to be interpreted by the viewer in the same way as the time window must be interpreted by Carlin. In this respect Anderson's analogy to the rube film is correct. *Déjà Vu* does use Carlin to demonstrate the proper way of watching a film but it does so through his professionalism rather than his incompetence.

The themes established in the self-reflexive reworking of Scott's style in the presentation of the time window also extend to the reworking of action cinema conventions in *Déjà Vu*. This reworking is also tied to the representation of technology, in this case a goggle-rig that extends the range of the time window and acts as a portable time window for the wearer. The presentation of the goggle-rig utilises many of the same techniques used in the depiction of the time window, which serves to foreground the thematic relationship between the sequences, in particular the rejection of critical distance in favour of the desire to get closer. Building on the earlier time-window sequences, the goggle-rig sequence draws attention to the ways in which these concerns relate to the conventions of action cinema.

The goggle-rig technology allows for a novel reworking of the action cinema staple of the car chase, with the participants separated by four-and-a-half days rather than mere moments. In this respect the goggle-rig sequence is a further example of the concern with bridging disparate spaces and times identified by Kasman and Vishnevetsky. It also foregrounds how the manipulation of spatial and temporal relations contributes to the drama and spectacle of action sequences, in particular chase sequences. In many respects the sequence conforms to viewer's horizon of expectation for a car chase, and indeed its effectiveness depends upon the sequence being read according to these conventions. The chase is framed as a pursuit. In the preceding scene Carlin and his team have identified Oerstadt (Jim Caviezel) as the bomber, having

witnessed Oerstadt shooting Carlin's partner Minuti (Matt Craven) and fleeing the scene with the wounded but still breathing agent. The cues for the chase are therefore quite conventional. The bomber must be followed so that he may be apprehended. In addition, the possibility of rescuing Minuti means that time is of the essence. Time is also the factor that complicates the sequence, as the events motivating the chase occurred not moments ago, as convention would dictate, but four and half days in the past. It is therefore unlikely that Carlin will be able to save Minuti and quite impossible for Carlin to catch his adversary – the fundamental motivation of any chase sequence. The sequence is thus a counterintuitive; Carlin is always four days and six hours too late.

While Carlin and Oerstadt are four days apart, the cross-cutting between Carlin in the present, Oerstadt seen through the time window, and the graphical representation of Oerstadt as a blip on the GPS map utilises the convention of cutting between pursuer and pursued, providing a sense of immediacy. Much of the sequence is depicted from Carlin's point of view, with one eyepiece from the rig obscuring part of the field of view while depicting the same area of space four and half days in the past. The present and past are easily distinguishable. The present day element of the chase takes place in bright sunlight, while the past element occurs at night, in the rain, and is dominated by the yellow light of street lamps. This visual distinction serves to emphasise the separation between Carlin and Oerstadt even as the editing encourages the perception of time and space as unified. In this way the film self-reflexively draws attention to its own production, highlighting the manipulation of time and space involved in the editing and denaturalising the conventions of the car chase.

Despite the impossibility of the situation, it is Carlin's refusal to accept the futility of his endeavour that provides the emotional drive in the sequence. The same drive informs Carlin's decision to save Claire, even when he is told that it is impossible. The goggle-rig sequence functions both as the central spectacular sequence in the film and as a crucial scene in the development of the lead character. Stylistically, the chase sequence provides the bodily thrills

associated with explosive spectacle, while also expressing the frustrations of Carlin's situation at a visual level. In particular the sequence is concerned with Carlin's dissatisfaction with being a distant spectator, able to observe events but not change them. Carlin can identify the bomber, but he cannot prevent the bombing.

The goggle-rig sequence also marks an intensification of the challenge to critical distanced demonstrated in the time window sequence discussed earlier. The presentation of the time window as an investigative tool frames the image of the time window as an image to be contemplated and interpreted. However, the layering of Claire's image over Carlin represents a comingling of past and present that complicates and challenges this distanced spectator position, echoing Carlin's own rejection of this position. The goggle-rig further challenges the supposed superiority of the distanced spectator position, continuing Carlin's movement towards immersion. Carlin is required to wear the goggle-rig in order to operate it, meaning that the perspective of the goggle-rig is an embodied experience. Where the sequences organised around the time window emphasise the power of vision (largely) freed from physical constraints, the goggle-rig chase sequence is about the limitation and frustration of vision. Where the time window is able to 'see' any place from any angle within a designated range and even pass through physical barriers, the goggle-rig is tied to Carlin's own limitations as a physical body within the world. Ironically, it is because Oerstadt's movements take him beyond the range of the time window – the line 'he's moving out of range' the functional equivalent to the prompt 'He's getting away!' – that Carlin is forced to use the goggle-rig. This complicates any simple binary of unlimited distanced perspective and limited embodied perspective, presenting both the time window and goggle-rig as differently limited.

The limitations of both the goggle-rig and the time window are explored through a number of action set-pieces that make up the chase sequence. The first occurs when Carlin initially dons the goggle-rig. A shot of Carlin fitting the goggles is followed by a POV shot of Carlin's view through the goggle-rig (Figure 9). Cutting back to the view of Carlin inside the

cab of the Humvee, Carlin grapples with goggles and turns the wheel frantically in order to avoid oncoming traffic. This is followed by a low angle shot of the front of the Humvee, tracking back to show the vehicle swerving. The sequence then cuts to a shot from a camera mounted on the right side of the vehicle, looking forwards from the rear of the vehicle (Figure 10). Positioned outside the safety of the interior of the car, this angle emphasises the closeness of Carlin's vehicle to the wall marking the edge of the bridge. The wall rushes towards the viewer as the Humvee scrapes along the wall. Cutting back to Denny, it is established that whilst Denny and his team can hear Carlin, they can only see the past via the time window and not the present. Later in the sequence, Carlin adjusts the goggles so that he has one eyepiece through which to view the past whilst still able to avoid cars in the present. A further POV shot of Carlin's view through the goggle-rig presents the eyepiece as frame within the frame, a miniature version of the time window (Figure 11). The eyepiece functions as both an aid to vision (allowing Carlin to see into the past) and an obstruction, obscuring part of Carlin's view of the present. In both the time window and the remainder of the frame, vehicles rush towards the viewer.

This sequence establishes both the limitations of the perspective of the distanced spectator shared by the team – they are unable to comprehend the dangers faced by Carlin in the present – and the physical dangers associated with the bodily experience of the goggle-rig. These dangers are emphasised through the conventions of explosive spectacle, in particular the rush of obstacles towards the screen. However, the sequence also continues to complicate the strict division between distanced contemplation and the embodied experience of the goggle-rig. For example, the images the team observe in the time window are the images 'captured' by Carlin's goggle-rig, and therefore represent a perspective limited to Carlin's physicality. However, from the safety of the control room the team are able to devote their full attention to the interpretation of the image, and are thus able to spot Oerstadt when Carlin (who must divide his attention between past and present) cannot.

The danger of this divided attention is particularly apparent in the sequence where Carlin comes face-to-face with Oerstadt. Having located Oerstadt and in close pursuit, Carlin's Humvee is clipped by a truck and sent spinning. Carlin's Humvee travels around and past the location occupied by Oerstadt's truck, so that Carlin is able to see the face of his adversary. This moment of the sequence in particular plays at fracturing and bringing together disparate times and spaces. While Carlin and Oerstadt may occupy similar, almost overlapping locations in space, they remain divided in time. This connection is reinforced by two shots of Oerstadt four and a half days in the past that are not presented as a frame within the frame but instead fill the entire cinematic frame. This presentation of time window 'footage' without contextualising framing not only puts it at the same level as the shots of Carlin, but also suggests that Carlin's attention is fully focused on the past. The first shot is very brief, positioned just behind Oerstadt's truck with the camera making sharp, searching movements suggesting that this is Carlin's point of view and the motion caused by him turning his head (Figure 12). The second shot (Figure 13) more closely resembles the sweeping, fluid camera moves associated with the time window, but this too is motivated by Carlin's movement as his vehicle is spun around Oerstadt.⁴¹¹ The moment is particularly significant as it is Carlin's first proper look at the face of his adversary.

The dangers of Carlin's focus on the past are made abundantly clear in a return to Carlin's POV (Figure 14). The goggle-rig eyepiece shows a close up of Oerstadt. Meanwhile, in the section of the frame showing the present, an articulated lorry is visible in the extreme background, rapidly moving into the foreground. The image of Oerstadt in the eyepiece appears in shallow focus, while Carlin's view of the present is composed in depth so that the extreme foreground detail of the eyepiece and background are both in focus. The lorry remains in focus as it moves towards the viewer, but Carlin does not notice it. This composition presents an interesting blurring of the conventions of explosive and contemplative spectacle. The depth of

⁴¹¹ Or rather, Carlin's vehicle is spun around a point in space once occupied by Oerstadt four and a half days in the past

field recalls contemplative spectacle, and yet it is used to emphasise the truck's movement towards the camera, recalling the dynamic forward momentum King associates with explosive spectacle.

The resulting crash not only forces the Humvee to spin out of control, it also blocks Carlin's access to the road down which Oerstadt 'escapes', further frustrating his pursuit. Crucially, the crash also damages the goggle-rig removing Carlin's ability to see the past and forcing him to depend on the directions of his colleagues who are still receiving a feed from the damaged goggles. Carlin's view of the present is also impaired, his windscreen almost entirely obscured by a crack sustained in the accident. Limiting Carlin's vision is particularly poignant, as it is Carlin's superior ability to read a crime scene that has led to his selection for the investigation. To frustrate the character's vision is to remove the very quality that would allow him to solve the case. By drawing attention to the limitations of both time window and goggle-rig and through the series of staged obstacles and frustrations faced by Carlin the sequence reworks the conventional chase-sequence strategy of complicating the protagonist's pursuit with obstacles and incidents to ensure the quarry is always just out of reach. In some sense, these obstacles are redundant since Oerstadt has already eluded Carlin in the sense that his portion of the 'chase' occurs four days in the past. Nevertheless, the presentation of the chase through conventional means – including the addition of obstacles to slow Carlin's pursuit – ensures that it is imbued with a sense of urgency. This sense of urgency is essential to understanding Carlin's motivations, and reflects his impossible desire to bridge the gulf between past and present. Moreover, the urgency and bodily thrills of the sequence serve to convince the viewer that Carlin may just achieve this, and that it is the obstacles in the present (such as the truck) preventing this, rather than Oerstadt's four day lead.

Purse's work on embodied spectatorship provides a useful lens through which to examine this. With its sustained use of point of view, the chase sequence of *Déjà Vu* encourages the viewer to share Carlin's embodied experience, to move as he moves and see as he sees. This

builds on the alignment of Carlin with the viewer in the earlier time window sequence, moving from encouraging the audience to see as Carlin does to *feeling* as Carlin. By complicating and combining the categories of contemplative distance and unthinking bodily thrills in various ways, the mode of viewing encouraged by *Déjà Vu* therefore recalls the kind of thinking through the body implied by Purse's notion of embodied experience. Rather than critical distance, *Déjà vu* calls for a kind of contemplation through intimacy, which acknowledges that action cinema is comprehended mentally, physically, and emotionally. Indeed, emotion would seem to be a key category for *Déjà Vu*, as Carlin's belief that the time-window can be breached could be interpreted as a triumph of faith over reason. Nevertheless, Carlin's belief that he can change the past is born of empirical observation, represented by his initial suspicion of the time window. Again, the film resists any simple binary of thinking/feeling, reason/belief.

While *Déjà Vu* clearly challenges and reworks the conventions of the action cinema, it does so from a position firmly within that mode. The film's engagement with action cinema is not that of distanced critique, but rather the paradoxical subversion and installing of convention associated with postmodern parody. This double-voiced engagement with action cinema is clear in the ways the film self-reflexively draws attention to conventions such as the manipulation of space and time through editing and yet continues to rely on those conventions for the generation of spectacular thrills. Indeed, Carlin's impulse to use the time window to change the past can be seen as an exaggeration of action cinema's concern with temporal and spatial relations.

More straightforwardly, *Déjà Vu* presents an extreme version of action cinema's concern with the hero being in the right place at the right time. In contrast to the serendipitous presence of John McClane (Bruce Willis) in the Nakatomi Plaza just as a terrorist plot unfolds in *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), Carlin is not in the right place at the right time and must constantly strive to put himself in that situation. Carlin expresses this desire when he declares, 'For all of my career I've been catching people after they do something horrible. For once in my life, I'd like to catch someone *before* they do something horrible'. Through the figure of Carlin,

the desire to be in the right place at the right time takes on a melancholy edge, emphasised through the hints at Carlin's dissatisfaction with his own past. Confiding in Pryzwarra, Carlin reveals that he lives alone. When Pryzwarra queries how Carlin could have let that happen, Carlin's response is 'Everything you have, you lose'. The exchange between Carlin and Pryzwarra gains an added poignancy when taking in to account the portrayal of these characters by stars familiar from earlier films in the Scott oeuvre. Washington is noticeably older than his first appearance in a Tony Scott film, as a young officer in *Crimson Tide*, the contrast between the idealistic but callow Hunter and the world-weary Carlin contributing to a palpable sense of the passage of time.⁴¹² The contrast is even more marked with Kilmer when compared to his role twenty years earlier as Iceman in *Top Gun*. Iceman's role as Maverick's (Tom Cruise) rival is conveyed as much through Kilmer's impressive physicality as the character's locker room banter. Pryzwarra's hair resembles Iceman's, if more dishevelled, his aviator sunglasses replaced by spectacles and his face now lacking its youthful, chiselled definition. This self-reflexive play on star persona contributes to the air of melancholy that permeates the film in a manner uncharacteristic of action cinema. The exchange also frames the passage of time as an inexorable process of loss, emphasising the quixotic nature of Carlin's desire to intervene.

For Carlin, the time window represents more than just the possibility of saving Claire and preventing the bombing. It is a chance for Carlin to make one crucial redemptive change in a life defined by loss. In this way *Déjà Vu* is able to gently interrogate the fantasy of 'right place, right time' heroics, and the belief in the redemptive power of heroic intervention that informs that fantasy. In *Die Hard*, the connection between heroism and redemption is clear. At the start of the film, John McClane is estranged from his wife Holly (Bonnie Bedelia). Through his heroic intervention, McClane is able to prove himself worthy, offsetting an extended period of inadequacy with a singular act of heroism. While the path to redemption in *Die Hard* may be

⁴¹² This can also be said of the use of Washington in *Man on Fire*, *The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3*, and *Unstoppable*. The latter film in particular bears comparison with *Crimson Tide*, as Washington's Frank takes on the role of elder statesmen and old hand to the younger and inexperienced Will (Chris Pine). However, while the relationship between Frank and Will is antagonistic, it is never as outright hostile as that of Ramsey and Hunter.

physically demanding – McClane must literally walk barefoot over broken glass – it is nevertheless the result of a single grand action rather than a project worked at over an extended period of time. While Carlin’s initial desire to use the time window to prevent the bombing can be understood as an attempt to grasp the opportunity presented for a singular redemptive act, *Déjà Vu*’s reworking of action cinema conventions serves to rework and expand the meaning of both redemption and heroism in the film. One way in which the film achieves this is through exploring the limitations of what Carlin’s heroic actions can achieve. This is particularly apparent in the conclusion to the goggle-rig chase. The sequence ends with Carlin having successfully pursued Oerstadt to his hideout, and yet because Carlin is already four days behind his quarry Carlin (and the audience) are robbed of a triumphant conclusion to the chase. The sense of defeat is compounded by the fact that in place of a heroic confrontation with Oerstadt Carlin is presented with a further crime to investigate, the murder of his partner Minuti.

Minuti’s death not only marks the failure of Carlin’s attempt at heroic intervention, but is also to an extent the result of an earlier attempt at intervention. Minuti only encounters Oerstadt because he is investigating the anonymous note sent back in time by Carlin and the team, intended to inform Carlin of Oerstadt’s location and intentions. The note is placed on the desk shared by Minuti and Carlin while the pair are in the midst of argument. Minuti believes that Carlin is refusing to co-operate and share information in order to reserve all the glory for solving cases for himself. Carlin retorts that he acts on hunches, not secret information. Discovering the note on Carlin’s desk, Minuti clearly takes it for exactly the sort of inside information that he suspects Carlin of keeping to himself. The attempt to rescue Minuti therefore occupies an indeterminate position in the reworking of the relationship between heroic intervention and redemption. On the one hand, Carlin’s emotional drive in the goggle rig sequence is the very slim possibility of being able to rescue Minuti, and therefore conforms to conventional belief in the redemptive power of heroic action. By saving Minuti, Carlin makes up for their earlier argument but also for placing Minuti in danger in the first place. This also serves to complicate

the relationship between intervention and redemption, as Minuti is only in danger because of Carlin's failed attempt at intervention. Carlin is thus doubly implicated in his partner's death: their earlier argument fostering resentment, and the sending back of the note giving Minuti an opportunity to act rashly and put himself in danger.

Carlin's inability to save Minuti prompts a reconfiguration of heroic intervention and redemption. This manifests as a reconsideration of who can be saved by heroic intervention. As much as heroic intervention involves saving others, it is also conventionally the path to saving or redeeming oneself. Carlin's desire to save Minuti and Claire is therefore somewhat selfish – they are the means to his own salvation. Added to this is the fact that both Minuti and Claire are only killed because of Carlin's attempts to intervene – Minuti because of the note and Claire because Oerstadt steals her vehicle after his own is damaged in the encounter with Minuti. Ultimately, Carlin is only able to save Claire through self-sacrifice. While Carlin is able to save Claire and with her help prevent the bombing, it is only at the cost of his own life. Carlin's redemptive narrative arc is therefore starkly different from that of McClane, whose reward for his exertions is reconciliation with his estranged wife Holly. Carlin's death means that he is denied the prospect of a relationship with Claire as a reward (or confirmation) of his redemption.

The time travel narrative does allow for a potential reconciliation of the romantic couple. The film ends by returning to the moment of Carlin's initial arrival, now investigating an attempted bombing rather than a successful one. This version of Carlin will have no need to use the time window and no need to sacrifice himself in order to save Claire. The film's first version of Carlin has ensured that a version of Claire and a version of himself are alive at the end of the film. Yet even this putative happy ending is infused with the same sense of loss felt throughout the film. While a version of Carlin is alive at the end of the film, he has not undergone the transformation from world-weary and defeated to passionate and idealistic that the 'original' Carlin goes through in his experiences with the time window. Furthermore, the 'new' Carlin is robbed of these transformative experiences by the success of the 'original'

Carlin. By having a version of Carlin return at the end of the film, *Déjà Vu* short-circuits the redemptive narrative in a way that merely having the ‘original’ Carlin die would not. In death, Carlin has a tragic heroism, his sacrifice a monument to his redemptive transformation.

However, the time travel conceit of the plot and the arrival of a ‘new’ Carlin erases this. Rather than being preserved in heroic stasis, Carlin is ‘reset’ – taken back to the state he was in at the film’s beginning.

The arrival of the ‘new’ Carlin also serves to reset the relationship between Carlin and Claire, although with key changes. The new Carlin is not the Carlin whom the audience have seen grow to love Claire. Carlin and Claire remain divided by death, but this time their roles are reversed, demonstrated in Claire’s echoing back of Carlin’s earlier lines to her, and the new Carlin’s unwitting repetition of Claire’s response. This echoing back of lines and Carlin’s apparent sense of *déjà vu* accompanied by the falsetto harmonies of The Beach Boys’s *Don’t Worry Baby* suggests this branching universe version of Carlin has some sense of his counterpart’s bond with Claire. However, these attempts to move towards a happy resolution cannot overcome the pervasive sense of sorrow that the film fosters. Any sense of happiness or triumph is always coloured by loss. This is particularly true of the paradoxes that provide hope for both Carlin and the spectator that it is possible to go back in time and save Claire. The fridge magnet message, bloody bandages, and Carlin’s fingerprints in Claire’s home signal that Carlin can go back in time because a version of him *has* gone back in time already. However, the very fact these clues remain while Carlin is investigating the death of Claire imply that a version of Carlin has already tried and failed.

The ending of *Déjà Vu* therefore represents a reconfiguration of what heroic intervention and redemption mean, and how this changes the role of the action hero. Rather than positing a potential relationship with Claire as the reward for Carlin’s heroism, Carlin’s intervention means that a version of himself has no need to intervene. The reward for heroism in *Déjà Vu* is not personal gain, neither is it the wiping clean of the past with a single redemptive act.

Nevertheless, there are ways in which the *Déjà Vu* fulfils exactly the expectations of action cinema. Carlin's intervention does serve to rewrite the past. The ferry bombing is prevented and everyone on board saved, reaffirming the central tenet of action cinema that action affects change. However, the film never departs from the understanding of life as loss, and the reversal of Carlin's and Claire's knowledge of each other at the end of the film reflects this: every gain is balanced by loss. *Déjà Vu* is therefore best understood in terms of postmodern parody, paradoxically subverting and installing convention.

Approaching Scott's work in terms of reworking and re-invention also allows for the bridging of the perceived break between Scott's so-called early and late periods. For example, a connection can be drawn between *Déjà Vu* and *The Hunger*, as both display the same double-voiced irony in their reworking of generic conventions. *The Hunger* engages with the conventions of horror cinema and vampire fiction. The film's engagement with the genre is evident from the opening night-club sequence featuring Bauhaus performing their song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. This reference to Lugosi immediately recalls Universal's *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931), and self-reflexively frames *The Hunger* as part of a tradition of vampire cinema. The sequence also features Bauhaus frontman Peter Murphy performing the role of vampire (Figure 15). Murphy spreads his coat to evoke a cloak or bat wings in exaggerated imitation of Lugosi's mannerisms in *Dracula*, such as Lugosi's use of his cloak to evoke bat-like wings when recoiling in terror from a cross (Figure 16). This play with performance is extended to Miriam (Catherine Deneuve) and John (David Bowie), both vampires performing humanity amongst a group of humans performing vampirism. Indeed, by adopting the trappings of Goth culture, Miriam and John become vampires performing humanity performing vampirism. They are therefore simultaneously displaying their true nature as vampires and concealing through the very act of displaying it.⁴¹³

⁴¹³ Catherine Spooner makes similar observations regarding the connections between vampires, Goth subculture, and performativity in *The Hunger*; taking particular note of John's use of a black wig as part of his costume in the club. Catherine Spooner, 'Costuming Vampires' *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film*, ed. by James Bell (London: BFI, 2013), pp. 20 – 21, p. 21

The use of allusion and the attention to performance in the opening sequence is indicative of the film's particular focus on those conventions of vampire fiction concerned with the deceitful quality of the vampire's appearance. However, while this deceitful appearance is conventionally tied to the monstrous nature of the vampire, and tied to oppositions of good/evil, these conventions are reworked in *The Hunger* in order to convey alternative meanings. This is apparent in the reworking of specific tropes of vampire fiction, particularly demonstrated in those sequences referencing the convention of the vampire's non-appearance in photographs and mirrors. For example, Miriam appears reflected in a mirror when she is *not* present rather than failing to appear when she is present. The sequence therefore reworks a convention normally associated with unnatural lack or absence in terms of unnatural presence. This reworking is not a complete break with convention. The sequence references the conventional use of mirrors and reflections to demonstrate the supernatural power of the vampire, and relies upon this convention in order to illustrate Sara's (Susan Sarandon) growing fascination with Miriam. This sequence demonstrates the double-coded irony of postmodern parody, as it is simultaneously innovative and referential.

The film's reworking of the conventions relating to vampires and photographs is more complex. When John is photographed by his young pupil Alice (Beth Ehlers), the details of whether or not he appears in the photo are withheld from the audience until it is anti-climatically revealed that he photographs just like any other man. This suggests either that photography does not have the power to reveal the monstrous 'essence' of the vampire, or perhaps even implies that vampires are not essentially monstrous. However, later in the film a photograph does play a role in revealing John's monstrousness; but does so not in its role as a record of any particular moment or person but because its presence in the apartment is evidence of Alice having visited John. On finding the photo, Miriam correctly interprets its presence to mean that John has fed from and killed Alice. In this case, John is not monstrous because he is a vampire but because Miriam perceives his killing of Alice to be monstrous. This shift from presenting the

representation of the vampire as essentially evil and monstrous to a being capable of monstrous acts but not essentially evil is commensurate with the largely sympathetic portrayal of John and Miriam throughout the film.

The film invites the viewer to sympathise with the plight of its vampire protagonists, while maintaining an emotional distance from these characters that precludes empathy. This sense of emotional distance, or inaccessibility, derives in large part from the star personas of David Bowie and Catherine Deneuve. Both Bowie and Deneuve exhibit a cold reserve, almost arrogance, which does nothing to detract from their desirability – indeed it is a key element of their appeal.⁴¹⁴ This reserve lends John and Miriam a quality of inappropriate or non-human emotional response. For example, when Miriam discovers that John has killed Alice her reaction is strangely muted. Miriam clasps the last photo taken by Alice to her lips and asks John ‘what have you done?’, the question delivered as a sigh rather than an exclamation or accusation.

The star personas of Bowie and Deneuve operate in such a way as to suggest that they are already a breed apart. Bowie’s persona in particular carries these connotations of other-than-human, through his role in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Nicolas Roeg, 1976) and through his early glam-rock alter ego Ziggy Stardust. The coldness and reserve of Bowie and Deneuve also contributes to a play of interiority and surface. The lack of obvious exterior demonstrations of emotion is ambiguously suggestive of either a concealed, inaccessible interiority; or a complete lack thereof. John and Miriam, like Bowie and Deneuve, are ultimately unknowable. For all that the viewer does sympathise with the situation of helplessly witnessing a loved one slowly dying, the viewer is not granted access to either Miriam or John’s interiority, but always kept at a distance.

⁴¹⁴ The trailer for *The Hunger* offers the ‘timeless beauty of Catherine Deneuve’ and the ‘cruel elegance of David Bowie’ as attractions to prospective viewers. From theatrical trailer included as part of special features on *The Hunger* (DVD, USA, Turner Entertainment Co., 2004) ASIN: B0002XP010

The suggestion that the vampires of *The Hunger* are not essentially evil creatures is made possible by the move away from the Christian mythological framework and its clear oppositions of good/evil and human/monstrous. In particular, crosses and other Christian symbols are notably absent from the film; save for one scene where a crucifix plays a significant role. Part way through transformation into a vampire, Sara perceives a gold crucifix as if it were Miriam's ankh pendant. Like the earlier use of Miriam's reflection in the mirror, this scene demonstrates Miriam's growing power over Sara. It also implies a connection, or even equivalence, between the ankh and crucifix. This plays on the contradictory meanings of the two symbols. A crucifix is a depiction of an instrument of torture that paradoxically symbolises eternal life; whereas Miriam's ankh is a symbol of eternal life housing a concealed blade that Miriam, John, and later Sara use to kill. While ancient Egyptian iconography may largely displace crosses and crucifixes, the film does not simply replace Christian with ancient Egyptian mythology. Rather, the interchangeability and equivalence of the two symbols demonstrated in this scene represents the proliferation of competing 'explanations' of vampirism in the film. In addition to the explanations inherited from the wider tradition of vampire fiction (and signalled through references to earlier texts such as Universal's *Dracula*) and the hints to possible links to Egyptian mythology, *The Hunger* also offers more scientific and materialist explanations for the supernatural. For example, Sara has her blood tested by her colleagues following her encounter with Miriam and discovers the presence of inhuman cells slowly gaining dominance over the weaker human blood.

The scientific never takes on the role of privileged explanation but rather exists alongside the more supernatural alternatives. Elsewhere in the film, connections between the supernatural and the scientific are more associative than direct, facilitated by the links made between John and Sara's ape test-subjects. Sara and her colleagues are researching the treatment of ageing as a genetic disease by artificially accelerating the ageing process in apes. Having enjoyed supernatural youth for many years, John finds himself suffering from a similarly accelerated

ageing process. The connection between John and the apes is established by cutting between John suffering from insomnia (the first symptoms of accelerated ageing) and scenes of Sara and her colleagues discussing video footage of their male test subject. It's reported that after a period of prolonged sleeplessness the ape killed and ate his mate. The intercutting suggests that the words are equally applicable to John, implying potential scientific grounds for vampirism and suggesting the possible future course of his affliction.

While John's actual fate differs substantially from that of his primate double, his decline continues to be conveyed in relation to the ape. As John ages rapidly in the waiting room awaiting consultation, Sara is otherwise occupied watching a video depicting the final moments of her test-subject. In addition to continuing to draw parallels between John and Sara's test-subjects and thus bolstering the scientific explanation of vampirism, the sequence also reworks the convention of the rapid decay of the vampire following its destruction. Firstly, although John's ageing is preternaturally accelerated, it can be read as an extension of the normally rapid decay of the defeated vampire. The effect used to depict the death of the ape conforms more closely to conventional representation of the defeated vampire (Figure 17), and in particular recalls the demise of Dracula (Christopher Lee) in Hammer's *Dracula* (Terrence Fisher, 1958) (Figure 18). The depiction of the ape's death through the conventions of vampire fiction destabilises any authority the scientific explanation may have over the mythological explanations of vampirism also at play in the film. As a self-reflexive gesture it is comparable to the circularity of Miriam's and John's performative costuming in the opening sequence. The figure of the ape provides a materialist or scientific framework through which to understand John's supernatural predicament, yet the death of the ape is itself framed according to the conventions of vampire fiction.

The proliferation of competing explanations of vampirism in the film allows *The Hunger* to elide the Manichean structures imposed on vampire fiction rooted in Christian mythology. Rather than presenting a binary opposition of good (Christian) humans and evil (demonic)

vampires, *The Hunger* offers vampires who are both other than human but more than simply demonic. One way in which *The Hunger* elicits sympathy for its vampire protagonists is through its multifaceted representation of the monstrous. One aspect of this has already been discussed in relation to the use of photographs in the film. The scenes dealing with John's ageing demonstrate a different sense of the monstrous. John's ageing is reminiscent of body horror, generating horror through emphasis and exaggeration of the biological reality of the body. In this way age and decay is presented as something grotesque and to be feared. This is forcibly apparent in the depiction of Miriam's former lovers, aged to the point of mummification and closer to filmic representations of zombies than vampires. John is also depicted as monstrous through allusion to *Nosferatu* (F.W. Murnau, 1922). John's shadow as he descends the basement stairs (Figure 19) resembles a scene from *Nosferatu* where the shadow of Count Orlock (Max Shreck) is shown ascending a staircase (Figure 20). The menace of the original sequence is absent from the scene in *The Hunger*, and is subverted entirely when the impossibly frail John tumbles down the stairs, becoming pathetic rather than horrific.

The treatment of ageing in the film is however strongly divided along gendered lines. Where male ageing is presented in terms of both disgust and sympathy, female ageing is portrayed as grotesque and Miriam depicted in terms of concealing appearances. This is demonstrated in a sequence depicting a conversation between Sara and Miriam in a standard shot-reverse-shot format (Figure 21 & Figure 22). After this initial exchange, rather than the anticipated close up of Catherine Deneuve, the next shot is instead an unflattering close up of an elderly woman, occupying exactly the screen space that Deneuve had previously occupied (Figure 23). The jolting cut from Miriam to the old woman is not only shocking but seemingly played for laughs, an effect of the contrast between the glamorous Deneuve and the far from flattering presentation of her counterpart. The contrast operates as a revelation, and as such encourages suspicion of Miriam's ability to conceal her true age. This sequence recalls a sequence in Hammer's *Dracula*, in which Dracula's youthful vampire bride (Valerie Gaunt)

transforms into an elderly woman after a stake is driven through her heart (Figure 24 & Figure 25). Miriam's death at the film's denouement also recalls this transformation (Figure 26).

The dissonant representation of male and female ageing frames Miriam's relationship with her lovers in such a way as to recall the doomed love of immortal women for mortal men in classical mythology.⁴¹⁵ The juxtaposition of immortality and mortality foregrounds the transience of life and the passing of time; but where the immortal women of classical mythology are often able to secure a form of immortality for their lovers preserving their youth and beauty, Miriam's powers do not extend to this. Not only do Miriam's partners eventually age, they are condemned to a seemingly endless wakeful death. Where John's fate suggests that eternal life is only worthwhile if accompanied by eternal youth, Miriam's immortality is equally unattractive. Through Miriam the film explores the tragedy and pain of witnessing the ageing and death of those one loves. The film's ending explores the ambivalent emotions associated with this experience, with Miriam torn between pity and disgust when confronted by the animate corpses of her past loves. Miriam cries out that she loves them all, and yet is repulsed when they attempt to kiss her. In *The Hunger*, both immortality and mortality are equally monstrous and tragic.

While *Déjà Vu* and *The Hunger* are very different films, both films exhibit a shared concern with the inexorability of time and the sense of loss associated with this. Where *Déjà Vu* is structured around the impossible desire to turn back time and do things differently, *The Hunger* is concerned with the unstoppable forward progression of time, and what is lost or left behind in that relentless move onwards. The more obvious ravages of time are clear in *The Hunger*'s engagement with the effects of ageing on the body. The attic full of coffins containing Miriam's past lovers is indicative of the no less damaging psychological effects of the progression of time. In both films, it is impossible to completely overcome time, even using science-fictional or supernatural means. The time window allows Carlin to save some people,

⁴¹⁵ See for example the myth of Selene and Endymion. In the myth, the moon Goddess Selene falls in love with Endymion, a mortal. Selene falls for Endymion while he sleeps, and in some versions of the myth Endymion returns to the cave in which Selene found him and falls into an endless sleep. The cause of Endymion's sleep differs depending on the version of the myth. See Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 210

but not all – and crucially not himself. In *The Hunger*, immortality does not mean eternal youth and its vampires are as plagued by the concerns of ageing and loss as mortals. Both *Déjà Vu* and *The Hunger* explore these themes by reworking the conventions of their respective genres. However, each film does so from a position firmly within those genres, the conventions of the genre providing a framework for the exploration of certain themes even as the film reworks that framework in order to accommodate its concerns. This is also the case with *Crimson Tide*. While the thematic concerns of the film are distinct from those of *The Hunger* and *Déjà Vu*, it simultaneously relies upon and reworks generic convention. These films may rework and reshape the conventions of their respective genres, but they do not exceed those genres. All three films rework their generic frameworks from within.

Crimson Tide, *Déjà Vu*, and *The Hunger* all demonstrate the re-inventive impulse associated with the postmodern genre of author-function in terms of reworking generic and stylistic conventions. While this is an important aspect of the re-inventive impulse associated with the postmodern genre of author-function, it could lead to an overly restrictive definition of the postmodern genre of author-function that overlooks other manifestations of the re-inventive impulse. Expanding the definition of the re-inventive impulse beyond generic reworking to include experiments with narrative and form reflects the importance of narrative re-invention to Brooker's and Brooker's revaluation of Tarantino through *Pulp Fiction*; an important influence on my definition of the postmodern genre of author-function.⁴¹⁶ *Domino* can be usefully analysed from this perspective, as the film is more remarkable for its reworking of the conventions of narrative and form than its engagement with genre. In particular the film is concerned with the construction of narrative and story-telling, and its own status as told story.

Domino opens on a black screen with centrally framed white text announcing 'this is based on a true story' (Figure 27). The appearance of the text is accompanied by a solid bang on

⁴¹⁶ Narrative and formal re-invention is not limited to *Pulp Fiction* or indeed the Tarantino filmography. Considering the Lynch filmography, *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway* in particular stand out as examples of narrative re-invention. To a lesser extent *Déjà Vu* can be read from this perspective, and particularly resembles *Pulp Fiction* as unlike *Mulholland Drive* its characters are not entrapped by the circular narrative but literally enlivened by it.

the soundtrack, as if underlining the authority of the statement. This is followed by the voice of the as yet unseen Domino (Keira Knightly), reciting the mantra 'heads you live, tails you die'. On completion of the phrase, the words 'sort of' replace the true story claim (Figure 28), scrolling in playfully from the right of the screen and undermining (or at least unsettling) the truth claims of the previous statement. Domino's 'tails you die' repeats on the soundtrack, but it has the quality of a sampled lyric being rewound and replayed. The repetition also has the effect of emphasising the word 'tails', ripping it from its context to suggest the homophonic alternative 'tales', a suitable substitution given the film's concern with storytelling. The claim 'based on a true story' is conventionally used to foreground the truth and authenticity of a narrative while simultaneously downplaying its status as narrative. The use of the term 'true story' rather than 'real events' already contains the suggestion of fiction, and is further unbalanced by the addition of 'sort of', emphasising the film's status as fiction and in doing so drawing attention to the storytelling apparatus.

Domino self-reflexively foregrounds the act of telling, and in doing so de-naturalises the notion that a 'true story' constitutes an unmediated representation of the truth. This theme is taken up in the introduction of the character Domino through a scene in which she is interrogated by FBI criminal psychologist Taryn Mills (Lucy Liu). The sequence serves as a narrative frame for the rest of the film, which is presented as a series of nested flashbacks. The sequence also has the quality of a confessional, seemingly reinforcing the truth claims of the film. However, the sequence also serves to frame Domino as storyteller. Indeed, Domino is a storyteller twice over, both in her onscreen interrogation by Mills and through her voiceover narration. The voiceover narration further draws attention to the act of telling, observing 'What I say over the next several hours will determine whether or not I spend the rest of my life in prison'. This remark (shared with the viewer but not Mills) colours Domino's interaction with Mills and challenges the confessional aspect of the interrogation. Crucially, the remark makes no claim as to whether Domino's freedom depends on telling a true story or a false one. In this

way *Domino* avoids falling in to a binary opposition of the true story told to the viewer through voiceover and flashback and the lies told to Mills.

This challenge to binary oppositions is reinforced through the film's presentation of Domino as a fractured subject. This is achieved visually through the course of the introductory interrogation sequence. Domino is revealed partially and in stages, her image pieced together through editing. Furthermore, the use of handheld cameras, long lenses and post-processing effects undermine the legibility of the images, hindering the viewer's accesses to what is depicted onscreen. The pace of editing also serves to frustrate and undermine the legibility of the sequence, each shot held for only seconds before being replaced by the next. Eschewing an establishing shot, the sequence begins with an extreme close-up of Domino lighting a match (Figure 29), before cutting to a wider shot of the character (Figure 30). This moment of revelation is frustrated by poor lighting which partially conceals Domino in shadow. The sequence continues to partially map out the character's features, moving through a 180° arc in the course of three shots (Figure 30, Figure 31, & Figure 32). The final shot of the series presents the best view of the character, although the lack of fill light throws the rest of the image into darkness, and Domino's profile appears almost two dimensional against the black background. The word 'Domino' appears on screen as the voiceover announces 'My name is Domino Harvey'. The image then disintegrates into a multiple exposure of Domino, with ghost images moving both away from and towards the viewer, constructing the previously flat screen space as three dimensional (Figure 33). Through the course of this sequence, the character is fractured and reassembled through editing, then further fragmented at the very moment the character's name is announced. Even before this dramatic fragmentation, Domino is already a divided character, split between onscreen presence and voiceover. Again, this is not a simple binary opposition, as the final fragmentation of Domino in this sequence is not merely a fragmentation but also a proliferation, three Dominos in the place of one.

As the film continues, so does the division and proliferation of Dominos through the nested flashbacks. In addition to the Domino of the voiceover and the onscreen Domino being interrogated by Mills, there is the Domino of the flashbacks. There is also an earlier version of Domino from the flashbacks depicting her first forays in to bounty hunting and a further Domino from a period preceding this, differentiated from the other iterations by her longer hair. There are also two Dominos not played by Keira Knightly, a young Domino (Tabitha Brownstone) and the real Domino Harvey, who appears at the end of the film as part of the film's coda. This takes the form of a montage composed from shots of each of the characters, labelled with the first name of the actor portraying them. Harvey appears superimposed over a clip of an exploding car from the film's denouement and shares the screen with a close-up shot of Knightly's Domino; who appears as a further ghostly layer added to the image (Figure 34). The image of Knightly's Domino fades completely, to be replaced by the label 'Domino' (Figure 35). The film also features the voice of Domino Harvey in the film's closing credit song, repeating the mantra of 'heads you live, tails you die' that Knightly's Domino provides for the film's opening titles. Rather than any straightforward opposition of truth/fiction, the fragmentation and proliferation of the Domino character instead offers a multiplicity of fictions.

The fragmentation of the central character in *Domino* can be compared to the fragmentation of Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* (Todd Haynes, 2007). However, the Dylan persona is fragmented to a greater degree than that of Domino; multiplied and divided across a range of performers of diverse age, ethnicity, and sex. Ultimately, the Dylan persona is decentred to the extent that it is framed as absence, as is implied by the title of the film.⁴¹⁷ The fragmentation of Domino is of a different order, more in keeping with Jameson's characterisation of the ideal postmodern viewer. In a rare embracing of the paradoxical, Jameson offers the slogan 'difference relates' as a characterisation of 'the postmodernist experience of form'. Jameson presents this mantra in contrast to reading strategies that 'stress

⁴¹⁷ The song from which the film takes its title is the only the song in the film to be 'performed' by Dylan, rather than covered by another artist. The song is played over the film's closing credits.

disjunction' to the extent that the 'materials of the text [...] fall apart in to random and inert passivity'.⁴¹⁸ Referring to the multiscreen art of Nam June Pak, Jameson argues that the postmodernist viewer must – Like David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* – view all the screens at once, perceiving relationship in difference.⁴¹⁹ Thus in *Domino* a form of coherence and unity is achieved through mapping the ways in which each of the Dominos differs from one another. There is no core Domino meaningful in itself from which the others deviate, each version of Domino derives its meaningfulness through its differentiation from the others. The concept of relation in difference is also a productive way of describing the type of unity associated with the postmodern genre of author-function. Rather than treating film texts as part of an organic unity, adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function requires discerning the ways in which discontinuous texts relate to each other.

The foregrounding of storytelling in *Domino*, and the framing of the narrative as a confession, dramatizes Domino's attempt to re-centre her fragmented subjectivity and rework the narrative of her life in to a meaningful pattern. In this way, *Domino* shares a concern with *Déjà Vu* in reworking the action cinema conventions of heroic intervention and redemption. For Domino, the act of telling her story allows her to rework it and through this reworking find new meaning. At the conclusion to her confession, Domino addresses the viewer in voiceover, drawing the threads of her narrative together and emphasising the fact that, thanks to her actions, Lateesha (Mo'Nique) has enough money to pay for her granddaughter's operation. This allows Domino to reframe her actions according to a narrative of redemption rather than nihilistic thrill seeking. Over scenes of Lateesha's granddaughter in the hospital, Domino's voiceover claims 'my mission is complete ... I saved her', reframing her involvement in the robbery as a quest to save a dying girl rather than the confused unravelling of a routine assignment gone awry. This redemptive quality is reinforced by a sequence in which Domino is depicted swimming underwater. Domino emerges from the pool next to her mother, telling her that she loves her

⁴¹⁸ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 31

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31

and so implying that their reconciliation is a part of Domino's redemption. The water imagery is suggestive of rebirth, while the Catholic devotional imagery appearing elsewhere in the film encourages reading the sequence in terms of baptismal cleansing.

Nevertheless, Domino's redemption is not something sanctioned by a higher power but rather the result of her retelling. Domino does not seek exterior validation of her redemption, declaring through voiceover 'if you're wondering what's true and what isn't, fuck off, because it's none of your goddamn business!'. For Domino, it does not matter what meaning the story has for any exterior observer, only what the story means to her. Similarly, it does not matter whether the story is truth or fiction. What matters is that through telling the story Domino is able to assemble the fragmented elements of her life in to a meaningful pattern; and through doing so is able to identify some purpose to her life that she has been unable to find until now. Domino's reframing of her story as a heroic quest to save Lateesha's granddaughter can also be considered in relation to the theme of loss identified in both *Déjà Vu* and *The Hunger*. By the end of the film, all of Domino's friends and colleagues are dead. However, by reframing her story as heroic intervention, Domino is able to redefine these deaths as heroic sacrifices rather than as meaningless. Domino is therefore able to in some way counter or overcome loss, not through an act of heroic intervention but through a shift of perspective that reframes her story in terms of heroism.

Domino's complication of the boundary between truth and fiction aligns it with Hutcheon's category of historiographic meta-fiction. In keeping with Hutcheon's definition of postmodern art, *Domino* questions 'the supposed transparency of representation' through the self-reflexive foregrounding of the narrative process, while Hutcheon's description of postmodernism as the confrontation between 'documentary historical actuality' and 'formalist self-reflexivity' is also a fitting description of the film. This overlap prompts a return to the question of whether the postmodern genre of author-function should include a requirement that film texts demonstrate identifiably postmodern concerns beyond the re-inventive impulse. Of

the films discussed in detail in this chapter, it is *Domino* that most obviously demonstrates a thematic concern compatible with postmodern theory. However, such a concern is also identifiable to a lesser extent in all the films discussed in this chapter. This issue was first raised in connection with *Crimson Tide*'s concern with perspectivalism and notions of reality as always already mediated. A similar postmodern concern is identifiable in *Déjà Vu* in relation to its continual problematisation of binary oppositions. To a lesser extent, the refusal of a privileged true explanation for vampirism amongst a multiplicity of potential explanations in *The Hunger* is an identifiably postmodern move, as is the film's interest in layers of performance. The identification of postmodern concerns in these films suggests that rather than modifying the working definition of the postmodern genre of author-function to include a requirement that films exhibit a concern with postmodern theory beyond the re-inventive impulse, it is more appropriate to acknowledge that adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective encourages the interpretation of a text in terms of postmodern theory. Returning to the example of Lynch, this would explain why the same features of a film are cited as examples of both modernism and postmodernism depending upon the critical perspective adopted. Following this, the value of a reading is not judged according to its ability to best unveil the inner truth of a text, but whether or not the reading is productive, rich, and useful.

I have demonstrated that adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function encourages a richer and more productive reading of the Scott oeuvre. By the standards of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function the Scott film texts remain non-authored not-art, whereas the commercial genre of author-function proscribes *any* reading of the Scott film texts. This chapter has demonstrated the obstacles preventing the construction of the Scott author-text in relation to Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, particularly in relation to a lack of any outsider sensibility. Neither the commercial nor postmodern genres of author-function have this requirement, but the postmodern genre of author-function provides a far more productive critical framework, as it allows for the texts to be

recognised as *both* commercial *and* meaningful, rather merely dismissing them as meaningless commodities. This is born out in the reworking of conventions from within demonstrated in *Déjà Vu*, *The Hunger*, and *Domino*. *Déjà Vu* in particular critically interrogates the conventions of heroic intervention and redemption in action cinema, but does so by reworking those conventions in order to find alternative meaning in them rather than critiquing them from a distance. In this way *Déjà Vu* remains an action film, but one that expands the range of meanings associated with the mode. *The Hunger* similarly reworks the conventions of genre, in this case vampire fiction in order to explore issues of mortality, ageing, and loneliness. Like *Déjà Vu*, *Domino* also engages with issues of heroism and redemption, but through its self-reflexive engagement with storytelling is able to approach redemption not as something bestowed from outside but as something arrived at through storytelling and a particular way of framing a narrative.

This chapter has focused on the re-inventive impulse in the Scott oeuvre as it manifests through the reworking of generic conventions. This focus is in part informed by the positioning of *Crimson Tide* as a major text influencing the subsequent analysis of *Déjà vu*, *The Hunger*, and *Domino* and in part because the affirmative re-reading of *Pulp Fiction* by Brooker and Brooker that provided the initial framework for the postmodern genre of author-function is rooted in a re-valuation of the reworking of convention in that film and across the Tarantino oeuvre. It is important to recognise that the process of re-invention characteristic of the postmodern auteur is limited to the reworking of generic convention, but can manifest in a number of ways. The material being re-worked is of less significance than the process of re-working itself. Maintaining this distinction is crucial in order to avoid the mistakes associated with labels such as nasty postmodernism or the Tarantinoesque, where an incidental element (be that a particular genre, or a theme such as violence) is taken to be characteristic of the postmodern rather than correctly identifying the postmodern in the form the presentation of that element takes.

Whilst the reworking of generic convention is perhaps the most obvious form of re-invention in the Scott oeuvre, alternative forms can be traced by positioning different films as a new centre from which to begin analysis. For example, by work outwards from the film *Revenge* it is possible to identify not only a reworking of the conventions of the revenge thriller, but within that a re-inventive treatment of themes such as vengeance, redemption, and honour.⁴²⁰ These themes are also evident in *Man on Fire*, and related to the reworking of the action hero in *Déjà vu*, and *Domino*.

Adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy for the analysis of the oeuvres of other directors mentioned in this chapter would also lead to the identification of different manifestations of the re-inventive impulse. In the case of Burton, generic reworking is the most obvious evidence of re-invention. Similarly the Coen Brother's oeuvre demonstrates many instances of generic reworking. Nevertheless, films like *Barton Fink* and *Inside Llewyn Davis* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2013) suggest an additional re-inventive attentiveness to the role of the artist, and the act of artistic expression. Both films deploy the convention of the tortured artist while simultaneously subverting it.⁴²¹

In the case of Cronenberg, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy may also serve to bridge a potential break in the Cronenberg oeuvre between the early science-fiction and body horror films with later films such as *A History of Violence* (2005), *Eastern Promises* (2007), *A Dangerous Method* (2011), *Cosmopolis* (2011), and *Map to*

⁴²⁰ In the pivotal scene where Jay (Kevin Costner) would conventionally exact vengeance against crime boss Tibey (Anthony Quinn), he instead asks forgiveness for sleeping with Miryea (Madenline Stowe), Tibey's wife. It is this 'betrayal' that prompts Tibey to seek revenge against Jay, with those actions leading to Jay seeking revenge in turn. This shift from revenge to forgiveness frustrates the horizons of expectation for the spectator. However, this moment also serves as a good example of the simultaneous dismantling and re-installing process of postmodern parody. Whilst the substitution of forgiveness for violence that only begets more violence is an unexpected and welcome turn, Jay's request for forgiveness suggests that the system of morality in place is still one of patriarchal honour: Jay is only able to stem the flow of violence by admitting that he has betrayed Tibey, an admission that brings with it uncomfortable associations of women as the property of their husbands. Rather resolving the moral quandary of revenge, the film shades the black and white morality of the revenge thriller in to a more ambiguous shade of grey

⁴²¹ The performance of folk-music in *Inside Llewyn Davis* functions as a device for exploring the tension between authenticity and self-expression with the re-invention and reworking, as folk performance consists both of re-interpretation of old standards and the composition of original material. The distinction is less between the authenticities of original composition versus arrangements but rather in the authenticity of the performance, be it of an original or an old standard.

the Stars (2014). Rather than classifying these later films as an abandonment of earlier concerns with the post-human, it is possible to trace a continuing interest with a postmodern reworking of notions of identity that is related to but distinct from the post-human. Approached in this way, the fragile and fragmented identities of the characters played by Viggo Mortensen in both *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* (a father hiding from his past and an undercover agent respectively) places them on a continuum with Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) and Max Ren (James Woods) in *The Fly* (1986) and *Videodrome* respectively.

Having explored the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy in relation to Hollywood cinema, the following chapter will move on to consider the implications of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function in relation to art cinema.

Figures

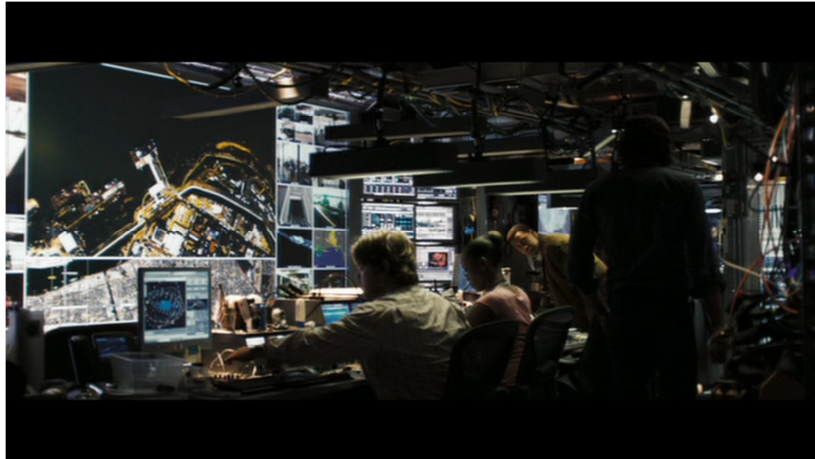


Figure 2: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

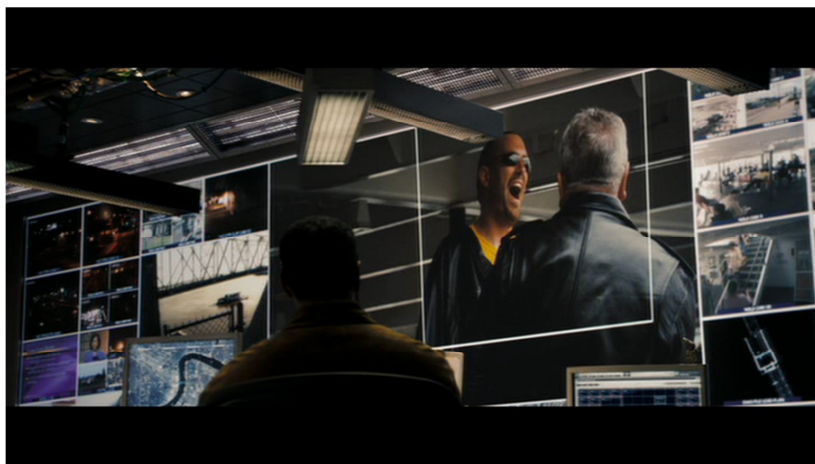


Figure 3: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

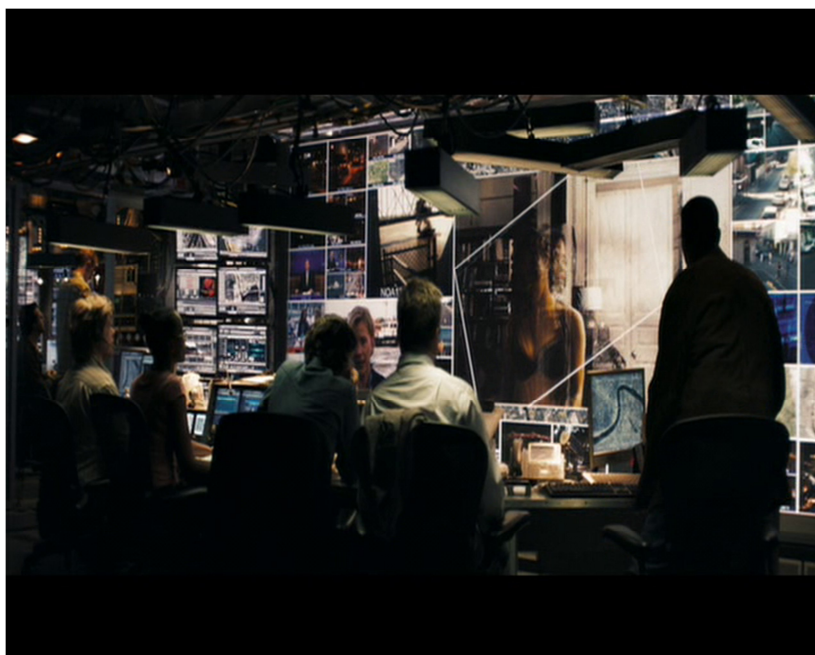


Figure 4: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

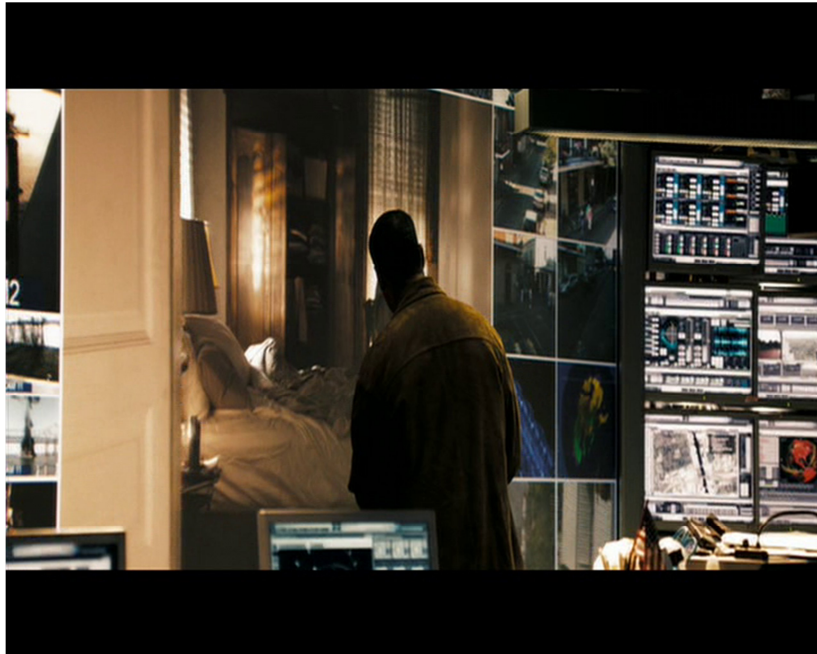


Figure 5: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

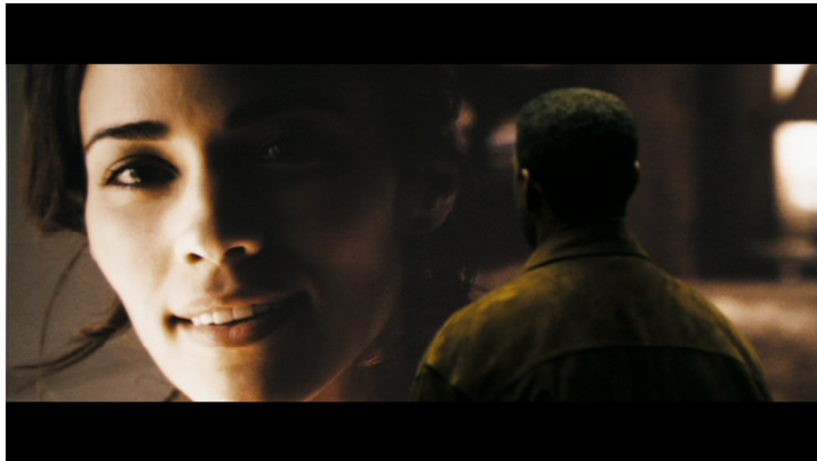


Figure 6: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)



Figure 7: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)



Figure 8: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

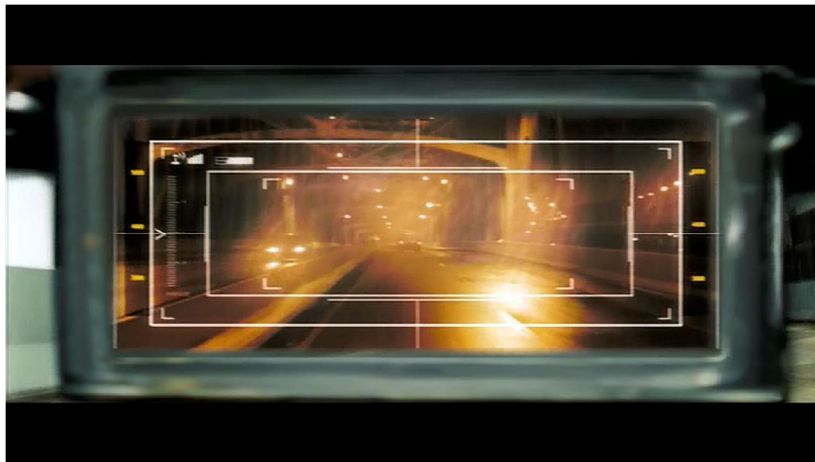


Figure 9: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

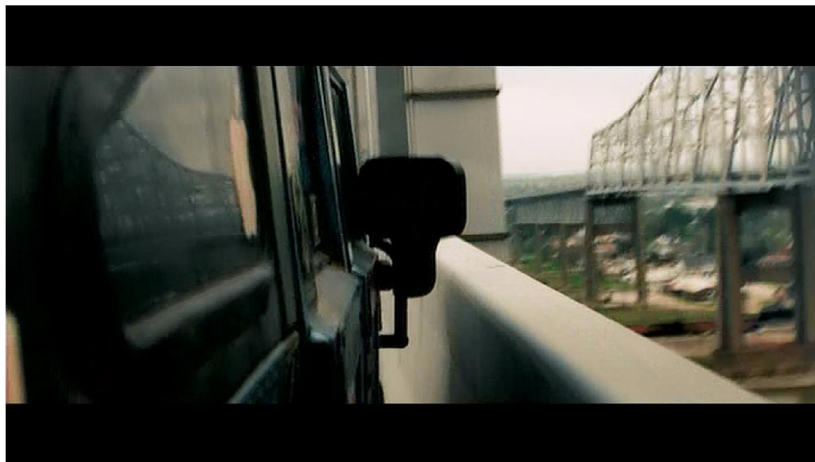


Figure 10: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

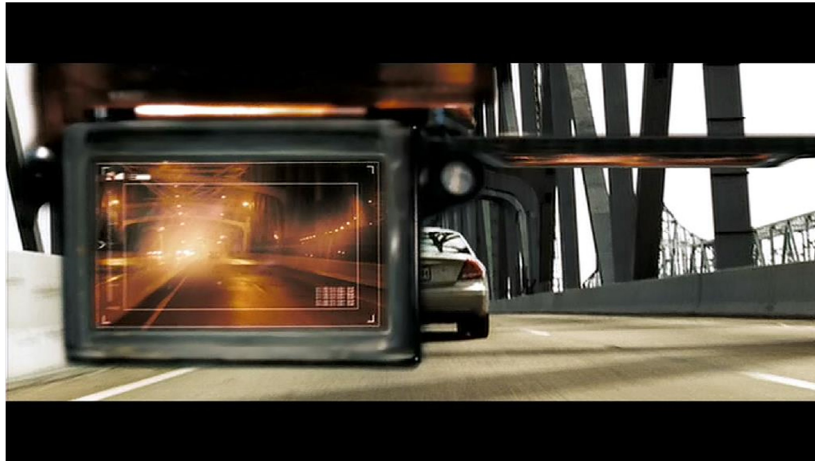


Figure 11: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

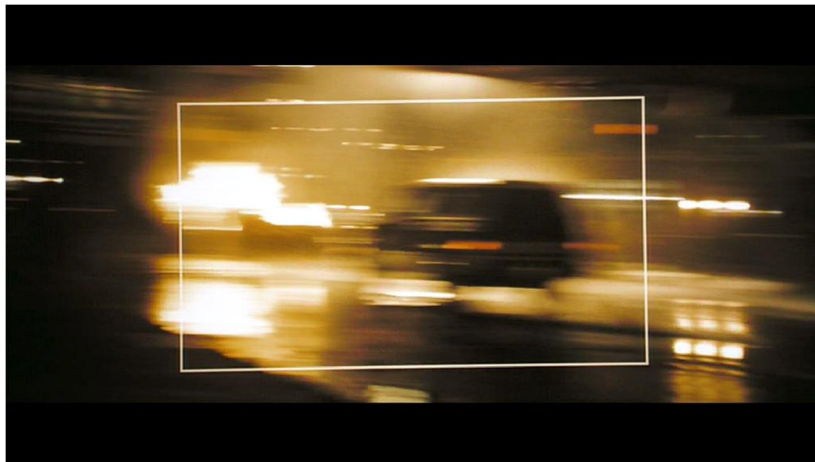


Figure 12: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)

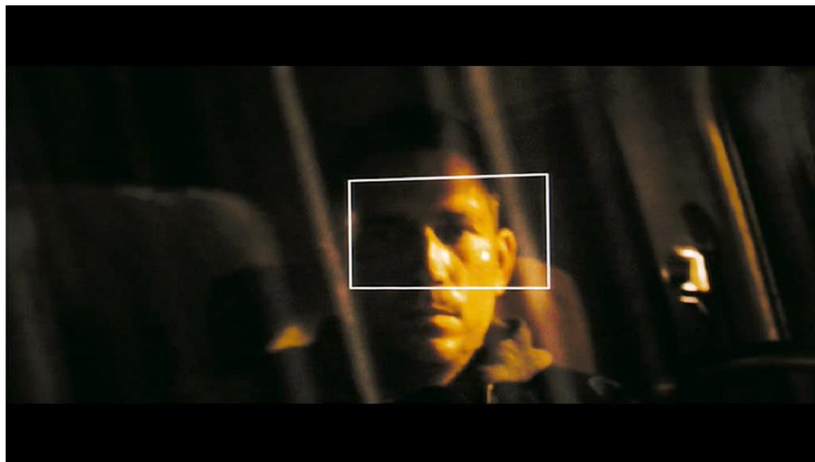


Figure 13: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)



Figure 14: *Déjà Vu* (Tony Scott, 2006)



Figure 15: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 16: *Dracula* (Todd Browning, 1931)



Figure 17: *Dracula* (Terrence Fisher 1956)



Figure 18: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 19 *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 20: *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F.W. Murnau, 1922)



Figure 21: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 22: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 23: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 24: *Dracula* (Terrence Fisher, 1956)



Figure 25: *Dracula* (Terrence Fisher, 1956)



Figure 26: *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983)



Figure 27: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)



Figure 28: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)

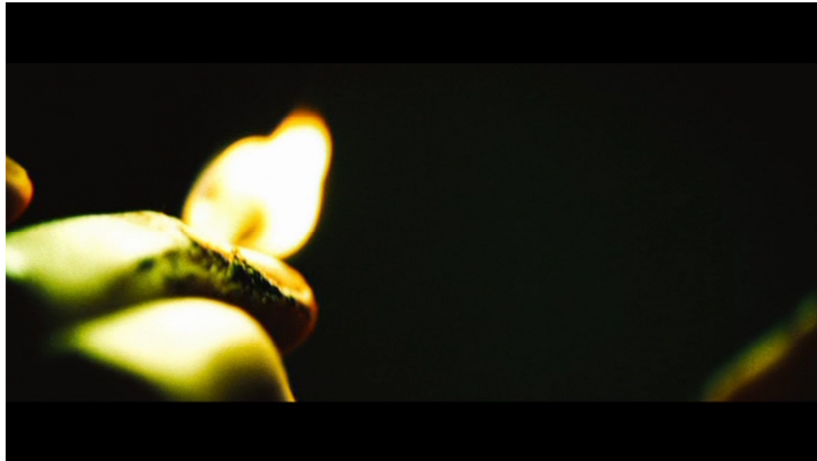


Figure 29: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)

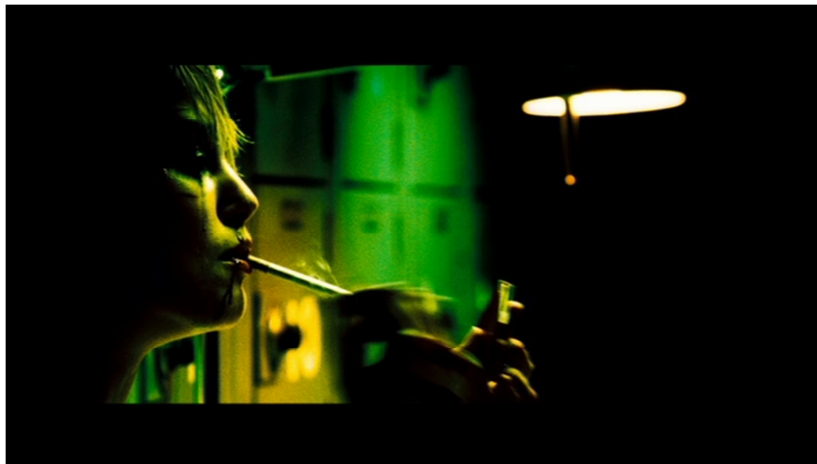


Figure 30: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)

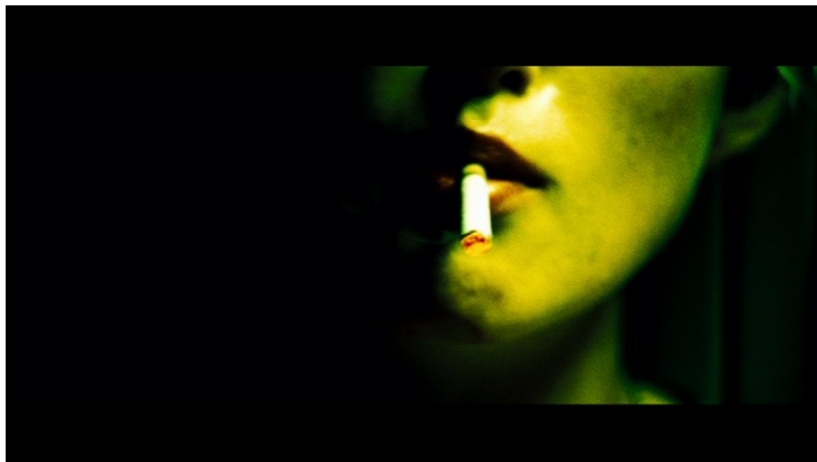


Figure 31: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)



Figure 32: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)



Figure 33: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)



Figure 34: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)



Figure 35: *Domino* (Tony Scott, 2005)

CHAPTER 3: SALLY POTTER

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the outcomes of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy in the context of contemporary mainstream Hollywood cinema, and the potential this has for re-valuing the oeuvre of a director otherwise classified as a non-author. In order to test the broader applicability of the postmodern genre of author-function beyond the specific circumstances of the Scott case study, this chapter shifts in focus to the opposite extreme: Adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy in the context of art cinema, and in relation to the author-text and oeuvre of a director already constructed as an auteur in relation to existing genres of author-function; using Sally Potter as a case Study.

The art cinema is the space in which the concept of the auteur is traditionally assumed to be the most secure. This supposed security stems from the apparent separation of art cinema from the commercial concerns of Hollywood coupled with an oppositional stance to Hollywood. Both of these factors suggest the criteria of outsider status and critical distance associated with the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function are to an extent 'built-in' to the art cinema context. Where the notion of complicitous critique associated with the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the re-valuation of the oeuvre of directors such as Scott, entrenched in the mainstream and identified as lacking critical distance, there would appear to be less need of such an intervention in the context of the art cinema. Where the postmodern genre of author-function is potentially of most value in the context of art cinema is in accounting for disruptions to the unity of an oeuvre caused by an inability to account for films that do not display sufficient evidence of critical distance. This is the case with the Potter oeuvre, which contains a number of films more closely aligned with the Hollywood mainstream in addition to more straightforwardly art cinema fare.

This disrupted oeuvre is one reason for the selection of Potter as a case study over directors from a similar context such as Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway. The Jarman, Greenaway, and Potter oeuvres all demonstrate the re-inventive impulse necessary to justify the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function. While the weaving and reworking of a rich and varied multitude of intertexts from various art forms and fields of knowledge in the films of the Greenaway oeuvre make Greenaway an attractive case study, the rigid structuralism and overt artificiality of the Greenaway style serve to maintain an appropriate critical distance from Hollywood cinema, even with films that rework the conventions of costume drama. Certain films in both the Jarman and Potter oeuvres also rework the conventions of the costume drama, but where the films of the Jarman oeuvre again maintain a critical distance; those of the Potter oeuvre are less overtly distinct. Jarman, Greenaway, and Potter all potentially have access to the Romantic and modernist genres of author due to their association with the field of art cinema. Furthermore, there is potential for the oeuvres of each director to be re-interpreted according to the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function due to the re-inventive impulse evident in the films. As observed in relation to Lynch, where a director has already been constructed as an auteur according to the critical perspective of one genre of author-function it is possible to adopt the postmodern genre of author-function as a reading strategy to re-read and reinterpret the oeuvre, identifying and emphasising new centres and points of influence from which to trace alternative patterns of meaning. However, where the films of the Jarman and Greenaway oeuvres consistently maintain critical distance, the Potter oeuvre does not; preventing the establishment of a unified oeuvre according to the criteria of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function. This suggests that in addition to merely presenting an opportunity for reinterpretation, the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function potentially allows the critic to identify new unities in the Potter oeuvre much as was the case with Scott.

Gender presents a further complication regarding the adoption of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function as a reading strategy for the interpretation of the Potter oeuvre. While in theory the association of Potter with the context of art cinema provides access to the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, the authors imagined by these genres are implicitly male, as is explored in the work on feminist theories of authorship in the review of literature.¹ While there may be obstacles preventing the construction of Potter as an auteur according to criteria of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function, there is potential for adopting the feminist genre of author function as an alternative reading strategy.

Taking gender rather than the opposition between Hollywood and art cinema as the key point of distinction between this chapter and the previous one, a different field of candidates for case studies would need to be considered. Kathryn Bigelow and Sofia Coppola stand as the most suitable candidates in this respect. Despite the clear differences between both filmmakers, the oeuvres of both directors display the re-inventive characteristic of the postmodern genre of author-function. This impulse is particularly prominent in the Bigelow oeuvre, manifesting as generic reworking and interrogation of conventions of masculinity and femininity. Indeed in the case of Bigelow the reworking of gender and of genre go hand in, with the two inextricably linked in films such as *Blue Steel* (1989) and *Point Break* (1991).

Both Bigelow and Coppola are also identified as occupying an insider position that places them at risk of being characterised as lacking sufficient critical distance when approached according to certain genres of author-function. Adopting the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the reconfiguration of this insider position as a potential platform for complicitous critique.²

¹ In addition to being implicitly male, it is also possible that the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function are implicitly heterosexual. If this is the case then Jarman's access is also potentially limited. While this thesis focuses on gender as a category excluded or obscured by the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, sexuality, race, nationality, and potentially class are also important factors to keep in mind.

² Crucially, this is only the *potential* for complicitous critique and not a guarantee. This is clear in Hutcheon's caveat that not all postmodern art forms are critical, and that some such as television are merely complicit. While I would not endorse Hutcheon's wholesale dismissal of television as complicit, I agree with the importance of maintaining a distinction between merely being an insider and mobilising that insider position as a platform for

The identification of Bigelow with an insider position stems from the close association of Bigelow with the conventions of Hollywood action cinema, in a manner similar to Scott. Interestingly in the case of Bigelow, this perceived lack of distance may be interpreted either as a lack of distance from the commercial concerns of Hollywood or potentially a too close association with the conventions of patriarchal Hollywood cinema, depending on whether the Romantic, modernist, or feminist genre of author-function is adopted. Despite Coppola's association with the same boundary space on the edge of Hollywood occupied by directors such as Lynch and Tarantino, Coppola is still constructed in terms of a lack of critical distance. This typically stems from accusations of nepotism, and claims that Coppola's career is only possible because of the status of her father Francis Ford Coppola.

A more pertinent construction of insider status builds on the perceived lack of distance between Coppola and both the subject of her films and her audience. There is some echo here of the construction of Tarantino as fan, lacking distance from both his fans and the popular culture he reworks. In the case of Coppola, this manifests as a too close association with the world of celebrity and fashion that her films – most notably *The Bling Ring* (2013) but also *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Somewhere* (2010), and indeed *Marie Antoinette* (2006) – often explore. When approached according to the modernist genre of author-function this closeness is assumed to be evidence of the absence of critique. Similarly Coppola is deemed to be too similar to the young affluent white women both represented in her films and assumed to be their audience. This is potentially not an issue when considering the role of author-as-spokesperson associated with the feminist genre of author-function, although the suggestion that Coppola speaks only to and for young, affluent, white, women could prove an obstacle.

Both Bigelow and Coppola are strong candidates for consideration as alternative case studies. However, they are both associated with fields in which the adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function as reading strategy has already been explored in this thesis, either in

critique. This is a further distinction between a director such as Bay on the one hand and Scott, Bigelow, or Coppola on the other.

relation to Lynch and Tarantino or Scott. While this still allows for analysis of the role gender might play in the postmodern genre of author-function, it limits the scope of the thesis to a narrow band of cinema. Furthermore, it is this stratum of cinema that is most conventionally associated with postmodernism, maintaining a binary opposition between a complicit postmodern Hollywood and a critical modernist art cinema.³ Potter on the other hand allows for the examination of distinct field of cinema while also maintaining the significance of gender as a point of distinction. This not only allows for the potential expansion of the narrow field of postmodern cinema, but also for an exploration of the role played by gender in the postmodern genre of author-function. This in turn opens out to further consideration of the political and critical potential of the postmodern genre of author-function, and how it might align with or deviates from the feminist genre of author-function.

Yvonne Tasker's *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* describes Potter as 'One of the foremost woman directors and formally experimental cinematic innovators to have emerged in the UK in the last thirty plus years',⁴ a sentiment echoed in the biographical entry for Potter on the BFI's *Screen Online*.⁵ An alternative version of this biography appears in the collection of essays accompanying the BFI DVD release of *The Gold Diggers* (Potter, 1983), describing Potter's films as 'audacious and visually sumptuous' and as 'something to be celebrated in an increasingly commercialised world cinema.'⁶ In a similar vein, Anne Ciecko describes how Potter has 'consistently avoided the lure of Hollywood and the mainstream',⁷ a theme also taken up in Catherine Fowler's praise of Potter's determination to go 'in her own direction, rather than relying on critics or studios and money-men'.⁸ Even when Potter moves towards the mainstream with *Orlando*, she is able do so without 'sacrificing' her formal, aesthetic and

³ With Bigelow in particular there is considerable overlap with Scott, risking reducing the scope of the thesis to a consideration of the postmodern genre of author-function in contemporary action cinema

⁴ Anne Ciecko, 'Sally Potter', Yvonne Tasker, *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 329 – 338, p. 329

⁵ <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/490062/> Adapted from Annette Kuhn, 'Sally Potter,' *Directors in British and Irish Cinema: A Reference Companion* (BFI Publishing 2006).

⁶ Annette Kuhn, 'Sally Potter (1949 -)', in *The Gold Diggers* (London: BFI, 2009), pp. 1 – 60, p. 57

⁷ Ciecko, 'Sally Potter', in *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors*, ed. by Tasker, pp. 329 – 338, p. 334

⁸ Catherine Fowler, *Sally Potter* (Illinois: The university of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 54

political concerns.⁹ The importance and influence of Sally Potter is also implied by the use of stills from Potter's *Orlando* as the cover images for Maggie Humm's *Feminism and Film* and Patricia Mellencamp's *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism*.¹⁰

In addition to being a source of interest for feminist theorists, Potter is also described as a theoretically informed filmmaker. E. Ann Kaplan identifies Potter as emerging from the context of theoretically engaged British feminist filmmakers.¹¹ Kaplan claims that Potter made the move from performance art to film when she realized the theories informing performances could be 'worked through' in film.¹² Lucy Fischer also sees feminist theory as an important context for Potter, providing her with an understanding of how gender issues 'might be integrated into works of art'.¹³ Fischer also notes the influence of structural film on Potter's interest in conceptual and experimental cinema.¹⁴ For Mellencamp, Potter's films *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers* are not merely informed by theory but are 'films as feminist film theory',¹⁵ a notion taken up by Fischer in her description of *The Tango Lesson* as 'a highly theoretical and pedagogical work of feminist film theory'.¹⁶

Fischer's description of *The Tango Lesson* gives the impression of a densely theoretical and potentially dry film, at odds with Annette Kuhn's description of Potter's films as 'visually sumptuous' and 'audacious'.¹⁷ Whilst theoretical engagement is clearly a part of Potter's persona, to concentrate on the theoretical at the expense of the other elements of Potter's films would be to ignore the fact that, as Kaplan says of *Thriller*, the films are 'art first and theory

⁹ Patricia Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 283

¹⁰ The chapter describing the fifth of Mellencamp's Five Ages of Film Feminism carries the title 'What Virginia Woolf Did Tell Sally Potter'. This title positions Potter as an heir to Woolf and secures a place for Potter in a feminist artistic tradition.

¹¹ In particular Kaplan notes the influence of Lacan on British feminist theory E. Ann Kaplan, 'Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*' *Millennium Film Journal*, 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 115

¹² E. Ann Kaplan, 'Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*', *Millennium Film Journal*, 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 115

¹³ Lucy Fischer, 'Passion, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*' in *Women & Experimental Filmmaking* ed. by Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 131 – 146, p. 131

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131

¹⁵ Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance*, p. 156

¹⁶ Lucy Fischer, "Dancing through the Minefield": Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*, *Cinema Journal* 43:3 (Spring 2004) 42 – 58, p. 42

¹⁷ Kuhn, 'Sally Potter (1949 -)', in *The Gold Diggers* pp. 1 – 60, p. 57

second'.¹⁸ The identification of Potter's films as art recalls the construction of Lynch in terms of the figure of the artist. This can also be seen in the emphasis placed on Potter's background in performance art. Where Lynch's training in the fine arts is mobilised in order to justify the imagistic qualities of his films, Potter's performance art background is used to explain the centrality of music and movement in Potter's film. In both cases this serves to legitimise a style that foregrounds non-narrative elements. Performance art is also used as a jumping off point for framing Potter's films in terms of more established art forms such as fine art, literature, and music; further recalling the strategies employed in the construction of the Lynch author-text. For both Fowler and Mayer, Potter's performance art background is seen to translate in to a variety of skills beyond writing and directing; such as editing, choreography, musical composition, and acting.¹⁹ Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman put this more succinctly, describing Potter as the 'reigning "Renaissance Woman" of the current avant-garde.'²⁰

As this brief overview demonstrates, the Potter author-text is predominantly constructed in terms of anti-commercialism, feminist critique, and in relation to the figure of the artist. The construction of the Potter author-text displays all the hallmarks of the modernist genre of author-function; perhaps even more so than Lynch, as the framework of feminist theory provides a more concrete foundation for critical distance than the outsider perspective of the artist. Yet unlike David Lynch, who has numerous volumes dedicated to auteurist considerations of his work, there are only two book length studies that examine Potter and her oeuvre in an auteurist context.²¹ How might we explain this imbalance, especially considering that the independent art cinema context in which Potter operates is supposedly the context in which the concept of

¹⁸ Kaplan makes this distinction in defence of *Thriller*, arguing that we judge it as art rather than theory and that we should not expect a short film to work through all its theoretical implications: 'Potter's film offers the possibility for change, and even if this change is achieved on the visual rather than the theoretical plane [...] it is an image that can stimulate us to find a theoretical underpinning for liberation.' E. Ann Kaplan, 'Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*, *Millennium Film Journal*', 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 122

¹⁹ Sophie Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A politics of Love* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), p. 12 and Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 1

²⁰ Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, 'Sally Potter', in *Women & Experimental Filmmaking* ed. by Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 129 – 130 pp. 129 – 130, p. 129

²¹ These are Catherine Fowler's *Sally Potter*, and Sophie Mayer's *The Cinema of Sally Potter*

authorship is most secure? Annette Kuhn's observation that all of Potter's films are 'very different from each other' suggests one explanation: that the diversity of Potter's films means they lack the consistency necessary to be considered a unified oeuvre.²²

The quote from Tasker that opens this chapter indicates some of the contexts through which Potter can be approached, including feminist film theory and British national cinema. While I do not wish to deny the importance of these contexts to an understanding of Potter's work (and indeed feminist film theory will remain an important thread in this analysis) this chapter will concentrate on analysis of Potter in the broader context of an international art cinema. Not only is this the broadest of the possible classifications of Potter's work, it also mirrors the examination of Scott in the context of contemporary Hollywood cinema. The comparison between Hollywood and art cinema also reflects the binary oppositions of art/commerce and art/entertainment that are crucial to the theories of authorship examined in this thesis and that play an essential role in the use of authorship as a marker of value.

This chapter will make the case for adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as a critical perspective for the analysis of Sally Potter. I will begin by assessing the genres of author-function at work in art cinema discourse, before going on to consider which genres of author-function are deployed in the literature on Potter. The chapter concludes with a close analysis of several of Potter's films, demonstrating the advantages of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function. This chapter is additionally concerned with exploring the compatibility of the postmodern genre of author-function with the broader concerns of feminist aesthetics.

Context: Authorship and Art Cinema

In the 1979 article 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', David Bordwell claims that art cinema defines itself against the classical narrative mode.²³ In particular, art cinema eschews the 'cause-effect linkage of events' of classical narrative in favour of the principles of

²²Kuhn, 'Sally Potter (1949 -)', in *The Gold Diggers* pp. 1 – 60, p. 54

²³ David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', *Film Criticism* 4:1 (Fall 1979), p. 57

realism and authorial expressivity.²⁴ Bordwell therefore explicitly sets up an opposition between art cinema and Hollywood cinema. It requires little effort to identify the value judgement implicit in this opposition, with classical Hollywood cinema aligned with commerce and entertainment, the art cinema (unsurprisingly) aligned with art. The principle of authorial expressivity also immediately frames art cinema in terms of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, and the criteria of self-expression. Bordwell demonstrates his awareness of this value judgement through his counselling readers to ignore the ‘tang of snobbishness’ associated with the phrase ‘art cinema’.²⁵

Bordwell’s identification of realism and authorial expressivity as the defining principles of art cinema requires some elaboration. In this context, realism is not identified as a quality of resemblance to an external real. Rather, realism in art cinema is associated with ‘violations of classical conceptions of time and space’, as stylistic violations of the classical norm.²⁶ Bordwell goes on to claim that such violations should be understood either as ‘the intrusion of an unpredictable and contingent daily reality’ or ‘as the subjective reality of complex characters.’²⁷ In this way, any potentially disruptive stylistic violations are justified in terms of their service to realism rather than as moments of self-conscious and highly visible style. This can productively be compared to the classification of post-classical departures from the classical Hollywood norm as either the high cultural, authored, and artistic departures of the Hollywood Renaissance or the debased, commercial, and sensual departures of contemporary blockbuster cinema. The term realism here performs the role of courtesy title that legitimises the stylistic departures of art

²⁴ Ibid, p. 57

²⁵ This advice illustrates Bordwell’s awareness of writing at a time when the academy is in the process of revaluing the previously denigrated industrial Hollywood cinema. Bordwell’s task throughout his article is therefore not merely to demonstrate that art cinema is a ‘distinct branch of the cinematic institution’ but also that it is a branch worthy of consideration. We can therefore identify in Bordwell’s work an interesting inversion of auteurism’s project of revaluing classical Hollywood cinema. Indeed in some respects Bordwell’s revaluing of art cinema can be seen as a response to the auteurism’s co-opting of the author for Hollywood cinema; returning the category of ‘authorial expressivity’ to its rightful place in discussion of art cinema. David Bordwell, ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’, *Film Criticism* 4:1 (Fall 1979), p. 56

²⁶ David Bordwell, ‘The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice’, *Film Criticism* 4:1 (Fall 1979), pp. 58 - 59

²⁷ Ibid, p. 59

cinema in more respectable terms. This can also be seen in Bordwell's category of authorial commentary.

Like Bordwell's category of realism, the 'authorial code' of the art film is associated with 'recurrent violations of the classical norm.'²⁸ Bordwell identifies 'authorial commentary' as 'any breakdown of the motivation of cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic'.²⁹ Both authorial commentary and realism are used to account for breaks with the invisible continuity editing of classical Hollywood. As with Bordwell's category of realism, the identification of authorial commentary is a strategy for describing a self-conscious foregrounding of style in more favourable terms. In this case, the justification of deviations from the stylistic norm in terms of authorial expression recalls the modernist genre of author-function and the criteria of unique voice.

While Bordwell primarily identifies the author as a unifying category in art cinema, fulfilling the functions performed by genres and stars in Hollywood cinema, Bordwell observes that this function is accompanied by the notion that the art film director has creative freedom, and that for this reason 'the art-film author is a textual force' that both 'communicates' and 'expresses'.³⁰ Bordwell associates this expression with 'the artist's *personal vision*'.³¹ Bordwell's move to considering artistic freedom and personal vision partakes of the conventions of the Romantic genre of author-function, rather than the more circumspect form of self-expression associated with the modernist genre of author-function.

While authorship plays a central role in Bordwell's definition of art cinema, it conflicts with Bordwell's category of realism. Bordwell acknowledges the incompatibility of the two categories, noting that to push an aesthetic of realism to the extreme would 'invite a haphazard text in which the author's shaping hand would not be visible'.³² At the other extreme, the 'surest

²⁸ Ibid, p. 59

²⁹ Ibid, p. 59

³⁰ Ibid, p. 59

³¹ Ibid, p. 59

³² Ibid, p. 60

signs of authorial intelligibility [...] are the least capable of realistic justification.’³³ Bordwell cannot afford to jettison either criterion, as he is attempting to formulate a totalising definition capable of accounting for art cinema in all its various forms. The categories of realism and authorial expressivity are also equally important to Bordwell in their role as courtesy titles associated with traditional ways in which value has been conferred to cinema, as objective document of reality and as expressive art respectively.

Bordwell’s solution to this problem is to suggest a reading strategy whereby any element that is ‘excessive’ in one category must be assigned to another.³⁴ Following Bordwell, any violations that cannot be accounted for according to Bordwell’s category of realism must be evidence of authorial commentary. Bordwell summarises this strategy as reading for ‘maximum ambiguity’.³⁵ According to Bordwell the film should ideally hesitate between categories, suggesting ‘character subjectivity, life’s untidiness, and author’s vision’ simultaneously.³⁶ Ultimately, Bordwell’s definition of art cinema would seem to favour authorial expressivity as the defining quality of art cinema, with Bordwell observing that the ‘competent viewer’ watches the art film expecting ‘stylistic signatures’ rather than narrative order.³⁷ Elsewhere, Bordwell describes the ‘small industry’ of film festivals, reviews, essays, film education, and author retrospectives that ‘introduce viewers to authorial codes’.³⁸ This education is necessary because it is ‘essential’ the art film be read ‘as the work of an expressive individual.’³⁹

Bordwell provides a primarily formal account of art cinema, however Bordwell’s addition of a reading strategy to his definition of art cinema, and particularly his reference to a competent viewer who knows whether to expect narrative order or stylistic signatures depending on what type film they are watching, suggests that art cinema cannot be defined entirely on formal grounds. Furthermore, the competent viewer gains competence through education by the

³³ Ibid, p. 60

³⁴ Ibid, p. 60

³⁵ Ibid, p. 60

³⁶ Ibid, p. 60

³⁷ Ibid, p. 59

³⁸ Ibid, p. 59

³⁹ Ibid, p. 59

institution of art cinema, learning to read art cinema in terms of authorial self-expression, and thus in terms of the Romantic or modernist genres of author-function. For a fuller account of the institutional context of art cinema, it is necessary to consult Steve Neale's article 'Art Cinema as Institution'.

Neale echoes Bordwell in identifying the author as a defining aspect of art cinema. However, Neale also suggests that an over emphasis on auteurs has led to a lack of systematic attention being given to the institution of art cinema.⁴⁰ Further recalling Bordwell, Neale observes that the art film is 'marked at a textual level' by 'signifiers of an authorial voice'.⁴¹ According to Neale, these authorial signifiers perform the function of differentiating the art film from Hollywood cinema. As such, the nature of these features will vary historically and geographically and will be subject to change dependent on which features are currently presumed to be dominant in Hollywood.⁴² Textual features are adopted because they contrast with Hollywood, and it is because they contrast with Hollywood that these features 'circulate as the signs of art in established cultural institutions.'⁴³ Neale adds that deviation from the supposed Hollywood norm also 'engages the other primary ideology of Art, the romantic view that Art is subjective expression.'⁴⁴ The signifiers of authorial voice function as signs of self-expression and therefore 'as the marks of Art itself.'⁴⁵ According to Neale, the function of differentiation is crucial.⁴⁶

Neale explicitly frames art cinema in terms of the Romantic genre of author-function through his reference to Romantic self-expression, however Neale also implicitly appeals to the modernist genre of author-function in his foregrounding of stylistic deviations from the classical Hollywood norm. Furthermore, Neale frames these deviations in terms of unique voice and critique. According to Neale the discourse of art is 'hostile to Hollywood on a variety of

⁴⁰ Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema as Institution' *Screen* 22:1 (1981), 11 – 40, p. 13

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 13 – 14

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 14

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 14

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 14

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 14

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14

grounds'.⁴⁷ This provides art cinema with a variety of ways to differentiate itself from – and so critique – Hollywood cinema, such as by being more realist, by using non-professional actors, or by being more abstract.⁴⁸ Despite the potential heterogeneity of these various strategies of differentiation and critique, they are nonetheless framed by practices of production, distribution, and exhibition to be read homogeneously within the institution of art cinema as 'the sign of the author'.⁴⁹ In this way, any stylistic deviation from the Hollywood norm is understood as both critical and as evidence of the unique voice of the author. Where Bordwell oscillates between Romantic and modernist genres of author-function depending on how he emphasises self-expression and artistic freedom, Neale's definition of art cinema is resolutely situated in the modernist genre of author-function, despite his explicit reference to Romanticism. Authorship is essential to both definitions of art cinema, as in each case what ultimately defines a film as art cinema is that it is understood to be the work of a self-expressive artist. It is this that allows the classification of art cinema as Art, in opposition to the (presumably) non-authored not-art of commercial Hollywood entertainment.⁵⁰

What is apparent from both Neale and Bordwell's definitions of art cinema is that any definition of art cinema must consider both formal and institutional categories. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover echo this sentiment in the introduction to their collection *Global Art Cinema*.⁵¹ As a starting point, Galt and Schoonover appeal to the common usage of the term art cinema to describe 'feature-length narrative films at the margins of mainstream cinema, located somewhere between fully experimental films and overtly commercial products.'⁵² This close-yet-distinct relationship to Hollywood is evident in Galt's and Schoonover's identification of the 'ambivalent' relationship maintained by art cinema in regards to the 'critical and industrial

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 15

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 15

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 15

⁵⁰ This summary somewhat obscures the subtle differences between the position of Neale and Bordwell, and it should be noted that Neale's article is in a more meta-critical mode than Bordwell's. Neale is particularly attentive to the ways in which the institution of art cinema constructs art cinema in terms of self-expression rather than self-expression being an inherent and essential quality of the films

⁵¹ Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, 'Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema', in *Global Art Cinema* ed. by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2010), pp. 3 – 27, p. 3

⁵² Ibid, p. 6

categories that sustain film history'.⁵³ On the one hand, art cinema is constituted as a rejection of Hollywood systems such as stardom and authorship, whilst on the other 'we find director and star systems in art cinema that closely parallel Hollywood's own structures, even where they reject its aesthetic hierarchies.'⁵⁴ Therefore while the art cinema 'contains an auteurist impulse; it 'demands a different version of authorship than the Hollywood auteur.'⁵⁵ Galt and Schoonover do not detail the particulars of this divergent concept of authorship, beyond remarking that 'auteur studies' have been rejected as 'an inadequate model of meaning production'.⁵⁶ Galt and Schoonover imply that it is the visibility and (political) agency of the figure of the author that matters, with the alternative space of the art cinema providing a platform for voices outside of the mainstream.⁵⁷ For this reason Galt and Schoonover argue that 'authorship takes on a pressing significance for thinking the potential of art cinema as a platform for political agency.'⁵⁸

The rejection of the aesthetic hierarchies of Hollywood recalls the modernist genre of author-function and the criteria of critical distance, while the description of art cinema as a platform for political agency is more in keeping with the politicised author-as-spokesperson of the feminist genre of author-function. Despite this clear similarity, Galt's and Schoonover's approach to authorship does not exactly fit the model of the feminist genre of author-function, as they do not specify the author as the representative of a gender, but rather as a representative of any marginalised or invisible identity. This is not however a return to the universal identity associated with the modernist genre of author-function, but rather a move to recognising the potential of constructing the author as a representative of a myriad of specific and intersecting identities, and thus building on the call to recognise the author as gendered, racialized, and politicised. Indeed, Galt's and Schoonover's approach to authorship differs enough from the

⁵³ Ibid, p. 7

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 7

⁵⁵ Galt and Schoonover, 'Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema', in *Global Art Cinema* ed. by Galt and Schoonover, pp. 3 – 27, p. 8

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 8

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 8

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 8

feminist genre of author-function to suggest the development of a range of explicitly politicised genres of author-function.

Considering the formal properties of art cinema, Galt and Schoonover list some typical features including ‘overt engagement of the aesthetic, unrestrained formalism’ and a pleasurable but loosened mode of narration, distanced from the structures and representations of classical Hollywood.⁵⁹ Galt and Schoonover maintain the pattern of defining art cinema as a departure from Hollywood cinemas, to the extent of claiming that the art film ‘might be seen as too slow or excessive in its visual style, use of colour, or characterisation’ in comparison to classical cinema.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the art film remains pleasurable and it is perhaps in this way that it remains distinct from the experimental or avant-garde film. Galt and Schoonover have no intention of promoting the art cinema as a space of pure art to be contrasted to the impurity of commercial Hollywood. Rather, they take the ‘impurity’ of art cinema to be its defining quality.⁶¹ Whether this implies that both poles of the spectrum are equally pure by virtue of their extremity (pure commerce, pure art) or whether art cinema is impure through its close association with Hollywood cinema is unclear.⁶²

In addition to confusing the binary of art/commerce, art cinema also combines the ‘otherwise incommensurate traditions’ of modernism and realism. According to Galt and Schoonover, art cinema ‘negotiated, merged, and complicated these competing impulses for audiences.’⁶³ The art cinema is realist to the extent that it follows the neorealist tradition having ‘the representation of the underrepresented’ as its ‘moral prerogative’.⁶⁴ This includes, for example, the representation of working class subjects, national subjects, or sexual minorities.⁶⁵ Conversely, art cinema is modernist to the extent that it ‘defines itself largely in opposition to

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 6

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 6

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 3 – 27, p. 6

⁶² The tone of Galt and Schoonover’s selection suggests a pluralistic celebration of the art cinema’s ‘mixed’ quality. Impurity remains a contentious term, however, suggesting as it does an absent ‘pure’ category.

⁶³ Galt and Schoonover, ‘Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema’, in *Global Art Cinema* ed. by Galt and Schoonover, pp. 3 – 27, p. 15

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 15

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 15

dominant realism', in a manner analogous to modernist literature's relationship to the nineteenth century novel.⁶⁶ Galt and Schoonover also identify as modernist the art cinema's exploration of 'subjectivity and temporality in ways that frustrate or attenuate classical Hollywood narrative.'⁶⁷ Galt and Schoonover further note that 'the art film extends its modernist tendencies in its privileging of internal conflicts, self-reflexivity, extradiegetic gestures, and duration over empiricist models of knowledge and pleasure'.⁶⁸ Galt and Schoonover build upon Bordwell's observation that art cinema is a hybrid form in which realism and modernism co-exist, adding that 'art cinema operates in a dialectical (or at least triangulating) fashion that demands we overcome the binary debate.'⁶⁹ While Galt and Schoonover associate representation of minorities with realism, it can alternatively be understood as a further example of their deployment and development of the author-as-spokesperson associated with the feminist-genre of author-function. This recalls Neale's claim that all the various forms of differentiation from – and critique of – Hollywood cinema are understood as evidence of the unique voice of the author.

In addition to categorising art cinema as impure, Galt and Schoonover also claim that art cinema 'constitutes a peculiarly impure spectator'.⁷⁰ The spectator is impure in the sense that they are asked 'to be both intellectually engaged and emotionally affected.'⁷¹ According to Galt and Schoonover, this impure form of spectatorship calls for aesthetic distance, but a distance 'constantly crossed with an emotive bodily response'.⁷² Galt and Schoonover note that this appeal to emotions and the body is often read as a 'failure of difficulty' for those critics 'writing from a modernist Marxist perspective'.⁷³ There is an intriguing parallel here with the opposition of distanced contemplation and mere bodily sensation in the previous chapter, suggesting that

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 16

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 16

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 16

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 17

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 3 – 27, p. 8

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 8

⁷² Ibid, p. 8

⁷³ Ibid, p. 8

the ‘failure of difficulty’ identified by Galt and Schoonover may also be conceptualised as a failure of critical distance in terms of the modernist genre of author-function. Similarly, the confusion of boundaries of mind and body suggested in the impure spectator’s constant crossing between the emotive and the intellectual recall the rejection of critical distance in favour of contemplation through intimacy examined in relation to *Déjà Vu*. Further parallels can be drawn between the analysis of categories of spectacle in the previous chapter and Galt and Schoonover’s consideration of the status of the image in art cinema.

Galt and Schoonover follow Barbra Klinger in asserting that the predominant feature of art cinema is ‘the spectacular, enigmatic and captivating image’.⁷⁴ They interpret this to mean that the ‘art of art cinema’ derives from the characteristic ‘overabundant visuality’ of the art film.⁷⁵ Klinger herself expresses a similar sentiment in her observation that what she terms the ‘arresting image’, epitomizes ‘the visual expressiveness usually associated with art films’ and is a ‘signature element of the genre.’⁷⁶ According to Klinger the arresting image occurs ‘when a film stops to contemplate an exquisitely composed, significantly evocative and/or uncanny image.’ The narrative halts or slows in momentum in order to allow ‘this spectacle to capture fully our attention.’⁷⁷ Klinger’s phrasing echoes King’s definition of the category of contemplative spectacle. The similar function of contemplative spectacle and the arresting image is also apparent in Klinger’s characterisation of the arresting image as the ‘money shot’ of the art film ‘insofar as it delivers payoff for one of the genre’s chief expected pleasures’⁷⁸ Unlike contemplative spectacle, the arresting image is not solely aligned with critical distance and intellectual contemplation but also emotional engagement, exposing audiences to ‘an intense perceptual moment not immediately comprehensible in terms of narrative function or theme, yet

⁷⁴ Barbara Klinger, ‘The art film, affect and the female viewer: *The Piano* revisited’ *Screen* 47:1 (Spring 2006), 19 – 41, p. 24 quoted in Galt and Schoonover, ‘Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema’, in *Global Art Cinema* ed. by Galt and Schoonover, pp. 3 – 27, p. 18

⁷⁵ Galt and Schoonover, ‘Introduction: The Impurity of Art Cinema’, in *Global Art Cinema* ed. by Galt and Schoonover, pp. 3 – 27, p. 18

⁷⁶ Barbara Klinger, ‘The art film, affect and the female viewer: *The Piano* revisited’ *Screen* 47:1 (Spring 2006), 19 – 41, p. 24

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 24

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 24

oddly touching or emotionally compelling.’⁷⁹ This recalls the blurring of the boundaries between the intellectual and the emotion associated with Galt and Schoonover’s impure spectator, as well as the notion of contemplation through intimacy. However, despite this compelling blurring of boundaries, the arresting image still functions in terms of critical distance in its role as marker of difference from the Hollywood norm. Klinger observes that the arresting image’s coupling of ambiguous meanings with ‘stylized visual feats’ serves to mark the art film as exceptional and as ‘as existing outside of mass culture’s ordinary fray.’⁸⁰

Ultimately, Klinger’s definition of art cinema follows those of Bordwell and Neale in granting centrality to the author. According to Klinger, the arresting image ‘radiates intentionality’ as ‘an especially self-conscious intervention of the filmmaker’s stylistic signature’.⁸¹ The arresting image clearly operates in terms of the modernist genre of author-function, the arresting image acting as a marker of unique voice that differs from the Hollywood norm. Despite the differences of emphasis across the definitions of art cinema examined here, the figure of the author is of central importance to each. Moreover, rather than art cinema being the most accommodating context for the construction of an author-text in terms of Romantic or modernist genres of author-function it is apparent that the entire category of art cinema *depends* upon the critical framework of the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function. In Galt and Schoonover’s words ‘only as a vessel of self-expression will the art film be able to achieve differentiation and commercial viability in a market dominated by Hollywood products.’⁸²

While the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function are clearly the dominant genres of author-function operating in the art cinema context, the construction of the art cinema as an oppositional and critical cinema of self-expression is also sympathetic to the feminist genre of author-function – although lacking the critical component of maintaining gender as theoretically and politically significant. While the discussions of authorship in art cinema

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 31

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 30

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 30

⁸² Ibid, p. 19

analysed above construct the figure of the author as exactly the kind of ‘universal’ (i.e. male) identity that the feminist genre of author-function opposes, Galt’s and Schoonover’s foregrounding of the importance of the art cinema as a platform for political agency suggests at the very least the potential for the construction of the author in terms of a more specific gendered, racialized, and politicised identity. Therefore, while authorship in art cinema may not be constructed in terms of the feminist genre of author-function, the art cinema nevertheless represents a potentially sympathetic context for the construction of the author according to the requirements of the feminist genre of author-function.

The identification of an alternative space for feminist film in opposition to the mainstream is a key concern of feminist aesthetics, and informs Laura Mulvey’s seminal essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. The identification of Mulvey’s essay with aesthetics is not an attempt to downplay the political and theoretical aspects of that work, but rather to draw attention to the fact that theoretical perspectives are also unavoidably aesthetic perspectives that value certain aesthetic strategies and not others. It is equally important to recognise that aesthetic preferences are not apolitical, a sentiment in keeping with Mulvey’s own focus on the concealed political and ideological dimensions of classical Hollywood aesthetics.

Outlining the approach taken in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey describes her appropriation of psychoanalytic theory as a ‘political weapon’ used to demonstrate ‘the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.’⁸³ For Mulvey, the challenge faced by feminist psychoanalytic inquiry is ‘how to fight the unconscious structured like a language [...] while still caught within the language of patriarchy’.⁸⁴ According to Mulvey, while an alternative to patriarchal thought cannot be created ‘out of the blue’, it is possible to ‘make a break’ in patriarchy by examining it with its own ‘tools’; psychoanalysis being an important example.⁸⁵ There are echoes of Jameson’s analysis of the utopian dimension

⁸³ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ *Screen* (1975), 16 (3): 6-18, p. 6

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 7

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 7

of Van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots* in Mulvey's claim that it is possible to create breaks in patriarchal thought using the tools of patriarchy. Just as *A Pair of Boots* makes use of the fragmentation of Capitalism and the division of labour in order to open up a pure utopian space of the senses, so psychoanalysis can be used to open up the cracks in patriarchal thought in the hope of opening a space outside of it.

While Mulvey initially seems sceptical of the potential for a utopian space outside of patriarchal thought, she does identify a utopian space outside of patriarchal Hollywood cinema. Mulvey suggests that the increased fragmentation of the Hollywood system, alongside the development of new cinematic technologies such as 16 mm film allows for the development of an alternative to patriarchal cinema. Mulvey claims that 'the alternative cinema provides a space for a cinema to be born which is radical *in both a political and an aesthetic sense*'.⁸⁶ Following Mulvey, the political and the aesthetic are inseparably entwined. This is as true of the mainstream as it is of the alternative cinema. According to Mulvey, the 'formal preoccupations' of the mainstream 'reflect the psychical obsessions' of patriarchal society.⁸⁷ For this reason the fledgling alternative cinema 'must start specifically by reacting against these obsessions and assumptions.'⁸⁸

The obsessions of mainstream cinema include scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic pleasure, or 'the pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight' and 'the constitution of the ego, through identification with the image seen' respectively.⁸⁹ Both forms of pleasure are catered to through a combination of aesthetic strategies. For example, the conventions of realism and continuity editing contribute to the perception of a film as a 'hermetically sealed world [...] indifferent to the audience' and thus fulfilling the voyeuristic pleasures of Scopophilia.⁹⁰ Similarly, the focus of attention to the human form encouraged by the conventions of mainstream cinema satisfies the narcissistic pleasure of the

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 7 – 8 emphasis added

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 8

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 8

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 10

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 9

male spectator.⁹¹ Conventions that reproduce the ‘conditions of human perception’ – such as deep focus, invisible editing, and camera movements determined by the action of the protagonist – also contribute to the satisfaction of narcissistic pleasure.⁹² According to Mulvey, these techniques replicate the conditions of the mirror phase and encourage the male spectator’s identification with the male hero of the film as a ‘more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego’.⁹³ This representation of the male hero as ‘a figure in a landscape’ is in stark contrast to the representation of women.⁹⁴ Mulvey draws particular attention to the ways in which conventional presentation of women through close-ups presents a fragmented body that ‘destroys’ any sense of the screen as three-dimensional space, and with it the illusion of depth demanded by narrative.⁹⁵ This difference in representation of men and women serves to align male characters with narrative and female characters with or as spectacle.⁹⁶ The potentially disruptive quality of the ‘alien presence’ of the woman-as-spectacle is counteracted through the integration of the woman in to the narrative solely in terms of the feelings she inspires in the male hero.⁹⁷

Mulvey’s psychoanalytic analysis of classical Hollywood cinema demonstrates the ways in which stylistic conventions such as continuity editing, realism, and even narrative are not innocent but rather implicated in the ideology of patriarchy. Following Mulvey, an alternative feminist cinema can only be politically opposed to the patriarchal mainstream cinema if it also rejects the aesthetic practices of the mainstream. In the conclusion to ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, Mulvey suggests some ways in which the voyeuristic-scopophilic look of mainstream cinema might be ‘broken down’, and in doing so hints at what the aesthetic

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 9

⁹² Ibid, p. 13

⁹³ Ibid, p. 12

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 13

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 12

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 12

⁹⁷ Mulvey quotes Budd Boetticher on the narrative role of women: ‘what counts is what the heroine provokes [...] In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.’ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ *Screen* (1975), 16 (3): 6-18, p. 11

strategies of the alternative cinema might be.⁹⁸ Where mainstream cinema seeks to ‘eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in audience’, the alternative cinema must draw attention to the ‘material existence of the recording equipment’ and so ‘free the look of the camera in to its materiality in time and space’.⁹⁹ Where the aesthetic strategies of mainstream cinema prevent the spectator ‘from achieving any distance from the image’ the aesthetic strategies of the alternative cinema allow for ‘passionate detachment’.¹⁰⁰ Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ therefore constitutes an aesthetic system that values certain aesthetic strategies above others as markers of political opposition rather than ideological complicity.

While Mulvey’s essay does not directly address issues of authorship, the call for an alternative cinema positioned ‘outside’ of the mainstream both politically and aesthetically does reflect the oppositional impulse of the feminist genre of author-function.¹⁰¹ Mulvey’s essay is centrally concerned with determining how films can be made to reflect the subjectivity of women. By analysing the structuring male gaze of Hollywood cinema, Mulvey is able to demonstrate the ways in which women’s subjectivity is systematically excluded. It is through rejecting the aesthetic strategies associated with the male gaze that Mulvey’s proposed alternate cinema is presumably able to make space for the representation of the subjectivity of women. This echoes the call for the representation of the lived experience of women associated with the feminist genre of author-function. Furthermore, Mulvey’s essay is underpinned by an understanding of the author as spokesperson and representative for a community that share a specific gendered identity. However, rather than any explicit call for women filmmakers, the understanding of the author as spokesperson most clearly manifests in Mulvey’s identification of the ways in which the aesthetic strategies of mainstream cinema reflect the obsessions of patriarchal society. It is therefore impossible for a female director to act as spokesperson using

⁹⁸ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ *Screen* (1975), 16 (3): 6-18, p. 17

⁹⁹ *Ibid* pp. 17 - 18

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 18

¹⁰¹ Part of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ is however concerned with a comparative reading of the representation of voyeurism and fetishism in the films of Hitchcock and Von Sternberg

mainstream aesthetics, as they actually serve to exclude women's subjectivity. Following Mulvey, it is only through the adoption of alternative aesthetic strategies, in an alternative cinematic context, that it is possible to represent female subjectivity, and thus for the director to act as spokesperson.

Mulvey's call for an alternative cinema and the definitions of art cinema above are united by a shared emphasis on the oppositional. This is also a key aspect of the feminist genre of author-function. However, not all feminist film theory adopts the strongly oppositional stance of Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. One near contemporaneous alternative is Claire Johnston's 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', which challenges the straightforward opposition of artistic, oppositional art cinema and commercial, ideologically complicit Hollywood. Johnston demonstrates how experimental and art cinema techniques of *vérité* realism and montage are just as ideologically implicated as the entertainment film. Like Mulvey, Johnston aligns feminist filmmaking with a critical stance towards the mainstream, arguing that the objectification of women in cinema can 'only be challenged by developing the means to interrogate male, bourgeois cinema.'¹⁰² Johnston is however critical of the naïve belief that there can be a pure space of cinema not implicated in ideology. Johnston understands ideology as something pervasive that cannot simply be eradicated by an act of will. According to Johnston, experimental and political films are as much 'products of an existing system of economic relations' as the entertainment film.¹⁰³ The art cinema and entertainment cinema are not only complicit in terms of economics. According to Johnston 'the tools and techniques of cinema' are themselves ideologically complicit, and the belief in the neutrality of the cinematic apparatus is itself a myth of the prevailing ideology.¹⁰⁴ Presenting the art film and entertainment film as equally implicated in economic concerns does not rob the art film of meaning, but rather

¹⁰² Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in *Auteurs and Authorship*, in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 119-126, p. 124

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 124

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124

elevates the entertainment film, granting it the political heft usually reserved for the art film.

Both forms may be equally complicit, but they are also both potentially meaningful.

The contrasting positions of Mulvey and Johnston regarding the suitability of oppositional and mainstream cinema practices for feminist critique represent divergent strands of feminist film theory that have significant impact on the ways critics approach and characterise the Potter oeuvre. In particular, where Potter has been the subject of auteurist analysis, the Potter film texts have tended to be treated as comprising a fractured or divided oeuvre, framed as a transition from the oppositional to the mainstream. For example, Fowler observes that Potter's early films 'deconstructed the mainstream representation of women' and denied access to the aesthetics of visual pleasure.¹⁰⁵ While the early films are associated with Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Fowler notes a shift in the later films away from outright denial of visual pleasure to an 'overt sense of "knowingness"' in line with similar developments in theory.¹⁰⁶ Lucy Fischer sees a similar transition dramatized in *The Tango Lesson*. According to Fischer, the abandonment of the 'Rage' film project by the character Sally is symbolic of discarding an antiquated feminist rage 'that might have been novel in the late seventies' in favour of the pursuit of pleasure.¹⁰⁷ Fischer's conflation of the character Sally with the director Sally Potter leads her to map the narrative of *The Tango Lesson* onto Potter's career, describing Sally's rejection of the 'Rage' project as in the spirit of 'feminist revision', and as a dramatization of Potter's move from 'the confines of experimental cinema to the broader realm of modernist narrative.'¹⁰⁸ For Fowler, this transition is less clear-cut. Where *Thriller* is 'a practical exploration' of Mulvey's essay,¹⁰⁹ *The Gold Diggers* is theoretically rooted in a more complex time, 'between the advocacy of a kind of anticinema – and the movement towards

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Fowler, 'Cinefeminism in its Middle Ages, or "Please, Please, Give me Back My Pleasure": The 1990s Work of Sally Potter, Chantal Ackerman, and Yvonne Rainer' in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. by Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, Valerie Raoul (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 51 – 61, p. 55

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57

¹⁰⁷ Lucy Fischer, "'Dancing through the Minefield": Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*' *Cinema Journal* 43:3 Spring (2004), 42 – 58

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45

¹⁰⁹ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 48

feminist interventions in the mainstream.’¹¹⁰ According to Fowler, *Orlando* marks the completion of this transition from ‘overtly feminist politics of sexual difference to more ‘humanist’ assertions.’¹¹¹ This is accompanied by an aesthetic shift from ‘complex counter cinema strategies’ to a simpler ‘classical’ narrative structure and from the avant-garde to the context of art cinema.¹¹²

Fowler and Fischer both characterise the perceived break in Potter’s oeuvre as an aesthetic transition from the oppositional to the mainstream, accompanied by a related thematic or theoretical shift. Fowler identifies a gradual aesthetic and thematic shift, composed of several stages. For Fowler, *The Gold Diggers* marks a shift towards the mainstream that nevertheless remains within the bounds of feminist politics. With *Orlando*, however, the aesthetic shift towards the mainstream is accompanied by a thematic shift from feminism to humanism. This transition is immediately problematic from the perspective of the feminist genre of author-function, and represents a move away from a concern with representing the specifics of gendered identity in favour of precisely the kind of universal identity that the feminist genre of author-function challenges. Fowler appears to map a trajectory whereby Potter’s films become less feminist as they become more mainstream, or rather the move towards the mainstream prevents the continued construction of the Potter author-text in terms of the feminist genre of author-function because Potter no longer meets the requirement of being oppositional to the mainstream. Although Fowler does not present the transition from feminism to humanism as a failure, it nevertheless has the effect of presenting the later mainstream films as lacking the oppositional and critical impulse of the earlier films.

Although Fowler identifies *Orlando* with a departure from explicitly feminist politics, she does not frame the movement towards the mainstream as the wholesale abandonment of critique. Fowler is able to do this by adopting the modernist genre of author-function in relation

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 49

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 63

¹¹² Ibid, p. 63

to *Orlando*, rather than the feminist genre of author-function. For example, despite identifying *Orlando* with mainstream aesthetic strategies, Fowler claims that there are still ‘elements recognizable from [Potter’s] early work [...] which disrupt the illusion that is otherwise created’.¹¹³ This serves to frame *Orlando* in terms of critical distance, suggesting that while it adopts more mainstream aesthetic strategies it does so only to critique them. Switching to the modernist genre of author-function is useful for Fowler, as it allows for the continued construction of Potter as auteur even when the films apparently fail to match the criteria of the feminist genre of author-function Fowler originally adopts. However, constructing the Potter author-text in relation to more than one genre of author-function results in a fractured author-text that cannot fulfil its unifying function, resulting in a fractured oeuvre with different texts organised according to different genres of author-function.

Fowler’s adoption of the modernist genre of author-function can also be read as an attempt to avoid classification of *Orlando* as postmodern. *Orlando*’s failure to conform to the requirements of the feminist genre of author-function means that the film runs the risk of being classified negatively as postmodern – that is as ideological complicit. Additionally, Fowler observes that the tendency to treat Potter’s films individually has led to critics incorrectly identifying *Orlando* as postmodern; focusing on the film’s ‘postgender’ politics and parodic styles rather than reading the film as a continuation of the concerns evident in Potter’s early performance art work.¹¹⁴ For Fowler, postmodernism is a classification to be avoided because it represents the absence of critique associated with both the feminist and modernist genres of author-function.

Fischer’s treatment of the shift from the oppositional to the mainstream differs from that of Fowler, and avoids the pitfall associated with constructing the Potter author-text according to more than one genre of author-function. Fischer frames the perceived shift from the oppositional to the mainstream as a transition from one type of feminism to another,

¹¹³ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 63

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9

characterising the previous type as ‘antiquated’. This suggests an attempt to ground Potter’s oeuvre historically in accordance with developments in feminist film theory. The multiplicity and elasticity of feminist film theory allows for the Potter filmography to be conceptualised in a more unified fashion, with the break configured as a transition and mapped on to historical shifts in feminist film theory. While this does have the effect of imposing a sort of unity on the Potter oeuvre, the unifying role is performed by the history of feminist film theory rather than the Potter author-text. Furthermore, it has the effect of constructing the film texts as no more than reflections of changing trends in feminist film theory. The filmography is subsumed in the greater unity of feminist film and loses its specificity as the oeuvre of an author.

Fischer’s mapping of the Potter oeuvre to ‘developments’ in feminist film theory suggests a historical progression from the strictly oppositional stance represented by Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ to later feminisms open to possibility of feminist critique from within the mainstream. Johnston’s ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’ is a clear example of the latter, although it should be noted that both ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’ and Mulvey’s ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ are examples of seventies feminist film theory, suggesting that the historical progression from oppositional to mainstream in feminist film theory is not as clear cut as Fischer suggests. Furthermore, Fischer seems to imply a trajectory from rejection of the mainstream in favour of the oppositional to the wholesale acceptance of the mainstream and rejection of the oppositional. Johnston does not exchange the oppositional for the mainstream but rather treats *both* as valid contexts for feminist filmmaking. For Johnston *all* forms of cinema are ideologically complicit, but this complicity does not undermine their political potential. Johnston therefore provides a way of classifying all of Potter’s oeuvre as potentially feminist and political without imposing a teleological narrative of change and transition.

There is also a clear overlap between Johnston’s position in ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter Cinema’ and Hutcheon’s notion of complicitous critique. This is encouraging in

regards to the suitability of adopting the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function, as it is evidence of a sympathetic fit between the postmodern genre of author-function and a particular strand of feminist film theory. This suggests that the identification of Potter as postmodern filmmaker need not be at the expense of Potter as a feminist filmmaker. The following section will examine the genres of author-function operating in the literature on Potter in more detail, and assess the suitability of adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function.

Sally Potter and Genres of Author-function

As noted in the previous section, critics have typically examined Potter's films individually rather than from an auteurist perspective. Nevertheless there are critics that identify Potter as an auteur, such as Anne Ciecko who describes Potter as an auteur 'in the most contemporary sense'.¹¹⁵ Ciecko does not elaborate on what the most contemporary sense of being an auteur might entail, other than observing that Potter makes 'contemporary British feature films as international co-productions [...] with a unique artistic vision' that challenges 'the conventions of narrative cinema and gendered points of view'.¹¹⁶ This elaboration does at least suggest that part of Potter's status as auteur is the result of her ability to make films that retain a national specificity in an international context, and of her oppositional stance to a patriarchal mainstream cinema. Ciecko's characterisation of Potter echoes, in condensed form, the authorial requirements of the feminist genre of author-function, and yet auteurist interest in Potter remains limited. This lack of interest may in part be explained by Ciecko's addition of 'contemporary' to auteur, implying that Potter's mode of being an auteur somehow exceeds traditional theories of authorship.

A similar distrust of conventional theories of authorship is evident in Sophie Mayer's characterisation of her work as both auteurist and not auteurist. Mayer acknowledges that, due to its focus on the work of a single director, her book is in an auteurist tradition and therefore

¹¹⁵ Ciecko, 'Sally Potter', in *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors*, ed. by Tasker, pp. 329 – 338, p. 335

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 335

treats individual works as part of a greater whole. Mayer adds the caveat that while she may ‘season’ her books with ‘archival material and long quotations from interviews’, she does this neither to encourage biographical readings ‘nor to cede to Potter control over the meanings of her films’.¹¹⁷ Mayer instead argues that the inclusion of such material permits her to explore the tension between Potter’s commitment to ‘collaboration and conversation’ and her identification as an auteur ‘by the system’.¹¹⁸ Mayer is clearly dissatisfied with the framing of the author as ultimate source and end to all meaning that stems from the privileging of self-expression in the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function. Mayer’s suspicion reflects the unsuitability of this notion of authorship to a collaborative medium such as film, and may also be understood in terms of the feminist genre of author-function’s rejection of the masculine individuality of Romanticism. Mayer’s hesitation between alignment with auteurism and differentiation from auteurism also reflects the tension between recognising that authorship is in some sense outmoded or discredited and the persistence of authorship as both critical approach and marker of aesthetic value.

Catherine Fowler is also attentive to the role of Potter’s collaborators, but ultimately grants Potter superiority. While Fowler refers to ‘Potter’s camera’, she describes how that camera is ‘directed by internationally acclaimed cinematographers’.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Fowler lists the editors who have worked with Potter, but refers to ‘her editing’.¹²⁰ Elsewhere in her book, Mayer describes Potter as an ‘auteur-as-collaborator’, the modification of the term auteur once again reflecting distrust or dissatisfaction with the ability of existing genres of author-function to properly account for Potter.¹²¹ For both Fowler and Mayer, collaboration appears to be a key aspect of Potter’s authorial persona. For Mayer, collaboration is ‘at the heart’ of Potter’s work, with Mayer extending the concept of collaboration to include not only those involved in the

¹¹⁷ Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, p. 12

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12

¹¹⁹ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 30

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 30

¹²¹ Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, p. 9

production of the film, but the viewer too.¹²² Fowler's treatment of collaboration is somewhat more ambiguous, suggesting that Potter's films set up a dialectical relation between 'company' and 'creativity'.¹²³ Fowler finds this dialectic indicative of the tension between a director's need to find a 'distinctive style' against the 'pressures and compromises' involved in the collaborative process of making films.¹²⁴

Despite Mayer's distancing herself from a merely biographical auteurism, Mayer nevertheless relies heavily on biographical anecdote, with the result that *Thriller*, for example, emerges as a direct result of the time spent by Potter and Rose English living in Squats in the seventies.¹²⁵ This presents *Thriller* as a translation of Potter's lived experience, a move compatible with the favouring of lived experience associated with the feminist genre of author-function but also strays in to the privileging of self-expression associated with the Romantic genre of author-function, and which Mayer supposedly wishes to distance herself from. Catherine Fowler is similarly reliant on the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, particularly in privileging originality and self-expression. Attempting to establish the value of *The Tango Lesson* in comparison with *Thriller*, Fowler argues that in the latter film Potter merely questions how a pre-existing narrative 'is put together around the woman', whereas Potter is 'fully in control of the narrative' of *The Tango Lesson*.¹²⁶ Seen through the critical framework of the Romantic genre of author-function, *Thriller*'s too close relationship to previous texts marks it as insufficiently authored in comparison to the originality of *The Tango Lesson*. While *Thriller* may compare unfavourably with *The Tango Lesson* in terms of the Romantic genre of author-function and originality, the film can be alternatively valued from the perspectives of modernist or feminist genres of author-function in terms of critical distance and critique or as an example of oppositional feminist filmmaking respectively. Shifting to these

¹²² Ibid, p. 5

¹²³ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 23

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 24

¹²⁵ Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, p. 14

¹²⁶ Catherine Fowler, 'Cinefeminism in its Middle Ages' in *Women Filmmakers*, ed. by, Levitin, Plessis, Raoul, pp. 51 – 61, p. 58

alternative perspectives insures against classification of the film as insufficiently original or the classification of the Potter author-text in terms of the category of postmodern non-author because of this.

The desire to avoid classification of Potter with postmodernism was touched upon in the previous section in reference to Fowler's reading of *Orlando* in terms of Potter's earlier performance art work. Fowler claims that exposure to the 'early, earnestly feminist, performance-artist side of Potter' allows the viewer to 'see the tension in *Orlando* between the purely cinematic elements [...] and more theatrical effects.'¹²⁷ Fowler is able to avoid classification of *Orlando* as postmodern by reconfiguring the film's violations of the classic norm in terms of the theatrical, here performing the role of value granting courtesy term. Elsewhere, Fowler describes Potter's performance work as 'in keeping with the modernist bent' of the sixties and seventies.¹²⁸ Potter's background in performance art is of particular importance to a number of critics. Corinn Columpar, for example, stresses the importance of dance to all of Potter's work, not just those that directly refer to it. For Columpar, dance is the defining feature of Potter's work, claiming that *Orlando* is 'marked by its maker' in its foregrounding of 'how socially structured movement serves to gender bodies.'¹²⁹ In this way Columpar is able to mobilise the biographical detail of Potter's training in dance to impose unity on Potter's oeuvre. This unity even extends beyond Potter's filmography, Columpar drawing a line from Potter's performance art to *Orlando*. Mayer extends Potter's oeuvre even further beyond the cinematic, identifying a 'fluid continuum' between Sally Potter's performance art and expanded cinema works and Potter's embracing of the possibilities of the internet with the online Sally Potter Archive (SP-ARK) and Potter's own website.¹³⁰ Again, otherwise

¹²⁷ The 'theatrical' effects noted by Fowler include the use of song and dance, looks to camera and 'the ironic use of well known performers' Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 2

¹²⁸ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 13

¹²⁹ Corinn Columpar, 'The Dancing Body: Sally Potter as Feminist Auteure' in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. by Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, Valerie Raoul (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 108 – 116, p. 111

¹³⁰ Sophie Mayer, 'Expanding the Frame: Sally Potter's Digital Histories and Archival Futures' *Screen* 49:2 2008 194 – 202, p. 195

contentiously postmodern elements of Potter's oeuvre are safely grounded in the borrowed artistic legitimacy of Potter's performance art backgrounds.

Both Fowler and Mayer single out the look to camera and breaking of the fourth wall as important aspects of Potter's filmmaking.¹³¹ Fowler identifies this as a specifically theatrical technique, again employing the courtesy term, whereas for Mayer the breaking of the fourth wall is indicative of Potter's dedication to 'creating interactive spaces, whether on stage, on film or online' and 'expanding the frame not only in terms of formal and narrative experimentation, but expanding it into the audience.'¹³² Fowler also reads Potter's self-reflexivity in terms of audience interactivity, interpreting the looks to camera and use of music as a way to 'draw in [the] audience, pulling them beyond passive involvement' by undermining the illusion of realism.¹³³ This represents an interesting inversion of the category of critical distance, as it combines active and critical involvement with being 'drawn in'. This echoes the rejection of critical distance in favour of engagement through intimacy identified in the previous chapter, as well as blurring of the intellectual and the emotional, which Galt and Schoonover associate with the art film. Contrary to Galt and Schoonover, Fowler rejects the importance of the image, claiming that the key to meaning in Potter's films resides in the 'reverse look of characters', which serves to create 'the bridge between audience and film', rather than in the contemplation of images.¹³⁴ Indeed Fowler goes so far as to claim that the restless camera and rapid scene transitions of Potter's films 'actively discourage the contemplation of the film's images'.¹³⁵

Fowler does not consistently conceptualise the look to camera in terms of engagement through intimacy, with the deployment of the technique in the film texts preceding *Orlando* understood in terms of critical distance. In these films, the look-to-camera functions to 'force

¹³¹ Fowler, *Sally Potter* pp. 8–9; Sophie Mayer, 'Expanding the Frame: Sally Potter's Digital Histories and Archival Futures' *Screen* 49:2 (2008), 194–202, p. 195

¹³² Mayer describes this expansion of the cinematic frame to include the audience as creating 'a feminist cyber network', terms reflecting Mayer's taking up of Haraway's cyborg manifesto. Fowler, *Sally Potter* pp. 8–9; Sophie Mayer, 'Expanding the Frame: Sally Potter's Digital Histories and Archival Futures' *Screen* 49:2 2008 194–202., p. 195

¹³³ Fowler, *Sally Potter* pp. 8–9

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31

the audience to stand back from films' and acknowledge their ideological complicity and 'adopt a reflective attitude and active intellectual engagement.'¹³⁶ Post-*Orlando*, the looks 'invite the audience in' to share the protagonist's commentary.¹³⁷ The look to camera in the pre-*Orlando* film maintains a strict distance between viewer and film, the film critiquing the complicity of the viewer from a space outside of the viewer's ideology. Recognition of this critique mobilises the viewer to action.¹³⁸ The look to camera in the post-*Orlando* films works in opposition to this, striving to bridge the divide between viewer and film. Fowler recommends that these looks to camera should not be seen as chances to 'stand apart' from Potter's films but 'to create bridges of reciprocation'.¹³⁹ The post-*Orlando* look to camera therefore more closely resembles Fowler's earlier conceptualisation of the look to camera in terms that recall engagement through intimacy.

The manner in which Fowler distinguishes between the pre- and post-*Orlando* deployments of the look to camera recalls the mapping of the perceived break in the Potter filmography to shifts in feminist film theory. Therefore, whilst Fowler identifies the look to camera as unifying element of the Potter filmography, the distinction made between a mode of critical distance and a mode of engagement through intimacy Fowler nevertheless serves to construct it as divided. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the perception of the Potter oeuvre as divided results from the inability to impose unity on the entirety of the Potter oeuvre by adopting a single genre of author-function, reflected in the adoption of the feminist genre of author-function in relation to the oppositional and political early films and the modernist genre of author-function in relation to the later films. I propose that the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the unification of the Potter oeuvre. Fowler's and Mayer's readings of self-reflexivity as prompts to engagement rather than distanciation are compatible with the critical

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 31

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 31

¹³⁸ See also the discussion of explosive spectacle and Soviet montage in the previous chapter

¹³⁹ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 31

perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function, despite Fowler's consistent resistance to too close an association of Potter with postmodernism.

Despite this resistance, there are critics who associate Potter with postmodernism. However, this is for the most part limited to consideration of *Orlando* as a postmodern film in isolation from the rest of the Potter filmography. Suzanne Ferriss and Kathleen Waites identify *Orlando* as postmodern because it emphasises the visual, a quality they find particularly conducive to the representation of postmodern subjectivity.¹⁴⁰ Maggie Humm also makes the connection between the visual, subjectivity, and postmodernism in her analysis of *Orlando*.¹⁴¹ Humm also associates *Orlando* with a move to surface, claiming that objects, surface, and music are the 'crucial signifiers' of the film, texture and colour coding replacing the cause and effect of narrative continuity.¹⁴² While Humm's analysis of the surface elements of *Orlando* eloquently demonstrates the ways in which the surface can be meaningful, her conceptualisation of the postmodern move to surface is unhelpful and does not do justice to the richness of her analysis of *Orlando*. For Humm, it is the attention of postmodernism to the surface that distinguishes it from post-structuralism, which is concerned with structures rather than surfaces.¹⁴³ Defining postmodernism solely as a move to the surface closely resembles the nihilistic conceptualisation of postmodernism as a lack of depth. Furthermore the upholding of a clear break between postmodernism and post-structuralism limits access to the affirmative conceptualisations of postmodernism such as Hutcheon's. This in turn robs postmodern works of political potential, as a concern with structures is essential to the de-naturalising and deconstructive impulse identified by Hutcheon.¹⁴⁴ Humm would not seem to hold too closely to this potentially nihilistic conceptualisation of postmodernism however, as her claim that *Orlando* is a postmodern film because of the ways it parodies the straightforwardly representational and

¹⁴⁰ Suzanne Ferriss and Kathleen Waites, 'Unclothing Gender: The Postmodern Sensibility in Sally Potter's *Orlando*' *Literature and Film Quarterly* (1999), 27:2 110 – 115, p. 110

¹⁴¹ Humm, *Feminism and Film*, p. 146

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 174

¹⁴³ Humm, *Feminism and Film*, p. 151

¹⁴⁴ This would also overlook the fact that the postmodern rejection of depth models is only intelligible in terms of structure, as it is a challenge to the hierarchical binary of depth/surface.

engages the spectator as a self-conscious and active contributor is more in line with the shared deconstructive impulse of postmodernism and post-structuralism.¹⁴⁵

The peculiarities of Humm's postmodernism no doubt stem from her attempt to conceptualise an affirmative, feminist alternative to Jameson's conception of postmodernism without reference to Hutcheon or post-structuralism more generally. Roberta Garrett's championing of Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction as a productive alternative to Jameson's category of the nostalgia film in Film Studies is more successful in this respect.¹⁴⁶ Garrett suggests that the restriction of discussion of postmodern film to Jameson's nostalgia mode is especially limiting when it comes to feminist analysis of postmodern films, as it fails to take account of films that 'playfully and self-consciously' make use of cinematic convention to 'undercut, rather than reinforce, the patriarchal logic of their antecedents'.¹⁴⁷

Historiographic metafiction is a very specific category of postmodern art, and while it is a label readily applicable to *Orlando* it is of limited relevance to the remainder of Potter's filmography besides *The Tango Lesson*. Nevertheless, historiographic metafiction does operate according to the same deconstructive impulse that informs the process of reworking and re-invention associated with the postmodern genre of author-function. This more general deconstructive impulse is identifiable across Potter's filmography. Mayer's observation that Potter's films demonstrate how 'visual technologies' produce and control gendered behaviour while resisting this process through the re-appropriation of the tools of oppression can be understood in these terms, while additionally recalling the double-voiced quality of postmodern parody and an acknowledgement that there is no pure space of critique outside of the system.¹⁴⁸ However, Mayer describes Potter's deconstructive attention to the apparatus of image making in

¹⁴⁵ Humm, *Feminism and Film*, p. 145

¹⁴⁶ Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 127

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128

¹⁴⁸ Sophie Mayer, 'Expanding the Frame: Sally Potter's Digital Histories and Archival Futures' *Screen* 49:2 (2008), 194 – 202, p. 195

terms of feminism, rather than postmodernism.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the overlap between Mayer's feminist reading of Potter and the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function suggests compatibility between the postmodern genre of author-function and a particular strand of feminist film theory.

From this brief survey of the existing literature on Sally Potter, it is clear that Potter's films are largely understood within the critical framework of the feminist genre of author-function, with occasional shifts to the modernist genre of author-function demonstrated in the resistance to identification of Potter's films as postmodern. The dominance of this framework is understandable given the positioning of Potter within the discourses of feminist film theory and art cinema. There are however aspects of Potter's persona that cannot be comfortably accommodated within this critical framework. In particular Mayer and Fowler's claims regarding the association of closeness and intimacy with critical engagement in Potter's work. Such championing of closeness is in particular antithetical to the modernist genre of author-function's criteria of critical distance. Despite some critics identifying a deconstructive impulse in Potter's work, most critics remain wary of classifying Potter as postmodern. Nevertheless, adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function would enable the tracing of new patterns of meaning across the Potter filmography and the reconceptualization of the Potter filmography as unified rather than fractured. The following section will explore these possibilities through close analysis of *Thriller*, *Orlando*, and *The Tango Lesson*. In addition to demonstrating the advantages of adopting the postmodern genre of author-function, the case studies will also continue to explore the compatibility of the postmodern genre of author-function with the concerns of feminist film theory and so determine the political and critical potential of the postmodern genre of author-function.

¹⁴⁹ Although Mayer does take up the work of Donna Haraway, she treats Haraway purely as a feminist theorist, rather than a theorist of feminist postmodernism (or postmodern feminism)

Case Studies: *Thriller*, *Orlando*, and *The Tango Lesson*

In the literature on Potter examined earlier in this chapter, *Thriller* emerges as the one text unequivocally identified as an ‘early film’ and associated with the strand of feminist film theory that favours the rejection of mainstream aesthetics, and thus interpreted in terms of critical distance and the modernist genre of author-function. This may at first glance make *Thriller* an unlikely candidate for consideration from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function. However, the film’s engagement with a number of intertexts can be approached productively in terms of the re-inventive impulse of postmodern genre of author-function. The primary intertexts of *Thriller* are Puccini’s *La Bohème* and the thriller genre, signalled through the title and repeated use of Bernard Herrmann’s *Psycho* score. The film’s title scene revels in the pulpy potential of the thriller, the aggressive strings of the *Psycho* theme accompanying the image of a screaming woman as ‘Thriller’ (in genre appropriate lettering) crawls from the bottom left (Figure 36). The sounds and images of the thriller are juxtaposed with photographs from performances of *La Bohème* and sound recordings of the opera.

One of the ways in which *Thriller* reworks *La Bohème* is by treating the death of Mimi as suspicious and a matter to be investigated. The film adopts the thriller genre as a lens through which to read and interrogate the opera, framing the analysis of *La Bohème* by Caroline Laffont’s character as a murder enquiry.¹⁵⁰ This also draws attention to the reliance of the generic pleasures of the thriller genre upon violence, typically towards women. In other words, there must be a murder before there can be a murder investigation. *Thriller*’s reworking of *La Bohème* through the conventions of the thriller establishes a link between the two, suggesting

¹⁵⁰ Laffont is credited as portraying Mimi/Mimi, suggesting the separated yet entwined quality of the film’s narrative. However, the slippage between characters is even greater than is suggested by the formations Mimi/Mimi for Laffont’s character and Mimi/Musetta for Rose English. The character identities of *Thriller* are mutable to an extent that renders the simple task of naming a character nigh on impossible. I will explore this instability later in the chapter, and for the sake of clarity, I shall refer primarily to the performer rather than the character. See also Jane Weinstock, ‘She Who Laughs First Laughs Last’, *Camera Obscura* 5 (Spring 1980), 100 – 110

that the pleasures of *La Bohème* are as dependent upon violence as *Psycho*.¹⁵¹ The ‘violence’ of opera is distinct from the violence of the thriller, as opera’s violence is hidden rather than overt. It thus requires an investigation to uncover it.

In addition to the reworking of *La Bohème* through the conventions of the thriller to investigate the violent exclusion of women from the narrative of *La Bohème, Thriller* simultaneously uses the opera as framework to make sense of a murder. This is suggested by certain discrepancies between the plot of *La Bohème* and the ‘murder’ narrative of *Thriller*. Laffont’s character claims that there are two bodies, and the investigator recalls the deaths of both Mimi and Musetta, despite Musetta not dying in *La Bohème*. This frustrates the attempt to distinguish between the opera and thriller intertexts in terms of a hierarchy of critical framework and object of analysis. The opera performs the role of critical framework to the murder investigation of the thriller narrative as much as the conventions of the thriller provide a framework through which to analyse the opera.¹⁵²

This mutual enfolding of text and intertext appears to reject the criteria of critical distance associated with the modernist genre of author-function. However, some sense of critical distance is potentially maintained by the apparent separation of the opera narrative and investigative narrative. This is achieved through the use of divergent aesthetic strategies, the opera narrative presented as re-photographed photographs, and the investigative narrative represented through a combination of stills and filmed segments in a setting that resembles (but is distinct from) the artists’ garret in the opera segments. For Kaplan, the separation between the contrasting spaces emphasises a separation between Colette Laffont’s character and the Mimi of the opera segments.¹⁵³ Kaplan sees this as a contrast between the suffering Mimi of the opera

¹⁵¹ The prominence of the death of the female heroine in nineteenth century opera is the subject of Catherine Clément’s study *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. Clément’s chapter on *La Bohème* is particularly interesting in comparison to *Thriller*, with both Potter and Clément drawing similar conclusions. See Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. by Betsy Wing (London: Virago Press, 1989), pp. 83 – 87

¹⁵² This recalls the relationship between Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *The Odyssey*, *La Bohème* serves as a useful lens through which to read *Thriller* while the film is itself a reading of the opera.

¹⁵³ E. Ann Kaplan, ‘Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter’s *Thriller*’ *Millennium Film Journal*, 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 117

and the questioning Mimi played by Laffont.¹⁵⁴ Kaplan marks this distinction by referring to the character played by Laffont as Mimi 1 and the Mimi of the opera text as Mimi 2.¹⁵⁵ The separation and contrast between Mimi 1 and Mimi 2 is important to Kaplan, as Mimi 2 is merely an Object trapped within patriarchal discourse whereas Mimi 1 is a (questioning) Subject, challenging such restrictions.¹⁵⁶ Kaplan notes how this contrast is conveyed at a visual level, with Laffont's short hair, androgynous costuming, and deeper voice contrasting to the traditional markers of femininity associated with Mimi 2.¹⁵⁷ Kaplan's emphasis on separation frames *Thriller* in terms of critical distance and the modernist genre of author-function. However, Kaplan's analysis does not take in to account how this apparent separation is continuously complicated and challenged, with the distinction between the spaces and narratives of the opera and thriller segments frequently destabilised.

One way in which this apparent separation is challenged is through repeated symbolic use of arabesque to suggest a connection between thriller and opera narratives. This construction of symbolic associations across intertexts serves to demonstrate that both are similarly implicated in the violent exclusion of women, no matter how innocent or critically distant they may appear. Kaplan also notes the significance of the arabesque, explaining that it represents the perfect form of the female body, but that it can only be held whilst the woman is unable to move.¹⁵⁸ The arabesque motif is first introduced in Laffont's voiceover description of the murder, noting that the murdered woman was carried out 'frozen in arabesque'. The arabesque is thus associated with death, whilst frozen resonates with the questions Laffont's character raises regarding Rodolfo's attraction to Mimi's frozen hand. Arabesque thus comes to represent women in stasis, frozen or dead, and how this stasis is both desirable and necessary in male driven narratives.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 116

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 116

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 116

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 116

¹⁵⁸ E. Ann Kaplan, 'Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter's *Thriller*' *Millennium Film Journal*, 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 118

Kaplan also focuses on the frozen symbolism of the arabesque, linking this to the frozen qualities of the still images used to illustrate the opera narrative.¹⁵⁹ However Kaplan identifies frozenness as solely a quality associated with the opera narrative, contrasting the frozen opera stills with the attic space of the investigative narrative; which Kaplan identifies as a space of movement.¹⁶⁰ Rather than emphasising the separation of the opera narrative from other elements of the film as Kaplan suggests, the symbolic use of the arabesque is in fact one way in which this apparent separation is destabilised. Kaplan's analysis overlooks the fact that much of the investigative sequence is also conveyed through still images. This shared aesthetic encourages interpretation of the opera and investigative narratives in terms of similarity, rather than difference. The alignment of the opera narrative with still images and therefore stasis in opposition to the theme of movement in the investigative narrative is further challenged by performance of the arabesque in the filmed segments. Through inclusion of the arabesque, even those moments of movement and agency are invested with the frozen qualities of the arabesque. Far from being a utopian space of pure critique, the investigative narrative is just as implicated in keeping women in stasis as the opera. In addition to uniting the otherwise disparate spaces of the opera narrative and the investigative narrative, the symbolic use of the arabesque serves to demonstrate the ways in which the thriller and opera are equally implicit in the violent suppression of women.

The performance of the arabesque also plays an important role in the film's reworking of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and (post-) structuralist theory. The film's engagement with various strands of theory is signalled through a scene in which the character portrayed by Colette Laffont translates passages from *Théorie d'ensemble*, a collection of writing from the *Tel Quel* group.¹⁶¹ Laffont's voiceover claims to be searching for a theory to explain her death, but also her life; playing on the multiple meanings of the word theory as both critical framework and as

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 117

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 117 – 188

¹⁶¹ The *Tel Quel* group included Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and Kristeva amongst its members, and was key to the development of poststructuralism.

hypothesis, in the sense of ‘I’ve got a theory’. This would appear to grant theory the privileged position of explanatory framework. However, the scene in which Laffont translates portions of *Théorie d’ensemble* in to English serves to disrupt the hierarchical opposition of critical framework and object of study by presenting theory as a text to be deciphered within the diegesis in addition to being a critical framework. In a later scene, Laffont reads from *Théorie d’ensemble* as English positions herself in arabesque against the wall (Figure 37). This suggests that theory, like opera and thriller, also depends upon frozen women. This in turn undermines the apparent objectivity of theory, demonstrating that it too is part of a violent patriarchal discourse.

Thriller’s challenge to the objective explanatory power of theory prompts Mellencamp to interpret Laffont’s laughter when reading *Théorie d’ensemble* as a rejection of theory in favour of the lived experience of women.¹⁶² Mayer also sees theory as something to be discarded, claiming that Laffont’s focus on the ‘outdated theoretical text’ prevents her from saving Rose English’s character.¹⁶³ Kaplan offers an alternative conceptualisation of the treatment of theory in the film. Kaplan suggests that *Thriller* does not reject theory, but rather rejects the belief that ‘texts’ contain the answers. Kaplan instead claims that ‘one has to discover the answers through one’s own *questions*.’¹⁶⁴ Following Kaplan, *Thriller* does not treat theories as answers, but rather as tools for asking questions.

Thriller’s attitude towards all its intertexts, theory included, is that of complicitous critique. *Thriller*’s taking up of theory and the thriller as investigative frameworks acknowledges that there is no pure outside space of critique that resists implication in the object of its criticism. This is reinforced by the simultaneous mapping of the investigative narrative to the framework of the opera, the Möbius-like enfolding of the intertexts ensuring that there is no outside space or master discourse. However, the complicity of theory and the thriller does not

¹⁶² Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance*, p. 158

¹⁶³ Sophie Mayer, ‘Expanding the Frame: Sally Potter’s Digital Histories and Archival Futures’ *Screen* 49:2 2008 194 – 202, p. 37

¹⁶⁴ E. Ann Kaplan, ‘Night at the Opera: Investigating the Heroine in Sally Potter’s *Thriller*’ *Millennium Film Journal*, 10/11 (Fall 1981/Winter 1982), 115 – 122, p. 120

rule out their usefulness as tools of analysis and investigation, as demonstrated in the taking up of psychoanalytic and Marxist frameworks in the re-examination and re-telling of the narrative of *La Bohème*. It is this reworking of all three intertexts – opera, thriller, and theory – through the process of re-telling that most obviously marks *Thriller* in terms of the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function.

When Laffont's character first recounts the story of *La Bohème*, she tells it from the perspective of Rodolfo and the other artists. Adopting different theoretical perspectives allows Laffont's character to plot a different course through the narrative. Each retelling is a repetition in difference, mapped according to either a psychoanalytic or Marxist perspective. This allows Laffont's character to recount the story from Mimi's perspective in subsequent retellings, describing Mimi climbing the stairs with her candle and losing her key. These events are dramatized with a filmed sequence, depicting a hand carrying a candle in the dark (Figure 38), then a hand knocking on the door (Figure 39). This retelling inserts Mimi's subjectivity into the narrative, with Laffont's narration adopting Mimi's perspective in her use of the first person. In another retelling, the narration adopts a more overtly critical stance, distanced from Mimi and referring to her in the third person. This time Laffont's narration describes Rodolfo finding and hiding Mimi's lost key, using subterfuge to prolong his encounter with Mimi. This more critical stance is illustrated by a change of perspective, the shots of the candle shown from a different angle (Figure 40).¹⁶⁵ These shifts in visual perspective dramatize the shifts in critical perspective that accompany each retelling. Furthermore, the addition of narrative detail with each retelling (Mimi ascending the stairs and Rodolfo concealing the key) demonstrates the way in which the selection and emphasis of narrative detail differs according to perspective.

These shifts in perspective not only affect the retelling of the opera narrative by Laffont's character, but also extend into the space of the investigative narrative. This reflects

¹⁶⁵ Rather perversely, the section with the first person narration is illustrated with images shot in the third person, whereas the segment narrated in the third person is illustrated with shots filmed from a first person perspective. This prevents any straightforward alignment of Laffont's narration with the character Mimi, and is in keeping with the slippage of identity elsewhere in the film.

the entanglement of the opera, thriller, and theory intertexts, and the dual-status of each intertext as both critical framework and object of analysis. The sequence beginning with Laffont's character contemplating herself in a mirror, accompanied by the voiceover asking 'can these be the facts? Is this the story of my life?' is an example of this reworking of the investigative narrative (Figure 41). The cut to an alternative angle of Laffont on the phrase 'Was that the story of my death?' (Figure 42) signals the shift of perspective, while the focus on mirrors and reflection identifies this new perspective as psychoanalytic. Laffont's voiceover describes the onscreen character as waiting for a clue. The awaited clue takes the form of an indistinct image of Rose English (Figure 43). In accordance with the current critical perspective, the clue is interpreted in psychoanalytic terms and Laffont's voiceover declares 'she saw herself as the Other'. This is followed by an image of Laffont in front of the mirror with English's reflection just visible in the top portion of the mirror (Figure 44). Laffont's voiceover claims 'she saw Mimi there, cold, tired and ill'. The film then cuts to a closer view of the previous image, with English's reflection more clearly visible (Figure 45). Laffont's voiceover concludes, claiming 'she saw timidity and vulnerability', with the film cutting to a repetition of the first indistinct shot of English, its place in the sequence of increasingly tighter framings revealing it to be English's reflection in the mirror.

The sequence can be understood as a reworking of the mirror stage. Rather than the idealised reflection confirming the sense of self, it instead undermines it. Laffont's character positions herself as other, suggesting English's character represents self and Subject. However, English's reflection appears as an image without source. English, here identified as Mimi, represents an idealised and unattainable reflection that disrupts the hierarchy of source/image with the result that Laffont renders herself other, whilst the reflection (Mimi) usurps the status of self. However, the ideal that Mimi represents is tiredness, illness, coldness, timidity, and vulnerability. The idealised image is therefore a problematic one, and it is this idealised image of the frozen woman that *Thriller* seeks to deconstruct. Seen from this perspective, the self-

othering of Laffont's character acknowledges that she does not identify Mimi as a reflection of herself, and that Mimi is not a true reflection but merely a constructed image – an image without source. This sequence therefore continues to challenge the association of theory with critical distance, by reworking the psychoanalytic framework even as it employs it.

The constructed and idealised version of Mimi revealed through the reworking of the investigative narrative according to the psychoanalytic perspective is the subject of further reworking from a Marxist perspective. When recounting the plot of *La Bohème* for the third time, Laffont's voiceover observes that the men 'produced stories to disguise how I must produce their goods'. A painter, musician, poet, and philosopher, the male characters of *La Bohème* represent the dominant bourgeois and patriarchal culture whose narratives freeze the representation of women and obscure the realities of capitalism and labour. This segment is illustrated with images from the National Museum of Labour History juxtaposed with stills from productions of *La Bohème*, drawing together the investigative and opera narratives and further emphasising the complex entwining of the opera, thriller, and theory intertexts. This juxtaposition also represents the dialectical approach appropriate to Marxist analysis. For example Mimi and Rodolfo's love duet is juxtaposed to a close up image of the hands of a seamstress as she sews by hand (Figure 46), exposing the gulf between the ideological and the actual.

Laffont's character explores what might have happened had Mimi lived, observing that had Mimi and Rodolfo's love borne children she would need to work even harder to support them, illustrated by an image of an older seamstress accompanied by children (Figure 47). Laffont's narration goes on to describe what would happen should Mimi be allowed to become old, and notes that such a woman would not be the proper subject of a love story. To illustrate this, an image of an elderly seamstress (Figure 48) is juxtaposed with a close-up of Mimi and Rodolfo's love duet (Figure 49), the soaring music of the duet played over both images. In voiceover, Laffont concludes that Mimi had to be young and vulnerable, so that her death may

prompt the men to become heroes in the depths of their grief. This observation is delivered over the indistinct close-up from the psychoanalytic segment of the film (Figure 43), connecting both approaches. This return to the scene of previous analysis suggests that each approach complements the other rather than the second approach superseding the other. Both approaches are necessary, as neither offers a full explanation on its own. *Thriller* therefore requires a mode of viewing akin to that of Jameson's ideal postmodern viewer, able to see all the screens at once. Rather than emphasising one reworking or retelling above another, *Thriller* encourages the viewer to find meaning in the ways the differences in each retelling relate to one another.

The benefits of this mode of viewing are evident in the shift from retelling Mimi's story to considering the untold story of Musetta. Laffont's voiceover muses that it would not have been a tragedy had Musetta died, as she was the 'bad girl'. The narration continues by observing that Musetta and Mimi were set up as opposite and complementary characters, kept apart in order to serve their roles. This discovery is the culmination of both Marxist and psychoanalytic enquires. The realisation that the idealised Mimi is defined according to her opposite Musetta is the result of the psychoanalytic enquiry into the opposition of self/other, whilst the Marxist enquiry reveals the ideological motivations behind this opposition, and what that ideology seeks to obscure. The notion that difference relates is also essential to making sense of the fragmentation and proliferation of the characters Mimi and Musetta. At various times throughout the film Mimi is represented by stills from a variety of productions of *La Bohème*; by a series of stills of seamstresses of increasing age; and by both Rose English and Colette Laffont. Musetta is similarly divided, represented by production stills and by both English and Laffont. To this list we might also add the vocal performances of Mimi and Musetta from *La Bohème*, and Laffont's voiceover. The slippage between Laffont-Mimi and English-Mimi first occurs in the key mirror scene where Laffont recognises English's reflection as the idealised Mimi and herself as other. A further example of the oscillation between Laffont and English also occurs in a sequence that juxtaposes images of Laffont and English in swapped

positions (Figure 50 & Figure 51). The narration for this segment is similarly indeterminate, with Laffont's voiceover claiming 'you were reading in French' over an image of Laffont reading. This suggests a disconnect between Laffont on screen and Laffont as narrator, which is in turn contradicted by the voiceover observing 'you were carried away, certainly' over an image of English being carried. Laffont's voiceover is not specifically aligned with any character, nor is it necessarily identical to the character portrayed by Laffont at any given time.

The fluidity of the roles of Mimi and Musetta also contributes to the blurring of boundaries between the opera narrative and the investigative narrative. The separation between these two narrative spaces is destabilised through the slippage between Mimi/Musetta and English/Laffont. Laffont's alignment with Mimi and later Musetta undermines the separation of the investigative narrative from the opera narrative. Laffont's claim that she is investigating her own death further challenges the distinction between the two spaces. Potter's editing also serves to bridge the gap between the spaces, such as in the segment dramatizing Mimi's death scene. The scene begins with a production still of the dying Mimi being brought to the artist's attic, with an empty bed in the foreground (Figure 52). This is followed by a still of Mimi on the bed, surrounded by Rodolfo and the artists (Figure 53). This cuts to a filmed sequence of English being lowered into bed (Figure 54), with the composition approximating that of Mimi on her death bed. The production still of Mimi surrounded by the artists is then repeated, emphasising the fact that the filmed segment dramatizes the actions elided by the cut between the first and second production stills. Later in the film, English is aligned with Musetta through a montage juxtaposing close-ups of Musetta's calf (Figure 55) with close-ups of English's calf as she performs an arabesque (Figure 56).¹⁶⁶ The association of Musetta with the arabesque motif suggests that Musetta is just as frozen in her role as Mimi, whilst the association of English with both Mimi and Musetta confuses the boundaries between the two characters. The characters of

¹⁶⁶ Catherine Clément notes the significance of Musetta's bare foot in *La Bohème*. Clément describes how a tipsy Musetta leaps and dances provocatively, making the men watch her. Musetta uses her wiles to convince her older lover that there is something wrong with her foot. When he leaves to buy Musetta new shoes, she collapses into Marcello's arms. Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, pp. 83 – 87

Musetta and Mimi eventually collapse into one another when Laffont's voiceover asks why she can remember Musetta's death scene over a repetition of the scene of English being lowered onto the bed.

The multiplicity of Mimis and Musettas frustrates the binary logic of opposition. Furthermore, having English and Laffont move fluidly between these roles confuses the boundaries between the characters and frustrates the opera narrative's need to keep the two characters apart and in opposition. This is an appropriately post-structuralist response to the conclusion of the psychoanalytic and Marxist analysis, and the revelation that Mimi and Musetta are complementary opposites kept apart to service a heroic male narrative. In addition to exploring the opposition of good girl/bad girl, *Thriller* also explores the possibility of reversing the hierarchical opposition of male hero/female victim; represented by the question 'would I have preferred to be the hero?' This change in roles is illustrated by a mobile handheld shot of Laffont seated in a chair (Figure 57), echoing an earlier sequence in the film establishing the heroic qualities of the artist/Rodolfo (Figure 58). Mimi's appropriation of the heroic role is further dramatized in a comically gender swapped dance sequence. Laffont's character exchanges her black dress for a jacket and leggings, with ruched material at the hips suggestive of ballet costuming or Elizabethan dress. Laffont's male partner wears a flowing skirt, and adopts an arabesque pose as he is lifted by Laffont (Figure 59). This scene is repeated, but in over-exposed slow-motion before freezing (Figure 60), with the narrator pondering 'what if I had been the subject of this scenario?'. Laffont's costuming is more flattering and less comical than that of her male partner, suggesting the attraction of adopting the male role. However, the freezing of the image and the range of meanings associated with the arabesque suggest that even in the role of male hero Mimi would be frozen, subject to just as many restrictions of appropriate behaviour. In particular, the representation of the male dancer as ridiculous suggests that appropriating the role of male hero merely perpetuates the devaluing of femininity.

The solution suggested by *Thriller* to the problem of women's exclusion from male heroic narrative is not the adoption of the heroic role. The inversion of binaries is shown to be an incomplete or unsuitable solution in the gender swapped dance sequence. The shifting of Mimi into the role of hero is also inadequate because it does not account for Musetta, where elsewhere the film has been clear that Musetta is as much a victim as Mimi. The end of the film presents an alternative solution, one that not only accounts for both Mimi and Musetta but opens up possibilities rather than closing them off. Following the realisation that Mimi and Musetta were set up as opposites and kept apart, the narrator observes that Mimi and Musetta never got to know each other. The narrator claims 'we could have loved each other'. The film ends with an image of Laffont and English embracing (Figure 61). The film concludes, therefore, not with an image of Mimi adopting a 'masculine' heroic role but with the possibility of love and friendship between women. This suggests that the solution to the exclusion of women from narratives of male heroism is not to appropriate those roles and repeat the same patterns but to create new stories with women at their centre. Furthermore the film's celebration of togetherness demonstrates the inappropriateness of readings such as Kaplan's, which fetishize separation. The film concludes that the real violence done to Mimi and Musetta is that they are kept apart and in opposition. It is this separation that they must overcome, and for this reason togetherness is the answer, not the masculine-individualist quest of becoming the hero. This drive to create new stories by reworking existing narratives is precisely the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function.

Fowler identifies the call for narratives foregrounding female community as a theme throughout Potter's work, suggesting that *The Man Who Cried* (2000) represents an exploration of what would happen if Mimi and Musetta are allowed to become friends.¹⁶⁷ This reading is problematic, as whilst one can easily map Suzie (Christina Ricci) onto Mimi and Lola (Cate Blanchett) to Musetta, this is only because the characters fit the good-girl/bad-girl binary that

¹⁶⁷ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 88

Thriller seeks to deconstruct. Furthermore, Lola turns against Suzie and ultimately betrays any sense of female solidarity. To see this as a continuation of the project of *Thriller* is to undermine the work of that film. *Orlando* is a far stronger example of the continuation of the project started in *Thriller*. Considered in relation to *Thriller*, the gender-switching dynamic of *Orlando* serves as an intriguing elaboration of the question ‘would I have preferred to have been the hero’. Rather than placing a female character in the mould of the male hero and thus simply continuing to value masculine characteristics, Orlando’s transformation dramatizes *Thriller*’s call to move beyond narratives of male heroism and to explore alternative female narratives. In this respect, *Orlando* goes beyond *Thriller* by exploring this alternative rather than tentatively suggesting its possibility in the film’s conclusion.

Like *Thriller*, *Orlando* engages with this theme through intertextual reworking, although this manifests rather differently in *Orlando*. Where *Thriller* is a sustained reworking of *La Bohème*, the thriller genre, and theory; *Orlando* reworks a number of texts from a variety of genres and historical periods. In particular, *Orlando* is concerned with reworking the representation of gender in these texts. Although much critical attention has been directed to the issue of gender in *Orlando*, there has been little investigation in the ways in which the film explores the subject through intertextuality. Sophie Mayer provides a quite comprehensive list of poetic allusions in *Orlando*, ranging from Orlando reciting Spenser for Elizabeth I, Shakespeare’s sonnet 29, the Khan’s quotations from The Quran, Pope’s witticisms in the Salon, and finally Shelmerdine (Billy Zane’s) quotations from Shelley.¹⁶⁸ However, Mayer uses these quotations to explore the shifting dialectic of public/private, contrasting Orlando’s public performance of Spenser with his private enjoyment of Shakespeare in his library.¹⁶⁹ Mayer notes that the scene of Orlando reading sonnet 29 in the library is the first time Orlando has been alone, and that ‘his reading here speaks for and from his private self.’¹⁷⁰ Mayer does not

¹⁶⁸ Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, pp. 98 – 99

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 98

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98

investigate the ways in which sonnet 29 is able to speak for and from Orlando's self, instead moving on to consider Orlando as a writer of poetry.¹⁷¹ What is particularly interesting about Mayer's brief analysis of Orlando's reading of sonnet 29 is that it seemingly frames quotation as self-expression: reading Shakespeare's words, Orlando is nonetheless speaking from himself.

The suggestion that Orlando expresses himself through quotations recalls the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function. Through quotation and performance, Orlando is able to take up the words of another and rework them to better express his own sentiment. Orlando's taking up of sonnet 29 encompasses multiple reworkings.

Through the framework of the sonnet, Orlando is able to reconfigure his jilting as a tragic lost love. The sonnets are an appropriate source for such sentiment, as they detail an unhappy love triangle between the speaker and the characters of the fair young man and the dark lady.¹⁷²

While sonnet 29 provides a framework for Orlando's experience, he also reworks the sonnet to better reflect his experiences. Orlando achieves this by selecting and emphasising certain parts of the sonnet over others. More important to Orlando than the comfort found through recollection of past love is the poetic description of despair and exile, with Orlando concluding his reading of the poem at the fourth line: 'And look upon myself, and curse my fate'.¹⁷³

Orlando never reaches the part of the poem where the narrator is lifted from his despair by the recollection of 'thy sweet love rememb' red'.¹⁷⁴ This suggests that what Orlando takes from the poem is not that his suffering is only fleeting but that suffering is a fit subject for poetry, and therefore there is something heroic and artistic in Orlando's own suffering. As with *Thriller*, there is no clear hierarchy of critical framework and object of analysis, the poem is reworked to match Orlando's experience just as that experience is understood through the poetry.

The film's use of *Othello* represents a less direct example of this process. Orlando witnesses a production of the play before his planned elopement with Sasha (Charlotte

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 98

¹⁷² See Philip Hobsbaum, 'The Sonnets', *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glasgow: Collins, 2006), pp. 1361-1362

¹⁷³ 'Sonnet 29', in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glasgow: Collins, 2006), p. 1367, line 4

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, line 13

Valandrey). Specifically, Orlando observes Othello's death in Act V scene ii, and his dying words 'I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee. No way/ but this -/Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.'¹⁷⁵ In an aside to the camera, Orlando describes *Othello* as a 'terrific play'. The inclusion of *Othello* prefigures Sasha's abandonment of Orlando and her choice to leave England rather than elope with Orlando. It is through the lens of *Othello* that Orlando is able to characterise Sasha's actions as 'the treachery of women' and his own jealous and possessive behaviour as appropriate. The phrase is itself a reworking of Euphrosyne's (Anna Healy) condemnation of Orlando after she breaks off her engagement due to Orlando's pursuit of Sasha, declaiming his behaviour as 'the treachery of men'. This implies that *Othello* is a 'terrific play' because it suggests jealousy is an appropriate flaw for a tragic hero, whilst infidelity (even perceived infidelity) by women is unforgivable.

The example of *Othello* also serves to demonstrate *Orlando*'s use of intertextual reworking to explore the history of the representation of women. This may be done implicitly, as in Orlando's unthinking recitation of Spenser's description of the fading beauty of the Virgin Rose for the ageing Elizabeth I, or explicitly, as in the use of Pope's 'Epistle to a Lady' as Pope's (Peter Eyre) criticism of Orlando. By quoting historically appropriate texts, the film demonstrates that the oppression of Orlando as a woman is the result of a cultural dominant in which women are treated as both lesser and other. As a man, representation favours Orlando, allowing him to reconfigure Sasha's refusal to marry him as a tale of tragedy and betrayal where he is the hero. As a woman, the representation becomes a trap, policing Orlando's behaviour rather than valorising it. In this way, *Orlando* continues *Thriller*'s investigation in to the ways in which narratives construct women as frozen in order to bolster the status of the male hero. *Orlando* builds on *Thriller* by exploring the impact of these narratives in a broader cultural sense, whereas *Thriller* (primarily) confines its investigation to the image of the frozen woman in the opera, thriller, and theory texts.

¹⁷⁵ William Shakespeare, *Othello* in *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Glasgow: Collins, 2006), pp. 1170 – 1209, v. 2. 361 – 363

There are further echoes of *Thriller* in *Orlando*'s engagement with issues of fragmentation and multiplicity. In particular, the use of voiceover in *Orlando* recalls the use of narration in *Thriller*, but further complicated by *Orlando*'s gender shifting narrative and Swinton's playing male. *Orlando* opens with Swinton playing the young male Orlando, walking back and forth reading poetry. The voiceover, also Swinton and identifiably a female voice, assures the audience that there can be no doubt of Orlando's sex. The voiceover thus simultaneously prompts the audience to read Swinton as male whilst drawing attention to the fact that Swinton's sex and the sex of her character do not match. This builds upon the already playful undermining of gender in the opening lines of Woolf's book.¹⁷⁶ This also creates dissonance between Swinton as narrator and Swinton as Orlando. The recognisably female voice of Swinton-as-narrator commands the audience to read Swinton-as-Orlando as male. This suggests that, as with Laffont in *Thriller*, there is no straightforward alignment between the voiceover narration and onscreen character portrayed, although the same actor portrays both. *Orlando* complicates this further by allowing interaction between voiceover and character, with Orlando supplementing the narrator's 'but when he' with 'that is, I'. This suggests a complex relationship between Orlando and the narrator. Orlando's address to the camera implies not only his awareness of an audience, but also of the narrator. Orlando's interruption 'that is, I' amounts to an acknowledgement that he is the subject of the narrative and suggests that he is distinct from the narrator's voice (despite both being 'voiced' by Swinton). This distinction is conveyed by the lowered tone of Swinton's voice when playing the male Orlando compared to the voiceover. This distinction and separation is challenged in the film's conclusion, where the voiceover echoes the opening narration but now describing the female Orlando. Unlike the opening narration, there is now a fit between the narrator's sex and the character's and thus a suggestion of overlap between narrator and character. At both the beginning and end of the

¹⁷⁶ Following a preface and list of illustrations that contrive to present Woolf's *Orlando* as a biography rather than work of fiction, the narrative proper begins with the lines 'He – for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it', playfully and paradoxically setting up Orlando's sex as simultaneously unquestionable and uncertain. Virginia Woolf, *Orlando* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 11

film, Jimmy Somerville's falsetto performance as herald and angel respectively acts as a counterpoint to the voiceover narration, suggesting that voice is not always a reliable indication of gender and thus further muddying the distinction between narrator and Orlando.

Like Mimi and Musetta in *Thriller*, Orlando is a fractured and multiple character. In addition to the deliberately uncertain relation between Orlando and the narrator, Orlando's supernatural transformation of sex acts as a challenge to traditional notions of the subject. The transformation has the effect of both fracturing and doubling Orlando, in the sense that the transformation functions as a break in continuity and 'replaces' the male version of Orlando with a female one. However, despite this radical break, Orlando is nonetheless presented as a continuous identity. While Orlando's transformation from male to female is the most radical disruption to the unity of identity, the changing historical periods also engender smaller shifts and breaks in identity.

Orlando's transformation can be seen as a play on the deconstructive process. By transforming from male to female, Orlando inverts the binary of male/female. In doing so, Orlando discovers the hierarchical nature of this opposition as a result of occupying the less privileged position. This process is emphasised in the mirrored structure of the film: The film begins with death and ends with birth; Orlando loses a lover and leaves England, Orlando returns to England and finds love. This mirroring is used to ironic effect in Arch-duke Harry's proposal to Orlando, which echoes Orlando's proposal to Sasha ('I am England and you are mine') and thus demonstrates Orlando's movement from possessor to possession. Orlando's transformation shows that the opposition male/female is constructed rather than natural; the remainder of the film demonstrates how this opposition is not equal, but constructed in favour of the male.

Orlando can therefore be seen as a continuation of the deconstructive project of *Thriller*, in that it too demonstrates how the differing cultural representation of men and women serve to bolster the heroic status of men at the expense of women. Where *Thriller* is concerned with how

this is achieved through the exclusion of certain female narratives and limitation of available female roles, *Orlando* uses its protagonist to enact the process of deconstruction. By changing from man to woman, Orlando experiences the inversion of the hierarchical binary male/female. As a man, Orlando is bolstered by this cultural bias, as a woman she is constrained by it. Having a single character experience both sides of the binary emphasises that this inequality is not natural but constructed.

While this analysis demonstrates a strong thematic link between *Orlando* and Potter's early films, in terms of style *Orlando* seems a less obvious successor to *Thriller*. The lush visuals and pageantry of *Orlando* are a marked contrast to the stark, minimal staging of *Thriller*. It is this difference of appearance that would seem to motivate the identification of a break in Potter's filmography, formulated as a shift from the oppositional style of *Thriller* to the mainstream style of *Orlando*. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, the identification of a break in Potter's oeuvre is a consequence of the dominance of the modernist and feminist genres of author-function in the Potter literature. Following such a framework, *Orlando* is marked as distinct from *Thriller* because *Orlando* is too closely associated with mainstream genre filmmaking and visual pleasure rather than oppositional art cinema. According to the critical framework of the modernist genre of author-function *Orlando* cannot be critical because it lacks the critical distance of *Thriller*.

Patricia Mellencamp attempts to frame *Orlando* in terms of critical distance by describing the film's engagement with the conventions of costume drama as tongue-in-cheek.¹⁷⁷ Mellencamp describes the costume drama with some disdain, seeing the genre as populated by 'underdeveloped, overcostumed characters in awkward dialogue scenes'.¹⁷⁸ The identification of *Orlando* as tongue-in-cheek echoes Jameson's modernist sense of parody, in which the high culture (modernist) text maintains critical distance and is thus protected from too close an association with the mass culture text it parodies. Rather than the critical quoting of modernist

¹⁷⁷ Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance*, p. 283

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 283

cinema, *Orlando*'s engagement with costume drama seems more of a kind with the treatment of matinee adventure serials in *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. As identified by Jameson, these films recreate the pleasures of their forebears on a grander scale. Rather than tongue-in-cheek dismissal of costume drama, *Orlando* is instead an amplification of the conventions of the costume drama. This can be seen in the fantastical chronology of the film, which allows the audience to revel in costumes, settings, and manners of many historical periods, whereas conventional costume dramas are typically restricted to a single era.

The reluctance to classify such exaggeration as a valid form of critique has been touched on elsewhere in this thesis. However, *Orlando*'s engagement with costume drama is not uncritical. For example, the excessive pageantry of Elizabeth's court both conforms to the expectations of the genre whilst simultaneously undermining the representation of Elizabeth. The casting of Quentin Crisp as Elizabeth challenges audience expectations of representations of the virgin queen, emphasising the theatricality of Elizabeth's court and drawing attention to the unspoken truth that Elizabeth at the end of her reign is not the same as the Elizabeth at the beginning of her reign, despite what official representations might suggest. The uncommented upon dissonance between Crisp's sex and Elizabeth's thus echoes the Elizabethan court's studied ignorance of Elizabeth's age. It is this unspoken rule that Orlando breaks in his recitation.

Orlando does not critique the conventions of the costume drama from a distance, but rather reworks them from within; rejecting critical distance in favour of complicitous critique. This is the sentiment of Garrett's claim that *Orlando* should not be thought of as an alternative period drama or a counter period drama, but rather an indication as to the possibilities of the genre.¹⁷⁹ This echoes my analysis of *Déjà Vu* in the previous chapter, a film that deconstructs the conventions of the action film in order to demonstrate the potential of the genre. A key way in which *Orlando* critically reworks the conventions of the costume drama is, unsurprisingly,

¹⁷⁹ Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 153

through costume. In addition to providing the usual pleasures of sumptuous production design, costume serves as both a shorthand indication of the changes in historical period and as an exploration of the conventions of masculinity and femininity of the period. Costuming also indicates the ease with which Orlando conforms to those conventions. For example, Orlando's Elizabethan costuming is form fitting but not constraining. Orlando's doublet is tight, emphasising Orlando's slenderness and by association youth, but also allows for a range of movement. Similarly, Orlando's hose are tight but allow for a freedom of movement far greater than any subsequent costumes until her final modern costume, which also serves to illustrate Orlando's freedom.

The most obvious contrast to Orlando's Elizabethan costume is Orlando's dress in the eighteenth century Society chapter. However, Orlando's costume in the preceding Politics chapter is equally restrictive. The long coat and heavy wig of the costume swamp Orlando. In contrast to the flattering form-fitting Elizabethan costume, this costume appears ill fitting and overlarge, as if Orlando were a child dressing up in his father's suit – a rather fitting comparison considering how poorly suited the naïve Orlando seems to be for international diplomacy. The layers of heavy fabrics are also particularly unsuited to the climate of Khiva, accentuating Orlando's discomfort. The costume dominates Orlando, the jacket concealing his figure and the wig overpowering his features. Whereas the autumnal colours of Orlando's Elizabethan costume complements Orlando's paleness, by concealing Swinton's red hair under masses of pale curls, this costume causes Orlando to appear washed out and drained of colour (Figure 62).

The contrast between Orlando's Elizabethan and eighteenth century costumes illustrates Orlando's changing alignment with the conventions of the age. As an Elizabethan youth, Orlando is quite comfortable with the masculine conventions of the age, and is clearly granted a greater range of expression than the repressive norms suggested by both the masculine and feminine costuming of the eighteenth century. In contrast to the Elizabethan period, where the narrator tells us young men contrived a feminine appearance, the eighteenth century is depicted

as a time of much stricter gender norms for both men and women. Orlando's response, as both man and woman, is to adopt an alternative repertoire of gendered behaviour. As a man, Orlando abandons Western imperial modes of behaviour in favour of Orientalism, as a woman Orlando flees the conventions of the Age of Reason and rejects Enlightenment in favour of the gothic. While this represents a shift away from reworking specific texts to a reworking of the conventions of broader cultural movements, it nevertheless recalls Orlando's self-expression through quotation. Just as poetry provided the framework for Orlando to rework his experience whilst simultaneously reworking that framework to better fit his experience, so Orlando adopts and adapts the conventions of Orientalism and the gothic. The centrality of costuming to these reworkings also serves to continue the film's complicitous critique of costume drama conventions.

In Khiva, Orlando sheds his unsuitable western apparel as he becomes increasingly enamoured of the traditions, poetry, and music of the country. Reclining around the campfire, Orlando removes his wig and inclines his head to gaze at the stars (Figure 63 & Figure 64). The film cuts to Orlando dressed in loose fitting, androgynous style in a pose echoing the previous scene. Orlando's posture and the composition of the scene – complete with urn and arched alcove – evokes the nineteenth century tradition of Orientalist painting (Figure 65). Explicitly framing Orlando's appropriation of Eastern culture in terms of an Orientalist fascination avoids the construction of Khiva as an authentic other in contrast to the superficiality of the West, whilst acknowledging that this is precisely the way Khiva functions from the perspective of Orlando the character. In this respect, Orlando's behaviour is not the antithesis of Western imperialism but just a variation of it. Orlando's Orientalism also serves to feminise Orlando, further evidence that Orlando's Orientalism works within the dynamic of imperial self and colonised Other rather than outside of it. Although Orlando's appropriation of the dress and culture of Khiva allows him to occupy a more feminine gender role, this is made possible by a dynamic that positions Western culture as dominant, imperialist, and masculine and Eastern

culture as colonised and feminine. In this respect, Orlando's Orientalism pre-empts his transformation.

In the same way that Orientalism represents an alternative mode of gendered behaviour for Orlando as a man, the gothic allows Orlando as a woman to escape the constraints of eighteenth century femininity. Orlando moves into the realm of the gothic after being declared legally dead and rejecting the proposal of Archduke Harry. The proposal echoes Orlando's words to Sasha, and frames Orlando as Harry's property. Archduke Harry also claims that marriage is Orlando's last chance of respectability. Orlando's escape into the gothic is therefore a flight to freedom, but it is also a rejection of the 'proper' behaviour of an eighteenth century woman. It is this transgression that thrusts Orlando into the realm of the gothic, a mode that values freedom, wildness, and unrespectable behaviour.¹⁸⁰

Just as Orlando's taking up of Orientalism operates in a binary with imperialism, Orlando's escape into the gothic also operates according to a binary logic, illustrated by the opposition of summer and winter. Orlando's rejection of Harry occurs in summer, against the backdrop of the manicured grounds of Orlando's home (Figure 66). Fleeing through a maze, Orlando escapes onto a wintry heath, a wild landscape of bare trees and ground mist (Figure 67). This opposition of season and location also conveys the opposition of Enlightenment culture and reason to gothic nature and unreason. Orlando's rejection of culture is made clear in her declaration 'nature! Nature, I am your bride – take me!', and is complemented by Orlando's change in costume. While running through the maze, Orlando's costume transforms from a powdered wig and wide-skirted dress to a deep green dress that emphasises Orlando's red hair and complements her complexion. Again, as with Orlando's Orientalism, Orlando's move to the gothic is not an escape into an authentic pure space but merely a shift from one side of a binary to the other. The gothic mode requires its opposite if it is to have any meaning as a space of rebellion. Furthermore, the film carefully frames both Orientalism and the gothic as modes of

¹⁸⁰ The suggestion that Orlando is also in some sense undead (she is legally dead and yet still lives) also reinforces this connection to the gothic

representation: Orientalism through an appeal to traditions in portraiture, the gothic through an excessive deployment of the conventions of gothic romance, in particular on the imagery of wildness and sexuality in *Wuthering Heights*. In this way, the film demonstrates gothic categories such as nature to be as constructed as its opposite, culture. A similar technique is used to convey Orlando's transformation from man to woman. The revelation of Orlando's transformation is framed in terms of representation, the scene depicted in a mirror (Figure 68) and deliberately echoing Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 69). Through this intertextual reworking the film clearly illustrates its engagement with the history of representation, and suggests that from the instance of her 'rebirth' as a woman Orlando is framed according to cultural norms of feminine beauty and behaviour. The use of the mirror adds nuance to this assertion by implying that Orlando sees herself according to these terms: there is no pure space of unmediated experience.

Where the depiction of the gothic mode differs from Orientalism is that the female Orlando is aware of the ironies and contradictions of taking up the gothic, whereas the male Orlando is naïve. Orlando demonstrates her self-awareness in adopting the gothic mode through her look to camera after Shelmerdine falls to the ground next to her (Figure 70). Orlando darts a conspiratorial look to the audience, conveying her surprise (and delight) that she appears to have literally stumbled into a gothic romance. This look contrasts to the more confused, lingering look Orlando shares with the audience before being called into Elizabeth's bedchamber (Figure 71). In this scene, the young Orlando does not know what to expect whereas the worldlier Orlando of the eighteenth century knows precisely what the arrival of Shelmerdine heralds. The first look to camera emphasises the gap between Orlando's knowledge and the audience's. The second suggests that Orlando is as able to read the genre cues as the audience is, and so shares the same expectations. This is playfully acknowledged when, after declaring herself nature's bride, Orlando looks up from the ground as if sensing someone approach (Figure 72). Rather than the expected reverse shot, the film instead cuts to the intertitle 1850 (Figure 73), followed

by the title 'sex' (Figure 74). This is followed by the expected reverse shot depicting Shelmerdine riding out of the fog in the manner appropriate to the hero of a gothic romance (Figure 75). Shelmerdine's horse rears and causes him to fall, an intertextual nod to Rochester's meeting with Jane in *Jane Eyre* and reinforcing the ties to the gothic.

Ironically, Orlando's self-awareness and worldliness are completely at odds with the role of gothic ingénue in which she casts herself. Orlando's move to the gothic is thus paradoxically a self-aware adoption of innocence and naivety. However, Shelmerdine no more 'naturally' inhabits his gothic role than Orlando. This is revealed when Orlando is tending to Shelmerdine, and the pair discusses their shared feeling of instantaneous intimacy. Shelmerdine describes how a woman may not wish to be trapped by her gender and so choose to be an adventurer instead – and thus not be a 'real woman' at all. Orlando then describes how a man may not wish to die for a pointless cause – and so not be a 'real man at all'. While this exchange potentially hints at the possibility that Shelmerdine has undergone a similar transformation to Orlando, it explicitly deals with the constraints of gender norms and the rejection of those norms.

Furthermore, *Orlando's* gothic is concerned with reworking and critiquing these gendered norms and stereotypes. For example, while Orlando is adopting the role of fragile gothic heroine and Shelmerdine the role of adventurous gothic hero, it is Orlando that has to rescue Shelmerdine. Unable to ride because of his broken ankle, Shelmerdine must cling on behind Orlando as she takes the reins (Figure 76). Later, when Shelmerdine embraces Orlando, she confides in the audience over his shoulder, claiming she is so happy she thinks she will faint. This signals Orlando once more taking up the fragile femininity of the gothic heroine.

Shelmerdine and Orlando oscillate between conventionally masculine and feminine behaviour. Shelmerdine is both a hyper-masculine heroic figure, associated with war, adventure, and liberty and a feminised, sensitive hero who quotes Shelley. In this respect, Shelmerdine is an example of the "'effeminate" male types' found in costume dramas.¹⁸¹ Garrett also notes that the

¹⁸¹ Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 130

costume drama is one of the few genres where male actors are coded in terms of to-be-looked-at-ness, or ‘as eye candy for female audiences’, citing Colin Firth’s portrayal of Mr Darcy in the BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995) as the prime example.¹⁸²

Shelmerdine’s taking up of an idealised masculine identity in accordance with the conventions of the costume drama echoes Orlando’s own knowing adoption of a particular type of femininity. Orlando and Shelmerdine are engaged in a knowing, mutually pleasurable role-play that allows the pair to embroil themselves in the pleasures of the gothic costume drama while simultaneously acknowledging that the gender roles they choose to inhabit are both constructed and flexible. Crucially, whilst Orlando and Shelmerdine’s self-conscious role-playing may serve to denaturalise the conventions of the gothic, it also celebrates and takes great pleasure in those conventions. In accordance with Hutcheon’s model of postmodern parody, *Orlando*’s engagement with the pleasures of the gothic is a double-voiced complicitous critique that simultaneously deconstructs and reinstates. The viewer is invited to share in Orlando’s delight and desire, to swoon with Orlando as she courts Shelmerdine. Zane’s Shelmerdine is an almost-too-perfect incarnation of the gothic hero, but part of the pleasure of the sequence is that he is recognised as such without this diminishing the pleasures of the fantasy. This is a distinct departure from the modernist genre of author-function and critical distance. The postmodern parody of *Orlando* is as loving as it is critical.

The denaturalisation of gender roles achieved by Orlando’s taking up of orientalism and the gothic allows Orlando to experience a freedom and fluidity of gender not experienced since the Elizabethan period. The fluidity of gender and the deliberate taking on and reworking of

¹⁸² Garrett, *Postmodern Chick Flicks*, p. 130 Mr Darcy, particularly as portrayed by Colin Firth in *Pride and Prejudice*, retains a privileged status in intertextual engagements with Austen’s work. In *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (Sharon Maguire, 2001), a loose reworking of *Pride and Prejudice*, Firth himself portrays Mark Darcy, the film’s equivalent of Darcy. In *Austenland* (Jerusha Hess, 2013), Austen-obsessed heroine Jane (Kerri Russell) spends her life savings on a Jane Austen experience where customers live out their Austen fantasies with romance guaranteed. Jane initially falls for a Wickham-like cad only to find he has been an actor ‘assigned’ to her all along. Jane eventually ends up with a Darcy like character who she believed was merely playing a role but who is revealed to genuinely fit the mould of Mr Darcy. Both *Bridget Jones* and *Austenland* playfully acknowledge that Mr Darcy is an unrealistic fantasy figure, whilst at the same providing a ‘real’ Mr Darcy’s for their protagonists. *Austenland* is particularly successful in this regard, as its focus on playacting serves to question notions of performance and authenticity.

gendered stereotypes is also an aspect of *The Tango Lesson*. This is made possible through the films playful reworking of the sexual politics of the tango. According to Fischer, the tango can be associated with masculine macho posturing, but is also a form of male melodrama where male insecurity is exposed.¹⁸³ Fischer sums up the dynamics of tango by observing that if men are ‘not that strong in tango discourse, women are not that weak.’¹⁸⁴ This dynamic informs the romantic and professional relationship between Sally (Sally Potter) and Pablo (Pablo Veron). As with the tango, both protagonists must negotiate degrees of submission and control. When learning to be a dancer, the director Sally must learn how to follow rather than lead. Similarly, as an actor in Sally’s film the dancer Pablo must learn to submit to the leadership of another.

The casting of Sally Potter as ‘Sally’ and Pablo Veron as ‘Pablo Veron’ implies an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical dimension to *The Tango Lesson*, with Fowler going so far as to identify Potter and Veron as playing themselves, rather than characters sharing their names.¹⁸⁵ However, *The Tango Lesson* consistently seeks to challenge the straightforward translation of lived experience to film, and indeed the very notion of what ‘lived experience’ may mean. In this respect, the casting of Potter and Veron ‘as themselves’ is better understood as a metafictional gesture that problematizes the boundary between truth and fiction. This engagement with gender and representation establishes a thematic link between *The Tango Lesson*, *Orlando*, and Potter’s earlier films. Although thematically linked, the devices used to investigate these themes in *The Tango Lesson* differ from those used in Potter’s earlier films. Rather than exploring how Sally’s subjectivity is shaped by other narratives, *The Tango Lesson* is concerned with Sally’s subjectivity as a particular mode of looking, and the ways in which this mode of looking shapes Sally’s experience narratively. *The Tango Lesson* therefore differs significantly from the intertextual reworking of either *Thriller* or *Orlando*. However, as suggested in the previous chapter, the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-

¹⁸³ Lucy Fischer, “‘Dancing through the Minefield’”: Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*’ *Cinema Journal* 43:3 Spring 2004 42 – 58 pp. 47 – 49

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49

¹⁸⁵ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 75

function should not be restricted to intertextual or generic reworking. Adopting the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function in analysis of *The Tango Lesson* foregrounds the film's reworking of notions of gender, pleasure, and authorship through the frameworks of tango and filmmaking.

The Tango Lesson begins by firmly aligning the audience with Sally's subjectivity. As Sally begins to write, the camera cuts from a detached, birds-eye-view to an intimate extreme close up of Sally's pencil and the paper on which she writes. As Sally begins writing, there is a jolting cut from black and white to colour, from extreme close up to an exterior wide shot of a woman running, before cutting back to the close up of Sally writing the word 'Rage'. The intercutting of the colour segment with the act of writing suggests that the former are images conjured up by Sally. In this way the film grants the viewer privileged access to Sally's subjectivity. This alignment of Sally with the viewer continues when Sally abandons writing for the day and attends Pablo's dance performance instead.

When Sally first enters the theatre, she is shot amongst the audience and has an imperfect view of the stage (Figure 77). The film then cuts to a perfectly framed and unobstructed view of the stage (Figure 78), followed by a tighter framing of Pablo in medium long-shot (Figure 79). This is followed by a reverse shot of Sally in close-up, who has now made her way through the crowd and watches Pablo enraptured, her chin resting on her hands (Figure 80). There is an ellipsis between Sally's arrival at the performance and the final shot of her close-up. It can be assumed that in this time Sally has moved through the crowd to get a better view. As such, the sequence of increasingly tighter framings of Pablo stands in for Sally's movement through the crowd. In this way, the audience is further aligned with Sally's perspective. Following the reverse shot of Sally in close-up, the shots of Pablo on stage oscillate between wide-shots and close-ups, suggesting Sally's searching gaze flitting across various details of the dance. When Pablo takes his bow at the end of the performance, he is depicted in medium close-up in an unbalanced composition that emphasises the exclusion of his partner from the frame (Figure 81).

This emphasis on Pablo and exclusion of his partner could represent Sally's focus and desire – it is not the dance that has her enraptured, but the dancer – although it may also indicate Pablo's narcissism.

The alignment of the audience with Sally's perspective seems to suggest that *The Tango Lesson* is a straightforward representation of the character's subjectivity and experience. However, it is important to consider the nature of Sally's perspective. Sally's perspective is a cinematic one, constantly searching for the filmic potential of an image. When she compliments Pablo on his dancing, she does so in cinematic terms, describing how Pablo uses his presence on stage like an actor in film. Sally's cinematic gaze is at its most obvious when she is scouting out potential locations for her 'Rage' project. Before the film enters Sally's subjectivity fully, she is framed in close-up, from behind, amongst a collection of empty seats that serves to once again align Sally with the audience (Figure 82). The film then cuts to a colour shot of the three models standing on the steps from the previous shot (Figure 83). The framing of this shot is much tighter, showing only the portion of the steps that the composition of the previous shot suggests Sally is looking at. This suggests that Sally's cinematic mode of viewing is not only transformative (the shift from black and white to colour) but also selective (only a section of the whole scene is chosen). The selective nature of Sally's perspective may also explain the focus on Pablo in Figure 81.

Sally's cinematic perspective is not only that of a director, but of a camera. This is illustrated by a scene of Sally pacing out a tracking shot (Figure 84), followed by a colour segment in which the camera movement echoes Sally's movement in the previous scene (Figure 85). Later in the film, Pablo complains that Sally has become a camera, and as such she is no longer really present. Sally counters that this is the manner in which she loves Pablo, with her eyes and with her work. Pablo sets up an opposition between 'true' lived experience, aligned with presence, and a mediated engagement with the world aligned with absence. Fowler also notes the construction of Sally's perspective as a camera, but aligns this perspective with

passivity. Fowler states that Sally ‘adores Pablo most, desires him most, and loves him most when she can be simply allowed to look as if from behind a camera’ adding it is only once she strays to the other side, as the female protagonist rather than the spectator, that things start to go wrong.¹⁸⁶ This rather troublingly sets up a dynamic of active/passive where the proper place for Sally is as the passive adoring viewer rather than the active protagonist. This seems counter to the film’s project, and does not account for the way in which Sally’s perspective as director and camera is an active perspective, both selective and transformative. Indeed the reason ‘things start to go wrong’ when Sally passes into the supposedly active world of dance is that Sally, accustomed to leading, must now follow.

Fowler’s notion of what it means for Sally to become a camera echoes Pablo’s in the film. It suggests that the camera, the mediating device, sets up a barrier between the viewer and that which is viewed. This mediation separates viewer from event. In Pablo’s terms, this constructs the viewer as absent, In Fowler’s terms as passive. Sally’s response to Pablo suggests a different model of mediation and counters oppositions of active/passive and present/absent. Instead, Sally posits a model of subjectivity where experience is always-already mediated. To be a camera is not to be passive and absent, but rather to actively shape one’s experience. It is this position that informs *The Tango Lesson*, and it is significant that the exchange between Sally and Pablo should take place in front of a mirror. The mirror is not only a general metaphor for reflection and mediation, but also the specific device that demonstrates that Pablo’s perspective is as mediated as Sally’s. Where Sally’s camera is transformative and associated with creativity, Pablo’s mirror is merely reflective and associated with narcissism.

For example, when Pablo learns that Sally has decided to make a new film about tango, he launches into an impromptu Gene Kelly-esque dance routine. Pablo transforms his kitchen into a stage, transmuting the mundane task of preparing a salad into a musical number. As the dance sequence escalates, Pablo leaps onto the mantelpiece and dances with his reflection in the

¹⁸⁶Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 78

large mirror positioned there (Figure 86). Pablo is constantly performing, existing in a panopticon as stage rather than prison. Interestingly, while Sally is configured as the possessor of a transformative cinematic gaze, Pablo is depicted in a state of constant to-be-looked-at-ness. Corinn Columpar notes that the to-be-looked-at-ness of Pablo inverts the conventions of the gaze, but does not reduce Pablo to the status of mere spectacular object. Rather, Pablo's to-be-looked-at-ness is grounded in his subjectivity, his identity deriving from his understanding of himself as a body in motion to be admired by an audience.¹⁸⁷ What Columpar's analysis does not explore is the extent to which Pablo's notion of himself as a performing body is self-sustaining, requiring no audience but himself. In his awareness of himself as performer he becomes his own audience. The mirror is thus an apt metaphor for Pablo's subjectivity.

Through a postmodern engagement with mediation, *The Tango Lesson* challenges notions of lived experience and subjectivity as something that exists outside of mediation. Lived experience is not innocent, nor does it precede representation. Rather, representation and experience exist in a feedback loop; neither preceding nor exceeding the other, both working on each other simultaneously. This confusion of representation and experience permeates *The Tango Lesson*. The representation of Sally's flat as an expressionistic space, for example, subtly implies this blurring of reality and fiction. Sally's growing dissatisfaction with her 'Rage' project is echoed by the growing dilapidation of her flat, from a small crack leading to the dismantling of the floorboards, to the collapse of the ceiling.¹⁸⁸ When Sally is forced to return to her flat to (literally) dust off her script for the 'Rage' project, her unease is conveyed through the use of canted angles (Figure 87). Although a relatively conventional metaphoric device, this exteriorisation of Sally's anxieties also implies the potential for Sally's subjectivity to exceed the safe bounds of the fantasy segments of the film, safely marked off from the narrative by the

¹⁸⁷ Columpar, 'The Dancing Body', in *Women Filmmakers*, ed. by Levitin, Plessis, and Raoul, pp. 108 – 116, pp. 112 - 113

¹⁸⁸ Fischer refers to this as the fall of the house of Potter, referencing Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher', which deploys the gothic convention of conveying a family's moral decline through an analogous ruination of the family seat. "'Dancing through the Minefield": Passion, Pedagogy, Politics, and Production in *The Tango Lesson*', *Cinema Journal* 43:3 (Spring 2004), 42 – 58

use of colour. By inscribing Sally's anxiety on her environment within the 'real' monochrome segment of the film, *The Tango Lesson* problematizes the safe distinction between subjective and objective, real and fantastic.

The disruptive potential of the erosion of distinction between real and unreal is demonstrated in the way in which *The Tango Lesson* calls into question the truth-status of a pivotal scene in the romantic narrative. Sally and Pablo engage in an intimate conversation regarding free will, destiny, and the existence of God. Sally admits that she does not believe that lives are governed by some superior power; however she also 'feels that she is a Jew'. Pablo responds by identifying as 'a dancer... and a Jew'. In this moment of shared intimacy, both Sally and Pablo cry a single tear. Later in the film, Sally describes a scene she might write, where she tells Pablo something important to her, that she is a Jew, and that Pablo replies 'I am a dancer, and I am a Jew'. Pablo responds that he may say such a thing, but when Sally goes on to suggest that the scene then requires Pablo to cry a single tear Pablo complains 'maybe I don't want to do that'. This scene reworks the previous, emotionally intense scene as a cool and detached sequence of stage directions. It also forces the audience to re-consider the ontological status of the previous scene. Is it something that really happens, but which Pablo wishes to distance himself from? Is it of the same order as the colour sequences, representing a moment from the film Sally plans to make? If it is the latter, then this completely disrupts the safe binary of monochrome/colour, truth/fiction and calls into question the status of every other scene in the film. Even if the first scene isn't false, the possibility that it *might* be is enough to disrupt the safe distinctions of truth/fiction and throw the narrative into a state uncertainty.

The narrative fallout of this uncertainty is that it problematizes the nature of Sally and Pablo's romance. If Sally and Pablo never shared this intimate moment (or if Pablo simply wishes to disavow it) then can we still assume that they were lovers? Neither is this simply a case of distinguishing subjective experience from the objective, as the opposition of subjective/objective is no longer possible as there are no longer reliable textual markers as to the

veracity of a scene. Sally and Pablo's relationship is reconfigured as a perspectival clash. Sally expresses as much in her argument with Pablo after their performance together. Sally argues that Pablo cannot understand her work because he doesn't know how to look, only to be looked at. The replacement of objectivity/subjectivity with a perspectival model of reality also links back to the concept of the always-already mediated. Experience cannot be opposed to and outside of representation because experience is always determined by perspective.

My reading of this moment differs radically from both Mayer and Fowler. Mayer reads both iterations of the conversation literally, seeing the second exchange simply as a recollection of the first.¹⁸⁹ Fowler's interpretation is somewhat more nuanced, noting the 'unexpectedness' of Sally and Pablo's tearful exchange in the café, and how this confounded reviewers 'who wanted to read from character to director'.¹⁹⁰ Fowler is more concerned with the moment where Sally describes this scene to Pablo, identifying it as a 'moment when we wonder where we are in the creative process: we have been watching a film made by her with him in it, yet now they are talking about how they would make that film'.¹⁹¹ Fowler therefore reads this moment somewhat differently to me, picturing *The Tango Lesson* as a Möbius strip film that rehearses its own creation, rather than as a challenge to categories of real and unreal. Fowler elaborates, describing how

'at that moment, when we seem to be caught in the film within the film, the completeness of creation that we are used to encountering unravels, and we are at once with Potter in the present moment of creation and with Sally looking forward to the future delivery of the film.'¹⁹²

It seems that in some respects this scene functions for Fowler as a moment of self-reflexivity that foregrounds the status of the film as fiction. Crucially for Fowler, it also points to Potter as the creator of the fiction, with Fowler implying a slippage between the character of Sally and

¹⁸⁹ Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter*, pp. 136 – 137

¹⁹⁰ Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 87

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 76

¹⁹² Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 76

Potter.¹⁹³ Fowler therefore neutralises this potentially destabilising moment through an appeal to the authority of the author, not unlike Bordwell's appeal to authorial expressivity in the art film.

Fowler's reading robs the scene of impact, eradicating any effect it may have on the rest of the film. Following Fowler, Pablo and Sally's relationship is unquestioned, as is the truth status of each scene. Fowler's reading suggests that each event in the diegesis is either the inspiration for or a rehearsal of the film being planned within the diegesis. This suggests a chain whereby the real Sally Potter makes a film based on her experiences, in which the fictional Sally plans to make a film based on her experiences, in which a further fictional Sally will make a film based on *her* experiences, and so on *ad infinitum*. While there is admittedly something pleasing in this image of a never-ending succession of *Tango Lessons*, they nonetheless maintain a solid foundation in the real. Each subsequent fictional *Tango Lesson* has its source in Sally Potter, the author. This is therefore a rather conservative authorial reading, which fails to account for the ways in which *The Tango Lesson* challenges the theoretical underpinnings of such a reading. A postmodern reading attentive to the ways in which *The Tango Lesson* challenges binaries of real/un-real and champions a model of subjectivity as always-already-mediated allows for a richer engagement with the film.

This reading of *The Tango Lesson* also allows for a more nuanced understanding of the presentation of authorship in the film. *The Tango Lesson*'s depictions of Sally at work – as screenwriter, scouting locations, coaching Pablo, and directing her dancers – suggests a fairly traditional representation of the figure of the author in terms of the Romantic genre of author-function. In particular Sally's abandonment of the 'Rage' project because it was a film she didn't want to make in favour of producing a film about the tango seemingly deploys the

¹⁹³ Fowler does this throughout her reading of *The Tango Lesson*, such as her description of 'Potter's gaze', where it is unclear whether she is referring to the character Sally, Potter as performer, or Potter as director. Fowler, *Sally Potter*, p. 78

convention of art as self-expression.¹⁹⁴ However, such a reading is rendered untenable through the film's deconstruction and destabilisations of categories such as the unified self and lived experience. Although the film is concerned with depicting the director at work, it uses this as metaphor for a particular way of seeing and being. By challenging the categories of truth and fiction, *The Tango Lesson* prevents the positioning of Sally as source to her text. Sally does not precede nor exceed her text, she exists through and in the text. The presentation of Sally's experience as always already mediated also disrupts the relation of creator and creation, an effect accentuated by Potter's casting as Sally. *Orlando* presents a similar challenge to Romantic authorship, although in a less sustained fashion than *The Tango Lesson*.

In the first chapter of Potter's *Orlando*, the young Orlando sits beneath an oak tree with his quill poised above an empty page, not unlike Sally at the start of *The Tango Lesson*. The final chapter of the film begins with the modern day Orlando delivering her manuscript to a publisher. The bracketing of the narrative in this way, with the starting and completion of manuscripts, suggests the manuscript Orlando delivers to her publisher contains the story of her life, or at the very least is the result of her experiences. This in turn strongly suggests the privileging of self-expression associated with the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function, a suggestion bolstered by the publisher's assertion that the manuscript is 'written from the heart'. The publisher then begins talking in commercial terms, noting that the manuscript should sell – provided Orlando rewrites the manuscript, increasing the love interest and providing a happy-ending. This seemingly introduces an opposition of art and commerce, where Orlando's personal narrative is butchered in order to make it more saleable. However, looking again at the publisher's dialogue, it is apparent that the initial indicator of the manuscript's saleability is its personal dimension: the publisher thinks it will sell because it is written from

¹⁹⁴ Unlike the fictional Sally, the real Potter did go on to make a film titled *Rage* (2009). As with its fictional antecedent, *Rage* is a film where a succession of fashion models are killed. *Rage* differs from the fictitious 'Rage' project in a number of ways. Firstly, the film is shot from the perspective of blogger Michelangelo, in the form of a series of interviews against coloured backdrops. Secondly, each of the murders is obscene – in the literal sense that they each occur off screen.

the heart. The quality of self-expression is therefore as much a marketable commodity as the happy-ending or love interest.

The casting of Heathcote Williams as both the publisher and the poet Nick Greene emphasises the connection between art and commerce. The opposing poles of art and commerce are united by the use of the same actor for representatives of both poetry and publishing. Furthermore, the poet Nick Greene is depicted as commercially savvy to the point of parody. Nick Greene meets with the overly earnest young Orlando in hope of procuring a wealthy patron, whereas Orlando seeks only a peer and mentor to discuss his own poetic efforts. The disparity between Orlando and Greene's interest is humorously illustrated in the composition of the dinner scene. The long table is positioned diagonally so that Greene is seated in the foreground to the bottom right of the scene and Orlando barely in focus in the extreme background at the top left. While Orlando sits at the head of the table, Greene sits along the long edge of the table. This perpendicular arrangement emphasises their divergent views and suggests that they are talking at cross-purposes (Figure 88). This cuts to a close-up of Orlando, who introduces the 'sacred' subject of poetry. On the word poetry, a servant carrying soup enters the foreground (Figure 89), and the camera refocuses so that Orlando is out of focus but the soup basin is sharply in focus (Figure 90). The camera then tracks the length of the table, following the progress of the soup until it reaches Greene, who firmly grasps the basin to prevent the servant taking it away from him (Figure 91). This playfully makes clear that Greene is far more interested in Orlando's hospitality than his poetry.

At every available turn, Greene amusingly diverts the conversation to his own poverty and suffering. Whilst Greene is very clearly concerned with the economy of art, he uses the language and myths of the Romantic genre of author-function to make clear the necessity of money. Greene diverts Orlando's discussion of poetry to a discussion of poet's lives, he describes his poetry in terms of struggle, he describes his ill health and his nerves (Greene is so sensitive he can feel a rose leaf beneath his mattress), and how he has suffered for his art.

Greene is clearly adept at the business of being an auteur. Rather than representing the abandonment of art in favour of purely commercial concerns, Greene demonstrates that art and commerce are inseparable. For all that Greene is a humorous figure; the film frames him as a talented poet (at least compared to Orlando). Furthermore, rather than a paean to his benefactor, Greene's poem is a (rather cruel) critical account of Orlando's poetic dabbling. Greene's financial dependence on Orlando clearly doesn't prevent him from being critical.

The encounters with Greene and the publisher do much to challenge the association of *Orlando* with the Romantic genre of author-function. The film's postmodern concern with subjectivity and representation also challenges any straightforward connection between Orlando's experience and Orlando's manuscript. If the manuscript is indeed a record of Orlando's life, there is no way of telling whether the events of the film represent the 'real' events or a version including the suggestions of the publisher. Indeed, so much of the film deals with the mediation of experience through art that any notion of an authentic, unmediated, version of Orlando's life is untenable. Ultimately, the film rejects the Romantic genre of author-function and the myths drawn upon by Nick Greene in favour of an alternative conceptualisation of authorship. The alternative type of authorship favoured by *Orlando* is suggested by the depiction of Orlando's daughter at the end of the film. The ending of *Orlando* also builds upon *Thriller*'s call for female community by introducing the concept of legacy.

As with Woolf's novel, *Orlando* ends in the present and with the birth of Orlando's child.¹⁹⁵ In the novel, Orlando's child is male, allowing Orlando to retain her property. Unlike the novel, the child in the film is female and so Orlando loses her ancestral home. Orlando's loss of property is not represented as a tragedy, but rather a shedding of patriarchal tradition. When Orlando visits her former home, the exterior of the property is bizarrely covered in white tarpaulin, even the lawns and topiary (Figure 92). This recalls Orlando's return from Khiva, and the scenes in which she attempts to navigate around the densely packed furniture draped in dust-

¹⁹⁵ In the novel, 'the present' is the twenties, whereas the film updates this to the nineties

sheets (Figure 93). Orlando's dress is exaggeratedly wide and ungainly, restricting Orlando's movements. At the end of the film however, Orlando is dressed in high boots, trousers, and sheepskin jacket, a costume that both allows a far greater range of movement, and through its association with aviators and adventurers, suggestive of even greater freedom. Orlando's daughter is similarly dressed, and dashes about the white expanse of the lawn (Figure 94). Through Orlando's daughter, the ancestral seat becomes a playground, or a present to be unwrapped. Orlando's former home is also transformed from a private space to a public one, open to crowds of visitors.

The sense of Orlando's ancestral home as public playground rather than private legacy also reflects the film's playful reworking of history and tradition. Rather than seeking a definitive break with a tradition of male-centric literature and culture, *Orlando* instead treats it as a resource to borrow from, interrogate, and rework in any number of ways. This is also a postmodern challenge to the authority of patriarchal tradition, no longer *the* tradition but merely *a* tradition. The film also shifts focus from the type of legacy represented by Orlando's ancestral home to a different concept of legacy tied to Orlando's child and Orlando's writing. The legacy of the family seat is exclusive, elitist, and backwards looking emphasising continuity with the past. Orlando's writing and Orlando's daughter instead shift to a forward-looking perspective, representing a sense of legacy as future potential. The narration reinforces this, observing that with the loss of her home, Orlando is no longer trapped by destiny and that 'ever since letting go of the past, she has found her life is just beginning'. Orlando's legacy to her daughter is not aristocratic privilege, but the freedom to create art. The scenes of Orlando's daughter playing with the camera at the end of the film, more than simply suggesting a familial inheritance of creativity, show that the deconstruction of dominant male culture creates the space for female art.

The type of creativity represented by Orlando's daughter is also important. The filmmaking of Orlando's daughter is primarily a form of play, and reflects the playful attitude of

Orlando. The link between *Orlando* and the art-play of Orlando's daughter manifests in the use of footage ostensibly from the daughter's camera. The cut occurs as the voice-over narration observes that Orlando has 'changed', cutting from an image of Orlando and her daughter contemplating a portrait of Orlando (Figure 95), to an image of static, (Figure 96) and then to images captured using a video camera (Figure 97). The cut from one form of representation (portrait) to another (video), and the change from celluloid to digital suggest a break with the past. However, the return to the location of the film's opening and the return of Jimmy Somerville's Elizabethan herald as an angel suggest revision and reinterpretation rather than outright rejection.¹⁹⁶

As with the previous case study, the analysis of the Potter oeuvre in this chapter has tended to emphasise the reworking of generic conventions as evidence of the re-inventive impulse of the postmodern genre of author-function. In part this is the result of positioning *Thriller* as a key text through which to interpret the Potter oeuvre, as the film clearly foregrounds its concern with genre. A further reason for focusing on genre is that in the Potter oeuvre genre is often the vehicle for the reworking of gender conventions. In this way the political dimension of the reworking of generic conventions of apparent. It is by reworking gender that the films of the Potter oeuvre are able to draw attention to the gender imbalance bound up and perpetuated by those generic conventions, and in doing so being to search for alternatives.

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, a case study focused on Bigelow would inevitably foreground generic reworking as evidence characteristic of re-invention associated with the postmodern auteur. However, like Potter this concern with reworking genre is also a vehicle for reworking gender. The re-inventive impulse of the Coppola oeuvre is harder to pin down. There is no readily identifiable concern with the reworking of generic convention, except in the irreverent and highly effective reworking of the conventions of the costume drama and

¹⁹⁶ This segment is partially filmed on DV and partially on celluloid, oscillating between the two. This switching back and forth between stocks also suggests interplay with the past rather than a complete break.

biopic in *Marie Antoinette*. Both *Lost in Translation* and *The Bling Ring* engage playfully with star persona, *Lost in Translation* deconstructing the Bill Murray as much as it relies upon it. Emma Watson's role as Nicki in *The Bling Ring* not only operates in contrast to her most famous role as Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter* series, but also in relation to Watson's work as activist and spokesperson. This is most apparent in scenes where Watson's character Nicki feigns interest in humanitarian concerns and uses the platform granted by her unexpected fame for further self-promotion. More so than in the reworking of theme or convention, the re-inventive impulse of the Coppola oeuvre is located in reworking of the significance of style and the relation of surface and depth to meaning. In both *Lost in Translation* and *The Virgin Suicides* (Coppola, 1999) this is borne out in the exploration of whether it is possible to know someone beyond surface perceptions, and the uncertainty as to whether the surface conceals a hidden depth or its absence. The treatment of history and conventions of biopic in *Marie Antoinette* is related to this concern. This attentiveness to surface is expressed somewhat differently in *The Bling Ring*, where the visual style of film, emphasising the seductive and tactile nature of surfaces as much as their lack of depth, demands a mode of reading that recognises the surface as a potential site of meaning. While this may set *The Bling Ring* apart from the other films mentioned; positioning *The Bling Ring* as a new centre encourages the identification of a similar strategy across the Coppola oeuvre, particularly in relation to *Marie Antoinette* and *Lost in Translation*.

It is also possible to trace alternative manifestations of the re-inventive impulse across the Potter oeuvre, in particular the ways in which star persona is deployed. Examples can be found in *Orlando* with Swinton and Crisp, but also the metafictional casting of Potter and Veron as Sally and Pablo in *The Tango Lesson*. Beyond the films discussed in this thesis, the use of Julie Christie in *The Gold Diggers* relies on her status as an archetypal female star of the sixties and seventies, representing not just a woman but a particular concept of womanhood and notions of female beauty (and the values attached to such beauty). *Rage* in particular demonstrates the

re-inventive impulse in the form of challenging the expectations associated with star persona. In a move similar to the casting of Potter and Veron in *The Tango Lesson*, the model Lily Cole plays the role of young model Lettuce Leaf. More overt play with star persona includes Jude Law in the role of Minx, a gender-queer model and Judi Dench as a cynical pot-smoking journalist. The deployment of Johnny Depp as the beautiful but passive and near mute object of Suzie's affection in *The Man Who Cried* can also be interpreted in this light, although this too incorporates the concerns of genre and gender.

The representation of authorship in *Orlando* and *The Tango Lesson* raises the issue of Potter's own status as author, and the advantages of considering Potter in terms of the postmodern genre of author-function. Analysing Potter's work through this prism brings into focus Potter's engagement with the history of representation through intertextual reworking and parody, as well as emphasising the deconstructive and re-inventive impulse of Potter's work. This perspective also overcomes the limitations of the dominant modernist genre of author-function, rejecting the criteria of critical distance in favour of complicitous critique and engagement through intimacy. This in turn avoids the threat of failed authorship represented by the apparent break in Potter's oeuvre by tracing a different set of patterns across the oeuvre.

Figures



Figure 36: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 37: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 38: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)

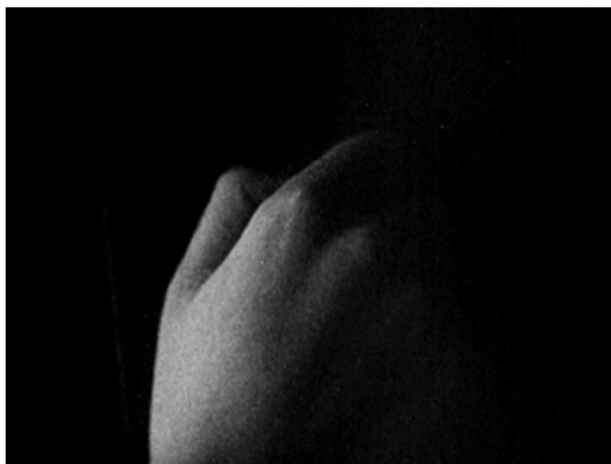


Figure 39: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 40: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 41: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 42: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)

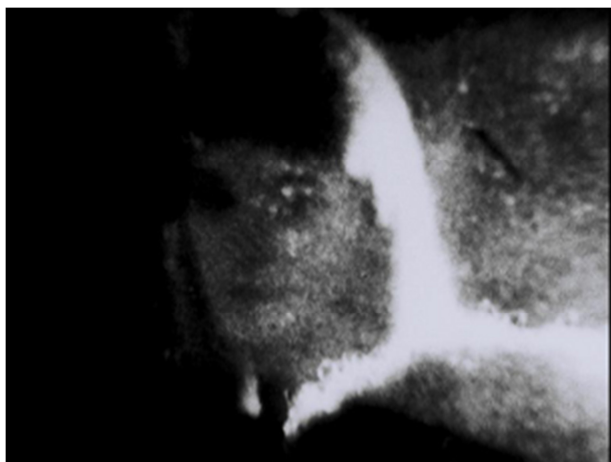


Figure 43: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 44: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 45: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 46: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 47: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 48: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 49: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 50: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 51: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 52: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 53: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 54: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 55: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 56: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 57: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)

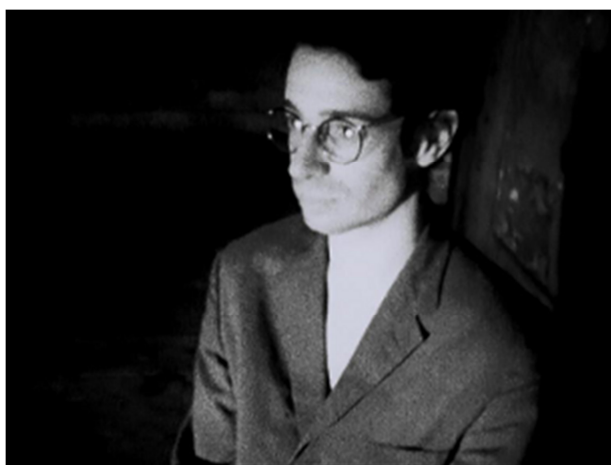


Figure 58: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 59: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 60: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 61: *Thriller* (Sally Potter, 1979)



Figure 62: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 63: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 64: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 65: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 66: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 67: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 68: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

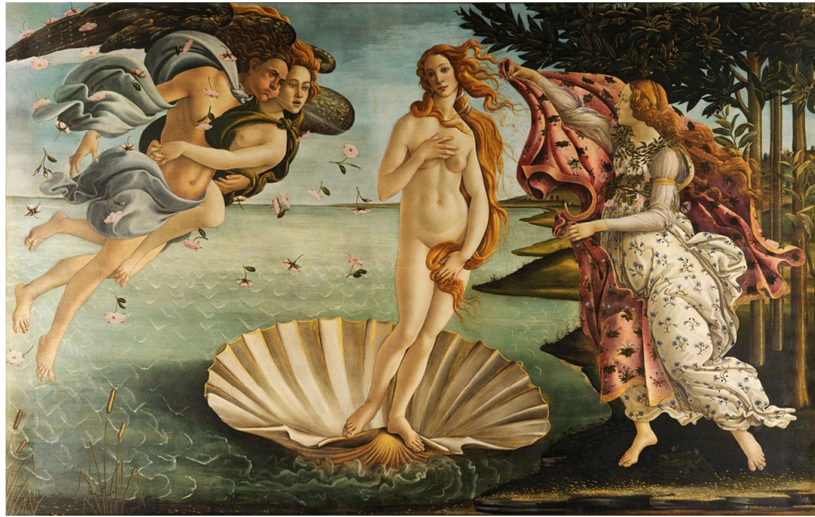


Figure 69: Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1486, tempera on canvas. 172.5 cm × 278.9 cm, Uffizi, Florence



Figure 70: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

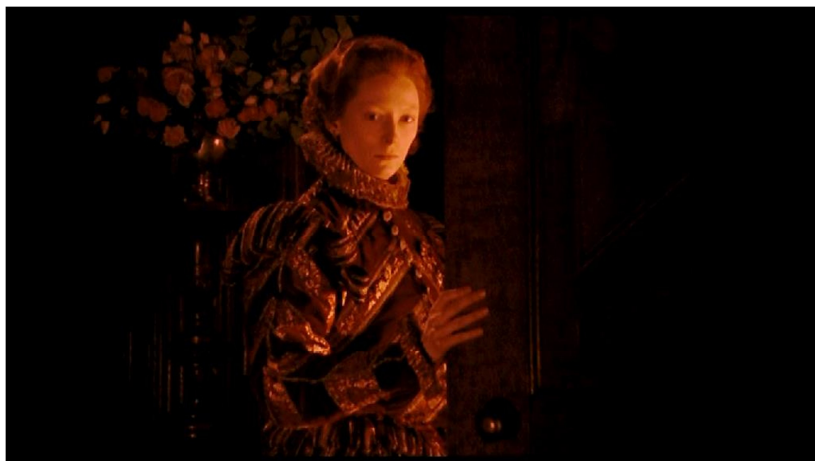


Figure 71: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 72: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 73: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

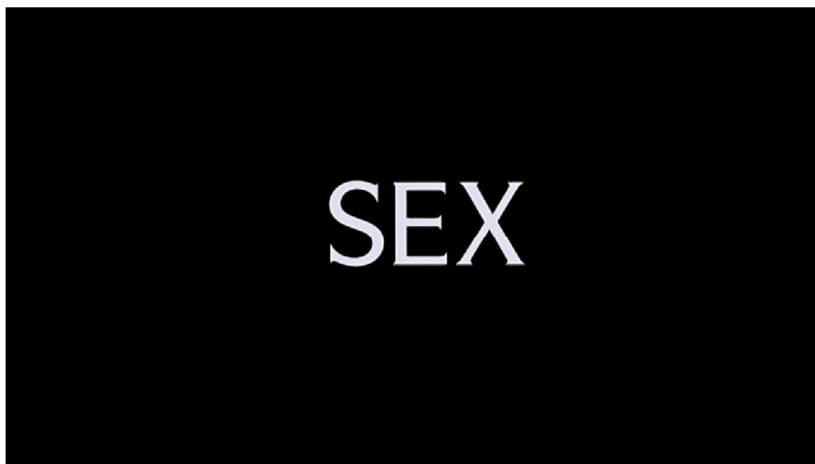


Figure 74: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 75: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 76: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 77: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 78: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 79: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 80: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 81: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 82: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 83: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 84: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 85: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 86: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 87: *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997)



Figure 88: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 89: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 90: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 91: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

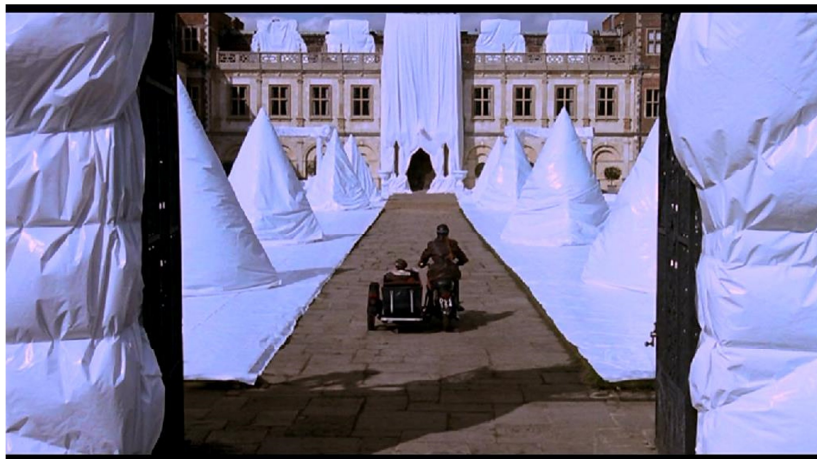


Figure 92: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 93: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)



Figure 94: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

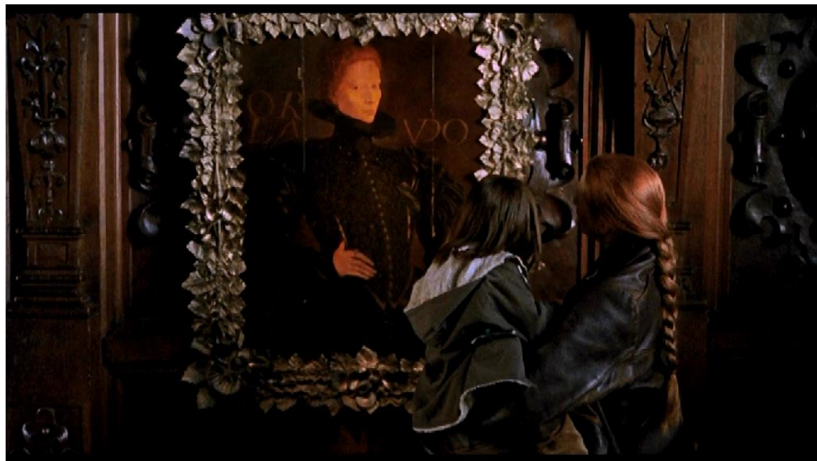


Figure 95: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

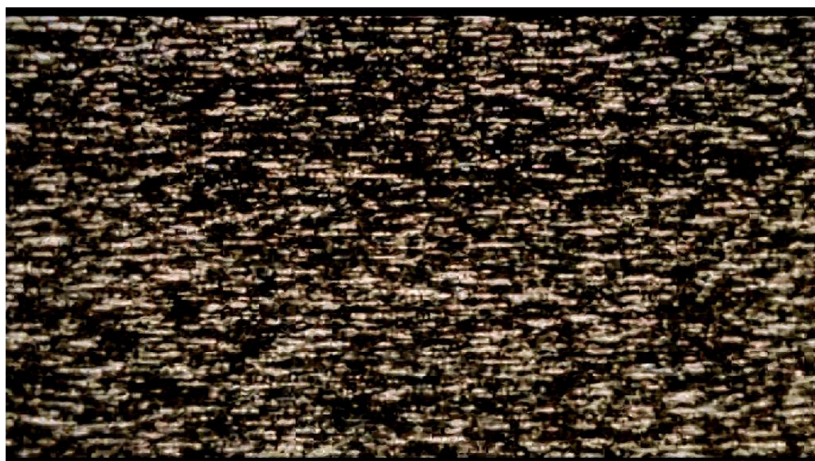


Figure 96: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

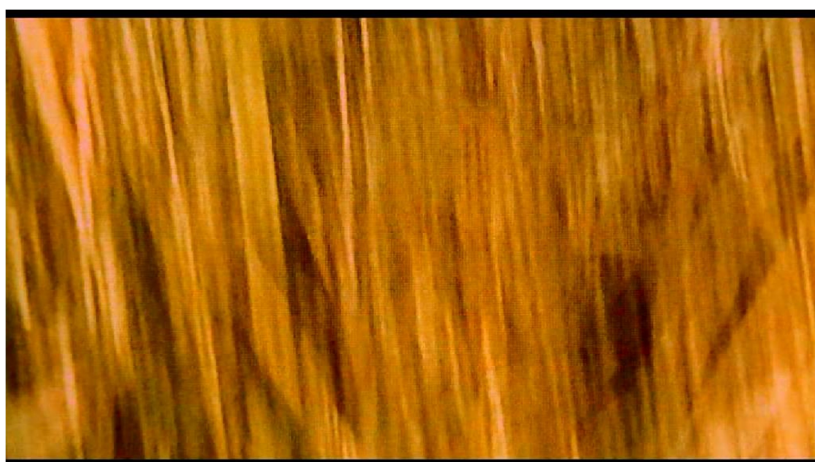


Figure 97: *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis, I suggested that the treatment of authorship in the keynote papers of the 2015 Film-Philosophy Conference was indicative of the deferral and displacement of the author and authorship in the field of film studies. The author is both everywhere and nowhere. The author does not persist as a monolithic and undifferentiated category but rather as a myriad of myths, narratives, or tropes of authorship. Through the identification of various genres of author-function, I have developed a critical vocabulary for charting the persistence of authorship and accurately describing its various forms.

Having the facility to distinguish between various forms of authorship makes it possible to identify the various aesthetic and political concerns that might motivate the critical deployment of authorship. This enables a meta-critical consideration of film authorship, examining not just whether or not a particular director is granted authorship status but also determining the criteria used to make such distinctions, and the assumptions about art and value that inform them. This not only applies to the construction of particular directors as authors but also to theories of authorship. The approach to authorship formulated in this thesis recognises that theories of authorship do not discover the conditions of authorship but rather create them, investing the category of author with the particular qualities that the theorist in question seeks to secure as markers of artistic value. Examples presented in this thesis range from the appeals to the Romantic genre of author-function by Astruc and the critics of *cahiers du cinema* in order to legitimise cinema as an art of self-expression, to the call to recognising the author as gendered as a political necessity associated with the feminist genre of author-function, to my own development of a postmodern genre of author-function recognising the aesthetic and political worth of reworking past forms and texts.

In addition to the reappraisal of particular directors and a reconsideration of the scope of postmodern cinema, the bringing together of postmodernism and auteurism in this thesis also has repercussions for the further study of approaches to authorship. Where existing conceptualisations of

authorship and postmodernism have conventionally placed the two at odds, the postmodern genre of author-function and the shift to considering the author as text overcomes this opposition in a way that remains theoretically consistent with both theories and without counterproductively extolling the 'meaninglessness' of postmodern texts. The approach to authorship presented in this thesis seeks to remain consistent with the concerns of post-structuralist and postmodern thought while, unlike Barthes's call for the death of the author, retaining the author as potentially rich site of meaning in the form of the author-text. In this thesis, the director has been identified as the author, and the author-text largely concerned precisely with the director's role as director. This is in keeping with the long critical tradition of identifying the director as the author. Where a director has also had additional roles as producer, script-writer, composer, or even performer this has been understood in terms of the ways in which it plays into the tropes of the Romantic genre of author-function. While it is not the focus of this thesis, there is perhaps potential to perform a further re-centring, shifting focus to the role of writer or producer and considering the various genres of author-function that contribute to the creation of these alternative author-texts. This would however be a substantial undertaking, and must therefore be the subject of further research.

The five genres of author-function presented in this thesis are not intended to be taken as an exhaustive or definitive list. The characteristics of the Romantic, modernist, feminist, and commercial, genres of author-function are defined and developed in relation to the critical literature examined in the review of literature and throughout the thesis, and reflect the major trends in the development of theories of film authorship in the field of film studies. The choice of labels for these genres also represents the ways in which these approaches to authorship take up the concerns of broader aesthetic traditions that extend beyond the field of film studies.

The characteristics of the postmodern genre of author-function were determined through the analysis of existing work on Lynch and Tarantino, in particular Brooker's and Brooker's affirmative reading of *Pulp Fiction*. Taking up and expanding upon this reading facilitated the formulation of a postmodern genre of author-function compatible with Linda Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism. The characteristics of the postmodern genre of

author-function were further refined through its use as a critical framework in the Scott and Potter case studies.

The affirmative aspect of both Hutcheon's and Booker's and Booker's postmodernism is of paramount importance to the formulation of the postmodern genre of author-function and to the project of this thesis. Taking up the distinction made by Constable between affirmative and nihilistic postmodernisms, I have expanded the former category in the development of the postmodern genre of author-function.¹ Adopting affirmative conceptualisations of postmodernism allows the characteristics of postmodern art (parody, intertextuality, and self-reflexivity) to be categorised as markers of artistic value rather than its lack. It is this that makes it possible for the postmodern genre of author-function to be utilised as a reading strategy for the reevaluation of oeuvres dismissed as not-art for demonstrating postmodern characteristics. While the postmodern genre of author-function stems from affirmative conceptualisations of postmodernism. Nihilistic conceptualisations of postmodernism are not absent from the approach to authorship presented in this thesis, and persist in the modernist and commercial genres of author-function.

The postmodern genre of author-function is further distinguished from the other genres of author-function in that it has no requirement of critical distance and instead accommodates the potential for complicitous critique. The notion of complicitous critique is adopted from Hutcheon's affirmative conceptualisation of postmodernism, and allows for the potential for critique from within. This is particularly useful in overcoming the obstacle posed by the criteria of critical-distance to the construction of a director such as Scott or Tarantino as an auteur, and as such expands the field in terms of the sort of director that can be constructed as an auteur. However, this is not licence to construct *any* director as an auteur according to the perspective of the postmodern genre of author function. In order to justify the adoption of the postmodern-genre of author-function as a reading strategy, the oeuvre of the director must demonstrate

¹ Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, p. 3

evidence of a re-invention. This criterion is adopted from Brooker's and Brooker's affirmative re-valuation of *Pulp Fiction*, and may manifest in a variety of ways; including but not limited to reworking the conventions of genre, narrative, and star persona.

The genres of author-function are not discrete categories, and there is a degree of overlap between the different genres. The difference between genres is often a matter of emphasis rather than clear distinction. For example, the characteristics of the bohemian outsider associated with the Romantic genre of author-function may overlap with the requirement of critical distance associated with the modernist genre of author-function or indeed the oppositional stance associated with the feminist genre of author-function. A clear example of such overlap is the different ways in which references to Lynch's training as an artist serve to construct him either as bohemian outsider or critically distanced observer. Alternatively, the deconstruction and de-naturalisation of gender in the films of the Sally Potter oeuvre can be aligned with the politics of both the feminist and postmodern genres of author-function. In such cases, identification of the most appropriate genre of author-function is down to critical discretion.

In this thesis, the genres of author-function are limited to those reflecting the broad trends identified in the review of literature and the postmodern genre of author-function. The identification of further genres of author-function is a matter for further research. However, increasing the number of author-functions also greatly increases the potential overlap between the different genres of author-function. It is important to maintain a balance between reflecting the multiplicity of approaches to authorship and critical usefulness. This allows for a degree of nuance and accuracy in distinguishing between differing constructions of the category of author without the critical framework becoming unwieldy and overburdened with terms.

For an approach to authorship to usefully classify as an additional genre of author-function, it must depart in some significant way from the genres of author-function presented in this thesis. Galt's and Schoonover's characterisation of authorship in art cinema as a political platform for marginalised communities represents such a departure; rejecting the model of

transcendent or universal identity associated with the Romantic and modernist genres of author-function and foregrounding the political importance of the specificity of identity associated with the feminist genre of author-function. However, for Galt and Schoonover gender is one among many characteristics held to be politically and theoretically significant. If more critics within Film Studies adopt Galt's and Schoonover's approach to authorship, or begin to construct the author along similar lines, then it may be possible to identify the emergence of an additional political genre of author-function, constructing the author in terms of a myriad of intersecting identities such as gender, sexuality, race, nationality, and class.

The approach to authorship in this thesis reflects Hutcheon's observations that the de-centring associated with post-structuralist, postmodern, and feminist theory is always a double process, 'comprised of a paradoxical installing as well as subverting of conventions'.² Building on Hutcheon, the de-centring of a concept is always accompanied by a re-centring, or an organisation around a new centre. The de-centring and re-centring impulse that informs this project is evident in the critical shift from treating the author as an expressive subject that both precedes and exceeds the text to a reconfigured notion of authorship that treats the category of the author as cultural and constructed, reflected in the change in terminology from author to author-text. This is a crucial step towards the construction of a postmodern genre of author-function, as it acknowledges that criteria such as self-expression and critical distance are not natural and necessary conditions determining authorship but rather narrative tropes tied to specific ways of conceptualising authorship.

A further concern of this thesis has been the continued role played by authorship in the aesthetic evaluation of film. The identification of the different genres of author-function provides a critical framework and vocabulary for the accurate description of the ways in which authorship is used as a marker of aesthetic value. It is through this framework that one is able to perceive the role played by criteria such as self-expression and critical distance in the exclusion

² Hutcheon, *Politics of Postmodernism*, p. 14

and devaluation of postmodern art. Furthermore, the recognition that the aesthetic evaluation of a text is tied to critical perspective rather than innate value opens up the possibility of reappraising previously denigrated texts. This revaluative process is not a matter of drilling down to some previously concealed value, but rather the result of a shift of perspective. This use of authorship is clear in the chapter on Tony Scott, where approaching Scott's oeuvre from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the revaluation of the apparent excesses of Scott's style as meaningful interventions and the revaluation of Scott's oeuvre in terms of the meaningful reworking of generic conventions rather than meaningless, depthless, sensation.

This revaluation is possible because from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function, the reworking of past forms becomes valuable rather than being perceived as a lack of originality. This shift of perspective also encourages attentiveness to ways in which the films of the Scott oeuvre rework the conventions of action cinema from *within* the context of the action cinema mode, modifying and expanding the range of meanings associated with action cinema. This is most apparent in the ways in which *Déjà Vu* and *Domino* engage with and rework the tropes of redemption and heroic intervention in order to interrogate the figure of the action hero and to present alternative formulations of that figure. This is an example of the paradoxical subversion and installing of convention characteristic of postmodern art. While the narratives of *Déjà Vu* and *Domino* are still centrally concerned with the redemption of Carlin and Domino through heroic intervention, the sense of what is to be redeemed, and how the heroic protagonist might achieve this is scrutinised and reworked. As a result of this questioning and reworking, Carlin and Domino represent a different kind of action hero. *The Hunger* similarly reworks the tropes of vampire fiction in order to mobilise those conventions in service of a narrative concerned with mortality and fear of ageing.

The adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function allows for a different kind of critical reappraisal in the Sally Potter case study. While the Potter oeuvre is not in need of

rehabilitation in the same way as Scott, the shift to the critical perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function inspires readings of the films that would not be possible from alternative critical perspectives. In particular, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function draws attention to the playful engagement with genre evident across Potter's entire oeuvre, not just the treatment of the costume drama and gothic-romance in *Orlando*, but also the reworking of the thriller and the Hollywood musical in *Thriller* and *The Tango Lesson* respectively. Adopting the postmodern genre of author-function also allows for consideration of the ways in which the reworking of various intertexts represents a deconstructive engagement with histories of representation.

A common feature of both the Scott and Potter case studies is that the oeuvres of both directors are constructed as fractured or divided. A further advantage of the postmodern genre of author-function is that it allows for the perception of patterns of unity across the Scott and Potter oeuvres rather than constructing them as fractured and non-unified. The adoption of the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the reappraisal of the entirety of the Scott oeuvre rather than limiting this to the select class of later films. In the case of Potter, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function allows for the identification of a critical and political impulse across the entirety of the Potter oeuvre, rather than characterising the Potter oeuvre in terms of a weakening of critique.

The unifying function of the postmodern genre of author-function is not to be mistaken for a static unity, where a set of signature themes and conventions are singled out as the defining characteristic of the Scott or Potter oeuvre. Rather than cementing an oeuvre into a static unity, adopting the postmodern genre of author-function as reading strategy represents an ongoing unifying process, a continual reading for unity. The postmodern genre of author-function is not simply a reading strategy, but is always already a re-reading strategy that involves a perpetual process of re-centring. With each reading, it is possible to identify a new centre – such as the reworking of conventions of genre or gender representation – and from there trace new unifying

patterns across the oeuvre. For example, while both the Scott and Potter oeuvres were approached with generic reworking as a central concern, this analysis led to identification of a potential centre of engagement through intimacy. In the case of Scott, engagement through intimacy presents itself as an intriguing starting point for a rereading of *Top Gun*, given the film's affective appeal. This can in turn lead to consideration of similar appeal in films such as *Days of Thunder*, and *Unstoppable*. A focus on engagement through intimacy also highlights potential similarities between *Top Gun* and the short film *One of the Missing*. In both films the internal torment of a character is conveyed not through dialogue but through *mise-en-scène* and editing.

However, before identifying engagement through intimacy as an additional characteristic of the postmodern genre of author-function alongside complicitous critique and the re-inventive impulse, it is important to confirm whether engagement through intimacy is a characteristic of postmodern works more generally, or whether it is peculiar to the Scott and Potter oeuvres. Despite working in the quite different contexts of mainstream Hollywood action cinema and the art cinema respectively, and despite the related differences in the filmmaking style associated with each director, both directors are associated with modes notable for their affective appeal: either in terms of the bodily thrill of action cinema, or the affective and emotional appeal of the arresting image. This raises the possibility that engagement through intimacy is a characteristic of the modes in which Scott and Potter work, rather than the postmodern genre of author-function. However, the analysis in the case studies suggests that the move towards engagement through intimacy is related to the rejection of critical distance in favour of complicitous critique. Given that the re-inventive impulse manifests in a number of ways beyond generic reworking, it follows that complicitous critique may do the same. Building on this, the insider positions of Tarantino and Coppola resulting from a perceived lack of distance from their fans and subject matter and Scott's position as an insider within the Hollywood system can be classified as two distinct forms of complicitous critique. Indeed, the reworking of generic conventions from

within is as much an example of complicitous critique as it is an example of re-invention.

Taking this into account, engagement through intimacy can be understood as a particular form of complicitous critique entailing a mode of engagement between film and viewer encouraged by the aesthetic strategies designed to draw the viewer in rather than fostering a detached and critical mode of viewing. This also involves an appeal to the bodily and emotional at odds with Jameson's identification of postmodernism with the waning of affect.

Classifying engagement through intimacy as a form of complicitous critique also prevents the postmodern genre of author-function from becoming too restrictive and excluding directors whose oeuvres do not demonstrate engagement through intimacy but which may utilise some other form of complicitous critique. For example, the films of the Todd Haynes oeuvre are not noted for qualities of intimacy, instead being classified as inaccessible surfaces. However the treatment of the surface as a site of significance and meaning disrupts the binaries of surface/depth in a manner similar to the disruption of critical distance of engagement through intimacy. A similar move is apparent in the work of Sofia Coppola and its abundance of seductive surfaces.

Approaching Scott and Potter from the perspective of the postmodern genre of author-function not only allows for a reconfiguration of their respective oeuvres, but of postmodern film more generally. As noted in the introduction, although the films of the Scott and Potter oeuvres exhibit stylistic traits characteristic of postmodern cinema, neither Scott nor Potter belong to the established grouping of postmodern directors. As Garrett notes, the existing field of postmodern cinema centres on a select cadre of cultish male directors. The characteristics of postmodern cinema as a whole are subsequently determined in accordance with the shared characteristics of this limited corpus. The focus on Scott and Potter in this thesis enacts a move from the margins of postmodern cinema to the centre, demonstrating what happens when the canon is re-centred on the margins. Reorganised around the new centres of Scott and Potter, postmodern cinema is defined in terms of generic reworking and deconstructive intertextuality.

Placing the precariously political texts of the Scott and Potter oeuvres at the centre of the postmodern corpus also serves to foreground complicitous critique as a key feature of postmodern cinema, as well as a particular type of exaggeration and excess associated with engagement through intimacy.

The re-centring of postmodern cinema on Scott and Potter differs from Garret's expansion of postmodern cinema to include the previously excluded category of the postmodern chick flick. Garret's approach creates an opposition between the politically favourable postmodern chick flick on the one hand and politically unacceptable 'nasty' postmodernism on the other. The re-centring demonstrated in this thesis rejects such an opposition, recognising instead the critical and political potential of postmodern texts; acknowledging their complicitous position within the very systems they seek to critique while maintaining the insider position as a viable platform for critique.

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