

Christine Evans

editor's introduction:

theology & the political

Only the political is intrinsically required to declare that the thought that it is, is the thought of the all. It has an organic need for this declaration... The political is impossible without the statement that people, taken indistinctly, are capable of the thought which constitutes the political subject of the post-event. This statement reveals that a political thought is topologically collective, which means that it can only exist as a thought of the all (Badiou par. 5).

In his essay, "Odradek as a Political Category", Lacanian-Marxist theorist Slavoj Žižek reiterates an assertion that has surfaced several times throughout his work: in today's postmodern, postsecular society, our closest approximation to the divine (in all its senseless absurdity) is an encounter with the insanity of state bureaucracy. As evinced by the recent predicament of a Princeton, British Columbia pensioner who – although very much alive – was declared legally dead by the Canada Revenue Agency (which subsequently demanded a tax credit on his estate), the Kafkaian dimension of 'insane' divinity which permits a Canada Revenue B.C. spokesman to look us in the face and tell us that we are dead, that we don't exist, offers us a glimpse of "another order beyond mere terrestrial everyday reality" (Žižek 140). Indeed, who is more qualified to confirm our existence than the agencies which uphold the Law and ensure the smooth, regulated functioning of the mysterious but structurally essential symbolic order? We may not be as metaphysically equipped to confirm our existence as we assume! It is clear that the message to the Princeton pensioner is also the standard punchline of innocuous and unfunny comic strips: namely, the horrible irony of the Big Other is not, "You aren't paying your taxes because you aren't alive", but rather, "You aren't alive unless you're paying your taxes."

This collusion of self and symbol, belief and Law, and faith and fact, is precisely the obscene dimension which marks the intersection of theology and the political. Although the two concepts have always shared an abstract heritage (suffice it to recall our mother's warnings to avoid all discussions of religion or politics while in polite company), it is only at the level of the properly symbolic – or, in Badiou's terminology, the "topologically collective" – that 'religion' and 'politics' can effectively transform into their philosophical counterparts of 'theology' and 'the political.' It is therefore the aim of this issue of UBCinephile to accept both theology and the political as coercive and reciprocal objects rooted and comprehended in the realm of the symbolic: if all theology is inherently political and all politics essentially theological, how does the idea of theology manifest in the current cultural sphere? Suffice it

to say that the nature of the theme values meta-commentary over religious practice, and theoretical investigations over practical applications; it seems unnecessary to state that the aim of the issue is not to damn or defend religious or political agendas, argue their empirical or metaphysical validity, or document the appearance of religious iconography in a film. Rather, the contributors to this issue endeavor to investigate the philosophical underpinnings of theology itself, its expression in film, and its political ramifications. The feature articles in this issue explore a variety of manifestations of theology. R. Colin Tait offers an analysis of mass culture and 'Walmartification' in post-9/11 America as exemplified by David O. Russell's *I ♥ Huckabees* (2004), while Jennie Carlsen analyzes Neil Jordan's *The End of the Affair* (1999) within the context of adaptation. I contribute a piece on psychoanalytic structures of belief in Jonathan Glazer's *Birth* (2004), Katherine Pettit offers an illuminating account of the historical and theoretical conditions of post-mortem and 'spirit' photography, and David Hauka submits Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) to a generic reframing as both an action film and a 'Jesus narrative.' Interspersed throughout the issue are thematically-attuned reviews of recent films/books and an interview with filmmaker Su Rynard. Be sure to peruse our website (www.film.ubc.ca/ubcinephile/) for additional feature articles, reviews, and interviews. UBC's Film Studies program is committed to the academic investigation of critical theory in visual culture, and aims to place its student body and faculty at the forefront of advancing cinema and visual studies as a rigorous academic discipline – particularly as an interdisciplinary phenomenon which explores cinema from varied perspectives. I am confident that this issue of UBCinephile reflects the aims of the program, and I hope that you enjoy reading the offerings of the contributors.

Finally, I'd like to publicly express regret over not heeding my temptation to surtitle this issue "The Passion of the Christ(ine)" at the last minute.

Many thanks to everyone who had a hand in this publication, especially Dr. Brian McIlroy, the UBCinephile editorial team (both local and abroad), Kate Castello, Dr. Lisa Coulthard, and Zanna Downes. ☺

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Jennie Carlsten

“somehow the hate has got mislaid”: adaptation & the end of the affair

“Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature...We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does. The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion. He will never regard a grand passion as a destructive torrent upon which a man is swept into certain actions as by fate, and which, therefore, is an excuse for them. He thinks that man is responsible for his passion.”

-Jean-Paul Sartre

“I fought belief for longer than I fought love, but I haven’t any fight left.”

-Sarah Miles

As social critics have observed a rise in fundamentalism and tribalism, a rise often tied to the turn of the millennium, English language cinema has seen a concomitant increase in mainstream films with overtly religious content - film being a site in which artists and audiences are working out their considerable anxieties about this ‘new’ assertion of religious values.

The *Harry Potter* films (Chris Columbus, 2001 and 2002; Alfonso Cuarón, 2004; Mike Newell, 2005), *The Passion of the Christ* (Mel Gibson, 2004), *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005, Andrew Adamson), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003), *Constantine* (Francis Lawrence, 2005) - all have been alternately praised and taken to task by critics and audiences for their perceived fidelities and infidelities to their source texts. This is hardly news; the discussion of fidelity is, as Dudley Andrew puts it, “the most frequent and most tiresome” approach to examining the issues of adaptation. (Andrew 265) In particular, comparisons between the source text and the film are arguably pointless and distracting to the real business at hand; examination of the film as a self-contained and terminal work.

The notion of fidelity, tiresome as it may be, is still useful, and particularly so when discussing the adaptation of the overtly theological text. Films that take Western Christianity as their implicit and explicit subject matter are not only frequently adaptations of earlier works, but all are of course also overshadowed by their constant consideration as adaptations of the Christ narrative. The notion that these works are intended or could be considered by audiences “on their own merits” is inherently problematic, particularly when the films are

self-consciously positioned, created, and marketed as adaptations. In the case of *Narnia* or *The Passion of the Christ*, for instance, the emphasis in the marketing, critical, and audience discourses is on the supposed transference of a religious ‘message’ to a new medium.

As Andrew himself puts it, “No matter how we judge the process or success of the film, its ‘being’ owes something to the tale that was its inspiration and potentially its measure...Adaptations claiming fidelity bear the original as a signified, whereas those inspired by or derived from an earlier text stand in a relation of referring to the original” (*Ibid* 262). Clearly, on one level these films may seek to be read as closed texts; on another, we can and should view these films not as contained statements or even performed monologues, but as conversational volleys, entries in an on-going dialogue. Considering the films specifically as adaptations can add to our understanding of both works, throwing arguments and assumptions into stark relief.

Neil Jordan’s 1999 adaptation of Graham Greene’s novel *The End of the Affair* can most simply be seen, and has been examined by critics, as an example of what Andrew calls the “borrowing” mode of adaptation. In this familiar mode, the adapter draws on, with varying degrees of specificity, the “material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text” (*Ibid* 264). The adapter chooses a text that has a pre-established audience, as well as a perceived ‘legitimacy’ as a text. A borrowed adaptation depends on universal myths and themes to sustain itself. This model, though, is subject-oriented. It considers the elements of the text, but not those of the adapter, whose own intentions and thematic concerns may converge or diverge from the source. Jordan’s adaptation of Greene’s work is more than simply a filmmaker’s treatment of an appealing text and goes beyond “borrowing”; it is an interesting study in convergence and divergence. George Bluestone’s alternate model of adaptation may be applied here. Bluestone uses the example of two intersecting lines, book and film. Where the two intersect, they are virtually indistinguishable, but as the lines continue, the two get further and further apart (Bluestone 200). In the case of Jordan and Greene, one can imagine their paths not as straight perpendicular lines with a single intersection, but as lines that converge and diverge. Where Jordan’s film converges with Greene’s novel, it illuminates Greene’s take on faith and the limits of human reason. Where the film diverges from Greene’s novel, an entirely different understanding of the narrative emerges. In a way, this pairing offers a ‘case study’ of adaptation.

The End of the Affair is, superficially, the story of a love triangle that unfolds through a series of flashbacks and *mise-en-abymes*. Maurice Bendrix, the narrator, is an atheist and a writer whose relationship with Sarah Miles is marred by his bitter jealousy; Sarah is discontent in her marriage to Henry, a civil servant. Against the backdrop of WWII London, Sarah and Bendrix carry on a long-term affair. During the Blitz, Bendrix is either killed or knocked unconscious by a bomb; believing him dead, Sarah rashly makes a vow to God that she will give Bendrix up forever if God will spare him. When it appears that her bargain has been accepted, Sarah rejects Bendrix without an explanation. Two years later, Bendrix hires a private investigator, believing Sarah to have a new lover. Eventually, he learns of Sarah's vow.

In both film and novel, the past 'catches up' to the present halfway through the story. It is at this point that the plots begin to differ. This difference is significant not only for narrative coherence, but also for its impact on the religious subtext of the piece and its ultimate meaning. Considering the film as a borrowed text, the preservation or disavowal of the themes of the earlier work is worth exploring. It may be useful to establish first the key differences in the two texts (and by key, I mean those that seem significant and illustrative of the adaptation of the theology – and not simply the plot): the nature of the manifest miracle, the figure of the atheist Reverend Smythe, the relationship between Bendrix and Henry, and, of course, Sarah's adherence to her vow.

The first deviation from the novel has to do with the miracle revealed after Sarah's death. In the novel, one of these involves a rationalist preacher, Smythe, with whom Sarah confers. She wants to be reasoned out of her belief; the man fails to convince her, and Sarah wonders if his lack of faith is really anger at God for the preacher's disfiguring birthmark. After Sarah's death, the birthmark miraculously disappears and thus the rationalist is converted. In the film, it is the detective's son who experiences the miracle; his birthmark disappears after Sarah kisses him. Clearly, this requires a different interpretation. The miracle is no longer one of faith conquering reason, but of innocence over sin; Sarah removes the child's blemish as a healing saint might, by virtue of her own moral sanctity.

Jordan, in fact, does away with the figure of Smythe altogether. Ironically enough, the role is conflated with that of the Catholic priest who advises Sarah. This alteration, which would seem on the surface to simply remove the overt intellectual questioning of faith, actually works quite differently to produce a more, not less, secular narrative. In the novel, it is precisely Smythe's arguments against God which ultimately convince Sarah of God's existence; "I had gone to him to rid me of a superstition, but every time I went his fanaticism fixed the superstition deeper." Without doubt, there is no possibility of belief; without her hatred of God, there is no love of God either. Jordan has effectively removed the doubt and the hatred, and in so doing, has removed the crux of Sarah's belief.

In another change to the plot, Jordan's story has Bendrix moving into Henry and Sarah's home before her death, rather than afterwards as Greene wrote it. The adaptive substitution here is one of dynamic weight. The change increases the significance of the relationship between Henry and Bendrix. It also allows, or perhaps



forces, Jordan to show Bendrix's emotions through his interactions with Henry. In the novel, Bendrix has no foil for his anger and so the reader is as confused about the emotions Bendrix is experiencing as he is himself. Greene emphasizes Bendrix's isolation; Jordan, having already reunited Sarah and Bendrix, has taken the story in another direction. An added scene, in which Bendrix apologizes to Henry, again emphasizes the relationship between the men and suggests an alleviation of Bendrix's isolation. Certainly, Greene's Bendrix remains unapologetic and even contemptuous; he hates Henry, as he hates himself. Finally, in the novel, Sarah keeps her vow to God. She promises to give Bendrix up forever in return for his life, believes absolutely that God has interceded, and dies without abandoning her vow. In Jordan's film, Bendrix and Sarah are reunited; Sarah breaks her vow and has time with Bendrix before she dies. It is this change to the ending that has caused some viewers to see the film as a violation of not only the form but also the substance of Greene's novel. Reviewer Stanley Kaufmann goes so far as to say that Jordan is "ravaging the spiritual elements in the novel" and asks why Jordan has bothered to adapt the novel if only to "squeeze and distort" its religious theme (Kaufmann 25). Richard Allea argues that the change causes the film to fail not only as an adaptation, but as a work of art: it "dissolves Graham Greene's central premise and relieves Sarah of her theological dilemma. And without that dilemma, the story ultimately doesn't make sense, and so it can't be said that the movie even stands on its own merits" (Allea, 18).¹

Greene only asks the reader to accept that Sarah truly believes in the miracle. He does not ask that the reader himself believe; Sarah's vow is more important than what precedes it. In having Sarah break her vow, Jordan shifts the interest of the film onto the miracle itself. Likewise, the disappearing birthmark is not clouded by any philosophic debate over intellect versus blind faith; it is a pure and simple event.² Jordan engages with the miracle

¹ Not all critics see these changes as destructive or even contradictory to Greene's intended reading. For example, Paul Baumann maintains that Greene's work is open to such an alternative ending, citing the "enigmatic aspects of Greene's fevered and heterodox religious vision." He points out that Sarah is not meant to be a perfect being, even after her salvation (Baumann 16). It is certainly true that Sarah still yearns for what she calls "ordinary human love".

² At the same time, moving the birthmark from another character to that of the boy also alludes to Jordan's earlier film, *The Miracle*

as a magical act, more than a religious act. (Notably, Jordan himself attributes his attitude towards the miraculous to the peculiarities of Irish Catholicism, which he describes as "...more to do with magic – it's a very superstitious set of lessons you learn when you're a child") (Wootton).

Where film and novel do converge is in their presentation of the other 'miracle': Bendrix's presumed resurrection and the ambiguity that surrounds this core event and thereby pervades the narrative. Both Greene's novel and Jordan's film rely on similar structural devices to create an intentionally and overtly ambiguous narrative. The use of first-person narration not only allows them to convey the internal dialogue of Bendrix and to recall a classic convention of the detective novel, but, most of all, the tactic makes Bendrix a self-conscious and active participant in his own conversion, and allows the audience the same self-conscious and active participation. Bendrix is a highly subjective and unreliable narrator and, more unusually, he is also highly aware of his own subjectivity. As Gene Phillips explains in his discussion of the novel, a conventional third person narrator would have made the novel "a pious and pedestrian tale of a mistress who repents and becomes a saint", whereas the subjective quality involves the reader in Bendrix's debate (Phillips 128). Because of the first-person narration, the reader/viewer's knowledge of events is limited; the audience only understands the 'truth' as it unfolds for Bendrix. This is important stylistically, and because it creates sympathy for the jealous and bitter antihero. More essentially, though, it encourages the reader/viewer to experience Bendrix's conversion (from one who doesn't believe to one who believes enough to tell God that he hates him "as though you existed") as he does. The novel ends with Bendrix still uncertain, still doubtful, still full of hate, leaving the reader to deal with this ambiguity.

Jordan preserves this quality to an extent in his adaptation by using limited perspective. Dramatizing Bendrix's internal struggle, however, is left largely up to the voiceover narration and facilitated by a framing device: the film opens with a pan over the typewriter and writing tools; Bendrix begins to type and the narration begins. Presenting Sarah's voice was an easier task, perhaps, due to the device of her diary. Beyond its function in supplying the missing pieces of the plot, the diary also allows Greene and Jordan to articulate the abstractions of Sarah's conversion, and above all, to demonstrate the limits of Bendrix's (and our own) understanding.

Neither novel nor film is structured chronologically; the audience must put pieces of the story together as it is revealed.³ The novel begins with the line "a story has no beginning and no end", and accordingly chooses as its own start a moment two years after the affair has in fact ended. The details of the affair are relayed first through Bendrix's memories and then through his reading of Sarah's diary. This reveals Bendrix's misconceptions,

misconceptions shared, at least on an intellectual level, by the reader. The pivotal point in the story – Bendrix's death or near-death and Sarah's vow – is written into the novel twice. Greene relays, in their words, the event, first as Bendrix experienced it and again as Sarah experienced it.

Jordan follows Greene's lead carefully here, mixing the present with flashback (without transitional cues, simply cutting between various periods in a deliberately uncertain manner) and showing us that critical scene multiple times. On film, Jordan is able to use varying camera angles and movement, along with additional footage, to literally give us a different perspective on the event. The effect is that both the rationalist and the spiritual versions are believable; the scene is ambivalent and the viewer cannot really know whether a miracle has occurred. What is accomplished in the book through Bendrix's ongoing narration is done on film by the visuals of those two scenes alone.

The unreliable narration, fractured chronology, and competing perspectives are not only generic cues – this is, after all, a detective story – but also cues to the narrative's theological intent. If our pursuit of salvation is, as Catholic theology has held, really a pursuit of knowledge, a seeking of moral perfection, then the ultimate goal of this detective story is somewhat loftier than the uncovering of an illicit affair.

Clearly, both Jordan and Greene struggle to find an answer to the dilemma Greene has laid out, the inability of reason to explain or provide meaning to human existence or bring us closer to that perfect moral knowledge. Where the two works diverge incontrovertibly is in how they cope with that dilemma. Jordan chooses a framework of neo-existentialism; Greene defies both the rationalists and the existentialists in what Gorra calls "a return to the pre-modernist conditions of narrative" (Gorra xvii) and in his insistence on faith alone, rather than faith in reason or in the will.

For his part, Jordan uses editing and camera movement to question this notion of certain knowledge; rather, he offers differing perspectives and multiple versions of cataclysmic events. Again, he follows Greene's lead: in the novel, the critical moments on the affair are described first by Bendrix, and then, again, in Sarah's diary, which makes up the middle portion of the novel and casts events in a new light for Bendrix and the reader. Jordan represents this difference in perspective literally. In an early scene, Bendrix and Sarah meet in an old haunt, two years after the sexual relationship has been broken off, for an awkward and (on Bendrix's part) hostile meal. As the two talk about Sarah's marriage, the camera tracks from left to right, tracing a predatory half-circle around the table, until Sarah breaks down and rushes from the restaurant. When, much later, the scene is recounted through the reading of the diary, Jordan changes nothing in the *mise-en-scene*, but reverses the camera movement, which now tracks from right to left. Similarly, the central event of the bomb blast and Bendrix's 'resurrection' is shown in turn from the perspective of both Bendrix and Sarah. Rather than recasting the entire scene, however, Jordan again uses a subtle variation.

Jordan's handling of these scenes would seem to permit both rational and miraculous explanations, turning a spiritual question into an epistemological one. Jordan

(1991), in which the main character, a teenage boy, experiences what he interprets as a miracle.

³ Interestingly, Edward Dmytryk's 1955 version of the film undoes this effect; the story is told chronologically first from Bendrix's perspective and then retold from Sarah's; the continual and un-signposted timeshifts are absent.



seems also to encourage a third reading, one which Greene himself closes off. This is, of course, an elementary psychoanalytical reading. The bomb blast is a moment of trauma, which produces in Sarah a hysterical response. The trauma of the blast is represented not just twice, but yet again at a moment of crisis for Bendrix, becoming a metaphor for his mental state. Jordan's gestures towards this reading seem, if one cannot be permitted to say a violation, at least a radical departure from Greene's position. In short, where Greene offers faith as the non-rationalist explanation, Jordan offers a choice between the magical and the psychoanalytic. God, as anything other than a fictional device, is removed from the narrative.⁴

At the same time, the malevolence of God, and of Sarah and Bendrix's mutual hatred for God, are undermined by Jordan's treatment of the physical Church, a point made by Phillip Kemp in his review of the film. "In the film, the church has become spacious and opulent. The draperies are bright with blue and crimson, the rood screen a glowing expanse of gold. Hazy sunlight streams through the stained glass. This is symptomatic: an awkward, edgy, tormented novel has been upholstered for comfort" (Kemp). Moreover, in Jordan's version, the Church is visually aligned through the lighting and camera angles with Sarah's home; at its

⁴ In adapting the novel, Jordan makes a judgement of the original work and finds it lacking. "If something is finished as a perfect work there is no point in trying to do anything with it. In this case I felt there was something to be done" (Wootton). What is lacking in Greene's novel, according to Jordan, is a measure of humanity. "Greene is great at moral dilemmas...what I needed to do was bring the human drama to the surface and find a way of making the whole thing understandable and believable in human terms" (Sony Pictures). Whereas the novel focuses on the intellectual and philosophical debates of the characters, Jordan focuses on the inexplicable aspects of human feelings. Jordan's declared intent might account for the direction the film takes toward standard melodrama. The appeal of Greene's text to Jordan, it should be noted, is most obvious when the film is considered as a part of Jordan's *oeuvre*. His concerns with the fantastic, with the unity of sex and death, with the motif of the storyteller – while there is not space here to examine these, a more thorough examination of *The End of the Affair* as an adaptation would surely require their consideration. In the context of these other works, Jordan's use of Greene, as well as his divergence from Greene, begins to make sense. Jordan creates stories not about faith and hate, but about magic and empathy.

worst, the Church here is stifling in its conventionality and security, dull and placid like Sarah's marriage to civil servant Henry, but certainly never terrifying, spiteful, or abusive. The god of Greene's *End of the Affair* is not a kind or forgiving god, nor is he a dull and passive god; he is a calculating and possessive outsider who thwarts the couple's efforts to be together.

Jordan's approach may have more appeal, in some ways, to a 'reasonable' viewer, and this may explain why Jordan's film never quite becomes the "diary of hate" that the novel represents. Bendrix's hate cannot be accounted for, nor is it driven, by reason. Even as he realizes, and as Sarah tries to reason with him, that his anger and bitterness will inevitably destroy the human relationship, he is unable to will himself into acting otherwise. Even as he realizes the futility of hating God – "I've got to be reasonable", he tells himself in his despair – Bendrix is driven to a twisted and unwilling faith – "I hate You, God, I hate You as though You existed." Greene has been labelled a Jansenist, a determinist, and an existentialist. In his treatment of Bendrix as a hero who hates, Greene seems not to strictly adhere to any of these positions. Rather, he takes account of what William Barrett calls "the Furies" – like those of Greek mythology, forces that cannot be controlled by rationality or by fate. As Barrett sees it, the existentialists, in their reliance on rationality and will, deny the Furies, and in so doing, fall short of really understanding human morality.

Iris Murdoch has described the modern fictional hero as "behaviourist, existentialist, and utilitarian." His being and morality, his selfhood, are determined by his actions and his expression of his will (Murdoch 8). While this would seem a fairly accurate description of the on-screen Bendrix, Greene's hero is something else. This Bendrix is a man in transition from just this sort of modern hero to another sort, one whose self is not dictated by his external actions or by the exercising of his will. The novel works structurally and thematically as a challenge to rationalism and its limitations.

Murdoch's conception of the sovereignty of good posits that morality and self-determination do not occur only in moments of will-driven action, but equally in the moments "in-between." This suggests that the passivity of a character like Henry, for example, can be moral activity, while Sarah's faith is more essentially moral activity than are her overt actions, and even Bendrix's hateful conversion is a movement towards knowledge and therefore moral goodness. Murdoch argues against the twin notions that morality cannot be an internal and wholly private concept, and that salvation by works is the only possibility. Moreover, reason and will alone cannot determine the morality of one's actions. Accordingly, Bendrix comes to belief in spite of reason, and yet we are not invited to view – in the novel – his belief as delusional or any less intellectually sophisticated than his previous (and even simultaneous) denials.

Bendrix loses control of his destiny, his narrative, and even the literal narrative as belief takes over. In short, he becomes – the novel becomes – unreasonable. At the 'arbitrary beginning' of the tale, Bendrix is the existentialist and utilitarian hero, with no desire for or belief in a transcendent moral authority, only for self-sufficiency and control over his own will. Bendrix is, of course, a writer – for Jordan a convenience that primarily enables a clever framing device, but which carries greater

significance. Bendrix cannot write his own story; when he tries, it gets perverted and reclaimed by the literal intercession of Sarah's diary. A researcher and biographer, Bendrix is incapable of empathy with his characters. What is lacking in Bendrix's life is not only love, but a narrative. In his work Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century, Neil Postman argues, as others before him, that we require a transcendent narrative "for without one, we can have no sense of purpose. Without a sense of purpose, we are left with only power as the source of authority" (Postman, 106). Bendrix, like all heroes, becomes a moral being; unlike the hero of reason and will, he does so not by creating his own narrative, but by accepting, however reluctantly, his place in a larger narrative over which he holds little influence.

Naturally, like Bendrix, the majority of the audience for Jordan's film prefers not to believe in the truth of such a narrative. Postman and, I think, Greene, would say that it doesn't matter. As Postman says, "the measure of a narrative's 'truth' is in its consequences" (*Ibid* 110). By the end of the film and the book alike, Bendrix believes, but what matters more to Greene is that he has already begun to live as though he believes, as if there is a transcendent moral authority. This is not to propose that this belief has brought Bendrix any satisfaction, only that his existence has become invested with purpose despite his resistance.

Jordan mistakes this purpose as "love", forgetting that hate can be as purposeful and moral as love. In fact, the novel leaves off before Bendrix has begun to love. Faith and hate come first, and Bendrix has only just attained these; his relationship with God is uncertain and anguished at the novel's close. Bendrix's lack of faith, in Greene's conception, means that he is incapable of love; while his hatred is a precursor to faith. By turning this into a love story, Jordan has in some respects missed the point, a point even Bendrix is able to articulate by the story's end. Michael Gorra, in his introduction to a recent edition, speaks of the novel's tendency to anger its readers. I'd like to suggest that this is more than an incidental tendency or failing, as Gorra casts it, but a strategy to replicate in the reader Bendrix's own feelings of vexation, loss, and rage. By framing Bendrix's transformation to a moral agent as a love story, Jordan alters the film profoundly.

I began this essay by speaking of the divergence of Jordan's adaptation and its significance to the larger question of adaptation. Andrew implores us to consider adaptation "a peculiar form of discourse, but not an unthinkable one...let us use it as we use all cultural practices, to understand the world from which it comes and the one toward which it points" (Andrew 271). Jordan's adaptation – expressing his own thematic concerns and reflecting a fundamental theological shift – points backwards to Greene's moral universe and forward to a new climate of production and reception, and may reveal as much through its divergences as through its points of concurrence. Gorra has called The End of the Affair "the religious novel of a fundamentally secular age" (Gorra xxi). If, as some would like to argue, we are abandoning the secular for a new fundamentalist era, Jordan's film may well be a fundamentally secular film for that religious age. ☺

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Christine Evans

i'm in love! i'm a believer!:

structures of belief in jonathan glazer's **birth**

TRANSPARENCY & TRANSUBSTANTIATION: RECUPERATING THE VULGARITY OF THE INHERENT TRANSGRESSION

In one sequence from Jonathan Glazer's film *Birth* (2004), the enraged and exasperated fiancé of protagonist Anna suddenly attacks a young boy who, contrary to all rational logic, has declared himself to be the reincarnation of Anna's deceased husband. The sudden and ethereal appearance of the boy, Sean – who shares the dead husband's name – intrudes upon the scheduled (re)marriage of Anna to her fiancé Joseph, who becomes increasingly intolerant of Anna's supernatural and transgressive fixation on the 10-year-old Sean. The aforementioned sequence takes place during a musical salon performance celebrating Anna and Joseph's engagement; having interrupted the performance to strike out at Sean, Joseph rants nonsensically to his shocked guests, "[Sean] doesn't have any clue of how to make something happen. He's living in a land where he's pretending to be something instead of doing the job, and that's the real problem." Does this accusation, in all its ambivalence and absurdity, not precisely express the standard attitude towards belief: the infinite delay of the unpleasant, traumatic truth (God does not exist, nobody truly loves me, Sean is not a supernatural reincarnation but rather a manipulative/deluded little boy) in favour of a vaguely ridiculous and indeed properly 'unbelievable' disavowal which keeps us from 'doing the job' and 'making something happen'?

Before continuing with this particular interrogation of belief, it is necessary to first address the peculiar improbability of such a reading in relation to *Birth* as a text. This film is an exemplary artifact of what theorist Slavoj Žižek identifies as (the post-political liberal incarnation of) our current, permissive society which, in its eagerness to promote tolerance, politically demures from judgement and reinscribes so-called 'transgressive behaviour' (sexual perversion and openness, cultural subversiveness, and so on) as normal, accepted, and healthy/therapeutic. Given that these formerly censored personal, sexual, and cultural elements currently enjoy some amount of psychic and social forbearance, the proper aim of psychoanalysis in postmodernity involves the analytical recuperation of the repressed or altogether vitiated libidinal matrix of 'normalcy', superficiality, and cultural vulgarity which must now be suppressed in order for the subject to appear appropriately enlightened and unashamed/secure; in revivifying this lost censure, or effectively 'returning the return of the repressed' to its foundation in obscene rituals and rules, psychoanalysis acknowledges that,

everything is turned back to front. Public order is no longer maintained by hierarchy, repression and strict regulation, and therefore is no longer subverted by liberating acts of transgression. Instead, we have social relations among free and equal individuals... [such that] the rigidly codified, authoritarian master/slave relationship becomes transgressive (Žižek 1999 par. 13).

To avoid a problematic misunderstanding: the point here is not that transgression *itself* has become completely integrated in our permissive society and is now sublimated and gentrified to the point of nonexistence, but rather that transgression merely occupies a different place – has reversed modalities, as it were – and has inverted to codify the 'backwards', sexually repressed/repressive Right which refuses to accept or celebrate difference and self-expression.

Accordingly, such attitudes are not only reflected in their historically-situated artworks and cultural artifacts, but in the anticipated and expected *interpretations* of such contemporary texts. This cultural logic emphasizes that the first, basic reading is perpetually inadequate and lacking, classified as vulgar and elementary in lieu of the evolution of secondary and tertiary readings which equate complexity and innovation with a particular variety of readerly transgressiveness. Apropos of the 'false' view/assumption that transgression is a thing of the past, *Birth's* controversial subject matter initially identifies it as a cultural object of permissiveness *par excellence*; in its open display of both taboo intimations of pedophilia and their transparent interpretive ramifications (Anna as the textbook hysteric, themes of doubling and delusion, failed attempts at mourning and their articulation in trauma, and so on), the film engenders – both narratively and analytically – what may be termed a formulaic transgressiveness. This is reflected in critic Greg Smith's assertion that *Birth* "tries so hard to be complicated that it... is ultimately meaningless" (88), and is therefore guilty of essentially vacating its 'first step' – its vulgar, basal reading that is too basic/elementary to account for analytically titillating, perverse permutations. Equally exemplary of this attitude is the enlightened postmodern cynicism which interprets the titles of two Krzysztof Kieslowski films (1988's *A Short Film About Love* and *A Short Film About Killing*) as ironically limited or comically subversive, but which neglects the 'other' truth of the titles apropos of their apparent simplicity: amongst other things, these films are indeed *about* love and killing. Consequently, the project of recuperating this primary reading is distinctly and ironically 'unnatural'; given that the primary

reading is so readily perceived as the foundation from which increasingly abstract secondary accretions emerge, it therefore becomes difficult to conceive of the originary or base interpretation as anything more (or less) meaningful than a site which engenders signification, or a surface upon which some analytical or ideological project is mapped.

This tendency to obfuscate – and, by extension, evacuate – the most elementary readings with their secondary accretions is precisely why I propose a fundamentally regressive approach to Glazer's *Birth*. Although the 'vulgarity' of such an approach does not aim at analytical essentialism (i.e., it does not propose a disclosure of the text's 'hidden secret' through the revelation of its ultimate meaning), its baseness and naïveté nonetheless manifests in an (attempted) recrudescence of the text's inherent transgressions.¹ However, if a given text is completely open and accessible, both as a subversive cultural artifact and as an ironically transparent object for analysis, how are we to properly access the 'inherent' aspect of the inherent transgression? One analytical feature of the inherent transgression involves the assertion that an apparently unassailable prohibition will nonetheless transubstantiate across a text, narratively and stylistically 'infecting' it as a necessary byproduct of censorship (consider the delight of the spectator who discovers the excessive sexual proclivities of the apparently gentrified films produced under the Hayes Production Code). However, this understanding of the inherent transgression as a reactionary and rebellious opposition to prohibition/repression/censorship is both incomplete and incorrect; the crucial point not to be missed in this formulation of transubstantiation is the fact that it does not *threaten* the "system of symbolic domination" (Žižek 2000a 7), but rather *supplements* it. As Žižek asserts, these perverse byproducts function as the "unacknowledged, obscene support" (*Ibid*) of the Public Symbolic Law, whereby prohibition (apropos of Foucault) exists as a positive "codification and regulation that generate[s] the very excess whose direct depiction it hindered" (*Ibid* 6). Simply stated, nothing properly exists 'outside' of the Public Symbolic Law, and nothing escapes assimilation into the domain of the Big Other; even rebellion against this domain is preinscribed (i.e., inherent) as a necessary condition of the Big Other and ideological integration itself.

This popular hypothesis of the inherent transgression and the textual transubstantiation of explicitly forbidden material is certainly unambiguous when applied to texts which are themselves 'openly repressed', especially if such prohibition is the result of a governing bureaucratic body (the Hayes Production Code) or a set of repressive sociocultural mandates (the Victorian era). However, if transgression under our current regime of tolerance no longer indexes the outbursts of "subversive motifs repressed by the predominant patriarchal ideology" (*Ibid* 8), then what specific repressed content erupts or transubstantiates in a film such as *Birth* which – as mentioned previously – conceals neither its perverse



textual tendencies nor its interpretive/analytical adjuncts? Here, it is possible to argue that not only the continued manufacture of such openly transgressive artworks, but also the obligation to interpret them in new and innovative ways, has descended into cultural malaise and dullness. One need only evoke the weariness and boredom with which we currently greet ultraviolent films or 'shocking' pornography as cultural objects of analysis, to substantiate Žižek's comment on the contemporary deadlock of art and sexuality:

Is there anything more dull, opportunistic, and sterile than to succumb to the superego injunction of incessantly inventing new artistic transgressions and provocations (the performance artist masturbating on stage or masochistically cutting himself, the sculptor displaying decaying animal corpses or human excrement), or to the parallel injunction to engage in more and more 'daring' forms of sexuality... (2004 par. 6).

Shall we simply read everything in a perpetually perverse inversion, contending that the hidden secret of a transgressive text is the fundamental propriety and conservatism that (apparently) lies at its heart? Although such a reversal is a viable and distinctly Lacanian-Hegelian option,² let us briefly consider another Žižekian articulation of the inherent transgression as the notion that "the very emergence of a certain 'value' which serves as the point of ideological identification relies on its transgression, on some mode of taking a *distance* towards it" (1998 3: emphasis mine). It is precisely this invocation of critical distanciation – that is, of *recognition*, or the ability to identify the symbolic point of ideological inscription *as such* – which renders accessible the recuperation of the transparent postmodern text's ideological controversy or 'true obscenity.' As such, it is my contention that a return to the debased, elementary, and properly vulgar 'first step' of interpretation is the only means of maintaining the gap between prohibition and codified appearance (the 'inherence' of the inherent transgression) which the

¹ Žižek characterizes the 'inherent transgression' as a point of ideological inscription or identification which is dependent on its transgression (for example, the unwritten rule dictating that an individual can never properly 'belong' to a community until he has broken some of its rules). Far from undermining, exposing, or challenging symbolic authority, such transgression ironically (i.e., inherently) upholds symbolic dominion.

² For example, in response to the contemporary postmodern deadlock of art and insubordination, Žižek links cultural and artistic transgressiveness to the demands of the market economy, which must integrate provocation and subversiveness into its establishment logic. Consequently, artistic shock value is subsumed under the rubric of the cultural-economic apparatus, which, "in order to reproduce itself in competitive market conditions, has not only to tolerate but directly to provoke stronger and stronger shocking effects and products" (*The Fragile Absolute: or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London: Verso, 2000b. 25).

enlightened and radicalized attitude of postmodernity so desperately attempts to close. Alternately, psychoanalysis provides an adequate means of deconstructing the rudimentary/anticipated surface-operations of narrative and interpretive 'conventions', as well as their analogical consequences. Slavoj Žižek posits that,

we can locate the need for psychoanalysis at a very precise point: what we are not aware of is not some deeply repressed secret content but *the essential character of the appearance itself*. Appearances *do* matter... (2000a 6).

Simply stated, the necessary *distance* required by transgression in postmodernity can only be procured through the reader's ironic *proximity* to the cultural object, such that its most superficial characteristics gain a renewed presence as unnatural, improbable, and ultimately transgressive textual supplements.

(MAKE-)BELIEVE UNTIL YOU (REALLY) BELIEVE!

It is into this analytically unnatural or libidinal matrix of superficiality, appearance, and vulgar transgressiveness that I wish to re-introduce the consideration of belief and its structuring principles in *Birth*. It seems unnecessary to state that *Birth* is a film 'about' belief just as it seems equally glib to declare that *any* film is 'about' a combination of universal signifiers (love, death, rebirth, and so on), as if such an assertion were a dazzling new epigram. However, the means by which belief manifests in a film so readily open to psychoanalytic interpretation (or, as some critics have remarked, prescriptively created for such interpretation) nonetheless remains worthy of exploration; not only is the film subjected to analysis under a philosophical abstraction (belief) which is often circumvented in favour of readings predicated on specific symptoms, but belief itself in this context must be interrogated relative to its cultural mutability.

In criticism and culture, belief has always occupied the place of a philosophical abstraction; accordingly, it can only be properly clarified when affiliated with a discipline which, through the specificity of its analysis (Christian belief, the concept of belief in psychoanalysis, the cultural value of belief in anthropology, and so on), imposes a measure of ritualistic construction onto an otherwise evanescent conceit. Consequently, the philosophical investigation of belief often entails a lengthy justification for articulating it as the function of a particular discipline. In much contemporary scholarship, this methodological preoccupation often evinces an inability - or at least a reticence - to distinguish between belief as an ongoing progression of indoctrination (the arduous process by which one comes to identify as a 'believer') and the life of belief or *Weltanschauung* (the particular perspective of belief through which the subject makes sense of the world around him). The legitimacy of this distinction is a central theological concern, given that its circularity (my desire to 'become' a believer always-already identifies me as one) may indeed constitute the very essence of what it means to believe.

We find an expression of this fundamental structuring conflict in the writings of St. Augustine, who (apropos of Plato's Paradox of Inquiry) examines the motivation to (learn to) love a god which one does not know. At the outset of his Confessions, Augustine, addressing God,

articulates the contradiction inherent in this isochronal motivation:

... for who can call on Thee, not knowing Thee? for he that knoweth Thee not, may call on Thee as other than Thou art. Or, is it rather, that we call on Thee that we may know Thee? but how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? or how shall they believe without a preacher? and they that seek the Lord shall praise Him: for they that seek shall find Him, and they that find shall praise Him (I.I.I. 1997 11).

Additionally, he provides us with a more succinct expression of this paradox in Book 8 of On the Trinity, asserting that, "Unless we love [God] now, we shall never see Him. But who loves that which he does not know? For something can be known and not loved; but what I am asking is whether something can be loved that is not known" (8.4.6. 2002 10)? However, what bearing does this theological conundrum have on the dominion of the Public Symbolic Law? Lacan identifies the specifically *symbolic necessity* of belief's cyclical impasse as the "order which is constitutive of the subject" (1988a 29) in his reading of Pascal's Christian injunction: "*Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'aurais trouvé* [You would not be looking for me if you had not already found me]' simply confirms the same truth [of the authority of the symbolic order] in different words" (2005 85). This irreconcilably extra-autonomous characteristic of belief as somehow exterior to the subject's free self-assertion is precisely why Gilles Deleuze situates the act of belief as a practical application of *habit*; as such, the outcome (belief) is less dependent on the subject's critical judgment than on the symbolically inevitable realization/satisfaction of expectation. He contends that, "We are habits, nothing but habits - the habit of saying 'I.' Perhaps there is no more striking answer to the problem of the self" (1991 x). As previously mentioned, albeit in the context of transgression, the universality of the Public Symbolic Law not only retroactively 'manipulates' our actions to conform to its smooth regulation, but likewise impedes upon our most intimate attempts at autonomy and choice, such that habitual belief - even in its most 'removed' theological and philosophical context - is an antecedent of the Lacanian unconscious. Pascal is here particularly illustrative of how the 'habit' of belief is less contingent on the subject's autonomy as judgmental and discriminating than on the retroactively significant 'connection' of an empirically meaningless symbolic circuit:

For we must make no mistake about ourselves: we are as much automaton as mind... Proofs only convince the mind: habit provides the strongest proofs and those that are most *believed*. It inclines the automaton, which leads the mind unconsciously along with it (172).

As per the inevitable assimilation of every action and counter-action into the domain of the Big Other, belief itself in psychoanalysis (as both sequential indoctrination and definitive *Weltanschauung*) is ideologically preinscribed as the search for something that we have always-already found, which is precisely why Deleuze's coupling of (intimate) belief with (impersonal) habit can be regarded as a psychoanalytic truism. Essentially, belief indexes a willingness, however unconscious, to participate in the structuring semblance of the symbolic network and, hence, become a subject.

My rather succinct delineation of belief's paradoxical identity (as that which is most intimate in the subject yet which concerns his free self-assertion less than he will ever know) is not intended to be dismissive; rather, the placement of this paradox as somewhat exterior to my argument is intended to remind the reader that the fundamental aporia of belief³ is rooted in the symbolic. Given that discussions of belief necessarily stray into the "to-ing and fro-ing" (Deleuze 1989 247) between the false or empty pretense of enacting belief in its absence, and the emancipated outcome ('I'm a believer!'), it is recommended that the reader always recall the unconscious symbolic mandate which functions as the kernel of belief. Conversely, the possibility of *overvaluing* this kernel and exploiting it as a curative, universalized response to all subsequent interrogations of belief (the defeatist attitude of 'all roads lead to the Big Other, so why bother?') is detrimental and should be avoided. Certainly we may always return to the extra-autonomous nature of belief as an anticipated readerly truism,⁴ but this by no means negates alternate avenues which explore belief beyond or independent of its status as a habituated symbolic construction.

To facilitate a more extensive examination of belief, I have designated three interdependent modalities of belief which – for the purposes of clarity – can nonetheless be interpreted as distinct. Positioning belief as a series of interrelated questions addressed to the Other, I identify these modalities or registers as *direct*, *transposed*, and *assumed* belief, and focus particularly on the register of assumed belief in relation to Glazer's *Birth*.

CHE VUOI?: THREE REGISTERS OF BELIEF, OR, TAKE MY BELIEF... PLEASE

Pascal's famous and controversial advice to those who struggle with their faith is to simply kneel down and pray, whereupon belief will appear or 'come by itself' over time. Although we can locate this statement as the median between the mantra of recovering alcoholics ('fake it till you make it') and well-intentioned nagging ('practice makes perfect'), it also functions as the ideal expression of the conflict between habitual indoctrination and identificatory *Weltanschauung*, where the subject must distinguish between the practice of "regulated repetition and [the material] which produces a subject acting in full consciousness according to his belief" (Butler 23). Pascal's statement has also undergone lengthy analysis by Slavoj Žižek, who considers it an exemplary illustration of the subject's need to both displace and infinitely postpone the unbearable burden of belief. Following Louis Althusser's assertion that the suggestion to 'kneel down and believe' articulates a reification of belief as "the institutionally reproduced condition of ideology" (Butler 9), Žižek approaches this Pascalian/Althusserian ritual as a self-

referential and causal release from the belief one only assumes one does not have. The enigma of the subject's (in)ability to perceive this liminal identity of believer/non-believer is classified by Žižek as the temporal or causal contingency which motivates the subject to kneel in the first place; here, we again encounter the problematic equivalence of habit and identity, indoctrination and *Weltanschauung*. If one kneels and performs the 'empty' rituals of belief with the intention of eventually acquiring belief, then the rituals are not empty at all, but spiritually and ideologically portentous – for this so-called believer-to-be, laying the groundwork for, or constructing the scene of belief already heralds its timely and mediated arrival. However, is this cycle of motivation and outcome not also a cynical ideological illusion which grants the subject a sense of *false* autonomy? Ultimately, he can reassure himself with the knowledge that his performance of ritualistic exercise is supplemented by an always-already actualized desire to believe, and can therefore ignore the possibility that his very *consent* to kneel and pray is as ritualistically and ideologically predetermined as the kneeling itself.

Expressing this self-referential causality as, "Kneel down and you will believe that you knelt down because you believed!" (Žižek 2005 par. 6), Žižek bypasses the condemnation of manipulative ideological state apparatuses and focuses instead on the familiar psychic *function* of what I have termed the register of 'transposed belief': that is, of allowing a ritual to believe on behalf of – or in place of – the subject himself. Whether 'kneeling down and praying' in anticipation of belief is authentically autonomous or not, the subject's ability to displace or transfer his belief onto another nonetheless alleviates the traumatic over-proximity of belief and grants him a "breathing space of a minimal distance towards it" (*Ibid*). Here, one can extend this use-value of ritual to include its relief from the specifically *analytical* symptoms of spiritual authenticity, such that the subject who transposes his belief (onto another) not only gains a comfortable distance from the object of belief (God, the possibility of reincarnation, a lover's fidelity – anything that demands belief), but also from the absurdity of exercising belief ('I am already a believer because I endeavor to become one through ritual, but this belief is not authentic because it is preordained by the symbolic order or some ISA...'). The ritual of prayer, which is performed "'on faith' that sense will arrive in and by the articulation itself" (Butler 21), here occupies the place of the intervening Other, the so-called 'subject supposed to believe' who takes up the traumatic burden of direct belief for the subject – much in the same way that a Greek Chorus 'directs' an audience through a staged drama by laughing, mourning, and commenting on their behalf. Lacan summarizes the dynamic between the Greek Chorus and the audience as follows:

When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you... It is just sufficiently silly; it is also not without firmness; it is more or less human. Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead (1992 252).

³ Žižek provides us with a concise summation of this aporia when he asserts that, "At some point, Alcoholics Anonymous meet Pascal: 'Fake it until you make it'", or, (make-)believe until you (really) believe ("With or Without Passion: What's Wrong with Fundamentalism? – Part I." [Lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com/zizpassion.html). <http://www.lacan.com/zizpassion.html>, 2005 par. 6).

⁴ Similar to how all psychoanalytically interpretive efforts seem to recrudescence a limited number of Lacanian proverbs: 'our desire is always the desire of the Other', 'love is giving something one doesn't have to someone who doesn't want it', 'a letter always arrives at its destination', '*les non-dupes errant*', etc.



This inversion of Pascal's formula, which accounts for the rather unexpected possibility that one wants nothing more than to be *free* of belief (or at least have the option of disseminating it), illustrates precisely how the subject can simultaneously identify as a 'true believer' while unburdening himself of belief's oppressive weight:

'You believe too much, too directly? You find your belief too oppressing in its raw immediacy? Then kneel down, act as if you believe, and *you will get rid of your belief* – you will no longer have to believe yourself, your belief will already ex-sist objectified in your act of praying' (Žizek 2005 par. 6).

If the strategy to avoid direct belief involves the transposition of one's belief onto anything or anyone that/who can temporarily occupy the place of the Big Other (symbolic ritual or, as I will address later, another subject), then how can we properly identify *direct* belief as distinctive? Is it possible to disjoint painful and solitary (direct) belief from its therapeutic, mediating (transposed) obverse, or can they only exist in a duplicate continuum? One means of approaching this question appears in a sequence from Edward Dmytryk's 1955 filmed adaptation of Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*; in this sequence, the tortured Sarah Miles, caught between her passionate, earthly love for Maurice Bendrix and her apparently divine love for a bargaining god, poses an exasperated question to God: "Don't you want my belief?" Does this assertive question not serve as the rejoinder *par excellence* to the well-known Lacanian enigma of '*che vuoi?*', the desire of the Other, wherein the subject ceaselessly inquires of the Other, 'What do you want from me?' Having effectively 'given' all she assumes God could possibly want (the sacrifice of pleasurable infidelity, devotion to her husband, adherence to Catholic doctrine), does Sarah's frustration and desperation not conceal a partial truth of precisely *what* 'the Other wants from her' – that is, her belief? However, Sarah's belief is evidently not an easy conquest, even for God; unlike her lover, who is demoted to a mere function of Sarah's spiritual transaction with God, her belief here is articulated as her most precious and closely-guarded *agalma* – that which is 'in her more than herself.' Not only does she conceal the intimacy and shameful sincerity of her belief from both Maurice and her husband Henry, but she also evidently regards it as the most valuable (and therefore paradoxically negotiable) unit of currency in a

theological wager with an entity that definitively embodies the spirit of the Big Other. The crucial point not to be missed in this encounter is the fact that Sarah's belief is very clearly articulated as *belonging to her*, although she is not empowered by her ownership (one's ownership of belief is evidently not synonymous with its mastery); rather, the solitude of 'my' belief is expressed as a conduit for frustration and despair, and plainly codes the question as a demand: 'Take my belief because I can no longer bear it alone!' We again encounter the aporia of the subject who can only properly doubt or reject that which he already believes; Sarah's 'question', therefore, aims not only at the performative pretenses of staged belief, but also at an intimate *direct belief* which nonetheless remains meaningless, inaccessible, and traumatic until it is mediated by or transposed onto the symbolic order. In this respect, one can never 'properly' believe (in the sense that he cannot tolerate or even survive his belief) until he rids himself of his belief, gives it up, or gives it away...

AM I THE SUBJECT SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE?: BETWEEN DIRECT & TRANSPOSED BELIEF

Thus far, I have primarily taken up the strategy adopted by the subject who endeavours to therapeutically (albeit perversely) 'cure' himself of an uncomfortable proximity to his belief. Although the necessary symbolic codification of belief is a recurrent concern in psychoanalysis, it nonetheless strikes one as overly curative and conclusive: should you find your belief unbearably oppressive, simply rid yourself of it by integrating it into the symbolic order. Žizek identifies this as the solution to "the conservative platitude according to which every honest man has a profound need to believe in something"; the appropriate response, apropos of transposed belief, is that "every honest man has a profound need to find another subject who would believe in his place" (1997 42). However, if this were truly the case, belief would be both universally accessible and impossibly blissful, the corollary naturally being that nothing would ever be truly 'worthy' of our belief. As a partial response to my own accusation, I should here mention that the process of transposing one's belief onto an Other is both arduous and vaguely objectionable, given that belief is never an immediate realization but rather an ongoing exercise with no fixed destination. Indeed, the trajectory between direct and transposed belief is not uninterrupted, although the register of belief that problematically exists between them is often neglected. This register, which I have identified as assumed belief, cannot be comprehended outside the context of direct and transposed belief, from which it emerges and around which it circulates (hence the necessity of presenting it within a matrix of interdependent 'beliefs' and not merely as a hermetically-sealed outcome).

Assuming that the believing subject does eventually transfer his belief on to an Other, the belief does not 'evaporate' or fully assume the modality of transposed, extra-subjective belief – its location is specific, and it is therefore necessary for us to question to whom this belief is transposed. The immediate objection to such an interrogation is that the identity of this subject is irrelevant, given that the subject supposed to believe need only "stand-in for the Big Other" (*Ibid*). As Žizek emphasizes, this mutable and naïve 'subject' may be inhuman (a ritual), a faceless collective ('the bureaucracy', 'the people'), or simply nonexistent, since "to produce his effects in reality,

it is enough that he is presumed by others to exist. In a definite, closed multitude of subjects, each person can play this role for all the others" (1989 186). We tend to conceive of the subject who temporarily occupies this place of the Big Other as entirely cipherous and therefore immune to the potentially harmful effects of believing on behalf of another. After all, even the subject supposed to believe is free to equally displace his belief onto someone who will believe for him, and so on. To sympathetically humanize this subject seems unnecessary, given his/her status as a temporary placeholder for the Big Other (which never inspires sympathy precisely because it *regulates* cultural codes and appropriate responses as a positive condition of its existence). However, this understanding of the subject supposed to believe as an infinitely inaccessible Other often obfuscates our consideration of the obverse possibility – the prospect that *we* are someone's 'subject supposed to believe', that *we* are effectively being duped by someone else's belief.

This is essentially the situation which transpires in Glazer's *Birth*, embodied in the relationship between Anna (who endlessly mourns the loss of her husband) and Sean (who satisfies Anna's resistance to closure by announcing himself as the reincarnation of the deceased husband). Crucial to my analysis is the fact that *Birth* presents the spectator with *two* believers and two distinct manifestations/modalities of belief, generally contingent on the spectator's (eventual) realization that one of these modalities is facilitated by its status as a lie. Like the spectator, Anna 'lives out' the majority of the film's diegesis suspicious of, but gradually succumbing to, the possibility that Sean is a legitimately supernatural entity (her husband's soul in the body of a ten-year-old boy). Conversely, Sean is overcome by a naïve and childish logic which dictates that he *can* be Anna's former husband simply because he loves her as a husband does, but must nonetheless premeditatively engineer the illusion of authenticity for Anna's benefit. One means of properly understanding the problematic economy of dual belief(s) in *Birth* (a quandary that may be partially attributed to its extreme, often disorienting textual transparency) is to effectively begin where the film's narrative concludes: Sean discovers that his predecessor had been unfaithful to Anna, and indeed had "never really loved her", which impels him to confess his deception. Having convinced Anna that he is truly the reincarnation of her dead husband, he admits to her, "I'm not Sean, [your husband] – because I love you." Anna, traumatized, begs her fiancé Joseph's forgiveness and marries him as originally planned; Sean, now apparently recovering from his matrimonial delusions through therapy but otherwise again behaving like a 'normal' ten-year-old boy, writes Anna a mollifying letter, which is read over shots of Anna hysterically crying and running across the beach at her wedding.

When confronted with the plea, 'You have to believe me!', as Anna is by Sean's insistence, one is immediately assigned (or, to risk an ideologically-loaded term, 'hailed') as the subject supposed to believe. One is here certainly free to decide whether or not any personal investment in this belief is worthwhile, but the role or responsibility is nonetheless explicitly arraigned; similarly, while Anna's belief is in many ways an inevitable wish fulfillment – since her inability to holistically mourn the death of her husband renders her defenseless against *any* belief, however improbable – she is nevertheless unable to reject her

appointment as Sean's surrogate believer. "You can believe what you want – everyone can believe what they want. I'm Sean, [your husband]," he asserts, effectively binding her to a tacit agreement: she must at least *attempt* to believe, even if this attempt ultimately leads to her rejection of his claim. Although himself a 'believer' of this sentiment, Sean's comparatively mature and vaguely callous strategy of belief is entirely dependent on everyone he endeavors to convince: simply stated, as long as Anna and her family continue to believe that Sean is Anna's husband, Sean's delusion will remain unchallenged and psychically sanctioned. In this respect, the naïvely imitative quality of Sean's belief (his route appropriation of another identity) accommodates its wide dissemination across a variety of 'subjects supposed to believe.'

However, does the transposition of belief onto an assortment of others, and particularly Anna, accurately describe both the economy and the limitations of Sean's belief? One should here recall the traumatic realization that inspires Sean's eventual confession ("I'm not Sean – because I love you"). How are we to interpret this statement? If we choose to differentiate between sublimation and idealization, a reading which accounts for the dynamics of courtly love initially appears exemplary; indeed, it is only after Sean learns the 'truth' about Anna – that she is undesirable and that her husband despised her – that their relationship can properly occupy a healthy and conventional place in the symbolic order (Sean returns to school, writes Anna polite and emotionally neutral letters, and sees a therapist, while Anna marries her long-suffering and age-appropriate fiancé). The crucial distinction, however, between Sean's traumatically disrupted idealization of Anna and the sudden overproximity of the formerly cold and inaccessible Lady in courtly love, is the fact that Anna never directly agitates or ruptures Sean's fantasy. The Lady (Anna), as she exists in the present, remains unchanged; she does not "step down from her pedestal" (Žižek 2001 41) and transform into a reprehensible entity for Sean, but is merely abandoned. Conversely, it was Anna's husband who found her repulsive, and Sean's refusal to appropriate this opinion prevents him from perpetuating the husband's persona. Indeed, so dependent is Sean's belief on the information gleaned from the husband's love letters (which Sean only assumed were addressed to Anna), that this impersonal belief can easily be reversed, and therefore redeemed. In transposing his belief onto both the physically and emotionally present Anna, and the entirely absent husband, Sean successfully circumvents an absolute and intractable loss when he admits his lie and abandons Anna. Should his transposed belief have suddenly collapsed (as it does when he discovers the husband's infidelity), he is sanctioned in reclaiming that belief from the 'other' absent entity and radicalizing it as the assertion of his will (i.e., 'I left Anna, I willed it thus'). This attitude towards belief is, as Žižek emphasizes, the "good news of Christianity" – the opportunity to traverse the fantasy, "to undo [the] founding decision, to start one's life all over again, from the zero point – in short, to change Eternity itself (what we 'always-already are')" (2001b 148). Consequently, Sean's recovery following the miscarriage of his transposed belief constitutes less a *reconstruction* of the (ruined) self than a *reconstitution* of the (changing/maturing/healing) self.

EVERY FUNDAMENTALIST SAYS I LOVE YOU: OR, I CAN'T BELIEVE (IN) YOU UNLESS I GIVE YOU UP

Despite the ironic autonomy of Sean's transposed belief, his penultimate gesture of 'freeing' Anna from her obligations as the subject supposed to believe "because [he] loves [her]", must be clarified in the context of assumed belief and its vicissitudes. Primarily, why is Sean's (transposed) belief redeemable as an act of will while Anna's (assumed) belief leaves her irreparably traumatized? Although I have briefly addressed the ineluctable quality of assumed belief, wherein the very injunction to 'believe me' implicitly guarantees the subject's participation in belief exclusive of his will, I have yet to elucidate the precise nature of investment in assumed belief. At this point, I should like to proffer the hypothesis that assumed belief is essentially synonymous with fundamentalism⁵, although far more insidious given that the 'intent' to believe in assumed belief is initiated and impelled by someone other than the subject.

Much like love, fundamentalism should be opposed to desire in the sense that the former does not actively seek its subject (of belief) - rather, this subject is perpetually and unassailably present. While desire is sustained by the radical separation "by which the *jouissance* obtained is distinguished from the *jouissance* expected" (Lacan 1988b 111), or is infinitely "caught in the logic of 'this is not that'" (Žižek 2001b 90), fundamentalist belief rejects this desirous cycle and aims directly at the object. Concurrently, while the desiring subject is always obliged to actively refuse that which is offered (Lacan expresses this refusal as the subject's cry of "'That's not it'" (Lacan 1988b 111), fundamentalism's logic revolves around the both the transcendent expression, 'That's it!' and - more perversely - the assertion that 'it' has never been otherwise. Characterized by "the violent return of the immediate belief - [fundamentalists] 'really believe it'" (Žižek 2005 par. 8), the fundamentalist's irreconcilable identification with his belief lacks the necessary aporia which sustains the distance between habitual indoctrination and *Weltanschauung*. Beyond the mere *overproximity* and oppressive weight of belief as evinced by Sarah Miles' experience of direct belief in *The End of the Affair*, the fundamentalist obliterates any distance between his identity and his belief, instead integrating the fantasy into his everyday life as a positive condition of his existence. Indeed, one would not be incorrect in assuming that the fundamentalist *does not believe at all*; given his direct identification with the fantasy, the mediating security of belief is rendered unnecessary, and the ceremonial activity of 'believing' gives way to pure *Weltanschauung*.⁶ This is

⁵ Although I certainly concede to the reality that fundamentalism is associated with reactionary and anti-democratic attitudes involving the militant reassertion of "non-negotiable moral values and essentialist identities" (Mouffe 6), this paper does not aim to address the specific ramifications of fundamentalism; rather, my project here involves an interrogation of the development of the fundamentalist attitude *qua* belief (Chantal Mouffe. "Introduction: for an Agnostic Pluralism." *The Return of the Political*. Ed. Chantal Mouffe. London: Verso, 1993. 1-8).

⁶ An ideal example of the fundamentalist attitude and specifically its impenetrable discourse of 'this has always been so' has recently materialized in the media. In September 2005, the Danish newspaper *Iyllands-Posten* published a series of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, some of them racist and inflammatory. The publication of the cartoons sparked outrage in Muslim



precisely why Sean does not fetishistically 'stand-in' for Anna's deceased husband, and also why Anna does not consider the experience adulterous or disrespectful to her husband's memory: in Anna's understanding of the situation, her husband is not dead at all, but reincarnated in the body of a ten-year-old boy. Indeed, if one attempted to formulate the experience as a category of fetishistic disavowal, one would be obliged to strip the irrational belief of its minimal distance to the object: in the fundamentalist variant of assumed belief, Octave Mannoni's epithet would simply be reimagined as, 'I know very well, but all the same...'

In a sequence following Sean's admission to Anna, Anna confronts her fiancé Joseph in a boardroom and begs his forgiveness. The sequence itself functions as an interesting rejoinder to those whose interpretation of Anna's belief stands in marked contrast to the analysis presented here. All things considered, is it not possible to assert that Anna is *fully aware* of her delusion and desperation, and yet willingly assumes the attitude of a believer simply because the alternative is excessively distressing? While I oppose the validity of this observation for its exclusion of the interdependent registers of Sean and

communities, not only because of objection to the openly racist representations, but because the Quran explicitly forbids all representations of the Prophet Mohammad (favourable or not). As demonstrations and threats of violence increase, the appropriately liberal response to this outrage is, of course, confusion as to why everyone can't get along, and the extension of an invitation to the offended to equally mock Western beliefs and gods. The radically moderate Left, which is prepared to tolerate everything *but* passion, here conceives of belief as little more than a pastiche of normalized mysticism(s), which allows us to "make fun of our beliefs, while continuing to practice them, that is, to rely on them as the underlying structure of our daily practices" (Žižek 2003 280). As such, the now standard objection to Arab and Islamic indignation over the incident ("they should not take the cartoons so seriously - after all, Christ is a media pariah *par excellence*!") quite simply misses the point of fundamentalism, which permits no cultural (i.e., ironic or distancing) intervention into the field of belief. Since this belief is immediate and inseparable from the self-conception of the fundamentalist, the ironic distance espoused by politically correct liberal multiculturalists is precisely the danger that must be quashed in the context of fundamentalist belief.

Anna's respective beliefs, Anna's apology to Joseph substantiates the posthumous humiliation she experiences for her role in the fantasy. "I just wanted to let you know that it's not my fault," Anna says. "Everything that happened – none of it is my fault." Is there anything more shameful than the confrontation with one's belief that reveals it to be false, and – specifically in the fundamentalist attitude – discovering that one has been the dupe of one's own fantasy (Žižek 2005 par. 8)? Anna's defensive apology to Joseph involves an automatic (and ultimately failed) self-absolution which makes great mention of the upcoming wedding ("I want to marry you, just as we planned"), but which never submits to the validity of her belief. It likewise proves worthwhile to here read Joseph in contrast to Sean; while Sean increasingly acquires all the necessary characteristics to identify him as *the* Sean, lacking even the minimal fetishistic distance of possibility or likeness, Joseph is explicitly coded as a functional replacement for Anna's deceased husband. Glazer explores this relationship through Joseph's subtle and insidious ostracism from Anna's family circle, his appearance as an intruding orphan in their exclusionist affairs, and his representation as vulgar and ineffectual – vaguely predatory in his pathetic desperation, despite his patience and kindness. One here recalls the standard Mozartean/Shakespearean narrative reversal of conjuring a mutually advantageous union *vis-à-vis* a mere rendezvous:

We will have to admit that the rendezvous, our rendezvous with love, takes place not once, but an indefinite number of times and that it is never 'love' that is at the rendezvous, or unique and universal love (Catholic love), or nomadic and multiple loves, but another presence or another movement of love... It is another who is at the rendezvous, but it is love itself that is revealed thereby – and betrayed (Nancy 93-94).

Simply stated, if the figure waiting for you at the conclusion of the narrative is not your 'true' love – the one for whom you have been pining since the outset – simply turn the situation to your advantage: feign love, and in feigning it, make it so. Does this arrangement differ in any significant way from the Pascalian logic of transposed belief in its suggestion to enact the pretenses of absolution in its absence ('Marry whomever will take you, and love will come by itself!')? The ultimate benefit of this situation is its governance by sentiment, cunning, and opportunism rather than belief-proper. In such situations, one is never truly obliged to believe, given that one love is as good as any other (hence the colloquial translation of Mozart's *Così fan Tutte* as "Everyone's doing it").

Nancy's distinction between the love which awaits us at the rendezvous and 'unique and universal (Catholic)' love can similarly be articulated in the context of belief. In the traditional Christian 'expression' of belief, Christ is desublimated and made humanly accessible to his followers not merely through banal corporeality (God at the level of man, vulnerable to earthly wounding and fallibility), but in the sense that some indistinguishable feature – a "pure appearance" or "imperceptible 'something'" – identifies him as different and divine (2001b 90). Žižek stresses that this difference "cannot ever be grounded in a substantial property" (*Ibid*), and is therefore exemplary of a divine desublimation wherein "transcendence is not abolished, but rendered *accessible* – it shines through in this very clumsy and miserable being

that I love" (*Ibid*). However, when we conceive of belief as an assumed quality – as an act of faith undertaken at the behest or demand of another – then the logic of fundamentalism (which states, 'Why properly believe when it *has always been so* – when what you believe has never given you any reason to doubt?') radically alters this Christian conception of desublimation. In Sean's appearance, the film does not express the exceptional difference that makes him worthy of Anna's/the spectator's belief as an 'imperceptible *something*', but rather as a palpable, awkward, and suffocatingly proximal *everything*. With the exception of their shared name as a *trait unaire*, the two Seans have nothing in common, and this discrepancy is of no concern to Anna once she is convinced of Sean's authenticity. In this context of desublimation, one should not confuse the reality of authentic and accessible love with idealization, given that sublimation itself entails a combination of the sublime and desublimation, wherein "the sublime dimension transpires through the utmost common details" (*Ibid* 2001b 41). Consequently, Anna does not de/sublimate (and, by extension, authenticate) Sean by looking 'past' the taboo veneer of a ten-year-old's body and effectively seeing her husband within. It is only after Sean admits his elaborate deception while seated in a bathtub that she is able to truly assess the situation in its unbearably commonplace absurdity: "I thought you were my husband. You're not my husband. You're just a little boy in my bathtub." In a case of genuine de/sublimation, this moment would herald the initiation of an authentic loving relationship. One should here recall Lacan's warning that we are free to de/sublimate as much as we like, provided that we are prepared to pay for this sublimation with a pound of flesh (1992 322). Sublimation is painful precisely because it generates a psychic *debt*.

By assigning Anna as his 'subject supposed to believe', Sean not only tacitly implicates her as a believer at all costs, but burdens her with the "inverted, true form" of her own fantasy of belief (Žižek 1992 13). As was previously mentioned, Anna is willingly deluded by the fantasy of Sean's reincarnation (as well as predisposed to believe as a defense against grief), but it is precisely the *inevitability* of her investment that allows Sean to both transpose his belief onto her and ensure that she will forever maintain this belief on his behalf (while he is free to mature and develop normally). This indicates the essential distinction between direct belief and fundamentalism: direct belief may be identified by the subject and designated as potentially harmful or oppressive, but must always necessarily be 'given away' or transferred onto a mediating 'subject supposed to believe' simply because the subject is unable to support this encumbrance alone. Conversely, assumed belief collapses all temporal and identificatory logic, such that the object of belief (Sean's reincarnation, God, and so on) becomes indistinguishable from the (intended) fundamentalist outcome, and eventually from the subject himself. Additionally, the subject who assumes belief on behalf of another risks falling victim to a preordained fantasy which he mistakenly identifies as his own; inasmuch as the subject has little authority over the direction of this assumed belief, he similarly can never *lose* his belief (since it is not his to lose), and belief forever and traumatically "walks with [him], sticks to [him], never lets [him] go" (Žižek 2001a 229).

In locating assumed belief and fundamentalism within a matrix of reciprocal registers of belief, I have sought to establish a model which not only accounts for the subject's transference of his belief onto another, but addresses the specific effect of the transposition onto the subject supposed to believe (who/which is often approached as a concept but not wholly as a 'believer'). In his R.S.I. Seminar XXII of 1974-75, Lacan declares that when a man loves, "[he] believes in a woman... A woman in the life of a man is something in which he believes" (quoted in Vinciguerra par. 5). Yet love is also, as Žižek stresses, "the *work of love*" – its constant undoing and uncoupling (2000b 128) – such that Sean's acknowledgment that he has lied because he loves Anna is only partially true. The 'other' truth behind the rephrasing of the statement, "I'm not Sean – because I love you", is, 'Because I love you, you can no longer believe (in) me.' Much in the same way that Lacan states that our only means of being guilty is by giving way to our desire (1992 321), the only way that one can truly love another is by absolving them of the burden of believing in that love.©

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R. Colin Tait

“jesus is never mad at us if we live with him in our hearts”: the dialectical view of america in david o. russell’s *i ♥ huckabees*

The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link. The nature of the cinematographic illusion has often been considered. Restoring our belief in the world – this is the power of modern cinema (when it stops being bad). Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, *we need reasons to believe in this world* (Deleuze 166).

In the wake of September 11, and the resulting paradigm shift which is an ultimate casualty of the event, perhaps now is a good time to examine the impact that this has had on one of our most interesting mass cultural institutions; namely cinema. If we believe Gilles Deleuze’s assertion that the medium’s history reflects the materialist conditions of its genesis, then a radical alteration of world historical events will necessarily also be embodied in the textual qualities of a film. Thus, any drastic change will be detectable within any film’s framework in order to account for the new qualities of the moment it emerges from. This will correspond to Deleuze’s conception of the “Time-Image,” where “the crystal” is “the point of indiscernability of the two distinct images, the actual and the virtual, while what we see in the crystal is time itself, a bit of time in its pure state...” (Deleuze 79). Cinema, then, will inevitably become the record of a particular mood of a particular time and stands for the public reaction of a specific moment. Deleuze’s analytical tool corresponds to Fredric Jameson’s own work in mass-cultural analysis, where cinema is also representative of the *unconscious* fears and desires of the society from which it emerges. Thus, a film “manages” within its structure the psychic issues that need to be addressed by the work of art. Jameson states that this method “allows us to grasp mass culture not as empty distraction, or ‘mere’ false consciousness” but rather, as “a transformational work on social and political anxieties which must then have some presence in the mass cultural text in order to be ‘managed’ or repressed” (Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” 25). Clearly, if he has both theorists’ models in mind, the film analyst is therefore equipped with a mechanism through which to view a particular document; both by characterizing the manner in which it depicts the frozen image of the moment that it emerges from (Deleuze) and also the unconscious elements that it necessarily contains as a work of mass culture (Jameson).

It is with these foundational tools that we can now address the cultural artifact *par excellence* of the 9/11 shift. While any film from 2001- 2004 would likely serve our purposes, I propose that David O. Russell’s 2004 film *I ♥ Huckabees* captures this *zeitgeist* most clearly as it is the frozen image of an America captured by cinema. Indeed, the film uses the raw materials of contemporary

Americana; issues ranging from the “Wal-Martification” of the suburbs, the decrease in public green spaces, to the consumption of petroleum which seemingly lies at the core of American foreign policy. At the heart of this debate lies the film’s centre; a throwdown between the Religious Right’s conception of American market forces (and their relation to modern democracy), and the liberal Left’s desire to preserve ‘open spaces’ regardless of the cost. The explicit debate of the film is portrayed at a dinner table, where environmentalist Albert Markovski (Jason Schwartzman) defends his position against the expansionist beliefs of suburban engineer Mr. Hooten. Albert’s goal is simply stated: “Albert - I’m talking about not covering every square inch of populated America with strip malls and houses till people can’t remember what happens when you stand in a meadow at dusk” (Russell 53). Mr. Hooten’s philosophy is characterized by his belief in the link between capital and democracy. He asks if countries like Sudan wouldn’t like a little bit of “suburban sprawl” as this would allow the war-torn region to resemble America with its “industry, houses, jobs, medicine, videos, toys, cheeseburgers, cars, computer games,” and thus embolden it with “a functioning economy” (52-53). Thus, Mr. Hooten’s portrayal is a satiric view of the conflation between suburban politics and manifest destiny. Russell deliberately depicts the relationship between the resurgence of the religious Right’s influence on the “average” American’s political views, and exploits an exaggerated vision of this Puritan ethos in both foreign and domestic policies to do so. As a result, everything is equivalent in the Hooten family and the statement of daughter, Cricket (who says that “Jesus is never mad at us if we live with Him in our hearts” [54]) corresponds to Mr. Hooten’s outrageous claim that “God gave us oil!” (57). It is by analyzing the direct rendering of these points of view that we should address the central issue of the film. This entails locating the presence and origins of the American Religious Right’s view of politics, society and the market (which all stem from the kernel of theological interpretation) and reflecting on how these influence aspects of contemporary American life. Only then can we can perceive the formal operations of *I ♥ Huckabees*, which not only positions the spectator to experience a rapid-fire enumeration of the issues of the day, but also attempts to equip him with a means to navigate through the new features of his era. The deep-structural qualities of the text (and its surface) both embody the extremely confusing time of the film’s conception, and also the subjective existential dilemma facing the contemporary American subject.

What the film depicts through its construction of seemingly one-dimensional characters corresponds to Jameson's view of allegory in film, where the author states that "allegory is precisely the dominant mode of expression of a world in which things have been sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence." In this manner "the object [film] itself is henceforth incapable of projecting any meaning on its own; it can only take on that meaning which the allegorist [filmmaker] wishes to lend it" (Jameson, *Marxism and Form* 71). What *I ♥ Huckabees* achieves is the literality of this transitional moment where the characters' opportunity to question their lives and their socio-political institutions, corresponds with our need to do the same.

Since the story is framed by the terrible events of September 11th it portrays the factors that led to the ultimate shift in American foreign policy. What did not occur, according to Slavoj Žižek (in his work on the topic, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*) was the public questioning of the institutions of American society that the window provided. Žižek states,

[w]hat if – as the massive display of American patriotism seems to demonstrate – the shattering experience of September 11 ultimately served as a device which enabled to hegemonic American ideology to 'go back to its basics', to reassert its basic ideological co-ordinates against the antiglobalist and other critical temptations? Perhaps I should none the less qualify this statement by introducing the temporality of the *future anterior*: on September 11, the USA was presented with the opportunity to realize what kind of world it was part of. It might have taken this opportunity – but it did not; instead it opted to reassert its traditional ideological commitments... (Žižek 46-47).

What Žižek called for was an intervention and an entry point for America into a multilateralist position in the newly emerging global space. What happened instead was the redoubling of unilateralist nationalist policies which oppose the author's view. Contrary to Žižek's observation, the very existence of the film is testament to the idea that a form of this questioning did occur; albeit on a different scale. Indeed, as we encounter the Deleuzian/Jamesonian position, we can see that the film embodies Jameson's system of "management" in the mass cultural text, where the issues of the day are presented, addressed, and worked out diegetically by the characters in *Huckabees* with a great deal of precision and sophistication. Nevertheless, we should be careful to qualify our characterization of *Huckabees* as a mass cultural text, as the film's positive critical reception was largely countered by its (tepid) box-office performance. Still, we have the rare occasion to analyze a contemporary film that embodies Deleuze's thoughts on cinema and the manner in which a viewer is presented with his contemporary reality through the means that it is depicted on screen. By directly addressing the prevailing ideology (the political dominance of the American Religious Right) and the manner that this is embodied on the global landscape (both domestically in the form of the suburban/exurban wasteland and abroad in the ever-expanding service economy) certain truths about the theological origin of American market forces can be asserted. By rendering these antagonisms explicit, the film attempts, through the dialectical process of its narrative construction, to separate the prevailing ideology from the recently scarred American psyche and present a viable alternative; one which unhinges the current composition of

politics from consumerism, theology and nationalism. These debates are played out in the multi-layered conflicts in *I ♥ Huckabees*.

The first of these is found in the clash between Albert Markovski and Brad Stand. This antagonism is central to the film's structure, as are Albert's attempts to understand Brad's prominence in his subconscious. Albert's seemingly random motivation to investigate his life is spurred on by his need to find the answer to the coincidental reappearance of "The African Guy," Steven. His quest is aided by the "existential detectives" of the Jaffe agency, who use a myriad of methods to "dismantle" Albert's identity and put him into spiritual contact with his immediate environment. Vivian and Bernard will also explain Albert's cosmic connection to his polar opposite; the corporate executive Brad. On the other hand, Brad, the rising star executive of Huckabees (here, a properly allegorical incarnation of Wal-Mart) stands as the opposite of Albert's desire for environmental responsibility. Brad eventually co-opts Albert's campaign to save the environment through a corporate fundraiser featuring Shania Twain. While Albert's goal was to save a vital piece of the environment, Brad's campaign involves climbing the corporate ladder through his successful manipulation of the currency of stardom. What the detectives reveal is that their bond specifically involves the fact that neither of them is happy with their current lives; Although Albert is a founding member of his organization, and Brad would seem to have it all (as the trappings of his successful career would testify) they both long for some sort of cosmic intervention that would point them in new directions.

Several other characters need to be mentioned, as their excessive beliefs can be viewed as the causes of their existential undoing. Therefore, we need to address the role of Tommy Corn, the shell-shocked firefighter whose personal encounter with the World Trade Center aftermath informs his opinion (likely shared by Michael Moore) that there is a direct link between American foreign policy (namely, the consumption of oil) and the attacks. Another character that needs introduction is model Dawn Rhodes (played by Naomi Watts) whose job as a "corporate spokesperson" for Huckabees is essentially reduced to a series of sexually charged gestures and poses. Her role as "Miss Huckabees" embodies the vacuousness of the surface exploitation of star personas, and who presumably possesses absolutely nothing of value underneath. The inclusion of the "existential detectives" who combine a philosophy that examines both the finite details of Albert's life and the infinite possibilities of his connection to the universe is contrasted by the presence of their former student, Catherine Vaubon. This nihilistic portrayal French theory serves as a foil to the Jaffes' by introducing an opposite philosophy to the detectives' own. As a result, the extra thread of critical theory is woven into the fabric of the diegesis providing the critic with yet another avenue to explore the film's meaning. Through the direct linking of characters to an extreme aspect of philosophy (Albert to environmentalism, Tommy to conspiracy, Brad to hypercapitalism, Dawn to appearance, the Jaffes' to existential/transcendental cosmology, and Catherine to nihilism) the film allows the diametrically opposed viewpoints to engage in conflict, and thus results in interesting narrative permutations, as characters speak, listen, and alter their views. This phenomenon varies greatly from the traditional (Hollywood) form, where

characters rarely embody a viewpoint or express any opinion about the world. In *Huckabees* the fate of the respective characters depends on resolving the new spiritual crises which arise from their new reality. A dialectical process of argument is engaged, and the various viewpoints come to inform and inflect the discussion within the film. The philosophy of “somethingness” is here opposed with that of “nothingness,” and the logic of reading poems to save large tracts of wilderness is countered with the idea of involving corporate charity into an environmental event. It is extremely important to note that the characters experience a great deal of change in their positions and this phenomenon is both testament to the complexity of the film, and to its interventionalist position in the post-9/11 landscape where the debate takes place within cultural institutions.

Before entering a discussion of the mechanics of the film, we should first investigate the path of its narrative. Albert enters the existential detectives’ office in order to find out the answer to the manifestation of his coincidences. He tells Vivian that he wants to know about “The whole thing. The universe...the big one. Should I keep doing what I’m doing or stop because it’s hopeless” (Russell 7). In their investigation Vivian informs him that they will scrutinize every aspect of his life, “[n]othing can ever be too small. You know how the police can find the tiniest piece of DNA and build a case, we might see the way you floss or masturbate and it could be the key to your entire reality” (4). Albert learns that this process will employ two methods; one will investigate every detail of the banalities of his existence and the second will consist of a form of spiritual counseling. Bernard illustrates Albert’s interconnectedness to the universe via the example of “the blanket” to teach Albert that “[e]verything’s the same thing, even if it’s different” (10). In order to achieve this understanding, Albert must first penetrate his subconscious through meditation. This begins with a confrontation of the negative symbols that both plague his subconscious and prevents his everyday mind from realizing its interconnectedness with the larger universe. In Bernard’s view, Albert must first deconstruct his identity, moving beyond the psychological (i.e. the articles of his subconscious mind) to the transcendental level of his being. Once Albert understands these connections, he’ll understand his own role in the structure of the blanket, or, as Bernard explains; “when you get the blanket thing, you can relax, because everything you could ever want or be, you already have and are” (11). The film demonstrates this connection visually in exhilarating ways as the screen breaks up into the little particles within the frame, and pieces of the images float to the other side. Thus, the metaphysical composition of the infinite is rendered fully and is embodied in a pro-filmic manner, as the visual expression of Bernard’s cosmology.

The film is also structured, to some degree, like a generic work in the detective/*noir* mode. It corresponds to Fredric Jameson’s writings on postgeneric film in his essay “Historicism in *The Shining*,” where he states that filmmakers (like Robert Altman, Roman Polanski, and Stanley Kubrick) can only emulate the old models of generic works, something that *Huckabees* very obviously does. In this manner, the notable change in the detective film (as outlined by David Bordwell’s account in *Narration in the Fiction Film*) is that the structure is turned inward. For the purposes of the narrative’s progression, Albert,



while still remaining the protagonist, is also the film’s central mystery. Following this logic, the answer to Albert’s existential mystery *should* yield the results of the resolution of the film’s plot. However, the film is far more complicated than this, and Albert’s story is merely one element of the detective film’s construction. Much like the hard-boiled, Raymond Chandler variant, Albert functions as the springboard to the larger mystery, as does the *femme fatale* in a film like *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), and he first misleads the detectives by planting false clues about his case. The metageneric transformation in this case is that Albert is both detective and mystery, and the plot largely focuses on him as the chief protagonist. The narrative is, in this sense, internalized and self-reflexive. As the investigation unfolds unsatisfactorily, Albert takes hold of it with the aid of his other, Tommy Corn. Tommy acts as the initial bridge between the two opposing philosophies of Western Existential Buddhism, and French Nihilist Theory. As such, Tommy not only convinces Albert to steal his file, but also influences him to cross over to the overtly anarchistic and nihilistic excesses of the sexy Vaubon. Ultimately, the resolution of the plot relies on Albert ending the perpetration of his lies (or the false evidence that he plants for the Jaffes’) and facing *a truth*; one that is brought about by his embracing a part of Vaubon’s ugly view of the world. The film demonstrates that only by incorporating Vaubon’s negative philosophy can Albert return to a positive place and solve his mystery. This dialectical movement is the work of the film, as the various conflicts jar against their opposites and find synthesis in a manner resembling Albert’s spiritual transformation. In this manner, it is possible for Albert to realize (in the sense of “the blanket”) that he and Brad are the “same” person, but only after tarrying with the negative can he come to this resolution. Though the characters are able to express their opinions in a sophisticated way, the degree of the flexibility of their representative philosophies is key to understanding this film.

Having examined the narrative construction of *I ♥ Huckabees*, it is now possible to analyze individual elements of the film itself. Here, I believe that an elaborate investigation of the dinner scene is crucial to understanding the issues that are at stake in the work. As previously stated, the scene embodies the collision of theology and politics within the single site of American discourse; the suburbs/exurbs.

Albert and Tommy ride out to the address of “The African Guy”; this time Albert has actually sought him out

instead of this being just another coincidence. Steven asks his adoptive family whether Tommy and Albert can stay for dinner. While the scene is short, it is also the explicit rendering of many of the film's core issues that need to exist in conversation, externalized from the characters and examined out loud. The array of topics includes the petroleum industry, smart growth in the suburbs, corporate responsibility and the issue of Christian Charity. The mention of Christianity within this context is extremely important, as it begs the viewer to ponder the contemporary collision (and collusion) of Church and State which is central to the film's specific relation to a particular time and space. In this way, the film relays its central subject of questioning, which goes beyond the existential issue of Albert as an individual (and here we can freely assert that Albert is predisposed to do this kind of work anyways) but to certain other types, such as the figures within site of the dinner scene. The cast of players here include disinterested teenagers, who make fun of their "adopted brother" Steven, who as a Sudanese refugee, resembled a "skeleton man from Africa" (55). The children smugly recall how Steven didn't know where food came from in America ("He wanted to know where all the meat comes from since he doesn't see any cows around here" 51), and they demonstrate their poor understanding of Christianity with their half-hearted recitation of Grace before eating and playing video games at the dinner table. Clearly, director Russell is pointedly taking aim at the ideological roots of America's current dilemma, and the dinner scene is his opportunity to directly criticize what he sees as the hypocrisy of the current synthesis of theologically-charged politics which exist alongside the consumptive habits of the typical suburban family.

Richard Jenkins portrays the American status quo *par excellence*, and is employed as a stereotypical mouthpiece for the Right. As a result Albert is immediately branded a communist by Mr. Hooten for having views that lie outside the suburban mainstream discourse. Additionally, the knee-jerk response to the announcement that Tommy is a firefighter (after September 11) is a predictable "God Bless You." Tommy and Albert respond by highlighting some of the problems that face the society of exurbanization and the (Christian) element of the ideology. These include, the collusion of the US government in places like Sudan (where Steven is from) with errant governments for the direct purposes of oil consumption, and the opposite opinion (from engineer Jenkins) who believes that if only people in those countries would get their country together (into a proper hypercapitalist society) they would have more than enough space to have mini-marts and to provide for everyone in their country, instead of having to rely on Christian Charity.

In this way, what the film enacts with the antagonism of the dinner table is that the this exaggerated version central Christian doctrine in the example the "successful American family" (as embodied by the Hootens' noble act of adopting Sudanese refugee Steven) which is not so much wrong as misguided, and that the deconstruction of an subjective identity (as in Albert's case, a man who is predisposed to do this sort of work) needs to occur through the exposition of prevailing positions and their place in contemporary society. In other words, before any progress can be made (particularly in the shadow of September 11) people have to be able view admit unpleasant things about their society, and their origins as well. The inherent tragedy

of self-knowledge is voiced by Tommy when he asks "why is it that people only ask themselves really deep questions when something really bad happens, and then they forget about it later..." (43) This question finds its echo in Zizek's view of historical trauma, where the author states that it is not only the choice between forgetting and remembering that is at stake, but rather, "[w]e should therefore accept the paradox that in order really to forget an event, we must first summon the strength to remember it properly" (Zizek 22).

While the film is unequivocally brutal in its criticism of American society, its most direct questioning is reserved for its biggest target; namely the religious roots of American civil life and the links between the current version of politics inflected by a specific version of the American Protestant dogma and expansionist doctrine. Doug Williams has pinpointed the pro-filmic expression of this ethos in his 1998 essay, "Pilgrims in the Promised Land" where the author grafts the foundational American myths of frontier expansion onto the Western film genre. For Williams, the movement to America by the Puritans was that of "an oppressed minority who felt themselves to be the Elect of God in a corrupted world," and to whom "the answer to the mystery of North America was clear - the New Continent was the Promised Land for God's chosen people, providentially revealed" (Williams 94). While Williams outlines the Puritanical strain in what he dubs the American epic form (the Western) it can be asserted that the same strains of religiously-informed ideological precepts still lay at the heart of American politics today. These range from the entitlement to the frontier and subsequent conquered lands, the "corelement" of patriarchy (96) and the transformation of a "vast wasteland" into a Garden of Eden. It is not a great logical leap to see these same impulses enacted on the new lands of the suburbs, where large congregations of (largely Christians) continue to settle the domestic American sphere and, to return to Albert's view, "pave over every last inch of American space" (Russell 53). Economist Benjamin R. Barber comments on this phenomenon in his intriguing study of the explicit link between runaway global capitalism and the return to fundamentalist strains of religion which he dubs as the conflict between "Jihad" and "McWorld." Here, the author states that "[a]t least since the 1730s, when America experienced its first 'Great Awakening' in Protestant fundamentalism, this country has periodically felt the zeal of reactive religion" (Barber 212). Furthermore, Barber locates this prevalent strain in suburbs, where followers of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson express the "yearning...for the certainties of a literal New Testament [that] are no less ingenuous than the yearning of Arabic martyrs for a literal Qur'an" (213). The logical sequel to Barber's and Williams' work lies in two recent essays, where the further link between Puritan theological principles and economic expansion is elaborated. The continuation of "Pilgrims in the Promised Land" can thus be found in Gordon Bigelow's essay "Let There Be Markets." In this work economist Bigelow outlines the inherent link between the rise of Capital and the ideological tenets of the American Protestant work ethic in its Puritan variant. Bigelow attempts to bind the intrinsic contradictions within the market to theological principles, stating that:

Looking back at two centuries at these early debates, it is clear that pure free-market ideology can be logically sustained only if it is based in a fiery religious conviction...The market is a complete solution, the market is a partial solution-both statements were affirmed at the same time. And the only way to hold together these incommensurable views is through a leap of faith (Bigelow,36).

With this view in mind it is also possible to return to the essence of expansionist policies and the treatment of Christian Charity. In Bigelow's view of early capitalist doctrine (for which he uses the Dickensian rendition of a system of "Bleak Houses" and orphanages as examples) the economist states:

At the center of this early evangelical doctrine was the idea of original sin: we are all born stained by corruption and fleshly desire, and the true purpose of earthly life was to redeem this. The trials of economic life-the sweat of hard labor, the fear of poverty, the self-denial involved in saving-were earthly tests of sinfulness and virtue...they believed that the suffering of the poor would provoke remorse, reflection and ultimately the conversion that would change their fate. In other words, poor people were poor for a reason, and helping them out of poverty would endanger their mortal souls (35).

Now it clear that the combination of these views establishes a continuing thread which binds these compatible concepts. First, the original myth of settlement, as dictated by Williams' interpretation of the Western as the American epic form, and also by Bigelow's assertion that the Market that is God's crucible by which the anointed will be revealed, serve to inform the religiously-infused politics that are present at the dinner table, and the further settlement of the frontier which is now represented in the relentless quest for both oil and for markets abroad. This self-contained universe is characterized in what Susan Willis calls 'exurbanization' and she depicts the residents of these areas as, "[h]aving fled more congested inner suburbs, exurbanites congregate in anomalous *cul-de-sac* neighborhoods newly gouged out of farmland and open nature." She continues, stating that "once installed, exurbanites lobby for more highways (to facilitate their consumerist lifestyle) and less growth (to preserve their dream of escape)..." (Willis 129). I would add to this assumption that that the exurbs implicitly promise the return to Eden for the "anointed." What this exurban impulse further reflects, in Willis' view (and as her discussion of the Washington sniper Lee Muhammad demonstrates) is that "the quintessential embodiment of our moment in history, the sniper manifests the repercussions of U.S. imperialism on the home front" (135). Here, Willis traces (as Zizek has) the interconnection of global capital (of which Wal-Mart/Huckabees is the ultimate example) and its 'evil' doppelganger; the international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, who planned and executed the terrible events of September 11.

What this intersection has demonstrated (it is hoped) is that by linking these seemingly disparate works is that they can be used to inform and to frame our discussion of the dinner scene. In this instance it is not the original inhabitants that need to be conquered (in the form of a native population) but *nature itself* that is literally paved over by the overwhelming ideology, which, in Bigelow's view, comes to stand in the way of both the progress of Christian society and the market itself. It is possible to see the depiction of the suburban as the new embodiment of the American Christian dominance of the landscape, and

this ideology ends up informing the current view of foreign policy and other aspects of society. Once again, as the dinner table scene exemplifies, the schism happens at the same time as the redoubling of authority, and the absorption of the language of Christian doctrine into nationalist politics; where the precedence of Christ becomes the motivation for all decisions in life, just as the appeal to reason is eclipsed by the combination of faith and ideology. The film's example shows Mr. Hooten's chiding Albert by telling him that not only is "the cat...killed by curiosity" (Russell 51) but that the consequence of questioning the dominant ideology is to be dismissed as a communist. This logic is subsequently used to discredit anyone with an opposing viewpoint, and was demonstrated in the 2004 American election, where John Kerry and Edwards were both characterized as being the most radically liberal forces in the United States.

Finally, it is the direct confrontation between Tommy Corn's view of oil consumption and "Christ's love" that is at the heart of this discussion. Tommy's asserts that "we'd all be heroes if we'd quit using petroleum" (54) and is countered with Mrs. Hooten's view that Albert and Tommy are "blasphemous socialists" (55). Finally, the debate comes to its climax when Mrs. Hooten offers proof of her Christian fealty by presenting Steven. Tommy opposes this logic by asking "How did Sudan happen? Could it be related to dictatorships we support for some stupid reason?" (56). It is at this point that Albert and Tommy are driven from the home and the episode ends.

Far from claiming to have "the answer," the film offers a multiplicity of viewpoints with which the viewer can align himself. These answers are embodied in the relativistic and multiply refracting ideas that are contained within the film. Here, the change from this central dinner scene is important, as it presents the viewer with alternative positions to relate to. In this way, the changes that occur in both Dawn and Brad's characters are even more significant than what happens to Tommy and Albert given that the latter figures are predisposed to change. That Brad and Dawn's transformation occurs almost precisely after the dinner scene (which is itself located at the direct center of the work) is further testament to the film's dialectical construction.

Brad and Dawn seem to have it all, and their relationship (and the possession of matching Jetskiis) are trappings of success in contemporary American exurban society. Additionally, the depiction of Huckabees as the new successful business model (as perhaps can be exhibited by the fact that Wal-Mart is now a larger employer than the manufacturing sector - which is embodied by the decline of the auto industry in the United States) and Brad as rising executive is interesting, as is the claim that Dawn (who clearly wears skimpy patriotic outfits and advertises in an array of suggestive poses) is *the voice* of the corporation when she is clearly its *body*. Though they seem to have absorbed the dynamic of the American Christian expansionist doctrine, it is both these characters that effect the greatest amount of change in the film. While they seem to be living the American Dream, it is revealed by the Jaffes that they are just as lost as everyone else. This counterfoil in the narrative is very powerful, as it allows the filmmaker to pierce the main issues discussed at the dinner table through a process of existential detangling.

Despite the fact that Brad goes to the detectives in order to undermine Albert's contributions to the Open



Spaces Coalition, the detectives question the certainties of his well-constructed façade by continuing to investigate him. Central to Brad's character is the "tuna fish story" where he has composed a cute anecdote about Shania Twain and how he fooled her into eating a tuna fish with mayo sandwich. What this story actually reflects is Brad's projection of a persona which hides his inner being. When the Jaffes ultimately call him on it, and replay the recorded occasions of his use of the story, Brad's carefully fashioned corporate personality falls apart, and he is left wondering aloud "how am I not myself?" Brad's career spirals downward as well, when he can't quite muster the fortitude to tell the tuna fish story to the board of Huckabees after his big promotion. The core of his identity, the mask he projects, is not only false but cannot be reconstituted once it has been destroyed.

A similar fate befalls Dawn, the "voice" of Huckabees, whose existence is physicality itself. Here, she represents the fallacy of the voice of corporate imagery. When Dawn begins to question the exploitation of her looks, she both falls apart and recomposes herself in the way she wants to live. She embraces the substance of who she is and attempts to cultivate her inner self. The manner in which she does so manifests itself, like everything else in the movie, as an extreme. Dawn follows the path of the other characters; embracing her opposite impulse as she makes herself ugly (the script actually refers to her from this point on as "Uglified Dawn"). For Albert, this means transforming himself from an environmentalist to an arsonist. Tommy will sacrifice everything he had in order to find what's important (it must be noted that Tommy's transformation is already in the process of being developed, while everyone else in the film is at the beginning). Brad will change from a carefully-composed executive to an overwrought, emotional wreck.

The film is more reasonable with its characters and their beliefs as well, and allows them to return and come to their own respective 'happy endings.' We witness Albert's growth as he moves beyond his initial philosophical formulations of the world, and it is only by his participation in a fully-rendered process of examination that this can take place. The conclusion that Albert's process allows for is the synthesis of the opposing philosophical precepts that take place in the movie. It is as Albert exclaims when he has his revelation that "he is Brad," or rather, that the question at the core of his destructive act may have achieved the opposite result; "did it bond me to Brad in the insanity of pain till I saw that I'm

Brad and he's me" (109)? It is clear that on the theoretical level of the text, a unity of views is necessary to make sense of the world, and Albert realizes that the new philosophy for post 9/11 America must include both aspects of the dialectic; as he states to the competing Jaffes' and Vaubon "you're too dark and you're not dark enough" (110). In other words, the philosophies of both the Jaffes' and Vaubon's aren't adequate to contain the good and bad elements of the contemporary moment, and that the interconnection of the universe is both "amazing" and "nothing special" at the same time. In short, they are dialectical. Albert's new cosmology becomes the synthesis of Vaubon's and Jaffes' where, "it grows in the manure of human trouble...no manure, no magic." (118-19). In this manner, only a dialogue (or intervention) staged in the pro-filmic world will provide an answer to the problem of "why [it is] that people only ask themselves really deep questions when something really bad happens, and then they forget about it later..." (41).

By raising the pertinent issues that contribute to the deadlock of the Right and Left political structure of American politics, the film is a valuable contribution to the biggest questions of our era. By utilizing a dialectical structure to analyze the religious and secular extremes, the film enacts what Slavoj Žižek characterizes as the need to break from the currently composed methods of ideological and religious discourses. In his short essay "From Christ to Lenin...and Back" the author asserts that there is a need for what he calls a "Leninist intervention," which opposes all sides of contemporary discourse in order to reassert a new paradigm to revise the politics of our moment. This break,

aims neither at nostalgically *reenacting* the "good old revolutionary times," nor at the opportunistic-pragmatic *adjustment* of the old program to "new conditions," but at *repeating*, in the present world wide conditions, the Leninist gesture of initiating a political project that would undermine the totality of the global liberal-capital world order, and furthermore, a project that would unabashedly assert itself as acting on behalf of truth, as intervening in the present global situation from the standpoint of its repressed truth. What Christianity did with regard to the Roman Empire, this global "multiculturalist" polity, we should do with regard to today's Empire. (Žižek, *On Belief* 4-5)

This notion corresponds to Barber's conclusion of his own study of politics, religion and Capital, where he asserts that it is only with the creation of what he terms a "global civil society" (Barber 286) that progress can take place. This would include a reconstitution of a "public" who are "something more than a random collection of consumers or an aggregation of special political interests or a product of identity politics" (*Ibid*). In other words, in order to change the parameters of the film's center (the dinner table scene) we need to be aware of the errant elements of civil society and individually examine these issues from all sides (Left and Right, theological and commercial). This movement (which I have proposed is the movement of the film) thus corresponds to Žižek's hope for the Leninist intervention where "it is only through such a violent displacement that the 'original theory' can be *put to work*, fulfilling its potential of political intervention" (Žižek 3). In order to do so, we can follow the path that the film dictates and find our interconnectedness to the universe through a questioning of our own lives. The film then, embodies an allegorical break from contemporary politics through its vocalization and reformulation of the important issues

facing American domestic and foreign policy; or rather, “of adopting the unequivocal position from which it is only possible to intervene in such a way that our intervention changes the coordinates of the situation” (*Ibid*). Here, the staging of a series of confrontations with the dominant ideologies (as represented by opposition to the concepts of Christian settlement of the new Promised Land – the exurbs and the revision of foreign policy by a serious questioning of the dependence of petroleum) yield positive results in the on screen discussion of these issues. In real life, the actual interventions, discussions, disagreements, debates (as recent history has shown) were largely silenced, and (as recent history has also shown) the pursuit of all that Tommy opposes continues unabated.

Perhaps here is a good time to discuss the final point that Tommy illustrates in the dinner scene, where he attempts to admonish the father figure and engage in a productive conversation by asking; “You say that you’re Christians living by Jesus’ principles, but are you” (54)? When turning the discussion to oil he states repeatedly that Jesus would be ashamed of the family, despite their best intentions to lead a good Christian life. In this sense, in its current unilateralist incarnation, American existence is mutually exclusive and strictly aligned with Capital. Furthermore, the American exurbanite is “hailed” (in the Althusserian sense) by the Ideological State Apparatuses which address him through the pan-religious appeal to his Christianity. I want to be clear that I am in no way asserting that *any* Christians are evil people, that the idea of Christian Charity is not noble, or even that “religion” is “the opiate of the masses.” Rather, I am suggesting (as the film suggests, and as recent historical “episodes” of the Terry Schaivo incident, and the “intelligent design” vs. evolution debate examples show) that we need to acknowledge Barber’s investigation of the dialectical relationship between the hypercapitalist form of globalization and its repercussions of fundamentalist retrenchment in both Middle Eastern and American contexts. Furthermore, by questioning the surrounding events that 9/11 provided a window to, we can perhaps “remember correctly” the historical context of the event on a global scale.

Here, one can refer both to Slavoj Zizek’s assertions about the immediate consequences of the event and that it was precisely this kind of questioning that did not take place. However, if we are to return to the Deleuzian/Jamesonian position then we will see the work of *I ♥ Huckabeees* not as an intervention *itself*, but an expression of the *desire* for the kind of questioning to take place. In this manner (and following this logic) the film (in Jameson’s terms) manages the collective fears and also the Utopian longing that opposes the ruling ideological construct. In this manner, the characters’ thorough self-examinations provide the society with the tools to examine themselves. What the film proposes (as I have argued by the very fact of its existence) is that by following a dialectical process of the logic of opposition, and by combining with a relativistic existential approach one can achieve a sophisticated balance and reconstruct a “third way” to facilitate America’s multilateral global citizenship. Firstly, it acts as a critical evaluation of the society that it depicts and offers tools to decipher not what the answers are, but to find the questions in the first place. Secondly, it not only criticizes the notion of the model of success within both its satiric depiction of the hypocrisy of the “proto-

Christian” doctrines of Americanization abroad and domestically, but also bitinglly criticizes the American Dream by demonstrating that the center does not hold. This is shown by the deconstruction (and disintegration) of the perfect American couple, Dawn and Brad. When the masks that they wear are removed, it is revealed that there is nothing behind them. This could be easily applied to the internal logic of the proto-Christian doctrine of “the market” (God) sorting everything out in the world by allowing the market (God) to anoint the chosen and by demonstrating that those who do not obey this “crucible” (here exemplified by Steven’s and his countrymen; the Sudanese) will perish at its hands. I understand that some of this analysis may be problematic given the conception of the role of film in our society, but considering that film is now our mass-medium *par excellence* and that it often contains the keys to understanding the various moments that it depicts, *I ♥ Huckabeees* is an excellent example of how a film can depict the fears and desires of an era explicitly, while still ultimately being a product for the palatable digestion by consumers. In other words, the film’s logic dictates that it will debate *for* the spectator and by presenting a conclusion that is *itself inconclusive*, it examines not only the moment of its origin, but acts as a record for the prevailing questions of its era. ☺

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David Hauka

christ, that hurts!: rewriting the jesus narrative - violence & the language of action cinema in mel gibson's **the passion of the christ**

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3-5: 700 BCE).

He was despised and shunned by men, a man of pain who knew what sickness was (A Prayer to Horus: 2575 BCE).

Centurion: You know what the penalty for harboring a wanted criminal is? Crucifixion!

Matthias: Oh.

Centurion: Nasty, eh?

Matthias: Could be worse.

Centurion: Could be worse! Crucifixion lasts hours. It's a slow, horrible death.

*Matthias: Well, at least it gets you out in the open air (Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, 1979).*

While on a trip to Peru, I visited the main Catholic Cathedral in Lima. As expected, inside the cathedral was a large cross from which hung a life-sized image of the crucified Jesus near (or at) the moment of death. While I had seen many representations of Jesus on the Cross in Europe and North America (as well as explicit illustrations of the martyring of the Saints) I was unprepared for the image presented. The carved Jesus' wounds were deep and horrific. White ribs stood out underneath ripped flesh – a glistening heart and lungs were just visible within the dark hollow deep within his open chest. Blood seemed to flow fresh and warm from the many punctures and tears that had ruined what was once a perfect body. Beneath a crown of vicious thorns, Jesus' face was a bloody pulp. The image of the flayed and dead Jesus rendered in such medical realism nearly overwhelmed me, and I stared in fascination and revulsion. Why would such an image be produced? The answer, I was told by a cathedral guide, lay in the daily experience of the local Indians centuries ago. They had suffered such violent treatment and torture at the hands of their conquerors that the usual depictions of Christ's sufferings did not impress them. It was decided by the Church of the period to exaggerate the wounds and suffering so that it would seem beyond the native's own. How else would the Indians accept that He gave His life so they might live under the whip of their Masters?

Expedient exaggeration of the violence done to the body of Jesus aligns Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) with the intentions of the makers of the carved Jesus in the Lima Cathedral. How else to convince a secular audience steeped in the violent images found in films such as *Braveheart* (Gibson, 1995) and *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987) that Jesus' death was such a monumental act of self-sacrifice that he absorbed all the sins of Mankind? And absorb is exactly what *The Passion's* Jesus does,

willingly accepting the impossible violence done to his body as necessary for the greater good.

It is into author Jean Baudrillard's domain of the hyperreal that we travel upon viewing *The Passion*. From its opening image of a full moon coursing over the Garden of Gethsemane to the final shot of the risen Christ leaving his tomb, there is not a single image that does not refer or rely upon an almost endless series of related images. The 'ultimate' image of Jesus presented by *The Passion* is potent only because of the images that have gone before it. All the representations we see in *The Passion* (Jesus and otherwise) evoke specific as well as general responses in the viewer and while these images seem particular to the story of Jesus, they also can be read across several film and art history genres – both secular and sacred. In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that the power of these images (overloaded as they are with social, cultural and historical meaning) has little to do with the "original" upon which the representation is based. The image, created in order to simulate (or stand-in for, or perhaps distill) the original, quickly replaces the original as the method by which cultural meaning is produced *because the layers of cultural meaning attached to the image over time become more important than the original object*. The simulation of the object replaces the object entirely, reproducing itself in favour over whatever the original was. The images presented in films such as *The Passion* do not represent an original object or event, they are simulations representing an original that can never be directly accessed or experienced. A contemporary audience understands that it can never experience the physical actuality of Jesus or his times, but they can experience an image/simulation of Jesus that agrees with the cultural meaning they have come to expect. They agree with the simulation presented, allowing it to stand-in for, or *replace*, the original. The *signs* of the real come to *replace* the real – in the case of Jesus and his times there is no alternative – and Baudrillard suggests, its simulation in effect destroys the real.

Like an icon of Jesus, the images presented are signs that have replaced whatever reality might have existed 2000 years ago in 1st Century CE Judea. The imagined reality presented has the imprint of authenticity – we are all familiar with how films represent the period in question. We are not surprised by what we see - it agrees with the images found throughout Christian art history and films such as *Cleopatra* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1963). Baudrillard's ideas of the hyperreal and the Successive Phases of the Image are especially resonant with the experience that is *The Passion*. If we accept that an image of Jesus (either an icon from Constantinople or an actor on

screen) is a reflection (not the original) of a profound reality, it takes little time to arrive at this conclusion that the same image has no relation to reality whatsoever - it becomes its own pure simulation. Yet despite its artificial nature, much is made of *The Passion's* authenticity. After screening the film, Pope John Paul II was quoted by The Wall Street Journal as saying "It is as it was" (Noonan). But did the Pope speak in Italian, Polish, English or perhaps Latin? Each language has its own subtleties and mistranslations are possible. To question the accuracy of the Pope's quote acts to demonstrate how far even in this circumstance we are from the 'original.' That we accept the quote as being accurate speaks as much to the social belief in the veracity of The Wall Street Journal and its reporters as to what we believe the Pope might say in this instance.

The "Jesus Film" as a genre has been present since the beginnings of Western Cinema. In Reading the Gospels in the Dark: Portrayals of Jesus in Film, author Richard Walsh examines how representations of Jesus in film have evolved over time, dividing these representations into two broad categories: "Jesus as Sign (Christ) and Jesus as Character (human)." Both these representations share the inescapable fact that the story of Jesus is *known* – so deeply rooted in the Western experience that it is impossible to change (Walsh). It is in fact a story in the pre-modern Epic tradition, one in which any attempt to humanize its hero is trumped by the cultural knowledge of his fate. The cinematic Jesus as Sign can be found in many forms: he is seen at a distance (either physical or psychological) in films as diverse as *The King of Kings* (Cecile B. DeMille, 1927), *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Peir Paulo Pasolini, 1966) or *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Terry Jones, 1979). In all of these films, Jesus stands at a formal remove from the audience, an icon whose formulaic reciting of lines and actions cannot deviate from the *known story*. This is the *Christ*; a Jesus transformed from the creditably human into a sign whose iconic power is so charged that it still used to evoke myriad cultural and historic imperatives.

In the case of Gibson's *Passion*, the Jesus represented is a fusion of several sources and Gibson makes a point of situating his film first and foremost with quotes from the Old Testament as found in an edition of the Holy Bible used by the Catholic Church (there are subtle differences between the Catholic and Protestant translations of the Bible, some which maybe of interest in a future examination of *The Passion*). However, the Gospels aside, the most influential source for Gibson's Jesus originate in the visions attributed to 18th century Nun Anne Catherine Emmerich as recorded in her book The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Emmerich's visions of the hideous physical violence done to Jesus are combined with Gibson's cinematic vision to resurrect a supposedly lost version of the Christ – one that belongs to the pre-modern (perhaps medieval) Church. The film's title is the first indication that its purpose is the recovery of this lost object: *The Passion of the Christ* is not *The Passion of Jesus*. The difference is important and not subtle - the word passion, whose Latin root means suffering, gives us clues as to where Gibson's lost Christ originates. He is to be found in medieval Passion Plays, such as the notorious version staged in Oberammergau, Germany before and during Hitler's rule. The Oberammergau Passion Play follows the same narrative as Gibson's *Passion* – Jesus' last twelve hours of life as illustrated by the Stations of the Cross. Although separated by 500 years, these versions share more than the

physical suffering of Jesus in common - they both present a Villain responsible for Jesus' death: the "Christ-Killing Jews" (Swidler: Oberammergau Website).

It is through the violence done to Jesus' body *The Passion* reveals its purpose: to rewrite what I shall call the Jesus Narrative such that it conforms to a specific religious/political reading. This reading, which requires that the Jesus Narrative constructed by *The Passion* be accepted as the *correct* version, replacing all that came before it, is often portrayed as being rooted in religious Fundamentalism. Given its association with *The Passion*, it is important to briefly examine what the term Fundamentalism has come to mean in popular usage. In the Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions, edited by John Bowker, Fundamentalism is defined as:

In general, a description of those who return to what they believe to be the fundamental truths and practices of a religion. It can thus be applied to this attitude in all religions (e.g. the resurgence of conservative Islam is sometimes called 'Islamic Fundamentalism'). But this use is sometimes resented by such people, because of its more usual identification with those, in Christianity, who defend the Bible against charges that it contains any kind of error. More specifically, it denotes the view of Protestant Christians opposed to historical and theological implications of critical study of the Bible. To avoid overtones of closed mindedness, Christians in the Fundamentalist tradition often prefer to be called Conservative Evangelists (Bowker 203).

Fundamentalist readings of sacred texts are often associated with an extreme form of literalism – that is to say: if it's written in the Bible that God created the universe in six days and that He rested on the seventh, then that is exactly what happened. There is no room for discussion. Those that disagree with the one true reading of the sacred text are considered Other – outside and in opposition to those with the special knowledge to interpret the sacred text correctly. By concentrating in horrific detail on the last twelve painful hours of Jesus' life, *The Passion* gives the viewer little time to consider alternative readings. To be Other in this context is to be damned.

Author Slavoj Zizek examines Fundamentalism in his book On Belief, and suggests that the Other represents the forbidden – usually in the form of excessive pleasure or *jouissance* - to the Fundamentalist (Zizek 68). Further, Zizek suggests that it is only through the existence of the Other with its attendant excesses that the Fundamentalist can define himself. But there is no pleasure to be found in how we see the Jews in *The Passion*. *The Passion* presents the majority of Jews as hideous, cruel and *different* from Jesus and his followers. Excess, instead of being represented by *jouissance*, is found in appearance, gesture and primitive behavior. Certainly a few, such as the Head Temple Priest Ciaphas stand out as leaders, but they only serve to re-enforce the collective cruelty of the Jewish mob. Positive character identification is located exclusively with those who either believe in Jesus' status as Messiah – especially his mother, Mary – or those sympathetic to his situation and suffering – including Pilate and a few Romans and Jews who are included in the Jesus Narrative. *The Passion* creates an absolute definition of good and evil; it does so by deploying a cinematic vocabulary foreign to the genre of the Jesus film.

Rejecting previous approaches to the subject, *The Passion* constructs Jesus by deploying a cinematic vocabulary



which director Mel Gibson has mastered both as director and actor - that of the Action Film. This radical departure from standard representations of the Jesus Narrative produces a potent hero familiar to audiences steeped in the Action genre, thus enabling a form of character identification. The application of this well-established and specific film vocabulary to a story (some would say *the story*) central to Western Culture, results in the creation of a *muscular Jesus*: a new and potent representation of Jesus that has more in common with John Rambo (*First Blood*, Ted Kotcheff, 1982) and Maximus (*Gladiator*, Ridley Scott, 2000) than the distant and gentle fisher of souls depicted in previous motion pictures. The resonance with Rambo and Maximus is deep, illustrated by a central requirement of the action genre: the action hero needs a villain to struggle with and define himself against. The Christ of *The Passion* does not die an innocent in order to save Mankind - he dies and is resurrected in order to empower those who believe without question his status as Messiah and his teachings. All others are excluded from salvation and shall spend eternity burning in hell.

An obstacle to a wide audience being able to read *The Passion* in a more or less coherent manner is Jesus himself. Past representations of Jesus on film illustrate that he is not a character the audience can identify with easily. Attempts to differentiate the human character from the sign fail and Jesus remains a distant iconic figure - a hero of the pre-modern Epic tradition. Jesus, the Sign or Character, is doomed to live, not choose as the post-modern hero does, his fate. The films that attempt to humanize Jesus usually resort to a standard narrative device - the love triangle - to do so. In both Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) and Norman Jewison's *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), Judas and Mary Magdalene vie for his love and attention. Neither succeeds (as *we know* they cannot) and instead they act out their fated roles: Judas betrays Jesus to their mutual deaths and Mary sublimates her physical love into chastity and worship.

This difficulty of identification with Jesus as a character, whether in film or other media, has generated a series of narrative substitutes - characters who possess flaws and qualities we see in ourselves. Refined over centuries, these substitutes for Jesus the Epic Hero appear throughout cinema. They represent good, struggle against and suffer terribly at the hands of their opponents. Then they rise, stronger for their suffering, to conquer their enemies. But in most cases, unlike Jesus, they are alive at

story's end. These narrative substitutes for Jesus are the "common man" as hero central to the novel and cinema. He is Benjamin Martin (*The Patriot*, Roland Emmerich, 2000) or Neo (*The Matrix*, A. & L. Wachowski, 1999), not Jesus or Gilgamesh. The common man story is 'unknown' and unlike the Epic Hero's can surprise us in how it ends. The common man hero can even meet Jesus, as in *Ben Hur* (Wyler, 1959). His life can parallel Jesus' trajectory through sacrifice and transformation, but without having to give up his desires for love and life. What Gibson attempts in *The Passion* is to combine the attributes of the Jesus of Sign with those of the "common man" substitute hero. While this combination has been attempted in the past (*The Last Temptation of Christ* is an example), as discussed, it has usually deployed the vocabulary of romantic melodrama. By using the vocabulary of the action cinema, Gibson avoids melodrama's unnecessary complications - such as (carnal) love and character development - complications that ring false in the Epic tradition.

In the uncomplicated worlds of Epic and Action cinema, the hero must struggle against his evil opposite. The stakes are high: should he fail, the world (or nation) will be lost. Both traditions feature characters and situations that are recognized on sight (or sound) by audiences familiar with the form. Both traditions use violence as a method of driving their narrative forward. By exploiting both traditions, *The Passion* manages not only to present Jesus as a Hard Bodied Action Hero but as the culturally known Epic Hero. The Epic, culturally 'known' story of Jesus is exploited in order to present a specific and highly coded Insider version. This Insider reading of the film exploits action cinema's vocabulary both to mask its presence and to re-enforce its central message: that the Inside reading of the film is the only correct one. And what a specific Insider experience it is - from the first image of the full moon to the last of the risen Christ's punctured hands against his nude and muscular thigh, the references seem countless - all relating to a specific reading of the cinematic text. It is the fusion of this intentionally specific (and paradoxically 'outsider' reading - for it is based upon materials and traditions not found in the so-called original text, the Bible) religious language of symbols and sound with the Action Cinema that Gibson manages engagement with a wide audience.

The Passion of the Christ presents its Jesus carefully - an innocent who doesn't deserve punishment of any sort, let alone the sustained and inhuman violence that is visited upon him. Gibson's Jesus accepts both the violence done to his body and his death as being necessary - a sacrifice required in order to fulfill ancient prophecies found in the holy texts of the Jews. And it is with a quote from a Jewish Prophet that Gibson begins his film. After the usual array of sponsoring company logos appear (including Gibson's own lightning cracked 'Icon'), music that evokes an ancient time fades up as the following passage from the Old Testament appears over black:

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by god, smitten by him, and afflicted (Isaiah 53:3-5: 700 BCE).

The quote from Isaiah is followed immediately by the film's first image: the full moon hangs high over a dark

landscape, a thin slash of cloud – a precursor of a larger, darker mass approaching – cuts across the lunar surface like a knife. The full moon and troubled sky established the camera descends towards the earth and the Garden of Gethsemane. Moving over a misty landscape bathed in cold blue light and cut by hard black shadows, the camera pauses to hover near the shadowed figure of a man. His back to us, the man pleads to an unseen presence. The man wears robes we recognize from countless images of Jesus but he speaks (between sobs) a language we cannot understand. Jesus is shaking – seemingly weak and afraid – he reaches out, his back still to us, to a tree for support. He continues to speak and cry. Jesus turns and stumbles out of frame calling to his disciple Peter and the first subtitle of the film appears.

The effect of this opening is immediate: subtitles replace what the characters on screen actually *say* with an edited text that the audience *reads*. An unspoken agreement is established between the film and the viewer that says: what you read, that which I have translated for you, is what is being said on screen – it is the truth. Language is used in *The Passion* for the same purpose as ancient Jewish Prophecy is used in the New Testament: to ensure that its message is read as being ‘authentic.’ Jesus and his followers speak ‘Aramaic’ and the Romans ‘Latin’ (two types of Latin are used – refined, ‘proper’ Latin for Pilate, his wife and Officers and a crude gutter Latin filled with obscenities for the common soldiery) – or, rather, they speak “reconstructed” versions of Aramaic and Latin as imagined and translated for the screenplay by Father William Fulco (The Passion of the Christ Website).

Jesus (Jim Caviezel) is not alone. As shadows pass over the moon, dimming its light, we see a figure watching Jesus from the safety of the darkness. Dressed in black, cadaverously pale, gaunt almost to the point of androgyny, the figure is Satan (Rosalinda Celentano). Satan speaks gently as she watches Jesus suffer alone in the darkness. As maggots crawl in and out of her nostril, she comments on his situation in a calm and detached tone – again in a language we cannot understand. In response to Jesus’ cries to his unseen Father, Satan ‘gives birth’ to a serpent, that drops from between her legs and slithers towards the distraught prophet.

The deployment of the action cinema’s vocabulary follows almost immediately. It manifests, as one might expect, in an act of violence. What is unexpected is that the perpetrator of the first act of violence in what is arguably an extraordinarily violent film is Jesus. Jesus stands. He is tall, physically impressive and commanding – the opposite of Satan. Satan’s words and the arrival of the serpent are the answer in his Father’s silence, filling him with resolve and certainty. And it is resolve that Gibson wants us to read in Jesus’ shadowed but stern features, not the anger that seems to be there. Staring at (or is it past?) Satan, Jesus crushes the serpent beneath his sandal with a violent stomp.

Jesus’ actions in the garden are cut against Judas’ meeting with the Jewish Priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. The Priests are portrayed as an alien and repulsive mass of conniving and bitter old men. Their fading physical power is concealed beneath excessively embroidered and bejeweled ornate black vestments. They regard Judas from a platform on one side of a torch-lit inner courtyard. On the opposite side of the courtyard, towering over Judas from behind, a large group of black armored Temple Guards

watch and wait for the Priests’ instructions. The Guards’ physical powers are obvious, but, like the Priests, they are clothed in complex and unnecessary excess. Combining visually with the Jewish Priests and hard black shadows, the Temple Guards evoke a feeling of ancient, malevolent decadence. In soft amber torchlight, Judas succumbs to the display of temporal power represented by the black mass of priests and soldiers. Jesus and Judas both succeed in fulfilling their required narrative roles, albeit by the overt display of opposite qualities: Jesus faces and defeats his own doubts and Satan in a display of strength and certainty while Judas realizes his fate by succumbing to doubt and weakness.

In these two inter-cut scenes, *The Passion* establishes the most stable of the action cinema’s conventions – the hero and his opposite. As well, what the Hero needs to accomplish (while already known by the audience) is laid out in a specific manner: Jesus accepts that he must carry out his heroic act by surrendering to those who would kill him. But for whom does Jesus sacrifice himself? With the exception of his few followers (who, save for the two Marys, are barely realized characters in the film’s narrative) there is no one. As Yvonne Tasker observes in *Spectacular Bodies*:

The hero of the action narrative is often cast as a figure that lacks a place within the community for which he fights, a paradox familiar from the Western genre. In the recent action cinema, problems of a location and position are increasingly articulated through the body of the male hero (Tasker 77).

The Insider knows that Jesus is sacrificing himself for a community that does not yet exist – one that will be found in the ashes of the order his sacrifice will ultimately destroy. The Epic Jesus’ suffering and death is *fated* – a closed loop of cause and effect: Jesus is the promised Messiah who will take on all the sins of man, ushering in a new era of peace and justice for those who believe. He *must* (will, has *always*) die(d) and (will) be resurrected through the unforgiving formulas set down by prophecy. In other words, there is no element of human choice present in this scenario; no blame can be assigned for its inevitable outcome. Those present in the drama must act as they do or the prophecies are not fulfilled and Jesus is not the Messiah. So why is it that we do not feel indebted to the vicious Jewish Temple Priests after they force the thoughtful Roman Governor to execute Jesus by crucifixion? It is their clearly drawn status as Other (unlike the Romans) that dooms the Jews to carry blame, not credit for Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection. The need to blame the Jews (or to be somewhat lenient, the Temple Priests) is central to *The Passion*’s version of the Jesus Narrative.

A central concern of the early Christian community was to prove that Jesus was in fact the Messiah foretold by the Jewish Prophets. Those who do not accept Jesus as Messiah are therefore no longer party to the covenant with God. This concept – that Christianity represents the fulfillment of Old Testament Judaism and that in so doing Christians have *replaced* the Jews as God’s chosen people – is called *supersessionism*. This centuries old Christian belief cuts off the Jews, and any who do not believe in Jesus’ status as Messiah, from God and the hope of salvation. Given that the Jews still claim the covenant with God and do not recognize Jesus, they are the enemy of the Messiah. Many Christian Churches have rejected supersessionism in

modern times due to its power to create and promote anti-Semitism, though it is still practiced by many conservative and fundamentalist denominations and some traditional Catholics. However, as part of his effort to bridge the historical gap between Catholics and Jews Pope John Paul II has on several occasions rejected supersessionism. To quote Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League on the occasion of the Pope's death:

Most importantly, the Pope rejected the destructive concept of supersessionism and has recognized the special relationship between Christianity and the Jewish people, while sharing his understanding of Judaism as a living heritage, of the permanent validity of God's covenant with the Jewish people. He was a man of God in every sense and a true friend whose visionary leadership will be sorely missed (Foxman: Anti-Defamation League Website).

The Passion's forceful reassertion of supersessionism is a further indication of the film's attempt to recover a 'lost' Jesus from the past and its strong association with the literalist form of conservative Fundamentalism. The tragedy of the absolute belief represented by Fundamentalism is that it allows no dissent or alternatives. Thus when Jesus rises from death to the sound of triumphant martial music, he represents the end of the previous, decadent order. Jesus has successfully fulfilled Jewish prophecy: he is the Messiah and therefore appropriates the authority of the old order. There can only be one true covenant with God, and it is with the Messiah. The Jews are successfully (!) superceded by the Christians and left to damnation and eternal suffering. It is in this creation of an evil Other to define itself against that the Insider's greatest pleasure is to be found. In fact, without the Other, with its excess and decadence as a source of hatred, the supposed good guys would not exist. If Žizek is correct, there is a secret desire on behalf of Fundamentalists for the Other – and in desire there is pleasure. In the case of *The Passion*, the required sacrifice of Jesus at the hands of the Jews by Roman proxy is the true source of Insider pleasure. What is sacrifice then in the context of *The Passion*? Žizek states that, at its most elementary, sacrifice is an exchange: "I offer to the Other something that is precious to me in order to get back from the Other something that is even more vital to me" (Žizek 69). By offering his life to the Other (in this case the Jews and their ancient Law represented by the Temple Priests) Jesus accomplishes that which the Jews never anticipated: their demise as God's Chosen people.

The events and characters established in *The Passion's* opening two scenes seem to be in agreement with the known Jesus Narrative. However, the Jesus of *The Passion* demonstrates something to the audience no other filmed Jesus has: that he is capable of physical violence that can destroy his enemies. This is a muscular Jesus whose body is capable of backing up his soft-spoken message of loving kindness with action. Once *The Passion's* Jesus has demonstrated his ability to use violence, his body as a site of potent masculine power is established. By doing so, we see him as the opposite of both Satan and the Jews. By establishing this opposition, the Jews and Satan become equivalent: they are the Action Hero's enemies and they will be defeated. The establishment of the Jewish Priests as Jesus' enemies is hardly new – the New Testament makes this assertion frequently. It is the Insider's reading of this information that is crucial to *The Passion's* narrative. In such a reading, the Jews represent the old order that has been

replaced by the new, Christian order. The Jews are impotent, incapable of controlling or destroying Jesus without the assistance of the Romans.

The Passion has two kinds of Romans: the first, represented by Pilate and his wife, are intelligent and secular (though in keeping with the film's representation of "good" females Mrs. Pilate is 'sympathetic' to Jesus and his message). The others, represented by the guards and soldiers who torture and crucify Jesus, are hideous caricatures of human beings. Barely controlled by their betters, the soldiers are thoughtless brutes who enjoy causing pain. As such, their acts are not motivated by hatred, fear or jealousy (as the Jewish Priests seem to be); they are merely instruments fulfilling their purpose. These representations of Romans and Jews are central to the Insider's reading of *The Passion*. For the film to be read successfully by a wide audience (which is largely made up of non-insiders) these representations as well as the rest of the extra-biblical material that it relies upon must be accepted as being 'true' to the Jesus story.

It is through the Action Cinema that a mutual language is created that both Insider and Outsider can read, thus allowing both sides to agree on what is being said. Of course, the Insider is still in the privileged and pleasurable position of being able to read all of the layers of 'hidden' meaning. A connoisseur of Quentin Tarantino's films can read *Kill Bill Volume 1* (2003) in a more sophisticated manner than a regular spectator: myriad visual and sound references to films important to the Action genre (in the case of *Kill Bill*, the readings are *very* specialized – they refer to a sub-genre of Action cinema; the Kung Fu film) pack the screen, giving the Insider great pleasure as references hidden from those without special knowledge stream by. But the hidden information found in *Kill Bill* is itself embedded within an Action film, a genre whose conventions can be read by all, so both Insider and Outsider can read the film and obtain pleasure. However, unlike an Insider reading of a Tarantino film, which allows room for interpretation, there is only one Insider reading allowed for *The Passion*.

When the vocabulary of the Action film is established, *The Passion* propels itself into what is an escalating series of violent events. Once the Temple Guards appear in the garden, there are few moments when Jesus' body is not pummeled or cut. Moments (rather than whole scenes) when violence is not being done to Jesus on screen are usually centered on those who watch his suffering. *The Passion* neatly inverts the standard narrative structure of the Action film at the same time it relies on the audience's ability to read the conventions of the genre. Instead of building upon characters in dramatic situations that can only be released by a violent act, it is violence that carries the narrative forward until it is interrupted or released by moments of character-based drama.

The Passion exploits two well-used cinematic conventions in order to accomplish narrative release of violence: flashbacks (mainly seen from Jesus' point of view, but also from the film's main female protagonists, his mother Mary and follower Mary Magdalene) and parallel montage that focuses on those who are sympathetic to Jesus. With the exception of the extraordinarily brief resurrection, it is only in the flashback scenes that we see Jesus' face and body clearly and at its most perfect. The first blow to Jesus is to his face (which we have seen only by moonlight and in shadow up to that point), an

important gesture that begins the slow and exhaustive transformation of his hard and perfect body into the receiver of all sin.

As Jesus' body is systematically destroyed, first by the Church (in its Jewish and decadent form) then by the State (the animalistic Roman Soldiery), flashbacks are used to suspend the violent moments on screen. If violence in action films produces what Leo Charney labels as a "burst of the present" (Charney 47), then *The Passion's* narrative would stall were it not for the moments of narrative "release" afforded by the injection of these sequences. But the flashbacks or parallel montage do not stop the violence of the outgoing scene. The scenes of Jesus teaching (rendered visually, as is the rest of the film, to evoke the paintings of Caravaggio and other recognized religious paintings), the moments with his mother Mary or when Mary walks stoically from his scourging are filled with the tension generated by the violence that proceeds them. The extended sequence where Jesus is scourged by Roman Soldiers makes strategic use of both flashback and parallel montage. It is here, as the first truly horrific damage is done to Jesus' body, that the full force of action cinema's vocabulary combines with *The Passion's* version of the Jesus Narrative to generate a series of cultural messages – messages that the Insider knows to be true and the outsider unintentionally accepts.

While Mary, Satan (depicted as an 'anti-Mary' several times in the scene) and the Temple Priests observe, Jesus' hands are chained to a low stone post as Roman soldiers test their canes and make jokes among themselves. The laughing and joking stop as the soldiers pause to consider Jesus' exposed back. Jesus squares his shoulders, drawing a breath in preparation for what follows. The damage sustained by Jesus is extreme – and *The Passion* deploys the same vocabulary used in *Braveheart* and *The Patriot* – a cinematic vocabulary that displays and celebrates the male body at the same time as that body is destroyed. We as spectators respond to the torture of Jesus of Nazareth as we might to the flaying of Rambo or the suffering/death (passion?) of Maximus and William Wallace.

The cane blows are counted off in Latin, building in intensity and effect as Jesus' body is written upon and transformed. Patterns are carved into his flesh; a starburst of fine red lines explodes between his shoulders; welts raised on the backs of his legs form overlapping 'x's.' It is hard work and the guards are spent when the ritual count of twenty-nine blows is reached. But Jesus is not finished. The pause in the action seems post-coital as the guards regain their breath and smile weakly at their work. Jesus has collapsed, only his chained hands visible as they keep him from falling to the stone floor. This should be the end of the punishment ordered by Pilate.

Jesus gathers his strength. In an act that provokes the wrath of the animal-like guards, he pulls himself up and back into position – offering up his ruined back for more punishment. Jesus' face strains with the effort, but there is no anger to be seen. The crowd of Priests and onlookers draw their collected breath as the Guards reach for even crueler whips – ones with metal hooks and pieces of glass embedded in their strands. The scene is presented from multiple points of view: the Jewish Mob (made up of nameless Temple Priests and rabble), mother Mary and Mary Magdalene, the Roman Soldiers, Satan and Jesus himself. Each point of view acts to reinforce the others, adding to the reading of what is being seen such that the



message transmitted is clear: *this must happen*. The monstrous female that is Satan observes and mocks Jesus as he suffers. Her calm face is a parody of Mary's noble acceptance and suffering. Satan walks through the crowd creating a terrible version of the Virgin and infant Jesus realized as hag and hideous dwarf. But in doing so, Satan not only strengthens Mary and Jesus' resolve, but – by their connection to the films action through the use of point of view – the spectator's as well.

From the first blow of a cane on Jesus' perfect back to the last piece of flesh ripped from his chest (after he has been flipped face up for more punishment), the violence is so extreme, so exaggerated, that it cannot be real. Yet the audience accepts this hyperreal depiction of violence and suffering because it occurs to the male hero's body. The hero in the action film suffers at the hands of his enemies and is reborn: he rises stronger than before, capable of beating his foes. The difference between how this transformation manifests in *The Passion* as opposed to *Rambo* is the moment of rebirth is deferred and the punishment suffered by the hero extended. Rambo's triumph over his foes is mirrored in *The Passion*: but it can only be accomplished by the hero's death and resurrection. *The Passion's* Jesus acceptance of punishment is not the masochistic suffering of a willing victim. This image of Jesus – not Christ – is phallic, hard and accepting of his punishment in order to destroy his opponents. With each stroke of the whip that rips his flesh, Gibson's Jesus strikes out at his enemies. With each blow his body is transformed – taken further from the human and towards its final, perfect manifestation.

Through his acceptance of superhuman suffering and death *The Passion's* Jesus creates a new system of communication that neither the secular Romans nor the primitive Jews can understand. It is a system that can be read by both the Insider and the Outsider because both parties know the epic Jesus Narrative: Jesus, the story goes, wins. *The Passion's* Jesus represents a revolution already won – a revolution that this film makes clear is not founded on the supposedly Christian messages of tolerance and understanding, but of triumph through righteous suffering, torment and death. The Jews are supplanted as God's Chosen People and the Romans are absorbed.

After the flayed Jesus is dragged away – his torture halted by the arrival of a Roman Officer who is horrified by how far the guards have gone (far beyond their orders) – and the crowd dispersed, the two Marys enter the

courtyard. Blood, in impossible amounts, covers the stone floor in pools. Using white towels given them by a silent Mrs. Pilate, the two women carefully mop and soak up Jesus blood. This is part of the ritual necessary for a Jewish burial – all of the body must be gathered for internment. However, it is also a statement as to the sacred quality assigned to Jesus' blood in Christian teaching.

Mary Magdalene experiences a flash of memory as she mops the blood: an out-of-focus crowd of angry Temple Priests are in the distance, made small and impotent by the sudden entrance into frame of Jesus' foot and leg – made giant-size by its foreground position and sharp focus. Jesus reaches down to the ground and draws a line in the sand – the earth seems to explode as he etches the line and then writes words in Aramaic we cannot understand. The tiny Temple Priests hesitate as they watch Jesus. After a moment they toss aside the heavy stones they carry, turn and walk away. Jesus' foot and leg stay firm in the foreground as a woman's hand, covered in hennaed designs the Insider reads to be the signs of a prostitute, enters frame. The hand shakes as it reaches for Jesus' foot, pausing just before it would touch. We see the woman whose hand it is – face painted in makeup that labels her a whore, Mary Magdalene cries softly in thanks for Jesus' mercy.

Jesus' torture and death are presented as ritual: The Temple Priests condemn Jesus using an outmoded Religious Law they themselves cannot enforce. The Romans, guardians of the ultimate secular power of state sanctioned death, carry out this Law for the Jews in order to preserve the peace and themselves. The cinema presents what is forbidden – an execution, preceded by terrible torture – as acceptable. In the West, bloody public ritual executions were formerly performed by the State and sanctioned by the Church. The practice declined, with few exceptions from the mid 19th century on. The shift of torture and execution from public and accepted to private and forbidden is discussed in the opening chapters of Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish:

The disappearance of the public executions marks therefore the decline of the spectacle; but it also marks a slackening of the hold on the body. In 1787... Benjamin Rush remarked: 'I can only hope that the time is not far away when gallows, pillory, scaffold flogging and the wheel will, in the history of punishment, be regarded as marks of the barbarity of centuries and of countries and as proofs of the feeble influence of reason and religion over the human mind' (Foucault 8-11).

What was formerly an integral part of and a ritual display of the State's power and authority (almost always linked with the Church), the public destruction of the criminal body, had become its opposite: a display of criminality that actually exceeded the acts committed by the accused. Punishment in the West was made secret and impersonal. The pre-modern forces of the Enlightenment created prisons that spoke to the new cultural imperatives and machines that would deal out death painlessly and efficiently. Whatever horrors follow in the 20th century and its modern conclusion in the Holocaust have their seeds in this transformation. The deaths of millions become hidden, unknown. The denial of the events is made possible-indeed necessary – by this new equation.

The spectacle of the public execution was transferred to the cinema early in its history. Leo Charney refers to "the cinema of attractions" in "The Violence of a Perfect

Moment" as the display of the most outlandish acts of violence. "Executions" of criminals by hanging or electrocution (even an elephant was filmed being electrocuted) and trains crashing into each other were common fare. Accepted by their viewers as being "real," these "attractions" were shown in isolation with no narrative other than the violent act itself (Charney 47-62). The hyperreal that we enter when watching violence in contemporary film has its roots in these early cinematic "attractions." Agonies far exceeding those of Damien's (Foucault 3-6) are manufactured and presented – bloody yet bloodless substitute spectacles for the good old days of the pre-modern era. *The Passion* takes simultaneous advantage of the Insider's knowledge that what they are watching is not real with their conflicting belief that the epic Jesus Narrative is true. There is no possibility that anything we are seeing in *The Passion* is rooted in an actual object or experience. What does exist in our experience of the film is *time* - time to be pulled through one hyper-violent moment after another. Time to be given brief respite from the ripping of flesh and the manly acceptance of punishment.

Before *The Passion*, Jesus in cinema could be defined by what he is not: he is not violent. He is not sexual – Jesus is an innocent. Before sending him to be nailed to the cross, Pontius Pilate asks Jesus "What is truth?" If *The Passion of the Christ* is to be accepted as "the" true Jesus Narrative, we must accept a Jesus defined by what he is: he is righteous. He is powerful. He is capable of violence. This new reading, made possible by *The Passion's* use of a filmic language and hyper-violence previously associated with the Action Cinema, also generates by default the following, troubling possible readings:

- The Jews are responsible for the death of the innocent Jesus.
- Jesus is the Messiah; not to believe so makes you his enemy.
- There is only one truth and only those who can read and believe in *The Passion of the Christ* know it.
- If you don't believe it, look out. ☹

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Katherine Pettit

metamorphic death: post-mortem & spirit photography in narrative cinema

As Geoffrey Batchen writes, photography has been associated with death since its inception. In stopping time, each individual photograph embodies the interweave of life and death. All photographs bear the work of death due to the temporal-material quality of freezing, mummifying or corpsifying the captured body. This temporal-material stasis is particularly manifest in the early beginnings of photographic technological development. Due to slow exposure times, the subject had to remain completely still for many seconds and even minutes to prevent the image from being blurred. The strain of motionlessness caused the subject's face to look sombre and morose. However, a solution became available for removing the physical strain from the subject. Special prosthetic devices were developed to constrain the subject. A neck and back brace was secured to the subject to ensure stillness and guarantee a detailed and clear image. Garrett Stewart observes that it was as if the body had to become a sarcophagus before it became a photographic effigy (44). This device transformed the live body into the stasis of an embalmed effigy. In order to appear lifelike, the technology of photography demanded that the subject act as if deceased (Batchen 208).

Portrait photographers took this corpse-like association with photography a step further and developed a lucrative trade in producing post-mortem photographs. Grieving parents could console themselves with a photograph of their departed child. The irony of photography becomes apparent again, as an image of the dead, *as dead*, somehow worked to sustain the living (Batchen 208). Jay Ruby writes extensively on the cultural phenomenon of post-mortem photography that began in the mid-nineteenth century and is still practiced today.

Ruby writes that death was a topic of polite conversation in the nineteenth century (7). The grieving process was considered normal, as is demonstrated by widowhood and its visual manifestation of wearing black in public, which was a lifelong social expectation for many women. Additionally, cemeteries were used as recreational sites. But this open and accepting attitude towards death became a forbidden topic for the American middle-class at the beginning of the twentieth century. The public display of mourning and distress over the death of a family member was considered to be pathological. However, this repressed view of death is changing, due to the proliferation of grief counselling and death education in public schools. Grief counsellors often use photography as a tool for facilitating the healing process, as Judith Stillion reveals:

This often helps clients to re-live the circumstances of a particular period and can result in re-gaining or attaining objectivity concerning their actions and decisions of that period. When clients re-live the period with the help of photographs, they frequently can let go of feelings of guilt and regret over actions taken or not taken during that particular time (quoted in Ruby 8).

Freud wrote that the mourning period is a process in which the subject learns that his or her loved one is now gone forever. In order to survive and heal, the person must direct his or her attention towards someone or something else. Substitutive objects, such as belongings of the deceased, or an image of the deceased, can help ease the grieving process (quoted in de Duve 123). Due to its indexical nature, a photographic image may be more useful than a drawing or a painting. Moreover, the indexicality of the photograph causes a mourning process to occur with every image. More specifically, as Barthes suggests with the "that-has-been," the viewer is always aware that the subject or the object of the image once existed in a certain time and place, but it does not exist in the same way at the time of viewing the photograph. The temporal death of photography brings awareness to both the mortality of the content of the photograph, and a sense of mortality to the viewer of the image. Whether a post-mortem photograph or not, the viewer is always engaged in a process of mourning. As Susan Sontag writes: "All photographs are memento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability" (15). In short, the mourning process of the photograph facilitates the healing process of grieving (de Duve 123). Perhaps photographic temporal death encourages healing by provoking contemplation on the impermanence of life and aids with the acceptance of the loss of death.

Photographs of death have a social purpose. Due to photography's connection to memory, and memory's connection to grief, a photograph of a dead loved one (either alive or posthumous) works as a therapeutic tool for the grieving process. The important social use of the photograph in the nineteenth century exemplifies Sontag's writings on the photograph as *memento mori*. The image of a loved one or a friend could be preserved and treasured as a memorial keepsake. The photograph offered the promise of a materialist realization of eternity. So, not only did photography aid in the grieving process, but it gave mourners tangibility for remembering the deceased.

The popularity of post-mortem photography is explained by an increase in death rates in the mid-nineteenth century. This was a time of social, demographic, and cultural upheaval in America. The population of the country tripled between 1790 and 1830



and would triple again by 1860. As cities grew, communities left the city for more space. Death rates due to tuberculosis were extremely high in areas that were crowded or over-populated. Tuberculosis became identified with the evils of urban life, while the rural lifestyle became a refuge from the disease and pollution of the city. A polarity between public and private life developed, with increasing importance being placed on the family unit. A new Victorian ideology arose that sentimentalized the family and its rituals, from birth to death (Stannard 84-87). The manifestation and utilization of post-mortem photography demonstrates the emerging importance of the nuclear family in the Victorian era.

Most photographs taken of the dead were of children, reflecting their high mortality rate. Tuberculosis had the largest impact on women and the young. Babies and children under age five were the highest risk-group for not surviving. There was the Victorian belief that the dead child was blessed with eternal youth and innocence, and the archival capabilities of photography facilitated that belief (Stannard 73-74). Thus, photographic stylistics were developed to deny the truth of death.

There are three styles of post-mortem family photography that are evident from 1840 to 1880. The first two styles attempt to portray the deceased as not dead, and the third style portrays the deceased with mourners. The first style can be labeled as “the last sleep”. The association of death with sleep can be traced back to classical Greece. The mythical sons of the night were Hypnos, god of sleep, and his twin, Thanatos, god of death. Thus, in the ideology of the late nineteenth century, people did not die; they embarked on the journey of eternal rest (Ruby 72). Blurring the boundary between death and sleep is an attempt to efface the reality of mortality.

The second style of post-mortem photography can be labeled as “alive, but dead”, portraying an attempt to conceal the notion of death or sleep. The body was not lying horizontally, but placed in an upright position, often in a chair. The eyes were open or painted on as if open, in an attempt to create the illusion that the subject was alive. The subject may have been photographed as lying horizontally, and then the photograph would have been turned and mounted on a ninety-degree angle so that the body appeared upright (Ruby 72). The grieving Victorian family reveal a profound fascination and desire for immortality by creating fictional photographs that portray the deceased as alive.

The aesthetic qualities of the first two styles of post-mortem photography usually concentrated on the facial features of the deceased, but a minority of photographs showed the entire body. The body rested on domestic furniture, such as a sofa draped with a sheet or coverlet. The setting was usually in the living room or the parlor of a private home. Sometimes, a dead child would be displayed as if asleep in a buggy. There are practical explanations for the popularity of close-up images of the deceased seated on a sofa in the parlor. Funeral parlors were nonexistent, and coffins were not readily available. Thus, “the last sleep” and “alive, but dead” poses demonstrate how technology and ideology coalesce. A body photographed in a coffin would have disrupted the illusion that the subject was alive (Ruby 72).

The third style of post-mortem photography depicts the deceased in the company of mourning family members. Photographs functioned to memorialize and idealize the social institution of the middle-class family. Often, no photographs would have been taken before a family member, such as a young child, died. Parents were depicted mourning their dead child—an attempt to create a final family image. When the subject was a child, it was held in the arms or the lap of the parent(s), as if the child were asleep. When looking at these images, it is often difficult to determine whether the child is asleep or dead. The display of grief on the face of the parents does not indicate the status of the child, as all photographs of this era portray sombre looking people due to the slow technology of exposure times. As was discussed earlier, people were placed in restraints to ensure a clear, unblurred image. The result was an image of a person without facial emotion with a rigid, expressionless posture (Ruby 88-90). This third style is an elaboration of the “last sleep” stylistic, but the inclusion of mourning parents also suggests the significant role of the family in the Victorian era.

Thus, the multiple associations of photography with death can first be seen in the earliest photographs where the slow technology demanded that the subject be as still as

a corpse. Then, real corpses were actually photographed, which served a social purpose in aiding the healing process of mourning. Photographers started with photographing live people who looked like they were dead, and ended by photographing the truly dead. The next step was to photograph the dead in the state of the afterlife, otherwise known as ghosts. Photographing the dead was the preliminary step that led to photographing ghosts. Additionally, cultural attitudes that surrounded photographic technology contributed to the transition from post-mortem to spirit photography.

There is one central characteristic of photography that brings associations of black magic, the occult and supernatural power: the double. While photography carried positivist associations of truth, the medium was also experienced as an uncanny phenomenon. The mechanical reproduction capabilities of photography were interpreted as an ability to create a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles. The new mythology welcomed the dissolving effects of modernity into the core of metaphysics. Tom Gunning provocatively suggests that the uncanny ability of photography to produce a double of the subject allowed it to embody associations of the supernatural (43). Therefore, I will examine the lineage of multi-cultural thinking on the double, as outlined by Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank.

Gunning recounts Freud's writing from *The Uncanny* (1919), stating that a fascination with repetition led Freud to go beyond the pleasure principle to a confrontation with the death drive and the conflict between Eros and Thanatos (43-44). Otto Rank also writes on the theme of the double, which was inspired by German uncanny cinema, in particular *The Student of Prague* (1912), where the trickery of double exposure was employed. Both Freud and Rank demonstrate that the double has a long lineage, from archaic beliefs to the romantic *Doppelgänger*. Photography worked as a new technology to furnish already existing beliefs regarding the uncanny.

Rank's classic essays in *The Double* (1971) provide a detailed account on the multicultural forms of the double and the beliefs that are associated with it. Rank posits that humankind's need for self-perpetuation or self-immortalization, which is partly achieved with the photographic image, led to the development of civilization and spiritual values. Rank outlines the diverse beliefs in the need to protect one's shadow, which is a form of a double. Another form of the double is in the reflection, reproduced in glass or in water. Many tribal peoples believed that the soul is embodied in the image. This was then carried over to permanent reproductive technologies, such as photography. Historically, there has been a prolific dread of one's own portrait or photograph found across many cultures, such as the First Nations, and tribes in Central Africa, as well as in Asia, East India, and Europe. It was thought that the individual's soul was manifest in the image of the subject, and it was feared that the foreign possessor of this figurative representation could lead the subject to harmful or deadly consequences (Rank 52-65). The beliefs of mysticism that surround photographic technology transcend culture and time periods.

When the daguerreotype was invented in 1839, this fear of the uncanny double was expressed by an uncertain public reception to the new technology. A decade after Daguerre's successful experiments, Balzac's writings indicate a deathly fear of the reproductive qualities of

photography. A photographer of the time, Nadar, wrote: "The lowliest to the most high [...] trembled before the daguerreotype [...]. More than a few of our most brilliant intellects shrank back as if from a disease" (Nadar 9). He continues by noting the response of his friend, Balzac, who expressed uneasiness about the photographic process. Nadar summarizes Balzac's "Theory of the Specters":

According to Balzac's theory, all physical bodies are made up entirely of layers of ghostlike images, an infinite number of leaflike skins laid one on top of the other. Since Balzac believed man was incapable of making something material from an apparition, from something impalpable - that is, creating something from nothing - he concluded that every time someone had his photograph taken, one of the spectral layers was removed from the body and transferred to the photograph. Repeated exposures entailed the unavoidable loss of subsequent ghostly layers, that is, the very essence of life. (9)

Rosalind Krauss writes in the relatively contemporary essay, "Tracing Nadar", that Balzac's theory expressed the dual identity of photography. The quality of the double was equally shared in the positivist's absolutism of matter and the metaphysician's existential link to the original source. Balzac wrote: "The external life is a kind of organized system which represents a man as exactly as the colors by which the snail reproduces itself on its shell" (quoted in Krauss 35). The connections to biology of this model were meant to carry the authority of Science, while the notion of man as a series of exfoliating, self-depicting images is the model of the snail in a poetic and whimsical form. The dual identity of photography as a coalescence of the binary discourses of art and science is revealed in Nadar's mystical theorizing of the medium.

Also around the time of Balzac's writing, there was a new cultural development in the United States - the metaphysical system of Spiritualism. The Spiritualist movement related its worldview to the modern changes in technology and science, such as electricity, telegraphy and new advances in chemistry and biology. Photography's quality of the double is what attracted the Spiritualists to the medium. Of particular interest was the trick photography of the double exposure, a kind of double within the double. Again, it was the ironic quality of photography's indexicality and simultaneous uncanniness that attracted Balzac to write about the medium and also the Spiritualists to it. Photographic likeness and the transparency of ghosts demonstrated the uncanny quality of photography, or, in other words, its capture of a spectre-like double (Gunning 47).

Photography substantiated Spiritualism. All claims of spirit photography as evidence of an afterlife rest on the indexical claim that ghosts, invisible to the human eye, are picked up by the more sensitive capacity of photography. Spirit photographers denied they knew how their photographs of ghosts were created. It was pointed out by skeptics of spirit photography that the ghosts that appeared in such photographs were often the exact duplications of existing photographs. While this observation indicates the method of photographing photographs to create the spirit image, the Spiritualists claimed that this did not rule out supernatural influences. Spirit photographs were thought to be produced by spiritual forces that used images of the dead as a way of communicating to the living (Gunning 64).

While Spirit photography often worked to substantiate the supernatural claims of the Spiritualist movement, these images also served a social purpose very similar to that of the post-mortem photographs. Spirit photographs were produced for the mourners to ease their healing process. Photographs of the dead were given to photographers to superimpose over the photographs of the mourners. These photographs were not used to claim evidence of an afterlife, but to create a consoling image. The only indexical claim of these photographs is that the image of the family lives on, even after the subjects have died. Furthermore, viewing these images today as cultural products, gives the contemporary observer a tangible understanding of the ideologies of immortality that were operating in the mid-nineteenth century.

The aesthetic tendencies of post-mortem, spirit photography and technological uncanniness are demonstrated in three films: Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001), Peter Newbrooks' *The Asphyx* (1973), and Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998). *The Others* utilizes two of the three styles of post-mortem photography -- "the eternal sleep" and "alive, but dead." *The Asphyx* expresses the Victorian Spiritualism that empowered the camera with supernatural capabilities. *Ring* presents a contemporary view of Victorian Spiritualism, using the haunting power of the technologies of video, the telephone and the camera.

In *The Others*, Grace lives in a mansion with her two children and three servants. Her husband is missing in action in World War Two. Grace's son and daughter are chronically allergic to light, and cannot leave the house. They must reside in complete darkness, and therefore all the windows are covered with thick drapery. In one scene, Grace is sorting through clutter in the attic when she finds a box of photographs. She comes across a photo album, where all the subjects of the images are either sitting upright in a chair or wooden bench, or lying down in bed. They are all wearing black and their eyes are closed. Grace asks her servant, Mrs. Mills, why everyone in the photographs is sleeping. Mrs. Mills tells her that what she is looking at is a "Book of the Dead"; later in the film, Grace finds a post-mortem photograph in her room, showing all three of her servants sitting on a couch, wearing black and displaying closed eyes. Grace realizes that her servants are ghosts. At the same time, the children find the servants' three graves in the garden and also realize that the domestics are ghosts. Later, the ghostly servants warn Grace that "the others" have her children. Grace enters a room where the children are hiding to discover a séance in progress and is told that she and her children are ghosts, too. In fact, when Grace's husband did not return from the war, she smothered her children with pillows and shot herself.

The use of post-mortem photography is key to the plot structure, as it is the discovery of the post-mortem photographs of the servants that leads Grace to realize that she and her children are also ghosts. Grace would not have realized that the servants were dead in the final post-mortem photograph if she had not discovered the black photo album earlier in the story, when Mrs. Mills explained to her that the subjects in the photographs were not asleep. There are nine photographs displayed in the "Book of the Dead." The images range from medium shots to long shots and from the elderly to infants. The corpses are either lying in bed to portray the first stylistic of post-mortem photography, "the eternal sleep", or the subjects are placed



upright in wicker chairs or wooden benches, portraying the second stylistic of "alive, but dead." The subjects are meant to look as if they are alive and posing for a photographic portrait. *The Others* does not depict post-mortem photographs of the deceased with mourners, the third stylistic of post-mortem photography. Some of the images depict more than one subject in the image, though. For example, in one photograph, there are two children seated on a wooden bench, holding hands. There is also an image of three young men lying together in one bed. The film is not only accurately referencing two of the three stylistics of post-mortem photography, but it is also demonstrating the frequency to which people died due to the tuberculosis epidemic during the middle and late nineteenth century. All three servants, Mrs. Mills, Mr. Tuttle and Lydia are shown to have died at the same time, as the three of them are shown seated together. The photograph is dated December 1891, which was, in fact, during the tuberculosis epidemic.

It is interesting to note that not only are the photographs depicted with historical accuracy, but the dialogue between Grace and Mrs. Mills also acknowledges the cultural attitudes of the time. While Grace is looking through the black book with Mrs. Mills, she finds the image of the two children together. Grace distraughtly expresses that she finds such a practice to be macabre, and does not understand how "these people could be so superstitious." Mrs. Mills had earlier explained that: "In the last century, I believe they took photographs of the dead in the hopes that their souls would go on living through the portraits." This recalls Otto Rank's discussion on the double and the fact that some tribal people believed that the image possessed the soul.

Achieving immortality through mechanical reproduction is further expanded on in *The Asphyx*. *The Asphyx* sketches the ideologies of immortality and Victorian Spiritualism in photographic experiments and their impact at the end of the nineteenth century. Sir Victor Hugo is a scientist who photographs people at the moment they die. In photographing the sufferers, he is repeatedly able to capture a certain smear on the picture near the head of the dying. In one scene, he projects slide images of individuals who are at the point of death, to a society of amateurs. He points out that in every image there is a black smear near the head of the nearly deceased. In order to determine the direction in which the smear is travelling, he develops an apparatus, whereby he can record moving objects. He must try to discover if the black smear represents the soul leaving the body, or if it is a death spirit

coming to take the soul away. Thus, he invents the motion picture camera.

In this film, the Victorian craze for spirit photography has been upgraded to produce the image of ghosts in the making, or death in process. What Sir Hugo discovers in action is that the puzzling smudge he has been studying is an ectoplasmic phantom, captured as it arrives on the scene of death. This is the Greek spirit of death, the Asphyx (derived from the term asphyxiation). It is the technology of the camera, which is more sensitive than the human eye that can capture the asphyx in action. *The Asphyx* accurately expresses the Victorian Spiritualist indexicality claim of the precision of the technology of the camera: the detail and instantaneous quality of mechanical reproduction is more faithful in reproducing reality than any human agency, so therefore the content depicted in the image must be truthful, and it is the weakness of the human sensory system that cannot perceive what the camera records. Furthermore, the camera is endowed with mystical strength, as its indexical ability allows the user of the technology to capture the death spirit for eternity, and thus achieve immortality. Without the sensitivity of the camera, the Asphyx could never be detected and therefore, never be caught.

Finally, the contemporary Japanese film, *Ring*, expresses a reversal of the Victorian beliefs regarding the immortality that is linked to the image as expressed in *The Others* and *The Asphyx*. *Ring* proposes the notion of impending doom that Barthes put forth in Camera Lucida, whereby viewing an image of the past, in the present, complicates the viewer's sense of mortality. Or, as Sontag writes, the photograph draws attention to the relentless melt of time, announcing an inescapable dismal fate for the viewer (15). In *Ring*, the power of the technology of the camera visually manifests this impending death of the subject by distorting the representation.

Ring links the technological apparatus to the supernatural. The story rests on the urban myth that a teenage girl, Tomoko, watched a video, and then received a phone call that she would die in a week. A television reporter, Reiko, investigates the story. She finds a picture of the teenage girl and her friends. She is provoked to investigate the story further when she sees the nightmarish image of the blurred and distorted faces of the four teenagers. Reiko travels to the place where the teenage girl saw the tape, watches the video and also receives the phone call. Her ex-husband takes a Polaroid picture of her, and as the picture develops, Reiko's face is revealed to be contorted and out of proportion. The Polaroid confirms her fate; she will die in one week, as did Tomoko, so she must solve the mystery to ensure her own survival.

The photograph is essential in pushing the plot forward, as it is used to confirm a dismal future, which motivates Reiko to solve the story. By contrast, in *The Others* and *The Asphyx*, the use of photography and the camera are manifestations of the Victorian beliefs of immortality and Spiritualism, linking mystic power to technology. But in *Ring*, the camera does not play an active role in changing a mortal's fate; the photograph's indexicality reveals a doom that is already present. The dualism of positivism and the capability of rendering a double lends the technology of the camera the power to reveal impending death that mere mortals cannot perceive. The light-sensitive, detailed image is rendered via the camera, which has the capacity to duplicate a reality that is

unseen by the average person. The evidence of the image allows Reiko to take matters into her own hands, and change her fate herself.

In conclusion, all three films accurately portray the shifting methods in representing death in photography in the nineteenth century. From posthumous photography to Spirit photography, there is a strong drive towards attempting immortality. Posthumous photography served as *memento mori* for the mourning, allowing the deceased to live on in the present in the form of an image. Spirit photography portrays the dualism that embodies the photograph. It is considered truthful due to its indexicality, yet the ghostly trace or double can also reveal information in reality that is not perceived by the human eye. The Spiritualists were striving to provide evidence that life does exist after death. The power of the technology of the camera brings immortality through preservation of the image, and thus the soul, as is demonstrated in *The Others*. The camera reveals the unperceivable ghost of death, which can then be captured to achieve immortality, as in *The Asphyx*. The camera reveals a distorted image that implies impending doom, and thus gives the subject a view of a dismal fate, but this fate can be changed via human agency, as in *Ring*. All three films suggest and replicate the Victorian ideology that the supernatural power of the technology of the camera can bring immortality in one form or another. ☺

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Film Review

palindromes

Todd Solondz. *Palindromes*. Extra Large Pictures (starring Ellen Barkin and Matthew Faber), 2004.

Reviewed by R. Colin Tait

While there are many issues which divide Americans, there is none more polarizing than abortion. Todd Solondz's awareness of this fact makes for his most insightful and most uncomfortable movie to date.

In *Palindromes*, Solondz presents us with Aviva, a girl whose name (and story) can be reversed to produce the exact same result. Consisting of an episodic structure, the film is similar to Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977), where the female lead is portrayed by several actresses, except here Aviva is played by a multiracial cast (ranging through several different types of women, including a large black woman for the central part of the film, Jennifer Jason Leigh at the ending, and a little boy along the way). What this accomplishes is an unnerving destabilization within the construction of the film, as *Palindromes* confronts the fabric of American life with nothing but stark reality.

From the first scene, the audience is presented with a shaky recording of a funeral. Here, we are informed that the deceased recently took her life when faced with the prospect of having a baby. This scene, rendered in caustic, Solondz-style, complete with a canned performance from a mediocre piano concerto reminds the viewer of one of the filmmakers favorite targets - the satiric depiction of the American middle class. When talking to her mother about her cousin's death, Aviva informs us that all she wants to do is get pregnant so that she will have nothing but love in her life forever. We know from the beginning that her goal will tread the delicate line between love and sex (sex being the necessary act for getting the kind of love that she wants to fill her life). When she has sex and is subsequently impregnated by a family friend's son, her parents force her to have an abortion so that she will conform to the status quo of her suburban neighborhood. Here, the film examines one extreme of the issue and the negative aspects of the completely liberal, secular view of abortion. This brutal depiction particularly hits home when the heartbreaking announcement comes that only the audience and Aviva's parents are privy to - the fact that during the abortion, an emergency hysterectomy was performed to save her life.

Aviva, deprived of this knowledge by her parents, runs away in order to find the love and happiness that she still believes only a child of her own can provide her. As a result, Aviva's encounter with the truck driver Earl is all



the more disturbing, particularly when the pre-teen perception of love is countered with the harsh realities of adult desires for sex. When Earl abandons her in a truck stop in the middle of nowhere, her quest continues, and eventually leads her to the American Heartland. When Aviva finds refuge in the arms of Momma Sunshine and her family of orphans that she adopted from around the globe, she encounters the extreme fringe of the religious far right, led by the enigmatic Doctor Dan, and his secret organization that employs born-again ex-cons to assassinate abortion doctors. Meanwhile, Aviva becomes part of the family, joining the dance band of "rejected children" whose repeated appearances on *The 700 Club* serve the political pro-life cause to assert their value as members of society, despite their various afflictions. When Aviva is rejected from the family for her (inadvertent) sexual proclivities, the film comes full-circle, and Aviva's adventure comes to a climax in a parodied version of *Bonnie and Clyde*. Finally, the film finds closure where it began, and continues the cycle in the suburban climate of her former life.

What the film deftly manages is the typically 'Solondzian' equal treatment of both sides of the issue. In this manner, the film shares content with Alexander Payne's sophomore effort *Citizen Ruth* (1996) which follows the equally empty sign of the pregnant woman (played with glue-sniffing excellence by Laura Dern) who finds herself in the center of the larger debate about the fate of her unborn child. Where *Palindromes* excels is in its rendering of the arguments in all their brutality - something Solondz had skillfully demonstrated in *Storytelling* (2001), *Happiness* (1998), and *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995). This film's strength, and Solondz's skill as a filmmaker, is in his presentation of the futility and circularity of the debate (and indeed the very violence of both extremes of the respective religious and secular positions) at the level of form, not only by casting seven actresses to portray the prepubescent Aviva, but also by linking the form of the film to its content. Thus, it returns to the very position that it began by bringing Aviva home, but having changed the perspective by examining the very limits of the abortion issue. Finally, this film reveals Solondz at his misanthropic best, where the film's palindrome structure (where the beginning and the end are the same) spares no target and in fact, only reveals the inherent hypocrisy of both religious and secular beliefs. ☺

Film Review

eve and the fire horse



Julia Kwan. *Eve and the Fire Horse*. Golden Horse Productions (starring Vivian Wu and Phoebe Kut), 2005.

Reviewed by Tara Kolton

A refreshing departure from so much of the escapist fantasy of modern, mainstream children's cinema, *Eve and the Fire Horse* follows a young Chinese girl's naïve and magical romp through the tangled webs of religion (specifically Catholicism) in 1970s Vancouver. Director Julia Kwan's debut feature offers a fresh take on religion in a multicultural society as seen through the eyes of its enthusiastic young protagonists.

As the film begins, the nine-year-old Eve explains (through voiceover) that she was born in the year of the fire horse, the sign said to produce the most troublesome children amongst the Chinese zodiac. Also bearing that most biblically symbolic of female names, Eve is at once caught between the worlds of Chinese cultural tradition and religious fantasy. Certainly, Eve bears the weight of a guilt she never willingly assumed. Indeed as sisters Karena (age 11) and Eve become immersed in Catholicism (in addition to their family's informally practiced Buddhist traditions), Eve seems destined to fulfill her role as the doomed menace in her family and social world. In the children's religious fanaticism, fear, and exclusion at Sunday school we can see reflected a fundamentalist approach to religion and tradition that condemns even the most innocent; Eve, condemned by her birth year and moniker, is forced to assume the role of scapegoat of whichever religious or cultural discourse she attempts to reside in.

At its heart, the film is one that examines the inevitable process of youth reacting to first-time life and faith-shattering tragedy; Karena and Eve's mother suffers a miscarriage and their beloved, live-in grandmother (certainly their closest tie to Chinese and Buddhist traditions) passes away. That this death spurs both guilt in Eve and a desire in Karena to believe in a heaven beyond their world raises a quite concise implication: that so often it is fear, guilt, and self-motivation which lies at the root of the most faithful uptake of religion. As such, after reading a book on Christianity which offers the promise of multicultural harmony in the heavens above, Karena chooses to adopt the religion which most suits her own desires. Meanwhile Eve hopes to latch onto the finer points of both Christianity and Buddhism, as well as her own vivid fantasies about each.

After the girls' father leaves for a trip to China, their somber mother May (Vivian Wu) enrolls them in a Catholic Sunday school program, figuring that two religions in the household are better than one. Karena and Eve quickly adopt quite opposite attitudes towards Catholicism; Karena serious and steadfast in her commitment, becomes devoted to most literally assuming Catholicism and rejecting Buddhism and her family traditions, while Eve tackles Catholicism with a youthful playfulness and idealism.

While *Eve and the Fire Horse* falters a little in its over-use of Eve's voiceover and occasionally leads us heavily-handedly towards certain emotional moments, Kwan always steers away from overly obvious or saccharine territory. Kwan offers no clear-cut answers or declarations; Eve doesn't have to make sense of religion, but is ultimately rewarded by the joy and confusion that comes with questioning, experimenting, and using her imagination. In one scene, Eve imagines her new goldfish to be her grandmother reincarnated, and it briefly springs into traditional Chinese song and dance before her.

Perhaps it *should* be over-the-top to see Eve dancing around the living room with Jesus and the Buddha, but the imaginative glee with which the fantasy takes place only brings the viewer to smile—after all, why shouldn't they dance together? Neither religion is condemned or promoted above the other, but as we watch the figures come to life and unite in dance with Eve, we are forced to question just how different the 'good' of each religion is. How easy does it become to forget the charity and good promoted by Christianity in turn for the assumption of guilt and exclusion? In *Eve and the Fire Horse*, religion as viewed through the eyes of these children reminds us how easy it is to misread religious discourse to fit our own desires and fears, whether used for positive inspiration, or used to isolate and condemn others.

That the film leaves the children's questions about religion open and perhaps even provokes its viewers to discover religion on their own terms and to question narratives which are imposed on them, is certainly unique amongst mainstream children's cinema. Kwan is concerned with the eagerness of children to believe in *something*, yet returns to the pointed notion that so often the adoption of any belief comes as a result of some sort of self-motivated desire or fear. That Kwan pulls off this intelligent, family friendly film with such charm and humor is nothing short of magical. ☺

Film Review

looking for comedy in the muslim world

Albert Brooks. *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World*. Kintop Pictures (starring Albert Brooks and Sheetal Sheth), 2005.

Reviewed by Tara Kolton

In choosing a title like *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World* for his new film, Albert Brooks creates a fair amount of expectation from viewers. Firstly we expect some sort of active looking, we expect some humour, and we certainly hope for insight of some kind into this 'Muslim world.' While on the surface, Brooks' film is about just what the title suggests, that the film is devoid of any pointed political or religious commentary, or really any comical content (other than determining what is indeed not funny to Muslims in India), is made all the more perplexing by this 'provocative' title.

There is curiously little searching taking place in *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World*. As Brooks' journey progresses, Brooks and company seem to expect the answers to be brought to them. Whether or not the idea that the comedy should come to him is supposed to be an intentional reflection of America's attitude towards the "Muslim world" is unclear. If it is, it's a point rendered too obvious and simplistic throughout the film.

Albert Brooks plays Albert Brooks, who is unexpectedly summoned to complete a 'national project' for the U.S. Government: spend a month in the Muslim world (in this case, India and Pakistan), and return with a 500-page report on what Muslims find funny, in order to "improve relations" between the two worlds. While it's a potentially absorbing premise, any hope for genuinely humorous encounters and revelations are thus rapidly quelled. Of course it's a ridiculous and simplistic assumption that one person could define any entire cultural or religious community's sense of humour, and this absurdity is certainly reflected during the introduction of the film as Brooks meets with a U.S. senator who claims that George W. Bush has a "great sense of humor." But what we absorb from this encounter is enough to take away with us for the rest of the film, as what follows as Brooks journeys to India (and Pakistan for a quantity of 4 hours to meet with a bunch of stoned, would-be Pakistani comedians) fails to focus on the people in more depth than an array of multiplied American clichés of both Indians and Muslims.

Though shot on location in India, the whole film is glossed over with a Hollywood sheen, and actors playing Indian Muslims spew out lines that could have only been written by an American screenwriter. It's never quite clear if the Hollywood aesthetics of this film are an intentional way of reflecting Brooks' (and the Western world's)



imposition upon the East in demanding definitive answers within a month for the U.S.' own benefit, or whether some of the insipid stereotypes are meant to be just that. Furthermore, it's hard to get a read on how we're to accept Brooks' version of himself - mostly he remains the clueless American, and the funniest moments of the film come as a result of his own (lack of a) star-image; he is unknown in Muslim India except for as a fish in *Finding Nemo* (2003). In India his comedy falters and doesn't quite translate; here he becomes that proverbial fish-out-of-water.

As Brooks fails to identify any consistency in humour amongst Muslims, we more troublingly fail to gain any real insight into India or its Muslim community beyond stereotypes with which we are already familiar. Brooks hires the dutiful Maya (Sheetal Sheth), a pretty and impeccably well-dressed young Indian woman. We're supposed to accept and find funny that this accomplished woman with a Master's degree is completely unacquainted with sarcasm - an apparent cultural difference. Another missed punchline comes as we pass the office next door to Brooks', crammed with Indian, English-speaking phone operators who answer the computer help-lines of overseas Americans; I found this no more funny than simply visually filling out that middle-class American complaint that they can never understand the Indian accents of computer-operators when they call for help. However, the point here is obvious - that America continues to exploit those overseas from afar, while their accolades and accumulated degrees would be rendered useless should they venture over to the U.S. in search of work. But as we follow Brooks along his journey we are unsure what to make of these criticisms. He neither grows much as a person (walking past the Taj Mahal without noticing it), nor does he completely obliviously waltz away from India. In the end what we are to assume about Brooks' failed project is a mystery that one barely cares to solve.

As Brooks returns to the U.S. with less than 4-typed report pages, little discovered, and a political crisis left in his wake, we perceive that indeed, the U.S. is an oblivious, world-exploiting nation, its attempts to understand 'the Other' selfish and misguided; but didn't we know that already? Here we have a film with an interesting premise, but Brooks doesn't seem to know where he should go with it, and we are left with an astonishingly conventional film about the Muslim world, which lacks the punch, insight, and humour that its title promises us. ☺

Film Review

caché

Michael Haneke. *Caché*. Les Films du Losange/Wega Film (starring Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche), 2005.

Reviewed by Christine Evans

Michael Haneke's latest offering is, superficially, the closest the Austrian director has ever come to making a detective story. Promising tension and intrigue, *Caché*'s premise of unwelcome surveillance is a familiar amalgam of Haneke's 1992 film *Benny's Video* and David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997); Georges and Anne (Daniel Auteuil and Juliette Binoche) are an affluent and unbearably cultured Parisian couple who discover a series of videocassettes at their front door. Viewing the tapes, they realize that someone is recording hours of footage of their home from across the street. The tapes are soon accompanied by grotesque and crudely-drawn pictures of blood pouring forth from a child's mouth and a chicken's decapitated head, inciting Georges and Anne to conduct an investigation that will eventually reveal the identity of whomever is terrorizing them. Aside from the film's critical accolades and the Anglophone-friendly presence of actress Juliette Binoche, the film's generically-accessible premise has proven palatable to the North American filmgoing public (earning *Caché* more in its U.S. opening weekend than Haneke's previous film earned in gross, and nearly tripling the U.S. opening weekend earnings of his heretofore most popular film, 2001's *The Piano Teacher*). However, just as viewers who expected *The Piano Teacher* to be a conventional – if not provocatively transgressive – love story were unequivocally horrified, anyone who seeks out *Caché* in the hopes of a suspenseful 'whodunit' will be sorely disappointed and (we can only hope) traumatically shaken.

Nonetheless, this assumed generic accessibility affords Haneke's film with a critical space in which to defy and disturb spectatorial conjecture, and – more perversely – to simultaneously actualize expectation. For although it is indeed possible to classify *Caché* as a detective story/thriller that derails to include considerations of political strife, guilt, and culpability, it is *also* a platitude on the necessary deadlock of 'goodness'; in the absence of evil and all its comforting determinacy, we are left only with shades of 'good' – the amorphousness of which shakes the very foundations of dispassionate *bourgeoisie* ideology. One is reminded here of G.K. Chesterton's remark that the detective story reinforces that

civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions... When the detective in a police



romance stands alone, and somewhat fatuously fearless amid the knives and fists of a thieves' kitchen, it does certainly serve to make us remember that it is the agent of social justice who is the original and poetic figure, while the burglars and footpads are merely placid old cosmic conservatives, happy in the immemorial respectability of apes and wolves... [The detective story] is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies (*On Lying in Bed and Other Essays* by G.K. Chesterton. Ed. Alberto Manguel. Calgary: Bayeux Arts, 2000. pp. 284).

This observation should not only be interpreted in confluence with the old comments regarding 'the banality of evil', but *qua* the greater complexity of 'goodness', morality, and the often unpleasant Kantian categorical imperative which holds sway over our duties as ethical subjects. In many cases – to one of which *Caché* bears witness – 'doing the right thing' is perplexingly dark and disturbing, and coerced from us by unwholesome people at inopportune times. Here, one should read Chesterton's 'morality' as not only the exciting, reactionary obverse of dull, opportunistic evil (exciting because one must be truly daring to restore justice and virtue in the world – the lesson of so many children's films), but as fundamentally dark and conspiratorial *in itself*.

It is in this context of internally divided (and eternally divisible) ethics that *Caché*'s cast of vaguely affable and wholly ordinary Parisian literati stand out as some of Haneke's most detestable characters to date. Indeed, Haneke's former cadre of existentially-divided perverts and psychopaths here appear downright harmless in their roles as solipsistically self-immersed *bourgeois* killers, compared to the pervasive, generationally destructive logic of negligence, apathy, and unclaimed guilt which regulates the lives of *Caché*'s characters. If ethics truly is the most dark and daring of conspiracies, is there anything more reprehensible than a Haneke character who may (or may not) 'do the right thing'?

Although *Caché* has its fair share of the creeping unease and shocking violence so characteristic of its director, Haneke's treatment of *Caché*'s central family is very inwardly-focused; whereas the families of many earlier Haneke films have suffered a violent cultural rupture, a sudden invasion of awareness, Georges and Anne aren't granted the luxury of marauding summer-house killers, a murder caught on camera, or the apocalypse. Rather, the situation presented in *Caché* is very similar to *The Seventh Continent* (1989), where Haneke protects his protagonist-family from the threat of outside invasion, thereby affording them only the privilege of self-destruction. ☹

Book Reviews

new books in film, philosophy, & cultural studies

Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*. Trans. Chris Turner. Oxford: Berg, 2005. ISBN: 1845203348 (paperback). CDN \$18.20

Reviewed by Lindsay Steenberg

French theorist Jean Baudrillard wrote *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact* three years after September 11th. That “rupturing event” and its metaphysical imaginings lie at the heart of his latest book. Fragmented into several sections and sub-chapters that could function independently, this work recalls a significant number of the central Baudrillardian theoretical concepts, such as simulacra and virtual reality and also the key Baudrillard-inspired film tie-in, *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), through only briefly and as a “(non)event.” Written in Baudrillard’s characteristic style, *The Intelligence of Evil* offers poetic theoretical musings, pop-scientific metaphors, and bold radical statements.

The purpose of *The Intelligence of Evil* is to bring evil back into the world, or at least revise its reputation. That is not to say that Baudrillard endorses violence, but rather that his fundamental assumption sees evil as part of form rather than content. Evil shows through good. Evil is God’s mistress, while Good is his estranged wife. Coming to an understanding *with* evil is the only way to challenge the world order and the hegemonic power of Integrated Reality (a parasitic combination of the virtual and the real).

Baudrillard’s theoretics engage with the theological not only as a religious force but also as a system of (Western) thought. Science, to Baudrillard, is as much a theological construct as religion. The belief in the real and faith in the virtual function in a similar systematic way. Our view of the real, the hegemony of global power, and the role of the media link Baudrillard to wider debates on theology and the political. In considering *The Intelligence of Evil* in light of theological debates, I will distill the book down to four terms: reality, the virtual, terrorism, and the (non) event.

Reality, or rather Integrated Reality, dominates Baudrillard’s world. It is symptomatic of globalization and the Western ideology of humanitarianism. It offers ultimate happiness through complete disclosure. We are happy because we know and receive everything we want. However, in obtaining everything we desire, meaning is lost and we remain unfulfilled. We are in a world of excess: too many banal details, too much access to information, and too much emphasis on happiness as the ultimate goal of human life. These “easy solutions” to the problem of globalization, virtualization, and the dominance of the real trap us. If reality is the new deity then it is over-exposed, like a celebrity to whom popular culture has become indifferent.

The Virtual, to Baudrillard, is not the enemy of the real. He claims that “it is in the Virtual that we have the ultimate predator and plunderer of reality, secreted by reality itself as a kind of self-destructive viral agent” (27). Baudrillard vehemently insists that the virtual is complicit in the contemporary world’s obsession with reality. This combination of dominance with subversiveness, each exerting an undeniable force, is part of a dual movement and a quality of reversibility that Baudrillard proposes in order to address the political situation in the world. He sees terrorism as serving a similar function to that of virtual reality. It is a destructive contagion that threatens the world order. However, Baudrillard considers terrorism, like evil, as a formal element – not necessarily as a violent act perpetrated by a partisan political group. This confusion of radical formal and theoretical terms with their violent referents can be disorienting for the reader. It seems, however, that this disorientation is part of Baudrillard’s agenda.

We are also disoriented by the status of terrorism, not only in Baudrillard’s work but in general. Is it evil as Baudrillard sees evil? Is it the only way to combat American manifest destiny? Can a terrorist act be a rupturing event with constructive benefits? Or is it purely misguided violent destruction? Perhaps it is, like everything (including death), a (non) event: something for which there is no distance between image and actuality, in which they become interchangeable. As a (non) event, terrorism would lose all meaning and only bolster the world order, thereby accomplishing the exact opposite of its goal. Baudrillard uses the example of the Iraq war. He claims that its event status is compromised by the nature of the press coverage and our consumption of its images/representations. As he says, the war in Iraq is not “like a film; it is a film” (124). It becomes a non-event. September 11th, on the other hand, is an event as well as a terrorist act. It was a direct assault on America and a convulsion inside Integral Reality. Terrorism, according to Baudrillard, is “both the ‘event-moment’ and the image-feedback” (164). It belongs to the image and to the virtual (a film produced with the aid of CGI special effects), and it belongs to the political (as an attack on America by Islamic splinter groups that disrupts the ordering of the world). Terrorism has also become synonymous with evil in US culture (i.e., the Axis of Evil). This last point is just the misconception Baudrillard’s book seeks to resist.

While Baudrillard’s hypotheses on evil are presented in a tradition of theological and metaphysical debates, his theories of contemporary terrorist politics have a more emotional connection to context. It is one thing to deal with the philosophies of St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, safely sequestered in the past, but quite another to take on the status of September 11th. Dealing with terrorism as form

(as does The Intelligence of Evil) must necessarily lose some specificity and focus on human casualties. This represents one of the most interesting debates circulating around Baudrillard's recent work: could he be advocating terrorism as a solution? However, presenting terrorism as a political solution does not consider the reversibility so crucial to Baudrillard. He points out the irony of terrorism in Integral Reality: it has become the key justification for the American culture of prophylactic terror. Baudrillard believes that the U.S. is inflicting terrorism on its population through its efforts to prevent foreign terrorist attacks.

Much of The Intelligence of Evil is occupied with discussing currents in media and politics with an emphasis on evil and its relation to terrorism and September 11th. Baudrillard calls for a convulsion in reality through which we can see evil underneath good and disrupt the Western world order. Even though the "reality-fundamentalists", as Baudrillard calls them, will struggle to absorb the dual movements and radical jumps proposed by The Intelligence of Evil, they will ultimately discover that Baudrillard's "theory-fiction" is both disturbing and disrupting to a unified view of (virtual) reality. ☺

- University of East Anglia

Fredric Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. London: Verso, 2005. ISBN: 1844670333 (hardcover). CDN \$32.34

Reviewed by R. Colin Tait

For anyone familiar with the sensation of reading Fredric Jameson's work, one is often confronted with the impression that, had the author more time to elaborate his claims, the secrets of the universe and the proper method to interpret them would make themselves clear to the reader. As a result, Jameson's essays often end with a question to be answered, further work to be done on the topic, or several different directions for the reader to pursue in the future. Moreover, those who have read beyond the author's most famous (and notorious) work, Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1992), are always confronted with the consistency of his system, and the manner in which each new work fills in another piece of a greater comprehensive theory.

With this in mind, Jameson's new full-length study Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, presents us with the best of the Marxist critic, as the book not only offers a comprehensive collection of his disparate essays on the topic of Utopia, but absorbs them into a larger whole with a new, 290-page (re)introduction. While Jameson's work, though consistent in its assertions, has often relegated the central concept of Utopia and its role within Marxist discourse to the background, here it is given its proper due within Jameson's larger methodological *oeuvre*. In this manner, Jameson continues the theory that he began in his earliest book, Marxism and Form, through his own elaboration on the tradition of analysis in The Political Unconscious and finally within the rubric of film studies with the essays, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" and "Conspiracy as Totality."

What is at stake, and what Utopia presents for Jameson, is an opportunity within the Marxist framework

to imagine a different version of the world. As a result, Jameson follows Theodor Adorno's theories of negative dialectics in order to assert that the Utopian imagination must first be rendered in its negative capacity in order to structure an alternate view of the present world. This new work, found in Archaeologies, follows the Jamesonian dictum to "always historicize" in order to trace the genealogy of Utopian fiction throughout history and assess its role. By investigating the roots of the traditions of Utopian fiction, the author makes extremely interesting connections, particularly in relation to Thomas More's original novel, which is often (incorrectly) referenced by its critics as the sole desire of the Utopian imagination and often used to counter theorists' assertions. What Jameson proposes, as he traces the history of the concept, is that Utopian fictions must be placed in their proper historical contexts, effectively countering the criticism that (liberal) Utopian visions always refer back to More's, but rather that More's vision reflects the historical raw materials of the moment of its emergence. Jameson links this impulse to the imaginative content of present-day science fiction writing, where the logic of his argument is extended to futuristic material (which is never to be perceived as *the* vision of the future but *a* vision which is entirely dependent on the raw materials of the moment from which it emerges).

Jameson states that the Utopian imagination must therefore counter the well-nigh universal effects of late and globalized capital and still perform through its negative capacity to present an alternative model to whatever system it attempts to counter. Among these visions, Jameson includes the practical desires for full employment (147), which can stand as an image of both "spatial" and "social differentiation" (15). In this manner, the construction of a Utopia becomes a "chimerical exercise" of hobby-like construction (35), where a version of the material conditions of the reality from which it stems, becomes a breeding ground for new (and perhaps productive) alternate visions of the world.

It is finally by defining and recasting the Utopian novel (and its extension in Sci-Fi) as a proper genre that Jameson can reassert the usefulness of such a category for the purposes of the Marxist historicist enterprise by claiming that,

The desire called Utopia must be concrete and ongoing, without being defeatist or incapacitating; it might therefore be better to follow an aesthetic paradigm and to assert that not only the production of the unresolvable contradiction is the fundamental process, but that we must imagine some form of gratification inherent in this very confrontation with pessimism (84).

In other words, Jameson echoes his earliest statements in his critical enterprise of uncovering and deciphering the traces of the absence of Utopia within the framework of the literary imagination. This further elaboration not only completes another essential portion of Jameson's works, but also allows the author to continue to assert his ongoing relevance as a gatekeeper of Marxist cultural study, whose ongoing project includes expanding the methodology of its practical application. ☺

- University of British Columbia

Kenneth Reinhard, Eric L. Santner, Slavoj Zizek. The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. ISBN: 0226707393 (paperback). CDN \$21.76

Reviewed by Christine Evans

The familiar and universally unpleasant Biblical injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself is, as Freud stresses in Civilization and its Discontents, a surprising and bewildering maxim. "Why would we do it?" Freud asks. "What good will it do us?... My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection... If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way..." (1). This injunction, taken up by philosophers, theologians, psychoanalysts, and political scientists alike, is problematized apropos of its apparent simplicity. But who (or what) is a neighbour? Is it the person on the other side of the flimsy apartment wall or symbolically-erected garden fence who, by virtue of his unwelcome proximity, can never please me (he is either too loud or suspiciously quiet, cannot train his dog properly, or does everything so perfectly that I despise him)? Or is 'neighbour' simply a universal signifier for everyone around us, such that our parents, friends, and lovers come to equally occupy this identity? Biblically, however, the principle of unconditional and infinite compassion is intended to be directed towards the total stranger whom we do not know and indeed may never encounter – in short, unlimited love for he whom we have the least reason to love.

These paradoxes of love, familiarity, and identity/collectivity are undertaken by Kenneth Reinhard, Eric Santner, and Slavoj Zizek in the three separate essays which comprise the text. However, of concern to the authors is not merely the question of neighbour-love and its (im)possibility, but its reflection in our social construction of ethical behaviour (the neighbour as the other *par excellence*), as well as its extension into the political realm. Although the respective authors each contribute a unique methodology and focus of inquiry (Reinhard primarily concerns himself with political applications of clinical psychoanalysis, Santner emphasizes accounts of the 'we' apropos of Rosenzweig, Badiou, and Pauline love, and Zizek posits a contra-Levinasian position which opposes love and justice), the consistent aim of their efforts yields a cogent text which ultimately showcases a collaborative spirit. The Neighbor is not as explicitly 'conversational' in its collaboration as 2000's Contingency, Hegemony, Universality (a written dialogue between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Zizek), but it nonetheless appears as a collective, cohesive effort dedicated to the detailed interrogation of a chronically underwritten (psychoanalytic) topic.

The unhappy reality of co-authoring a book with Slavoj Zizek (or even appearing alongside him in an edited volume), is the fact that one's contribution is often overshadowed by Zizek's enthusiastic, joyfully haphazard, and bombastic treatise. Essays appearing with Zizek's work often given the uncomfortable impression of dejectedly laying the groundwork for Zizek's grand Lacanian finale, but the independently persuasiveness and theoretical rigor of Reinhard and Santner's essays in The Neighbor elevate them beyond standard Zizekian padding. Indeed, Santner's contribution ("Miracles Happen: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Freud, and the Matter of the Neighbor") is the volume's standout work; imbued of

Santner's characteristically dazzling but historically-situated brand of scholarship, Santner's balance of high philosophy, Lacanian appendices, theology, and the historicist (contextualized) intervention, results in a methodical, balanced, and focused contribution.

Santner asserts that we can focus our neighbourly investment outwards, acceding to its effects not only on our own psyches but also on the necessary change experienced by the loved neighbour. What does love *do* to the neighbour? Contrary to the universalism of neighbour-love espoused by Alain Badiou in Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism, Santner argues that Paul's reduction of all biblical commandments to the single injunction, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself', is an entirely "objectal" maxim, since it

directs our minds, indeed our entire being, toward that which is most objectlike, most thinglike about the other, the dense and resistant materiality of his or her drive destiny (125).

Divine love truly 'excepts' us from this bind of forever objectifying/being objectified by the neighbour (and, by extension, succumbing to one's finite existence), in the sense that it transcends all representation; such love must not be tied to a particular object in order to 'exist'. Santner, *qua* Rosenzweig, concludes that it is precisely this "fantasy of exception" which defines *secularity*, and that monotheism exists as a therapeutic rejoined to this state of exception. As such, "we don't... need God for the sake of divine things but for the sake of proper attentiveness to secular things" (*Ibid*).

Zizek's contribution, provocatively titled "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence", complements Santner's therapeutic and reactionary monotheism by interrogating the notion of post-secularity via the route of the Law. As we have come to expect from Zizek, a significant portion of "Neighbors and Other Monsters" is a contextualized reprint of an earlier essay, "Odradek as a Political Category." Although the Odradek fragment is certainly a more comfortable fit with the theme of the volume than some of Zizek's other attempts at harvesting portions of his own work, the strength of the essay is largely indebted to its placement after Reinhard and Santner's contributions. These earlier pieces, rather than merely setting the stage for Zizek's 'ultimate' (and, as other edited volumes have often tacitly suggested, 'ultimately correct'), rigorously supplement it with clinical-political (Reinhard) and theological-philosophical (Santner) context.

Finally, a text dedicated entirely to a Lacanian investigation of the neighbour within a focused framework (i.e., its theological origins and political manifestations) is a welcome addition to the psychoanalytic canon. While the paradoxes associated with loving one's neighbour as oneself are frequently mentioned in psychoanalytic scholarship, they often index another psychic symptom while themselves remaining uninterrogated. The concentration afforded to the neighbour in this text, as well as its varied but balanced dissemination across three methodologically-distinct examinations, identifies The Neighbor as a necessary but long-overdue investigation of a contentious subject. ©

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