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*Moments in Space, Spaces in Time: Phenomenology and the Embodied Depth of  
Cinematic Image*

by

Trevor G. Elkington

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2001

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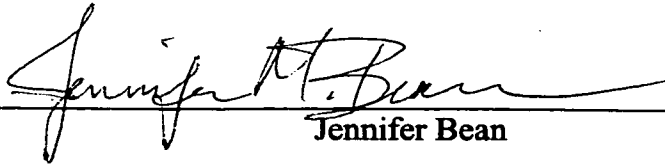
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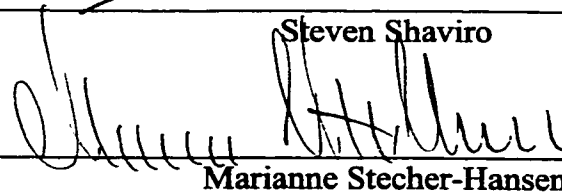
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Abstract

*Moments in Space, Spaces in Time: Phenomenology and the Embodied Depth of  
Cinematic Image*

by Trevor Glen Elkington

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Department of Comparative Literature

This study discusses the perception of depth in film, focusing upon how the spectator perceives cinematic spatiality. Pointing to recent examples, new cinematic technologies are shown to mandate new theoretical paradigms in accounting for a developing spatial logic. Contrary to Lacanian, Neo-Formalist, and postmodern paradigms, which posit the film as superficial and passively perceived, the work presents the spectator as an active body engaged with an image that is perceptually deep. Drawing upon the perceptual phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, Michel de Certeau, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, each chapter analyzes films that posit the human body as the *zero-point* of spatiality, such that depth is related to the spectator's embodied perception. The dissertation concludes by discussing the relation between space and time in comprehending depth, arguing for a Gestalt-oriented film paradigm.

In Chapter Two, Peter Greenaway's films initiate a discussion of the difference between place and space; space and depth are recognized as relying upon the activity of human bodies. Greenaway's films illustrate the conflict between order and chaos; his films' static structures reveal themselves only through the action of character and camera. Chapter Three discusses the zero-point in connection to questions of reality and depth, discussing *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) for its use of hand-held camera before analyzing *The Matrix* (1999) and *Fight Club* (1999) for their ability to place the spectator

within a central spatial position via digital image manipulation. Chapter Four looks at the Dogme 95 films for their claims of authenticity; analyzing the Manifesto and Vow of Chastity for their assumptions regarding film and the technological mediation of perception. Drawing upon Don Ihde's concept of instrumental realism, the films are shown to posit the spectator as an active participant in the comprehension of a mediated and yet deep moment. Chapter Five takes up the issue of time, discussing *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Go* (1999), *Run Lola Run* (1999), and *Time Code* (2000) as spatio-temporal gestalts reliant upon a deep image for their narrative logic. While this dissertation focuses upon recent films, it concludes by pointing to the arguments' theoretical implications regarding perception and cinematic experience.

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## I. Introduction: Embodied Spatial Perception and the Depth of Image

A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117)

Our organs are no longer instruments; on the contrary, our instruments are detachable organs. Space is no longer... a network of relations between objects such as would be seen by a witness to my vision or by a geometer looking over it and reconstructing it from outside. It is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality. I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live in it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," 178)

What is the depth of an image? What is the space of film? How does the spectator perceive spatial depth? What role does the spectator's perceptual organs, his or her physical body, play in the construction of cinematic depth? Is there a connection between film space and narrative, and if so, how does the spectator make sense of it? Are these relations affected by technological innovation, particularly the advent of digital imagery? Presumably, in answering these questions, one would turn to film theory. And yet, in considering depth and perception at this contemporary moment, theories of the cinematic image have come to an impasse. Long accepted assumptions have become increasingly unwieldy when applied to particular types of films emerging within the last ten to fifteen years of film history, the era most commonly thought of as "postmodern." Yet, the postmodern film is itself dictated by changing cinematic technology; effects and techniques are possible today that were unthinkable fifteen years ago. New technologies

demand new theoretical perspectives. Digital technology now affects the way movies are made, how they are displayed, and how they are distributed. Lightweight digital cameras capable of hours of uninterrupted footage invite completely new forms of cinematography; on-line editing and computer-generated effects allow filmmakers to construct cinematic images that were previously unthinkable; and web-casts and video projectors open up a completely new, commercially subversive venue for filmmakers to get their films to the viewers. Yet, by and large, film scholars have analyzed recent innovations through the lens of decades-old, and I would suggest insufficient, theoretical paradigms. Innovation in film practice mandates innovation in film theory.

Consider a moment from Andy and Larry Wachowski's breakthrough summer blockbuster *The Matrix* (1999), a manic exploration of the play between artifice and reality, surface and depth, in film. Roughly a third of the way through the movie, the protagonist-hacker Neo (Keanu Reeves) has been inducted into a small group of freedom fighters who have cast off the illusion of reality under which, ostensibly, the rest of us labor. The prophetic figure Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) has sought Neo out, explaining that what we accept as reality is in fact a computer construct piped directly into our brains by machines that have taken over the world. Humanity is in fact the slave-battery for these machines; the machines present the illusion of the world in order to keep human brains occupied while they siphon electricity from our bodies. Morpheus and his accomplices free Neo of his mental slavery and begin training him to assume his role as the savior of the human race. The first step is to condition his mind to reject the limits of the computer-generated reality he has known. He is strapped into a chair and computer programs are downloaded directly into his neural network. Morpheus calls up

the “jump program.” The premise is simple: Morpheus runs across the roof of a skyscraper and leaps from it to another roof across the street, an impossible distance that defies the laws of physics. He tells Neo to follow him. Neo sprints forward, leaps bravely into the air, and plummets to the ground. When he hits the asphalt below, the asphalt bends, stretching to accommodate his momentum before flinging him back into the air, his body bouncing off the pavement like a child on a trampoline. The physical laws of the simulation have been programmed to allow for the actions of his body, and the “depth” of the image of the pavement becomes permeable to his physical demands.

Why is this important? This dissertation argues that in the midst of contemporary cinema, a new cycle of films has emerged that operates on assumptions counter to dominant trends not only within movie style but also within film theory. Almost without exception, traditional models have accepted that the cinematic image is flat, impossibly superficial, and completely illusory. Across paradigms, from psychoanalytic models through Neo-Formalism to postmodernism, the dominant assumption is that the “depth of cinematic image” is an oxymoron. There is no depth of cinematic image, at least not beyond the illusion that presents itself upon the screen. However, as I will argue, this assumption leads to a fundamental suspicion toward the very thing film theorists claim to admire, film itself. Rather than accepting the superficiality of the cinematic image, rather than concurring with the idea that cinema is a perceptual illusion, I identify an undercurrent within contemporary film that runs through a range of otherwise seemingly disparate movies, films that operate upon a deep model of the image. These films arrive at this model of image by particularly emphasizing the role of the human body in the

construction of depth, focusing upon perception and mobility as active processes that counter the notion of the image as flat illusion.

The films I will discuss in the following pages are all products of the last two decades, an era in which “postmodern” has become a cultural buzzword. In fact, most of the films I will discuss were produced within the past five years. Stylistic tropes of pastiche, self-referentiality, simulation, and artificiality, all central to a definition of what is postmodern, have become commonplace in contemporary filmmaking. Films like *The Matrix*, *Fight Club* (1999), *Go* (1999), *Run Lola Run* (1999), *Time Code* (2000), and particularly *Blade Runner* (1982), have determined for many how postmodernism is defined. And yet, as I will argue, they also present assumptions that are unaccounted for by postmodernism or other contemporary theoretical paradigms. Similarly, international anomalies like *Festen* (1998), *Idioterne* (1998), and *Mifune* (1999) provide further evidence of a need for new theoretical perspectives that can account for the Dogme 95 film collective’s<sup>1</sup> call for cinematic depth or “authenticity.” British art-house favorite Peter Greenaway, with films like *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (1989) and *Prospero’s Books* (1991), provides an example of a filmmaker working through issues usually considered postmodern, often employing the most recent developments in technology. And yet, from his earliest short films, he is taken up with issues of bodies, space, and depth. All of these works point toward a need for new theoretical perspectives. Yet, contemporary theory is often at a loss to explain the re-emergence of the connection between bodies and spatial depth as a crucial issue for film. In the

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<sup>1</sup> While international media sources seem to have settled for the English word *dogma*, the filmmakers themselves tend to favor the Danish word, *dogme*. Moreover, as I will argue in Chapter Four, I see the

following pages, I construct a theoretical model to account for this new cycle of films, what I call *deeply embodied* or *deep-embodiment* films. Often drawing from exactly the same films that other contemporary scholars offer up as proof of film's superficial, illusory, and thus postmodern nature, I will focus upon the role of the human body and the act of perception as a process of understanding depth in the cinematic image, reaching beyond simple perspectivalism. It is therefore necessary to engage the evolution of theories that address the image as depthless, coming largely from the psychoanalytic and Neo-Formalist tradition, as well as the contemporary state of postmodern film theory.

Neo's encounter with the simulated asphalt in *The Matrix* provides a fitting opening example of this new spatial logic. The moment at which the surface stretches to accommodate his momentum reveals the depth of this image as something other than superficial. But, an objection immediately springs to mind. Any one who has watched the film knows that this is merely a training program constructed to allow for exactly these types of mistakes. The program operates on a fundamentally different physical logic than the computer simulated "reality" being pumped into humanity's collective consciousness, and upon an entirely different order altogether from the real world inhabited by Morpheus and his followers. However, as Neo discovers, the body responds to the simulation as though it were real. Upon emerging from this training simulation, he notices a trickle of blood flowing from his mouth, a souvenir from his trip to the pavement. Story-wise, this sympathy of the human body for the events within the simulation is necessary. If the freedom fighters were impervious to the physical demands and insults of the "matrix," then they could accomplish their goals within it without any

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entire project as specifically linked to Danish film history and Danish culture in general. Hence, I will

fear of harm, causing the movie to be much, much shorter. However, for the purposes of my argument, it plays a much more interesting role. The computer simulation constructed for humanity by the computers is presented as a form of illusion, the proverbial wool that has been pulled over human eyes. Morpheus wants to strip that illusion away and reveal the truth that lies beneath. The parallels between this construct and the act of watching a movie are immediate and significant. The “matrix” is the *perfect* film, one in which all of the viewer’s senses are fully, perfectly engaged. If Neo makes a mistake, his body reacts accordingly, even to the point of death, because his brain believes it *should* be dead. The trickle of blood on Neo’s chin signals to us that the body will respond according to this “superficial construct” as though it were entirely real; indeed, Neo’s body responds to the depth of this computer-generated image in exactly the same way that his body responds to the reality outside the matrix, at least before he masters its physical logic. In addressing the issue of the matrix as an “illusion,” a much larger issue is broached. *The Matrix* itself is only a film; we are not in the midst of it in the same way that Neo is caught up in “the matrix.” We sit in our chairs, but we can get up and walk out at any moment. Moreover, we are not in danger from the image itself; we cannot be hurt by a bullet projected on the screen. Yet, who has not experienced a slight jump in the stomach from a well-crafted on-screen fall, or been startled by objects that leap into view from off-screen, or even experienced nausea from images that move too rapidly? We do react to the film image in an embodied fashion. Our perception of a film image is an active, intentional act, in which we reach out and decipher the image from the central perspective of our body. Indeed, the point of *The Matrix* and Neo’s

ascent to messianic status revolves around his eventual ability to make the simulation *obey* the demands of his body, to bend and break the laws of physics according to his needs.

I am not going to suggest that the film viewing experience is one in which we can command the constraints of physics within the film itself, although the technology of virtual reality environments is making exactly that kind of experience increasingly possible. What I argue in the following pages is that film theory has not yet begun to satisfactorily negotiate the role of the human body and the act of perception within the film experience. The films that I discuss, regardless of their many dissimilarities, all share one common feature: they revolve around the notion of the human body as the center of space, and rely upon the image as capable of supporting perceptual and narrative depth. In analyzing these films, I develop a model of both film and narrative space that is constructed upon this centrality, a paradigm of *deep embodiment*. In this argument, I will turn to a source of theoretical inspiration that is only now becoming fully appreciated among film theorists: *phenomenology*. In particular, I will explore the ideas of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel de Certeau, as well as their modern day disciples such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks, and Don Ihde. Significantly, phenomenology offers concepts that fall outside traditional models of the cinematic image as they have developed within film theory. A cursory, and by necessity generalized and simplified, review of dominant theoretical trends reveals a tacit acceptance of the film image as flat, illusory, and artificial. This acceptance, pursued to its conclusion, implies a fundamental mistrust and rejection of the very medium theorists

are attempting to understand. Thus, I am interested in building a theoretical model of embodiment out of these contemporary films. I am also interested in reflecting on the ways in which these films, and therefore my theoretical framework, may challenge larger assumptions about the very nature of film, a task to which this dissertation can only begin to make the most rudimentary gestures.

The equation between flatness, artificiality, and illusion in the cinematic image is firmly established by early psychoanalytic film theory,<sup>2</sup> as spelled out most clearly in Jean-Louis Baudry's classic essays "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" (1970) and particularly in "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema" (1975). For Baudry, the experience of watching a movie in the theater is analogous to the allegory of Plato's cave, in which the audience sits enthralled, captivated by illusions and shadows cast upon the wall. Simultaneously, Baudry establishes the application of Freud, and to an extent, Lacan, in his relation between dreams, the mirror stage, and the process of film comprehension.<sup>3</sup> It is beyond the scope of this project to comprehensively discuss psychoanalytic film theory, but as an immediate point of conflict between the psychoanalytic paradigm and an embodied paradigm, one can point to what Steven Shaviro calls "an almost reflex movement of suspicion, disavowal, and phobic rejection" (11) of the film image in the

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<sup>2</sup> The following discussion of psychoanalytic film theory is particularly influenced by Steven Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body*, in which a more thorough and thoughtful critique of the psychoanalytic model is undertaken.

<sup>3</sup> The examples of psychoanalytic, specifically Lacanian, impact upon film theory and the model of film as illusion are too numerous to mention. Key works include Kaja Silverman's *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), Christian Metz' "The Imaginary Signifier" (1975), Teresa de Lauretis' "Through the Looking Glass" (1980), and Richard Allen's *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* (1995). I am not suggesting this tradition, in all likelihood the most significant development in film theory, is without purpose or application. What I am

founding texts of psychoanalytic film theory. Taking Baudry as an early and perhaps simplified example of this discussion, one can nevertheless see how comparisons of the film image to Plato's cave and Lacan's mirror postulate the unreliability, even aggression, of the film image, a mistrust found to varying degrees in the work of subsequent psychoanalytic film theorists. The film image is cast as a man-made tyrant, an illusory construct before which we are enthralled, powerless to think for ourselves or employ any form of self-determined activity; the film acts upon the spectator and his body, but the spectator does not bodily act upon the film. Consequently, the film image is viewed as static and impossibly shallow.<sup>4</sup>

Baudry's early work is vital in understanding the history of film theory, both for the seminal role it plays as well as for the wealth of what I would call missed opportunities, moments where Baudry begins to infer alternate routes for film theory that are largely undervalued by later scholars. Baudry recognizes the construction of space in traditional film models as dating to Renaissance ideals based upon a single perspective, as opposed to what he sees as a Classic Greek model of space that "is discontinuous and heterogeneous (for Aristotle, but also for Democritus, for whom space is the location of an infinity of indivisible atoms)... correspond[ing] to the organization of their stage, based on a multiplicity of views" (289). Unfortunately, Baudry does not pursue the idea of a space that is infinite or heterogeneous, or the possibility of films that might operate

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suggesting is that it may not be the most efficient theoretical model for dealing with the examples I will provide.

<sup>4</sup> One might be tempted to argue that this is exactly what *The Matrix* represents: passive human beings physically and psychologically enslaved by an illusion. However, it is worth noting that before Neo masters the physics of the matrix, all of his fellow freedom fighters are capable of engaging their role within it as active participants capable of superhuman feats. Though their bodies may be semi-dormant outside of the matrix, within the matrix, already the illusion has begun to bend to their embodied consciousness. By the time Neo

on some model other than the one he sees operating in film, instead focusing on how this “centered space” of the classic film will relate to his Lacanian-Platonic notions. Moreover, particularly in “Ideological Effects,” Baudry begins to pursue a phenomenological angle that is largely missing by the time he writes “The Apparatus” in 1975. At times Baudry sounds uncannily like Merleau-Ponty and de Certeau. Discussing early filmmakers’ realization of the mobility of the camera, he writes “to seize movement is to become movement, to follow a trajectory is to become a trajectory, to choose a direction is to have the possibility of choosing one, to determine a meaning is to give oneself meaning” (291-2), before continuing on to discuss Husserl directly. However, Baudry argues for film spectatorship as the process of a disembodied eye, making a move toward transcendental subjectivity perfectly in keeping with his discussion of Husserl but entirely in opposition to the majority of phenomenology’s primary practitioners, Merleau-Ponty most notably, who insist upon existence and perception as an experience always already lived *through* and *in* a body. Baudry’s gesture toward transcendently subjective vision makes possible his later work on specularization and identification with the mirror as per Lacan. If our experience of the film is one of disembodied vision, then we are that much closer to the prerequisites of Lacan’s mirror stage: “immature powers of mobility and precocious maturation of visual organization” (294). Baudry can thus conclude in applying the mirror stage to film spectatorship, “if one considers that these two conditions are repeated during cinematographic projection – suspension of mobility and predominance of the visual function – perhaps one could suppose that this is more than a simple analogy” (294). Indeed, this will be the primary concern of his later work,

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transcends this position, it is clear that the illusion can be an interactive location of embodied depth,

by which time he has abandoned entirely the earlier leanings toward a phenomenological paradigm, with its reliance upon perception as an active bodily process. The films I will discuss throughout this work challenge Baudry's Platonic-Lacanian model, by centering upon images and motifs of bodily activity in an infinite space. But one wonders in passing what Baudry, in positing the audience member as a passive slave to the image, might make of the audience member who simply walks out of the theater before the movie is over, apparently freed of her mental chains.

This is exactly the point he takes up in "The Apparatus." If in "Ideological Effects," he uncannily echoes de Certeau and Merleau-Ponty, this essay begins with a startling anticipation of Baudrillard: "One constantly returns to the scene of the cave: real effect of impression of reality. Copy, simulacrum, and even simulacrum of simulacrum. Impression of the real, more-than-the-real?" (300). In this essay, Baudry fleshes out the comparison of the film experience, and what he calls the "impression of reality" or "the reality effect," to Plato's cave and Lacan's mirror. Baudry describes Plato's prisoner as "the victim of the illusion of reality, that is, of precisely what is known to be a hallucination... of *an impression of reality*" (302). Clearly, Baudry is pointing once again to the film experience as likewise the impression of reality. And here, I do not disagree: the film is not the thing it records. It presents a record of events to the senses of the spectator. However, as I will argue to a greater degree in Chapter Four, I do not agree that the spectator is unaware of the nature of film as a presentation of events, nor do I agree that because the film is not what it presents, that it is innately suspect and tyrannical. The spectator does not enter the theater expecting to actually experience the

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understood as a construct and yet engaged actively.

events presented on the film; to term the film “illusion” assumes that the spectator gullibly expects something other than an image. In other terms, a film can have a “reality effect” without the spectator actually thinking he is experiencing the moment recorded. Moreover, as is pointed to in the example from *The Matrix*, there is increasing tendency to see the film image as having a real relation to the body as an active organ of perception. Hence, the depth of image becomes something other than superficial in terms of our relation to it.

At times, Baudry forces his reading of Plato’s cave to extremes, as when discussing the immobility of the prisoners and their reliance upon the shadows on the wall. He acknowledges that in Plato’s metaphor, the prisoners have been chained and enthralled to the image since birth. Their muscles have atrophied, their minds completely formed around the only experience they have known: watching the shadows on the wall. It then becomes a thorny issue to suggest that our experience in the cinema is somehow the same. If I drink too much soda and have to find the restroom, haven’t I exercised a level of volition not available to Plato’s spectators? Wouldn’t this very act dispel Baudry’s metaphor? He addresses this issue by suggesting that though we can leave the theater or choose not to watch, we do not have an active role in the actual perception of the film, noting “the subject has always the choice to close his eyes, to withdraw from the spectacle, or to leave, but no more than in a dream does he have the means to act in any way upon the object of his perception, change his viewpoint as he would like” (314). I might argue that blinking or averting one’s eyes specifically *is* a form of acting upon the object of perception by selecting which events one will perceive. Moreover, I might note new DVD formats that allow the spectator to do precisely that which Baudry says we

cannot do: change the angle of the camera at will. But more to the point, the use of Plato's allegory, one familiar to most educated audiences, leads me to consider the metaphorical elements that Baudry ignores.

Plato's allegory of the cave is an analogy of the role of the philosopher in attempting to lead the populace to enlightenment. However, Baudry largely ignores this act. Who is the prophet in Baudry's comparison, and what is the truth to which he is leading the prisoners? If I were in the theater and an unknown individual suddenly burst in and began shouting that we are all fools being misled by illusions of reality, wouldn't I be justified calling for the manager? Why? Because I *chose* to be in this cavern, and I understand that having paid a fee to be here, I will only be given access to this "illusion" for a short time before physically getting to my feet and re-entering what would presumably be Plato's realm of enlightenment *outside* the theater, following Baudry's construction of the metaphor. I enter the theater anticipating a film as an object of its own nature; I do not expect personally to experience the event recorded. One might argue that Baudry sees himself, as film critic, in the role of the prophet, the one who can awaken the misled audience, much in the role that Plato saw himself as the philosopher. This article then becomes his form of entering the theater and decrying its illusion. However, if this is the case, objections arise. We are led immediately back to Shaviro's objection that psychoanalysis reflexively mistrusts the item it claims to revere, the film itself. Moreover, in assuming he can free us from the film's illusion, to what is Baudry hoping to awaken us? It is difficult to speculate. Either he hopes for us to abandon the film altogether and turn to the truth outside the theater, as Plato might be said to aspire, or he hopes for us to reach a stage of engaged, active spectatorship, in which we are

consciously aware of the illusion before us. But I would suggest that this is already the case when we watch a film; we may be drawn into the film at times more deeply than others, but at no time are we not aware of our ability to leave the theater.

Given what I see to be fundamental flaws in Baudry's Platonic analogy, that subsequent scholars have focused more exclusively upon his comparisons to Lacan's mirror stage becomes understandable for the moment. However, the embracing of Lacanian dynamics of the subject become equally problematic when considering issues of bodily activity, the depth of the image.<sup>5</sup> As noted above, Baudry draws strict parallels between the experience of the mirror stage in infancy and the spectator's experience in the cinema, stressing the somatic similarities between the immobile, visually present child and the seated, visually active film-viewer. Interestingly, he argues that it is not the image with which the transcendental subject identifies, but the apparatus. He notes in "Ideological Effects" that "just as the mirror assembles the fragmented body in a sort of imaginary integration of the self, the transcendental self unites the discontinuous fragments of phenomena, of lived experience, into unifying meaning," concluding therefore that "the ideological mechanism at work in the cinema seems thus to be concentrated in the relationship between the camera and the subject" (295).<sup>6</sup> Baudry's

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<sup>5</sup> For a parallel critique of the Lacanian model, see Thomas J. Slater's "Considering the Active Viewer: The Basis for Seeing Film's Liberating Impact of Language," (1989). The author critiques the Lacanian construction of a passive viewer, and instead posits the act of spectatorship as one in which meaning is always actively created by the viewer working in and against the image. While Slater sides in passing with Bordwell and Thompson as a possible counter to psychoanalytic models, he ends by proposing an abbreviated phenomenological model based largely upon ideas set forth in Frank Tomasulo's essay "The Text-In-The-Spectator: The Role of Phenomenology in an Eclectic Theoretical Methodology," (1988). Unfortunately, both authors are able in their limited space to set out the barest outlines of a phenomenological approach.

<sup>6</sup> Vivian Sobchack will takes up this idea of the camera constituting a filmic body in her work *The Address of the Eye* (Princeton, 1992). However, by working through a phenomenological framework based primarily upon the non-transcendental Merleau-Ponty, she rids the relation between subject and cinematic Other of its Lacanian antagonism. Moreover, she further complicates both the notion of the constitution of

connection between self, mirror, and cinema is more fully explored in “The Apparatus,” in which he fills out his earlier sketches. Comparing the film to a dream state, he lays out what he sees to be the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the subject’s connection to film, at no time questioning the assumed flat and illusory nature of the film. He writes that “the cinematographic apparatus is unique in that *it offers the subject perceptions ‘of a reality’ whose status seems similar to that of representations experienced as perceptions*” (314). This confusion between representation and perception, coupled with his understanding of the spectator as a passive one-way recipient<sup>7</sup> of the film’s images, leads him to conclude that “cinema offers an artificial psychosis without offering the dreamer the possibility of exercising any kind of immediate control” (315). As I will continually suggest in the following pages, this idea of the film-viewer as passive, even helpless, recipient of the film’s domination by hallucination dismisses what I see as a very active process of perception, in which the subject reaches out to the film as the film reaches out to him, a process demonstrated in the construction and comprehension of image depth in the films I will offer as examples.

Baudry concludes his thoughts on film by noting that in the end there is a difference between the dream or hallucination and the film, but not along the lines that I would argue. He acknowledges that in film there is a real act of perception occurring.

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the spectator’s body and what she sees as a body of the film separate from the subject by investigating the role of the projector, a detail not fundamentally present in Baudry’s work.

<sup>7</sup> The idea of a one-way versus two-way interaction between spectator and spectacle is taken up most comprehensively by Miriam Bratu Hansen in “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street.” Responding directly to Benjamin’s concept of innervation and his essay on film, “One-Way Street,” Hansen demonstrates how subsequent texts by Benjamin exhibit a backing away from earlier conceptions on the perception of film. Though tied to this particular theoretician, Hansen’s argument that the perception of film must be seen as an interaction between audience and film, in which “innervation” becomes a give-and-take process, can be seen as analogous to the phenomenological model I am developing here.

We do see a film in the theater and perceive its images. However, he states, “one cannot hesitate to insist on the *artificial* character of the cine-subject. It is precisely this artificiality which differentiates it from dream or hallucinations. There is, between cinema and these psychological states, the same distance as between a real object and its simulacrum” (316). Here, Baudry seems to suggest that film is in fact something less than dreams or hallucinations. Where the dream or the hallucination is entirely psychically constructed, the film makes the claim of being tied to an object, and therefore more duplicitous in its aspiration toward reality:

While, in dreams and hallucinations, representations appear in the guise of perceived reality, a real perception takes place in cinema, if not an ordinary perception of reality. It would appear that is it this slight displacement which had misled the theoreticians of cinema, when analyzing the impression of reality. In dream and hallucination, representations are taken as reality in the absence of perception; in cinema, images are taken for reality but require the mediation of perception. This is why, on the one hand, for the realists, cinema is thought of as a duplicate of reality – and on the other cinema is taken as an equivalent of dream – but the comparison stops here, leaving unresolved the problem raised by the impression of reality. (316)

Baudry is most clearly referring to the work of Siegfried Kracauer and his fellow Realists in their suggestion that film duplicates reality. In the following chapters, I do not wish to suggest that the film is an unconstructed representation of the event it records, nor do I

even wish to suggest that it is a flawless copy of reality.<sup>8</sup> What I wish to suggest is that there is a different route to understanding the depth of the cinematic image, one that encompasses the active role of perception. By that, I am not echoing Baudry's implicit assumption of perception as some sort of mediating field between the object perceived and the transcendental subject that is locked away in the psychic structures of the self. Subsequent emphasis on how the subject becomes connected to an artificial, mirror-like image, usually to its own detriment, makes an assumption of the falsity of the image itself. It is flat in comparison to reality, and therefore not to be trusted. Instead, running through my analyses of specific film texts will be the implicit suggestion, as per Merleau-Ponty and others, that perception is the prime experience, that there is no distinction between the subject and its perception, that perception is always already a lived experience, and that all perception takes place from the spatial and temporal zero-point of the body. In discussing the depth of the image through specific examples, I hope to illustrate how dominant trends of film theory are therefore inappropriate for discussing deeply embodied films.

If the psychoanalytic model views the image with distrust, the Neo-Formalist school might be said to view it with feigned neutrality, and yet nevertheless there is the accompanying assumption that the film image is superficial and illusory. While the Neo-Formalists lean toward an understanding of the subject's perception of film as an active process, their conception of that active role makes no consideration of film or the film image as a medium capable of depth and complexity, specifically in the form of excess.

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<sup>8</sup> However, Ian Aitken presents a convincing interpretation of Kracauer's work in "Distraction and Redemption: Kracauer, surrealism, and phenomenology," (1998). In this essay, the author demonstrates

For the Neo-Formalists, the film is never more than an efficient, constructed narrative told through images that are distanced from the subject. Perception for them becomes an act of assembling discrete elements into a narrative whole. Consequently, the notion that the body perceives or reacts to the film image in a manner similar to the perception of reality is out of the question. Depth of an image is an artifact constructed by our mental synthesis of elements, and not an experientially immediate event. The work of Bordwell and Thompson provides clear examples, as when discussing the creation of depth within image in their classic film textbook *Film Art: An Introduction*, “again, we develop our understanding of depth cues from our experience of space in the real world and from conventions of space in such arts as painting and theater. In cinema, depth cues are largely provided by lighting, setting, costumes, and figure behavior” (192). They continue, “the depth cues suggest that a space has both *volume* and several distinct *planes*. When we speak of an object having volume, we mean that it is solid and occupies a three-dimensional space, a film suggests volume by shape, shading, and movement... Planes are the layers of space occupied by persons or objects. Planes run into depth, from foreground through middle ground to background” (192-3). Bordwell and Thompson fully elaborate the influence of lighting, setting, perspective, planes, movement, and other aspects of image composition that create the illusion of depth. The implicit argument is that cinematic depth is built from the ground up, out of isolated elements in an almost mathematical act of construction, and not the other way around, in which space exists *a priori* as a whole, experienced at once, so that if the “fundamental” elements can be abstracted from it, it is after the fact of our initial perception. However,

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the influence of Husserlian phenomenology upon Kracauer, particularly in his understanding of naturalism

their understanding of movement is often overdetermined and irreversibly linked to a two-dimensional comprehension of space. The tendency is to view elements in isolation, or to view a particular film space as being divided up into rigid, superficial planes across which characters may then interact, as if it were through the interaction across these rigid planes that we understand the film-image's depth. The Neo-Formalist understanding of film space is to view the image as one would traditionally view a painting, analyzing it for elements of line, texture, color, shadow, and other rigid *a priori* designations. It is exactly this atomized, or what Merleau-Ponty might call a Cartesian, assessment of perception that leads to the Neo-Formalist's assertion of a flat and static image.

Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, specifically resists reductive or isolating analyses of the depth of image. For him, the image is something understood "top-down," all at once, from which the elements that more traditional methods use as their building blocks can then be split off. Opposing Cartesian materialism, he writes

It was necessary (for Descartes) first to idealize space, to conceive of that being – perfect in its own genus, clear, manageable, and homogeneous – which our thinking glides over without a vantage point of its own: a being which though reports entirely in terms of three rectangular dimensions. This done, we were enabled eventually to find the limits of construction, to understand that space does not have three dimensions or more or fewer... and to understand that the three dimensions are taken by different systems of measurement from a single dimensionality, a polymorphous Being, which justifies all without being fully expressed by any. Descartes

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and surrealism, arguing for a paradigm that synthesizes the three factors.

was right in setting space free. His mistake was to erect it into a positive being, outside all points of view, beyond all latency and all depth, having no true thickness. (“Eye and Mind” 174)

In other words, Merleau-Ponty argues against an understanding of depth in the world before us as something that can be objectively perceived, as if from a position without vantage, without a body, splitting the “reality” of depth and the world off from our mental presentation of it. For him, our perception is first and inherently lived within our body. We understand everything from this locus, and there is no empirically objective vantage point from which we can understand the world (here, specifically depth) as something separate from ourselves. What is more, and of most interest to our understanding of the depth of image, Merleau-Ponty argues against what he sees as the reductive concept of a hierarchy of dimensions, each deriving from the last. In other words, for Descartes, we have the first dimension, length, from which we derive the second dimension, width. Taken in tandem, they can build the third dimension, depth. For Merleau-Ponty, if anything, depth is the first dimension, the dimension in which our bodies operate on the day to day, the space of our perception of the world around us. That we can then work “backwards” to derive length, width, depth, color, or what have you, is reflective of our vantage point as a perceiving body already operating within that space. “Depth thus understood is, rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of a global ‘locality’ – everything in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and depth are abstracted, of a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is *there*” (180).

This understanding of image, implicitly connected to a consideration of image as flat and two-dimensional, wherein depth itself consists only of an infinitesimal series of thin planes, lacks a consideration of movement, in this case the movement of the camera. The idea seems to be that one can understand film by pinning the image down and dissecting it into progressively smaller and smaller parts, as though this is what our own conscious perception does immediately upon the viewing of any image. But how can one ask a person to identify the isolated elements of perception before they have completely perceived the image itself: What is the perspective of the image that you are still in the act of comprehending? What is its color? Where is the overlap? How deep is its depth? The act of perception is the sum total of all of these elements and their collective interaction. Consequently, and contrary to what Neo-Formalism suggests, any attempt to isolate these elements occurs *after* the act of perception, and not before. They do not exist in isolation. I will return to a critique of this top-down approach to film analysis throughout the following pages, but what I want to stress most clearly here is this model's comparison of our understanding of the cinematic image and its depth to our understanding of perspective, as though a cinematic image were nothing more than a moving painting. Not coincidentally, the majority of examples used by Bordwell and Thompson are derived from working with film stills, a vital but necessarily incomplete tool for understanding *motion pictures*.

Bordwell and Thompson, along with their fellow Neo-Formalists, rely upon a paradigm of film and narrative that is complete and perfectly efficient. Their comprehension of space is built upon the idea of isolated elements: color, texture, overlap, perspective, shadow, figure behavior. These elements then interact to create a

sense of space. This definition is helpful in beginning to understand the composition of particular shots and in the connections from shot to shot, but it becomes problematic at the point where Bordwell and Thompson argue that this is *all* there is to film: the interaction of isolated elements in complete efficiency, without excess. Consequently, Bordwell and Thompson's understanding of narrative is one in which every detail, each and every shot, scrap of dialogue, glance and gesture, serves a narrative purpose and is completely and thoroughly digested by the spectator. Bordwell explains it in his essay "Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures" simply as "in classical fabula [story] construction, causality is the prime unifying principle" (19), meaning that every element serves a causal purpose connected to the story. The suggestion is that either every element within a film is there for a purpose, or that as a spectator, we assign every element a narrative purpose. Pragmatically, this contradicts direct experience. As anybody who has ever worked in the production of film can attest, mistakes do happen, and frequently. Light stands tip over, production assistants cough during audio recording, stray animals wander into the scene, clouds cast a shadow on the actors, shots are lost, and film is underexposed. There are an infinite number of variables that go into the production of a film, most of which are not under the control of the filmmakers. Some are included in the film as happy coincidences, welded to framework of the narrative. Others simply cannot be avoided, or are not even noticed. On the other side of the film stands the spectator, now expected to be the infallibly efficient interpreter of every element and detail on the screen. That the light falls from one direction, and not another, or that a character says "can't" instead of "cannot," is expected to be grasped and assimilated into our process of comprehension of the narrative. Of course, given any

particular example, explanations begin to spring to mind: the character says “can’t” because he is a rural American, this being a cue to his origins. But once again, this becomes an explanation after the fact. Our process of comprehension, though it can be improved and expanded upon, is never complete or entirely efficient.

Stephen Heath offers a clear critique of the Neo-Formalist position in his essay “Film and System: Terms of Analysis” (1975). Heath claims that “just as narrative never exhausts the image, homogeneity is always an *effect* of the film and not the filmic system” (100). Heath’s arguments are heavily influenced by Roland Barthes, in particular, his work *Image, Music, Text*, which Heath later translated into English. Heath asserts that any consideration of film as internally and wholly consistent is a misstep for film theory. Thompson directly responds to Heath in her essay “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” arguing that Heath never provides a consistent example of excess that cannot be given an explanation by the critic. Subsequently, Thompson provides her own reading of Barthes in which excess, if it exists, serves only to “roughen” the narrative whole. While an interesting theoretical gesture, Thompson fundamentally misapplies the very concept of excess as something without utilitarian value by suggesting that cinematic excess can be used, paradoxically, to stress narrative order.<sup>9</sup> Thompson

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<sup>9</sup> As Heath borrows his notions of excess from Barthes, Barthes in turn borrows Bataille’s central notions of excess and waste in order to further his own notion of “the third meaning” of the photographic image; that is, the meaning found in the image that lies beyond notions of denotation and connotation or “the information level” and “the symbolic level.” Bataille’s notion of excess is clearly laid out in his 1933 essay, “The Notion of Expenditure.” Working from the ideas of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, Bataille critiques the myth of utility, in which all economies struggle toward useful commerce and the accumulation of wealth. Rather than focusing upon utilitarian exchange, Bataille draws our attention to expenditure, and within expenditure lies the notions of *waste* and *excess*, two key notions in Barthes’ analyses of photographic image. The greater part of consumption is “represented by so-called unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e. deflected from genital finality) – all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves” (143). In other

provides the Formalist take on Barthes' "third meaning," attempting to bring the concept of cinematic waste back into the folds of usefulness by welding it to the structure of Formalism:

The concept of excess needs not be used only in semiotic, structuralist, or post-structuralist analyses... The Formalists seem to have at least approached the realization that excessive elements provide a large range of possibilities for the roughening of form; the material provides a perceptual play by inviting the spectator to linger over devices longer than their structured function would seem to warrant. (133)

Thompson concludes that Formalism allows for the presence of deviant elements that complicate the narrative structure. However, this explanation does not satisfy, as it deprives the concept of excess of its very fundamental definition in Bataille and Barthes

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words, certain elements of human existence specifically serve no purpose, a notion that Barthes would interpret into the realm of perception and comprehension.

Barthes addresses the implications of excess in the image in his 1970 essay, "The Third Meaning." For Barthes, gaze does not equal immediate and complete comprehension; if it did, there would be no need for language. Gaze is not a totalizing experience; it allows for an excess of meaning that does not fit immediately into our comprehension of the image. Barthes suggests another level of "meaning" that lies beyond the informational level and the symbolic level. Ironically, to do so, he chooses a still from Sergei Eisenstein's silent classic, *Ivan the Terrible*, the very founder of the Russian Formalists upon which Bordwell and Thompson rely. Beyond the levels of information and symbolism lies a third meaning, one which Barthes cannot express in precise terms. Indeed, it would seem that it is precisely this inability to express in language the definition of the third meaning that *defines* the third meaning. He writes, "As for the other meaning, the third, the one 'too many', the supplement that my intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive, I propose to call it *the obtuse meaning*" (54). Barthes specifically admits that it is beyond his rational grasp. It is the information left over, the excess. Here, Barthes echoes Bataille's critique of an insistence of usefulness but nevertheless alters Bataille's radical intent. For Barthes, excess is part of the image, just as for Bataille excess is part of economy and human existence. There will always be something left over, something beyond utilitarianism or a totalizing, unified approach to comprehension. Excess exists, simply. Barthes continues, "It is clear that the obtuse meaning is the epitome of a counter-narrative; disseminated, reversible, set to its own temporality, it inevitably determines (if one follows it) a quite different analytical segmentation to that in shots, sequences and syntagms (technical or narrative) – an extraordinary segmentation: counter-logical and yet 'true'" (63). The challenge this presents to the Neo-Formalists is clear: if there is something that lies beyond the informational and symbolic levels, something that remains obstinately inexplicable, then the film is not completely efficient. There are elements that serve no purpose.

as specifically the thing that serves no purpose. Excess remains a problem for the Neo-Formalists, and despite their earnest attempts to provide analytical explanations for any particular example of excess in a narrative, there are an infinite number of other examples that have not yet been explained. Excess, or the third meaning, conflicts with Neo-Formalist theories of the image as it demands a consideration of the film as both narratively and spatially infinite. Consequently, the notion of the third meaning becomes particularly important in arguing for a model of the depth of image.

Interestingly, in providing a conflict for highly structured Neo-Formalist paradigms of the film image, Barthes' third meaning also provides a point of conflict for more recent, post-modern theories of the image. However, whereas psychoanalytic models mistrust the image for what is seen as its superficial, illusory nature and Neo-Formalism assumes this very superficiality and illusion in order to provide a bottom-up model for how film cues function, postmodern theories of the image, both in general and in particular application to film, enthusiastically embrace these qualities as examples of the general condition of human existence. Nevertheless, and despite their enthusiasm, I will suggest that they are similarly insufficient in understanding a particular trend in the contemporary moment, specifically the re-emergence of spatial and temporal depth as a cinematic structure. If one were to believe many post-modern theorists, spatial manipulation within a film becomes a matter of impossibly thin images gliding smoothly across each other. And if we are taken in by the images before us, it is because we have been tricked by their illusory and superficial nature. A prime example of this theory of the image can be found in Mark C. Taylor's *Hiding*, an attempt to capture the hyper-textual glide of Web-based technologies in book form. He writes, "when nothing

remains... nothing but skin and bones, when bones appear to be nothing... nothing but layers of skin, what once was called 'reality' becomes not only unbearably light but impossibly thin" (12). Taylor's sense of the superficial nature of reality and human experience begins with a biological metaphor. He discusses how human tissues form in the womb, first as a single layer of tissue consisting essentially of the same layers as skin, which eventually folds and develops an inside and an outside, some layers forming organs, others forming bone, and that which remains forming skin. Consequently, the human body contains no distinct delineation between inside or outside, just one complete layer of skin folded in upon itself. He concludes, "if depth is but another surface, nothing is profound... *nothing is profound*. This does not mean that everything is simply superficial; to the contrary, in the absence of depth, everything becomes endlessly complex. In the city of glass, where (the) all has become impossibly thin, nothing is ever what it seems" (18). Taylor's analysis covers a wide variety of topics, from phrenology, through tattooing and ritual scarification, to high fashion and performance art. In his attempt to substitute endless complexity in the place of depth and profundity, he employs a tactic used by most postmodern theorists: a celebration of superficiality brought about by the denigration of human perception. Depth is just another form of surface; the surface facing away from us, the surface folded in upon itself: it is a question of our positioning. Our perception of image, bound to the surface, means that everything, even reality, is impossibly thin. Rather than mourning this fact, Taylor encourages us to embrace superficiality and the endlessly complex interaction of surfaces.

Taylor's notion of the omnipresence of superficiality closely parallels the ideas of Jean Baudrillard. In *America*, Baudrillard celebrates American culture's superficiality,

and yet one cannot help but mark a note of derision. He sees in American culture, and particularly its cinema, the pinnacle of his concept of the simulacra, the imitation without original. Thinking of Hollywood, he erases the boundary between film as a two-dimensional artifact and “real” life: “in America cinema is true because it is the whole of space, the whole way of life is cinematic. The break between the two, the abstraction which we deplore, does not exist: life is cinema” (101). At first it might seem that Baudrillard is contradicting Taylor, at least initially positing an essential distinction between life and cinema, between two-dimensional art and three-dimensional space, which has been erased in America. But that is not what Baudrillard is claiming at all: he argues that the commonly accepted void between life and film is an abstraction that does not apply in the postmodern utopia of America. It is not that film *has depth*, but that life *lacks depth*. In this can be heard echoes of Baudrillard’s earlier work *Simulacra and Simulation*, in what he calls “The Strategy of the Real”: “the impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible” (19). Here, Baudrillard suggests that the distinction between broad terms like “real” and “illusion,” or “depth” and “superficiality,” once might have existed. However, in our current postmodern state these notions no longer have any meaning. Everything is simply an endless cycle of commodification and exchange. Depth of image becomes a moot point, as these categories no longer hold true.

In *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson maintains a generally productive skepticism toward the excesses of postmodernists like Baudrillard and his predecessor, Jean-François Lyotard. Jameson instead elaborates a neo-Marxist account of postmodern

phenomena, casting it in terms of the historically motivated dialectic toward a utopian, or at least post-capitalist, state. He does not deny many of the fundamental observations made by postmodern theorists. He expressly takes up “constitutive features of the postmodern,” among them “a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary ‘theory’ and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum” (6). In a preliminary discussion of postmodernity’s dismissal of dichotomous notions of essence and appearance, Freudian latency and the manifest, authenticity and inauthenticity, or signifier and signified, he notes “what replaces these various depth models is for the most part a conception of practices, discourses, and textual play... let it suffice now to observe that here too depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces” (12). Jameson does not deny the abundant support for postmodern claims of depthlessness, both in theory and in practice. He points to the Wells Fargo Court building in downtown Los Angeles as one example of the dominance of surface over depth:

a surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume, or whose putative volume (rectangular? trapezoidal?) is ocularly quite undecidable. This great sheet of windows, with its gravity-defying two-dimensionality, momentarily transforms the solid ground on which we stand into the contents of a stereopticon, pasteboard shapes profiling themselves here and there around us. (13)

It is perhaps fitting that Jameson should discuss a building in Los Angeles, the apex of superficiality in America according to Baudrillard. Though Jameson offers an account of these phenomena that will place them within a larger, dialectical framework, he does not

attempt, at least at this moment, to deny their presence. He accepts the two-dimensionality of the Wells Fargo building rather than point out the rather obvious truth that the building does have depth and volume, something easily revealed by walking around it or by talking to any one of the hundreds of people who work *inside* the building. Instead, he offers an account of the building from a single point of view, with no account for movement or the lapse of time, such that our vision is not capable of deciphering the building's depth.<sup>10</sup> But Jameson's description of the building only accounts for one moment among many; if the building *seems* two-dimensional at this moment, further acts of perception will reveal that it is not. It is exactly these further acts of perception that I will pursue in the pages that follow, in which the movement of the perceiving subject, the lapse of time, and the breaching of boundaries becomes central to revealing the depth of the object. As an object that serves to record movement through time and space, the film image then becomes the necessary point of departure for that discussion. Ironically echoing Lacanian and Neo-Formalist models of the image, postmodernism claims that the image is superficial and that depth, particularly in film, is an illusion, a momentary trick of which we eventually know better.

Our understanding of a film is predicated upon our understanding of the space in which it occurs. The creation of depth, be it deep or shallow, will dictate part of our understanding of the narrative unfolding within it. The established space of a shot in *Citizen Kane* (1941), with its deep focus, aggrandized depth-of-field, and deployment of

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<sup>10</sup> Here, as with Taylor and Baudrillard, Jameson echoes what Martin Jay calls in his volume *Downcast Eyes*, the *denigration of vision*. Jay finds this questioning of vision consistently throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy, and consequently, in the foundational texts of postmodern thought. Simply stated, our eyes are not up to the task assigned to them: to comprehend the visual cues placed before them. I will take

cavernous sets, may have very little in common with the film space of a movie like *Cube* (1997), in which nearly all scenes take place within a jail-like cell roughly ten feet by ten feet. Our understanding of these narratives is necessarily affected by the spaces in which they unfold. You could not relate a narrative like *Citizen Kane* in the set of *Cube*; likewise, the paranoia and anxiety of being locked in a small, airless room would be lost, were the movie not actually set in one. But more importantly, there is another way of understanding the relation between film space and narrative space, one that relates to the very nature of narrative itself. De Certeau argues in *The Practice of Everyday Life* that narrative is the act of unfolding a space; the act of describing a character moving from Point A to Point B, the simplest possible narrative, creates a narrative space. Likewise, the act of reading that account, though the reader may move no more than his eyes across the page, also creates a narrative space within the confines of his perception. The film narrative is projected in front of the audience who “reads” the cinematic text as objects move across the screen. The narrative space perceived by the viewer is linked to the actual space created within the film, as events furthering the plot also occupy a space created through camera movements and post-production montage. The act of watching a movie unfolds a very real space, both in cinematic and narrative terms, in that the story created also constructs a space in which it exists.

More directly, the space of the film is experienced bodily, as though it were a real space within which the viewer were physically located. The viewer’s perception orients itself within the space of the image as it would orient itself in any physical space. In “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty discusses the act of perceiving a work by Cézanne. For

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up this issue throughout this work, offering an account of perception that is not invalidated by momentary

him, perception is the unification of eye, mind, consciousness, and body, such that our experience of the image before us is one of complete physicality, not at all the wanderings of a imagination detached from its physical presence. As he states it, “we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement” (162). By extension, I argue that film depth is a bodily one, not merely a mental construction, as the Neo-Formalists might suggest. Our understanding of depth, particularly the depth within an image, is not a phenomenon that can be successfully grasped through a reduction it into its elements: line, color, overlap, perspective, shadow, texture, or even movement. It is not something built up out of separate and distinct elements. It is a phenomenon that exists first, experienced bodily. Only from there can the viewer then extract its elements. The application of phenomenology to the depth of image reveals, quite contrary to postmodern ideas of the superficiality and lack of depth in image, that image is experienced as deep, rich, and complex. Missing from traditional models is a consideration of perception as an active, embodied act, an accounting of the role of movement in the creation of depth, the very variable that distinguishes *motion pictures* from the media that existed before it. Depth in film becomes the presence or potentiality of perception in and of motion. It is then fascinating that contemporary film should produce a cycle of works that operate out of spatial and temporal depth and complexity.

The importance of the body and the physical act of perception has only recently begun to be discussed by a handful of film critics. Likewise, the application of phenomenological texts to the cinematic experience can be dated back to Dudley

Andrew, in fairly recent works such as “The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory” (1985). Scholars such as Steven Shaviro, Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks<sup>11</sup> are only recently coming to terms with the role of the body in the understanding of film on the level of perception and experience, in ways largely free of the traditional prejudices as I have discussed. In his work *The Cinematic Body*, Shaviro maps a paradigm of the cinematic experience that reintroduces bodily perception to film theory. Drawing primarily from Deleuze and Guattari, Shaviro conceptualizes film as acting upon the body; importantly, unlike the psychoanalytical tradition, for which he reserves a far-reaching and persuasive critique, Shaviro presents the seduction of the cinema as something to be accepted, even embraced for its masochistic pleasures.

Shaviro’s critique of the psychoanalytic model hinges upon the paradigm’s concept of film as an artificial illusion, a claim that necessarily leads to an antagonistic relationship between film scholar and film text. As I have discussed above, Baudry’s comparison of the film image to the images on Plato’s cave as well as to the mirror in Lacan’s theory of subject development becomes highly problematic in relation to issues of perception and depth when discussing a bodily active subject. Shaviro, on the other hand, begins his critique by noting a reductive logic inherent to much of psychoanalytic film theorists: “It is high time we rid ourselves of the notion that we can somehow free ourselves from illusion (or from ideology) by recognizing and theorizing our own entrapment. Such dialectical maneuvers tend, ironically, to reinforce the very objects of

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<sup>11</sup> For further discussions of the role of the body in film, one can turn to “Body and Screen,” Margaret Morse (1999, *Wide Angle*, 2.1); *Screening the Body*, Lisa Cartwright (1995, University of Minnesota Press); “The Body and the Archive”, Allan Sekula (1989, *The Contest of Meaning*, MIT Press), and elsewhere. I have chosen to focus on the texts that I feel are most primary to the general theory of film experience.

their critique” (10-11). Shaviro, instead, embraces our entrapment before the image, and celebrates it for its potentially masochistic pleasures. However, I question the notion that we are “trapped” before the image on the level of bodily activity and perception, suggesting instead that we are in a give and take relationship with the image in which the “gap” between subject and object becomes non-existent; this give and take posits the film experience as something other than masochistic or submissive. If anything, to employ Shaviro’s terms, our experience of the film is dominant and submissive at the same time.

Importantly, he notes the tendency found in Baudry and the Lacanians to equate film image with artifice, artifice with superficiality, and superficiality with falseness, noting again that “what is usually attacked is the emptiness and impotence of the image, its inability to support the articulations of discourse or to embody truth. Images are condemned because they are bodies without souls, or forms without bodies. They are flat and insubstantial, devoid of interiority and substance, unable to express anything beyond themselves” (16). It is exactly the move I want to question, running the risk of falling prey to what Baudry would obviously fear: accepting the image as having depth and substance in and of itself, at least on the level of bodily perception. We do not experience the perception of the image as a flat thing, or if we do, we at the same time relate to it as something deep. We are in a constant and active state of perception and comprehension, something quite different from the passive slaves of the Platonic metaphor; therefore, we are in a state quite different from masochism. While I agree with Baudry and the Lacanian theorists that visual presentation cannot capture the excess of reality or the complex textual play of absences and mediations, I would also argue, along with Roland Barthes and Georges Bataille, that the film image itself is complex beyond

the powers of language to restrain it. There is more to an image than can be said of it. But more importantly, I argue that the film spectator, now more than ever, understands that film is not the thing it presents upon the screen. The film image is perceived as an object of-and-for-itself. Consequently, the question of illusion becomes ridiculous: it is only an illusion if the audience somehow believes that what projector shows is the same moment in time and space as that which the camera recorded, and that they are being assimilated into it. The audience intuitively understands, on the contrary, that there is a mediated distance. I will return to this idea in Chapter Four, where I discuss the recent Dogme project.

Interesting as a point of comparison to the phenomenological paradigm of embodied perception, Shaviro isolates a counter-argument to the Platonic-Lacanian image model in Guattari and Deleuze's notions of perception, the body, and stratification, "the hierarchical ordering, coding, and territorializing of previously multiple and heterogeneous forces" (27). The distinctions and oppositions between image, language, and truth that underpin Baudry's arguments are revealed as essentially wide of the mark:

It is not the case that everything is linguistic or textual, but rather that language is one particular instance (although an important one) of the process of stratification. The alternative between presence and mediation, or phenomenological immediacy and linguistic deferral, is therefore a false one: experience is *at once* textualized (or opened to the play of negations and differences) and anchored in a living present. Signification and presence are two coexistent dimensions of perceptual "truth." (27-28)

Underlying Shaviro's argument is the notion that the perception of the image is not quantitatively or qualitatively different from the perception of other objects, at its foundation. In other words, our perception of the image is not more illusory than our perception of any other object in space; it is understood that this image has been constructed from recordings of a moment lost in time and space; the mediation is assumed, but it does not mean the presentation of that construction is somehow invalid or superficial. There is a perceptual and conceptual depth to the image.

However, he and I part ways on the issue of the simulacral nature of cinema, as he writes, "if cinematic perception differs from 'natural' perception, this is because it undermines both sides of the double articulation. Film viewing resists canons of 'perceptual' truth... its simulacral incorporeality precludes an objective reference" (28). As I discussed in relation to Baudrillard and the postmodernists, the film image is not something separate from its "objective reference," and our perception of the image is one that is based significantly upon the bodily tracing of active vectors. Which is to say, we relate to the depth of the film image because it relates to our own bodily ability to actively move through a particular moment in time and space. The term "simulacra," as I understand Baudrillard's theoretical investment of the term, means a representation without original, mimesis for which there is no referent. I hope to offer an alternative model, in which the film is understood as having an objective reference, but is also understood to be an object within reality for its own merits: our perception of the image is understood as deep beyond the limits of the screen. The similarity and conflict between our arguments becomes most clear in relation to the Shaviro's conclusion that "film should neither be exalted as a medium of collective fantasy nor condemned as a

mechanism of ideological mystification. It should rather be praised as a technology for intensifying and renewing experiences of passivity and abjection” (65). I wholeheartedly concur with the first conclusion, but cannot accept the model of passivity and abjectivity that comprises *The Cinematic Body*. Instead, what I find most remarkable is film technology’s capacity for intensifying perception. In this regard, my approach shares kinship with the recent work of Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, both of whom rely upon the concept of the embodied perception as a central tenet of their understanding of the cinematic experience.

Marks, in *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000), discusses a group of experimental films made by minority, multi-cultural directors working between the mid-Eighties and mid-Nineties. Discussing works by filmmakers such as Trinh T. Minh-ha and the Black Audio Film Collective, Marks argues that these films’ aesthetic positioning centers on memory and disjunctive spaces, which rely upon an embodied notion of the cinematic experience. For a minority filmmaker working within larger, unaware, population, the act of remembering becomes a crucial political act, particularly when the body serves as a marker of difference. The films she focuses on are primarily experimental short-films produced by politically aware and motivated artists marginalized by a dominant culture. While I am fascinated by Marks’ arguments, and by the works that she engages, many of the implicit statements she makes also apply to the cinematic experience in general. Thus, her arguments bear relevance for the films I will discuss, categorized as either popular, Hollywood-produced films or works by international filmmakers working from a position entirely within their national cultures.

It is interesting that Marks disputes Shaviro's model of embodiment, stating that his "assaultive and masochistic model of spectatorship maintains a radical alterity between self and film, merely switching the poles of who does what to whom" (151). At the heart of her critique is the idea that cinema can, or does, bridge the alterity between self and film, a dynamic I have suggested lies at the crux of the depth of image and our perception of it. Ironically, despite her critique of Shaviro's model, Marks relies directly upon the same sources, Deleuze and his predecessor Bergson, to provide a working model of the relation between body and mimesis. Though she acknowledges that Deleuze does not employ the term mimesis, she draws a connection between it and Deleuzian concepts of the relationship between the world and the sign or image. She writes, "like memory in Bergson's theory, mimesis is mediated by the body" (139), in the sense that is through the body that mimesis is registered. Elsewhere, again discussing Bergson, she notes the role of the active body in perception, concluding that "a Bergsonian form of film spectatorship involves a viewer's 'attentive recognition' on the images onscreen" (147). This positing of "attentive recognition" once again challenges Baudry's model of the subject as a passive thrall to the image, and consequently provides a challenge to the psychoanalytic model of the cinematic experience. Moreover, Marks' derivation of a Bergsonian/Deleuzian model of embodiment resembles in tangible ways the phenomenological framework I derive out of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, which in itself provides a challenge to the distanced or abstracted psychoanalytic dynamic of image perception. Indeed, Marks makes this connection between the embodied perception models of Deleuze/Bergson and Merleau-Ponty explicit for their resemblance to each other and for their refutation of psychoanalytic traditions, noting "although they

cannot be utterly reconciled, both Merleau-Ponty's 'consciousness of the world' and Bergson's 'the world is consciousness' work against the psychoanalytic understanding that 'consciousness misrecognizes the world'" (150). She continues by discussing Merleau-Ponty,

Theories of embodied spectatorship counter at their root theories of representation grounded in the alienation of visuality from the body, in particular Lacan's theory of the mirror phase, which has been so influential in cinema studies... Rather than an encounter between two lacks (the fundamentally lacking subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the fundamentally lacking object of the film), the phenomenological encounter is an exchange between an embodied self-in-becoming (the viewer) and its embodied intercessor (the cinema). (151)

However, Marks rightly notes that despite their significant similarities, Bergson and Deleuze cannot be seamlessly reconciled to Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology, a point made clearest by Vivian Sobchack, who argues to the contrary that "Deleuze, however, neglects the *embodied situation* of the spectator and of film... It is not time, but space – the significant space lived as and through the objective body-subject, the historical space of situation – that grounds the response to...the question of cinematic signification" (*Address* 31). Unfortunately, Marks makes only rudimentary gestures toward resolving this gap before largely abandoning her use of phenomenology in favor of Deleuze and Bergson. Nevertheless, her debt to Sobchack is quite clear, providing as it does a "model of embodied spectatorship, such as Sobchack's, [in which] the relationship between

spectator and film is fundamentally mimetic, in that meaning is not solely communicated through signs but experienced in the body” (149).

Vivian Sobchack, in her groundbreaking work *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992)<sup>12</sup>, lays out a model of perception that is bodily active and precipitated upon Husserl’s notion of intentionality, the idea that every action is an action toward something. The subject is not separate from the object, because every action is specifically formed out of its expression toward the objective world. Likewise, just as the subject reaches toward the object in all its acts, so does the object reach toward the subject in its existence; the object exists specifically *for* the subject. The very notion of intentionality challenges models of perception that posit the subject as a passive recipient of the object’s intentions, in this case, the inscription of the film’s values upon the receiving spectator who does not act with or upon the film. What is more, Sobchack engages, though at times indirectly, the relation between depth and excess in the film image. Sobchack discusses film technology as a form of instrument-mediated perception, suggesting that the gap between what film theorists call “point-of-view” is nevertheless insufficient for understanding the commutative relation between embodied-perceiver and film. Point-of-view is, rather,

a juncture that echoes the different situations of the spectator’s body and the film’s body and creates in the spectator a resistance to the projected perception, an inability to absorb it totally. In other words, from all that phenomenology has revealed about the perceptive modality of vision and its information of and by all other modalities of bodily perception, we

cannot meaningfully abstract vision from the spectator's lived-body.

(179)

Sobchack's argument has deep implications for my understanding of film. Not only is it not possible to objectify or abstract vision, exactly as the Neo-Formalists would ask us to do in breaking a film into its "visual elements," but it is likewise impossible for the spectator to completely absorb a film due to the difference between her bodily position as a person sitting in a theater watching a movie and the position the film will present for her as a body within the narrative action. Sobchack re-presents here two central notions of phenomenology, that of the *Horizont* (horizon) and the *Abschattungen* (sketch or literally "off-shadings"), arriving at their definition through a discussion of the nature of film. Briefly defined, the *Horizont* is the limit of our perception, the horizon beyond which we no longer perceive. The *Abschattungen* are the momentary perceptual sketches that we construct of each object, each one always giving way to the next as we shift location both in time and space. Our perception can never be perfectly objective, perceiving an object from all sides at once. There will always be a horizon to our perception.

Dermot Moran, in explaining Husserl, suggests the difference between the phenomenological account of perception and more traditional ways of thinking about the object-filled world, writing "traditional empiricism or sensationalism had attempted to describe the actual nature of our perception in terms of sensual data but had ignored the manner in which all perception takes places under a number of horizons which are implicit structural aspects of original experience itself" (*Introduction to Phenomenology*

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<sup>12</sup> Sobchack rehearses her ideas in an essay published the same year, "The Visual and the Visible: Toward

162). Our perception is a process of confirming or denying our intentional expectations about an object, a process that is without end, as we cannot be in all places at once. There will always be a side that we cannot see. I will return to this issue in Chapter Three, suggesting that the film experience is one in which the spectator's perceptual horizons are in a commutative relationship with the perceptual field displayed in the movie. I will specifically argue that a recent trend in filmmaking struggles either to work beyond these perceptual horizons, a task that though impossible nevertheless holds fascinating phenomenological potential, or to fit the horizons of the film's field of perception more closely to those of the spectator as a lived-body in a world among objects, which is to say, to diminish the sense of something that lies between our perception and the film's perception. Underlying this argument is a statement on the nature of the image. Just as we cannot exhaust the unlimited potential of the space around us, it is likewise impossible to reduce the space of the image to a set, quantified number of analytical elements.

Sobchack concurs with the critique of the Platonic-Lacanian model, and the psychoanalytical model, which is for her a misconception of the difference between perception versus expression. Psychoanalytical models focus entirely upon the either one or the other, usually focusing on the tyrannical expression of the image, undervaluing the subject's perception. She further argues that film theory's emphasis upon the subject entirely sidesteps considering the film as an active body with forms of perception (the camera) and expression (the projector) of its own. However, of more interest in relation

to the issue of the depth of the image and what I call *deep-embodiment* films is her identification of movement as a key factor in our understanding of film and its space.

Thus, the theoretical and static categories of *time* and *space* as they might be described for a transcendental consciousness become for the existential consciousness lived materially, dynamically, and meaningfully as *finitude* and *situation*. Lived finitely and perspectively, the very temporal and spatial limitations of embodied consciousness inaugurate a *need for movement* in the world – fulfilled by the *power of movement* made possible through the agency of the material and enworlded lived-body.

(59)

More than simply calling upon movement as a means of understanding the depth of image, embodied consciousness, in an echo of de Certeau, *mandates* movement. We are creatures of movement, and our perception of the world around us, and therefore the film before us, is always already an experience bound up in the lived experience of that movement. We understand the film as an artifact because of its very ability to capture the movement of objects.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Sobchack draws a connection between movement and the act of vision, which traditional models have assumed to be a passive act, noting “in its structure as an existential activity and its implication of an embodied viewer, the act of vision (whether human or ‘mechanical’) is always *dimensional*, always has a thickness as it possesses possible or actual *movement* in the world as intentional and diacritical activity” (134). Concurring with Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack argues that vision as an act is

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<sup>13</sup> This idea, that the film is reliant for its signification upon movement, will be of interest in my discussion of Greenaway, particularly for his fascination with the work of Eadweard Muybridge. The static

bound up with movement, that we understand the image before us as a deeply dimensional object because of the very nature of vision as an act of motion, an embodied act.

Curiously, Sobchack fails to deliver significant, concrete film examples of her argument, preferring to operate on the level of abstract concepts. Nor does she expressly make the connection between depth and movement outright. She understands the cinematic experience to be an embodied one, but she does not consider this argument for its direct application to how we, as spectators, relate to the image as a deeply meaningful and meaningfully deep experience. She begins to gesture in that direction, noting how “the body’s finitude and situation and its power to movement transform the abstractions of time and space, informing them with the weight of choice and the thickness of movement, with *value* and *dimension*” (59). Sobchack has opened the door to a fascinating wealth of possibilities, a door through which I intend to step. Looking concretely at numerous recent examples, I argue that a phenomenological model of depth and the image is not only relevant to our understanding of film in its nature, but of particular necessity at this particular moment in the history of film, in which a cycle of films arrive to provide unavoidable challenges to both traditional and contemporary models.

In this chapter, I have moved quickly through a wide range of complicated theoretical issues that I believe are inherently connected in their struggle to fully accommodate the sense we get when watching a film. We are not merely watching two-dimensional images interacting with each other, but instead we see objects interacting in

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photograph, in its attempt to capture movement in a medium that is static, explodes into action in

space in the same manner we perceive them in “real life.” We have all had the experience of being drawn into a film, the point at which we are no longer aware of the world outside the screen, of ourselves in the theater, or of the person next to us eating popcorn. If the image, and therefore film by its nature, is superficial, nothing but an infinitesimally thin surface, than how is it that we respond to it as though it were an extension of the world we inhabit, perceiving the space on the screen as an extension of our perceptual horizons? In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the image, far from shallow and two-dimensional, is in fact deep and three-dimensional, at least in our experience of it. Standing counter to the thrust of postmodern theories of the image, I offer numerous examples of films that experiment with cinematic depth in relation to narrative.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the work of the British filmmaker Peter Greenaway, for some the epitome of film’s superficiality and aloofness. Greenaway’s highly artificial and constructed narratives, in which conceits such as counting from one to one-hundred frame-by-frame become more important than the motivations of characters and other traditional indicators of narrative sophistication, have driven many critics to dismiss his work as post, or even anti-, human. Taking up again Michel de Certeau’s work on space and the significance of boundaries, this chapter instead reveals Greenaway’s work to be inextricably bound up in the importance of the human body as an active organ of perception. Greenaway’s complicated narrative structures are the boundaries against which characters are unleashed in order to create narrative space out of structural place. The rigid composition of Greenaway’s sets and shots likewise are the initiation of film

space and depth, the film and its reception being revealed as an active process. The conflict between order and chaos is shown to be a central motif for Greenaway, and the space that arises out of the destruction of ordered places revealed as one of the filmmaker's many tropes.

Chapter Three moves closer to the human body as active perceiver by moving away from the "objective" perspective still found in Greenaway, in which the camera coolly observes the actions of the characters and their construction of space. Instead, I discuss the positioning of the camera in the place of the character's body as it constructs narrative and spatial depth. Beginning with a discussion of the impact, both in terms of film history and of audience reception, of the point-of-view, handheld narrative in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), I discuss the notion of an active construction and perception of depth that moves beyond notion of boundaries and oppositional rigidity. Tying into questions of technology and technique and working particularly from Merleau-Ponty and Don Ihde, I offer a model of the camera as the embodiment of the viewer's vision that nonetheless accommodates the spectator's complete awareness that they are *not* one with the film. I then turn to other, less obvious examples of embodied spatial perception, discussing *Fight Club*, *The Matrix*, and *Blade Runner* for their instances in which images are modeled upon a notion of space as deeply embodied. How this model of spatial depth then relates to questions of narrative depth is taken up in order to highlight the impact of depth upon the cinematic audience.

Chapter Four returns to the technique of hand-held camerawork and its relation both to cinematic and narrative depth in order to discuss the films of the Dogme 95 collective. However, unlike *The Blair Witch Project*, the Dogme project is shown to be

one in which the spectator's embodied perception is not tied to a particular character or narrative conceit. Rather, the camera work attempts to place the spectator herself as an active participant within the film narrative. I discuss Dogme 95 within a historical context, both as a reaction to certain international trends and movements throughout filmmaking history and as a response to naturalism in Danish film in particular. I analyze both the language of the Dogme framework, and the films themselves for their attempts to construct a notion of reality as related to depth in the film, paradoxically coming at a moment when film is regarded as anything but deep and real.

Chapter Five then concludes by taking up questions of the importance of time as a vector within film and narrative depth by discussing several recent examples of what I will call the *zero-moment* model. I discuss films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Go*, and *Run Lola Run* for their deployment of a narrative structure based on spatial *and* temporal depth within a particular scene, in which characters shoot off in potentially infinite directions from a central point in time and space. These films rely upon temporal depth in order to create the narrative; without the interaction of characters and plotlines across vectors of space and time, the narrative would cease to function. Finally, coming full circle, I drawn upon earlier conclusions regarding the nature of embodied spatiality in order to discuss the hand-held temporal complexity of Mike Figgis' fascinating digital experiment, *Time Code*. A prime example of the connected nature of time and space in the creation of film narrative, the film provides grounds for reconsidering traditional models of film depth, therefore serving as a fitting conclusion to the arguments made.

## II. Bodies, Buildings, Boundaries: Peter Greenaway's Cinematic Spaces

I believe that cinema is at its most successful when it acknowledges its own artificiality. (Peter Greenaway, from *Being Naked Playing Dead*, 240)

I have always been fascinated by the particular excitements aroused by a sense of place, the distinction of a particular *genius loci*. This is true if the place, space or location is indeed a real one but is certainly also true if the location has been invented in words, in a painting or in the cinema. (Peter Greenaway, *The Stairs: Geneva* 79)

There is a moment in British director Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) that illustrates for me the entirety of his artistic opus. Prospero, played by John Gielgud, leafs through the collection of books that have been his solace and his foundation, both literally and figuratively, upon the island to which he has been banished by his despotic brother. He opens a book on architecture as the narrative voice describes its contents. Inside, architectural models unfold with the opening of each page, like a child's pop-up book. A particular model springs forward, the diorama of a building front reminiscent of an Italian villa. The image dissolves to the diegetic world of the characters. We see Prospero and his daughter, Miranda (Isabelle Pasco), followed by a procession, walking down the stone steps of a building, and the spectator realizes that the building is the same as that modeled in the book. (See Fig. 2.1 and 2.2) The tactic will be repeated, as a courtyard of interconnected pillars and arches, much like a honeycomb, gives way to a scene of Prospero and Miranda lunching in the very same courtyard just previously modeled in the book. (See Fig. 2.3 and 2.4) As this film, Greenaway's film adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is caught up in the relationship between books, bodies, and

buildings, it is fitting that the book should give way to the building, which in turn is inhabited by the body. Greenaway clearly implies that the act of opening the book in some way creates or shapes the structures within which the characters act and interact; the act of the hand opening the book creates the *actual* physical space, the very same space in which Prospero sits reading his books.

For Greenaway, the structure comes first. The recurrence of an architectural model giving way to the actual realization of that model as a physical building in *Prospero's Books* mirrors the highly constructed, indeed artificial, nature of his films. As such, they would seem to support a critical paradigm that conceives the film image as illusory or superficial. Yet, quite to the contrary, consistent throughout Greenaway's body of work is the notion that humanity exists to bring chaos to the order of art and artificiality. Greenaway's highly constructed narratives are enlivened by the unrestrained characters unleashed upon them, just as Prospero and Miranda inhabit structures that previously appeared as stiff paper constructs. His films exemplify the tension between chaos and order, superficiality and depth. What begins in his early short films as an experimentation with narrative and non-narrative forms gives way in his later films to highly stylized visual compositions, in which rigidly composed *mise-en-scène* becomes the setting for frenzied human activity. By introducing the variable of human action, he highlights the necessarily permeable nature of boundaries. Moreover, in his most recent films, this tension between order and chaos, buildings and bodies, is compounded by digital film editing technology: images that layer one upon another, as in *Prospero's Books*, add yet another level of stasis and dynamism. As such, Greenaway's films offer a fascinating challenge to the idea of film as illusory or flat.

The theorist Michel de Certeau provides a practical framework for understanding Greenaway's work. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* he writes, "every story is a travel story – a spatial practice," (115) emphasizing the importance of movement, be it actual or metaphorical, from one location to another within the story as the fundamental element of space in narrative. De Certeau specifically considers "space" as that construct erected within the imagination of the reader or audience, as she travels from Point A, the beginning, to Point B, the end. For de Certeau, this act of traveling across is the "practice" of that space; human action and the movement within a pre-designed place (the plot or structure of the film) is what converts it into an inhabitable space. De Certeau further argues that the very act of travelling from one point to another *is a form of narrative*, even if nothing of interest happens along the way. This definition then provides a foundation for de Certeau's understanding of the difference between *place* and *space*: place is rigid, pre-defined, static, whereas space is the practice of that place, the introduction of mobile elements in time and space, most typically human bodies. To state it in another way, if a point on a map, say the Place de la Republique, is a place, then the actual space of that location is enacted through the act of going there and witnessing the interaction of mobile elements. The location springs from two-dimensions into a robust three-dimensionality. The space then of a narrative is the introduction of mobile elements into it; in literature, both the actions of the characters and the reader reading through it enact that space. But I would argue that this connection between narrative and movement, place and space, becomes far more dynamically realized in film, as exemplified in the works of Peter Greenaway. The introduction of mobile elements

such as the actors acting and the spectator moving through the film with the action of their eyes converts the film into a narrative space as well as a cinematic space.

Greenaway foregrounds issues of structure; he enacts the *where* of the film before he elaborates upon the *why*. It is here, at the point of interaction between mobile human elements (actor and audience) and the rigid structure of the film, that Greenaway engages the play between the superficial, two-dimensional image and the three-dimensional sense of space and location. De Certeau summarizes the conflict simply by stating that “*space is a practiced place*” (117). Place is constructed, limited, bound and bordered by ordinates and relations of finite objects to each other; space is created when place is acted upon, when the infinite interactions of mobile elements over time are introduced into its stability. The play between our understanding of its boundaries and dimensions is always in flux.

Throughout his career, Greenaway has struggled with the role of narrative in creating film. His first films are an attempt to deploy non-narrative structure, and yet he later admits: “I’ve since realized [that non-narrative filmmaking] is probably a contradiction in terms, because anything that moves through time – given human desire for cohesion and chronology – would seem to have some sort of narrative” (Woods 227). He elsewhere recalls: “I began to feel that I was denying myself what I really wanted to do — which was to tell stories... I have always found it easy — too easy — to write stories” (Hacker 215-6). Here, most clearly, lies the crux of Greenaway’s artistic project: how to create a non-traditional, non-narrative structure, while aware that the spectator’s act of moving through the film from beginning to end constitutes its own form of narrative? Some critics have taken issue with the project altogether, seeing his films as

cold formulations of philosophical or mathematical ideas in which the human factor is alternately brutalized and dismissed. As critic Bruce Reid writes in his review of *8 1/2 Women*, “all of Peter Greenaway's films depend less on human emotion than they do on a particularly fierce adherence to preordained patterns,” arguing that, “x-raying human behavior until it becomes no more involving than plots on a graph, however, remains the director's method of operation, and his endless lists and catalogs remain pointless to me.”

However, upon closer look, Greenaway's films reveal themselves to be caught up in the very active presence of the humanity and their unpredictable emotions, emphasizing the importance of character and human potentiality. The difference is that the films are not organized around the personality or problems of a particular individual. Rather, Greenaway's characters enact or experience their problems, conflicts, and personal motivations around and through the rigorous compositional structure of the film. A Greenaway film can be seen as the cinematic equivalent of an erected building, an architectural structure, in which the floorplan is carefully designed according to preconceived concepts of form and function. Once designed, the edifice is then built, shot by shot, sequence by sequence. But as with any building, the design of the structure becomes a nexus of interactions between humans, objects, and time, thus unfolding space out of the rigid place of pre-configured structures. If Greenaway is a “structural” filmmaker, in the sense that his films operate first as carefully crafted and composed structures into which the narrative and filmic action is then enacted, is this the cinematic equivalent of action actualizing space out of place? More importantly, what impact does this have upon the classic notions of cinematic and narrative space? At what point do Greenaway's places become spaces? And what is the role of the human body within this

interplay? Within Greenaway's rigid structures, how can one account for the radical mobility of characters and cameras? As I will argue, Greenaway consistently deploys the tension between rigidity and flow, order and chaos, from his earliest experimental shorts through his highly stylized art-features. Careful consideration of these films thus reveals the centrality of the human body in the realization of space out of place; the body becomes the active point of conversion from passive flatness to active depth.

### **The Early Films**

Greenaway is one those rare artists who seems to have known where he was going long before he got there. Trained as a painter and known for his work in mediums such as print, sculpture, painting, installation art, and exhibition design, he established himself as a director by working his way up from a position as doorkeeper at the British Film Institute. After time spent sweeping the editing room floor at the British Central Office of Information, he eventually found his way into an editing position. During this time he was making his own short films on his own time and money. From these earliest short films through to his most recent experimental feature films, certain themes and stylistic motifs recur with regularity. As a director, he is known best in the United States for recent films like *Prospero's Books* (1991) and *The Pillow Book* (1996), in which, through artistic use of post-production digital manipulation, images stack up on each other like so many playing cards. Over an image of actors is superimposed -- within its own, separate frame -- an image of other actors, or of a boat, or a book; yet within each image, there is an overwhelming abundance of detail and movement, all captured in deep focus and working within a deep space. Images in Greenaway's recent films are at once completely

flat, in the sense that they can be laid on top of each other without conflict, and at the same time completely deep, in the sense that a complete, cohesive, and active world of objects exists within each level of image. Even before his access to digital technologies or the budgets to use them, Greenaway was sorting through the issues that occupy his feature films: numerical hierarchies, highly stylized narrative structures, crowded non-narrative visual elements, and most particularly, the boundaries of image depth and space.

In an interview for *Take Ten* (1991), a survey of contemporary British directors, Peter Greenaway said of his approach to filmmaking,

When I first started to make films there was a shared feeling among underground filmmakers to make non-narrative cinema. It was a reaction — never of course shared by overground cinema — that the psycho-drama approach, working with the dominance of actors, was making films that essentially were illustrated novels. There must be alternate ways of doing it. Literature had experimented with different ways before the dominance of the novel. However, if you throw narrative out, you have to find other ways of structuring. (215)

In a later interview, he says of his earliest films:

My intentions were to see if I could make films that acknowledged cinema's artifices and illusions, and demonstrate that — however fascinating — that was what they were — artifices and illusions. I wanted to make a cinema of ideas, not plots, and to try to use the same aesthetics as painting which has always paid great attention to formal devices as

structure, composition and framing, and most importantly, insisted on attention to metaphor. Since film is not painting – and not simply because one moves and the other doesn't – I wanted to explore their connections and differences – stretching the formal interests to questions of editing, pacing, studying the formal properties of time intervals, repetitions, variations on them, and so on. Which was all rather convenient for I couldn't pay actors or build sets. I had no money. All of those very early films were made for twopence; I was my own cameraman and my own editor. If I could have written the music, I would have done that too. Such ambition and such lack of resources makes for irony or disaster. The irony has become endemic. (Woods 18)

Greenaway understands and seeks to illuminate the artificiality of a medium, film, which in the work of "overground" directors most often strives to present itself as an exact mimesis of the objects and moments recorded. Furthermore, Greenaway's sense of irony must always be foregrounded in any discussion of his films; it is the most relevant response to those critics who would term him pretentious, rigid, or cold. Trained first as a painter and still a regular exhibitor of his non-cinematic art, he is aware of the limitations, problems, and contradictions of a project that seeks to illustrate the superficial image in cinema by comparing it to something that it is not, specifically painting. He further complicates the task by contrasting the art of filmmaking with three-dimensional arts, namely sculpture and architecture. As a director, Greenaway acknowledges the paradoxes and potential impossibility of the task he has set himself, to

play in the nexus between three-dimensional space and two-dimensional image, and yet he pursues it, delighting in it for the very sake of that irony.

In his early short film “Windows” (1975), Greenaway explores the boundary between inside and outside, safety and danger, with a camera that tracks for four minutes through footage of windows, houses, and the grounds beyond. A voice-over monologue provided by Greenaway himself recounts statistics on the number of deaths in a certain English county due to falls from windows. The deaths are catalogued by age, occupation, details of death, and so on, providing an early example of Greenaway’s fascination with categories and classifications. The film places significance upon windows as a nexus point for passing between the inside and outside of a location, the point at which the distinction between the two areas is breached. The potential for the human body to penetrate that boundary becomes of key importance, in the case of this film by falling through it. The effect is to highlight the artificiality of these distinctions, to stress the importance of human intentions and behaviors in determining those boundaries.<sup>14</sup> Only at the moment that a human body passes into, through, or out of a place, does that place take on importance as a narrative element. If the purpose of the film is to catalogue the

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<sup>14</sup> The importance of this notion is seized upon more directly by Julianne Pidduck’s “Of Windows and Country Walks: Frames of Space and Movement in 1990’s Austen Adaptations.” Pidduck makes the influence of French theorist Michel de Certeau explicit, writing “to imagine audiovisual texts as the splicing together of ‘mobile elements of duration’ or ‘movement image’ is to suggest a dynamic, spatiotemporal approach to the moving image,” a suggestion that is implicit within de Certeau and of key importance in understanding the interaction between narrative and cinematic space. Pidduck continues by providing a gendered reading of spaces in Austen adaptations, and concludes, “to fold these observations back into my core question of gendered space and movements, these texts, as part of a ‘woman’s genre’ of costume drama, operate in de Certeau’s terms to ‘found’ or even to ‘authorize’ the exploration of gendered places and experiences within a representational field still dominated by masculine stories” (399). Much of Pidduck’s analysis is based around the twin images of the Austen-women, seated at the window, looking out into the space beyond, and the Austen-woman, unleashed into that space. These two images clearly recall the notion of boundary, in which the presence beyond boundary and the penetration of that boundary, in this case, according to Pidduck, by the liberated woman rarely found in Austen adaptations, is a reification of space over place.

instances of death from people falling out of windows, then the only qualification of importance for a particular house is whether somebody (some body) has fallen out of it, preferably from a great height. The cinematography of the film constantly juxtaposes the inside and outside of the house, stressing the importance of the window as the location where rigid structures become flexible through human vectors of motion. Over the four minutes of the film, as the concept unfolds, the viewer comes to realize that the cinematography tends to move upward, toward windows, along their sills, peering outward into the spaces beyond windows in order to stress what lies beyond the boundary, while the narrative describes the falls. Although these are likely not the same windows as involved in the statistics, and in fact the viewer quickly comes to doubt that the statistics are true in the strictest sense, an immediate connection is made between the spaces recorded by the camera and the events as narrated.

His film "H is for House" (1976) is made up of seven minutes of scenes around a house in the country, in which a woman and a young child have lunch and engage the peaceful rural environment. In following their activities, the camera focuses upon structural elements of the house and its surrounding area. By dividing attention between house and humans, Greenaway again implies interactions between human bodies and architectural entities. That the humans are largely shown on the outside of the house is of strategic importance, implying that the house, the place of residence, does not contain the entirety of human activity. As I have noted, Greenaway's filmic corpus revolves around issues of rigid structures, both as human interactions with buildings and with narrative constraints. However, Greenaway sets up these devices only to reveal their limitations; he is keenly aware of the human potential for unpredictability. Within the order that he

imposes, within the rigid narrative and compositional structures, characters are unleashed who bring about chaos and the demise of structure. His films record the constant play between rigidity and flexibility, stasis and motion, order and chaos.

The early Greenaway expressly experiments with non-narrative filmmaking in such examples as “Windows” and “H is for House.” Yet during this stage of his career, prior to his receiving support for longer projects, Greenaway also experiments with ways of telling stories that while unusual, do rely upon a more classical narrative form. The film “Dear Phone” (1976) is a collection of very short narratives told in voice-over in which the characters interact with or become obsessed by telephones. Shots of telephone boxes in a wide variety of locations alternate with shots of the handwritten texts of the stories being told by the narrative voice, often full of corrections, emendations, and additional material. Figures 2.5 and 2.6, two successive shots from the film, highlight the associative link between telephones and texts.<sup>15</sup> Though the film also makes an associative argument connecting the various places, the telephone boxes themselves, and the narratives about telephones, there is no motivated diegetic connection between any of the individual telephones shown and the telephones mentioned in the stories, much in the same way that “Windows” leads the viewer to connect by visual association the windows shown in the film with the windows being described by the narrator. A similar gesture is made in Greenaway’s “Water Wrackets” (1978) in which the twelve minutes of the film are taken up by shots of pools, ponds, small dams, and other bodies of water, often still and stagnant, over which is narrated a complex history of a political struggle centered

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<sup>15</sup> The film here predicts the overwhelming importance of the *image* of text in his later films such as *The Cock*, *The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover*, *Prospero’s Books*; and *The Pillow Book*. In these three films, the representation of books and words on paper becomes a dominant visual motif.

upon water rights through changing dynasties and various other events. The specific events and contents of this history, or even who the characters are, become secondary to the motif of water, particularly water held back by artificial means, the juxtaposition of order (the dam) against the potential for chaos (the freely flowing water). Again, the director creates an interaction between the places shown in the film and the narrative that overlies them based entirely upon an associative link. The places shown are not the places described within the narrative, but become linked, in a sense become the space of the overlying narrative, by the audience's act of passing through the narrative, of receiving the voice-over descriptions while looking at the places depicted in the film. The reception of the film by a human audience is the necessary step in linking the film space and the narrative space. In a complicated fashion, narrative and cinematic spaces are practiced in a parallel process.

Greenaway's fascination with questions of narrative and place, of architecture and the human body, first seen in his earliest short films becomes most clear with his first feature-length project. Structural order is established only to be disturbed or disrupted by human actions and motivations. *The Falls* (1980) tells of ninety-two victims of the unexplained VUE (Violent Unknown Event), taken from an index of millions of victims. Thus divided, the number "ninety-two" becomes both a recurrent motif and structural means of organizing the film, existing prior to the characters or actors who will play them. While the same could be said of any film in which a script exists before shooting begins, Greenaway's focus upon artificial structures within narrative accentuates the notion of the film as a piece of architecture and the filmmaker as the designer and builder of that architectural space. The structure exists first; the human characters within it exist

only to make it possible as a narrative, in other words, to create its narrative space. A similar device is employed in *A Zed and Two Noughts* (1985)<sup>16</sup> in which twin brothers, both zookeepers distraught over the deaths of their wives in the same car accident, begin to film the process of bodily decay in an attempt to understand the reason for death in the process of life. These filmic records of decay, which start with an apple and progress through larger and more complex forms of life, from shrimp through dogs and gorillas to the attempted recording of the brothers' own decay after death, are a narrative of sorts within themselves. At one point, a shrimp is removed from the film-within-the-film, and though its disappearance is not explained, the spectator knows from the surrounding narrative that a character has been forced to eat the decaying crustacean. Likewise, the filming process itself becomes interrupted by the zoo administrator, who attempts to stop the brothers from recording the alarmingly high rate of animal deaths in his zoo. As with all structures for Greenaway, narrative, in whatever form, is susceptible to the influence, even interruption, of human activity.

In his film, *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), indeed as in most of Greenaway's films, the plot is organized on at least one level around numbers, in this case, the sequential counting from one to one hundred. Numbers are physically included in the *mise-en-scène* of individual shots, so that the audience cannot help but make a mental note of them as they occur. Some numbers are obvious, for example three dead fish tagged with consecutive numbers, others so subtle as to be easily missed. Some numbers are diegetically motivated, as when the boy Smut (Jason Edwards) paints a number on the road to catalogue a dead animal for his collection of roadkill photography, while others

have no narrative explanation; they simply occur. In terms of story, the film follows three women, all named Cissie, played by Joan Plowright, Juliet Stevenson, and Joely Richardson, who drown their husbands in respective order. The local coroner, Madgett (Bernard Hill) is manipulated through his sexual longing to cover up the murders, despite rising suspicion among the victims' relatives and friends. However, the story frequently becomes secondary to the act of counting, as audience members are encouraged to search each shot for the progressing numbers. This approach to narrative, in which the film is carried forward as much by the conceit of linear counting as it is by plot and story, reflects once again the intersection of Greenaway's interest in non-narrative filmmaking and his desire nevertheless to tell stories, noting the interaction between the carefully constructed *mise-en-scène* and the human characters that populate it. In doing so, he highlights the inherent artificiality of this film, alluding to his general belief in the artificiality of filmmaking as a medium. Even the title of the film alludes to the act of "painting by numbers," a creative activity performed according to a predetermined pattern. The spectator is aware at all times of the careful composition of this film, a trait that remains true of all of Greenaway's films.

But how does Greenaway's work relate to more traditional models of film space and the illusion of three-dimensionality? As discussed in the previous chapter, I understand film and narrative space as both related and resistant to reductive or isolating forms of analysis, in which elements are severed from each other and the importance of their interrelation lost. Moreover, I am arguing for a reconsideration of the importance of the body and movement, both in the actor on-screen as she creates spatial potential

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<sup>16</sup> I have intentionally skipped over Greenaway's 1982 breakthrough film, *The Draughtman's Contract*, as I

against the measure of her body's experience, but also in the spectator's own body as a perceiving organ. Discussing painting, Merleau-Ponty writes:

Because depth, color, form, line, movement, contour, physiognomy are all branches of Being and because each one can sway all the rest, there are no separated, distinct "problems" in painting, no really opposed paths, no partial "solutions," no cumulative progress, no irretrievable options. (Eye and Mind 188)

Crucial to his point here is that our understanding of art and image is based in the juncture of elements as they converge upon our embodied perception. While potentially helpful in the short-term, analyses that seek to concretely isolate any one element of that perception inherently fail to encompass or describe the phenomena in a meaningful way. True of painting, Merleau-Ponty's argument becomes even more applicable to film as a medium that accounts for movement through time and space. If our means of understanding an object moving through space and time is reliant upon isolating each and every element of color, form, line, and contour within that trajectory, then our perception would become frozen in place, immobilized by something akin to Zeno's paradox as we parse the image into ever smaller units. Our perception would be so caught up in ever decreasing minutiae that it would be impossible to trace the entire arc. Rather, we understand the image from a vantage of embodied perception, from the top down, as an element of the lived-in-world, after which it becomes possible to delineate elements. However, a possible problem arises in the application to Greenaway's work. If Greenaway, as he himself suggests, depends upon the revelation of artificial and illusory

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will return to a more in-depth discussion its structural and thematic elements at a later point in this chapter.

nature of the film image, then how does this relate to a bodily experience of depth in the cinematic image? If he points out the lack of depth, how can our bodies experience its depth as Merleau-Ponty would suggest? These questions will become particularly problematic in relation to his later films, in which he employs digital technology in order to layer images one upon another, reveling in their flatness. Part of the answer to these questions lies in Greenaway's own awareness of the paradox of his art; he intentionally plays with exactly these types of contradictions in order to draw our attention to them, not away from them. More to the point, Greenaway constantly reasserts the importance of opposing the infinite vectors of potential motion held within the human body against the rigidity of structure, be that structure the architecture of a building or the seeming inflexibility of Greenaway's narrative design.

### **The Still Image Versus the Moving Image**

In his seminal essay "Narrative Space," Stephen Heath writes that "narrative contains the mobility that could threaten the clarity of vision in a constant renewal of perspective; spaces becomes place - narrative as the taking place of film" (392), later concluding, "offscreen space becomes onscreen space and is replaced in turn by the space it holds off, each joining over the text" (398). Narrative space becomes a nexus of interplay between infinite elements that are experienced all at once, as interrelated, rather than a construction of separate elements that exist alone and then join to create a whole while still remaining unique and distinct. Depth of space, in film as in the world around us, is understood in relation to the embodied perception as the junction of infinitely

mobile elements, such that our understanding of it constantly demands a “renewal of perspective.”

Heath’s description calls to mind Greenaway’s fascination with the work of the photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904). Muybridge sought to catalogue human and animal motion through a battery of successive cameras that would capture and isolate minute changes in position. Famous Muybridge photo-series include a galloping horse, women in the act of bathing, and men walking, each split second captured statically on film. Greenaway is captivated by these images, even including them, radically altered, in *Prospero’s Books* and his painting and art exhibitions. But it is as a failed experiment in space and motion as much as their success as individual images which most interests Greenaway:

Again a project that mocks human effort – record all of the movements of the human body and most of Noah’s ark as well – it could never be completed... It’s as an unfinished and unfinishable catalogue of anecdotal ephemera that I like it the best – twenty-seven pictures from three angles of a naked woman throwing cold water over her naked female companion, forty-four pictures from four angles of a naked Muybridge walking a short plank... It’s a telling example of all those highly equivocal human attempts – from Newton to Linnaeus, Messerschmitt to Darwin and every historian and scholar you can think of, to record, order and try to make sense of the variety of chaos. (As quoted in Woods 57)

Greenaway takes an almost Borgesian delight in categories, lists, and catalogues, celebrating them most when they succeed least. As a filmmaker, he stands at the nexus

point of order and chaos, attempting through the symmetry and style of his film structures to catalogue the chaos that swells within his shots, constantly threatening to spill over its boundaries, and often succeeding at it. Consider, for example, Figures 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9, stills from *Drowning by Numbers*, *The Cook...*, and *Prospero's Books*. In these three figures, detail and activity overwhelm the viewer. Greenaway carefully composes the details of each shot the way an artist composes a still life; but these are not still lives, and, ultimately, he cannot control what his actors are going to do on anything more than a general level. What is more, as we shall see, the careful composition of the images and of the structure of the films' narratives will give way to the chaos of the characters within them; or to state it in different words, the rigidity of the composition will give way to the chaos of reality. The point being here that once again, Greenaway reveals his awareness of the paradox within the task he has set himself: to create films that heighten the superficiality and artificiality of their medium while fostering the illusion of reality and depth. By allowing chaos to overtake the rigidity of his structures, by allowing movement to create space in de Certeau's sense, he allows, or rather cannot avoid, the reassertion of depth and reality. Likewise, Muybridge's attempts to capture the infinitesimal moments within the simplest act of motion draw immediate connection to traditional definitions of how film space is constructed, insufficiently asserting that we can understand film space through a rigid dissection of its elements, going so far as to freeze the moving picture in a paradoxical attempt to discuss how that motion gives the image its space and depth. Attempting to separate one element of the moving image from the rest results in only understanding that element, not the entire image itself. The only way to understand the depth of a filmic image is to witness it *en toto*. How then are we to

understand Greenaway's fascination with painting, a two-dimensional medium that cannot, within itself, contain the actual movement of objects? The importance of two-dimensionality is only made clear by placing it within the context of Greenaway's appreciation of three-dimensional art forms, in which movement, particularly the movement of human bodies, becomes the key factor. In the same way that his plots are highly constructed as a means to juxtapose the chaos of human bodies, two-dimensional images are deployed in order to highlight the depth of the moving image as a spatial and temporal medium.

The difference between still photography, even experiments such as Muybridge's, and film, obviously, is the containment of movement through space and time. However, this very factor, particularly with regards to the creation of space, is most often overlooked. The difference between a photograph and a film image is something akin to the difference between place and space, which itself can be seen as the difference between a floorplan (place) and the building itself as objects move within it (space), or indeed, the script or pre-established structure of a film (counting from one to one-hundred, indexing ninety-two fatalities) and the recording of that film with actors moving through the blueprint and creating its space around them. In *Prospero's Books*, Greenaway takes Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* as the blueprint for an entirely different project. The script itself becomes foregrounded, even appearing as text superimposed over the characters or overlaid as a completely separate image upon the action beneath it. It also makes an appearance as a book in itself, the last of Prospero's collection. More importantly, we are always aware as viewers that what we are witnessing is a performance of that play, much as a building is a performance of an

architect's floorplan. The conversion of the play from script through set to film becomes one of the dominant motifs of *Prospero's Books*, and the myriad of spaces of all possible definitions becomes one of the challenges and delights facing the viewer.

Likewise, one might look at the script of a film, or in fact the film itself at the moment before a viewer begins his journey through it, as a type of map or potential space that demands enactment by a human body. Upon travelling through them, "the long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be... it creates shadows and ambiguities with them" (De Certeau 101). The act of moving through the narrative creates nuances and depths to the rigid artifact that cannot exist without that human interaction, reliant as they are upon the actual practicing of the place according to the spectator's specifically active subjectivity. Greenaway himself, however, notes the inefficiency of using a typical film as a map of a real space:

Cinema can only offer limited illusionary three-dimensional space which must be made significant within the rigid confines of a rectangular frame, and it conventionally can only offer one viewpoint at a time. Consider working the situation backwards and attempt to recreate a "real" location solely with the information given by the film; very rapidly that real landscape would be full of voids and blanks, and grossly ill-fitting details. It has long been cinema practice to accept this misalignment of real space – and cinema audiences have well learnt to accept this great spatial deception with extraordinary equanimity. (*The Fall: Geneva 77*)

Here Greenaway refers to the typical approach of spatial continuity seen in the average feature film, particularly as perfected by Hollywood-based filmmakers. The typical film

does not seek to portray spaces that exceed the demands of narrative.<sup>17</sup> The spaces created are pared down to their absolute essentials, often abbreviating a full sense of that space through the process of editing together only the spaces that are necessary to the narrative. Yet we as an audience accept it as a “real” or “true” enactment of space. Why? This response relies, in part, upon the spatial cues outlined by Bordwell and Thompson, but a good deal of it also relies upon the motions of objects within that space serving to support our notions of its boundaries. Objects do not fly out of nowhere and off into spaces that did not previously seem to exist. What Greenaway accomplishes in his films is to place these boundaries in the forefront and isolate them for what they are, artificial constructs enacted by the filmmaker through the movement of objects through them.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note at this point that I am glossing a much larger and infinitely more complicated set of theoretical debates surrounding the concept of cinematic excess, as most coherently expressed by Stephen Heath in his essay “Narrative Space.” In it, Heath works through the implications of Roland Barthes’ notion of the *third meaning*, the level of significance in a cinematic image that always seems to exist beyond his grasp or analysis. For him, and for Heath, there is always something more to the film than would seem called for in the script or in a formal analysis of the narrative. He uses Hitchcock as an example. In a sequence in his film *Suspicion*, Hitchcock follows two inspectors as they question a young woman (Joan Fontaine) as to the whereabouts and activities of her husband, played by Cary Grant. At one point in the sequence, one inspector stares off-camera, at a small, abstract painting, before continuing his line of questioning. Heath uses this as an example of a detail in the film that has no diegetic motivation; it is excessive to the narrative. Kristin Thompson responds to Heath and his ideas in the essay “The Concept of Cinematic Excess,” in which, I would argue, she attempts to acknowledge the presence of excess while welding it to the structure of Neo-Formalism. Her essential argument is that if cinematic excess does exist, it serves to draw the spectator’s attention back to the structure of the film, a rough spot that accentuates the film’s otherwise smooth surfaces. That this argument flies directly in the face of the basic concept of excess, as defined by Barthes and his predecessor Georges Bataille specifically as something that serves no purpose (not even an indirect or negative one), as I discuss briefly in the introduction to this dissertation. For the purposes of my current argument, however, suffice it to say that while I agree with Heath that excess exists inevitably, I would also suggest that it is the goal of most filmmakers of the continuity school to root it out whenever possible. Excess of space within a typical action sequence would mean any portrayal of the depth of that space beyond the needs of the action taking place. An illustration in the extreme of the relation between movement and the *illusion* of three-dimensional space.

<sup>18</sup> Later in this work, I will return to the issue of boundaries within space in order to discuss the significance of a style of filmmaking that seeks to reverse the process, never giving a clear notion of where boundaries are in order to constantly push at the envelope of space through the use of subjective camera work.

Greenaway's claim that films make bad maps for spaces would seem to contradict my argument that his understanding of space is architectural, a map for a space within which actors will interact, were it not for his own acknowledgment of the attention paid to just exactly that level of precision within his movies. Film space, for Greenaway, is realized with the same attention to detail and exactitude of the architect:

In *The Draughtman's Contract* great efforts were made to complement the nature of the demands for veracity that were integral to the plot by filming a location that would be fully comprehensible. More than one enthusiastic viewer, without assistance from extra-frame sources, and without visiting the place of filming, has been able to recreate the location in geographical exactness solely from information taken from the film frame. (*The Fall: Geneva*, Greenaway 77-78)<sup>19</sup>

That this attention to the detail of a space may lead to excess is one of the delights of Greenaway's work. The space surrounding the actors is a complete one, a world with seeming infinite potential for movement.

If the film is a map for the spectator as she moves through the space,<sup>20</sup> both narrative and filmic, of a film, then perhaps the composition of a single shot or series of

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<sup>19</sup> The possibility of reconstructing a set or schema of camera shots recalls Branigan's essay "The Space of *Equinox Flower*," in which he reconstructs the camera angles from Ozu's film, presumably after careful and repeated viewing.

<sup>20</sup> As Anette Michelson discusses in her 1973 introduction to Noël Burch's *Theory of Film Practice*, André Bazin makes a parallel argument concerning the reality effect in relation to depth of field and deep focus, specifically in films like Welles' *Citizen Kane*. Bazin suggests that films operating in an aggrandized depth of field allow the spectator to work his way through the cinematic image much as he would through the reality that surrounds him daily, unlike a film with a shallow depth of field, which attempts to guide or restrain the spectator's perception. "The spectator retains his 'democratic right,' as it were, to make meaning from within that cinematic manifold, that recording of reality, of those 'facts,' the naked and modest revelation of which, the director, in his loving respect for 'things themselves,' presents" (ix-x). Moreover, Michelson suggests that Bazin, writing contemporary to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, was

shots can be likewise thought of as a map for the journey an eye takes through that image. As Alan Woods notes,

What is new is the particular, painterly kind of artifice, the detachment, the lack of (cinematic) ‘purity,’ in a way; the insistence that we are witnessing a spectacle, a parade of multi-layered theatrical – not really cinematic – time which is being performed in the real time of the take. In a way, Greenaway has begun to dramatize the movement of an eye through a large picture – something which the documentary camera (parodied in *A Walk Through H*) has already done wretchedly with real paintings. (Woods 81)

The idea of dramatizing the movement of an eye through a painting immediately recalls Merleau-Ponty’s “Eye and Mind,” in which he analyzes the work of Cézanne for its use of space and composition. Although he refers only briefly to film in the essay, it is not difficult to apply Merleau-Ponty’s ideas to the motion picture medium, particularly when discussing a filmmaker who is so heavily and consciously influenced by painting and its methods. It is Merleau-Ponty’s contention that we understand image and art through a process in which our eye becomes representative of the entire body in a sort of mental synecdoche, such that we experience the image as a bodily sensation. Perception is an active, embodied experience, not the experience of a detached consciousness passively receiving the duplication of objects. Our mind places ourselves and our bodies into the space of the image through the action of the eye travelling through it. As Merleau-Ponty states it,

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influenced by the concepts of phenomenology in his approach to film. The spectator’s active existence

‘The painter ‘takes his body with him,’ says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement. (283)

This notion of the eye standing in for the body may have affected Woods’ understanding of Greenaway directly, as he elsewhere points out, “all painting since *Cézanne* has been forced to address the picture surface. Outside 3-D fads, cinematic *trompe l’oeil*, cinema, surely, is doomed to a transparent picture plane, a window on its worlds?” (Woods 88, my emphasis) Woods’ argument is directly related to Greenaway’s desire to acknowledge film’s artificiality, a large part of which is its superficiality of image. And yet, just as Greenaway seeks to exploit the paradoxes of the filmic image and acknowledges with typical irony the potential of film to create an illusion of depth and possibly reality at the very same moment he highlights its artificiality, so does Woods acknowledge that it is an illusion. “Painters create spatial meaning: meaning as it is apparent in an image, in which nothing disappears from view, and the associations filtered through the thinking, *the embodied eye*... do not succeed each other, but co-exist, in an experience of duration without linearity or coherent sequence” (122, my emphasis).<sup>21</sup> For Merleau-Ponty and Woods, the eye becomes a presentation of the body.

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becomes the thing that makes the film.

<sup>21</sup> Woods is not the only critic who has applied Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology to our understanding of Greenaway’s films. Borrowing from scholar David Abram, Paula Willoquet-Maricondi writes, Abram applies phenomenology, most specifically the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to an investigation of the impact of written language, particularly the phonetic alphabet, on

We as spectators enter into the space of the film through our visual interpretation of it, and thus experience its depth on a physical level, becoming in fact one of de Certeau's "vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables" (117). Building from Woods' distinction between a type of space in which the spectator stands in for the artist or camera and a type of space in which all is revealed as a construction, a staged entity which many can view from the same angle, what Greenaway instead seems to be accomplishing is an image in which we stand in the position of the camera or director, and yet are forced to acknowledge that this is his created space. We witness the location and experience the thrill he felt as a first-hand viewer of it in the act of recording it on film. What is more, particularly in the later, digitally manipulated films, we are forced to acknowledge the artifice, the two-dimensionality of his craft as well.

### **Greenaway as Painter, Greenaway as Architect**

The tension between Greenaway the painter/photographer and Greenaway the filmmaker is played out across his creative work, in all the various media in which he has worked. Moreover, to some extent, all of his films, even his earliest short films, address

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our perception of and relation to our bodies and to the "body" of the world around us. In this study, Abram examines the origins of writing and describes writing's subsequent gradual divorce from its natural referents--the human body and the land. What I would like to suggest in my analysis of *The Pillow Book* is that the split between language and body, which, Abram convincingly suggests, was brought about by alphabetic writing, is something analogous to the split, hypothesized by Lacanian theory, of the Subject from the totality of Being brought about by the Subject's entry into the Symbolic. I further suggest that this split is the central motif of the Oedipus legend, and that this legend operates as a master narrative in our particular patriarchal civilization, a civilization that, in abandoning its roots in the living body of the Earth that nurtures it, has inscribed itself in a deadly narrative of biospheric proportions.

Willoquet-Maricondi will go on to suggest that Greenaway's relation of text to body in *The Pillow Book*, in which bodies becomes locations for text and language, addresses and complicates this split. The importance for this study is her reliance upon Merleau-Ponty, through Abrams, to posit the potential of the body as a sensing organ.

the complexities of film space and narrative space. However, it is with *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) that the ramifications of a comparison between painting and film become fully realized, predicting a theme recurrent in the rest of Greenaway's work. Set in the seventeenth century, the film revolves, at least initially, around a Scottish draughtsman, Mr. Neville (Anthony Higgins), who has been retained by an English aristocrat, Mrs. Talmann (Janet Suzman), to draw the buildings and grounds of her husband's estate as a birthday present. In lieu of payment, the Draughtsman agrees to accept sexual favors; the drawings then become a bitter form of revenge for the noblewoman, who in fact detests her husband. Mr. Neville lays down a strict set of guidelines for activity within the house and grounds, detailing during which hours certain areas must be completely vacant of human activity so as not to obstruct his view. But the Draughtsman cannot constrain the inhabitants of the house to abide by his rules. His strictures are violated with an increasing degree of regularity and severity, to the point that the drawings, which are originally only to be of the place set before Neville's viewfinder, instead become records of the humans that pass through those spaces, largely evident through the objects they leave behind. In Figure 2.10, we see the Draughtsman's original drawing. In Figure 2.11, we see a ladder that has been left perched beneath a window. In figure 2.12, Neville adds the ladder to his drawing, against his original intent. Why the ladder has been left there is uncertain, perhaps the work of a forgetful window-washer, though by the end of the film, it seems likely to have had a more lascivious purpose. Likewise, the drawing of the gardens includes a piece of clothing, a veil left by a young woman on a mission of her own. (See Fig. 2.13 and 2.14) Though Neville attempts to remove the offending veil, he finds that he cannot, and like the ladder,

is forced to include it in his composition. What is more, as the film progresses, Mr. Talmann turns up dead, and the objects recorded within the drawings seem to offer some indication of who may have committed the murder. The drawings become a record of the narrative of the murder, much in the same way that the frustrated Mr. Neville cannot help but record the human presence within his previously static depictions of place. In the end, the Draughtsman himself is murdered, in part for fear that he knows the murderer's identity, but more out of revenge for his philandering ways. The movie unfolds through the drawings, and yet it is not contained within them. They are a static recording of the important movements of characters through and beyond those spaces. It is the trace of their movement that makes the drawings relevant. A rigid two-dimensional image is given depth by the movement of the characters.

Interestingly, as Alan Woods notes in *Being Naked Playing Dead*, it is this inability to control or restrain human behavior that inspired Greenaway. He writes:

We do not need to know that Greenaway's own attempts to draw a house inspired the film to make a connection between the draughtsman's attempt to control what comes before his perspective frame and Greenaway's need as a director to assemble his properties and his actors in a location in front of a camera. (The child who appears in the film, we learn from an interview, refused to be separated from his teddy bear, an anachronism running parallel to the draughtsman's problems with linen and clothing and ladders intruding themselves into his compositions)... In addition to the drawings, into which meanings are smuggled against the artist's will, there is a painting, an intentional allegory; though both drawings and

paintings are subject to the endless and unavoidable ambiguities or interpretation. (Woods 46-47)

The drawings of the draughtsman, despite his best attempts to keep them rigid and un-*practiced* in de Certeau's sense of the word, become infected with reminders of the very real and actualizing interaction of humans and the attending objects; he is forced to record the proof of "vectors and velocities" within the space under the very act of attempting to convert them into two-dimensional places. The obvious parallel with the act of filmmaking is clearly not lost upon Greenaway; it is one of the intentional purposes of the film to foreground this parallel, and the film acknowledges the ironic paradox of attempting to capture a three-dimensional situation in two-dimensions. The vector of a child refusing to give up his anachronistic teddy-bear, which would normally spoil the setting of a British costume drama, for Greenaway only further realizes his intent: to acknowledge the artificiality of cinema while at the same time pushing at the boundaries of its ability to realistically capture a moment in time and space.<sup>22</sup> Greenaway composes his shots the way an artist composes a painting, but he then releases actors into those compositions, given them depth beyond the illusions available to the painter.

Though well-known in international circles from a fairly early stage in his filmmaking career, and certainly since the release of *The Draughtsman's Contract* in 1982, Greenaway's films nevertheless struggled to find an audience in the United States until the release of *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989). The film takes

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<sup>22</sup> Woods contrasts two types of space, one in which the viewer stands in the place of the artist (or director) and the other in which the space is presented static, as constructed and displayed; I will revisit this idea in another guise during the discussion of the use of subjective, hand-held camerawork in *Dogme 95* and other films in Chapters Four and Five. Suffice it to say for now that I see this contrast as indicative of a contrast

place largely within the confines of a French restaurant frequented by the vulgar small-time Thief, Albert Spica (Michael Gambon), and his band of thugs. Spica wants to bring the owner-chef (Richard Bohringer) under his sway. Accompanying the Thief on these evenings is his Wife, Georgina (Helen Mirren), who we quickly realize detests her husband and is a victim of his vulgarity, both sexually and spiritually. In the restaurant, she sees a man, Michael (Alan Howard), dining alone while reading, the embodiment of everything her husband is not, and they soon become lovers. Typical for a Greenaway film, sex and love do not lead to salvation. The Thief discovers them. He kills Michael, Georgina flees, and in time exacts her revenge upon Albert in a most unusual and strangely delightful way: she has the body of her lover prepared by the Cook and then forces Albert at gunpoint to sample the flesh before shooting him. As with his previous work such as *Drowning by Numbers* and *The Draughtsman's Contract*, the film is arranged in such a way that the narrative is furthered by artificial means; in this case, the structure and the structural motif is broken up into eight days' worth of menus, one for each day over which the film unfolds. Each day is prefaced with the menu being prepared for that day, with the final day's course artfully obscured so as not to reveal the ending. The logic of the procession of meals spurs the action along, so that, like *Drowning by Numbers*, the progress of the structure becomes as important as the actions of the characters within that structure. More importantly, however, as with his earlier films but here taken to an extreme, *The Cook* is a painterly film. Greenaway consciously refers in his cinematic composition to Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and the Dutch Masters. Characters strike tableaux that recreate specific paintings, hold for just a moment, and

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between newer models of creating film and narrative space and the more traditional, "continuity" based

then flow naturally into action again. (See Fig. 2.15) Once again, we see Greenaway calling attention to the artificiality of film, as well as its potential for comparison to painting. However, the point often overlooked by scholars seeking to underscore the influence of painters upon Greenaway is that the characters do break the tableau. (See Fig. 2.16) Once Georgina enters in the scene, the carefully composed reference to a Hals painting that dominates the restaurant, as seen in Figure 2.17, disintegrates into a collection of characters simply standing around. As quoted earlier, Greenaway notes specifically that “since film is not painting – and not simply because one moves and the other doesn’t – I wanted to explore their connections and differences – stretching the formal interests to questions of editing, pacing, studying the formal properties of time intervals, repetitions, variations on them, and so on” (Woods 18). Greenaway seems to de-emphasize the importance of movement in film, but it is only to point out what seems to escape others: that this is an obvious difference, one of many between painting and film.

The comparisons Greenaway makes between these two artistic media is serious and intentional, yet filled with irony and paradox. Just as the characters could not logistically hold the tableau for the entirety of the film, without the film becoming nothing more than a sort of painting on film itself, human movement reasserts itself in film and, in doing so, stresses the depth of the space. Throughout the film, the Cook’s kitchen has remained largely an inviolable territory, despite Spica’s attempts to assert his will over it with rude behavior and verbal assaults upon the staff. The kitchen, deep and high, remains the ordered domain of the Cook. However, once Spica discovers

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forms most often found in Hollywood feature films.

Georgina's infidelity, itself a challenge to his ability to control his environment, he destroys the kitchen and its order in a fit of rage. His rampage continues on into the Book Depository, the Garden of Eden *to which*, ironically, the Lovers have fled. (Fig. 2.18) Despite the overflowing stacks of books, the general sense is that each book has its distinct place within that order. Once Spica discovers the Depository and finds Michael alone there, he and his gang of thugs destroy that sense of composed order, killing Michael in the process. (Fig. 2.19) That the order of the kitchen, the depository, and the film reasserts itself, that Spica is punished for his transgression, marks a distinct turning away from *Draughtsman*, in which the organizing protagonist is killed, his work undone. In this instance, Greenaway's need to tell a particular type of story overrides his understanding of order and chaos: if Spica were not punished, audiences would howl. And indeed, the complexity and possible inevitability of chaos asserting itself over order does seem to present itself in the later films. Nevertheless, the point remains that the rigidity of the director's compositions can only be appreciated once movement is introduced into them. As for a viewer who looks at a painting, rigid, unmoving, despite two-dimensional factors such as perspective, overlap, and color as mentioned by Bordwell and Thompson, it remains essentially two-dimensional. Once action is introduced into that rigid place of the painting, the depth of the space springs into life. This is the conflict that Greenaway illustrates in the play between paintings and film.

The conflict between two and three dimensions as portrayed on film is addressed in a different manner in Greenaway's earlier film *The Belly of an Architect* (1986). Some critics have seen the film as an aberration in his filmmaking, far more "human" than his previous and following films. This has been largely attributed to the remarkable

performance of Brian Dennehy as Stourley Kracklite, an American architect who has come to Rome with his wife, Louisa (Chloe Webb), to orchestrate an exhibition of the eighteenth-century French architect, Etienne-Louis Boullée, of whose buildings not a single still exists. Obsessed by the work of his hero and the project before him, Kracklite neglects his wife, who out of frustration takes a lover, a younger Italian architect. Louisa also soon finds that she is pregnant by Kracklite, while Kracklite discovers that he has stomach cancer. Parallels are established between the life growing in Louisa's belly and the death growing in Kracklite's, and both are interestingly juxtaposed to the designs of Boullée as they are finally given life in models, mock-ups, and exhibits. Kracklite attempts to realize a plan for the exhibit, and attempts to create models of the architectural designs with which people can interact, while within the architecture of his and his wife's belly, a new form of "life" is slowly taking shape, all of which is shot against Rome's stunning architectural presence. Characters pass in and out of buildings, and in one notable scene, Kracklite and his Roman hosts stand before the Pantheon and applaud its structure. Architecture here directly requires bodily response. Two-dimensional designs spring into three-dimensionality, echoing the process of taking a film narrative beyond its pre-existent structure and turning it into a three-dimensional space through the movement both of camera and the human bodies and objects placed before the camera. In the final moments of the film, Kracklite, cuckolded, cancer-ridden, and exiled from his own project because of his unpredictability, throws himself to his death<sup>23</sup> from a window as Louisa cuts the opening ribbon for the exhibition. At the

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<sup>23</sup> The obvious similarities and possible direct reference to his early film "Windows," in which the film follows the statistics of window-related fatal falls, is but one of the many examples of Greenaway's work looping back upon itself, tracking down the same issues and themes.

moment of Kracklite's death, Louisa's water breaks. Places in *The Belly of an Architect* literally become infested with human life, activity, and movement. If *The Cook* or *The Draughtsman* are films about the interaction between human motion and bodies with the art of painting, then *The Belly of an Architect* is a film about the interaction of human bodies with sculpture and architecture. Greenaway openly acknowledges this influence, going so far as to refer to himself and his cinematographer Sacha Vierny as the "architects" of the film (Elliott and Purdy, 14). What is at issue here is the interaction between vectors of motion and temporality, most significantly as contained within and exhibited by the human body, and the constructed places found in architecture and film.

This relation of human bodies to structure, particularly architectural spaces, is not overlooked by Greenaway scholars, particularly in the excellent volume *Peter Greenaway: Architecture and Allegory*. Most notable within this "introduction" to Greenaway's work is the focus upon the interaction between architecture and human bodies. The authors quote literary scholar Peter Brooks on the meanings of plot, drawn from the *American Heritage Dictionary*, as "1. (a) A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose, (b) A measured area of land; lot. 2. A ground plan, as for a building; chart; diagram. 3. The series of events consisting of an outline of the action of a narrative or drama. 4. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme" (30). Elliott and Purdy draw useful connections between all the possible definitions of plot and the works of Greenaway, successfully highlighting the importance of place, land, plans, diagrams, narrative events, and secret schemes in all of his films and other projects. Most importantly for this essay, however, is the awareness that the Brooks' quote displays of the point of interaction between place, as in plot of ground, narrative as

a series of events over time, and the function of individuals within that framework.

This observation is most clearly born out in *The Belly of an Architect*, of which Greenaway notes, “in tune with all the mid-1980’s discussion of architecture, I had wanted to make a film that commented on the responsibility of architects, and to make comparisons between the construction of a building and the construction of a film”

(Woods 233). Elsewhere, he writes,

Although film cannot adequately demonstrate the dramatic excitements of the three-dimensional space of architecture, I certainly can comprehend these effects whilst being in a history-conscious architectural space during the making of a film. Whilst cinema has disadvantages over theatre in its inevitable denial of the real and physical presence of actors, acting, people and crowds, I personally can enjoy and be fascinated by those phenomena, for I can experience the visual and aural sensations of being with them in order to make a sound-and-picture image of them on film for an audience to see. (*The Stairs: Geneva* 7)

On the surface, Greenaway seems to be celebrating his enviable opportunity as director in experiencing the real spaces of the film as they are recorded on film. However, a record *is* made, and while Greenaway stresses the artificiality of film as a medium, he nevertheless takes great pains to create a realistic presentation of the space of the set, through the use of deep focus, but more specifically through the contrast of rigid and dynamic composition. Greenaway takes joy from the interaction between human bodies and three-dimensional spaces, be they building or sculptures. In an early sequence from *The Belly of an Architect*, a banquet is held before the Pantheon in Kracklite’s honor, and

in his speech to the assembled crowd he calls for them to applaud its architecture. On the film set, not only did the actors applaud, but so did the crew and the assembled audience.

The applause was not wasted. Maybe we were applauding the building's distant author or its long dead patron. Maybe the applause was for the building's history, its vicissitudes or its magnificent decay.

Maybe we were exhilarated to be clapping such a particular mixture of stone and shadow. Maybe the applause was to express a sheer exuberant delight in the canons of exhilarating architecture, in an exciting use of space and indeed in the performance of history that has both made and then swept around that building. We were undoubtedly clapping a performance, a performance, perhaps of history and time and sense of place, though that performance was not conventionally "alive" or rehearsed or artificially provided for us as an officially attentive audience.

But then why should it be? (*The Stairs: Geneva*, 91)

Greenaway sees the building as a performance within history, both as the realization of an architect's idea, but also as a space caught at a particular moment and as a testament to the course of human events and actions that have moved in and around that space. That this should elicit applause makes sense within the context of Greenaway; just as his films are structures erected for the interaction of human vectors and velocities, so are buildings a three-dimensional realization of the same project.

## **The Digital Age**

For most Americans familiar with his work, Greenaway is specifically associated with a unique visual style most clearly displayed in *Prospero's Books*. With this film, Greenaway takes motion-picture art to a new level, having discovered the potential for digital manipulation of film stock in the post-production process. As with his previous works, the film is an amalgam of art-forms: part painting, part architecture, part sculpture. Consequently, Greenaway's highly distinctive and highly composed visual style can be seen as further evidence of his quest to highlight the artifice of film, and yet, at the same time, he constructs a film that is entirely deep in its understanding of embodied space. The notion that film is or should convey a belief in the mimetic duplication of reality is exactly the definition of film that Greenaway at once typifies and parodies:

It has been said that the technology of the new Guttenberg revolution that is surfacing is going to completely change our notions of the manufactured image, and I think for the first time we will see something which we can say is truly autonomous cinema, cinema cinema, and which doesn't have all the mimetic associations that are a characteristic of what's come before. We will truly have the ability to make infinitely manipulated images – the freedoms of a painter. (Woods 263)

Clear examples of what Greenaway is calling for are found in any of his film projects to come after his work *A TV Dante, Cantos 1-8* (1989), the project in which he discovered the Quantel Paintbox, a digital editing tool that allows him to overlap and manipulate images. Yet, despite the highly artificial layering effect, the images follow the mandates of deep embodiment, as we see in Figure 2.20. In this still from *Prospero's Books*, the

sprite Ariel makes his official entrance as stated in the text of *The Tempest*, although he has been present on-screen, un-introduced, since the opening credits. An image of Ariel is superimposed upon the background of the shipwrecked sailors as they are brought onto the island, rather than simply having Ariel enter the same shot as the sailors. The effect highlights Ariel's entrance, and yet we recognize that Ariel is present as part of the overall space. The layers of the image are separate and yet act upon each other. The post-production manipulation of image becomes much closer to what Greenaway calls for in the evolution of film technique. He acknowledges his debt to painting and the other arts, and yet calls for a move away from them within filmmaking. His work is at once masterfully "painterly," and yet also masterfully "cinematic," in the most contemporary definition of the term.

Greenaway's goal of accentuating the artificiality of the film image reaches heights of complexity with his discovery of the Quantel Paintbox. Up until this point, Greenaway focused upon boundaries of shape and structure and the potential of resisting and moving within and across them; with digital technology, Greenaway becomes capable of portraying spaces within spaces, overlapping images, and directing interaction across them. As mentioned above, the concept of a digitally inserted frame within a frame first appears most significantly in Greenaway's made for television adaptation of *The Divine Comedy*. Titled *A TV Dante* (1988), the director and his collaborator, the painter Tom Philips, designed the work as though it were a piece of literature, one that could be picked up and set down as necessary. The resulting work predicts Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* two years later, both for its use of Sir John Gielgud, here playing Vergil, and for its use of digital inserts of additional material, in this case the insertion of

cinematic “footnotes,” commentary by scholars, and other material. However, it is with *Prospero’s Books* that Greenaway fully realizes the potential of this technology to play in the margins between two-dimensions and three-dimensions, between place and space, between bodies and buildings. In analyzing its structures carefully, one can begin to see where Greenaway’s cinematic rumination of spatial and narrative paradox would find its master form.

More than a simple adaptation, *Prospero’s Books* is literally built out of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The film opens with a simple foreword: “Prospero, once the Duke of Milan, now reigns over a faraway island, living there with only his daughter, Miranda. Twelve years earlier Prospero’s brother, in league with the King of Naples, had exiled Prospero and his daughter from his home.” Already in the introduction, as in a child’s fairytale, Greenaway has begun to create the foundation of place by establishing the setting of where the narrative will unfold, which de Certeau asserts is the first order of narrative, noting “the story’s first function is to authorize, or more exactly, to found” (123). Foundation, as de Certeau calls it, “‘provides space’ for the actions that will be undertaken; it ‘creates a field’ which serves as their ‘base’ and their ‘theater’” (124). The place or foundation of the film, Prospero’s Island, will soon be revealed to be a space as well, but the manner of construction is more complicated than might be anticipated from this straightforward introduction. Ironically, only Prospero and Miranda are said to “live” on the island. This will strike the spectator as strange once the movie begins, as the screen is flooded with human bodies, naked, semi-dressed, or clad in elaborate costumes. The screen explodes with detail, a mass of humanity housed within solid marble architecture, as is seen in Figure 2.21. This distinction will become more

significant throughout the film, as the spectator realizes that not only are the people or sprites the manifestation of Prospero's will, but in fact the island itself will be revealed to exist only in the form of Prospero's narration of it.

The foreword continues: "One evening, Prospero imagines creating a storm powerful enough to bring his old enemies to his island. He begins to write a play about this tempest, speaking aloud the lines of each of his characters. It is the story of Prospero's past and his revenge..." The play then opens with a procession. In a stunning tracking shot that lasts several minutes, Prospero (John Gielgud), walks the length of his castle, surrounded in all directions by bodies of all sorts, shapes, sizes, and ages. The island teems with detail, and the film plays upon this crowded place through the use of cinematic inserts. Greenaway inserts close-ups that overlap the action of the film, superimposes images of texts or faces, and provides meta-diegetic cut-aways that comment upon the content of the film, often including three or more layers of "windowed" shots. Prospero's Island explodes into three-dimensional space as Prospero progresses down the length of his castle, in the sense that the space of the film is revealed as capable of supporting more than the diegesis of the narrative. At the end of his procession, Prospero sits at his desk and begins to write the opening lines of *The Tempest*: "Boatswain?" The line is spoken simultaneously in Gielgud's voice and in the voice of the actor who will play the ship's Master; both voices speak at the same time that Prospero is shown writing it. The constructed space of the film is contained by the act of Prospero writing the play *The Tempest*, and the film itself is shown to be the incarnation of Prospero's imagination, as indeed the island itself is the construct of his

knowledge as contained by his books. Prospero's creation of the play and the island is at once imaginary and real, that is, at once a narrative and physical space.

As Prospero sits writing the play, we see Prospero once again walking the length of his ornate castle, only this time he passes himself as he sits writing at his desk. It is important to note that Greenaway does not present the interaction, or intersection, of real and imagined objects as in any way abstracted. They exist within the same place and often react to each other across lines of narrative. Prospero as a figure writing recurs throughout the film, as do images of pens, paper, and inkwells; a shot of a pen dipping into ink becomes a motif within the film, serving as a constant reminder that the film, as the viewer watches it unfolding, is a written construct. Greenaway takes this notion of written construct, or narrative, several steps further in the course of the film. Long passages of prose are superimposed over the *mise-en-scène* at key points in the film, and all voices in the film are narrated by Prospero, in Gielgud's voice. At points, the characters do not even move their lips; the lines are inserted in editing, such that Gielgud's voice blends with the voice of the actor as the line is spoken, and the line is then inserted into the film. Clearly, the play is meant to be viewed as being narrated by Prospero, and yet the events of the play eventually do impact the meta-diegetic figure of Prospero-who-writes, as it becomes clear that through imagining a tempest that brings his enemies to his island, Prospero *actually does* bring his enemies to his island, a sort of sympathetic magic. By the end of the film, Prospero will descend from his writing desk and depart from his island, an option made possible only if one sees the events of the play as written by Prospero as being simultaneously real and imagined.

The title of the film is taken from the books that Prospero has been allowed to keep in his exile. In the diegesis, however, the books become the material basis of the island. Throughout the film, certain books are shown and explained in inserted or superimposed images, such that the explanation comments upon the course of the play. For example, at the moment that Miranda meets Ferdinand, the Prince of Naples, a image and narrative description of *The Book of Love* is imposed over the image of the couple as they fall in love. The contents of the books are also not confined to prose or image. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one particularly important book contains three-dimensional models of the rooms of the castle, and specific models are erected just prior to characters entering that physical place, implying that the content of the book in some way constructs the physical place within which the characters will intersect. The idea contained behind the continuous reference to books and their contents is simple: the narratives of the books construct the island itself.

This idea is illustrated most clearly at the end of the film. Up until this point, Prospero has “narrated” all of the lines of the characters. Miranda and Ferdinand are in love, and their marriage is blessed by the King and by Prospero. Prospero will be returned to his throne, and all is to be restored to its rightful position. However, once Prospero has manipulated the lives of his enemies, namely his brother and the King of Naples, to a point that his own exile can come to an end, the characters begin to speak for themselves, in their own voices, no longer narrated through Gielgud’s voice. Slowly, the line between Prospero’s imagination of the play and the physical presence of the “characters” upon the island is dissolved, so that Prospero steps down from his writing desk, dons his court clothing, and joins his characters in the wedding of Miranda and

Ferdinand. Prospero then makes preparations for his departure from the Island, and in doing so, decides to destroy his books. The many books that have been detailed throughout the film are now slammed shut in rapid succession, and are shown burning, dissolving, or blurred with water. Prospero stands upon a pier, and assisted by his fairy servant Ariel, throws his books one by one into the sea. As he does so, the set about him begins to slowly disappear. The background gives way to an infinite starry night, and the foreground decreases. The narrative voice that has detailed all the books to this point speaks for the last time, describing the final book, titled *A Book of Thirty-five Plays*: The narrator speaks, “This is a thick printed volume of plays dated 1623. There are thirty-five plays in the book, and room for one more. Nineteen pages have been left for its inclusion, right at the front of the book, just after the preface. As this is the thirty-sixth play, *The Tempest*.” We hear the Gielgud’s voice again, repeating the first lines of the play, “Boatswain?”, bringing the viewer full circle to the beginning of the film. Prospero tosses the book into the sea, but Caliban, Prospero’s old nemesis, swims up and retrieves it as it sinks. The voice continues, “Whilst all the other volumes have been drowned and destroyed, we still do have these last two books, safely fished from the sea.” The camera then pans to Prospero, who stands naked before the starry background, as he delivers the final soliloquy of *The Tempest*, a call to the audience to release him from his bondage through their applause. (See Fig. 2.22, 2.23)

This final scene is vital to Greenaway’s cinematic vision in a number of ways. Much in the same way that the Draughtsman cannot control the people around him, or prevent them from disturbing his compositions, Prospero’s control over his creation decreases as he gets closer to the space in which it is enacted, such that he has no control

over the course of action once he stands side by side with the characters of the play he himself has written. He has literally entered his construction, turning it into a final, definitive space. It becomes clear once Prospero's books are destroyed that the island itself is built out of the books, much in the same way the film is constructed out of the play. As the books are destroyed, the island disappears, until all that is left is Prospero addressing the audience directly. And what is the content of that soliloquy? A plea to the audience to be freed from his bands, as though to imply that the place constructed in the play, and thereby the film, can only be truly intersected and turned into space through the action of the audience. In other words, the narrative and cinematic spaces do not truly exist until the audience travels through them, via their observation of them. In relation to de Certeau and Merleau-Ponty, one might see this journey as a literal one, in which the embodied eye becomes an active participant in the spaces set before it. Prospero's Island is a place mentally constructed out of Prospero's books, which becomes an inhabitable space through the appearance of the characters upon it and their interaction within it. Prospero then descends into his creation, creating a truer space out of his narrative place.

However, the true transition from place to space has occurred cinematically, through Greenaway's adaptation of Shakespeare's play. As was suggested before, film can be seen as the medium within which place becomes space, in which "one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables." Cinematic space is, by its nature, "composed of intersections of mobile elements" (117). Much as the Island is a narrated space that becomes an intersected space, the play *The Tempest* becomes a place for Greenaway, out of which he narrates a space by introducing the variables of direction, velocity, and time. *Prospero's Books* is built up out of Shakespeare's play; it contains

within its “architecture” or narrated cinematic structure the actual elements of Shakespeare’s narrative, in the form of superimposed text, quotations, and direct reference to the play itself. But only film can realize this very literal creation of narrative space. Similarly, one might say of Greenaway’s film that it is itself only a place until it is intersected by the viewer. As in any narrative, the structure of the film is static until the traffic of the viewer travels through it on the way from Point A, the beginning, to Point B, the end. The spatial potential of the film is realized at the moment the viewer travels through it.

With *Prospero’s Books*, Greenaway realizes the culmination of interaction between structure and story, place and space, and the interaction between bodies and buildings. The films that follow expand upon the idea and take tangents of the concepts and images presented within this and earlier films to new heights. *The Baby of Mâcon* (1993), unfortunately seen in North America only at festivals and special screenings due to distributors hesitant about the frank nudity and violence, continues to explore the human body’s interaction with architecture, and employs some of the complicated visual style of *Prospero’s Books*. Likewise, *The Pillow Book* (1996) returns to ideas first presented twenty years earlier in “Dear Phone,” through the central importance of written text, here inserted digitally in a variety of overlays much like that employed in *Prospero’s Books*. Moreover, *The Pillow Book* presents a new vision of the human body, in which a Japanese calligrapher uses bodies as her canvases, the body physically transformed into location of narrative. The action of her arm and brush are recorded, however temporarily, upon the architecture of the human structure. As in Greenaway’s earliest films, the structure of the film is also designed around the presence and

significance of numbers: in this case, the preset number of scrolls that have been promised to the calligrapher's publisher, each delivered on the skin of another human canvas and brought to him by human vectors of motion, that is, by the human bringing the "place" of the text with him as he arrives before the publisher. The plot of the film is then pre-ordained by the numbers chosen before the camera ever rolls. The importance of numbers returns in Greenaway's most recent release, *8 1/2 Women* (1999)<sup>24</sup>, in which a wealthy widower and his son assemble a harem of exactly that, eight and a half women. That the half-woman is conceptualized as an amputee is at once shocking for its frank categorization and entirely in keeping with the director's ruthless loyalty to the pre-ordained structure, even at the expense of political correctness.

As a filmmaker, Greenaway accentuates and ironizes the conflict between deep space and deep focus of his compositions, rich in detail, and the artificially imposed edges and frames of the digitally manipulated layers placed upon them. Robin Woods is closest to the truth when he argues that the director "retains as much simultaneous, spatial meaning as possible, and he reinvents it for a temporal medium" (Woods 123). In introducing his film *The Belly of an Architect* at the Cambridge Film Festival,

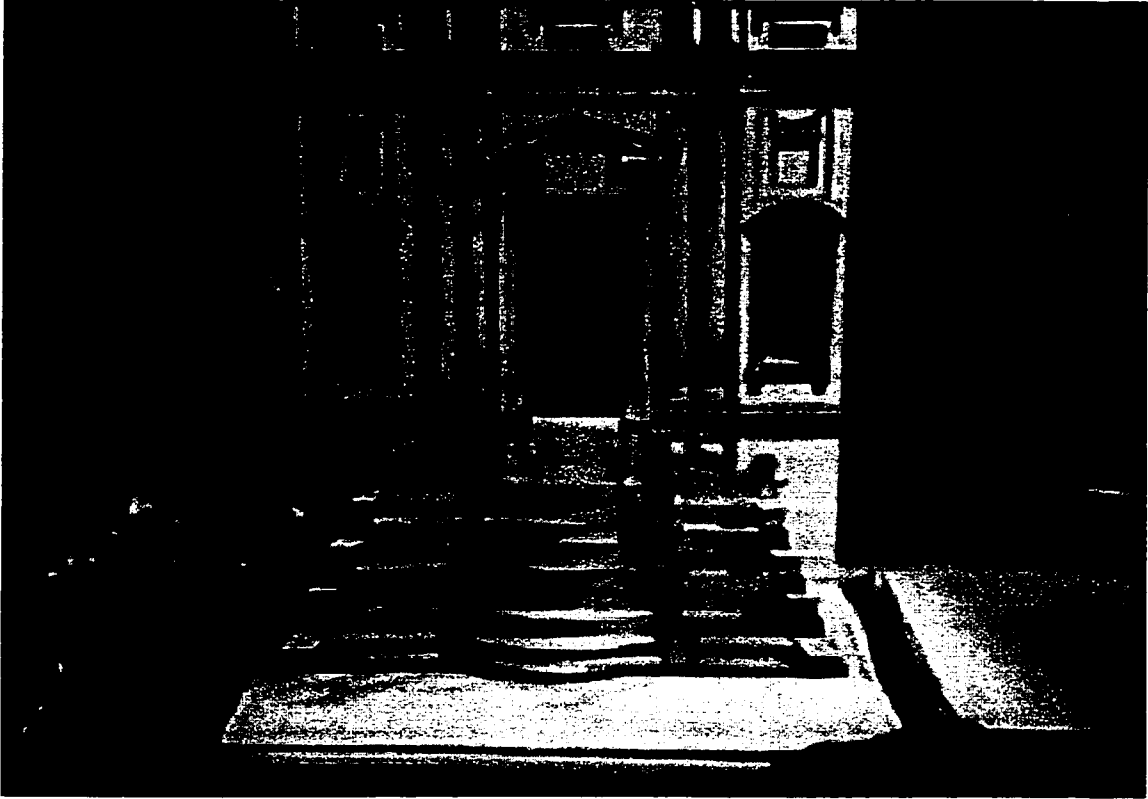
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<sup>24</sup> In many ways, *8 1/2 Women* is a return to earlier techniques for the director. Although it does contain some of the digital artistry of *Prospero*, it is to a much lesser degree. For the most part the film instead focuses upon the story of a father and a son grieving the death of their respective wife and mother in a most unusual way: inspired by Fellini's film, they assemble a harem of women, all presenting some unique aspect of their unresolved desires, in an attempt, it seems, to ward off mortality. As this is a Greenaway film, sex inevitably leads to death and emotional catastrophe. The women destroy the men, not out of maliciousness, but as an extension of who they are in relation to this unnatural arrangement. Rather than being fulfilled by their romantic and sexual conquests, the men are harried by the results of their decisions. The father eventually dies, happily, as he realizes his love for one woman, played by Polly Walker, at the same moment of his death. The son, on the other hand, no longer privy to her sexual favors, is abandoned, as indeed he is abandoned by all the women of his harem. Stylistically, particularly toward the beginning of the film, there is some superimposition of text and image, but this lessens by the end of the film. Interestingly, the film also abandons the dark palettes of *The Cook*, *Prospero*, and *The Pillow Book*, settling on a color scheme more closely related to the sun-filled outdoor scenes of *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

“Greenaway remarked that his viewing of his films was always, at least initially, inflected by his strong memories of the actual shooting of the film, so that each individual shot also reminded him of everything that was just out of shot. It is now clear that this was to prove more important than it then seemed. ‘The back or wrong side of a set can be as interesting as the so-called right side’” (Woods 160). That Greenaway should make such a comment should come as no surprise. As a director, he consistently demonstrates his fascination with the definitions of space, both literally and figuratively. His movies become a means to transgress those definitions, and yet in transgressing those boundaries, he truly realizes a deeper sense of what space, both in image and in narrative, can become. In the next chapter, I explore the possibilities of narrative to create space in the absence of boundaries. Where Greenaway specifically establishes structure in order to work against it, movies such *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *Fight Club* (1999), and *The Matrix* (1999) explore the possibilities of space without boundaries, a space in which the human body becomes the central reference or zero-point, against which all other spatial limitations are measured.

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Thematically, as well, these two films, where sex, death, and art swirl around each other on a wealthy Englishman’s estate, seem most closely related within Greenaway’s oeuvre.



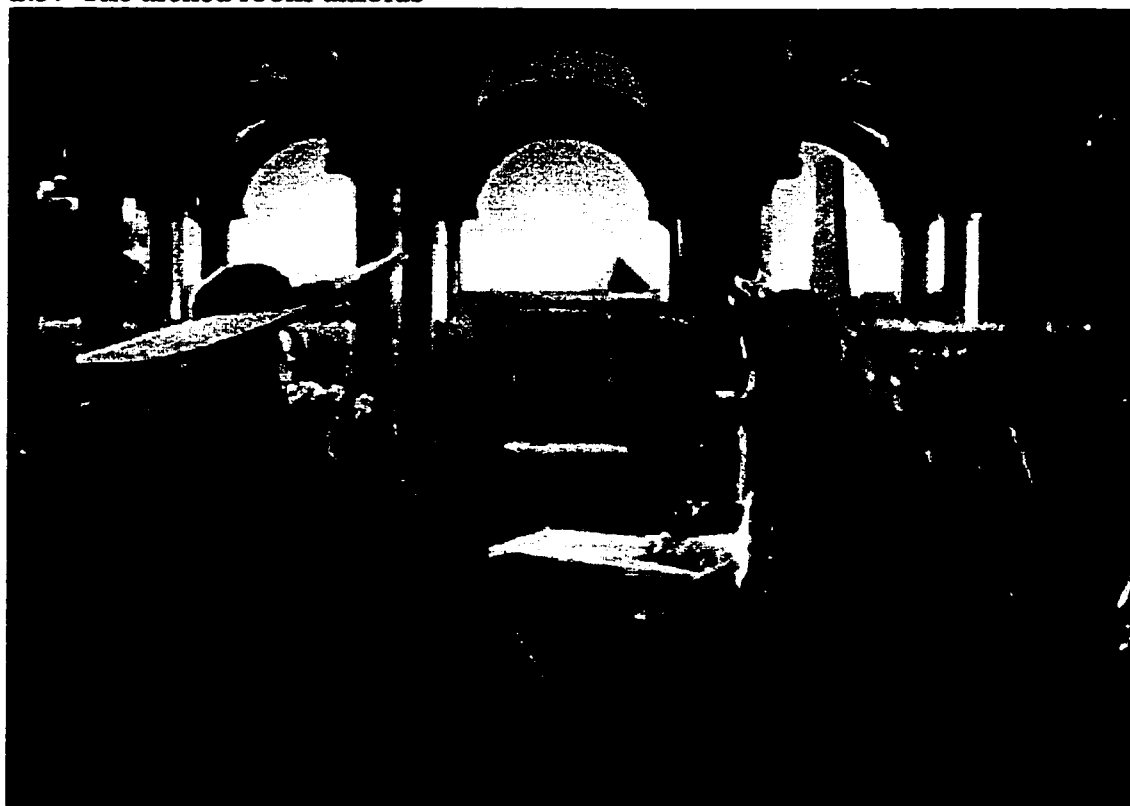
2.1: The façade unfolds



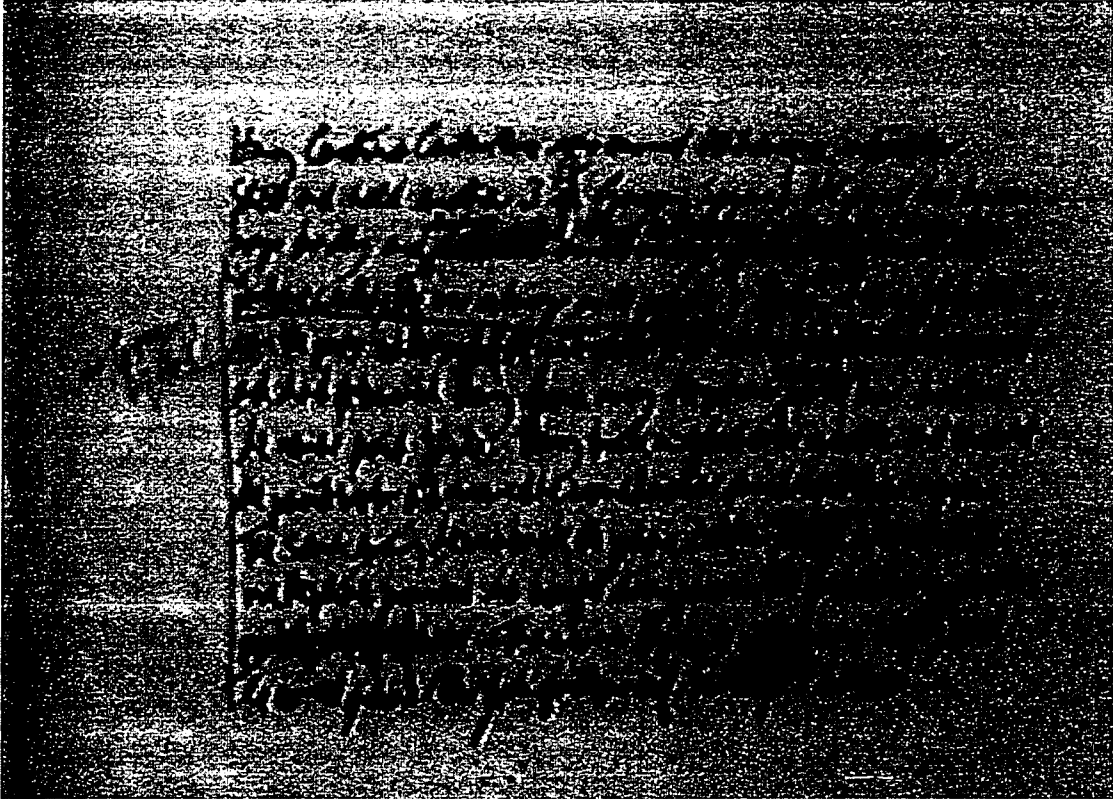
2.2: Prospero and Miranda in front of building



2.3: The arched room unfolds



2.4: Prospero and Miranda in the arched room



2.5: Text



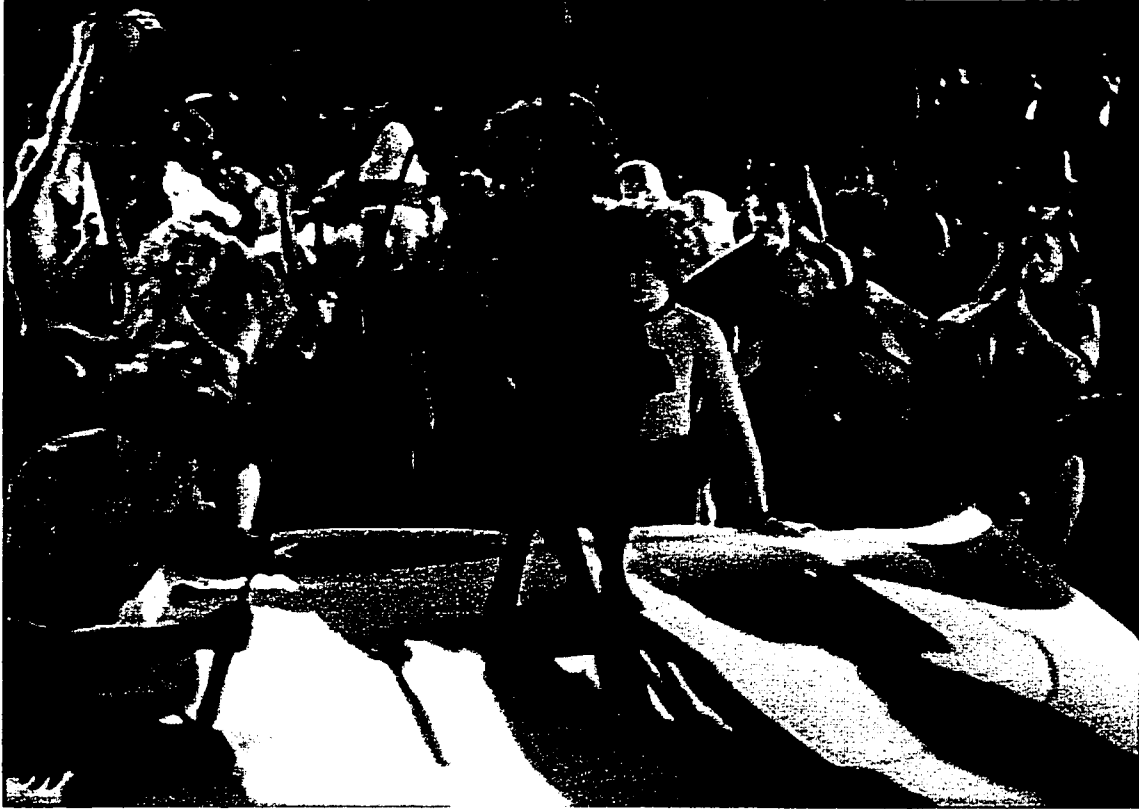
2.6: Telephone



2.7: Detail from *Drowning by Numbers*



2.8: Detail from *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*



2.9: Detail from *Prospero's Books*



2.10: The drawing, without ladder



2.11: The ladder



2.12: The drawing, with ladder



2.13: The veil



2.14: The drawing, with veil



2.15: The Hals tableau from *The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*



2.16: The tableau is broken



2.17: The Hals painting



2.18: The Book Depository



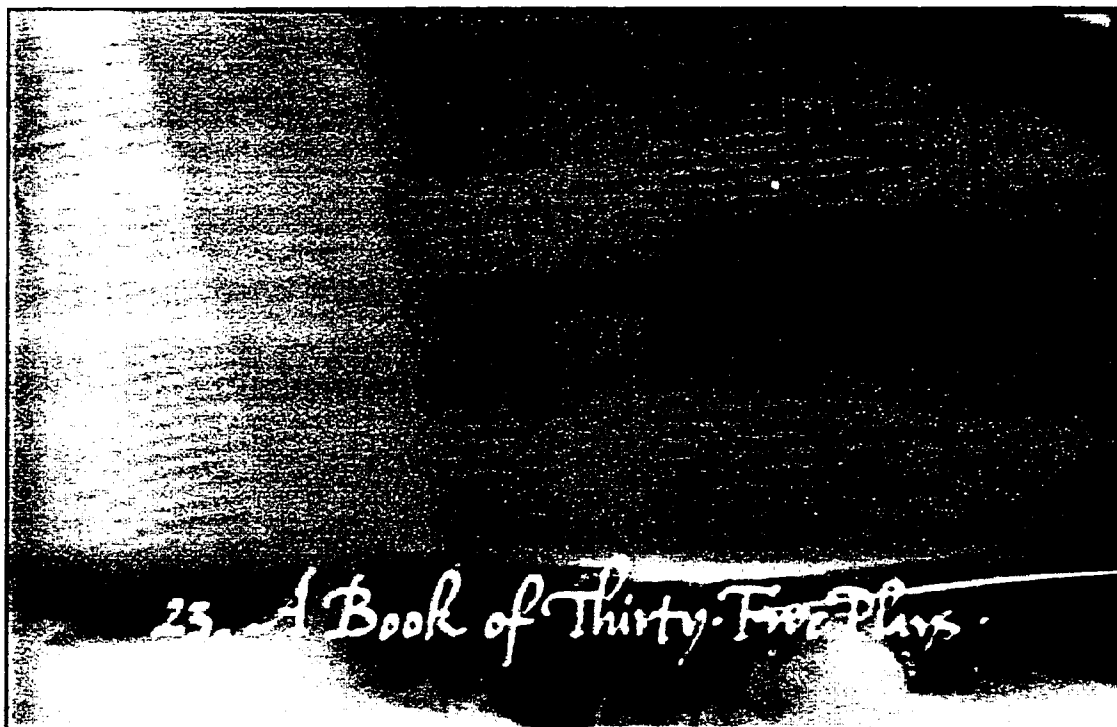
2.19: The Depository in chaos



2.20: Ariel makes his entrance



2.21: Bodies, books, and buildings



2.22: The book of thirty-five plays



2.23: Prospero stands alone

### III. Embodied Technology: Deep Image and the Digital Revolution

The blind man's tool has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight. In the exploration of things, the length of the stick does not enter expressly as a middle term: The blind man is rather aware of it through the position of objects than the position of objects through it. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 143)

When we make a long-distance telephone call, the instrument and its associated and very complex equipment experientially "recedes" and we simply focus upon and experience the conversation with the other. In short, when the technology is good – at least in this kind of use situation -- it becomes semi-transparent with respect to communication. It can be functionally "forgotten." Conversely, only when it functions poorly or doesn't work at all does it obtrude itself into our experiential aims. A measure of the quality of this type of technology is in fact the degree of "transparency" which it may allow the user. (Don Ihde, *Existential Technics*, 50)

Occasionally, a movie transcends notions of critical or commercial success; occasionally, a movie becomes simply an unprecedented cultural phenomenon. Such is the case with Eduardo Sanchez' and Daniel Myrick's 1999 horror film *The Blair Witch Project*. Shot on an in-the-can budget of about \$25-30,000 (Kaufman 23), by the first weekend of its wide release in the United States it had made over \$29 million on 1,101 screens across the nation and continued to pull in above \$130 million per week for the next four months before going overseas and earning similar receipts. This does not, of course, take into account merchandising, video release, and copyright proceeds. It inspired imitators, parodies, spoofs: *The Hair Witch Project* (1999), *The Tony Blair Witch Project* (2000), *The Bel Air Witch Project* (1999), *The Bogus Witch Project* (2000), *The Oz Witch Project* (2000), and the list continues to grow. It launched the obligatory uninspired sequel, *The Blair Witch Project 2: Book of Shadows* (2000). Without question, part of the mystique of the film resulted from clever advance marketing; long

before the movie was released, the filmmakers hyped the film with false press releases and a bogus website that led the public to believe that the footage of three hapless college kids wandering in the woods to meet their eventual fate was entirely authentic, that the movie was a slice of reality edited into a feature film. The filmmakers managed to maintain this hoax into the first weeks of distribution, intentionally released only in limited theaters at first, so that word-of-mouth guaranteed a hotly anticipated nation-wide release. When the filmmakers finally admitted the truth and the supposedly dead actors began granting interviews with David Letterman and Jay Leno, the effect only bolstered the film's reputation. As with *El Mariachi* (1992) before it, audiences and industry insiders alike marveled at the film's audacious ability to turn in box-office success while working on a production budget smaller than what the average studio film might spend on catering.

To a large degree, the secret of the movie's aesthetic success was the directors' understanding that limitations in technology and funding could be used to tell a particular kind of story more effectively than would be possible using sleeker, more expensive means. "We decided to shoot on video because that was the most realistic thing to shoot on," states director Eduardo Sanchez: "It was basically a movie about these people being lost and documenting it. So obviously they'd have a video camera out there with them" (Kaufman 24). Cost, then, became negligible. In order to remain loyal to the story's period, taking place in 1994, the filmmakers chose a camera from that period. "So we picked up the oldest Hi-8 camera they had at Circuit City, an RCA consumer-grade camera that cost \$500" (24). In the story, the characters are shooting the project for a college film production course. In pre-production, a producer suggested they shoot these

segments on a 35mm Arriflex, for ease of transfer: “We called it ‘the anvil’... It was so heavy” (24). Instead, the filmmakers opted for black-and-white 16mm, in this case a CP-16. The logic of the film mandates a camera that not only would the characters be able to easily carry and manipulate, but that the average community college film production class would actually have access to. The result of these technological considerations is the film’s aura of authenticity: the technology reflects the no-budget nature of the film-within-the-film. “We shot a movie on Hi-8, the premise dictated that, but the side effect is that it’s going to reduce some of the barriers that old Hollywood has been accustomed to – thinking that it’s got to be shot on 35mm. It doesn’t necessarily have to be that way” (26). Audiences were thrilled by a film unlike any they had seen in the theater before, and were drawn in by the illusion that these were real people suffering a real fate, an effect created by the recognizable nature of the technology: video and cheap 16mm. Particularly in the case of video, the image is a result of a technology that most audience members will have had direct experience with; it is a type of camera that they themselves have used. It appeals to the spectator on the level of direct experience. Beyond questions of technology, the mere use of entirely hand-held cameras drew the audience in on a purely visceral level. The images were shaky, the obvious artifacts of inexperienced and terrified young students.

When I went to see *The Blair Witch Project* in the theater for the first time, the manager of the theater complex came in personally to address the audience. She wanted to warn us that, in past showings of the movie, audience members had experienced nausea and disorientation, ostensibly due not just to the nature of the story, but also to the hand-held style, with its frenetic, jerky images, and swish pans. The camera travels

rapidly across spaces within the cinematic frame, often faster than the camera lens or one's can register the details. The fact that the movie was eliciting such a strong bodily effect is interesting in itself, but is compounded by the fact that the manager needed to remind us that this was, after all, only a movie. If we started to feel sick, we could always avert our eyes or leave the theater. If our experience of the cinematic image is detached and objective and entirely a one-way street in which the film acts upon a passive spectator, as has been suggested by Lacanians, Neo-Formalists, and postmodernists alike to varying degrees, then how could it be possible that, first, audiences were having a bodily reaction triggered by the image itself, and second, that we could choose to disconnect from our perception of the film if and when necessary? According to the first model, we should be able to watch a film full of jarring cuts, disorienting camera work, and indecipherable transitions, as well as images of violence and unlimited gore, and feel no response, as the image is clearly always something detached from ourselves or our bodies. According to the second model, upon feeling the nausea dictated by the film's images, we would be held there, pinned beneath its tyrannical gaze. Clearly in this case neither were true: the manager went on to hand out airsick bags, and people left the theater in small, huddled numbers throughout its showing. What I would instead suggest is a model for understanding the film experience and the construction of cinematic space within the film image in particular as based upon something other than a rigid split between spectator and image. The cinematic experience, as clearly seen through our perception of the depth of image, is a two-way street, in which the spectator reaches out to the film just as the film reaches out to the spectator.

In a film like *The Blair Witch Project*, space is constructed following a model in which the spectator is placed spatially within the film, and not outside of it, as is the case with more traditional cinematography. In *Blair Witch*, the events occur around the body as the central means of perception, occurring in deep, full space, and not simply in front of the camera along a 180°-degree access. This is not the same thing as a purely subjective point-of-view, though it does stand in contrast to more traditional cinematic models that operate upon a notion of an objective or God's-eye perspective. On the contrary, phenomenological based readings specifically critique the assumption that POV and hand-held camera work offer a true assimilation of the subject into the film or an accurate approximation of the spectator's experience of perception, an argument made most clearly in Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye*. I address these critiques by noting the difference between the film placing the spectator in the moment and the film placing the spectator as though he were in the moment. Moreover, I argue for an understanding of the film technology as experientially transparent, making reference to Don Ihde's theories of technological embodiment, noting that though the film is always present, it is also allowed to recede in the spectator's perception. What I am going to suggest is that the spectator, in watching a film, is embraced in a complete subject-object relationship that is taken to its extreme in a film like *The Blair Witch Project*. However, *Blair Witch* is not a solitary example of this spatial positioning, and the operational model is not unique to its particular use of video and 16mm film. Most tellingly, the spatial logic that this film deploys on an almost non-existent budget using extremely low-end technology is also at play in a number of high-budget, special-effects laden 35mm films emerging from the Hollywood studio system in the past few years. As an example of the

same effect arrived at via greatly different methodology and apparatus, I will discuss two other 1999 films, both studio-driven blockbusters: David Fincher's *Fight Club* and the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*.

### ***Blair Witch* and the Anxiety of Deep Space**

The story of *Blair Witch* is simple: three college kids, Heather, Josh, and Mike, go into the woods near Burkittsville, Maryland to film a documentary on the local legend of the "Blair Witch," a supernatural figure who supposedly haunts the area and preys on children as revenge for her exile and death during the Colonial era. The three amateur filmmakers are never seen or heard from again, but a year later their cameras and footage are found in the basement of an abandoned shack in the woods. The footage is taken and edited into a film, and the audience witnesses first-hand as the three become lost and descend into desperation, panic, and then terror. As Sanchez notes, the decision was made for the majority of footage to be shot on a hand-held video camera, lending an air of authenticity not available to traditional film media. Their argument is simple: as video is cheap, that would be what the students would use to document moments of "reality," while reserving the more expensive 16mm stock for particularly important moments in the film. Consequently, the shift between video and film footage is aesthetically significant. Not only do the students choose their moments carefully for shooting on film, they are more careful about their cinematography. The film footage is steadier, slower, even at times relying upon a tripod, whereas the video footage is sporadic, dizzying, like catching a ride inside the visual perspective of the character holding the camera. And this is the effect the filmmakers wanted. As they note on the

Director's Track of the DVD version of *Blair Witch*, some of the best video footage came in the moments when the actors seemed to forget the camera's presence and behaved as though this moment was not being recorded at all. Scenes such as the numerous arguments over which way to go next, or the panic and anger when Mike admits he destroyed the map, play out as though the camera had merely been left on, even though the spectator does know on some level that an effort is being made to record this moment clearly.

A good example of the visual contrast between the video camera, as the recorder of real and unpredicted events, and the 16mm camera, as the recorder of intentionally significant moments, can be seen later in the film. The students encounter a collection of artifacts in the woods, set specifically in their path and reminiscent of other "dolls" left for them, clear evidence that they are prey to an intelligent and malevolent force. Heather, the leader of the project, asks that this be recorded on film, despite ample footage of it on video. The suggestion is that the video footage is somehow background material, unmanipulated, not "art," and therefore, ironically, a more authentic record of this moment as far as the audience is concerned. The video footage is not *selected* in the same way that the 16mm footage is, and the difference in the footage is most evident at this point in the film. The video camera records quick, blurring images and the voice of the cameraman. The 16mm image is careful, steady, stately, almost beautiful in its black-and-white shading, the manipulated product of an individual with a purpose in mind for the footage. As the movie switches back and forth between the 16mm and Hi-8 footage, the implication is that we can rely upon the video footage more than we can upon the 16mm camera to be an accurate record of the everyday events of these three characters.

What is more, the very nature of the handheld camera, both on 16mm and on video, is to reinforce the audience's awareness that this footage is being shot by a specific character, that we are being given the point-of-view of a particular person, a particular perceiving body, who is carrying this camera through a particular moment in space and time. The film asks that we trust this person with the camera and their perspective, and relies upon this trust, so carefully established in the film up to this point, in order to play upon our sympathies for greater and greater effect as the film moves toward its terrifying conclusion.

Of course, the intelligent and malevolent force that the characters are really up against is the movie's directing team, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, who have created this and other situations, with specific and individual instructions for each character's behavior, by working just a few hours ahead of the three actors.<sup>25</sup> Their most significant manipulation of this cinematic construct remains, however, their ability to force us to sympathize, even to the point of nausea, with the physical perspective of the individual characters. If we were not affected by the image before us, if we were not bodily involved in our perception of it as a deep and meaningful construct, we would not need to avert our eyes when things get a little too rough. Our eyes and ears are telling us

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<sup>25</sup> The Director's Track on the DVD version provides insight into the unique methods of this film. Direction was conducted largely through drop-off packages of specific cues and motivations for each actor, or by staying just a few hours or even minutes ahead of the actors and planting props in their way. While the director's worked as hard as possible to not intrude directly upon the actors' experience or interfere with their reactions to the events and artifacts designed for them, occasional mistakes occurred, such as when the actors missed an important drop off and ended up wandering into somebody's backyard. Uncertain as to what to do, they spent the night in a hotel before being rounded up by the directors. At other times, the directors would have to intrude directly upon the actors, and even created code words to let them know that what was about to occur was not part of the film and that the actors did not have to react to it accordingly. The moves between "authenticity" and "inauthenticity" highlight the construction of this film, in which many of the most highly cinematic moments are entirely improvisational or in fact real reactions by the actors, not as characters, to unpredictable moments during the production. The video

that we are moving with the camera, while the rest of our body is telling us we are not. The cognitive dissonance aroused by this conflict is at least partially responsible for the theater manager handing out airsick bags for this film, which she did not have to do for every other film playing the sixteen screen multiplex that day.

But why would we respond bodily in this way? Aren't we separate, as subjects, from the film as an object that unfolds before us? Clearly, I would argue no, we are not. *Blair Witch* breaks down traditional relations between audience and image that posit the audience as here and the film as always over there, by forcing us to occupy a perspective within the film, as events unfold around us. It is Merleau-Ponty's contention that we understand all image and art through a process in which our eye becomes representative of the entire body through a sort of synecdoche, such that we experience the image as a bodily sensation. Our mind, as an organ of our embodied perception as a whole, places our body into the space of the image through the action of the eye travelling through it.

‘The painter ‘takes his body with him,’ says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a *mind* could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement. (283)

The implication of the cinematography, in which the camera is held at eye level, jerking back and forth, panning and tilting in a manner similar to the eyes of a person in that position, in effect places us as a spectator directly in the space recorded. Compare the

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camera often functioned to capture the true authenticity of a moment, of three real people, not fictional

technique to a more stable cinematic space of a typical film, in which though viewing from the perspective of the camera, the camera itself does not make its presence known. Traditional camerawork most often strives to become invisible, non-intrusive. In *Blair Witch*, quite to the contrary, the camera-work announces itself at every turn as the specific, visible presence of a body that conveys this specific camera. As Merleau-Ponty explains in "Eye and Mind," the cinematography affirms the "body which is an intertwining of vision and movement." The camera's position is explained through the narrative as the camera being held by a particular character, recording the events as they occur around him or her. The spectator is forced into the character's visual space, and thus inhabits a projection of the character's body, placed within the space of the movie as it happens *around* him, not *in front* of him. Vivian Sobchack echoes Merleau-Ponty in her application of phenomenology to cinema, arguing "for both ourselves and the cinema, intentionality (the correlational structure of consciousness) inflected in existence is also always a mobile structure, inscribing itself in the world as the agency and the movement of the lived body" (63). Most importantly, intentionality is always mobile, reliant upon the notion of a lived body in motion through the act. Therefore, when a film like *Blair Witch* manages to capture the sense not only of first-person perspective, but also of the intentionality of both our perception and the film's expression, we are even more centrally placed within the space of the film. When things happen in this movie, they happen *for* and *to* a specific person, the person holding the camera and recording them. By occupying that position as the film reaches out to us, we become the central point of

the film, the zero-point of perception that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty suggest is the basis of the human experience of self.

The zero-point of perception relies upon phenomenology's fundamental challenge to the Cartesian split between subject and object. Husserl defines consciousness through intentionality: every act by the subject is an act toward *some-thing*, an object. This is not the same as a purely subjective definition of reality, as Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty to a greater degree, will argue that we cannot have consciousness without an object of which the subject is conscious. Rather than a rigid split between subject and object, the two are intermingled in consciousness to the level that the boundaries can be said to be no longer present. At its core, consciousness can be said to be the active perception of consciousness as an object and as the subject. Our perception of film as an object is therefore no different from our understanding of any other object; we reach out to it as it reaches out to us, such that the gap between subject and object is ultimately done away with. We cannot be conscious without being conscious of an object. On the other hand, the traditional film, and the traditional account of the viewer's relation to it, relies heavily upon a rigid split between the spectator as subject and the film as object.<sup>26</sup> The viewer is here, and the film is something separate, over there. The dynamics of the film as it engages the subject across that divide then becomes the basis of the hermeneutics of film theory: how does the film act upon the spectator; what reactions does it elicit; what assumptions does it make in the act of communication?

Phenomenology questions, and ultimately discards, this split as artificial, placing it subsequent to two primary factors: one, we experience the film through our perceptual

consciousness as a subject; and, two, our perception is an act of intention toward something, the object, the film. As Merleau-Ponty writes in *The Phenomenology of Perception*:

We have become accustomed, through the influence of the Cartesian tradition, to jettison the subject: the reflective attitude simultaneously purifies the common notions of body and soul by defining the body as the sum of its parts with no interior, and the soul as a being wholly present to itself without distance. These definitions make matter perfectly clear both within and outside ourselves: we have the transparency of an object with no secret recesses, the transparency of a subject which is nothing but what it thinks it is. The object is an object through and through, and the consciousness is a consciousness through and through... The experience of our own body, on the other hand, reveals to us an ambiguous mode of existing... I have no means of the knowing the human body other than that of living it, which means taking up on my own account the drama which is being played out on it, and losing myself in it. I am my body, at least wholly to the extent that I possess experience, and yet at the same time my body is as it were a "natural" subject, a provisional sketch of my total being. Thus experience of one's own body runs counter to the reflective procedure which detaches subject and object from each other... (198)

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<sup>26</sup> This model of subject-object relation in film is most clear in the early psychoanalytical models, as I have discussed in Chapter One.

Here, Merleau-Ponty elaborates an understanding of the body as both subject and object, inextricably interwoven. He opposes Descartes, for whom body is a mere object, a shell inhabited by the true subject, the soul. Consequently, the body becomes nothing more than one more object in the world surrounding the subject-soul. Merleau-Ponty rejects the Cartesian model, noting that it ultimately rests upon a notion of God, in which the divine is the only true subject, and that our souls are but an extension of the subjective position of God. Only through this reliance upon a Divine perspective does objectivity then become possible; for Descartes the world around us and our physical place in it is not centered upon ourselves, but upon God. Or, as Merleau-Ponty writes,

behind man as he in fact is, stands God as the rational author of our *de facto* situation. On the basis of this transcendent guarantee, Descartes can blandly accept our irrational condition [as subject *and* object]: it is not we who are required to bear the responsibility for reason and, once we have recognized it at the basis of things, it remains for us only to act and think in the world. But if our union with the body is substantial, how is it possible for us to experience in ourselves a pure soul from which to accede to an absolute Spirit? (199)

Merleau-Ponty is unwilling to accept the God's-eye perspective that would make objectivity truly possible within our experience of the world. We, as embodied perceptual consciousness, are subjects, and we experience both ourselves and the world around us as objects towards which we actively reach with our actions. We do not experience the world as an objective construct, bound by rules of mathematical perspective and quantitative analysis. We experience the world through our perception,

based upon our body as the measuring stick for all objects around us. We are always already a perceiving body, and anything we experience makes sense to us only through that perception. Perception is the one factor we cannot doubt, because perception is the keystone of consciousness. If we can not perceive consciousness, then we are not conscious.

Scientific objectification, which attempts to construct a notion of perception abstract from our own bodies, is nevertheless reliant upon our individual perception in order to function. We can create a representation of perspective constructed out of abstract mathematical application, such as an architect's blueprint or a painting in the grand style. Nevertheless, not only will we perceive the blueprint or the painting from our perceiving body as zero-point, but we will comprehend the space depicted by consciously placing ourselves mentally within that space as our body would occupy it. As Husserl defines the zero-point in *Ideas II*,

The Body is, in the first place, the *medium of all perception*, it is the *organ of perception* and is *necessarily* involved in all perception. In seeing, the eyes are directed upon the seen and run over its edges, surfaces, etc.

When it touches objects, the hand slides over them. Moving myself, I bring my ear closer in order to hear... *given with the localization of the kinesthetic series in the relevant moving member of the Body is the fact that in all perception and perceptual exhibition (experience) the Body is involved as freely moved sense organs, as freely moved totality of sense organs*, and hence there is also given the fact that, on this original

foundation, all that is thingly-real in the surrounding world of the Ego has its relation to the Body. (Welton 163-164)

Again, Husserl establishes the link between intentionality, consciousness, and movement, posing the question that Merleau-Ponty will answer. What remains unaddressed is how this definition of space, relying upon movement and subject/object intentionality, plays out in the comprehension of film space.

Ironically, Merleau-Ponty isolates the question, and the issue of movement in our understanding of depth, by his sole reference to cinema in "Eye and Mind." Merleau-Ponty arrives at a discussion of other attempts to understand movement in painting and photography through his argument for understanding Cézanne that relies upon the notion of vision as an embodiment of our body in motion. Our eye moves through the painting and we understand it as the experience of our body/perception moving through the space of the image. He describes certain painters' attempts to portray motion through a two-dimensional medium:

the instantaneous glimpses, the unstable attitudes, petrify the movement, as is shown by so many photographs in which an athlete in motion is forever frozen. We could not thaw him out by multiplying the glimpses. Marey's photographs, the cubists' analyses, Duchamp's *La Mariée* do not move; they give Zenonian reverie on movement. We see a rigid body as if it were a piece of armor going through its motions; it is here and it is there, magically, but it does not *go* from here to there. Cinema portrays movement, but *how*? Is it, as we are inclined to believe, by copying more closely the changes of place? We may presume not, since slow-motion

shows a body floating among objects like an alga [sic] but not moving  
*itself*. (185)

He continues by arguing that the true sense of movement is derived only when the perceiving body is placed in positions that are physically untrue, through a “mutual confrontation of impossibles (that) could, and could alone, cause transition and duration to arise in bronze and on canvas” (185). He examines Rodin’s statue of a walking man, in which both feet are firmly planted on the ground at the same time -- a moment never achieved by a person walking in real life -- as an example of this moment. As an extrapolation, I would argue that film derives a sense of motion and therefore space by being something more than infinitesimally precise displays of an image that is in fact *not* moving itself. This echoes Merleau-Ponty’s critique of Descartes’ attempt to reduce the entirety of a thing to its elements, making a fallacious judgment of what those elements are. The film is not its individual frames; it is the image that moves upon the screen as we see it. If a film were simply a collection of stills, we would be able to watch a film by simply taking the film strip out of its canister and running our eyes up and down the progression of still images. In fact, it is particularly at this point that it becomes impossible to indicate what is happening in a movie, as each still contains only a fraction of difference from the one before and the one after; to gain a sense of what is occurring, one has to see the frames projected in quick succession. Only with the film running do the isolated stills make sense, because we understand the film as a whole, as something that exists within our mind, a product of our sensing body, of an illusion that is nonetheless real to our perception. The film is the space that occurs based on our perception of it all at once, and not as something built up out of discretely discernible

rigid stills; in the same way Merleau-Ponty argues we understand depth all at once, and not as something built up out of length, width, and depth. That we can reduce film to stills or depth to its dimensions says nothing of its inner nature as a thing in itself in relation to how we perceive it. We do not understand them for their elements; we understand them as complete experiences. This is perhaps another way of saying that we experience the world at once, in a snap, from our individual perspectives, as embodied perceivers in the locus or zero point of perception, all things reaching toward our means of perception at the same time as we reach outward toward them.

In a movie like *The Blair Witch Project*, this level of bodily involvement reaches its extreme. Each spectator is forced to experience the film from the point-of-view of the character holding the camera, the events of the film unfolding around her in the same manner that phenomena in the world unfold around her embodied perception. The events and objects, or phenomena, of the film can then be said to be reaching out to a specific point-of-view, just as the camera and the body carrying it can be said to be reaching out to the objects in the act of recording them, a reiteration of Husserl's central notion of intentionality. This is not the same thing as a purely subjective point of view, as the handheld camera has traditionally been described by critics and filmmakers, nor is it something specific *to* handheld camera, as Vivian Sobchack argues effectively in *The Address of the Eye*. She writes,

film, therefore is more than “pure” vision. Its existence as a “viewing-view/viewed-view” implicates a “body.” Realized by the physical presence of the camera at the scene of the cinematography yet not the same as the camera, the film's “body” need not be visible in its vision —

just as we are not visible in our vision as its accomplishes its visual grasp of things other than itself. Still, the film's "body" is always implicated in its vision, just as our whole being as embodied informs what we see and makes us present to the visible even as the visible appears as present to us. This incarnation of vision inhabits a world – a world that exceeds its bodily limits, and to which it relates finitely and from an embodied situation. (133)

I have touched upon Sobchack's phenomenology of film previously, providing as it does a central challenge to limiting models of the image prevalent among certain film and postmodern theorists. Specifically, as I have discussed, Sobchack eventually moves beyond the need for parentheses to bracket the film's "body," arguing "through phenomenological description of what is, in experience, an empirical and functional subject-object" (133). The main importance of this moment in Sobchack's argument is, first, its positing of film as a subject-object in and of itself, and second, the notion that film implies a body not only in its recording and exhibition, but also in its address to the spectator. *Blair Witch*, then, becomes not an aberrancy, but an extreme or possibly idealized example of something always already at work in film.

Interestingly, Sobchack herself raises two important objections to my argument that the hand-held, point-of-view camera stands in for the spectator's body. First, in discussing previous experiments with movies predicated on POV techniques, such as Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1946), a film marketed through the idea that the spectator would be in the movie, would *be* Philip Marlowe, Sobchack questions the film's first-person perspective and its relation to the human body (230). All camerawork

in Montgomery's movie is shot from Marlowe's perspective, and he is only revealed when the camera catches his reflection in a mirror, or in a similar gesture. Motivating the film is the idea that if *Marlowe* lights a cigarette and we see it from a POV shot, it will be the closest thing possible to *me* lighting a cigarette in the movie. However, as Sobchack and numerous other critics have noted<sup>27</sup>, the effect of this film is, if anything, *even more* alienating to the spectator's subjectivity. Through the persistent and occasionally awkward POV work, the spectator is constantly reminded of the artificial construct placed before him. Theorists have presented various explanations for this phenomenon, which largely reiterated the idea that the camera is not and can never be the exact assimilation of the character's body and the spectator's body. The dissonance aroused between the spectator sitting passively in a chair watching a film that attempts to convince her that she is in fact somewhere and somebody else is patently false and insurmountable. Sobchack herself argues that the alienation between subject and film in this instance is related to a far more complicated separation, that between the character's body and the film's body.<sup>28</sup> The point remains, however, that the dominance of critical reception to *Lady in the Lake* as a subjectively embodied POV film is that the effect simply does not work, a critique that would seem to extend itself to my argument regarding *Blair Witch* and its ability to place the spectator's body in the center of the film. The spectator *is not* in the film, and she has only to shift in her seat or get up for popcorn to illustrate the separation between herself and the film object.

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<sup>27</sup> Bordwell and Thompson specifically discuss it in their textbook, *Film Art: An Introduction*, on Page 148, as an example of POV and its complications. Likewise, Jean Mitry discusses it in *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*. Other considerations of it can be found in Edward Branigan's "Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View-Shot" (1975).

However, I am not arguing for a seamless suturing between spectator and image. If anything, I am arguing quite the opposite. Unlike Lacanian-based models of film perception, I do not argue for a “suturing” effect at all; instead, I am arguing for a model of the image that accommodates the deeply active and mobile role of the spectator’s body. Specifically because I *can* get up and leave the theater, *Blair Witch* approximates the movement of the human body on a more active level than does the average God’s-eye perspective film, which often eliminates the behavioral patterns of the human body through crane shots, helicopter shots, edits that are physically impossible to emulate, and innumerable other standard effects. What is more, opposed to so many other POV film projects, *Blair Witch* offers a specific diegetic motivation for its perspective: the camera is always established as the prop of a particular body moving through that space. The spectator understands that the reason this POV shot is possible and available to him is that the film itself was shot by a specific, identified character, presented as a real person. This is not the case with *Lady in the Lake*, which simply starts out from Marlowe’s perspective and never attempts to explain why we are able to gain this particular, “inside the head,” vantage point.

Sobchack’s second objection centers around the entirely accurate observation that hand-held camera work, generally a sign in the movies of “real” subjective vision and physical movement, behaves nothing like how our actual vision or other senses behave. She notes “the jerky and mechanical quality of ‘hand-held’ camera is so *unlike* our own general experience and sense of a physical movement such as running that we become

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<sup>28</sup> Sobchack’s central notion of the film’s body related specifically to the film as a phenomenologically intentional artifact, one that, like any subject with a body, both perceives via the camera, and expresses via the projector.

aware of the physical difference and sudden presence of an intending, mobile ‘other’” (288), and proceeds to argue that the hand-held camera is a culturally constructed *sign* of movement and authentic vision. It is no more or less accurate to actual vision and movement than any other type of camera work. In fact, it may even serve to *further* distance the spectator from the image, heightening our awareness of the technology that specifically cannot capture an accurate approximation of human sense and mobility. Once again, I would note that *Blair Witch* addresses this issue, at least in part, through the a priori designation of any hand-held camera as being a camera held by a specific character. We are not being offered a vision of what the character’s senses receive, we are offered a vision of what the character sees specifically through the camera. We understand that we are viewing from a limited perspective. Moreover, and particularly important to my subsequent discussion of the hand-held camera work in both the Dogme 95 movies and Mike Figgis’ *Time Code* (2000), it is not necessary to dismiss the signification of the hand-held camera simply because it is a culturally constructed sign. If the spectator immediately recognizes the hand-held camera as a sign for authentic vision during authentic human movement, regardless of the cultural construct or its foregrounding of technology, the effect is nevertheless the same: the role of this particular camera technique still emphasizes the role of the human body as a mobile element in the creation of depth in the image, as the spectator reads the camera as a sign of exactly that. If anything, *Blair Witch*, in a Brechtian gesture, exposes the technology of the film *in order* to make these arguments implicit.

But, if *Blair Witch* foregrounds the video camera as the technology that allows the embodiment of the spectator within this fictional space, wouldn’t it also end up

foregrounding the role of the projector and the presence of the theater? That is, if the spectator is aware of how a video camera operates as a piece of technology, then she is also aware that it requires a venue and a means of projection in order to exhibit it. Wouldn't that only serve to vault the spectator out of the film and back into her seat? Again, part of the experience of *Blair Witch* is predicated upon the spectator's constant understanding that technology is the means by which this vantage-point is possible. Without the diegetic motivation of the hand-held POV camera, what one would be left with is an updated version of *Lady in the Lake*, with all its accompanying perceptual problems. It would seem to be an irresolvable paradox. And indeed, the very nature of the project defies common sense: when we watch a movie in the theater, we are not experiencing the moment for itself, we are experiencing a recording of it. We may experience it as though we were there, but we also understand at all times that we are not.

There is a way out of this seeming paradox. In *Existential Technics* and elsewhere, Don Ihde presents a model for understanding embodied perception's relation to technology. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of the blind man's cane and Martin Heidegger's hammer,<sup>29</sup> Ihde develops a notion of technology that functions transparently. We understand that we would not be able to conduct the operations before us without a given piece of technology, but in order to employ that technology in a useful manner, we must be able to look beyond it toward the object operated upon. In the instance of the blind man's cane, the blind man is only able to employ the cane usefully

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<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, in discussing the function of tools, makes use of the hammer in a manner similar to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the blind man's cane. When using a hammer, the user does not focus upon her relation to the hammer unless somehow either she or it functions improperly: a poorly aimed strike, a damaged shaft. When the hammer is functioning properly, it becomes transparent, it withdraws as a function of its usefulness. (Ihde 50)

by allowing it to recede behind the data it presents *through* its technology. In other words, if the user were constantly focused upon the data of the cane itself, such as its length, its texture, or its temperature relative to the user's hand, he would never be able to receive the data necessary to use it properly as a means of avoiding objects. Indeed, one might say that the process of using the cane properly is the process of learning to allow the cane's perceptual qualities to recede behind the larger perceptual data it can present. Ihde relates this metaphor to the telephone, a technology more complicated and therefore more relevant to my argument. When we use the technology, it is understood that we are speaking to a person *through* the telephone. We are not speaking *to* the telephone, nor is the telephone speaking for us to the other party. Consequently, the role of the telephone becomes transparent behind its communicative purpose. It functions as an extension of our embodied perception. "It must itself 'withdraw' so that the human action which is embodied through the technology can stand out" (51). We only become aware of its presence at the moments that it ceases to function properly, that is to say, transparently. How then does this relate to film and, in particular, *The Blair Witch Project*?

Ihde's notion of embodied technology, what he elsewhere develops as *instrumental realism*, would seem to contradict my previous conclusion about *Blair Witch*'s foregrounding of its technology. If we are constantly reminded of the video's presence as the recording technology, then how can it be allowed to recede? Logically, it should stand to constantly remind the spectator of her role as a spectator in the theater, as indeed Brechtian theater does. However, I am not arguing that the spectator is not aware of her position in the theater. I am arguing that the spectator experiences the space as though she were in the film, that is to say, the film is constructed in terms of depth as

though the spectator were the center of its space. Moreover, it is precisely because the technology is foregrounded that we are able to allow it to recede in our experience of it. Once the spectator understands the relationship between the recording technology and the body that carries it in relation to the narrative, it becomes no longer an issue. We understand that the camera is carried by a human body that is part of the narrative; that is why it behaves as it does. The technology of the film can then become transparent. *Lady in the Lake*, on the other hand, does not allow for this diegetic explanation; the spectator is presented with a POV that is not explained in relation to the technology. It consistently behaves contrary to how the spectator expects it to behave, and can therefore not recede or become transparent. I will return to this argument in Chapter Four in relation to the Dogme movies, where hand-held camera work is not offered as a diegetically motivated POV. I will nevertheless argue that these films function to place the spectator in the midst of the deep image, specifically due to the nature of their project and their technology. However, in *Blair Witch*, the implicit body carrying the camera is not questioned unless the technology of the film itself intentionally functions contrary to its transparent nature. It is exactly this effect that the filmmakers will exploit at the end of the film.

Nowhere is this sense of the film's implicit body seen more clearly than at the end of *Blair Witch*. The amateur filmmakers are still lost; despite having traveled in a direct line for an entire day, they have ended back where they started. Something is stalking them, leaving small, intimidating totems in their path. They hear the voices of children in the night. Worst of all Josh, the initial cameraman, has disappeared entirely. The next morning Heather discovers several human teeth wrapped in a scrap of his flannel shirt.

That night they hear his voice calling out in pain. They flee the tent, calling his name, trying to find him. Suddenly out of the pitch dark looms an abandoned house, near collapse, isolated in the middle of the woods. Heather and Mike enter, hysterical, thinking Josh must be inside. They run from room to room, Josh's voice still calling to them. They become separated in the house, Mike carrying the Hi-8 and Heather carrying the 16mm, both with film running. Arcane symbols, writing, and the bloody handprints of children cover the walls. Heather screams for Mike to wait for her, but cannot find him. All of this is relayed to us from the first-person perspective of the cameras, cutting back and forth rapidly so that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to track where the characters are in relation to each other. We are left following Heather's footage from the 16mm camera, with Heather screaming Mike's name.

The directors make good use of what has been achieved up to this point, the climax of the narrative. As the film has been careful to establish, the cameras are always held by a individual character, not an anonymous cameraman, and the directors have been careful to denote which character specifically is doing the shooting. When the characters enter the abandoned house, we know that Heather is filming with the black-and-white 16mm camera, whereas Mike is shooting with the distinctly different looking, color Hi-8. We are led to believe upon entering the house that we can track where they are by which camera we are looking through. At first, this seems to work, as Mike and Heather separate and we realize Mike is headed toward the basement while Heather is still upstairs, screaming for him to wait. However, at this moment, the directors play a trick, to which they confess on the DVD version of the film. We see a shot from the 16mm, Heather's vantage point, as she careens through the attic, panning across the

bloody handprints of children. She screams “Mike, Mike!” But the soundtrack sounds *wrong*, tinny, far away, as though Heather were standing somewhere else, the camera not in her hands. What the directors have in fact done at this moment is use the audio track from Mike’s camera, who is now in the basement, and overlay it at this moment on Heather’s footage. The audience has been led up until this moment to trust the audio track as an indicator of who is holding the camera and where characters are in relation to it. Now, suddenly, we cannot, and yet do not even recognize what has changed. They call the effect “disorienting” (*Blair Witch* DVD); our orientational cues have failed us. We are literally unsure where the characters are in relation to each other, themselves, or the camera. Heather enters the basement and sees Mike standing in the corner. She is struck from behind. The camera falls to the ground and sputters out. The blow seems to come out of nowhere.

The effect is only possible because of the film’s meticulous, previous establishment of the embodied nature of the cinematography. We have come to rely upon each shot’s accurate correlation to a particular character’s embodied perception, such that we can reliably transfer our own embodied sense of perception into each shot. When that reliability is ruptured by using an unreliable audio track, where our voice comes from too far away to be where we should be, we are cast loose. Our embodiment is challenged. Rather than seeing this as a fundamental challenge to my argument, I see this as further proof of what is operating here through the use of the handheld camera. If we had not been led to rely upon the camera as the zero-point of the film’s embodied perception, we not only would not have been tricked by this manipulation, we would not have had any bodily reaction to the movie at all: no nausea, no fright, and certainly no

sense of sympathetic terror when the blow descends from nowhere upon the back of Heather's head. The audio trick is an artificial, and effective, gesture that relies upon all that precedes it – a disturbance in the established system. We still experience the film actively from an embodied position of perception, but, for a few brief moments, we have to question our position in the film, which up until now has been absolutely central. Much more than an objective image from which we as spectators sit completely apart, as passive recipients of the film's intentions, the image before us requires that we engage it actively in order to orient ourselves not only within its narrative, but within its space. Consequently, our experience of that space is much more closely related to our everyday experience of bodily motion through the space that surrounds us than it is to standing passively before an endlessly shallow image, as the postmodernists and Lacanians would have us believe, or to meekly accepting the empirical building blocks of perception in order to build from bottom-up our perception of this object, as the neo-Formalists would have us believe. The space experience is not only deep, but also bodily interpreted as any space would be.

### **Hollywood's Big-Budget Ride Films**

Imagine yourself propelled head-long backwards down a dark, winding path, enormous gray shapes and unidentifiable forms looming out of the dark, missing you by inches. You change directions and speed rapidly, suddenly jolting up or to the side, never knowing where, exactly, you are headed. Suddenly you lunge up and out through a narrow exit and into the daylight, down a slope and onto a long metal track. What am I describing? A trip on Disney's "Space Mountain" amusement park ride? No, this is the

opening credit sequence to David Fincher's *Fight Club*, a long, digitally-sequenced pull-back through a confusing tangle of matter not at first identifiable; this is perhaps a fitting introduction to a movie that relies so heavily upon plot twists, unexpected turns, and a general sense of being adrift in a dark and confusing place. Fincher, originally a matte and optical effects cameraman, worked his way into directing music videos for Madonna and others. He made his film debut by taking over the troubled *Alien3* (1992) production after two other directors abandoned it. Fincher quickly established his style through movies of a similar vein: dark, hyper-violent, visually stunning, narratively complicated, and often mordantly funny. Coming after a series of complicated and critically controversial films like *Se7en* (1995) and *The Game* (1997), it was perhaps foreordained that *Fight Club* would be party to a critical roller-coaster ride every bit as jarring as his opening sequence. Following the story of Jack,<sup>30</sup> a man adrift in a faceless corporate world in which duvets and dining sets have come to mean more to him than love, sex, or personal fulfillment. Jack falls in with an enigmatic and charismatic rebel, Tyler Durden, after Jack's apartment is destroyed in an explosion. The two strike a common chord, literally, when they discover that through fighting they regain a sense of their lost vitality. Soon after, they have started a ring of underground fight clubs where men can learn to connect with themselves and other men through appalling acts of willful brutality. But this is not enough for Tyler, as we learn. He sets his sights on nothing less than the destruction of capitalist society, and forms a private army of disgruntled office

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<sup>30</sup> Ed Norton's character, the narrator, remains coyly nameless throughout the film itself, just one more clue that he and Tyler are one in the same person. However, as David Fincher discusses with Pitt and Norton in the DVD Director's audio track, the character is specified as Jack in the script's dialogue cues. The name Jack is, of course, taken from the film's *Reader's Digest*-like series of articles written from the first-person

workers, bartenders, and desk clerks. Jack's final confrontation with Tyler packs one of the most unexpected plot twists in cinematic history, a turn that reorients the entire nature of the film and demands at least one repeat viewing. The inventive plot of the movie, however, is but a hint of the importance of Fincher's movie. Employing the most advanced cinematic technology, the movie takes us from an airplane crash in which, if you look closely, you can spot Jack Daniels mini-bottles bouncing off the inner cabin, to a fly-through of the inner wiring of one of several bombs set to destroy the buildings housing debt and credit records for corporate America. Clearly, like Durden, Fincher has high aspirations for this project.

Critics without fail narrowed in on the violence of the film as a basis for their objections to what they perceive as the film's message. Roger Ebert began his review of the film with an unambiguous summary of his opinion, writing,

*Fight Club* is the most frankly and cheerfully fascist big-star movie since *Death Wish*, a celebration of violence in which the heroes write themselves a license to drink, smoke, screw and beat one another up... Sometimes, for variety, they beat up themselves. It's macho porn -- the sex movie Hollywood has been moving toward for years, in which eroticism between the sexes is replaced by all-guy locker-room fights. (*Sun-Times*)

Of course, one might respond that Ebert had missed the point entirely, taking Durden's violent, crypto-Marxist spin on the "Men's Movement," to be the "message" of the actual film, when in fact the movie makes a clear statement that Durden is on the wrong path, a critical depiction of what happens when insanity mixed with charisma meets the

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perspective of various bodily organs ("I am Jack's colon," "I am Jack's medulla oblongata") which

unfocused, testosterone-fueled rage of men who cannot think for themselves.

However, to give Ebert credit, he anticipates this response, arguing that whatever the movie may *claim* as its moral imperative, what in fact the majority of the very same dissatisfied and violence-prone men in the audience will take away from it is a further incitement to violence, now fueled by an additional sense of moral righteousness. Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* takes a more balanced view of the film, writing

*Fight Club* sounds offensive from afar. If watched sufficiently mindlessly, it might be mistaken for a dangerous endorsement of totalitarian tactics and super-violent nihilism in an all-out assault on society. But this is a much less gruesome film than *Seven* and a notably more serious one. It means to explore the lure of violence in an even more dangerously regimented, dehumanized culture. That's a hard thing to illustrate this powerfully without, so to speak, stepping on a few toes. (*New York Times*)

If only other critics had been at least as careful in their critique as Ebert and Maslin, wrong or right. Far too many found it an easy move to condemn the movie's violence without demonstrating a clear understanding of why it was there, such as Bruce Westbrook of the *Houston Star*, who simply saw it as an opportunity to call for stricter censorship, reasoning that "if movies were rated as stringently for violence as they are for sex, violence would be toned down and manageable. But they aren't, and the limits for violence are continually pushed": an explicit longing for a 1930's era moral code. However, whatever their opinion of the violence or moral stance of the movie, what critics could not deny was its visual and technical virtuosity, calling it "a thrill ride

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becomes a motif throughout the rest of the film ("I am Jack's complete lack of surprise").

masquerading as philosophy” (Ebert), “like watching some nerveless kid play pinball in a minefield... a wonder to see such prowess” (David Thomson, *New York Times*), displaying “lightning-fast visual sophistication” (Maslin). One cannot help but note the recurrent theme of video games, thrill rides, and dangerous games. As Fincher acknowledges in the Director’s Commentary to the DVD version, the movie drew from thrill rides and video games, among other elements, for its visual inspiration; maybe there is hope for the critics after all. This visual inspiration is seen clearly from the very first moment of the film, the aforementioned opening credit sequence.

As the movie starts and the spectator is thrown into a dark, startling world, shapes loom towards him. At times they seem to be spiderwebs, or blue-gray cables, or clouds of floating doughnuts. (See Fig. 3.1) We pull back and up, along long strands meshed among many, up through unrecognizable forms, and eventually out through what looks like a bead of water. We track down a flesh-colored plane and onto a steel-blue track of metal. Gradually, as the digital images segue into film footage, we realize that we are pulling back along the barrel of a gun, and eventually the camera pans to the side and the focus reveals that this gun is in a man’s mouth, who we will learn is the Narrator, Jack (Ed Norton). The gun is held by another man, Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt), who asks Jack if he has anything he would like to say. The long pull-back, over which the opening credits played, was in fact a pull back from the center of Jack’s brain, specifically from somewhere around the amygdala, or the center of fear responses, according to Kevin Haug, Visual Effects Supervisor (Fight Club DVD).<sup>31</sup> The “camera,” in this case a

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<sup>31</sup> The visual effects department insured medical veracity by working with Katherine Jones, a medical illustrator who participated in the Visible Human project, in which human cadavers were sliced into

computer-generated simulation, pulls back from the level of individual synaptic gaps as we see enormous dendrites emitting neurotransmitters, out through the neuron, along the nerve, up through his skull and skin tissue, out through a hair follicle alongside a bead of sweat, down his forehead and past his nose, and up the barrel of the gun. Haug discusses how this sequence, created entirely using CGI graphics, was inspired by two main sources or “looks.” The director Fincher instructed the effects team that this sequence should be paced and designed like a “ride film,” the short, first-person sequences that are shot for the most recent wave of interactive amusement park rides, in which the audience is placed in a hydraulically mounted room that lifts, tilts, and shakes according to the logic of the film being watched. Moreover, the sequence should have the look of a night-time scuba dive, giving the sensation of a dark, weightless glide past enormous gray shapes that loom seemingly out of nowhere.<sup>32</sup> The result is a sequence in which the spectator literally rides through the human brain in the same way that one might ride through the Matterhorn at Disneyland, similarly recalling Disney’s *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), in which a surgical team is miniaturized and injected into a dying man’s bloodstream. The team then “rides” the man’s bodily structures until they arrive at the point of the problem. The important point to be made here is that the implicit logic of this long pull-back sequence from the level of cells relies upon a notion of space that is theoretically infinite; the depth of the image does not stop at the surface of the shot itself. Though we may only appreciate the space around us on the level which we perceive, the

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millimeter thin sections and scanned into a computer, to allow real-time three-dimensional fly-throughs of the human body for medical practitioners.

<sup>32</sup>This scene also recalls Ray and Charles Eames’ short scientific documentary *Powers of Ten* (1968), in which the camera zooms out from a picnic to the level of the universe, the Earth an invisible speck, before

limits beyond that perception stand waiting for a better technology of perception, in this case through digital imaging. Moreover, given the embodied experiences upon which the sequence was modeled, it is clear that this is meant to be perceived *not* as though by a disembodied consciousness floating through the brain, but as a body moving through a space not otherwise perceivable without the assistance of the computer generated effect.<sup>33</sup>

Similar moves are made elsewhere in the film, such as when the camera pulls out backwards from a wastebasket, working backward from large, indecipherable icons to reveal the Starbucks label on the side of a discarded coffee cup and the Lay's trademark on a bag of potato chips and finally the rim of the trashcan. Or similarly, when a fuse is detonated inside Jack's apartment, triggering a gas explosion, the camera tracks in along the floor, up the face of the oven, across the range and past a tea-kettle, down the back of the refrigerator to the actual fuse located beneath it, witnessing the ignition and pulling quickly back and out through the apartment before the first wave of the blast. Here, as opposed to a completely computer-designed and generated sequence, the director and

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plunging back down into the hand of one of picnickers, stopping at the subatomic level inside a carbon atom.

<sup>33</sup> In Chapter Four, I will discuss the issues of authenticity that are at play in the films of the Dogme 95 collective. In arguing that film can be an authentic experience of a recorded image, I again borrow Don Ihde's notion of "instrument mediated perception," in which perception can be heightened or altered by a piece of technology, but is nevertheless not questioned for its "authenticity." For example, one would not question that an astronomer gazing at the stars is having an authentic perception of the phenomena at hand, even though it is a perception only available to him through the telescope and thus filtered through glass lenses and glass tubing. Similarly, we would not say that a doctor operating on a patient via orthoscopic instruments and miniaturized cameras is somehow experiencing an illusion of the patient's body. Though the sequence in *Fight Club* is entirely a computer-generated effect, it is not any less authentic in terms of how we perceive it. In short, it and indeed all film, is far from an illusion to the spectator. It is important to note in passing that there is an element of time at play in this argument: film is a recorded medium, in which the events perceived are being played back. They, unlike the orthoscopic surgery, are not being experienced contemporaneously by the spectator at the moment that the instrument mediates them. This issue will be addressed more fully in Chapter Four, where I will suggest that this factor does not play as significant a role in our experience of the recorded phenomena as one might otherwise think.

cinematographer employ a technique more commonly used in music videos, known as *photogrammetry*, in which the image is frozen and the camera *seems* to pan around this object frozen in time and space, movement isolated and limited to the camera, as if to give the eye more than one rapidly successive profile of this object after the other. Nothing moves as the camera, seemingly weightless, pans 180° across the apartment or through the wastebasket. The effect is a slightly otherworldly movement, clearly something other than a “real” camera moving through time and space. What the camera at this moment then attempts is to isolate time in favor of a stronger notion of space, freezing the temporal perspective in order to give us more spatial perspectives; though time for us, as spectators, continues as the camera moves around the frozen object, time within the movie, for the object, does not. Interestingly, this is precisely how this type of shot is compiled; multiple still cameras record the same image from a variety of angles, and a computer compiles them, filling in the details of the transition from one static image to the next, rendering a smooth transition around an object actually frozen in time and motion.<sup>34</sup> The technique allows the filmmaker to create single-shot sequences that would otherwise be impossible, as seen in Figure 3.2 and 3.3. In the first, the camera tracks across the top of a kitchen stove. The still captures the moment that the “camera” passes between the body and the handle of a shiny teapot.<sup>35</sup> The second still follows

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<sup>34</sup> I am immediately reminded of Muybridge’s attempt to isolate and inventory the infinite changes within a single motion. The significant difference, of course, is that the computer can effectively approximate the difference between each still photo. However, once again, it is necessary for motion to be reintroduced to the still photo in order for there to be an actual sense of depth and meaning conveyed. Without the computer’s simulation, the film would be left with nothing more than an assortment of frozen images, cutting from one to the next without conveying a sense of spatial continuity around the object frozen in three-dimensional space.

<sup>35</sup> The limits of video-capturing technology, coupled with the pan-and-scan format of the VHS release, make this still hard to read. The large dark shape looming in the upper right hand corner is the teapot handle. The stove-clock is visible in the background, while the teapot body is to the lower left.

shortly thereafter, when the camera tracks down between the wall and the back of the refrigerator, capturing the moment when the refrigeration unit switches on and detonates an explosive charge.

Ironically, what *Fight Club* accomplishes through computer animated still photography, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* accomplishes through more traditional, and most significantly, less costly means; as *Blair Witch* demonstrates, the spatial model discussed here is not reliant upon specific budgetary resources or pieces of technology so much as it is a shift about *how* to use that technology. Perhaps the most influential science-fiction film in recent decades, Scott's dystopian view has become the model for a host of subsequent films and novels, presenting a Los Angeles so badly polluted that the sky is a constant dark, rainy haze, the population a polyglot and creolized amalgamation of Latin, Asian, Germanic, and Slavic influences; a world in which androids created as servants can no longer be easily distinguished from their degenerate masters. In it, the "blade runner" Deckard (Harrison Ford) is assigned the job of tracking down and "retiring" four renegade androids or "replicants" who have returned to Earth in search of their makers. Volumes of critical attention have been devoted to this film, in which Deckard's humanity becomes open to question, literally and figuratively, as he hunts down and destroys creatures that have become indistinguishable from their human creators. However, often overlooked is a brief sequence in this film, which may be seen as inspiration for the type of image-spatial logic at play in the CGI sequences in *Fight Club*. Deckard has discovered a photograph in the apartment of one of the replicants, Leon. He places the image into a computerized image reader, which scans and displays certain sections at the command of the operator. (See Fig. 3.4) Panning and tracking

through the photograph in the same way a camera might move through a set, Deckard narrows in on a particular detail far in the background of the photograph, an image reflected in a mirror of a woman lying on a bed, covered in some sort of scales or sequins and made-up like a dancer. (See Fig. 3.5, 3.6) He realizes this “woman” is one of the replicants he is hunting, providing a vital clue as to where she might be hiding. Using the information, he tracks her down at a strip club where she performs nightly.

As Steven Shaviro observes, *Blade Runner* is “for many critics the quintessential postmodern film” (*Body 3*), and yet Deckard’s moment with the photograph might be read as resistant to the postmodern trope of image as an impossibly thin surface. Deckard’s ability to pry out a tiny piece of information from an average-looking photograph is an interesting one, both in terms of its spatial implications for the image at hand as well as for the problems of technological and media-based limits it casually glosses. He uses the computer to focus in on a detail not apparent to the naked eye. He directs the computer to move through and into the photograph in the manner one would direct camera movements on a film set: “pan right,” “pan left,” “zoom forward.” But he also directs the camera to move in the way that a human body would move through the room that is captured in this photograph: “back out,” “move in on...” He uses mathematical coordinates to guide the computer’s movements more efficiently, but the commands that Deckard gives the machine are ones that operate within the three-dimensional space of the room depicted in the image, more so than instructions that operate upon the two-dimensional grid of the photograph’s surface. As often as he instructs the computer to center on a particular coordinate or focus in on a particular cell, he also tells the computer to pan a certain number of degrees or move in a particular

direction, and the camera moves according to a 360° space in which the camera's original vantage point is the central axis.

The sequence operates on the assumption that the computer is capable of enhancing details that the human eye cannot see in the photograph, blowing up specific sections in order to relate the details contained therein.<sup>36</sup> However, the problem of resolution is not addressed. Specifically, if one continues to blow up a particular area of a photographic image, one quickly encounters the limits of the photographic medium; there is a limit to the detail captured in a photograph, beyond which one simply increases the amount of space between the grains of the detail. Simply stated, moving into the photograph in the way Deckard does would result in a very grainy blur that might or might not be a woman indistinguishable from an amorphous blob of color. However, the image that Deckard finally arrives at, an image blown up out of an area only a few centimeters in diameter, is more or less the equivalent of a regular photograph. This would seem to be a technological impossibility. What one is then left to assume is that either photography has radically changed in its nature by this moment in the future, a possibility not implied anywhere else, or that the computerized image reader somehow makes this type of image scanning possible, filling in the details based upon clues from the surrounding area. But the point remains that the two-dimensional image in this sequence has no apparent limit to its depth, and, furthermore, rather than negotiating that

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<sup>36</sup> Scott Bukatman, in his 1997 film-book on *Blade Runner* for the BFI Modern Classics series, anticipates much of my argument through his assertion that "this inert object, a mere trace of the past, becomes multidimensional and is suddenly possessed of the present-tense modality of cinema... the frozen moment of the photograph is granted a new temporality" (46). Bukatman even goes so far as to invoke Merleau-Ponty. However, his primary argument asserts that this moment casts a still picture into a cinematic moment, gives it temporal depth. I agree, but would take the argument one step further: the moment also casts Deckard physically into the space of that image.

limitless space in flat two-dimensions, Deckard negotiates it as a body moving through three-dimensions.

The similarity between this computer-aided journey into the photograph and the computer-generated tracking sequences in *Fight Club* is immediately apparent; the audience is allowed to perceive in a bodily way a phenomena that is physically impossible. Interestingly, the means by which these sequences were created is not all that radically different. In *Fight Club*, a still camera was used to capture numerous images that could then be scanned into a computer and animated to create the fly-through sequences. In *Blade Runner*, numerous still photographs were taken of the same apartment. The motion picture camera could then film these still photographs, focusing on key areas. The next or “deeper” photograph can then be cut in, creating the sense of movement in and around the still photograph depicted within the film. What is shown as one photograph in the movie is in fact an amalgamation of many photographs edited together in the real time of the film recording. The movement within that amalgamate photograph generated by the computer in the film is in fact a rudimentary form of stop-motion animation put together by Scott and his cinematographer. What is missing is the smooth flow of the CGI sequences of *Fight Club*; one wonders if Ridley Scott were to film this sequence now, whether there would be the same clicks and jerks, or whether we would be brought seamlessly into the space of the photograph on a smooth “ride film.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> As it turns out, there is more than a casual coincidence between these similarities. Douglas Trumbull, the special effects designer for this film and many other sci-fi classics, is also the originator of the “ride film” technology, from which *Fight Club* expressly draws inspiration. What is more, he is also the director and producer of *Brainstorm* (1983), a film in which technology makes it possible for a person to experience another person’s memories in present tense, as if they were happening to the person using the technology. This “total film” concept is a clear inspiration for numerous later films such as *Strange Days* (1995) and, most notably, *The Matrix*. The influence of *Blade Runner* upon the logic of subsequent films clearly extends in unexpected ways.

The uses of animating still photography within a motion picture seem to be without limit. The technique is used to similar effect in Larry and Andy Wachowski's sci-fi blockbuster, *The Matrix* (1999). Ironically, where critics attacked *Fight Club* for being stylistically and aesthetically thrilling but morally or philosophically reprehensible in its content, they attacked *The Matrix* for being stylistically and aesthetically thrilling, but morally or philosophically *void* of content.<sup>38</sup> Roger Ebert criticized it for essentially lacking a Third Act that matched up to its opening premise, describing the "letdown when a movie begins by redefining the nature of reality, and ends with a shoot-out" (*Sun-Times*). Janet Maslin, generally positive about the film, cannot help but add that the film "makes particular virtues out of eerily inhuman lighting effects, lightning-fast virtual scene changes (as when Neo wishes for guns and thousands of them suddenly appear) and the martial arts stunts that are its single strongest selling point" (*The New York Times*), notably not praising the film for its patina of Eastern-influenced cyberpunk messianic philosophy. Jay Carr of *The Boston Globe* is willing to go along with the film's apparent focus on style over content, crediting the Wachowskis for a "script [that] manages to be both silly and dense, and it's perfectly understandable that Keanu Reeves' hacker should spend a lot of the film looking puzzled about what's going on." Bob Graham of *The San Francisco Chronicle* writes that the film's most astonishing element is "that so much money, talent, technical expertise and visual imagination can be put in the service of something so stupid." However, once again, where professional critics

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<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that there was plenty of positive reaction from both critics and audiences alike. While I concentrate on notable film critics with mixed or negative reactions to both films, such response didn't stop either film from being gargantuan financial successes in a year of truly daring and inspiring films such as *Being John Malkovich*, *Election*, *Three Kings*, *American Beauty*, and *The Sixth Sense*, to name but a few.

may target the film for its lack of a stronger story or a deeper intent, they cannot avoid crediting the film for making a significant advance not just in special-effects technology, but in setting a new standard for aesthetic appeal. Behind that aesthetic appeal lies an understanding of our relation to the film medium as having potential beyond a merely superficial reaction to a projected illusion.

*The Matrix* follows Thomas A. Anderson (Keanu Reeves), a corporate drone with an interesting personal hobby, in this way similar to *Fight Club*'s Jack. Anderson is a hacker known as Neo in his off-hours, who spends his time searching on-line for an elusive computer genius known only as Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne). When Morpheus instead singles him out, Neo is vaulted out of his complacent world and into the knowledge that the world that surrounds him, and ostensibly the viewer, is in fact a computer simulation or *matrix* created by machines that have taken over a bombed-out world. Morpheus believes that Neo is a messianic figure who will lead humanity out of the Matrix and into a promised land of happiness. Immediate themes and ideologies beg critical attention, but more relevant to the purposes of this discussion is the film's revolutionary use of special-effects technology. Already within two years, many techniques innovated within this film have been copied in music videos, television, and other feature films to the point that even the copies have become a rich ground for parody. At the heart of the progression from Thomas Anderson the hacker to Neo the humanist messiah is his developing mastery of the Matrix itself. Inherent to this mastery is a command over time and space, such that Neo becomes by the end of the film the center-point of spatial logic, where the very laws of physical reality bend to fit his needs. Of course, in the Matrix, what humanity thinks of as reality is in fact a simulation. This

fact, along with the film's explicit reference to Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, tropes of transcendental enlightenment, and neo-Hegelian predictions of an end to history, have led many critics to embrace this film as the supreme example of postmodern superficiality at play. Of course, I am going to suggest quite the opposite; central to the aesthetic style of *The Matrix* is an assumption of space and time as endlessly complicated and deep.

Once Neo has been rescued from the Matrix, pulled from his womb-like slumber where he and rest of humanity are being milked of energy to power the machine-masters, he is guided toward mastering the reality of the Matrix itself. The jump program is but one test that he has to challenge, one that we have seen is possible, as Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss), Neo's love interest, makes numerous similar leaps in the opening sequences of the film. By the end of the film, he will have mastered this and far more. Gradually, he learns the nature of his powers. And as he does, the rules of physical reality slowly bend to his will. This mastery is reflected in the special-effects of the film. During key action sequences, objects slow their progress through time in relation to the objects around them, or freeze altogether in order for the film's point-of-view to pivot around them and gain a fuller perception of all sides of the object, as though one could freeze in space and attempt to view the object from all sides. Husserl's notion of the *Abschattung*, at least within the film, is turned on its head. Early in Neo's development, before he has mastered reality, the effects are relatively minor. Morpheus engages Neo in a combat training program, and, as the two battle, their exaggerated trajectories through space slow to the point that we can watch Neo arc gracefully over Morpheus in a leap that would not only be physically impossible, but over in a matter of seconds if it were possible. At

other times in this battle, Morpheus' and Neo's fists blur, implying that they move faster than the human eye, or the camera, can capture. Coupled together, the effects imply that at least within the Matrix, once mastery is achieved, the individual is capable of subjecting the objective world to his or her will.

A later example demonstrates this ability more clearly. Neo (Keanu Reeves) and Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving), a lethal "agent program," engage in combat in a deserted subway station, squaring off like two gunslingers in a John Ford western. They run forward, leaping and grappling with each other in mid-air, firing their guns rapidly as they rise. The duo slows in time and motion, and we watch the bullets trace delicate trajectories in slow-motion around them as they seem to hover weightless in the air. (See Fig. 3.7) The perspective swings around them, capturing them from both sides as they remain nearly frozen in time. Note, I did not say that the camera itself pans. It does not, even though it appears in the film as though the camera is panning around Neo and Agent Smith hanging in mid-air. The sequence is computer-generated photogrammetry, created from numerous still photographs of Keanu Reeves and Hugo Weaving captured at that moment in their wire-harness assisted trajectory through space. A computer then "animated" the sequence, approximating the shift from one still image to the next. For this shot to be possible prior to the photogrammetry technology, the actor would be required to hold *impossibly* still while the camera physically panned around him. However, in such an attempt, real time would still be unfolding; with the intervention of the computer generated sequence, the object is truly frozen in time relative to itself. Keanu Reeves does not age one second during the camera's simulated pan around him. The implication here in the narrative is that the characters are moving so fast relative to

time that their actions must be slowed down in order for us to be able to perceive them. However, in *The Matrix* as in *Fight Club*, the implication is clear: the space of the image is deep beyond limit. Time is the boundary that limits our perceptual horizons, linking them inextricably to what went before and what comes after. If one could freeze that moment, one could then truly perceive the object in full depth, moving through the infinite possibilities of space, seeing the object from all sides at once. Of course, time does not truly stand still for the spectator; seconds tick by even as the object on the screen is frozen. Perhaps more importantly, however, is the consistent assertion that it is the camera as a substitute for the spectator's body that occupies a central point from which it can explore the potentials of space, whether it be inside a character's living room, his wastebasket, or his head. As I have argued, this central point of the camera becomes inevitably linked to our embodied sense of perception, once we view the film.

One might argue that, at least in *The Matrix*, the central position of the individual within a deep space is subverted by the narrative itself; Neo's ability to manipulate space and physical reality is belied by that fact that it is only possible *within* the Matrix itself. Neo's mastery of the Matrix, completely realized at the moment he is able to infiltrate Agent Smith's program by literally diving into him and obliterating his code from the inside, is nevertheless a mastery *only* within the Matrix. While the hallway walls literally flex outward from the aura of Neo's power, this is only a simulation. One can presume that once Neo has fulfilled his destiny and destroyed the Matrix, humanity will be released back into reality and Neo will lead them to the promised land; his mastery of the Matrix's physical space will not extend to the space of reality. However, I would argue that even though Neo's ability is only real within the Matrix, and therefore not "real" at

all in the sense of simulation, the implication for the nature of space and time is nevertheless relevant to my argument. While computer animation makes it possible for Neo to freeze in space and time, the camera swinging around the object to portray a deeper sense of space and time, the implication is nevertheless that the image itself is endlessly deep. While I, as a subject-object in a world among other subject-objects, can never see all sides or elements of an object at once, the film implies that I could, given endless access to funds, devise a complicated technological or instrumentally mediated system capable of doing just that. As in *Fight Club*, where the computer makes it possible for us to experience phenomenon that we could otherwise not, here the Matrix makes phenomena and experiences otherwise impossible now possible. While I will return to the notion of instrument-mediated perception in the next chapter, what I want to stress here is that *The Matrix* does not present the argument that the depth of space and time over which Neo gains mastery does not exist in reality (outside the Matrix); depth does exist, but it is only within the Matrix that one could become physically capable of subverting our embodied placement within them.

Throughout all the films I have discussed so far, the manipulations of space are reliant upon the intentions of characters. In *Fight Club*, Jack is the center of the spatial manipulations that occur. The camera pans outward from the center of his head, as though from the center of his subjectivity, implying that the contents of the film emanate outward from his imagination, and yet, clearly, this is a realm of objects that he inhabits. Likewise, in *The Matrix*, Neo becomes able to literally bend and manipulate space around him. This issue, in which the individual characters occupy the center of spatial construction, at least thematically when not directly stylistically, recalls the

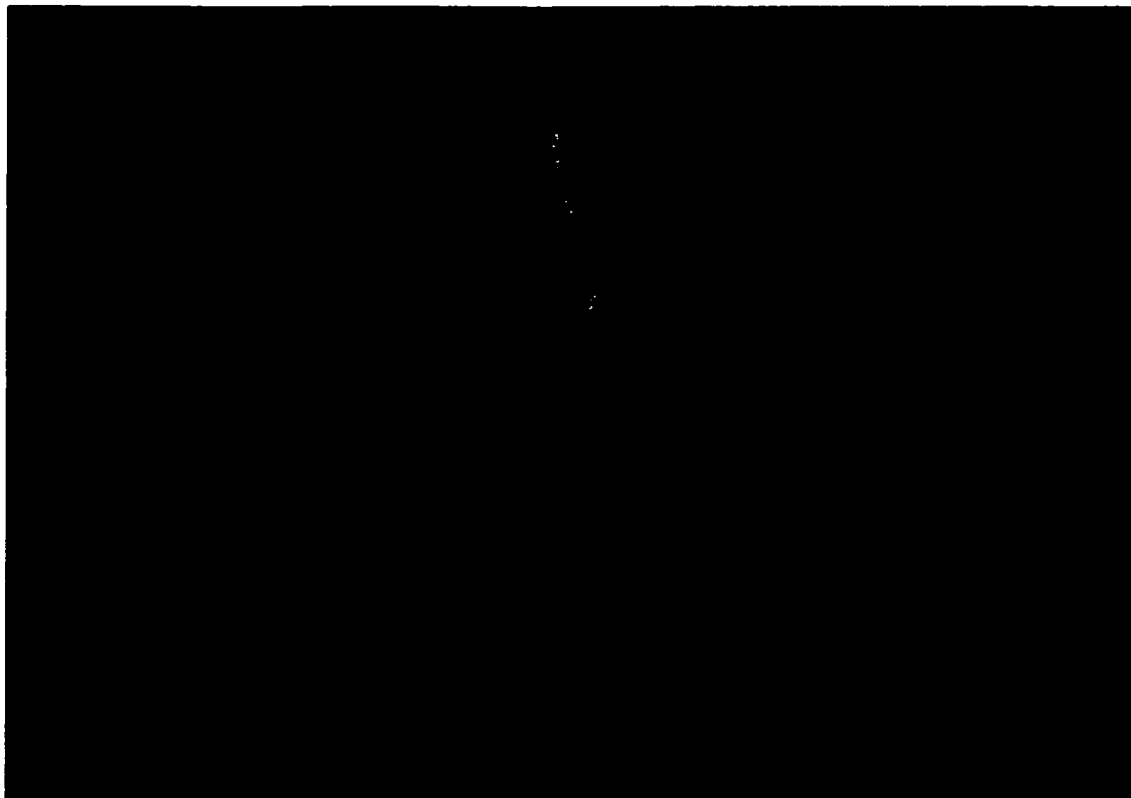
phenomenological notion of the zero-point of perception, particularly as it is employed by Merleau-Ponty. Most importantly, that zero-point is always an embodied one, as our consciousness cannot be separated from our body. The zero-point of our perception relies on our bodies as a lived-in consciousness, and the world we perceive, either as film or otherwise, is a lived-in state of being. Therefore, the anxiety, terror, and nausea we experience when watching *The Blair Witch Project* is a result of our bodily involvement with the image on the screen, such that we place ourselves literally in the shoes of the characters onscreen. What they experience, we experience, seemingly firsthand.

Up until this point, I have only obliquely referred to the interaction between time and space as it is evidenced in moments like the frozen objects of *The Matrix*, in which time slows or freezes in order for the spectator to appreciate depth of space. However, the interaction between space and time within the phenomenological sense of embodied perception of the image is a far more complicated issue to which I will eventually return in Chapter Five, as a conclusion to my argument. Within Michel de Certeau's definition of space is an understanding of time as one of many vectors of movement; I will discuss the connection between space and non-linear narratives in films such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Run Lola Run*, and *Go*, where space is reliant upon motion and the rupture of chronological boundaries, where instances of coincidence and synchronicity become central to establishing a particular narrative in time and space. I will also discuss Mike Figgis' experimental feature *Time Code*, in which four video cameras record four 93-minute continuous takes across four lines of a particular narrative, and the results are

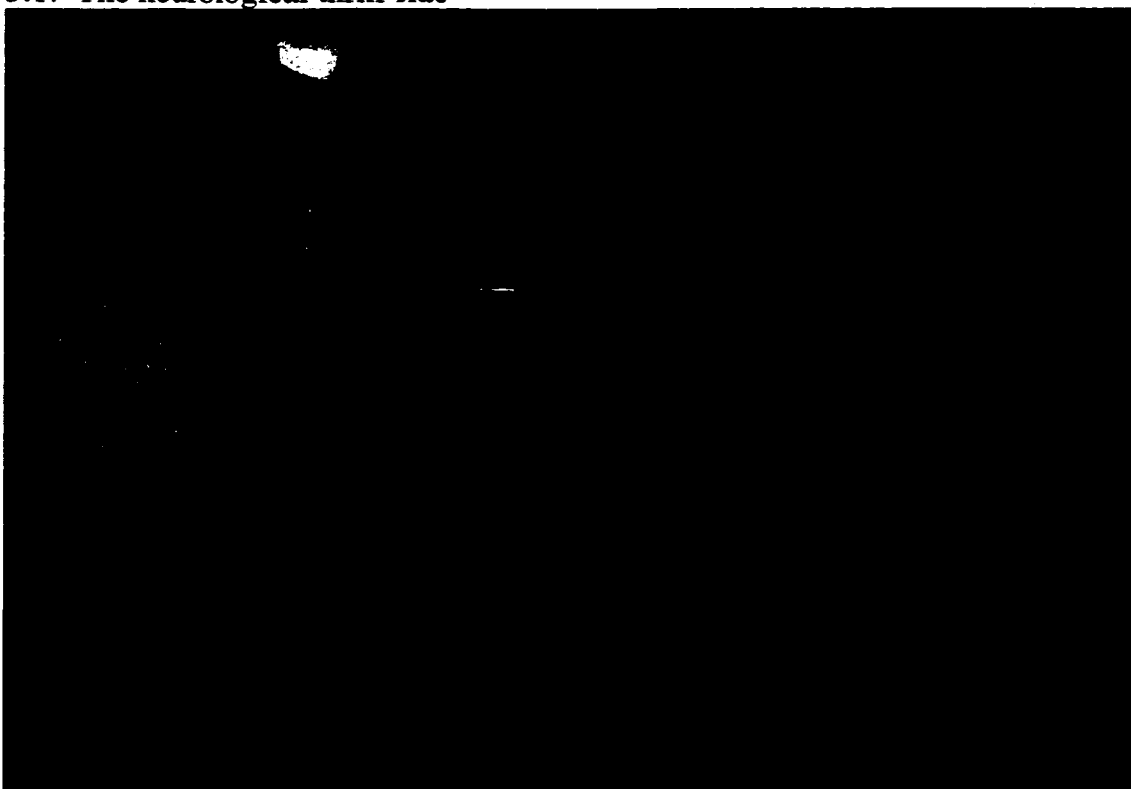
displayed on a screen divided into four sections, resulting in the ability to witness an event or object simultaneously from multiple angles.

However, a further discussion of the embodied zero-point of perception is necessary in relation to film as a technological medium. At work in a hand-held film like *The Blair Witch Project* is an assumption of authenticity that is made more explicit in the movies of the Dogme 95 filmmaking collective. The apparent problem for a filmmaker attempting to truly depict the camera as the embodied perception of the spectator is the simple fact that the camera *is not and can never be* the actual body of the spectator, as was specifically noted of Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake*. Traditional critics might argue that what the spectator witnesses is only a re-presentation, and therefore only an illusion. Despite the apparent "real-life" authenticity of *The Blair Witch Project*, the film is after all a construct. These are actors and the footage they capture is edited together at a later date. More to the point, when we see that film, we are not perceiving the actual events as they unfold in the woods, we are seeing a recording of them. We would seem to be inevitably distanced from them both temporally and spatially by the very nature of film as a recording. So there can never be true authenticity in film, at least not in the sense that our everyday perception of life as we live it can be said to be authentic. This apparently inevitable paradox is at the center of the Dogme films. They further illustrate the paradox of filmic authenticity, and yet clearly stated within the foundations of the Dogme project is the belief that film can be an authentic presentation of experience. My discussion of the Dogme project will take us beyond the directly character-based notion of the zero-point perception; the camera, no longer representing the point-of-view of a particular character, now finally allows us to move within the film space as ourselves,

anonymous voyeurs to and yet active participants in the acts before us. This ability only becomes possible through instrumentally mediated perception.



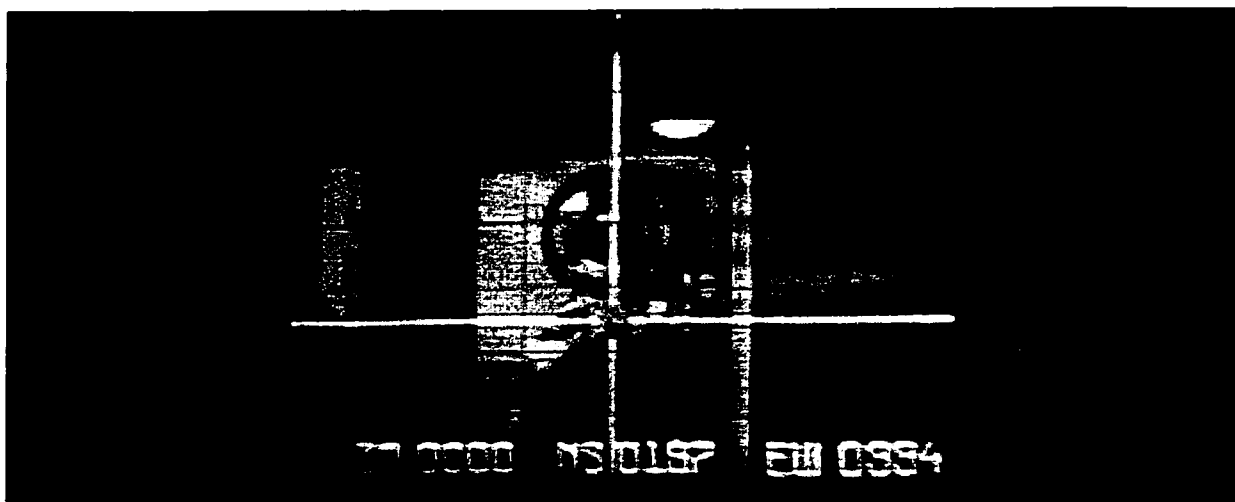
3.1: The neurological thrill-ride



3.2: The teapot fly-through



3.3: Detonation



3.4: Blade Runner image tracker



3.5: The woman in the background



3.6: Close-up on the woman



3.7: Neo and Agent Smith, mid-air

#### IV. Dogmatic Spaces: Dogme 95 and Embodiment of Authenticity

We grasp external space through our bodily situation. A “corporeal or postural schema” gives us at every moment a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them. A system of possible movements, or “motor projects,” radiates from us to our environment. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “An Unpublished Text,” 5)

Early in the year 2000, I was working at a video store in Seattle, earning extra money while studying for my doctoral exams. Thomas Vinterberg’s movie *The Celebration* (original title, *Festen*, 1998) had recently been released to video; upon its theatrical release, Vinterberg’s film instigated a wave of international acclaim for both its visceral emotional appeal and the timeliness of its technological and aesthetic approach, having been shot entirely on a hand-held DigiBeta camera. It enjoyed a successful theatrical run and placed Vinterberg, and his filmmaking collective Dogme 95, in the minds of critics and scholars across the globe.<sup>39</sup> One day at the video store, while I was working at the counter, a middle-aged woman came in to return *The Celebration*; it turns out that she was a professional caterer, and made it her habit to see any movie that dealt with food and meals. Her daughter had recommended this film, as it centers around a

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<sup>39</sup> *Festen* was nothing less than an international phenomenon: Vinterberg was interviewed in *The New York Times*, the movie was called a breakthrough by critics, and the Danish filmmaking collective that Vinterberg represented, *Dogme 95*, became not only a topic of conversation among critics, filmmakers, and theater-goers around the world, but also served as a rebellious call to arms against the complacency of traditional filmmaking. Shot on Digi-Beta, produced according to a strict code of rules known as The Vow of Chastity, which attempts to do away with all forms of excess and superficiality, and having been awarded the Special Jury’s Prize at Cannes in 1998, *Festen* was without question unlike anything that had appeared on theater screens before. As one critic would state the case in *Res*, a magazine devoted to “the future of filmmaking,” “filmmakers looking to make the switch from film to DV [digital video] seemed to be waiting for some form of proof that would validate DV as a viable filmmaking medium. Along came Thomas Vinterberg’s *Festen*, and suddenly the conversation about format switched to a conversation about substance – not in methodology, but in content” (Turk 14). The implication is not that Vinterberg’s film

family's celebration of the father's sixtieth birthday, complete with a day of dining, drinking, and socializing.

So, given my interest in Danish cinema, and curious by what audiences other than film specialists might make of Vinterberg's shining international debut, I asked the middle-aged caterer at the counter what she had thought of it. She hated it. She had turned it off halfway through and refused to watch the rest. She was irritated with her family member for having recommended it. Not only did the film not dwell overtly upon food and dining beyond the context it provides for exploring issues of secrecy, family dynamics, and Freudian psychodrama, the film actually made her physically ill, with all its handheld camera work, jittery editing, and overall low-budget feel. She couldn't understand why anybody would want to make a movie that looked like it was shot at a family reunion by drunken Uncle Bob.

While I don't agree with her assessment of the film and its merits, I think her instinct was right on the mark. How better to make a movie about a family's eldest, prodigal son returning to the fold on his father's birthday to reveal to family and friends that the seemingly upstanding patriarch had molested him and his twin sister throughout the childhood, that her suicide as an adult had its roots in the father's sins, and that the son's own descent into madness had started in a dark and painful childhood. Part of the discomfort this film evokes is the all too real appearance of authenticity that is part of the very form of the film, with its hand-held video cinematography, apparently clumsy editing, less than optimal lighting, and seemingly spontaneous acting. But as I will argue, there is more to her reaction than simple discomfort of a story told well enough to seem

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lacked content, but that up until this point, such a conversation had simply been unnecessary, even

real. The style of the film, owing to the constraints under which Vinterberg produced it, effects a relationship between viewer and the narrative-filmic space that places the viewer in the center of the film, events happening around her. The caterer's nausea, as I will suggest, stems to a significant extent from resisting the zero-position of perception in this film.

A particular set of sequences in *Festen* presents my argument most succinctly. Christian (Ulrich Thomsen), the oldest brother, returns to the family estate after many years abroad. He goes to his room to rest and is joined by Pia (Trine Dyrholm), a maid and waitress at the resort with whom Christian once had a relationship. It is clear that she still longs for Christian, but also understands that something is impeding his emotional stability. They discuss their lives, and Pia prepares to take a shower, hoping to perhaps be joined by Christian, who instead falls asleep in a chair. In a nearby room, the youngest son, Michael (Thomas Bo Larsen) and his wife Mette (Helle Dolleris) are preparing for dinner. Michael discovers that his dress shoes have not been packed and flies into a rage, holding Mette responsible for insuring that he is presentable to his father. His father's approval is clearly more important than anything else, even the well-being of his wife and children. The situation quickly degenerates into a bitter display of shouting, recrimination, and near violence, with the two squaring off like well-trained boxers. Meanwhile, the surviving sister, Helene (Paprika Steen), is shown to her room by a hotel employee, only to realize that this is the room in which her sister, Christian's twin, killed herself not so many months before. At first she considers finding a different room, but eventually decides to stay. She begins pacing about the room, scrutinizing the

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unthinkable. *Festen* quite literally made a new form of filmmaking apparent.

walls, peering under furniture, clearly looking for something. She explains that as children she and her sister would play a game, in which they would leave coded clues for each other that would eventually lead to a treasure. The treasure she now searches for is the sister's suicide note, which has never been found.

The three sequences take place simultaneously, and the editing cross-cuts from room to room in order to unfold each piece of narration at the same pace. However, what is most notable about the sequences is the cinematography. The hand-held camera paces throughout the scenes like one of the characters themselves, reflecting the tempo and temperament of each respective conflict at hand. Michael shouts at Mette, berating her for not having packed the proper shoes. He gestures to his feet, declaring that he cannot greet his father wearing only his socks. She shrieks back that he should have taken responsibility for packing his own belongings. The camera follows each line of dialogue without cuts. It starts with Michael as he shouts at Mette, tilts down to reveal his feet wearing only a pair of white tube-socks, pivots and tilts up to Mette for her reaction, and then pans back to Michael for his response. The camera movement follows the same line of action that our own eye would take, were we present *in the room*, witnessing the scene as part of deep multi-dimensional space, and not a passive viewer on the other side of a screen stretching 180° across the front of a theater hall. Likewise, as Helene tracks clues through her dead sister's room, into the bathroom, and ultimately into the bathtub where the sister slit her wrists, the camera tracks along and up the walls, across the ceiling and down again, under and behind furniture, along baseboards. Rather than cutting to each specific location as Helene specifically looks at it, the camera instead follows the line of eye-sight as it would move through the scene, again as if we were there, experiencing the

scene for ourselves. Very little effort is made to preserve a sense of the 180° rule; the logic of the sequence operates in a full, 360° space in which events happen all around the camera, not just in front of it. A sense of orientation is preserved through minimal cutting, so that the spectator can track the progress of the camera as it moves, providing a minimum of gaps that might challenge the spatial placement of the viewer. Nevertheless, the effect is to place each member of the audience in the position of the camera, no longer an invisible and detached viewer, but an active participant in the scene and in the realization of space.

The effect is similar to the sense of zero-point embodiment as discussed in relation to the hand-held cinematography of *The Blair Witch Project*. However, there is a crucial distinction between the spatial logic of that film and *Festen* and the other Dogme 95 films; in the Dogme films, we are placed as *ourselves* within the space of the film. In *The Blair Witch Project*, the effectiveness of the film relies upon placing the viewer in the position of a specific character, so that our empathy for him is forced by placing us within the realm of his own experience. The narrative of that film is careful to make clear who is holding the camera, who is filming, so that we are anchored to a particular character's point of view, and we are never allowed to exist in a space abstract from the three characters. That is to say, we never are allowed the kind of detached, omniscient perspective assumed in traditional filmmaking. *Blair Witch* elicits our sympathy, and our fear, by putting us in the shoes, so to speak, of the characters. Later, when the movie begins to manipulate our spatial orientation by transposing visual and audio cues, we nevertheless retain the perspective of a particular character. On the contrary, in all of the Dogme movies to varying degrees, we are placed as *ourselves* within the space. We are

not embodying a specific character as explained by the diegesis; we are uncomfortable participants placed directly in the midst of the scene. Whereas traditional film theory focused upon the role of the spectator as a passive voyeur in the cinema, the logic of the Dogme films<sup>40</sup> mandates that if we are voyeurs, we are active voyeurs. The characters on the screen may not see us, but we are among them.

The logic of the hand-held camera, as I noted in Chapter Three, relies upon Husserl's notion of the body as the zero-point of perception, particularly as taken up by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and the manner in which the phenomenologists do away with the Cartesian split between subject and object. Intentionality specifically implies that the subject and object are caught up in each other, intermingled parts of a whole. Every human, or subjective, action is an act toward an object; consequently, our subjective understanding of the world is founded upon the objective world. This basic concept about the relation between subject and object underlies Husserl's notion of the zero-point of perception, and consequently my definition of depth in cinema. The spectator in the theater reaches out to the image as the image reaches out to her, similar to the subject's experience of the real world outside the theater. The image has depth because, perceptually, the spectator's body engages it as a deep or "real" space, nevertheless aware that it is a construct. This centrality of the body in perceiving depth, so central to Merleau-Ponty in his understanding of Cézanne, is clearly anticipated by Husserl. He states the case most clearly in *Ideas II*, writing "the Body, in virtue of the constitutive

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<sup>40</sup> *Festen* is clearly not the first film to exploit this possibility. Cinema vérité, as mentioned, is an important precursor for the documentary-style cinematography of Dogme, and raised many of the same arguments about illusion and authenticity. What cinema vérité did not do was acknowledge the inherent paradoxes of its goals, as Dogme clearly does. The importance of this gesture reveals a significant current in the Dogme "philosophy" in general: the importance lies in the process, not the product.

role of the sensations, is of *significance for the construction of the spatial world*"

(164). Husserl's idea that we place our body centrally in constructing space is crucial in comprehending film and narrative. We understand the film by placing our bodies in it and by experiencing its images through our bodies. The zero-point of perception that is our body is placed within the space constructed on the screen, requiring us to occupy the position of the camera as it is born by a human body throughout the narrative construct. We are literally placed in the zero-point not only of the film space as it is constructed and recorded, but also of the narrative space as the story unfolds around the camera.

Dogme 95 embodies this perspective at its extreme. However, the manner in which this dynamic plays out across the Dogme films is a complicated tangle involving the role of the director, the intent and language of the Dogme Vow and Manifesto, and the role of the hand-held camera and the camera-man. All the elements build upon Dogme's essential claim of authenticity, the idea that filmmaking can be the act of capturing a moment in time and space with a minimum of distorting manipulation. Claims of authenticity must be reconciled with the very nature of film as a technologically constructed medium. Making that reconciliation concludes my understanding of how these films posit the human body as the center of a deep space captured by the film image; in order to do so, I will eventually turn to Don Ihde's notion of instrumentally mediated perception. But before that reconciliation can be made, one must first understand Dogme's underpinning claims of authenticity.

## The Director's Liberation

On Monday, March 13, 1995, Danish filmmakers Thomas Vinterberg and Lars von Trier sat down to write a set of rules for a new type of filmmaking. Tired of the constraints of traditional production models, and sickened by the non-stop parade of the same tired plots, shallow characters, and clichés dressed up with flashy special effects – all marketed on the attraction of the director's name and the appeal of the actors – von Trier and Vinterberg set about outlining a new model for making film. In doing so, they constructed the framework for the filmmaking collective, *Dogme 95*, “Dogme” being the Danish word for “Dogma.”<sup>41</sup> The resulting documents from that meeting, “The Dogme 95 Manifesto” and “The Vow of Chastity,” would present a call-to-arms to their fellow Danish directors, and eventually to the world. Soon joined by Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring, the four Dogme “brethren” each set out to produce their cinematic artifact in accordance with the Dogme rules. Vinterberg's *Festen* (The Celebration, 1998) would come first, and would go on to compete against Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *Idioterne* (The Idiots, 1998) at Cannes, winning the Special Jury Prize.<sup>42</sup> Next came Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Mifunes sidste sang* (Mifune, 1999), which played to critical and audience acclaim around the globe, winning the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1999. The final Danish Dogme film, *The King is Alive* by Kristian Levring, is at the time of this writing playing in film festivals internationally to an enthusiastic reception. In the interim between *Festen* and *The King is Alive*, Dogme 95 became an international cause

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<sup>41</sup> In their official documents, the directors tend to favor the Danish spelling *dogme*; hence, I will follow their lead. Moreover, as I see the entire project as being specifically linked to the history of Danish filmmaking, it seems only fitting to use the Danish spelling here.

<sup>42</sup> Von Trier's continued disappointment at not winning the Palme d'Or would eventually be solved in 2000 with the victory of *Dancer in the Dark*, starring Björk.

celebre. Non-Danish directors signed on to the project. American director Harmony Korine (*Gummo*) released *julien donkey-boy* (1999), presenting it to the Dogme 95 brethren for their certification. Likewise, Jean-Marc Barr, a close friend of Lars von Trier,<sup>43</sup> released *Lovers* (1999). Though not as successful as the Danish films, these movies would prove that Dogme was far from an isolated phenomenon. Many others were *rumored* to have expressed interest, among them Paul Morrissey and, in a stunning display of perversity given the tone and intent of the project, the big-budget effects wizard Steven Spielberg. By late 1999, Dogme, and its platform, could rightly be said to have caused a revolution of sorts in international filmmaking. The digital video technique of *Festen* and *Idioterne* would open the doors for critical and commercial acceptance of feature films shot on small budgets using digital technologies: Miguel Arteta's *Chuck and Buck* (2000), von Trier's own *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), Mike Figgis' *Time Code* (2000), Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000). Dogme 95, initially formed as a revolution, has become an institution in itself.

The intent of the Dogme project is to constrain directors to a strict and spartan production style, in which artistic license would be minimized and the scope of the projects limited, thereby freeing their ability to focus upon the act of capturing the truth of the moment and their characters on film. Like a poet working within a metric form, they would be freed by their constraints. As Thomas Vinterberg states it, "først og fremmest gjorde reglerne, denne begrænsning, arbejdet til absolut det sjoveste og i virkeligheden det mest befriende, jeg har været med til. Så skægt nok har det haft den fuldstændig modsatte effekt. Netop fordi der var så klare rammer, havde vi en meget let

følelse inden for dem. Vi kunne boltre os frit” (Vinterberg 13) [first and foremost, the rules, this boundary, made the work absolutely the most fun, and in reality the most liberating, that I have participated in... Precisely because there were such clear rules, we felt very light within them. We could break free.] Elsewhere, Vinterberg calls *Festen* and Dogme 95 his “attempt to undress film, to reach the ‘naked film’” (Vinterberg, Dogme website).<sup>44</sup> Søren Kragh-Jacobsen states the case in these terms: “it’s liberation from the way a director can be raped by technology, the fact that you can be tyrannized by all the expensive gear, by the cranes, filters, dollies and spotlights; in that area we can’t beat the Americans anyway, so we Europeans should head in another direction.”<sup>45</sup> (Ebbe Iversen, *Berlingske Tidende*, as cited on the Dogme 95 website).

Unfortunately, very few directors or critics apparently understood that the political and artistic agendas could not be separated. Dogme became either a political cause or an artistic exercise. Consequently, the project became for many, literally, *the* one and only manifesto for a new way of making movies; the official rules overcame the creative process and ultimately became the same type of bourgeois cinematic codification to which Dogme was responding. It is possible to apply, for a fee, for Dogme certification through their administrative body.<sup>46</sup> Worse, the tone of the Dogme project, with its highly ironic, self-aware, and self-reflexive positioning, was largely misunderstood. In an interview with *Res*, a magazine devoted to digital filmmaking,

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<sup>43</sup> Perhaps best known for his starring role in Luc Besson’s *The Big Blye* (1988), Barr also plays a secondary character in von Trier’s *Breaking the Waves* (1996).

<sup>44</sup> This, and many other useful pieces of information and interviews to which I refer, can be found at the Dogme 95 website: [www.dogme95.dk](http://www.dogme95.dk).

<sup>45</sup> Kragh-Jacobsen’s use of the terms “rape” and “tyranny” are at once fascinating and disturbing. The director is cast as a victim, violated by traditional means of production. Though I find his language overwrought and tinged with alarming overtones, his point remains vividly clear.

<sup>46</sup> See Appendix D for the application form.

well-known director Mike Figgis, without once mentioning the words *Dogme* or the names *Vinterberg* or *von Trier*, comes off sounding like a bad imitation of the Manifesto. Speaking of his digital film *Time Code*, which simultaneously tells four interweaving “real time” stories through the use of a screen split four ways, Figgis states:

As an audience, we’ve been corrupted by too much sugar and too much popcorn. Film has become such a prostituted art form – it’s been to bed with far too many people and we know that. In the crudest terms, we don’t feel like we’re getting a virgin anymore. So one has to reinvent a kind of chastity for the cinema, one that allows you to enter the relationship with cinema in a fresh way. (*Res 33*)

Despite the crude metaphors<sup>47</sup> and the assumption of filmmaking, and film viewing, as a boys-only club, Figgis echoes the more strident call to film authenticity as seen in the Manifesto, even going so far as to use the word *chastity*. However, what he does not seem to grasp, and what so many other non-Danish filmmakers and critics seem to have missed entirely, is that *Dogme* was, at least initially for the Danish filmmakers, a game. Vinterberg describes the conditions under which the Manifesto and Vow were written:

There is an implicit duplicity in The Dogme 95 Manifesto. On one hand it contains a deep irony and on the other it is most seriously meant. Irony and seriousness are interlinked as inseparable. What we have concerned ourselves with is the making of a set of rules. In this sense it is a kind of

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<sup>47</sup> Figgis again here echoes the language of Vinterberg, with his hope to “undress film”, or Kragh-Jacobsen, with his language of rape and violation by technology. What is interesting is the way in which Figgis turns the tables; suddenly, rather than a predator or a force to be struggled against, film becomes a prostitute, the product of too many other lovers. As we shall see, the call for purity and authenticity will be echoed throughout the *Dogme* project. Yet, whereas for Figgis, film becomes a whore that must be rescued from

play, a game called 'rule-making'. Seriousness and play go hand in hand. A clear example of this is that the very strict and serious Dogme 95 Manifesto was actually written in only 25 minutes and under continuous bursts of merry laughter... Still, we maintain that we are in earnest. Dogme is not for fun. It is, however, both liberating, merry and almost fun to work under such a strict set of rules. It is this duplicity which is the magic of 'Dogme'. (From the Dogme website).

Dogme is, as Kragh-Jacobsen once called it, "more of a cure than a creed" (Riding 22).

So what, exactly, is Dogme 95 calling for? What are the contents of the prescription the Dogme brethren wrote for themselves?

### **Revolutionary Language**

From its outset, the Manifesto embraces a seriousness of language that calls to mind, not coincidentally, the Communist Manifesto. With its almost Marxist zeal and calls for cinematic purity and authenticity, the Dogme Manifesto and the Vow of Chastity intend to free the director from the constraints that come with traditional, Hollywood-inspired production methods. Bolstered by a cinematic call to arms, Dogme filmmakers set out to create a new type of film, shooting according to the strict *Vow of Chastity*, a preconceived set of rules to which each director swears his allegiance and from which each film would be reviewed for its purity. Dogme is not the first collective of directors, nor are they the first filmmakers to make movies according to preset rules. The French

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her errant ways by a forceful director with a clear vision of her potential, for the Dogme filmmakers, film, like the call-girl protagonist of *Mifune*, is something that can transcend its past by seizing the moment.

New Wave, to which the Manifesto makes direct reference, are in many ways the ideological precursors to which Dogme is responding. As the Manifesto announces:

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby ... false!

By referring to a new wave that turns to muck, the Manifesto makes direct claims to the French New Wave for its inspiration and reaction. Moreover, it points to the year 1960, by which time Truffaut had already made *The 400 Blows* (1959) and *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), Godard was finishing *À bout de souffle* (1960), and Resnais had released *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959); the Sixties would be the decade of the New Wave's greatest productivity. Moreover, the project refers indirectly to various other antecedents through its call for a disciplined austerity. One thinks immediately of Italian Neo-Realism, for the anti-escapism of de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) or Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), and of the documentary inspired *cinéma vérité* found in the films of D.A. Pennebaker or the Maysles Brothers, as well as numerous other politically inspired cinematic movements. In particular, Dogme borrows from Neo-Realism and *cinéma*

*verité* the goal of capturing purity or truth on film as a means of rebellion against illusionistic or excessive tendencies among filmmakers and against bourgeois complacency in general. With its multiplicity of references both political and aesthetic – Marxism, neo-Realism, the French New Wave, cinema *verité*, even the Ten Commandments through the Vow of Chastity – Dogme’s gesture toward any one particular ideology becomes less important than its general allusion to all revolutionary platforms. As much a political stance as an aesthetic one, the Dogme Manifesto argues that directorial excess supports the complacency of bourgeois taste: the illusion and artifice attainable by unrestrained technology and augmented by auteuristic directors only leads the audience away from a true understanding of the characters before them. Auteurism encourages individualistic, even solipsistic, excess in the Romantic ideal of a single vision by a single artist.

Closer analysis of the language of the Manifesto and the Vow reveal an assumption of the possibility of authenticity in the moment, of the potential for film to transcend notions of “representation” as explained by the traditional focus on mimesis in film theory. Instead, Dogme 95 relies upon the idea of “presentation,” in which the camera can faithfully record the moment in a pure and authentic manner, expressing this perception to an audience that perceives it in an active manner. Stylistically, as I have suggested the Dogme films place the spectator not as a passive recipient, or subject, that is separate from the image-object upon the screen, but instead as an active interpreter that is positioned literally within the cinematic and narrative space of the film. But there is a paradox inherent to Dogme 95 that is not only woven into the language of the Manifesto and the Vow, but also an artifact of the collective’s largely undervalued dialogue with

Danish film history. The language of Dogme 95 makes claims of authenticity and purity through its discussion of false bourgeois illusion. Elsewhere, I will argue this is largely a continuation of a project evident in Danish film from the silent era. However, film is an artificial medium, and the dominance of film theory to date has worked to understand its' effects as an illusion of reality. How can a filmmaker strive toward truth, and abandon, artifice and illusion if the quintessential nature of film *is* the artificial illusion of truth?

The Dogme 95 Manifesto and the accompanying Vow of Chastity<sup>48</sup> are fairly brief documents, and yet manage to pack a remarkable amount of information, assumption, and intent within their brief length. The Manifesto and Vow are more than simple declarations of purpose from a group of filmmakers who see themselves working within an artistic vacuum; far from it. Vinterberg and von Trier, in writing these documents, also engage a dialogue with the history of filmmaking. The documents serve the purpose of addressing certain historical moments and certain filmmakers and simultaneously presenting Dogme 95 as a revolutionary clarifying spirit, literally something old and yet new. Beginning with the statement that “Dogme 95 has the express purpose of countering ‘certain tendencies’ in the cinema today,” it is clear that they are referring not just to their own small nation. As the Manifesto states, “The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.” The inherent critique of the French New Wave is that the movement as a whole is subject to the whims and temptations of the individual directors. Though taken as a group with common goals, the group possessed no unifying central

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<sup>48</sup> For complete texts of both, see Appendixes A and B.

tenet, thereby susceptible to individual tastes and, perhaps, weaknesses. As the Manifesto states, “The wave was never stronger than the men behind it... The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby... false! To DOGME 95 cinema is not individual!”

This reaction against auteur theory, seen as “bourgeois romanticism,” is one of the most significant elements of the Manifesto. Vinterberg and von Trier aspire to a purer form of filmmaking, one that is not tainted by individual tastes and personal whims. As such, the director is to become but one role within the functioning machine that is the film process, no more or less than the actors or technicians. Less, in fact, as the director is not allowed to credit himself in any way for directing the film. The director becomes more closely equivalent to a piece of technology, an extension of the camera or editing equipment. The director is not an artist, creating the movie according to his personal vision; he is a clear medium for transmitting the moment directly to the spectator. As stated in rule Number 10 of the Vow, “I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a ‘work,’ as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.” Underlying this attack upon the director as artist-auteur is the notion that there is *truth*<sup>49</sup> to be had, and that it can be recorded faithfully by technology. However, it is a truth that is vulnerable to individual notions of taste and style if not treated with faithful, pre-established rigor. This is a unique moment in contemporary filmmaking, and presents a challenge to dominant theories of mimesis and representation. For Dogme 95, the film is

not seen as a lesser or tainted imitation of what has been recorded. It is seen simply as a vehicle. There is no acknowledged lessening of the moment through recording. It becomes a question not of representation, in which we witness a mirroring or retelling of unreachable events, but of *presentation*, the conveyance of an active experience. There is an assumption of authenticity, that the moment can be accurately captured, unadulterated by the medium, and presented to the spectator's perception. As I will argue later, the films place the viewer in the moment, a direct witness, and not as the detached observer of a moment that is always already absent. The Dogme critique of the New Wave is that the directors allowed themselves to affect the presentation of the moment by shaping it to their individual artistic whims.

Likewise, the Manifesto makes an implicit statement about the relation of technology to humanity, criticizing filmmaking for its inherently elitist position as an endeavor reserved to those with the financial means to pursue it. In doing so, it presents an interesting spin on the relation of technology to democracy. "Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratization of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies." Though perhaps naïve in some sense, the claim that anyone can make movies is certainly more true today than it was even ten years ago. With the improvement of digital video cameras, the availability of personal computers with editing software, and the low cost of storage media such as tapes and disks in comparison to film stock, it has become possible for the individual to make a film of comparable quality to the Dogme films without backing from a studio or private

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<sup>49</sup> I employ the term "truth" advisedly, and yet Vinterberg and von Trier introduce themselves into the conversation by calling auteurism "false."

benefactor.<sup>50</sup> However, this emphasis on the possibilities opened up by new technologies to the “everyman” filmmaker depends on two key assumptions. First, the Manifesto assumes there is somehow an innate authenticity that comes from filmmaking by the great unwashed masses, a truth that is somehow implicit in democracy, and that by unleashing technology into the hands of many, whom we can assume will not see themselves as artists but perhaps as truth-tellers, that the resulting films will by their very nature capture the truth. The second assumption is that the advance in technology that makes Dogme 95 possible, specifically meaning digital video,<sup>51</sup> is somehow less susceptible to manipulations according to personal whims *in itself*. As anybody who has worked with digital video can attest, this is far from the truth. The digitization of an image opens the image up to a myriad of potential manipulations, both within the camera while recording through in-camera effects and filters, but also in the editing stage, when editing effects become an issue of a few clicks of the mouse. Again, the Manifesto makes a point of assuming the authenticity of presentation that is possible in filmmaking: “In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticized to death, [the New Wave directors] said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded. The ‘supreme’ task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience.” As Vinterberg and von Trier

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<sup>50</sup> At the time of writing, it is possible to purchase a Macintosh G4 computer, a “prosumer” quality digital video camera, and the editing software suite Final Cut Pro 1.25 for well under \$10,000. As Myrick and Sanchez demonstrate, it is possible to create a feature film for under \$30,000 before marketing and distribution. Compare this with the budget of a “small” budget studio film, which falls generally around one to two million dollars. When a filmmaker is able to put together a production for less, as for example with Robert Rodriguez’s *El Mariachi* (1993), shot for around \$7,000, it is usually accomplished by shooting with cheap film stock on borrowed equipment. In Rodriguez’s favor is also the fact that the movie was shot in Mexico using unknown actors. Of course, budget issues become far more complicated once one takes into account re-edits, distribution, or advertising, factors not included in the fabled low budgets of *El Mariachi* or *The Blair Witch Project*, as those expenses are dealt with after the initial production. The point remains, however, that with each advance in technology, filmmaking becomes more accessible to the common public.

argue, filmmaking has *become* the art of illusion, the emphasis being that film is not inherently illusory in and of itself. They reject the “illusion of filmmaking” as meaningless and empty. “The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.” If film is not an illusion by its nature, than what is it? Presentation, as a real experience perceived, not representation, as an abstracted moment unattainable by technology.

The Manifesto is, however, aware that improving technology is a double-edged sword. The same breakthrough in digital technology<sup>52</sup> that makes *Festen* and *Idioterne* possible also makes possible the contemporary heights of Hollywood spectacle, with digital dinosaurs stalking screaming children and Leonardo DiCaprio diving from the sinking Titanic. The cosmetic enhancements made possible through digital image manipulation, so beautifully explored in the movies of Peter Greenaway, are seen by the Dogme directors as the last blow against truth in filmmaking:

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using the new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind. DOGME 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

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<sup>51</sup> Though Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s *Mifunes sidste sang* was actually shot on 16mm, an exception that will be discussed later.

<sup>52</sup> Again, it is worth noting in passing that the Manifesto and the Vow say nothing at all about digital video. The only reference to any format comes in rule nine of the vow, that the format be Academy 35mm. This however, is not specifically a reference to the medium that the film be recorded on, but rather the format in which the movie be exhibited. Vinterberg and von Trier were aware of the impossibility of shooting a hand-held film on a 35mm camera.

Finally, the Manifesto acknowledges that anyone, even the democratic “everyman” to which the previous paragraphs appeal, can be tempted by the cosmetics of technology. What is needed then is discipline, a set of foreordained rules by which the filmmaker operates, and through which he or she can assure the presentation of the authenticity of the moment as recorded by the camera and presented by the film. Nevertheless, this claim does not question the possibility of truth in filmmaking. The illusions are not the medium itself, they are the intermediary barrier that must be stripped away through a rigorous application of the Vow of Chastity. This assumption of the possibility of authenticity is seen even more clearly in the Vow itself.

The distinction between representation and presentation becomes most clear in considering the Vow of Chastity. Consisting not coincidentally of *ten* rules, the Vow can be divided into three loose categories. One, restrictions on place and time, with Rule One mandating that all shooting be done on location using only the props and settings on hand, as they exist on location, and Rule Seven stating that all action is to take place “here and now,” meaning there is no displacement of time or location. Two, restrictions on the process of recording the moment and location: Rules Two, Three, Four, Five, and Nine mandate that all sound must be ambient and recorded on set, shooting must be handheld, images must be in color with no special lighting, no filters or optical work are allowed, and that the format be 35mm. Three, restrictions on the narrative and the creative process: Rule Six forbids artificial action such as murders or use of weapons, Rule Eight disallows any form of genre movie, and Rule Ten, perhaps the most infamous rule of all, forbids the director from crediting himself or exercising any form of personal taste. Despite the varying nature of the rules themselves, however, the function of each is

the same: to preserve the assumed authenticity of the moment as it occurs before the camera, to strip away the artificial excesses associated with filmmaking. The director is literally restricted to the “here and now,” preventing any artificial manipulations that are not part of the reality of the actors performing on the set. For example, the proscription against murders or artificial action is necessary, as obviously a murder staged on film is not a real or authentic moment in time and place. The actor is not actually killed; what is being recorded in that instance is an illusion. For a murder to occur in a Dogme film, it would require that the actor actually be killed. Likewise, the proscription against genre movies not only precludes the possibility of highly stylized and artificial constructs such as musical numbers or shoot-outs with aliens or hostile natives. For a musical number to be justified in a Dogme film, the characters would require an authentic motivation for breaking into song-and-dance, the event would have to happen in real time, and the other characters would have to respond in a realistic manner. Kragh-Jacobsen circumvents this rule in *Mifune* by having a small party in which somebody plays the guitar while the protagonists dance. But this moment is not a true song-and-dance number; it is a moment occurring within the reality of the movie. It is not abstracted, and *Mifune* is not a musical.

More central to the rule against genre films is the notion that the presence of generic parameters would invite the audience not only to question the authenticity of the movie, which would no longer be a recording of a moment in place and time but an artifact constructed according to illusory and “bourgeois” expectations, but that they would invite the audience to focus on the genre more than the moment itself. When we watch a Gene Kelly musical, we watch with the expectation that there will be singing and

dancing; our expectations form a filter between us and the presentation of truth in the film. Likewise, the rules against sound sweetening, artificial lighting, lens filters, or optical effects not only limit the director to recording what is before him without resorting to personal tastes, but also strip away layers of illusion that stand between the spectator and the presentation of authenticity. The purpose of a Dogme film is to allow characters and situations to develop as real entities. The constraints this places upon the production often shaped the development of the film itself; the rules take over the production, displacing the director entirely. Lars von Trier highlights this situation when discussing his struggles with Rule Two, the requirement that sound and image must not be recorded separately:

The rule means—as I interpret it—that you are allowed to do nothing with the sound and picture after shooting: sound and picture hang together, and neither may be changed or moved afterwards. This means that we often edited according to the sound instead of the picture, because if you require a particular sound or cue, you have to use the picture that accompanies it, which has meant weirder pictures and peculiar differences in the intended result between the sound and picture sides.

In the forest scene we had put a mike up a tree to capture the ambient sound ... it is like reinventing movie-making, don't you see? Bring the ambience forward instead of the sound of the scene itself is a common, simple effect, but now it suddenly became difficult to achieve because the decisions had to be taken on the spot. A load of cinematic effects that

otherwise seem easy or cheap to me suddenly become difficult again

... (From the Dogme 95 website)

Rather than controlling the process of filmmaking, the director becomes subservient to the demands of the moment, creating situations within the film that the director had not imagined during the original conception. The result is similar to the poet writing within a rigid form, in which the meter or rhyme dictates unique, unanticipated considerations, and in doing so challenges and unleashes the poet's artistic sensibility.

The consequence of the Vow of Chastity is to force the director to obey the mandates of authenticity and presentation.<sup>53</sup> The medium of film is not questioned as an adulterating or superficial gloss upon the reality of what occurs on the set, before the camera. Or if it is, if there is an implicit acknowledgment of this possibility within the Manifesto's railing against the potential dangers of the technological storm, it is accepted for the sake of presenting the spectator with an authentic moment and it is reined in by the discipline of the Vow of Chastity. To reverse the logic of this claim, I argue that if film is purely and innately superficial and illusory, then there is no purpose to the reaction against superficiality found in the Manifesto. Film would be doomed to be a tool of bourgeois romanticism before one even started. Dogme 95 must be based upon either the possibly naïve belief that film and the filmmaking process are not artificial, or it must concede this contradiction in reaching for a greater truth.

The process of making a Dogme film is often an exercise in creative rule-bending and may be inherently paradoxical. Throughout interviews granted during the debuts of

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<sup>53</sup> In Jesper Jargil's *The Humiliated* (1998), a documentary on the making of *Idioterne*, von Trier even goes so far as to call the film his attempt to reach authenticity, though by the end of the project, he questions whether anybody believes in that possibility other than himself.

three Dogme films released so far, the directors have attempted to be honest about the ways in which they may have circumvented or even violated the rules. Vinterberg was taken to task by his Dogme brethren for violating Rule Three when he strapped the camera to a boom for a brief shot in *Festen*. He also confessed to having produced a prop when he allowed production assistants to spend budgetary funds on a suit for Ulrich Thomsen (Christian). Likewise, Kragh-Jacobsen confessed to having manipulated the set by shooting some chickens from a neighboring farm into the background of one particular sequence. The directors went so far as to make a formal apology to their Dogme brethren, who then issued a reprimand. One can detect, despite the high-sounding rhetoric, a certain sense of humor underlying these official proclamations that is easily read into the confrontation with all of the potential paradoxes and self-contradictions found in the Dogme project. As Lars von Trier states in an interview with Peter Øvig Knudsen in discussing *Idioterne* and Dogme in general:

In some places, [*Idioterne* is] disastrously silly: malicious, foolish, and meaningless silliness. But the film contains other facets... The new wave gave fresh air, and in the same way Dogme 95 has been designed to give fresh air, to regain lost innocence... Dogme 95 contains a few impossible, paradoxical rules, but the same goes for religious dogmas, too.

To be sure, the fundamental act of making a movie, in which a script is written, actors and crew are assembled on a set, and the results are recorded, is an artificial construct. There is no purpose for this group of people to be doing what they are doing were it not for the filmmaking process. The Dogme filmmakers are not objective documentarists; they are constructing fictional narratives. But this very paradox is part of the attraction of

the Dogme project. It is at once ridiculous and praiseworthy, devoutly tongue-in-cheek and deadly earnest. The challenge is how to best meet the impossible standard set by the Vow; the reward is a new way of making movies.

The directors, at least in their press releases and public relations, seem highly serious; yet, in private interviews, they are keenly aware of the slew of paradoxes, self-contradictions, and potential impossibilities innate to their project. Nevertheless, in many ways, the call for “chastity” by the Dogme directors is in fact a call to authenticity; as clearly seen in the language of the Manifesto and Vow, the Dogme project relies upon an agreed assumption that technology is capable of presenting a moment in time and space authentically. Of his film, and the Dogme project in general, Thomas Vinterberg has stated that he sees it as an intensification of character, the opportunity to confront character due to the lack of technical trickery (Vinterberg 12). Vinterberg makes an indirect connection between the characterization, technology, and style, stating,

There is also a second reason [*for the appeal of Dogme*], which remains true of Danish film and of myself, as I am to a great degree a product of Danish film culture. I think it has been very difficult to liberate ourselves from a certain film convention that has many good qualities, but is also in many ways heavy and stifling. When one, as a film director, is going to make a film, it will automatically happen in a certain way. You have a team of thirty people about you, a large light and sound stage and all sorts of other things that must be planned in advance. It is a large and heavy machine. The results are a particular type of film, and it applies to Danish film in general, I think. (Vinterberg 16)

The director here calls attention to the artificial nature of film production, arguing that the Dogme process, relying as it does upon hand-held camera, unadulterated sets, natural lighting and sound, and natural acting, leads to a more realistic film experience.<sup>54</sup> For

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<sup>54</sup> In many ways, the Dogme 95 project can be seen as a continuation of an aesthetic ideology running through the history of Danish cinema. Critics have noted Danish film's tendency toward naturalism, particularly upon the use of natural lighting and settings, on-location shoots, realistic acting styles, and detailed set design; in other words, focus has been placed largely upon the *mise-en-scene*. This can be seen as a precursor to Dogme's reliance upon authenticity in lighting, setting, and the like, predicting the proscription against manipulation during post-production. This can also be seen in the Danish tendency toward slower editing tempos. One thinks immediately of certain Bergman films, or of the later films of Carl Dreyer. One might argue that this slower editing tempo is mandated by the attention to *mise-en-scene*; the details of the shot are more important than editing effects. The Dogme 95 project, in many ways, is a continuation of a project present since the beginning of Danish film history. Since Denmark's earliest as a major factor in the silent film market, Danish film has been perceived as having a particular style. Ole Olsen's Nordisk Film, still in business today, became a key figure in world cinema, and large numbers of Danish films were exported annually, and the films produced were acknowledged for their unique qualities. From a 1908 review in *Moving Picture World* of the film *En Kvinde af Folket* (1908, *A Woman of the People*):

Now this is what is wanted in moving picture story telling -- no ambiguity, doubt or obscurity.... The photography of this picture is up to the fine standard which the Great Northern Company have set for themselves, the tints and tones being judiciously chosen. What we like about it, however, is the intense realism of the acting. Every word, every gesture of the principal characters in this piece is a masterpiece of carefully studied histrionics. This is another case where the illusion is so perfect that one seems, as it were, to be looking at scenes from life itself. (Mottram 51)

Here attention is drawn to the technical quality of Danish film, as well as the quality of the acting and the general appeal to realism. Of particular interest is the idea that the illusion can be so perfect that the spectator seems to be looking at "scenes from life itself"; the critic accepts the illusionary nature of film, and yet at the same time suggests that there is a moment that can be captured realistically. This rings oddly against the previous sentence, in which the piece is called a "masterpiece of carefully studied histrionics." The critic's assumption seems to be that naturalism or authenticity can only be achieved through careful preparation and solid acting – a notion that runs counter to the spirit of Dogme, with its "show up and shoot" aesthetic. Nevertheless, the possibility of presenting "scenes from life itself" is clearly left open. Moreover, there is a clear implication that if authenticity is to be captured, it can only be done so via discipline and rigor. Here, it is through careful preparation of sets and lighting; in Dogme, it is through the rigor of its guidelines.

Ron Mottram discusses at length the evolution of the Nordisk style, and the impact it had upon world cinema, always stressing the importance of *mise-en-scene*, particularly lighting, sets, and acting styles: "The sets are done with greater attention to realism... The realism of the interiors is matched by a significant use of real locations for the outdoor scenes, while the traveling scenes are done aboard real trains and boats in motion... Most interesting is the consistent use of available light and of studio light that imitates, for expressive purposes, the light of nature" (Mottram 96-7). Dogme continues this tradition of location shooting and natural light; the frequency of outdoor shots is a convenient way of working around the prohibition on artificial lighting, and allows greater space for the handheld camera to work. Still, the effect of this use of natural lighting, when coupled with "realistic" acting and skillful camera work, is most commonly seen as giving a sense of the actual moment as recorded. Editing invites manipulation and superficial post-production changes, and is therefore seen as a step away from authenticity.

Though a complete discussion of the topic is beyond the scope of this project, the films of Carl Th. Dreyer likewise demonstrate a tendency toward Naturalism and away from sensationalism. Particularly in

example, the large ensemble cast was required to sit in on all of the various shots during the long banquet sequences, including close-ups, rather than being allowed to leave the set when they were not on camera. The result is a heightened dynamic between the actors being filmed and the actors off camera, a dynamic visible in the performances. What is more, as the day of shooting wore on, the cast grew increasingly tired, the result being a heightened sense of fatigue as the fictional party progresses over the day. Again, the result is the sort of naturalistic style that has been a key element of Danish national cinema. In the above quote, Vinterberg cannot help but focus upon himself as the creator of the film, and of himself as a product of the Danish tradition of filmmaking. Clearly, Vinterberg is violating the spirit, if not the letter, of the Dogme Vow of Chastity.

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his later films such as *Vredens dag*, (1943, Day of Wrath), *Ordet*. (1954, The Word), and *Gertrud* (1964), Dreyer's style slows down, often to a crawl, becomes more contemplative and depends on fewer camera pyrotechnics. As Dreyer becomes increasingly interested in questions of faith and spiritual struggle, his sets become sparser, cleaner, with a greater reliance upon natural settings and natural lighting. Indeed, along with Ingmar Bergman, one might argue that he is responsible for the general perception of Scandinavian film as consisting almost entirely of long shots and even longer takes of people talking, or not talking at all. Where Dreyer becomes interesting for my argument is through his use of natural lighting and outdoor settings, and his thorough de-emphasis of editing. It would seem that Dreyer's goal was to prevent the distraction of his audience, to force them to focus upon the situation at hand rather than the technology of filmmaking. Again, I would suggest that underlying Dreyer's project is an assumption, perhaps naïve, that the camera can be a truthful participant in the presentation of an authentic moment, and the spectator can be an active interpreter of that moment. The idea of the spectator engaging more deeply in this type of deep, contemplative image echoes André Bazin's notion of film ascribing to the "recording of reality, of those 'facts,' the naked and modest revelation of which, the director, in his loving respect for 'things themselves,' presents" (Michelson ix-x).

The tendency of Danish filmmakers, Dreyer included, to turn to less threatening documentaries during the Nazi Occupation was inspired more by political exigency than aesthetic concern. However, after World War II, while most documentarists turned to fictional narrative, the applied lessons of documentary filmmaking can be seen in the movies appearing throughout the Fifties and Sixties. The influence of documentary filmmaking "becomes apparent in the unvarnished realism which began to appear in narrative. The striving towards authenticity is noticeable in a predilection for location shoots, or in the changes in dialogue, for example, when a novel like *Ditte Menneskebarn* was filmed by Bjarne and Astrid Henning-Jensen as *Ditte, Child of Man* (1946), changes which have the purpose of increasing the realism in the narration" (Widding 16). At the same time, the emphasis on location shooting and realism in sets, dialogue, and therefore presumably acting style, is clearly a continuation of a style established in the silent era, an intensification of the naturalistic style dominant in Danish filmmaking. Likewise, even for heavily "artificial" movies such as *Babettes gæstebud* (1987, Babette's Feast) or *Pelle eroberen* (1987, Pelle the Conqueror) with their historical settings, costumes, and relatively stylized editing, can be argued as a continuation of an emphasis on "authenticity" for their use of natural lighting and outdoor scenes,

Vinterberg responds, “The ‘Dogme’ rules should be considered ‘symbolic’ and not as a means to remaining secretive or hidden. They are an expression of the directors wish to recede into the background and thus push other talent into the foreground. The ‘Dogme’ directors finest duty is to register private moments between persons and not to influence them” (from the Dogme 95 website). As such, the Dogme project clearly reacts to the traditional emphasis upon the director’s role in the creating and marketing of films, which in Denmark traditionally centers upon the director as auteur; interestingly, Vinterberg argues that by receding, the director heightens the presence of other talents, including the performance of the actors themselves. In other words, Vinterberg allows the actor to act “naturally,” without intervention; he specifically does not want to influence the “private moment between persons.” Of course, one can argue that the camera itself always presents an influence, an observational effect; the artificial situation of making a film itself exerts an a priori form of influence. But the Dogme directors are aware of the paradoxes. What they struggle toward is to create an artifact that as closely as possible parallels the real act of existence, toward an approximation of our immediate, everyday, authentic existence *in-the-world*. In doing so, the film assumes its own form of authenticity beyond the superficiality or artificiality of the traditional film. This presentation of authenticity assumes not only of the “transparency” or unadulterating nature of the technology, but also the potential for a presentation of reality based upon perception. Perception, despite its ability to be incorrect, cannot be questioned for itself; it is the zero-point of our experience and the process through which we manifest consciousness.

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eliminating the distraction of the film process as a technology. Consequently, the Dogme project can be

### **Dogme 95 and the Paradox of Authenticity**

I have drawn upon a variety of sources in order to point to the implicit claims of authenticity found in the Dogme 95 project. Only by understanding Dogme's complicated stance regarding the ability of film to capture an authentic moment in time and space can we understand the depiction of a deep space through the two-dimensional film medium. And yet, I have not directly addressed the fundamental paradox at the heart of the Dogme 95 films: claims of authenticity are immediately complicated, if not outright contradicted, by the fact that a movie is a constructed and artificial medium by its very nature. A moment is recorded, that footage is returned to an editing studio, and it is assembled into an artifact, the events occurring in an order dictated by the needs of the narrative and not the spatial-temporal order in which they actually occurred. Is it even possible to make claims of authenticity in relation to film? Certainly, many scholars would argue that it is not. And yet, as illustrated, claims of authenticity are inherent to this project. So how do we resolve the inherent paradox of attempting to present authenticity through a medium that is by nature inauthentic? The experiencing of a movie is not actually me, the individual, experiencing the authentic moment occurring as one unique moment in time and space. How does Dogme even account for the inherent paradox of attempting to present the authenticity of a moment that is in itself, in a sense, not an authentic moment? The event recorded is still a film set, in which actors are acting according to a script. The actors are not the characters they portray; the events enacted are not the events they claim to be. The film is an artifice of reality; it is not the reality of

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seen as the most recent example of a much longer tradition in Danish cinema.

script itself. Which is to say, the only reality of a film set is that this is a film set. It is not the story itself. So how can this paradox of authenticity be related to the effect of the hand-held camera, in which the spectator is placed within the space of the film as though it were authentically occurring around him or her? Can there be an authentic moment of zero-point perception within the constructed space of a film? The easy answer is no, there cannot.

The more complicated answer is that the Dogme filmmakers knew this beforehand, but set out to accomplish something they knew would be inherently impossible on many levels, not for the sake of achieving the goal but for the treasures that would be unearthed along the way. Just as I cannot ever truly experience what another person sees and feels in her own body, because I am my own zero-point of perception and therefore filter everything through my embodied perception first, likewise the camera cannot truly place us in a moment that is past, recorded elsewhere in time and space. But the intent of Dogme is not to overcome that impossibility; the intent is to challenge the current state of filmmaking and strive toward presenting something closer to the authenticity of our embodied perception than is currently embraced by big, spectacularly false and illusionistic movies playing in theaters around the world. The tongue-in-cheek irony nature behind the high formality of the Manifesto and the Vow is also present in the overall aim of Dogme. But that does not mean that the movies themselves are therefore failures. They do present the authenticity of the moment by acknowledging the nature of what they do.

Similar to *Blair Witch*'s ability to foreground its constructed nature by making the film clearly about the process of recording a particular moment, the Dogme films are able

to foreground their constructive process by making the technology and technique of the film so clearly evident. When the Dogme films were released, the majority of immediate reaction to them was for the audacity of the project itself. Most audience members entered the theater already aware of the elaborate set of rules and the ideological agenda behind them. However, in watching a Dogme film, the spectator is aware that this is a unique style of film, even if they are not aware of the particular set of rules that went into its making. The style foregrounds itself, through its camera work, through its lighting and other mise-en-scène elements, through its very existence as a film within a larger project. Once acknowledged, in a process similar to the hand-held POV cinematography of *Blair Witch*, the technology can recede, become an extension of the spectator's bodily perception of this movie. The spectator can accept her position as the zero-point of perception because it is understood that the rules governing the creation of this film mandate a hand-held camera, that the film footage was produced by a specific human body operating within a particular moment in time and space. To return to where I started, I would suggest that the middle-aged caterer who felt sick while watching this movie felt that nausea not because she was distracted by the film, but rather that the movie had succeeded in placing her as a zero-point of perception within a cinematic and narrative space that the technology of the recording itself could not successfully record. In other words, despite the ability of the hand-held camera to place us as a zero-point within a 360° space, and despite its ability to make us perceive the film as though we were experiencing it authentically, our expectations betray us, as the camera ultimately *cannot* be our true perception. The caterer felt nausea because she had come to expect the camera to act as a true, authentic organ of perception, to act as our own organs of

perception would act in this situation. When the camera fails to be her perfect perception, she experiences a deep sense of disorientation.

This effect is clearly seen in a moment from *Festen*, when the audience is intentionally reminded not only of the rules by which this film is made, but also by the presence of the camera-man manipulating the camera by hand. Christian has confronted his father, and after being banished from the manor, finds his dead twin's suicide note in which she makes clear the horrors of their childhood. The note is read before the assembled guests. In an emotional uproar, the father, Helge, (Henning Moritzen) admits his acts and leaves the room. Then, in a truly strange moment, the toastmaster (Klaus Bondam) announces drinks and dancing the next room. In this sequence, the lighting is low, provided by a few dim chandeliers. At the beginning of the sequence, a hand appears from off-screen, lights a candle, and then recedes. (See Fig. 4.1) The initial reaction is to assume that this hand belongs to a character who will be shortly introduced. But this introduction never comes, and one realizes that all of the characters present in the room are accounted for in the background seen behind the hand holding the camera. To whom does this hand belong? One must assume it belongs to the camera-man, Anthony Dod Mantle, lighting a candle as a source of light for the shot. A detail so brief as to be easily missed, the scene nevertheless reminds the spectator that this film is a technological artifact, one being shot by a very present and active camera-man; the cinematography is the result of embodiment via its hand-held demands. What is more, if the spectator is well-aware of the Vow of Chastity, she may also recognize the direct reference to Rule Four, in which a single additional light source may be attached to the camera during low-light situations. The effect is not just to remind the audience that this

is a film shot according to a set of pre-determined rules, but also to remind the audience of the deeply embodied nature of this production. Similar moments abound throughout the Dogme films, in which the embodied camera and the rules by which it behaves foreground themselves: the jostled camera, the occasional low lighting, the absence of a musical score. The spectator is constantly reminded of their position of the embodied center of action, as it has been recorded by the camera.

It may seem that there is a contradiction within my argument here, in that if the film reminds the spectator of its constructed nature as a technological artifact, then he or she would seemingly be unable to place themselves within the role of the zero-point. That point is already occupied by the camera-man, which is clearly not the spectator. Don Ihde addresses exactly this question through his notion of instrumental reality. By arguing that technology becomes experientially transparent when it operates properly, Ihde provides a potential resolution to the paradox of authenticity by arguing that technology is mediated perception. Ihde's central argument is that means of instrumentation should not be dismissed as faulty representations of an unreachable reality. As an example, he offers the perception of the surface of a chalkboard. Feeling it with one's fingers gives the perception of smoothness. Writing on it with chalk would give another, different perception. But if one were to run a dental pick across the surface, one would realize that the chalkboard is in fact rough and irregular. The mediation of the dental pick upon our perception provides new sensory data. But we would not dismiss that perception as false or illusory. Film, as a mediating technology, operates the same way. It offers to the viewer a mediated perception that can present new information perhaps not recognizable without this particular piece of technology. To dismiss that

mediation as somehow innately falsifying and illusory would be to question the very nature of technology, to dismiss elements of our everyday life that we rely upon simply in order to exist: eyeglasses, simple tools, anything that perceptually extends the human body.

Objections arise. First, in the example given, the perception, though mediated, is nevertheless immediate. There is no distance of time between the event, the dental pick running across the chalkboard, and our perception of it. In a film, the events happens, the film is processed and edited, and we perceive the results months, even years after the event occurred. One might argue that the distance of time mandates that the film is an illusory representation of events long gone. Perhaps, and yet consider the telescope. An astronomer gazing upon a celestial body understands that the light reaching his telescope has traveled perhaps thousands of years, that the phenomena he records may be in fact the mere memory of a thing that no longer exists. But he accepts the perception for what it is now. There is a similar, even exaggerated lag in time, but he does not dismiss the perception at its heart. Rather, the distance between event and perception is understood as one factor in the perception and comprehension of this event. The perception is mediated by time and by the telescope.

One might further object that in both examples, the mediation is conducted through an inanimate piece of technology, whereas in film, after the mediation of the recording camera, there is yet another step, in which editors cut, rearrange, and augment the film stock. Their mediation is anything but inanimate. Setting aside instances in which there is no editing, as in Warhol's films or in certain documentary footage, the editor constructs the film intentionally according to individual tastes and whims. But this

is exactly what *The Vow of Chastity* seeks to limit, the distorting whims and tastes of the director and editor. Just as an astronomer might understand that there is a flaw in his lens, and adjust his observations accordingly, the film viewer understands that the film is shaped by certain elements beyond her control. It then becomes a question not of the illusory nature of film, but of the permutations its authenticity has undergone. In the Dogme 95 project, a concerted effort has been made to control the distortions that might occur in the presentation of the moment either through manipulations on the set, manipulations through the camera, or manipulations in the editing room. It seeks an authentic mediation. Clearly, the directors realize this is a task that does not come easily, but must be set about with rigor, imagination, and a forthright acknowledgment of the potential paradoxes of their goal.

The acknowledgment of paradox is perhaps most clearly seen in Lars von Trier's film, *Idioterne* (The Idiots). Though containing fewer swish pans and other clearly hand-held effects than Vinterberg's *Festen*, the movie nevertheless exploits its ability to place the spectator in the zero-point of perception through its obvious digital nature,<sup>55</sup> but more importantly through its thematic emphasis on violating boundaries through the exercise of subjective free-will. Vinterberg places us in the midst of the film, von Trier places us there and then forces us to become a participant in the violation of moral codes, as an expression of our mastery of ourselves as subjects. In many ways the most challenging of the Dogme films, Lars von Trier's *Idioterne* also requires the closest analysis. Of the four original Dogme filmmakers, Lars von Trier is the most internationally established,

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<sup>55</sup> Here, one may refer back to my analysis of *The Blair Witch Project*, in which I make a case for the importance of digital video as a referent for placing the spectator physically in the role of cinematographer.

and the most prolific. Moreover, he is the director most clearly influenced by the established film tradition, stating,

If you examine the history of the cinema the way I'm constantly doing, I've tried to seek some of the lightness and enjoyment possessed by the films I refer to with *The Idiots*: the French new wave, and what I call the Swinging London period—including the Beatles films where they ran through London carrying a giant iron bedstead. The new wave gave fresh air, and in the same way Dogme 95 has been designed to give fresh air, to regain lost innocence. (From the *DOGME 95* website)

In particular, as he has acknowledged elsewhere, von Trier owes a great debt to the films of Danish auteur Carl Th. Dreyer. Von Trier's first commercial work outside of film school, *Medea* (1988), was shot for Danish television from an unfiled script by Dreyer himself, and the resulting film has the feeling of a Dreyer film, with long silences and sequences set against the Danish countryside. Von Trier's later film, *Breaking the Waves* (1995), responsible for establishing his broader international reputation, is clearly a reference to Dreyer for its questions of sin and sacrifice. The film opens with an interrogation sequence most reminiscent of Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, and the inherent issues of faith, persecution, and spiritual trial that recur throughout Dreyer's body of work are clearly taken up in this film, though to different ends. Given this influence by the most well-known auteur in Danish cinema, von Trier would seem to have the largest task in terms of shirking his role as director, a task complicated by von Trier's own international reputation.

Von Trier's recent films have moved away from the technical wizardry of his early films such as *Medea*, *Forbrydelsens element* (1990, *The Element of Crime*), and *Europa* (1992, *Zentropa*), in which he mixes video, digital imaging, and film with color manipulations, backdrops, and other technical tricks to often startling and intriguing effect. With the series *Riget* (*The Kingdom*) (Part I, 1995, Part II, 1998), and continuing on in *Breaking the Waves*, von Trier moves toward more naturalistic acting styles, natural settings, and ambient light and sound. His Dogme film, *Idioterne*, is the story of a group of young radicals who attempt to challenge bourgeois mentality through an imposition of strict rules of conduct. The parallels then between the radicals of *Idioterne* and the participants in the Dogme project are immediate; it is this type of trickery and media sensationalism one comes to expect from von Trier. In the film, a group of young professionals spend their free hours "spazzing out," entering public places and acting as though they are mentally handicapped. Eventually, they retreat to a house in the suburbs and continue their social experiment. The results are tragic, near catastrophic, as one by one the characters are forced to confront the fall out of real life and make a choice between playing the idiot and returning to their outside lives. Of the film, von Trier states,

The idea for *The Idiots* arose at the same time as the Dogme project. At one level the Dogme rules emerged from a desire to submit to the authority and the rules I was never given in my humanistic, cultural-leftist upbringing; at another level they express the desire to make something quite simple. In a normal film production you are hampered by having to make decision about and control an infinite number of things such as

filters and colours. The Dogme rules basically say that you mustn't do any of that. (From the *DOGME 95* website)

Throughout the making of the film, von Trier required his actors to “spazz out” in their private hours, spending hours with each individual actor unlocking their ability to lose themselves in the role. What is more, on the day of shooting the film's climax in which the group engage in an explicit sexual free-for-all<sup>56</sup>, von Trier greeted his cast and crew completely naked, insisting that all people in the project immediately disrobe. The entire day was shot in the nude. These heavily determined acting cues result, ironically, in strangely unmannered performances, as though the actors, like the directors of the Dogme project, have been freed, not bound, by the rules set for them.

As *Festen* violates traditional spatial boundaries with its frenetic camera work, a style that *Idioterne* embraces to a lesser extent, von Trier and the characters of his film violate social boundaries of etiquette and acceptable behavior. As I have explored in relation to the films of Peter Greenaway, the importance of violating boundaries in the differentiation between place and space relies upon the subject-body's ability to act dynamically, to move across borders and boundaries in order to reveal the limitless potential of space and time. These boundaries only serve as objective standards set according to our subjective being; they are not significant in and of themselves. A boundary around a nation exists only in our acceptance of it; the walls that contain the

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<sup>56</sup> This scene, which includes explicit footage of erect penises and about ten seconds of vaginal penetration, guaranteed that the movie would not be shown in the US without an X-rating, equal to box-office poison. Von Trier refused to cut the scene, insisting that the only compromise he would accept is that large black bars, obvious marks of censorship, be placed over the offending genitalia. At first, distributors and censors refused. However, with his growing reputation, von Trier was able to force his position. *Idioterne* played, black bars and all, across the US. This may have been his intent all along: to show the ridiculousness of censorship standards, and to use the resulting compromise to point out the similarities to between his

interior of a house exist as such because we give them that meaning through the measurement of our body. In a truly objective world, there is no difference between the inside and outside of a house, as far as the house itself is concerned. *Inside* and *outside* have significance only to the extent that one condition, *inside* the house, has a different impact upon our bodies than does being *outside* the house. By moving across these boundaries, we reveal that space itself is not a flat or superficial construct that we can experience safely from an objective position. Our experience of the film is one in which our body is used as the measurement for the spaces constructed in it; far from a passive experience, our comprehension of space is necessarily dynamic. The significance of the Dogme films is that they attempt to embrace this model of space by emulating our individual experience as the zero-point of our own perception, despite the variety of technical and theoretical paradoxes.

So what does this mean? To return to my example from *Festen*, in which Helene tracks a set of clues left by her sister, though the camera tracks much the way our eye would, there are moments in which the camera behaves in ways in which our eyes do not. Specifically, it is able to focus in upon clues on the ceiling in ways our eyes do not, the frame of the shot physically moving in on the detail. When our eyes focus upon a spot on the ceiling, our field of vision does not narrow, only our field of focus does. In order to get the same effect as that captured on the camera, we would have to climb and physically bring our head closer to the detail, which the cameraman clearly has not done. Similarly, the blurry swish pans so indelibly linked to handheld camera, in which the camera moves faster across a space than the technology can effectively record the detail,

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behavior and the behavior of his characters. Both attempt to challenge bourgeois mentality and are

is not the same visual effect as when we turn our heads quickly, say to answer an unexpected call from behind our left shoulder. Our eyes are able to focus much more quickly upon details as we move our heads. Finally, and most significantly, Vinterberg cheats. The camera is not entirely handheld. As he admits in his official “Confession” as part of his application for Dogme certification, “I confess that in one take, the camera was attached to a microphone boom, and thus only partially hand-held.”<sup>57</sup> The camera films from an angle that could not be achieved by our own body. What is more, occasionally the camera does cut to an angle to which we have not actively perceived the cameraman moving, causing a jump in the continuity of the cinematography. As the camera tracks across the bathroom, we are given a shot looking down from the top of the shower stall, from above and behind the shower head. In order for this to be possible and still present a truly authentic zero-point experience, the audience would have to watch as the cameraman climbed up to that position and turned around to shoot down. The angle and the positioning of the camera would require that the cameraman be somewhere above the ceiling. It is an impossible position for us to occupy bodily. The combination of effects is disorienting, vertiginous; we have been trained to perceive this narrative and cinematic space as authentic.

Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s film *Mifunes sidste sang* (Mifune) is an interesting counterexample of how this impact can only be achieved through a conscious employment of the hand-held camera as a free-moving emulation of the zero-point body itself. Far more traditional in style and narrative than the previous Dogme films, the film tells the story of a successful young Copenhagener who is called home to the family farm

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punished by a disapproving society.

in rural Denmark to look after his mentally handicapped brother, Rud (Jesper Asholt) after the death of their father. The viewer soon learns that the young man, Kresten (Anders W. Berthelsen), has lied to his new wife (Sophie Graabøl) about his past, and continues to try to keep the truth from her. As the marriage unravels, Kresten falls in love with their housekeeper, Liva (Iben Hjejle), who has answered Kresten's advertisement. Kresten only later learns that Liva is in fact a prostitute, fleeing Copenhagen and the threats of an anonymous phone-caller. The trio is then joined by Liva's younger brother, a troublesome adolescent with a history of delinquency, whom Liva has placed in a boy's academy with the hope of improving his life. Often sentimental, the film neglects to confront some of the key issues between characters. The brothers work through their tensions fairly easily, the woman's past is dealt with almost in passing, and other potential areas of conflict, such as the wreckage of Kresten's marriage, are wrapped up nicely in a happy ending that recalls the most traditional elements of the Classic Code.

Kragh-Jacobsen is loyal to the Vow of Chastity, with a few notable exceptions<sup>58</sup>, but he intentionally does not employ the dynamic cinematography of *Festen* and *Idioterne*, perhaps with good reason, as he is telling a much more conventional and less confrontational story than the previous two Dogme films. The dynamism of those films would only serve to distract the viewer from the gentle humanism of the film. In an interview with Ebbe Iversen for *Berlingske Tidende*, he states "I wanted to get away from contrived drama, back to the family and the small-scale play; I wanted to make an affectional, optimistic, summer film," continuing "of course I could have made a Søren

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<sup>57</sup> See Appendix C for Vinterberg's confession in its entirety.

Goes Absurd - but I am not Lars von Trier” (Dogme 95 website). As Iversen notes, Kragh-Jacobsen takes a distinctly different angle on the Dogme project:

Unlike *The Idiots*, Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *Mifune* was not shot on video, because although video allows the director to shoot far more longer takes to work on in the editing suite, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen did not think that this technique suited the story he wanted to tell - neither does he consider that there is anything revolutionary per se in the use of handheld cameras. (Iversen)

While a fine film in its own right, the result of the differences in production can clearly be seen in *Mifune*, which feels much more like a traditional film. Gone are the tracking shots and quick pans of *Festen*, or the disregard for socially constructed boundaries found in *Idioterne*. “when I was asked to join the Dogme Brotherhood my only stipulation was that there should be film in the camera” (Iversen). In an interview with Peter Rundle for the Dogme 95 website, he states:

Then there is rule number three which says that the camera must be hand held. I have shot this film with Anthony Dod Mantle who also filmed *The Celebration* and it was important for both of us to move in a completely new direction. So every time he got started on the restless camera, I said: I believe that the dynamics are between the actors and not in the restless camera. For me that is not a new style - it was already seen in the Danish film "Balladen om Carl Henning" and completely refined in Lars von

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix C for Kragh-Jacobsen's confession in its entirety.

Trier's *The Kingdom* and *Breaking the Waves*, so I didn't find any reason to use it here.

The result of this decision, however, is that *Mifune* does not look like a Dogme film, not does it achieve the same sense of the zero-point. We are able to experience and enjoy the film from the illusory detachment of a traditional film. Ironically, though Kragh-Jacobsen has in no way violated any tenet of the Dogme project, he has produced a film that does not *look* like a Dogme film, at least as it had been defined up to that moment by Vinterberg and von Trier. In effect, it illustrates the unique model of spectator relationship to film space operating in the previous films by revealing how one variable, the "restless" digital video camera, can effect such a significant difference.

So what are we to make of Dogme? If the zero-point of perception can only truly be experienced within our own bodies, as the subject of our own perceptions, then film can never truly achieve the same effect. A film cannot be literally inside of us, perceiving outward through our senses, looking outward through our own eyes. The Dogme films, with the restless hand-held camera standing in for our own bodies, are only emulating the zero-point of our perception. Are they just wasting time with all this talk of chastity and truth? Can they circumvent the inherent paradox of presenting authenticity through film? As Husserl and Merleau-Ponty suggest, this distinction between subject and object is not nearly so clear cut, and certainly, one must take into account the irony of the project they have set for themselves. To dismiss the project entirely would be to dismiss the very real achievements of the films themselves. The fact remains that our body *does* respond to the films in an active way. The recognized inability of film to truly place us in an authentic moment in space and time, the nausea

that we feel from the jerky edits and blurring pans, is a testament to the fact that we do measure the images and space on the screen through the measure of our own bodies. We lend ourselves to seeing the images around us as if we were truly in the zero-point of that film. All of which is to say that the depth of these images is experienced as bodily deep. Moreover, to dismiss the films as failed experiments would miss entirely the significant and invigorating break with cinematic tradition this project provides, particularly in terms of how film portrays space and narrative. Though stylistically quite unlike the works I have discussed previously, Dogme is a continuation of a recent trend that seeks to portray space in film as more than a rigid, flat, and two-dimensional image playing out on a theater screen. It attempts to capture the deep embodiment of the space in which we, as subject-object perceiving bodies, exist in the world.

### **The Aftermath: Post-Dogme**

As of the writing of this dissertation, there are currently twenty-four “official” Dogme films that have been released or are scheduled for production, including the original three that I have discussed here and Kristian Levring’s *The King Is Alive*, which has been shown in Europe and is only now appearing in international film festivals. Like Lone Scherfig’s *Italiensk for begyndere* (2000), a light comedy that provides a distinct change from Vinterberg’s and von Trier’s intensity, some of the films are by Danish or Scandinavian directors. The rest of the projects span the globe: the United States, Argentina, Italy, Korea. Harmony Korine, the screenwriter of Larry Clark’s *Kids* and director of *Gummo*, released *julien donkey-boy* in late 1999, as did Jean-Marc Barr with his film *The Lovers*. Both played predominantly at festivals and art-houses. Beyond

direct “certification,” however, Dogme infuses a number of other recent films. As mentioned, Mike Figgis’ *Time Code* owes an enormous, apparently unacknowledged, debt to the Dogme project, as does Miguel Arteta’s *Chuck and Buck*. Likewise, Alan Cumming and Jennifer Jason Leigh recently debuted their digital video film, *The Anniversary Party* (2001), in which they assemble an A-list ensemble of personal friends such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Kevin Kline, and Parker Posey. The highly improvised film that covers one twenty-four hour period, as a couple celebrates their anniversary. Of course, secrets, jealousies, and truths all surface and the film follows the repercussions, clearly owing a great deal to *Festen*. Not coincidentally, Jennifer Jason Leigh was inspired to undertake this project after having acted in Kristian Levring’s Dogme #4, *The King Is Alive* (2000), the first truly beautiful digital film. Though not a Dogme-film, *The Anniversary Party* would not have been possible without them; even the title of the film recalls the first two Dogme projects.

Ironically, the lesson that most international and independent American directors have taken away from the success of *Festen* and *Idioterne* is that an interesting film can be made fairly cheaply on digital video, a lesson that while perhaps assumed, was not explicit to the Dogme project at all. Nowhere in the Vow of Chastity is it dictated that the film must be shot on digital video, a fact exploited by Kragh-Jacobsen to make a 16mm Dogme film. One might suggest that for his part this is what von Trier had in mind in shaping the Manifesto, with its complicated stance on technological breakthroughs being both the downfall of contemporary cinema and the great hope of a revolution in cinematic truth. Indeed, he went on to release *Dancer In the Dark*, starring Björk and Catherine Deneuve, a melodrama shot entirely on digital video with much the same perceptual

effect as the Dogme films. However, the sense of an authentic moment is clearly set aside, as the movie is a musical, erupting into elaborate song-and-dance routines that are shown to be the product of the protagonists day-dreams.

Moreover, the four Dogme brethren, Kristian Levring included, embarked upon a video project for Danish television shot live in Copenhagen on the December 31, 1999, called “D-Day,” an obvious play upon the feared millennial Armageddon. The project is a fascinating attempt to embrace four separate moments in space across the same moment in time. However, this project is different from those films, in that it was broadcast live. The concept is for four film crews to follow four characters through four different storylines as the characters make their way toward New Year celebrations. Story lines weave in and out, and the characters encounter each other at various times. The footage was broadcast live over the four main national television channels in Denmark, the idea being that the viewer could edit his or her own unique film by switching back and forth between channels, an interactive approach similar in concept to Figgis’ *Time Code*. Though not officially a Dogme project, the resulting *cinema verité* follows not only the spirit of Dogme, but necessarily many of the provisos found in the Vow. Pragmatically, it is not possible to shoot this type of live, on-the-street project using a plethora of artificial lighting or props, and though the directors were able to guide the crew into certain encounters, the actors performed largely through improvisation. Moreover, as the only editing encountered is that of the spectator moving back and forth across channels, there is in effect no post-production manipulation of the footage. The result is a sort of pseudo-Dogme film on the fly.

Most interesting to this dissertation is the ways in which Dogme, along with the films it mirrors and the films it has inspired, provides a direct challenge to the notion that the cinematic image is flat and passively experienced. These films work upon a notion of cinematic and narrative space as deep and actively perceived through the experience of our embodied perception. Having moved through a wealth of cinematic examples in order to demonstrate the possibility of alternative models, it now becomes possible to widen my scope, to engage a model of experience as the nexus of space, time, and causality upon the active body. Where up until this point I have treated the element of time as a secondary issue, often focusing on films that attempt to freeze time in the interest of exploring space, in the next chapter I take up the issue of time as a spatial vector. More specifically, I focus upon time as an element of de Certeau's definition of space, developing a notion of the *zero-moment* parallel to the *zero-point*, in which a particular point not only in space but in time is presented as the nexus of the vectors that illustrate depth. This discussion begins by looking at recent movies that present moments in time as the nexus of spatial vectors; characters gather in a location, and the movie then follows each character as they shoot outward along their own narrative trajectories. Finally, though mentioned obliquely throughout this chapter, I have not directly discussed Mike Figgis' *Time Code*, because although clearly indebted to the Dogme 95 project, it is nevertheless its own entity. Figgis' film is the culminating example of my argument; I discuss the movie for its embodied spatiality as well as for its specific implication that temporality is in itself a form of embodied depth. As I argue, the deeply embodied image, particularly in a motion picture as a temporally finite artifact, relies

upon an understanding of time as limitless and multifaceted. Perception of depth requires the inclusion of time as a variable.



4.1: The hand from off-screen

## V. Conclusion: Zero-Point and the Temporal Gestalt of Film

And so from the most primitive descriptions of the peculiarities of perception in cinema, to our emotional involvement in the image, to the momentum of a narrative, to the constitution of a cinematic world, to the description of types of worlds (or genres) and to the life of our interpretation of them, phenomenology claims to be closer, not necessarily to truth, but to cinema and our experience of it. (Dudley Andrew, “The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory,” 49)

Let us say right off that a film is not a sum total of images but a temporal *gestalt*. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology,” 54)

How are we to understand Merleau-Ponty’s use of the term *gestalt*, particularly in the sense of the temporal dimension in film? Drawing from the original Gestaltists such as Max Wertheimer (1880-1943) and Kurt Koffka (1886-1941),<sup>59</sup> Merleau-Ponty argues that perception is not an empirical process by which the mind assembles together atomized components of information, but instead works upon immediate, irreducible *gestalts* or “wholes.” It then follows that our understanding of film operates similarly as an immediate “*gestalt*.” We see the film image and we grasp it at once; elements such as lighting, editing tempo, or audio cues that can be isolated from the *gestalt* are recognized separately only after the fact of perception. But by introducing temporality to the *gestalt* of human perception, my assessment of the image comes full-circle back to de Certeau’s definition of space, which entails both physical and temporal movement. Perhaps more than any other medium, film relies upon and is caught up in time and the question of

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<sup>59</sup> The early Gestaltists developed their ideas “in reaction against earlier sensationalist psychological theories which tried to break down the mental life into atomic sensations and ideas” (Honderich 312). While the proscription against sensation might seem to lead to a questioning of Merleau-Ponty’s primacy of perception, one must recognize that for his perceptual-existential phenomenology, perception is much more

temporality. Where I might read a book slightly faster or slower than another person, or ponder longer or shorter upon a painting or statue, a film, like a televised program, will be experienced for the same duration of time by every audience member. Temporal accidents such as a damaged and spliced print or, as in the day of silent film, varying projection speeds, do not change the fact that the film-viewing experience is structured according to temporal span as much as it is upon a particular narrative or the space erected within and by that narrative. If anything, temporal accidents of this type only serve to underscore the importance of the temporal vector in film. It is understood that a given span of time within a film, for instance minute ninety-seven through minute ninety-nine, contains particular narrative information that is coded specifically to that moment. What then is the relation between space and time in film? If our body serves as the zero-point of perception in relation to film, might it be possible to develop similarly a zero-moment, the center point around which narrative revolves? Several recent films explore the idea of a central or zero-moment, around which trajectories of space and narrative project outward like debris from an explosion. These film highlight the inextricability of space and time, and in doing so, challenge not only the reading paradigms favored by traditional film theory but also the central tenets of many “postmodern” theories as well.

We have arrived at an unexpected point of contention between the movies I have discussed and a larger issue within postmodernity, that of the relationship between the present, the past, and the future. Consistent to postmodern theory is the notion of the postmodern condition as the atemporal present, in which *now* has become cut off from history and future so that we dwell only in the moment. However, while endless

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than sensation. It is the comprehension of consciousness, and therefore a gestalt experience, not an

examples of atemporality can be found in contemporary films<sup>60</sup>, a consistent counter-tradition also exists, one in which the connection between past, present, and future is consistently and continuously emphasized. I offer a handful of examples: *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Go* (1999), *Run Lola Run* (1999), and *Time Code* (2000). Ironically, the examples I offer are often considered as prime examples of postmodernity at its clearest.

The concept of the ahistorical or eternal present runs throughout the very initial texts of postmodernism. In Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, the author does not seek to establish a new paradigm or develop a revolutionary aesthetic or theoretical model; rather, he wants to describe a phenomenon that he sees as already upon us. Lyotard's definition of "the postmodern condition" builds upon three main points: the destabilization of metanarratives, the erasure of depth or transcendent truth as the end of analysis and discourse, and the nature of discourse as a game of perpetual "newness." Lyotard writes, "simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives," and continues with the statement that "the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements — narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind" (xxiv). Lyotard sees this as a process of delegitimization, but unlike his philosophical nemesis Jürgen Habermas, Lyotard does

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empirical reduction.

<sup>60</sup> Any film that experiments with narrative chronology, such as Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) or *Alphaville* (1965), is commonly held up as an example of postmodern atemporality. In these examples, events occur contrary to cause-and-effect rationality: we see a wrecked car and its casualties and only later do characters have the actual accident. However, even in these films, I would argue that our understanding of the image before us is reliant upon past and future: the wrecked car takes on its significance once we see the accident occur later, even if it is out of cause-and-effect order. Moreover, the accident would have no

not regret the loss that incredulity reifies. He writes “the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (37). The delegitimatization of metanarratives, in which Hegelian or Marxist social dialectics are questioned and rejected, necessarily leads to the other central ideas of Lyotard’s postmodernism, but again, as is evident from texts like Baudrillard’s *America*, this is a state to be accepted, even celebrated.

In place of metanarratives, Lyotard substitutes endless non-zero-sum games, in which there is no end, no winners or losers, but rather an infinite and perpetual exchange of moves within a discourse. As Fredric Jameson notes in his foreword to the English translation, “the justification of scientific work is not to produce an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather simply to produce more work, to generate new and fresh scientific *énoncés* or statements... or best of all... again and again to ‘make it new’: ‘Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver de *nouveau*’” (Jameson ix). In stating that our current postmodern moment rejects metanarratives, by projecting discourse as an endless exchange of moves to which there is no end, Lyotard is essentially establishing the dominance of the present moment, detaching it from any past causality or future effect. Our lives, and the course of society, science, biological development, do not progress toward a point or culmination. What happens today, ultimately, has no real bearing on what happens tomorrow and is not a result of what happened yesterday, if one accepts that events are not culminating toward a grand conclusion. Clearly, this is a rejection of Marxist, Darwinian, or Hegelian dialectics, in which all events are part of a

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meaning unless we had already seen the wreck and are thus able to make the connection between the two

grand march through time toward some goal, the meta-narrative of human existence.<sup>61</sup> By rejecting meta-narratives, and thereby simple cause-and-effect, Lyotard consequently casts the human state free of temporality in the traditional sense, such that our existence is a collection of current moments that have very little to do with each other.

Significantly, within the context of this student, the postmodern acceptance of the eternal present is fundamentally connected to the idea of the image as flat and superficial, as both rely upon a questioning of human perception and the acceptance that there is no greater depth of existence than the current moment. Depth, however, relies upon the idea that there is more available than what one sees or experiences in a specific moment; there is the other side, the aspect not seen. Similar to Husserl's *Horizont*, depth requires that there is more than *this* perception right at *this* moment. There are more details available to perception than we can experience in a moment, thus inviting a deepened engagement, be it with an image or with the world outside the theater. If one can present a model of image that is perceptually deep, then one must also accept a notion of the present moment that is tied not only to the past but also to the future. Consequently, as I will argue, traditional film theory is, though useful, ultimately incomplete in its approach to our perception of the image both spatially and temporally. Through a further discussion of the *Abschattungen* and the nature of perceptual horizons, one appreciates a model of

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events.

<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, one way of regarding postmodern theory, Lyotard's in particular, is to view it in light of its Hegelian and Marxist underpinnings. Lyotard, as Fredric Jameson will argue in *Postmodernism*, might just as clearly be describing the culmination of the metanarratives that he seeks to discard. The postmodern moment then might simply be the arrival of Hegel's state of Absolute Knowledge or the last stop before the realization of Marx's utopian worker-state. However, the scope of this argument is beyond the range of this dissertation.

perception that is top-down, active, instantaneous, and yet reliant upon what has gone before and what is to come.

I am not going to argue against the evidence supporting Lyotard's claim, nor am I going to dispute directly the postmodern theorists who have developed his notion of the continual or ahistorical present moment. Examples of postmodernism in film are seemingly endless; one can point to examples of postmodernity in many of the very same films that I have presented here as counter-examples: *Blade Runner*, *Fight Club*, *The Matrix*, *Prospero's Books*. Nor do I dispute that the qualities postmodern film scholars find in these films exist; at most, the issue becomes a question of which came first, the theory that describes the qualities or the films that display them. Once postmodernism becomes a cultural euphemism for "cutting-edge" and "avant-garde," it is virtually assured that artists will create texts that act upon that zeitgeist, intentionally or unintentionally. Rather, I want to suggest, as I have throughout this dissertation, that a counter-aesthetic exists, often within the very same texts, that rejects many of the fundamental notions of postmodernity in order to present an alternate paradigm for human perception and human existence. Through a discussion of four particular examples, *Pulp Fiction*, *Go*, *Run Lola Run*, and *Time Code*, I demonstrate further the role of temporality in constructing the filmic image's spatial depth. Central to the first three films discussed is a narrative structure that establishes the centrality of one or more particular moments, in which characters interact before pursuing divergent narrative tangents. These narratives explore the endless vectors that issue outward from a single moment in time and space, twisting and turning but ultimately looping back to one essential moment. Having understood that model, I can then engage a discussion of the

fourth example, Mike Figgis' *Time Code*, in which the temporal and spatial depth of a particular moment is developed in a most radical fashion.

Awarded an Oscar for Best Screenplay, and nominated for Best Actor (John Travolta), Best Supporting Actor (Samuel L. Jackson), Best Supporting Actress (Uma Thurman), Best Director, and Best Editing (Sally Menke), Quentin Tarrantino's *Pulp Fiction* was a success among audiences and critics alike, spawning a host of imitators that focused upon *Pulp Fiction*'s criminal underpinnings and cool, casual violence, most often at the expense of the film's wit and humor. Importantly, its most notable feature is its experimentation with time in the form of non-linear narrative structures. Of course, it is not the first to do so: films have often played with temporality, through flash-back and flash-forward as well as through the order in which scenes are placed. *Citizen Kane* is but one famous example in which the events are told out of chronological order; here, however, the non-linear elements are diegetically justified. We know when a flashback is occurring, because a character will tell us so. More interesting are those films that do not stop to explain their non-linear structures. *Pulp Fiction* is the first of what I see as a modern trend toward rejecting narrative linearity at a crucial moment in cinematic history. The film serves as the marker of an emerging shift toward experimentation with time, one in which the audience is expected to follow along without obvious cues from the director or the script. It is assumed that the looping, achronological narrative will be understood, at least by the end of the film; the result is a film in which the death of a character can *foreshadow* events in his own past. The film follows three main story lines, centered on three separate characters or groups of characters. However, in terms of narrative structure, there are two key moments in which the various complicated

storylines intersect: in the coffee shop at the beginning of the film, and in the bar where Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) conducts his criminal enterprise. The film's structure is non-linear; it does not follow direct chronological order. Instead, we follow different characters through the important moments of their respective narratives. Once one narrative trajectory has been traced to its completion, another character's narrative trajectory will start. However, what then becomes important are exactly those moments in time and space where narrative trajectories intersect, revealing a sense of multi-layered depth. The movie attempts to capture the infinite depth of time and space at any given moment: there are literally infinite stories going on simultaneously in the world. Tarrantino's project attempts to show us how a handful of them are interrelated.

We encounter the first before the credits have even rolled. In the narrative space of this sequence as we first perceive it, the main perspective is of two characters, Pumpkin (Amanda Plummer) and Honey Bunny (Tim Roth), discussing new criminal ventures in a cheap diner. Rather than robbing gas stations and liquor stores, they will now start holding up coffee shops, this one in particular. The moment that the two characters burst from their table, guns waving, the scene freezes and the opening credits roll. This sequence is in the fact the nexus of more than one story, a fact left unrealized until the end of the movie, at which point two other characters' narrative trajectories will bring them to this location. After the opening credits, we meet Vince (John Travolta) and Jules (Samuel L. Jackson), two small-time hitmen assigned by their boss, Marsellus Wallace, to retrieve a briefcase and execute the men who stole it. The two characters encounter a variety of obstacles, from the disposal of a headless corpse to the technicalities of cleaning skull fragments from upholstery; eventually Jules drops out of

that narrative and we follow Vince alone. Vince's narrative trajectory seems to end with him blowing a kiss at Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman) at the end of that night. However, at the end of the film, the audience will re-encounter Jules and Vincent in the very same coffee shop that opened the film, and we will see the rest of Pumpkin and Honey Bunny's coffee shop heist played out from the perspective of Vince and Jules. At this point, if the spectator has been watching carefully, he will recognize Vince's outfit as the same one seen on a man shown walking past Honey Bunny and Pumpkin at the beginning of the film, establishing Vince and Jules as "off-screen" presences throughout the opening sequence. At this moment, the spectator is required to re-read the past, in this case the beginning of the film, in order to fully appreciate the present, experiencing the deep overlap of the narrative as well as understanding the excess of cues presented in the opening sequence: Vince walks by Pumpkin and Honey Bun's table, but we do not know this we see the moment from a different perspective. In Figure 5.1, from the beginning of the film, we see a man walk by dressed in shorts and a T-shirt; in Figure 5.2, from the end of the movie, we see Vince with Pumpkin and Honey Bunny in the background to the left, and we now know why he is dressed in these clothes and not his usual black suit. The opening sequence requires depth in order to accommodate the multiplicity of narrative perspectives occurring simultaneously.

The second central moment of the film occurs chronologically after Jules and Vincent finish their breakfast at the coffee shop and deliver the briefcase. However, in terms of the film's structure, this scene occurs long before they arrive at the coffee shop. After Vince and Jules have finished their assignment, with a long, unexpected detour taken to resolve an additional, accidental murder, the two return the briefcase to their

boss at his headquarters in a bar. Chronologically, we have skipped a sequence: the coffee shop with Honey Bunny and Pumpkin. We will have to wait until the end of the film to see what plays out in the moments between the end of the assignment and the duo's arrival at the bar. However, according to the logic of Vince's narrative trajectory, this is the most crucial next scene, as here Marsellus directs Vince to entertain Mia while he is out of town on business. The rest of Vince's narrative will follow the outcome of that date. However, in this sequence, there is an important intersection with yet another narrative trajectory, as Vince encounters Butch, an aging boxer who has been paid by Marsellus to take a dive in an upcoming fight. Vince antagonizes Butch at the bar before being called away by Marsellus. When we later return to follow Butch's narrative trajectory, we will witness Butch receiving the money from Marsellus. The rest of his narrative trajectory will follow him as he double-crosses Marsellus and attempts to get out of town without being killed by Marsellus's henchmen. Later, Butch and Vince will re-encounter each other, and Butch will kill Vince. This moment occurs roughly half-way through the film, and yet we will see Vince alive and well at the end of the film, in the diner, reminding us of the perspectival logic at play in the structure of this film. We witness Vince's death out of chronological order because it makes sense within the trajectory of Butch's narrative to witness it at this point.

The next, and final, scene begins, and we see Vincent, alive, and Jules walking into the diner for breakfast, wearing the beach attire from their earlier narrative. How can this be? The audience is expected to unravel the complicated set of non-linear narratives on their own. The sequence must take place after they clean the car of Marvin's remains, but before they return to the bar. Vincent has not encountered Butch at all, has not met

his date with Mia, and obviously has not been shot by Butch. The significant point here in relation to my argument is the means by which one particular span of time, in this case the two or three days that transpire between the linear chronology of Vincent and Jules retrieving the case and Butch and Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros) riding off into the sunset, is structured not by chronological order, but by narrative logic to capture the richest sense of spatial and temporal depth. Each one of these storylines could have been told in linear order: Pumpkin and Honey Bunny have breakfast, decide to rob the diner, encounter Jules and Vincent, and leave the diner. Jules and Vincent retrieve the case, have breakfast at the diner, encounter Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, visit the bar. Vincent goes on a date with Mia, rescues her from an overdose, is assigned to kill Butch, and is killed with his own gun. Butch takes the bribe, wins the fight, goes back for his watch, kills Vincent, fights with Marsellus, kills a redneck and rescues Marsellus, and rides off into the sunset with Fabienne. But each story line reveals too much of the next storyline. We would see the diner scene twice in its entirety, knowing its conclusion already upon watching it the second time. We would see Vincent die twice at the hands of Butch. The ending of the movie would be entirely different, as Vincent's appearance in the coffee shop sequence would lack any poignancy, since in the linear narrative structure, he is not already dead. The non-linear structure allows not only a narrative economy, in which sequences do not have to be shown twice, but also allows story lines to merge and comment upon each other. The diner sequence would lack importance if the movie had not already established the importance of the case, Jules' religious reawakening, and Vincent's subsequent, but already seen, death.

The effect, once the movie is over and the spectator weaves together the convoluted narrative in her head, is to realize the simultaneity of the story lines across boundaries of location and space. These stories are happening all at once, issuing outward from two central points: the coffee shop and the bar, where the main characters of disparate stories happen to bump into each other in a seemingly casual coincidence, before shooting off each in their own direction along the trajectories of their respective stories. The stories expand ever outward against the boundaries of chronological narrative in order to comment upon each other. Two or three particular moments are seen from more than one perspective, realizing the infinite spatial and temporal trajectories that issue from a specific zero-moment. Vincent and Butch meet in the bar: Vincent goes his way, and Butch goes his. We follow each, even as they re-encounter each other later in the film, after having many significant encounters with other trajectories along the way. Jules and Vincent encounter Pumpkin and Honey Bunny in the diner, each on their own trajectory, and split off in different directions from that point. But all of the characters are bound together by the duration of time that expires from the beginning of the film to its end; it's the space that is explored by the characters' stories within that duration that becomes unlimited. Space and time become two limitless coordinates, X and Y, issuing from two central zero-moments, across which the film will follow the characters. The effect is a dynamic, motion-based definition of cinematic and narrative space and time.

Where in *Pulp Fiction* the stories issue outward in a looping, reflexive manner from two locations in the film, in Doug Liman's film, *Go*, three story lines issue outward from one specific location, with a fourth story-line splitting off later. As in *Pulp Fiction*,

the effect is to explore the simultaneous potential trajectories that issue from or convene upon zero-points in time and space, in this case the backroom of a rundown supermarket on Christmas Eve day, a rave later that night, and an apartment the next day. The movie begins with Claire (Katie Holmes) asking Todd (Timothy Olyphant) whether he could have predicted that they would end up together, considering all that had happened. The audience does not know what she is referring to, but rather than stop to explain, the camera cuts to a rundown supermarket, and the movie begins its complicated narrative. The first story follows Ronna (Sara Polley) one of the cashiers at the supermarket, who needs additional money for rent. In agreeing to take a shift for her friend Simon (Desmond Askew), she is launched into a series of events that will lead to a drug-deal gone bad, a trip to a rave to sell fake Ecstasy, an encounter with a very irate drug-dealer (Timothy Olyphant), and near-fatal encounter with a yellow Miata. We return to the grocery store's backroom and begin the second story, following the trajectory of Simon. Ronna agrees to take his shift, and we follow his narrative trajectory out of that zero-point of time and space. He is on his way to Las Vegas with three friends, and while there, Simon engages in a menage-a-trois, flees a burning hotel room, helps steal a car, goes to a strip-club, shoots a bouncer, is involved in a car chase with two gangsters, and flees back to Los Angeles.

Story three follows Adam and Zack, and does not begin from the back room, but splits off from Ronna's story shortly thereafter. Ronna agrees to sell Ecstasy to Adam (Scott Wolf) and Zack (Jay Mohr), who normally buy from Simon. We revisit the drug-deal sequence now from Adam and Zack's perspective, having previously seen it from the perspective of Ronna's narrative trajectory. We discover the reason the drug-deal

goes bad: Ronna is tipped off by Zack that this is a police-sting operation. From this moment on, we follow the story of Adam and Zack, lovers in the process of realizing that they have cheated on each other with the same man. They attend Christmas Eve dinner at the home of the officer in charge of the sting, who eventually tries to sign them up as distributors of an Amway-like product. They leave, decide to confront their mutual fling, and end up at the same rave where Ronna is now selling fake Ecstasy in the parking lot and where Todd, the angry drug-dealer, is hunting for her, thinking that she intentionally double-crossed him. They confront their lover, and upon leaving, accidentally run over Ronna with their yellow Miata, at the moment of her encounter with Todd. They flee, but later return to hide the evidence: they see that she is still alive, and place her where she will be found by others. The rave, as a location, serves as a secondary zero-point for the film's structure, as two of the four narrative trajectories reconvene at this point.

The other two narrative trajectories convene later, in Todd's apartment. Claire has been left with Todd as collateral for Ronna's drug deal. Later, she is retrieved by Ronna and goes to the rave, only to be abandoned again when Ronna flees Todd. She goes to a diner where the three usually meet, only to find Todd there. They have breakfast and realize a mutual attraction. We are brought full-circle to the moment at which the movie begins, Claire asking Todd if he could have predicted that they would end up together, all things considered. Upon returning to his apartment, they find the gangsters from Las Vegas, who believe Simon lives there. Todd and the gangsters find Simon, exact their revenge, and the film ends with Ronna, Claire, and their friend Mannie back at the parking lot of the rave, where they find Ronna's keys and discuss what to do for New Year's Eve.

The interwoven nature of the plot becomes clear only once the movie has been explored in its entirety. Key moments are portrayed from multiple perspectives, such as the first meeting between Simon, Ronna, and Claire in the breakroom, where Ronna agrees to take Simon's shift. We see it once from Ronna's perspective, before she goes back to work; we see it once from Simon's perspective, before he races off for his trip to Las Vegas; and we see it once from Claire's perspective, before she gets dragged into Ronna's drug deal. Doug Liman discusses this scene in the Director's Audio Track to the DVD version of the film, pointing out that the original script did not include it. After initial production, he decided to come back and shoot additional footage here in order to create a single unified moment. Like a Greenaway film, the boundaries of this central spatial moment are ruptured by mobile elements, the characters, and like *Pulp Fiction*, certain moments in the film will only make sense, and maintain their dramatic nature, when seen from multiple perspectives. The moment that Ronna realizes the drug deal is a set up is viewed first from an obscured angle, and we do not know that Zack has specifically tipped her off until we see that moment again from his perspective. Likewise, we do not know that Adam and Zack are driving the Miata that runs Ronna down until we see it again from their perspective. The tension and hope of the opening moment of the film, in which Claire and Todd sit in the diner, is not clear until we have learned, much later, the nature of their original encounter. The film portrays a given duration of time across multiple spatial trajectories, stressing the infinite possibilities that can issue outward from a central moment, in this case, the meeting of the three characters in a supermarket breakroom. While the narratives all tie back in to each other at the rave

and in Todd's apartment by film's end, there is nevertheless the intimation of other stories about to begin, as characters discuss their plans for New Year's Eve.

*Go* masks the motivations of its non-linear narrative in the nature of the stories it tells, so that the impact of the movie relies upon the way the story is told, never acknowledging the artificially manipulated plot and character action. In contrast, Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* overtly acknowledges its artifice, at face value, and entices the audience to intentionally explore the possibilities within a given moment. The intent is clear from the movie's tagline, "Jeden Tag, jede Sekunde triffst Du eine Entscheidung, die Dein Leben verändern kann," [Every day, every second, you meet a decision that can change your life.] Where *Pulp Fiction* and *Go* tell stories in a non-linear fashion as part of their drama, *Run Lola Run* turns non-linear narrative *into* the drama. The film announces at the outset that it will manipulate time and space in impossible ways, requiring the audience to think about the infinite possibilities within that moment and the ways in which miniscule differences in time and space have far-reaching consequences.

The basic scenario is simple. Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu), a courier for organized crime, loses 100,000 deutschmarks of his boss's money. His only hope is to come up with an equal amount before his boss arrives in twenty minutes. He calls his girlfriend, Lola, for help. The movie is set in motion, clocking in at almost exactly eighty minutes, a crucial detail for a movie centered upon time. We follow Lola as she runs from the apartment, thinking of a way to get Manni the money. Unlike *Pulp Fiction* and *Go*, which follow multiple characters through multiple narratives as they interweave and connect with each other, this film follows one character, Lola, through three permutations of the same twenty-minute time span, showing the different options she can pursue and

the inevitable results of her decisions. As Tom Whalen stresses in his review of *Run Lola Run* for *Film Quarterly*, the movie emphasizes the idea of a game or series of games, in which “when one game ends, another is about to begin. Hardly a pause, and even then the pause is preparation for the next game” (34). Like a video game, in which the player can press the “restart” button if a particular progression through the game’s obstacles is unsuccessful, after the end of the first two twenty-minute durations, Lola is given a momentary pause outside the plot as if for the game to reset itself, and then she is given another chance to get it right.

Interestingly, each twenty-segment time span influences the next, as Lola somehow learns from the mistakes of her previous attempts to save Manni’s life. For example, in the first segment, during an animated sequence reminiscent of children’s cartoons or a music video, Lola encounters a young punk and his menacing dog on the stairs. The first time through, Lola runs around them. The second time through, the dog growls at her and the boy trips her, sending her tumbling down the stairs. On the third time through, the time in which she gets everything correct, she leaps over the dog and turns and growls at them both. Likewise, in the first segment, Lola unsuccessfully tries to borrow money from her father, a banker; in the second, she somehow recognizes this as a dead-end and instead robs the bank. In the third, she places a bet on a roulette wheel, and, howling with frustration, miraculously wins. The first two sequences, in which Lola fails, end in death. In the first, Lola dies, shot in the attempt to hold-up the grocery store; in the second, Manni is killed, run down by an ambulance, stopped by Lola just as he is about to enter the supermarket to rob it. In the third, not only does Lola win the money in the casino but Manni also manages to find the homeless man who took the original cash.

The film explores three possible permutations through the same infinite set of possible events over twenty minutes, following the possible spatial vectors each character will follow.

This underlying theme of infinite spatial and chronological potential is underscored by a secondary technique employed in the film. The future of minor characters that Lola encounters along her route, such as a man with a stolen bicycle, a surly woman pushing a baby carriage, and the bum who takes Manni's cash at the beginning of the film, are all pursued in a quick montage series of still photographs, flashing forward to what will happen to them after this briefest of encounters with Lola, the main character. But with each variation of possible events, the future of the characters change. After Lola's first encounter with the man with the stolen bicycle, we see him chased by thugs and beaten; he wanders into a cafeteria, still bleeding, and befriends the cashier. They marry. After her second encounter with him, he quickly degenerates into a soiled, scruffy bum, and eventually dies of an overdose in a subway bathroom stall. In the third, we do not see a montage series: instead, he sells the bicycle to the homeless man who has Manni's money. The implication is that at least in relation to Manni and Lola, this is the correct course of events. Likewise, the surly woman is first shown losing her child to social welfare, stealing another in a park, and being chased by the parents. Second, she is shown buying a lottery ticket and winning, and then sipping champagne with her husband in front of their new house, baby crib at their side. Third, she becomes a Jehovah's Witness, and is last seen handing out literature on the street. Somehow, due to the slightest variations in time and space in which these characters' brief encounters with Lola take place, their lives are set on very different paths. And

while this particular movie emphasizes Lola's role in the lives of others, as well as the impact of her split-second decisions upon her own future, the assumption is nevertheless clear. Time and space become infinite in relation to the center point of the characters in question; their enactment of certain vectors within the infinite set of possibilities erects the narrative around them. Just as each is a minor background character in Lola's life, Lola is a minor character in the background of their lives. And yet even the briefest interaction can have longstanding effects.

How then does this offer a different model of time and space, and in particular, our perception of those two phenomena, than that found in dominant postmodern theories? The most direct and simple answer to that question hinges upon the importance of the connection between past, present, and future moments in these particular films. In *America*, Baudrillard suggests that in his journey across the United States he found the perfect postmodern state. He at first celebrates the speed of travelling through the desert on the long, open freeways of America, noting "speed is the triumph of effect over cause, the triumph of instantaneity over time as depth, the triumph of the surface and pure objectality over the profundity of desire... its only rule is leave no trace behind" (6). Quickly thereafter, he describes the US as "lacking a past through which to reflect on this, and therefore fundamentally primitive," but nevertheless "the primitive society of the future" (7). Baudrillard suggests that the true postmodern condition is one in which cause and effect have become disconnected, much in the way that Lyotard does with his questioning of meta-narratives or the possible culmination of social dialectic, and as other

postmodernists such as Taylor will do in other guises.<sup>62</sup> The past no longer shapes the present, and there is no sense of the future. What we are left with is a present that is bombarded by consumer and commercial concerns. Live for today, as they say, for there is no tomorrow. However, in the films that I have singled out in this chapter, the narrative structure relies upon each particular sequence being causally connected to both a past and future moment. For example, in *Pulp Fiction*, Vince's reappearance in the coffee shop at the end of the film would not contain the poignancy it does were we not aware that he will be killed tomorrow in a sequence we have already witnessed. Likewise, the comedy of his and Jules' attire, dressed not in their usual sleek black suits but instead as though they were on their way to a volleyball match, would not apply if we did not know how and why they ended up dressed this way in a much earlier scene. In *Go*, the entire movie is told as a flashback of sorts, so that we can only understand the meaning of Claire's comment to Todd about the unlikelihood of them ending up together once we have understood everything that has transpired up until this "opening" moment. Likewise, as they leave that diner and experience the next event, their future is affected by Simon's past encounter with the two gangsters from Las Vegas. The carefully structured non-linear plots are completely reliant not only upon cause-and-effect, but also upon the audience's strict attention to what happened before, what is happening now, and what will happen next. In *Run Lola Run*, we see this careful attention to cause and effect,

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<sup>62</sup> To be fair to Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism* he does essentially suggest that the postmodern condition is in fact a stage of late capitalism. As a Marxist theorist, he argues that our current moment of commercial and consumer saturation, a moment in which speed is valued over depth, is but a stage within a larger dialectic that relies upon past and future. We are progressing toward a culmination of that dialectic. However, we might presume that as Jameson works out of Marx, so does Marx work out of Hegel; call it the worker's utopia, the end of capitalism, or Absolute Knowledge: all three suggest that at the end of the dialectic, a state will arise that is truly the end of history. If our current state is not that state, then it is around the corner.

and what is more, the impact of small decisions upon the future becomes the theme of the movie. Lola cannot progress forward until she gets these twenty minutes perfectly correct. Clearly, in these three movies history and future are very much a consideration.

But there is a more complicated answer to the above question as well, one that hinges upon the phenomenological model of perception. According to Husserl, the limits of our perception, or *Horizont*, are not rigid boundaries, but instead fade into periphery much like our peripheral vision is a vague line beyond which we do not perceive, but of which we also do not perceive the precise point of limitation. As we gaze upon an object in space, we are given an *Abschattung*, a sketch of the object's qualities. As we move about the object, the location of our perceptual *Horizont* also moves, so that we gain a new perspective upon the object. Through this movement, we are given a nearly infinite progression of new *Abschattung*. At this point, Husserl's definition of perception might sound suspiciously like Muybridge's experiments with still photography, in which the camera attempts to capture a fixed "sketch" of an object in motion. Surely, this is the basis of Merleau-Ponty's fascination with exactly those studies, or Cubist attempts to capture an object in motion, exemplified in Marcel Duchamp's 1912 painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*.<sup>63</sup> However, unlike Muybridge's photography or Duchamp's painting, perception does not attempt to "freeze" the sketches in time and space. Instead, perception assimilates one sketch to the next, creating a moving reference or understanding of the object. In this manner, perception becomes much more like the photogrammetry of *Fight Club* and *The Matrix*, in which a potentially infinite

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<sup>63</sup> Marcel Duchamp, (1887-1968), perhaps better known for his Dadaist innovations of kinetic art and "ready-made" art, nevertheless flirted briefly with Cubism and painting. *Nude* is his attempt to capture an

progression of finer and finer sketches are blended into each other by our process of comprehension. That our sketches (*Abschattung*) may never be perfect or complete is not a fault in the nature of perception, but simply the process of coming to a closer understanding of the actual object. As Husserl and Merleau-Ponty admit, we may never actually come to understand all sides or qualities of the object, just as we could never see them all at once. I do not presume to have understood everything about these given films, just as I would not presume to have understood everything about a particular object, even if I had studied it for years -- though I would presume to have gotten close. What is more important is the understanding of perception and comprehension as a process, and most importantly, as a process that relies upon the past and the present. We know what we have perceived about the object up until this point, our position at this moment is reliant upon the immediate past just as our state of perception and comprehension is reliant upon it. Moreover, in perceiving and attempting to comprehend the object before us, be it a horse moving through space or a film playing before us on the screen, we understand that our current perception is always in the process of giving way to a future form of perception that is informed by this moment. We may be wrong or incomplete in our current perception, just as the present moment may have revealed that we were wrong in the past, but the future holds the possibility that we might gain a closer or more complete understanding.

If perception is limited and open to error, might technology come to the aid of that perception? In relation to *Blair Witch* and the Dogme movies, technology in the form of instrumental reality allows for a deeper perception of a particular image and narrative

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object in continual motion through a chain of overlapping figures, echoing Cubism's general attempt to

space. Might it play a similar role in the relation between space and time? This issue lies at the heart of British director Mike Figgis' experimental feature, *Time Code*. The concept for *Time Code* is at once fairly straightforward and enormously complicated. The film follows four simultaneous uncut 93 minute takes shot on four separate hand-held cameras, following four basic storylines that intertwine throughout the movie; the four stories are shown on a screen split four ways, with audio cue levels providing the clearest indication of which part of the story the viewer should follow at any given moment. The film's complexity begins in the technical and logistical elements of such a project, and then becomes far more complicated when one accounts for the theoretical implications for narrative, image depth, and a sense of embodiment within the film. Employing the deeply positioned, active spectator gained in the Dogme projects by the use of hand-held digital cameras, Figgis takes their project in an intriguing new direction by providing the spectator multiple, simultaneous views upon the same object located in time and space as cameras shoot certain events or actors from different angles at the same time. While we still do not see all aspects of an object at once, the film significantly expands the horizons of our perception. Recalling de Certeau's definition of space as "vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables" (117), with depth emerging through the violation of boundaries of place, then what is now necessary is to consider the importance of *time* as a spatial variable. As I will argue, *Time Code*, as an example of a movie that stresses exactly that important relation between time and space, emphasizing the connection between past, present, and future. In doing so, it directly challenges

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portray objects for a multiplicity of perspectives.

notions of the image as ahistorical and atemporal, instead foregrounding – indeed depending on -- the importance of temporal trajectories in the act of perception.

Figgis is not the first director to attempt a continuous, uncut movie; Hitchcock attempted a similar project in 1948 with his experimental film *Rope*, which has the appearance of one continuous take. However, it is only an appearance, as the technology of film, then and now, would not allow for one uncut take equal to the length of a feature film. Hitchcock was required in fact to make ten takes, which he shot and edited in such a way that the cuts were invisible. Cameras at the time could only hold about ten minutes worth of film stock, so Hitchcock designed each take to move to a full-screen black image near the end of the reel, for example, a dark suit coat or the back of a chair. The camera would then cut, reload, and begin the next take on the same black image. The takes could then be edited together on the black in such a way that the camera would only seem to pass by the image, obscuring the cut and providing a sense of continuous take. However, it is clearly not an actual continuous take, and given the precise nature of choreography and timing required for the progression of shots, the film is restricted almost entirely to one small apartment. Figgis accomplishes something considerably more complicated, a possibility made available to him only through the advent of digital technology.

Originally born in England, Figgis began his career making pop music videos<sup>64</sup> before turning to TV movies and feature films. With his 1997 *Leaving Las Vegas*, starring Elisabeth Shue and Nicolas Cage as dissolute lovers on the road to nowhere,

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<sup>64</sup> It is significant how both Fincher and Figgis have a background in music videos; though beyond the scope of this project, it does invite speculation upon the impact of that experience upon how these directors view the relation between image and narrative.

Figgis made a move into the mainstream. However, his continued interest in experimentation insured that his next films, *The Loss of Sexual Innocence* (1999) and a film version of Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1999), a project where he first experimented with split-screen images, would remain solely art-house fare. *Time Code* seems unlikely to change that trend, and indeed Figgis has stated that he cannot imagine at this point in his career returning to traditional, feature length 35mm filmmaking (*Res 35*). Simple in a narrative sense, one watches *Time Code* for its cinematography and presentation format; it becomes the cinematic equivalent of a high-wire act, constantly wondering if this is the moment that the performer will come plummeting to the ground.

The four-way split-screen recalls the perspective of multiple security cameras seen from a central station, in which one can literally observe more than one space at a time. Figgis drives this point home with an image early in the film, a shot of the security camera display in the guard's desk at Red Mullet, a production studio in Los Angeles and the setting for most of the movie: this one quadrant of the film screen is itself divided into four additional quadrants, enabling the guard to monitor four locations at once. (See Fig. 5.3) The four quadrants each start with a separate thread of the story: a lesbian couple (Selma Hayek and Jeanne Trippelhorn) in the throes of infidelity; a woman dealing with the mental and emotional disintegration of her lover (Saffron Burrows); a production team attempting to get their next projects in line; and the head of a production company (Stellan Skarsgård) struggling with addiction and the potential loss of his lover. As the stories progress, characters often cross out of one quadrant and into another, caught for a brief time in both cameras before they make the complete crossover. To complicate matters, Figgis adds several events that cut across the narrative, happening in

all four quadrants at once. Three earthquakes of increasing intensity, an effect created simply by shaking the camera and directing the actors accordingly, are shown simultaneously in all quadrants. Likewise, at various synchronized moments, particular aesthetic details are emphasized, such as extreme close-ups of eyes by all four cameras. The director clearly has something to say about the nature of time, coincidence, and synchronicity. What is significant is the relation of these temporal factors to the creation of a deep space.

Figgis faced considerable logistical considerations in completing this project. With four cameras running simultaneously, characters weaving in and out each other's cinematic space and narrative trajectory, it was not practically feasible to work from a traditional script. Moreover, Figgis encouraged his actors to improvise much of their performances; very little dialogue was pre-determined. Instead, Figgis devised a four-part script written on composer paper sheets laid end to end horizontally, so that each of the four narratives could be seen running parallel to each other simultaneously. Each main character was represented by a particular color, so that as they crossed over from one quadrant to another, their color would be shown shifting from one narrative "bar" to another. Events that cut across the narratives were delineated by a strong vertical line through the four bars, with a notation of precise time and specific details for camera and cast. Instead of specific dialogue, the script consisted mainly of camera directions, events, and improvisational situations; as such, it was six pages long. Most feature film scripts run around one-hundred pages. With the script in place, the actors shot fifteen separate, complete 93-minute takes; each day's shots were brought to a screening room on the very same day and mixed live as the ensemble cast watched and critiqued the

performance in anticipation of the next day's shoot. As the improvised performances changed from day to day, and as some actors left to pursue other projects<sup>65</sup>, it was largely impossible to take one particular camera's recording from one day and mix it into the recordings from another day. In effect, Figgis compiled fifteen different, unique feature-length films in the span of fifteen days.

Additional complications arose as four cameras and crews operated simultaneously, often in the very same space, with the mandate not to capture each other in their shots. As Figgis describes in the "making of" documentary of *Time Code*,<sup>66</sup> the crews developed an elaborate system of sign language and choreography to stay out of each other's way. Particularly in earlier cuts, actors make unnatural movements or cameras dip or rise for apparently no reason; most often, these small glitches are the result of two or more camera crews working in proximity. The impact of this technique presents a depth of image unlike any film previously made, in which the spectator is embodied in four places at once, or in one place from multiple perspectives. The camera work builds upon the sense of embodied placement as discussed previously in *Blair Witch* and the Dogme films, but takes the impact one step further by attempting to place the spectator not just in *one* space, but in four, simultaneously. One would be tempted to call this ability to be in more than one space of a narrative at once a "third-person" perspective similar to that commonly employed in novels, except that in a novel, one can only read of one event at a time. While we may be disembodied and able to know things

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<sup>65</sup> Laurie Metcalf, who played Jackie on *Roseanne*, played the therapist shown in most opening sequences; however, on the day of shooting for the version that would be eventually released to theaters, she was absent for a TV taping and another actress was brought in. Depending on which version one sees, even cast members might be completely different.

<sup>66</sup> Found on the DVD version.

at once about characters separated by time and distance, we are only able to gain that knowledge sequentially, not simultaneously. In *Time Code*, we are seeing it all at once, but from the first-person perspective of the hand-held camera. Likewise, one might be tempted to call this a “God’s eye” perspective, except that we still do not really see *everything* at once; we are still limited to four cameras, so that while we are able to see an object from more than one perspective, each perspective is itself a limited perspective, similar to our real-life, embodied perspective. The effect is a *multiple first-person perspective*.

Clearly, the ability to be in more than one place at the same time, or the ability to see one object from multiple perspectives has a significant impact upon the perception of space in this film, a perception that is totally reliant upon instrument-mediated perception as discussed in relation to the Dogme films. Without four cameras, this project would not be possible. But what is more, specifically without *digital video* technology, this project would not be possible. In *Rope*, Hitchcock experienced the dilemma of how to shoot a feature-length film in only one take. The simple fact is that he could not; he could only create the illusion of one consecutive take. However, with storage capacities available to digital technology, the duration of possible takes increases with each technological improvement. If one could find a large enough disk, or a perfectly efficient means of data compression, one could theoretically make single continuous shots lasting hours, days, weeks, or even years. Moreover, digital technology plays a specific role in the exhibition of this film. As Figgis laments, the digital version of this movie is the only “true” version; once transferred to celluloid, it must be broken up again into separate reels. These reels will then be spliced together in the projection booth by the

projectionist, effectively introducing edits, though invisible, where there previously were none. More to the point, as the film reels age and sustain the type of burns, bursts, and tears inherent to fragile celluloid, damaged frames will necessarily have to be cut out and the ends spliced together by projectionists, producing much more noticeable edits similar in appearance to minute jump cuts. Not only is the type of perception in this movie inherently reliant upon instrument-mediation, it is reliant upon a particular type of instrument mediation.<sup>67</sup>

If one were suddenly able to perceive more than one set of horizons at the same time, to be in more than one body at the same time, the perception of depth would become necessarily an exponentially more complicated experience. Figgis encourages the audience to think specifically about these types of questions throughout the film. Moments in which characters are captured from a variety of angles, such as when Stellan Skarsgård's character Alex arrives for the first time and we see him captured simultaneously from two angles. Or much later in the film, when a young filmmaker (Mia Maestro) pitches a film uncannily similar to *Time Code* to the Red Mullet producers and is captured by two cameras from only slightly different angles at the same time, producing an effect like a continuously running jump cut, the difference between the two takes slight and yet noticeable, producing the same feeling of slight displacement. (See Fig. 5.4) Even the narrative of *Time Code* invites this type of cross-perceptual speculation, as specific events remind us of our unique ability, via technology, to perceive specific moments from more than one perspective. For example, Lauren

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<sup>67</sup> Though the threat of unintended edits due to the nature of film may be about to disappear with the growing interest in commercial quality digital projectors among theater owners.

Hathaway<sup>68</sup> (Jeanne Tripplehorn) portrays a jealous businesswoman who suspects her lover Rose (Selma Hayek) of infidelity, so she plants a microphone in her bag. As it turns out, Rose *is* having an affair with Alex, and when Lauren overhears the two engaged in a momentary tryst behind the studio's projection screen, we not only see and hear them on the lower right hand corner, we also see Lauren listening to them in the upper left hand corner. (See Fig. 5.5) But most importantly, we also hear the two through Lauren's headset as well as through the soundtrack from their quadrant, providing us a multiple perspective upon this moment. Similar in effect, but through a different means, the various events that affect characters at synchronous moments, such as the earthquakes, stress a unity of space across time, as well as emphasizing our potentially limitless perceptual horizons when instrumentally mediated. The earthquakes emphasize that these characters are effectively in the same space, the space of the earthquake; where we might not normally be able to see all of these characters at the same time because of their spatial separation, the technological instrumentation of this movie allows our horizons to expand to encompass the moment.

One might argue that despite what appears on the screen, the spectator is nevertheless only really seeing one screen split into four squares; he is not actually perceiving more than one image at the same time. If one disregards the arguments made previously about the role of embodiment of perception in the image, one might also argue that the spectator remains passively separate from the image. However, aside from the hand-held camerawork, the film requires an active, interpretive role on the part of the spectator simply to keep all of the action straight and interpret the various visual and

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, Figgis originally envisioned this character as a man, but after having been turned down by

audio cues. The effect is similar to focusing one's attention on the person before you and disregarding the people in the background, but *also* requires one to realize that the people in the background are simultaneously pursuing their *own* narrative arcs in which *you* are but a background player. By film's end, in addition to placing the spectator in a centralized position around which everything is occurring, the movie also manages to position the spectator as one character following one particular narrative trajectory through time and space in the midst of a nearly infinite number of other time-space-narrative trajectories. The spectator is but one object among many within the entire space of the film. Moreover, the film has managed to do in real time what *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* attempt to do through photogrammetry: show more sides of the object at a given moment than human perception could accommodate on its own. Where in *The Matrix*, Neo as an object freezes in space and time so that the camera can swing around him and present us, as subject-objects, more than one perspective upon his location in time and space, *Time Code* is able to present those multiple perspectives without freezing the object in time by tracking them simultaneously with more than one camera. We are given more than one *Abschattung* at the same time. Likewise, where in Stephen Heath's essay "Narrative Space," he points to the small, excessive elements found within any given film as indicators of other narrative trajectories existing within this film world, the director choosing to follow only one, in *Time Code*, the director is allowed to follow those other narrative time-space trajectories as well *and* at the same time.

In a film like *Go* or *Pulp Fiction*, where each event is reliant upon the past and upon the future, the challenge to the relentless present is clear. However, the connection

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his first choices, offered the part to Jeanne Tripplehorn, who enthusiastically accepted.

between space and time becomes more central in *The Blair Witch Project* or the Dogme movies, in which the camera mimics our bodily position in space, providing the audience with progressive sketches of objects in space, fluidly moving through space and providing a continually new progression of moments and *Abschattungen*. We perceive the objects on the screen as we would perceive objects placed before us in “real life.” That the camera moves as our body would move through that space reinforces the bodily nature not only of perception, but of our body as perceiving the space and time of this particular film. Rather than a superficial image placed before us, we move through a deep space and perceive it in the same way that we perceive our movement through the theater on the way to our seats. This act of bodily perception is then taken up again in *Time Code*, where the camera again captures the bodily nature of progressive *Abschattung*. However, in Figgis’ film, the depth of space is folded into the depth of time, as we are able to perceive four simultaneous *Horizont* through the inclusion of four simultaneous cameras moving bodily through a space. Were we able to freeze a moment in film space and truly move through it spatially, we would realize there is no end to the depth of image, to the external narratives that Stephen Heath refers to in “Narrative Space.” Likewise, were we able to freeze upon one space and follow it through time, we would see that there is no end to the depth of it in the temporal dimension. Figgis gives us four simultaneous, continuous sketches of a particular 93-minute duration, one in which each moment is undeniably linked by digital technology to the one before it. There are no cuts, no edits, no temporal gaps between the moments as depicted in the film, just as there are no edits in our own personal experience of time and space.

Dominant paradigms within postmodernism tell us that the image is flat and superficial and that the current moment is not connected to the past or the future. Phenomenology, as I interpret it, tells us that perception is reliant not only upon the past, but also upon the future, that our movement through space and time around an object reveals the endless depth of space and time. I have identified a handful of films that arise in the midst of the proclaimed postmodern moment that work upon a phenomenological model of embodied perception of space and time, and in doing so, offer a direct challenge to the paradigms of postmodernism. It is now a question of the future as to whether that challenge can be met.



5.1: Honey Bunny in foreground, Vincent in background



5.2: Vincent in foreground, Pumpkin and Honey Bunny in background



5.3: Guard's security cam



5.4: Mia Maestro: The running jump cut



5.5: Alex and Rose tryst – Lauren listens on

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## APPENDIX A: THE DOGME 95 MANIFESTO

DOGME 95 is a collective of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995. DOGME 95 has the expressed goal of countering “certain tendencies” in the cinema today.

DOGME 95 is a rescue action!

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby ... false!

To DOGME 95 cinema is not individual!

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratization of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies. But the more accessible the media becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase “avant-garde” has military connotations. Discipline is the answer ... we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

DOGME 95 counters the individual film by the principle of presenting an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticised to death, they said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded.

The “supreme” task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? Is that what the “100 years” have brought us? Illusions via which emotions can be communicated? ... By the individual artist’s free choice of trickery?

Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance. Having the characters’ inner lives justify the plot is too complicated, and not “high art”. As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.

The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.

To DOGME 95 the movie is not illusion!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away

in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGME 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

## APPENDIX B: THE VOW OF CHASTITY

"I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by DOGME 95:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
  2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).
  3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).
  4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).
  5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
  6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
  7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
  8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
  9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
  10. The director must not be credited. Furthermore I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a "work", as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.
- Thus I make my VOW OF CHASTITY."  
Copenhagen, Monday 13 March 1995

On behalf of **DOGME 95**

Lars von Trier

Thomas Vinterberg

## APPENDIX C: DOGME 95 DIRECTORIAL CONFESSIONS

## Thomas Vinterberg's Confession

As one of the DOGME 95 brethren and co-signatory of the Vow of Chastity I feel moved to confess to the following transgressions of the aforesaid Vow during the production of Dogme #1-The Celebration. Please note that the film has been approved as a Dogme work, as only one genuine breach of the rules has actually taken place. The rest may be regarded as moral breaches.

I confess to having made one take with a black drape covering a window. This is not only the addition of a property, but must also be regarded as a kind of lighting arrangement.

I confess to having knowledge of a pay rise that served as cover for the purchase of Thomas Bo Larsen's suit for use in the film. Similarly I confess to having knowledge of purchases by Trine Dyrholm and Therese Glahn of the same nature.

I confess to having set in train the construction of a non-existent hotel reception desk for use in The Celebration. It should be noted that the structure consisted solely of components already present at the location.

I confess that Christian's mobile or cellular telephone was not his own. But it was present at the location.

I confess that in one take, the camera was attached to a microphone boom, and thus only partially hand-held.

I hereby declare that the rest of Dogme #1-The Celebration was produced in accordance with the Vow of Chastity.

Pleading for absolution, I remain

Thomas Vinterberg

## Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's Confession

As one of the DOGME 95 brethren and co-signatory of the Vow of Chastity I feel moved to confess to the following transgressions of the aforesaid Vow during the production of Dogme 3 - Mifune. Please note that the film has been approved as a Dogme work, as only one genuine breach of the rules has actually taken place. The rest may be regarded as moral breaches.

I confess to having made one take with a black drape covering a window. This is not only the addition of a property, but must also be regarded as a kind of lighting arrangement.

I confess to moving furniture and fittings around the house.

I confess to having taken with me a number of albums of my favourite cartoon series as a youth, Linda & Valentin.

I confess to helping to chase the neighbour's free-range hens across our location and including them in the film.

I confess that I brought a photographic image from an old lady from the area and hung it in a prominent position in one scene: not as part of the plot, but more as a selfish, spontaneous, pleasurable whim.

I confess to borrowing a hydraulic platform from a painter, which we used for the only two bird's-eye overview shots in the film.

I do solemnly declare that in my presence the remainder of Dogme 3 - Mifune was produced in accordance with the vow of chastity.

I also point out that the film has been approved by DOGME 95 as a Dogme film, as in real terms no more than a single breach of the rules has been committed. The rest may be regarded as moral transgressions

Copenhagen, 20 Januar 1999  
Søren Kragh-Jacobsen



Director:

Screenplay & Dialogue:

Director of Photography:

Producer:

Main Cast:

(Name of the Part)

.....=.....

.....=.....

.....=.....

Budget in US dollars:

Length in minutes:

By this I confirm my willingness to pay Danish Kroner 10.000,- for the Dogme95 Certificate.

.....  
(Director's signature)

Since this feature film has a fair- to high budget I volunteer to pay Danish Kroner 30.000.- for the Dogme95 Certificate.

.....  
(Director's signature)

By this I ask for an annulment of the demand for a payment of 10.000,- Danish Krone. (Please state your reasons for an annulment):

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....  
(Director's signature)

When I have finished the film and received the Dogme certificate I agree to send a VHS-copy of the film (preferably with English subtitles) to the Dogme Secretariat to be filed in the Dogme archives

.....  
(Director's signature)

Send to: Nimbus Film, Dogme Secretariat, Avedoere Tvaervej 10, DK-2650 Hvidovre, Denmark.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Trevor Glen Elkington

Born: 1970, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Education: BA, English Literature, University of Utah (1993)

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