ACTOR-LESS ATTRACTIONS: BOKEH

SPACE AND STUNT CASTING IN

NARRATIVE CINEMA

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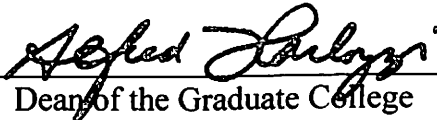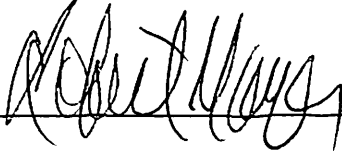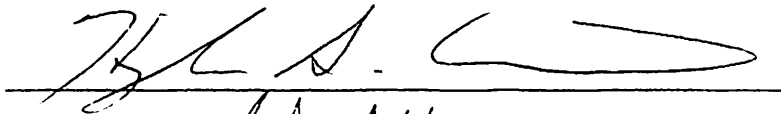
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The Portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertories intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.

-Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

Chapter 1:

A Model for Cinematic Bokeh Space:
Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris and Actor-less Athletics in *Safe at Home!* (1962)

Belonging to the long Hollywood tradition of casting unconventional celebrities in

key roles, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris's appearances as themselves in Walter

Doniger's *Safe at Home!* (1962) remain a fascinatingly excessive example of sports

celebrity worship. While other sports films idolize athletes playing themselves, such as

Jackie Robinson or Muhammad Ali in *The Jackie Robinson Story* (1950) and *The Greatest*

(1977), Doniger's exercise in celebrity fixation, with its peculiar exhibition-like structure,

exists as a type of cinematic baseball card for obsessive young fans. Posters and trade ads

for the film promote both of the New York Yankees' iconic statuses, especially among

children, with the taglines proclaiming, "A Grand Slam! Fun and Laughter with the

Greatest Guys in Baseball . . . and the luckiest kid in the world!" and "WOW! Fun and

laughter with the idols of millions!" The film's narrative about a young boy's (Bryan

Russell as Hutch) relationship with his father unfolds mainly to showcase the Florida

training camp of the 1962 line-up of the New York Yankees, focusing primarily on icons

Mantle and Maris. This minimal storyline generates numerous chances for the major

league team to display its athletic abilities in extended training sequences and for Mantle

and Maris to interact with adoring young fans. The production revels in its capacity to

show something usually removed from the expected elements of motion pictures, *non-*

cinematic celebrities. The narrative that unfolds never attempts to merge its centralized performers into its fictional spaces and, instead, simply allows its diegetic elements to house Mantle, Maris, and, to a lesser extent, their teammates. In what follows, I will illustrate how this film provides a portrait-like structure whose primary motivation is to *pose* its subjects (Mantle and Maris), an arrangement that greatly contradicts our formal conceptions of fictional space by allowing the coexistence of different manners of on-screen persons--actors and non-actors. At the same time, I will also dissect the formal issues involved in such a prospect, including how this structure challenges our receptions of diegetic space and cinematic metalanguage. In essence, *Safe at Home!* serves as my model in this project, illustrating how the tradition of stunt casting relates in its on-screen composition to photographic portraits. This correlation creates a distinctive structural phenomenon that can best be explained through the employment of Japanese concepts of photographic composition. These distinctions not only acknowledge the plane-of-focus, but the out-of-focus backgrounds of portraiture, which the Japanese dub "bokeh."

Though not completely singular to *Safe at Home!*, non-actor performance--also known in the film industry as stunt casting--complicates many of the popular definitions applied to cinematic stars or, in a more general sense, any particular person in a fiction film. In *Acting in the Cinema*, James Naremore defines the three manners of cinematic performances as follows:

> This [figures "playing" themselves] suggests that people in
> a film can be regarded in at least three different senses:
> as actors playing theatrical personages, as public figures
> playing theatrical versions of themselves, and as documentary

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evidence. If the term *performance* is defined in its broadest sense, it covers the last category as much as the first: when people are caught unawares by a camera . . . they usually provide evidence of role-playing in everyday life (15). [1]

These generalized definitions ultimately must be altered when examining extended guest casting in narrative films. As defined by Michael Anderegg, guest casting consists of actual performances from real "people playing 'themselves,' or some version of themselves" (147). Guest performances can prove self-reflexive in a variety of ways, with appearances ranging from Babe Ruth's portrayal of himself in the Lou Gehrig biopic *Pride of the Yankees* (1942) to the playfully postmodern horror film *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1991), where director Craven and actors Heather Langenkamp, Robert Englund, and John Saxon play "themselves" within a complicated storyline. To Anderegg, these performances incorporate all three of Naremore's personages and, therefore, challenge "the contract that we have with fictionality, either by making excessive demands on our willing suspension of disbelief or, alternately, by attempting to solidify our belief by an injection of hyper-reality, a striving to intensify and even to transcend mere verisimilitude" (147).

Throughout *Safe at Home!*, there are numerous sequences that challenge the definitions of guest performance provided by Naremore and expanded upon by Anderegg.

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[1]

To explain this distinction, Naremore uses an example from the television show *Dynasty*, where real-life pianist Peter Duchin, playing himself, performs at the wedding of the show's fictional characters. During the sequence, Duchin briefly interacts with the actors, while still maintaining his non-fictional persona. Such a scene, to Naremore, exemplifies the second definition for cinematic people--the idea that Duchin plays a "theatrical version" of himself.

3

As Hutch sneaks off to Fort Lauderdale to find his baseball idols, he observes the Yankees training before a crowd of spectators in two extended sequences. His first foray into the stadium (his first view of the team) parallels the overall viewing experience involved in this film. The spectators fill the stadium to view not a game of baseball but an exhibit of the iconic celebrity of baseball, a situation that clearly corresponds with the experience of an audience observing not a telecast of a game but only the cinematic exhibition of baseball celebrities. As Hutch sits and looks upon his icons, the film cuts to footage of the team hitting and catching. The image of the players captured in the sequence does not illustrate the first two elements of Naremore's definition of cinematic figures since it contains neither "actors playing theatrical personages" nor "public figures playing theatrical versions of themselves" (15). Instead, the footage of the team establishes the third personage--a type of "documentary evidence" oddly displayed within a fictional film. The team's actuality simply appears without any of the theatricality of cinematic performance. The only substantial theatricality emerges in the sudden cuts to the reactions of Hutch, meant to mirror the supposed feedback of the film's spectators. The close-ups of the baseball icons playing outfield cut quickly to a wide-eyed Hutch's awed responses of "Mickey Mantle!" and "Roger Maris!" (figs. 1.1-1.2). The clear distinction between the fictional space and the actuality of the icons surfaces in the cuts from the documentary-style footage of Mantle and Maris to the theatrical reactions of actor Bryan Russell within the persona of Hutch. The two baseball icons seem to convey performance, as Naremore specifies, in only the broadest sense by providing "evidence of role-playing in everyday life," as their practicing exists as evidence of an activity that the Yankees perform on an everyday basis regardless of the cameras (15). This distinction provides a clear difference

from the performance of the actors, who function in a theatrical manner only because of the camera's presence.

The other extended training sequence, where Mantle and Maris invite Hutch to sit in the dugout and observe the practice, follows this structure in a more pronounced manner. Once again, the sequence counters Anderegg's definition of guest casting since the two real-life figures do not contribute to the verisimilitude of the narrative. Instead, the theatrical performances of Russell and actor William Frawley as fictional coach Bill Turner disengage from the documentary-like performance of the team. The sequence provides a film highlight for the expectant baseball fans by permitting an extended opportunity for celebrity fixation. The team illustrates its training methods in exhaustive detail, as such real-life Yankees as Whitey Ford and Yogi Berra rush to catch fly balls and run the bases. During this montage, the recorded sounds of the yelling coaches and murmuring fans intensify the documentary-like feel. The only interruptions of actorly performance materialize in the form of short cuts to fictional coach Bill Turner (William Frawley) yelling standard commands such as "keep running" interjected within footage of actual Yankee coaches, which are immediately followed by a repeating of the phrase by Hutch. Despite these brief interruptions, the realism of the practice footage dominates the sequence, creating a type of idolization of the players' physical capabilities.[2] The scene concludes with Mantle and Maris in an escalating montage version of their recent home

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[2]

In another nod to its documentary-like feel, the sequence's idolization often employs fixed camera set-ups beside the practicing athletes. This technique, first employed by Leni Riefenstahl for *Olympia* (1936), was commonly used for capturing close-ups of actual athletes in mainly non-team sports for documentaries. Critics often link Riefenstahl's development of the technique to her own idolization of the athletic human form. See Infield, 129-43

run race. Peppered with shots of a wide-eyed Hutch, the film displays the two icons in a

succession of alternating shots, each swinging away to the increasingly intense sounds of

cracking bats. [3]

As illustrated in these training sequences, Mantle, Maris, and their teammates

appear removed from the fictional elements of the film, separated in their documentary-

like realism from Russell and Frawley. As a result of this detachment, the repeated

images of the team often disrupt our viewing experience, creating disturbances within the

film's fictional spaces. Stephen Heath explains that a spectator perceives unity when

watching an on-screen space, a perception he defines as *homogeneity*, or "an *effect* of the

film. . . . the film is the organization of a homogeneity" (100). Homogeneity is

constructed from such expected elements as sight and sound, thereby, transcending the

constructs of storytelling functions by creating its effect on the viewer through promoting

a correlation between elements on-screen. As Stephen Heath explains, homogeneity

includes not only components important to narrative, but stylistic considerations such as

montage, musical score, and other elements--the tangibility of cinematic space itself that

remains both confined and defined by its materiality. To Heath, homogeneity is "haunted

by the material practice it represses and the tropes of that repression" (100). Since the

stars of *Safe at Home!* originate outside motion picture conventions, they appear at odds

with the other formal elements on-screen and disrupt the homogeneity of the fictional

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[3]

The 1961 home-run showdown between Mantle and Maris, who were dubbed by the
media as the "M&M Boys," concluded with 54 and 61. Maris's 61 homers broke Babe
Ruth's previous 1927 record of 60. The Yankee's 1961 line-up, often described as the
best in baseball history, also features such notables as Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Elston
Howard, and Johnny Blanchard. The historic season concluded with the team defeating
the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series four games to one.

spaces, creating obvious textual lesions. These lesions materialize in the cuts between the fictional reactions of Frawley and Russell and the documentary-like performances of the Yankees in the training sequences. It is as if two motion pictures (one narrative and one documentary) alternate on-screen between the shots of the actors within their theatrical personas and the realism of the athletes. Each cut interrupts the viewing experience, creating jarring textual lesions blatantly noticeable to the viewer.

The intensity of these formal disruptions along with their repetition, as illustrated by the redundancy of the training montages, constitutes the primary reason why Mantle and Maris do not exist as guest performances in a traditional sense. Anderegg discusses Cecil B. DeMille's guest role in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) as injecting into the fictional world "a self-conscious and slightly awkward realism. His performance, his very presence, calls into question the verisimilitude of the situation in which he is presented and the characters with whom he interacts" (149). Throughout the film, DeMille appears as a significant supporting character who must relate on some level to the other performers. Since faded movie star Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) falsely places her hopes in the director to oversee her planned comeback vehicle, his ultimate rejection of the idea figures prominently in the narrative. Unlike the stars of *Safe at Home!*, Anderegg's example illustrates a variation upon the concept of cinematic excess--periodic disruptions that do not completely undermine the formal homogeneity and, instead, only prove mildly conspicuous. Kristin Thompson argues that this basic concept of cinematic excess rarely disintegrates the overall homogeneity. Instead, such minor intrusions tend to disrupt only insofar as they provide meanings "beyond those of coexistence" with other formal elements (134). For example, cinematic excess may

materialize in something as basic as an actor's overly dramatic mannerisms or inordinately stylistic props or costumes. Anderegg's contention that DeMille's presence in *Sunset Boulevard* provides "slightly awkward realism" illustrates the famous director's role within this particular fictional system. He never actually disrupts the homogeneity, only adds a somewhat excessive verisimilitude by reminding the audience of a "real" Hollywood outside of the fictional frame of the film. The on-screen space of *Sunset Boulevard* successfully houses the excessiveness of DeMille's performance, making his appearance conspicuous but never truly disruptive. Mantle and Maris's appearance in *Safe at Home!* never creates verisimilitude and, in fact, separates their physical "bodies" from the fictional world of the film--as illustrated by the awkward cuts between the real-life Yankees and the actors' responses in the training sequences. The fictional space houses celebrities as themselves, but, unlike the traditional guest casting of DeMille, never successfully accommodates them. It is as if the baseball stars wandered into the frame by accident and managed to stay there.

Cinematic excess surfaces in all narrative cinema, even *Safe at Home!*, but does not account for the role of actuality exemplified by Mantle and Maris. While the two stars often appear removed and somewhat excessive in comparison to their surrounding fictional spaces, such casting decisions restructure the core concepts of Thompson's definition. She contends that probably "no one ever watches *only* these nondiegetic aspects of the image through an entire film" (132-33). The major dilemma with *Safe at Home!* is that it overemphasizes elements not typical to fiction film--iconic baseball stars who, while not nondiegetic, are removed from the expected components of cinema. [4]

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[4]

Thompson's use of the term "nondiegetic" references Roland Barthes' "The Third

While it would be difficult to maintain that a spectator only watches these components, they remain the film's focus and the viewer's primary object of desire. Another important distinction appears in the production's own formal *motivation*, a concept Thompson defines as the following:

> A film displays a struggle by the unifying structures to "contain"
>
> the diverse elements that make up its whole system. Motivation is
>
> the primary tool by which the work makes its own devices seem
>
> reasonable. At that point where motivation fails, excess begins.
>
> To see it, we need to stop assuming that artistic motivation creates
>
> complete unity (or that its failure to do so somehow constitutes a
>
> fault) (134-35).

Since the primary motivation of *Safe at Home!* is to display baseball icons, this definition of cinematic excess must be reconsidered with Mantle and Maris. The film's overall motivation is to display its non-cinematic stars, which, despite their incongruent nature and the resulting textual lesions, makes the two baseball players not excessive. Instead, these non-cinematic elements become the inversion of cinematic excess. They function as a type of cinematic *essential* for the fictional space, since without these baseball stars there would be no need for the cinematic world that houses them. In the simplest terms, without Mantle, Maris, or the New York Yankees, there is no need for the cinematic

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Meaning" where he discusses "obtuse" meanings in Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1945). Nondiegetic meanings are counternarrative and illustrate a text's heterogeneity, or multiple meanings (47-48). While still cinematically unfamiliar elements, Mantle and Maris are not counternarrative and, thereby, cannot truly be dubbed nondiegetic. In fact, as I will illustrate later, the two baseball stars are crucial to the narrative world of the film, thereby making them *fundamental* diegetic elements.

structure of *Safe at Home!* that frames them. To display the celebrity of these particular baseball stars constitutes the sole reason for producing the film and, therefore, the creation of all the narrative devices that surround the icons. Without the real-life Yankees in the training sequences, there would be no need for the theatrical performances of the fictional characters watching the players. Mantle and Maris exist as not only the stars of the production, but the sole motivation for creating its diegetic spaces.

This unconventional convergence of cinematic and non-cinematic elements creates a structure greatly different from other motion pictures. As already established, *Safe at Home!* contains a formal motivation primarily based in displaying singular subjects (baseball stars) as opposed to narrative. This links the film to motivations usually found in photographic portraiture, which also displays individual subjects. In the most basic sense, this analogy to portraits materializes in the basic concept of the star vehicle, motion pictures meant primarily to showcase major movie stars. Here, the expectation that stars must appear as the gravitational center of the on-screen universe partly dictates the formal motivation of the production. *Safe at Home!*, however, exists only to house those specific persons because the formal cinematic elements frame these points of focus (the real-life baseball icons) as opposed to relate with them. As a result, the overall film is constructed as a type of cinematic portraiture. To fully explain this structure, let us consider the distinctive way Japanese photographers define photographic composition, definitions many American photographers began to adopt in the late 1990s. In many photos, the subjects constitute the plane of focus for the lens, while the surroundings remain out-of-focus, confining the centralized subject. The Japanese dub the quality of the surrounding area, the "out-of-focus blur," as *bokeh*. This blurry space couches the

subject's quality of focus--or, in Japanese, the *pinto*.[5] In the photo portrait of Mantle and

Maris, these elements are clearly visible (fig. 1.3). The focused clarity (pinto) of the two

baseball icons appears in the foreground of the photo, while the blur (bokeh) of the

stadium frames and confines the two subjects. Portraiture films, such as *Safe at Home!*,

can be understood as erecting a formal structure analogous with the relationship between

photographic bokeh space and the pinto. They contain not a literal visual blurring of area,

but rather a figurative *out-of-focus-ness*. In the film, all of the fictional elements on-screen

contribute to the bokeh space. The actors in fictional personas, the settings, and,

ultimately, every surrounding element contain a figurative out-of-focus-ness in relation to

the focused-upon and intensified actuality of Mantle, Maris, and their teammates (the

pinto couched by the space).

Clear examples of cinematic bokeh appear in sequences where the fictional

characters and the real-life baseball players must interact. For example, during Hutch's

first tangible encounter with the icons in Mantle's Yankee Clipper hotel room, the

theatricality of actors Frawley and Russell coexists with Mantle and Maris within

individual frames. The sequence illustrates two different formal motivations throughout

its progression, beginning with a more traditional narrative intent and then adopting the

distinctive bokeh space common in prominent stunt casting. The scene begins with

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[5]

Standard romanization systems actually translate the Japanese characters as "boke," but
this leads to persistent mispronunciation on the part of most English speakers. The word
"bokeh" is pronounced in evenly stressed syllables: bo-keh. The transliterated term
"pinto" is defined by *Kodansha's Basic English-Japanese Dictionary* as "the point at
which the image of an object is visible in the sharpest outline through a lens, on a camera
plate" (363). Basically, "pinto" is "focus" in photographic terms, though not in other
English definitions of the word. It is pronounced in the following evenly stressed
syllables–pi-nto. See Kennerdell's "What is 'Bokeh'?" and "Re: Bokeh Question."

Frawley (as the fictional Turner) playing the board game Scrabble with the two icons (fig. 1.4). The on-screen figures, both cinematic and non-cinematic, interact by exchanging playful objections over the correct spelling of words.

Turner brags, "There you are gentlemen, now let me see you top that."

Mantle counters, "Hey Bill, I hate to tell you this, but you can't spell." Here, Mantle *directly* addresses Frawley by the name of his fictional character, Bill Turner. Such an acknowledgment establishes Mantle as another cinematic character within the fictional space. The baseball icon performs Naremore's second personage for cinematic figures, providing a theatrical version of himself. The sequence continues with both icons becoming straight-men to Frawley's comic lines. The coach challenges a dispute over spelling by grumbling, "Who says so?" Mantle counters with "*Webster*," to which Turner confusingly asks, "What club is he with?" With this, the film cuts to a tight two-shot of Mantle and Maris as they exchange quietly amused looks. Even though the performances of the two icons are stilted in comparison to Frawley, the intent to integrate the figures into the story space still materializes for one of the few times in the production. This portion of the sequence adopts the motivation typical to narrative film, allowing Frawley, Mantle, and Maris to coexist as cinematic elements on-screen. Despite this, the film still manages to punctuate the frame with elements that tie the two icons to a world unrelated to the fictional narrative. For example, by having them play Scrabble, the sequence binds the baseball players to a tangible (and copyrighted) product popular in the "real world" of early 1960s America--a reference made especially potent since the game was probably owned by many of the film's intended prepubescent viewers. Even though the icons are portraying versions of themselves during this instance, the film still manages

to identify Mantle and Maris with the non-cinematic reality of the spectators.

But a traditional narrative motivation does not persist as the sequence moves the three figures into Mantle's bedroom. While seated at the game table, Turner smells a foul scent and then proceeds to follow it to its source--Hutch, who smells like dead fish due to hiding in a seafood delivery truck. Much like the inclusion of the Scrabble board, the production continues to remind the viewer of a real world removed from the space on-screen--this time by focusing on a sense completely removed from the movie-going experience, smell. More importantly, the production's distinctive portrait-like composition emerges within a crucial moment as the smell's source is located. At first, only showing part of Hutch as he emerges from underneath a bed, the scene continues with fictionalized dialogue between the two baseball icons framed in a medium two-shot. Maris exclaims, "A kid! Where did he come from?" To which Maris replies, "Did I tell you what I found in my room last week?" While this exchange contains the same theatrical tone of the earlier banter, there is a quick cut to a tight reaction shot of Hutch, firmly reestablishing the two icons as the pinto (focus) of a cinematic portrait. Here, the young character adopts a wide-eyed stare upon the icons, with his mouth hung open in disbelief, a reaction obviously meant to mirror the supposed feedback of the film's intended spectatorship of young baseball fans. In this sense, the sequence begins to adopt a similar tone to the stadium training scene where Hutch's reactions in the grandstands were also meant to imitate the intended reactions of the film's young audience. From this instant, the bedroom sequence adopts distinctive *bokeh space* around Mantle and Maris by framing them in a centered position between the characters of Hutch and Turner. This awkward positioning literally confines the pinto (the real-life baseball icons) between the

figuratively bokeh elements (the fictional characters). Mantle and Maris even adopt a stance typical to portraiture, stiffly placing their hands upon their hips and forcing smiles (fig.1.5). The action lapses into a representational exhibition similar to the training scenes, with Hutch gawking at his heros in a theatrical awe more intense than his reactions during the first training sequence. The young character's entranced responses of "Roger Maris!" and "Mickey Mantle!" mirror the utterances found earlier during the initial training exhibition. The sequence further solidifies their iconic status through a response to Turner's dialogue:

Now you see them in the flesh and they're sure ordinary, aren't they?

When Hutch responds with an offended "No, they're not!," Mantle (standing center-frame with Maris between the fictional Hutch and Turner) agrees with the boy, stating "Don't pay any attention to him, Hutch, he's getting too old." The sequence firmly repositions the two baseball stars as focused-upon subjects, figuratively confined and intensified by bokeh space. Both in the dialogue and the frame's composition, intensifying the pinto now establishes the formal motivation of the scene. The sequence ends by having another element of actuality, Whitey Ford, enter briefly to take Mantle and Maris out of the room, leaving the two theatrical personages of Hutch and Turner to discuss the largely irrelevant fictional elements of the narrative.

In the Yankee Clipper scene, the difference between the "non-actual" and the "actual" persons on-screen intensifies for the spectator. Since Mantle and Maris appear stilted in comparison to the other actors, the scene accentuates their positions as non-actors. But beyond this performance-based distinction, the production's overall portraiture-like structure (its link to photography) also contributes to the disjointed effect.

Most photographs exist as frozen instances of reality, displays intentionally chosen by an exhibitor or photographer and knowingly pursued by the audience. We view photographic portraits in hopes of finding a "real" subject, limited and displayed through the lens of a photographer and within its own framed manipulated environment--the blurred bokeh space that couches the clear pinto. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes defines the photographer as the *Operator*, a term that refers to the literal process of capturing frozen moments, a practice that might have "some relation to the 'little hole' (*stenope)* through which he looks, limits, frames, and perspectivizes what he wants to 'take'" (9-10).[6] When considering bokeh space in portraiture photography, this becomes a twofold *stenope*--the camera's gaze and the limiting surroundings of the out-of-focus blur simultaneously look, limit, frame, and perspectivize the subject of the photo. Nearly the same process occurs within cinematic bokeh spaces when the viewer dismisses the incidental surroundings employed by the filmmaker to house Mantle and Maris. In the final moments of the Yankee Clipper sequence, the pinto of the space (Mantle, Maris, and, to a lesser extent, Ford) remains framed by a twofold *stenope*--the camera's gaze and the limiting surroundings of the fictional elements of Frawley and Russell in character. When Mantle and Maris stiffly stand between Hutch and Turner (fig. 1.5.), this analogy clearly emerges as the spectator's gaze is forced to acknowledge not the story elements of the space but the bodies of the real-life icons positioned center-frame.

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Since only an amateur photographer himself, Barthes admits he cannot truly define the role of the *Operator* during the process of taking photos. Instead, he explores the two experiences he understands more fully, "that of the observed subject and that of the subject observing" (10). Similarly, since I could hardly understand the intentions beyond the act of exhibiting, my focus is not on the exhibitor (the filmmaker), but the relationship between the viewer and the pinto.

Both photographic and cinematic bokeh spaces reflect what Barthes describes as the *pose*, the concept that a frozen reality is set on display somehow by an exhibitor (photographer). This phenomenon accounts for the intensely awkward disjuncture between the baseball icons and their surroundings in the Yankee Clipper scene. Barthes explains that the "physical duration of this pose is of little consequence; even in the interval of a millionth of a second . . . there has still been a pose" (78). No matter how the intention of the filmmaker helps to define the motivation of cinematic bokeh space, the primary factor in understanding the pose of Mantle and Maris inheres in the act of viewing. According to Barthes, the pose consists not of "the attitude of the target or even a technique of the *Operator*, but the term of an 'intention' of reading: looking at a photograph, I inevitably include in my scrutiny the thought of that instant, however brief, in which a real thing happened to be motionless in front of the eye" (78).[7] All of these distinctions would remain irrelevant if the viewing of a film like *Safe at Home!* was not so integrally tied to the knowing intention of the audience. Since the viewer expects a posed reality upon entering the theater, the film presents a distinctive cinematic pose within many crucial sequences, including the Yankee Clipper scene. But, unlike photography, the actuality (the pinto) does not gain significance because it appears as a frozen moment.

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[7]

To Barthes, this sensation only occurs with motionless images, since photography gives the sense of "something *has posed*" while cinema shows that "something *has passed*" and "the pose is swept away" in a series of images (78). In most cinema, this observation proves correct. But within cinematic bokeh space, with its significant structural links to portraiture, the actuality exists inside the confines of both cinematic and photographic viewing experiences. The pinto truly *has passed* in a series of consecutive images, yet since this is exhibited actuality, it also *has posed*, or, to be more precise, *has been posed* by an exhibitor (a filmmaker). In viewing *Safe at Home!*, all these experiences can combine since the sensation that something *has passed* remains, yet this something (Mantle and Maris) definitely *has been posed* for the spectator.

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Mantle and Maris announce their significance instantly, like the subjects of photographic portraiture, yet remain significant despite being in motion, since the viewer's gaze is constantly upon the icons. As indicated by the Yankee Clipper sequence, the spectatorship remains defined by the pose of Mantle, Maris, and, to a lesser extent, Ford. Neither actual persons playing versions of themselves nor the completely fictional roles of Frawley and Russell determine the effect of the scene. What creates the effect on the viewer is the distinctively posed manner of the baseball icons awkwardly positioned in the frame's center and surrounded (limited and intensified) by fictional elements.

While the concept of a pose helps to explain the contrasting effect between the pinto and the surrounding cinematic bokeh, this posed actuality also determines another significant aspect of the viewing experience. The pinto (Mantle and Maris) dictates how the spectator reads the fictional elements of the diegetic space, the overall constructed fictional system of the film (the fiction's own metalanguage). Deborah Linderman defines the metalanguage of most texts as follows:

> The metalanguage of a text is not a separate code abstracted
>
> from it and existing outside, beyond, and above a target language;
>
> rather it is implanted within the so-called object language and is constituted
>
> by the narrative itself as a set of directives for how to read
>
> the object text (145).

This linear concept of directives--the narrative constituting the metalanguage, which sets directives for reading the object texts--deviates within cinematic bokeh space. In *Safe at Home!*, a metalanguage develops around baseball-related objects that are primarily significant because of their connection to the cultural ideology of Mantle and Maris. This

ideological system originates *outside* the confines of typically cinematic systems, thereby remaining largely tied to a non-cinematic world. The cultural significance of Mantle and Maris, meanings developed within a system usually unrelated to cinematic worlds, determines the directives for many significant object texts. In essence, Linderman's definition deviates because specific diegetic elements (the pinto) "implant" meaning into the metalanguage as opposed to vice-versa. The framed elements of Mantle, Maris, and the Yankee line-up often dictate the reading of the fictional bokeh spaces that frame them. As a result, the non-cinematic significance of the players often provides the directives for the story space's obsessive celebration of baseball. Since the real-life baseball icons are the subjects of this cinematic portrait, the elemental significance of the film produced simply to contain them is dictated by their overwhelming influence.

This phenomenon materializes throughout *Safe at Home!* as the iconic celebrity of Mantle and Maris overwhelmingly defines the elemental significance of fictional spaces. A key scene in Mike's (Scott Torre) bedroom features two theatrical personages, Mike and Hutch, literally framed by representations of iconic actuality in the form of novelty "bobble-head" dolls of Mantle and Maris (fig. 1.6). The fictional personages are confined by commodified and collectible representations of actuality, object texts significant not because of the fictional system of the film but because of the non-cinematic significance of Mantle and Maris. The production's goal of limiting and framing baseball celebrities defines *Safe at Home!*'s metalanguage. The cultural significance (the celebrity worship of the two icons) conveys meaning upon the overall metalanguage, which, in turn, implants meaning into the object texts (the "bobble-head" dolls). The intent of the production to centralize Mantle and Maris directs the system for decoding the diegetic elements of the

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bokeh space. [8] This deviation clearly emerges in much of the film's idolization of baseball-related object texts--including the training stadium, the autograph seekers, the Little League equipment, and other assorted Yankee-related elements. In a key scene in the locker room, Hutch wanders in alone and, after a shower, wraps himself in the uniforms of his two icons as he falls asleep. This blatant fetishization once again proves significant due to non-cinematic elements, since the baseball iconography of Mantle and Maris supplies meaning for the uniforms. Another key example of this phenomenon appears in the significance of the Mantle and Maris glossy photos during the early scenes of the film. Hutch receives the photos in the mail then deceives his teammates by autographing them himself. While the photographic portraitures serve as important points in the narrative, they provide a more significant purpose by offering the first sight of the baseball icons outside of the opening credits. The photos themselves, *frozen* celebrity actuality framed by both cinematic and photographic bokeh spaces, supply a promise of the framed *unfrozen* portraits to appear later in the film. Much like the "bobble-head" dolls, the significance of the photos relates to the motivation of the production, providing a promise of more actuality to come.

    A sequence following the introduction of the photographs solidifies the overall concept of actuality over fictional space in *Safe at Home!*, a notion defining the motivation of the production and, therefore, its metalanguage. During a Little League game, Hutch, playing the outfield, imagines that Mantle and Maris stand beside him. The film generates

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[8]

This intention also appears in a broader sense when considering the overall setting of *Safe at Home!*. Since the film's motivation is to provide actuality in the form of the Yankee's Fort Lauderdale training camp, the Florida setting was decided upon for easy access to this location. In essence, the intent of the production (to exhibit the Yankees) defines the entire setting of the film.

the effect of Hutch's imagination by blurring his fellow Little League teammates and refocusing, literally turning bokeh into pinto. As a result, Mantle and Maris eventually frame Hutch, who is centered between the two icons. The effect is an inversion of the composition of the Yankee Clipper scene, with non-actuality (the bokeh element of Hutch) framed by two elements of actuality (the pinto of Mantle and Maris). The Little League sequence, which appears relatively early in the narrative, clearly indicates how to read the character of Hutch, who serves as a representational baseball-obsessed spectator. By having fictional elements literally morph into actuality and then frame a crucial bokeh element (Hutch), the production establishes three crucial principles. First, it indicates the film's heterogeneous structure, defined by elements of actuality and non-actuality--seen throughout the film as actor and non-actors must share the same on-screen spaces. Next, by having the fictional characters dissolve into the real-life baseball players, the film also affirms the importance of the pinto over the fictional frame (the bokeh). Finally, the sequence indicates that the metalanguage remains defined by the overwhelming presence of a non-cinematic attraction, an attribute that constitutes the unapologetic purpose of the production. In essence, the sequence serves as a microcosm for the structure and motivation of the motion picture as a whole.

This formal motivation differentiates *Safe at Home!* from other more popular examples of guest casting, identified by Michael Anderegg as "people playing 'themselves,' or some version of themselves" (147). One area where this definition becomes problematic is in autobiographical films, where motion pictures take the traditional Hollywood form of a biography and casts the subject himself in the lead. Studios hoping to cash in on the celebrity of sports icons Jackie Robinson and Muhammad

Ali cast the legends in *The Jackie Robinson Story* and *The Greatest*. This concept of autobiography was not limited to sports films; Howard Stern's *Private Parts* (1997) and Audie Murphy's *To Hell and Back* (1955) also follow this tradition by having the actual person perform the story of his life. On a surface level, these films seem to present experiences similar to viewing the bokeh spaces of *Safe at Home!*. After all, they also offer spectators the promise of a real person within a fictional frame--the films' spaces house traditionally non-cinematic celebrities.[9] What distinguishes these autobiographies from the bokeh spaces of *Safe at Home!* are their correlation to the genre of 'biopic,' biographical narratives that display historical episodes of notable lives.[10] Both autobiographical and biographical films contain a common narrative structure that progresses from early childhood to some kind of establishment of celebrity, a linear progression that drives the formal motivation of the film. As a result, the celebrity actuality in autobiography must interact with the film's cinematic world to encourage the progressive motivation of the narrative. Since this integration proves fundamental, the story and the surrounding non-actual elements do not disengage from the pinto. The subject of the film adopts the second definition of filmic personages provided by James Naremore, throughout the film, they become "public figures playing theatrical versions of

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To Hell and Back complicates this scenario, since Murphy was already an established movie star at the time of the production. But the story being told, his World War II experiences, still capitalizes on a celebrity established *off-screen*, therefore, the basic motivation still applies.

10

This genre was intensely popular during Hollywood's Golden Age and includes *Annie Oakley* (1935), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), *Young Thomas Edison* (1940), *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945), and *The Man of a Thousand Faces* (1957) See George F. Custen's *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History.*

themselves" as opposed to existing as variations upon "documentary evidence" (15).

They are pinto that integrate into the cinematic surroundings, thereby corresponding with

a traditionally narrative formal motivation. Despite the display of non-cinematic actuality

in these examples, there is no pure bokeh space in the cinematic autobiography.

A clear example of this distinction appears in Jesse Hibb's *To Hell and Back*, a

film whose appeal rests largely in its iconic subject, yet contains the traditional narrative

motivation largely absent from *Safe at Home!*. Star Audie Murphy established his iconic

celebrity as a hero of the second World War, where he was awarded more than two dozen

citations for his heroic actions including the Congressional Medal of Honor and a

battlefield commission all before the age of twenty. He capitalized on his fame upon his

return to the homefront by becoming a Hollywood leading man.[11] By the time Murphy

agreed to star in an adaptation of his 1949 best-selling autobiography *To Hell and Back*,

he had already established himself as a cinematic celebrity—a figure exhibiting Naremore's

definition of "actors playing theatrical personages" (15). Despite this traditional appeal,

the attractiveness of his wartime heroism dominated the promotion and dictated the

success of the film. *To Hell and Back*, the only motion picture where Murphy plays

himself, remained the largest hit of his career.[12] The film establishes Murphy's non-

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[11]

Throughout his career, Murphy appeared in numerous notable productions, including John Huston's acclaimed version of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951). Oddly enough, even though he initially gained celebrity as a war hero, when it came to genres, Murphy appeared most often in westerns, not war films. He appears in thirty-three westerns, beginning with *The Kid from Texas* (1950) and ending with *A Time for Dying* (1969). See Simpson's *Audie Murphy: American Soldier*, 257-89.

[12]

The film was a major success for Universal Studios. By grossing nearly 10 million dollars, it was the largest moneymaker up to this point for the studio.

cinematic appeal as a war hero by opening with the purely non-cinematic personage of General Walter Bedell Smith, who serves as narrator. Throughout, the general's voice reappears to provide exposition for the extensive leaps in time common to the biopic tradition, reestablishing elements of verisimilitude by explaining troop movements and other historical details.

Unlike Smith's persona, which feels documentary-like in its stilted movements and inflections, Murphy's presence appears primarily based in an actorly performance. The first images of "Audie" are of an actor (Gordon Gerbert) playing a young Murphy on his mother's farm. When the film literally exchanges the young boy with the older "teenager," it morphs into a shot of the actual Murphy gathering firewood. Unlike the blurring of the Little Leaguers into Mantle and Maris, the effect here demonstrates something greatly different. In *Safe at Home!*, the blurring results in fictional children (bokeh) being replaced by the film's singular attraction (pinto). Similarly, in *To Hell and Back*, the blurring results in a fictional child (Gerbert as a young Murphy) being replaced by the film's attractive star (Murphy as himself). Once Mantle and Maris appear, they can simply disappear, which they do, and permit the narrative to progress without any interference. But once the "teenage" Murphy appears, he must quickly integrate himself into the fictional space. As a result, he instantaneously adopts a theatrical version of himself as his persona, a distinction easily identified by the fact that the 30 year-old actor is playing a 17 year-old version of himself. [13] What becomes lost in such theatricality is the concept of a

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[13] Age remains a crucial indication of the theatrical personage of a younger self embodied by Murphy throughout the entire production, since all of the actions of the film occurred before the real-life Murphy's 20th birthday. The notion of a figure playing a younger self ultimately defines cinematic autobiography as a subgenre removed from cinematic biography. In biography, an actor of any age could play the subject, while in

cinematic *pose*. Murphy, throughout the numerous detailed interactions with his fellow actors, does not instantly adopt an intense focus within his appearance in a scene--a defining characteristic of such pinto as Mantle and Maris in *Safe at Home!*. Instead, the war hero often adopts a diminished position within many of the elaborate battle scenes, moments that significantly frame such object texts as explosive special effects and gunfire. As a result of this traditional structure, the film ultimately maintains the original linear concept of "directives" provided by Deborah Linderman, where the metalanguage "is implanted by the narrative itself as a set of directives for how to read the object text" (145). With *To Hell and Back*, the metalanguage follows this progression without any of the conspicuous ties to the "real" world seen in the bokeh spaces of *Safe at Home!*. The only alteration is that the source material for the narrative is Murphy's life story, proving similar to the narrative motivation found in any biopic. Unlike the baseball paraphernalia of *Safe at Home!*, the significance of such object texts as military uniforms, weapons, and artillery prove significant due to the narrative, which just so happens to follow Murphy's life. In the bokeh spaces of *Safe at Home!*, story in any regard remains incidental to the physical presence of Mantle and Maris. The exhibition of these baseball icons, not narrative, dictates the motivation behind the production.

In the final analysis, *Safe at Home!* provides a model for cinematic bokeh, a structural curiosity found within stunt castings that are not autobiographically-motivated. The extent of the pinto's ability (or lack of ability) to coexist with the fictional elements

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autobiography, the actor essentially always plays a younger character. To reasonably accept this narrative world, the viewer must willfully disavow the logical conclusion that an older person is in the persona of a younger self. In *Private Parts*, Stern even allows his voice-over to jokingly point out a similar inconsistency when he first "replaces" the fictional personage of his younger self at college.

dictates the film's displacing effect on viewers. As an extreme example of this phenomenon, the stunt casting of *Safe at Home!* presents the essentials of the bokeh structure. It illustrates significant structural links to photographic portraiture by having a formal motivation primarily based in displaying the singular subjects of baseball stars. The production also clearly illustrates the formal disruptions that results from framing such non-cinematic figures, as seen within its training montages and stilted interactions between actors and non-actors. Throughout, the film illustrates a cinematic version of the Barthesian concept of the *pose*, a distinctly bokeh-related phenomenon that also dictates a crucial deviation in reading the text's metalanguage, clearly illustrated in the film's idolization of baseball-related items. This film remains a production with a metalanguage defined by the significance of real-life baseball celebrities, an attribute that dictates the creation of the film's story space. Its formal motivation, structure, and, therefore, entire purpose is to house non-cinematic actuality. As a result of such distinctiveness, it proves an oddity even within the exhibition-like tradition of stunt casting, remaining intensely unapologetic throughout about its celebrity worship and bokeh-defined form. Because *Safe at Home!* revels in its profit-motivated celebration of Mantle and Maris, it stands as the ideal model for the cinematic bokeh structure. By providing a crucial link between film and portraiture, this phenomenon serves as a challenge to many of the accepted definitions of narrative cinema. As will be shown in my other chapters, bokeh also challenges film beyond these formal considerations. What the structure ultimately disrupts are some of the most basic concepts behind cinematic spectatorship, redefining the very manner in which a viewer comprehends images on-screen.

Images for Chapter One:
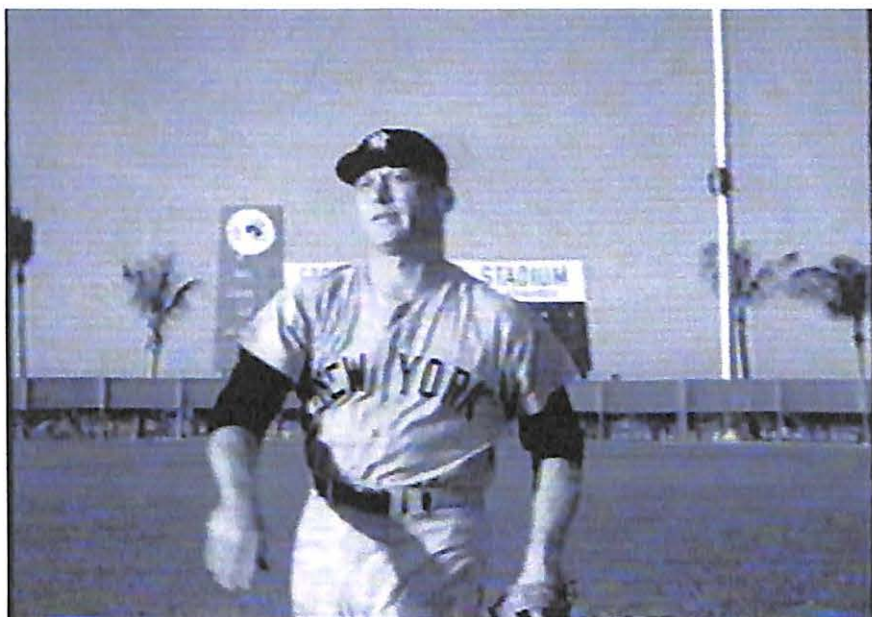
Figure 1.1. - Mickey Mantle plays the outfield, in a moment highlighting documentary-like realism from *Safe at Home* (1962).

**Figure 1.2. - Hutch (Bryan Russell) watches the baseball exhibition
of his real-life icons.**
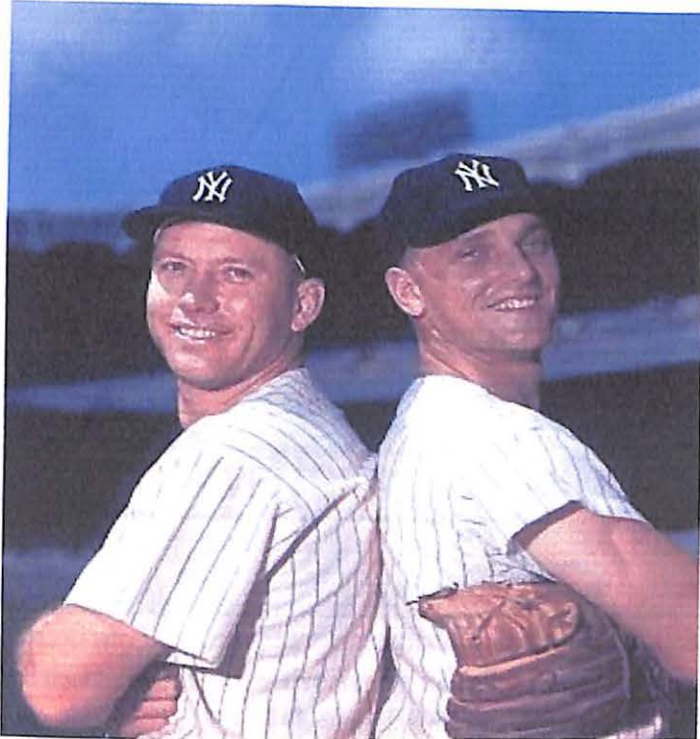
Figure 1.3. - In this portrait of Mantle and Maris, the qualities of photographic bokeh are apparent. The out-of-focus-ness of the stadium in the background displays a blurred quality (bokeh). The clarity in the foreground (the subjects Mantle and Maris) display clarity (pinto). The bokeh of the blurred stadium couches the pinto of the two baseball icons.

Figure 1.4. - As Mantle and Maris play Scrabble with Coach Bill Turner (William Frawley), the two icons interact with the story space--portraying theatrical versions of themselves.

Figure 1.5. - Fictional bokeh elements of Hutch and Turner frame Mantle and Maris.

Figure 1.6. - The bobble-head dolls of real icons Mantle and Maris frame the fictional Hutch and Mike (Scott Torre).

Chapter 2:

Temporary Bokeh and Subversive Pinto:
Deviations from the Phenomenon in Musical Showcase Cinema

While examining the history of motion pictures in its infant stages, Tom Gunning

dubbed many of the earliest films as "the cinema of attractions." This term arises from the

fact that most films produced before 1906-07 were, as Gunning describes them, "actuality

films," often sold to audiences of the period as simple exhibits of moving images. The

reason for seeing these films was not to get lost in a narrative world, but to view the new

invention called motion pictures. These exhibitions only projected simple short scenes,

often everyday activities or visually stimulating performances, without any narrative

context. The key structure to this type of cinema was more akin to vaudevillian staging

than storytelling, with the concept of *showing* as opposed to *narrative* being the primary

formal motivation behind the productions. As Gunning describes, these films revel in

their "ability to *show* something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema

analyzed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionistic cinema" (57). These productions

contain a blatant adoption of actions that would later be perceived as destroying the

realistic illusion of cinema, thereby establishing "direct" contact with the audience. Such

short films contained comedians smirking at the camera, the constant bowing and

gesturing of magicians, and other audience-aware moves from performers.[1] With their

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[1]

In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz contends that narrative cinema "is not exhibitionistic. I

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simplistic vaudevillian displays, these early films provide the seeds to the structural

phenomenon that would later become bokeh space. Just as the motivation to display a

singular attraction (the moving images themselves) dictates the structure of this early

cinema, the motivation behind later stunt castings of nontraditional celebrities dictates the

structure of bokeh space. Both bokeh and the cinema of attractions sell themselves to the

audience as structurally *showing* something as opposed to having a crucial narrative,

thereby destroying the illusion of a voyeuristic viewing experience. The bokeh structure

is found in films that contain remnants of these stage-based motivations to exhibit

unfamiliar attractions. As Gunning contends, the early cinema of attractions never

completely disappeared despite the ultimate dominance of narrative, but, instead, went

"underground both into certain avant-garde practices and as a component of narrative

films, more evident in some genres (e.g. the musical) than in others" (57). Bokeh space,

in all its varying degrees, contains the vestiges of this earliest of cinematic structures not

as a simple component, but as a dominating characteristic.

While these remnants clearly appear within films defined by a bokeh structure, the

genre of the musical often provides fundamental deviations from the phenomenon. In this

chapter, I will examine how narratively-disengaged musical performances create crucial

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watch it, but it doesn't watch me watching it. Nevertheless, it knows I am watching it.
But it doesn't want to know." This "fundamental disavowal" guided popular cinema into
"paths of 'story,'" structures allowing film to appear as "a beautiful closed object" (94).
Since the cinema of attractions is pre-narrative and contains such overt acknowledgments
of the spectator, Gunning implies that this fundamental disavowal does not exist. The
illusion of voyeurism does not dictate the motivation of such films since they are *clearly*
exhibitionistic, thereby not appearing as closed objects upon the screen. Since the
performers smirk and bow to the viewer, these primitive films fail to allow the audience
the sensation of being true voyeurs (of viewing something that is unaware it is being
viewed).

variations in the cinematic bokeh structure. While a text such as *Safe at Home!* has a

driving motivation to showcase real-life baseball stars (Mantle and Maris), these musical

examples depart from my originally established bokeh model. With this examination of

musical performances, I will explore how these deviations frame and limit the pinto

beyond the formal considerations outlined in my prototype of *Safe at Home!*. [2] I choose

my two primary film texts for their distinctive structural dissimilarities as musical

performance showcases. Each of these productions displays crucial irregularities in the

bokeh phenomenon's two defining components: the figuratively out-of-focus fictional

frame (*bokeh space* itself) and the *pinto* (non-cinematic figures exhibited through the

tradition of stunt casting). Bokeh, as I am defining it, is usually a *constant* factor

throughout films that centralize non-actors--characterizing the portraiture-like structure

created by all prominent stunt casting in narrative motion pictures. Mitchell Leisen's *The

Big Broadcast of 1938* (1938) contains musical sequences that serve as prototypes of

temporary bokeh, periodic exhibitionistic interruptions in the narrative. This deviation

allows for an exhibition of "real-life" persons without the overwhelming influences found

in a bokeh-defined production like *Safe at Home!*. A second example, Allan Arkush's

Rock n' Roll High School (1979), examines the addition of *subversive pinto* couched

within an otherwise prototypically bokeh-defined production. This deviation presents

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[2]
To clarify the types of musicals that usually contain cinematic bokeh spaces, I must distinguish two attributes common in these films that were outlined in the non-musical example of *Safe at Home!*. Firstly, much as Mantle and Maris were figures unfamiliar to the world of film, the pinto of my musical sequences will also be cinematically unfamiliar. Secondly, in the same manner as the Yankee training sequences seemed removed from the narrative, the musical performances I will cover often disengage from the storyline. In other words, traditional musicals--such as *Top Hat* (1935) or *Singing in the Rain* (1952), where performance sequences are smoothly incorporated into the narrative--rarely contain bokeh spaces.

non-cinematic attractions that challenge the blatant forms of audience acknowledgment found in all cinematic bokeh spaces.

Both these deviations illustrate how the commercial forces behind the productions alter the typically voyeuristic appeal of narrative cinema itself. During moments of distinct self-awareness, the musical sequences challenge the voyeuristic viewing experience by overtly pointing to the intent to showcase performers as opposed to narrative--thereby acknowledging the film's awareness of the spectator. Each a distinct product of the commercial tastes of their respective eras, my two primary examples showcase individual acts removed from the narrative world of the film and from the expected elements of cinema. The bokeh space and its enclosed pinto prove desirable for an audience in ways distinctly removed from the iconic and overwhelming appeal of Mantle and Maris, who provided the unadulterated pleasure of celebrity worship. These new examples represent the ways in which the pinto does not dominate the production with its iconic celebrity and, instead, provides attractions of Otherness, figures proving unconventional within cinematic terms because of their ability to originate from mediums other than film and from subcultures separated from the audience.

Musical examples of *temporary bokeh* began to surface in narrative motion pictures when sound films were still in their infancy. During Depression-era Hollywood, studios created a number of productions that were meant to showcase popular radio performers, films belonging to the distinctly 1930s subgenre of 'Radio Musicals.' While the employment of actors from stage, television, or radio in key roles (often termed in the industry as "crossover casting") remains a common element of Hollywood films, many of these 1930s productions prove significant in the scattershot nature of their showcasing. In

the course of their narratives, numerous radio stars appear as themselves performing in fictional cinematic versions of live radio broadcasts. For example, Paramount Studio's "Big Broadcast" series, by its very name, promotes itself to audiences as a presentation of typically non-cinematic performers, stars who until then were only heard and rarely, if ever, seen. The series begins with Frank Tuttle's *The Big Broadcast* (1932), a lightweight narrative concerning a fictional manager, Leslie McWhinney (Stuart Erwin) trying to save his bankrupt radio station. Throughout the film, numerous real-life radio stars perform as themselves in fictional radio broadcasts, including The Four Mills Brothers, Cab Calloway, Kate Smith, and The Boswell Sisters.[3] Since there is no singular pinto in such a film, the primary selling point of the production becomes its ability to showcase multiple non-cinematic stars. As a result, such a film presents scenes showcasing a momentary pinto, not iconic figures such as Mantle and Maris who solely constitute the reasoning behind the production. Showcasing radio itself constitutes the rationale for the film as opposed to any one performer from that medium. The Big Broadcast series continued throughout the decade, followed by three similarly structured productions: *The Big Broadcast of 1936* (1935), *The Big Broadcast of 1937* (1936), and *The Big Broadcast of 1938*. Each film continued to provide fictionalized radio broadcasts serving to showcase multiple radio stars, with appearances by such celebrities as Ethel Merman, Gene Krupa, and Benny Goodman as themselves. Eventually, the productions

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[3] More prominently featured in the cast are Bing Crosby, George Burns, and Gracie Allen, who portray, as James Naremore would describe, "theatrical versions of themselves" (15). Their appearances remain dissimilar from the other radio performers because of their involved interactions with fictional characters, such as Stuart Erwin's Leslie McWhinney. Despite this distinction, which discounts these popular performers as pinto within bokeh spaces, the appearance of these radio stars still adds to the appeal of the film as showcasing usually non-cinematic performers.

added "highbrow" performances by opera stars and symphonic orchestras to their lineups. The series evolved into a manner of variety show, all performed between the minor interruptions of narrative that always include a convenient fictional broadcast to showcase the radio stars.

More showcase than narrative, any Big Broadcast film illustrates in its structure an advanced version of the early cinema of attractions described by Gunning. These earliest of films do not follow the voyeuristic definitions of cinematic spectatorship supplied by Christian Metz, since such productions contain performers without narrative context who regularly acknowledge the audience (by nodding and bowing, for instance). These characteristics destroy the fragile illusion of film itself being unaware of the spectator. Unlike this complete disregard of the voyeuristic experience, the bokeh structure, containing vestiges of this primitive cinema, only provides a limited yet heightened acknowledgment of spectatorship. In productions with any degree of bokeh space--either complete (such as *Safe at Home!*) or temporary (as seen in the Big Broadcast films)-- Metz's definition of voyeuristic viewing can still apply, albeit imperfectly in comparison to the closed narrative worlds of other fiction films. In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz clarifies a film's ability to simultaneously know and not know that it is being viewed, a capacity that defines an audience's voyeuristic experience:

> The one who knows [that it is viewed] is the cinema, the *institution*
>
> (and its presence in every film, in the shape of the discourse
>
> which is behind the fiction); the one who doesn't want to know
>
> is the film, the *text* (in its final version): the story . . . . In this way
>
> the cinema manages to be both exhibitionistic and secretive (95).

In the bokeh structure, the *institution* of cinema--here in the form of the commercial reasoning behind the production--always manages to become apparent to the audience in key moments. As Metz explains, the illusion of voyeurism is now a "finely tuned economic plateau" that relies on the spectator's awareness that the object being viewed "is unaware of being watched" (95). During prominent moments in sequences with bokeh space, the audience becomes aware of the institution of cinema--the commercially-dictated motivation to pose non-cinematic celebrities. As seen with Mantle, Maris, or the numerous Big Broadcast performers, the pose of any pinto results in moments where the institution overwhelms the text. The disruption in the on-screen fictional space creates a textual mutiny of sorts, with the underlying commercial forces of the film taking over the narrative.

Clear examples of these acknowledgments of institution (of the medium of film itself) often appear in the Big Broadcast films. The very structure of their narratively-closed worlds are continually challenged by a hyper-awareness periodically present on-screen. For example, the narrative of *The Big Broadcast of 1938* follows a fictionalized race between two luxury liners, the Colossus and the Gigantic, across the Atlantic Ocean. The storyline unfolds onboard the Gigantic, which runs on the newly-discovered "radio power." This fantastical invention's name appears as a direct acknowledgment of the medium whose stars figuratively fuel the production itself. The film features radio star Bob Hope within his first film appearance and places him in the role of radio announcer Buzz Fielding. Despite giving what James Naremore in *Acting in the Cinema* describes as a performance based in "playing theatrical personage," the film often displays Hope in the contexts expected for his then-established radio persona (15). Throughout many key

sequences, he remains framed before a large radio microphone that is decorated with the fictionalized O.B.C., promoting the name of the broadcasting station, as his character announces musical performances throughout the film. In other words, Hope serves as the radio announcer for not only the fictional broadcast, but for the film's actual audience by informing spectators of what showcased performance will soon follow. His periodic appearances in this familiar radio-announcer persona creates the perception that the film itself documents an actual "big broadcast," simultaneously being listened to by a radio audience as the viewers watch the film. [4] Hope's addressing of the fictional radio and actual film-going audience mirrors language common to late 1930s radio announcers, employing the popular acknowledgment of "Ladies and Gentlemen." The film's fictional spaces remain periodically defined by an acknowledgment of not only the existence of differing mediums of entertainment, but also moments where radio stylistics dictate how the spectator perceives the diegetic elements of the film.

Throughout *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, examples of such an acknowledgment emerge in transitions between Hope's announcer and showcased musical performances. During the first of these moments, Hope and comic Ben Blue (as Mike) stand onstage within a longshot that incorporates into the frame the theater's audience, fictional passengers portrayed by Paramount extras. Initially, Hope portrays the announcer

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[4]

The employment of an actual radio celebrity to play a radio-announcer (or a similar character) who addresses the audience was common in the series. Jack Benny, arguably the period's most popular radio star, portrayed a similar role in *The Big Broadcast of 1937*. In a similar manner, Hope's Buzz Fielding alternates between serving as the film's radio-announcer and hiding from his character's multiple ex-wives in an involved subplot. It is also important to note that the musical performances introduced by the announcer are not the only ones in the film. Other sequences in the Big Broadcast series include more traditional musical scenes incorporated into the narrative and, therefore, into the story space.

persona as a fictional element of this larger story space, announcing actions correlating to the unreal situations of the film. He proclaims to the fictional audience and "radio listeners" that, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the greatest race of the ages will soon be on!" This announcement, along with the visual inclusion of the surrounding passengers, anchors the sequence to the story space. But this system soon deteriorates when the scene then reveals an overt awareness of the medium. The film quickly shifts to framing Hope and Blue in a tight-two shot behind the large O.B.C. microphone, no longer framed by the fictional passengers (fig. 2.1). Here, Hope's announcement of an actual performer from the world of radio appears to directly address the film's spectators, replicating the typical patter of radio personalities from the era:

> Now ladies and gentlemen, I want to introduce a man who
>
> made a bubble into a musical career--Mr. Shep Fields. Two
>
> years ago, come next washday, Shep became the Columbus
>
> of the swing world with his discovery of Rippling Rhythm.

By presenting a performer usually removed from the medium of film, the sequence overtly indicates its difference from radio by exhibiting an addition of images. In this moment, temporary bokeh emerges since the audience becomes aware of the film's acknowledgment of spectatorship. This instant shift from the fictional to the nonfictional (from a seemingly closed story structure to audience-aware exhibition) provides a temporary revelation of one of the commercial motivations behind the film--to present cinematically-unfamiliar elements like Shep Fields. The musical sequence that follows merges animation of a "little ripple" of water over the orchestra's performance, ultimately allowing surreal visuals to enhance an addition of images to the sounds of radio (fig. 2.2).

This recognition allows for the temporary suspension of the fictional story by indulging in an exhibition of image. In such an instance, the fictional space momentarily becomes medium-aware, pointing to its own attributes and limitations as a filmed object. In doing so, it also proves audience-aware, allowing the film text itself to address the viewer's presence through the prospect of *seeing* Hope and Fields. While these acknowledgments do not prove as blatant as the nods and bows of the early cinema of attractions, they still encourage a recognition of—to use Metz's term—the *institution* of cinema (here in the form of the medium itself) by providing radio stylistics through film. By having the audience willingly acknowledge the specific addition of images to what should only be sound, the film creates moments where the institution overshines the text. The addition of cinema provides the bokeh frame that couches the momentary pinto, in this instance the sound of the radio performers. Since the sound of radio was usually listened to away from movie theaters, any images momentarily added to the experience constitute a bokeh frame, adding perspective to a cinematically removed element. In this sequence, the acknowledgment of two mediums in the space supplies the heterogeneity needed for the creation of cinematic bokeh, even if the effect is only temporary.

Variations upon this acknowledgment appear in two other performance sequences that configure the temporary bokeh into a less contrasting form. When Hope presents singer Tito Guizar, the film allows the fictional elements of story space to cleverly maneuver into the frame, and the transition from story structure to radio-like exhibitionism becomes less abrasive. The sequence begins with Hope running onto the stage from the fictional audience, thereby allowing him to transition from his position within the story space to the film's radio-announcer role. The scene commences with the familiar touches

of a broadcaster performance, by having Hope present the singer with typically radio-like

excitement:

> Ladies and Gentlemen, I've got a rare treat for you, a great
>
> Mexican singer, Tito Guizar!

But the radio stylistics do not last long, as the sequence allows for the story space of the

fictional ocean liner to punctuate the performance. No longer in his "radio announcer"

role, Hope nervously crosses the stage looking for Guizar, who busies himself on the other

side of the room by kissing a beautiful blonde. Then the singer, draped in a poncho,

performs his first song as he quickly walks by fictional passengers, finally appearing

onstage in time for his second number. While the performance remains uninvolved with

the narrative and introduced in the style of radio, Guizar's contact with the story space

allows for a less abrasive example of temporary bokeh. Consequently, the resulting

musical performance integrates more smoothly into the film, with Guizar periodically

joking to a responsive audience of the ship's passengers, whose laugher and clapping

appears on the soundtrack.

A similar attempt to punctuate a non-cinematic performance with fiction proves

less successful after Hope introduces Madame Kristen Flagstad of the Metropolitan Opera

Company. Throughout Flagstad's performance of a Richard Wagner piece, there are two

crucial cuts to real-life conductor Wilfred Pelletier, supposedly standing before the

fictional passengers in the audience. Pelletier's presence before the unreal crowd appears

especially conspicuous because the conductor obviously stands before a projection

process, a screen used in classic Hollywood to literally project a background image behind

an actor (fig. 2.3). The attempt to seamlessly merge the real radio performer into the

story space fails as his surrounding diegetic elements materialize as a clear example of temporary bokeh, literally enclosing the conductor within an out-of-focus projection of images. In essence, both this and Guizar's performance sequences illustrate different manners of temporary bokeh in the same film. Since he somewhat integrates into the story space, Tito Guizar feels less removed than the other showcased radio performances. Therefore, as his scene progresses, the singer's presence borders on James Naremore's definition of "public figures playing a theatrical version of themselves." Creating a more disjointed feeling, Pelletier fails to smoothly integrate into the fictional space, thereby having a removed nature more akin in its realism to "documentary evidence" (15). Regardless of both these distinctions, such interruptions of narrative indicate how the overall production manages to showcase acts in only periodic disruptions, creating temporary bokeh that never displays the overwhelming influence of pinto such as Mantle and Maris in *Safe at Home!*.

The Radio Musicals of the 1930s, including *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, are precursors to numerous other musical films that incorporate a less-obvious awareness of medium. Much like the "Big Broadcast" series, these productions still contain sequences that incorporate performers famous from either radio or recordings. However, such productions usually do not include the *defining* characteristics of a differing medium, which appear in the Big Broadcast series' employment of radio-announcers and fictional broadcasts. During World War II, Hollywood's effort to entertain the troops often produced motion pictures with flimsy narratives to simply showcase various acts, such as *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), *Hollywood Canteen* (1944), and *Follow the Boys* (1944). An interesting variation upon this fractured showcase structure surfaces in American

International Picture's Beach Party series of the 1960s. Much like the Big Broadcast films, temporary bokeh often materializes as musicians famous from another medium (radio, recordings, and television) occupy uncomfortably disconnected positions within fictional spaces. With showcases in these films, the spectator no longer focuses upon the addition of images to sound. By the early 1960s, the standard rock n' roll acts featured in AIP films already established themselves as musical and visual attractions on popular television shows such as *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1948-1971) and *American Bandstand* (1952-1989). While the motivation of these sequences depends on the transplanting of stars from different mediums, the more startling effect on the audience emerges in contrasts of a different nature. The major distinction now materializes in the musical performer's culturally-defined Otherness, dissimilarities from both the fictional surrounding characters and the film's intended spectatorship. While the demarcations of the Big Broadcast series base in combining elements of different mediums (radio and film) and the contrasts of *Safe at Home!* are iconic, these musical bokeh spaces incorporate cultural Otherness--contrasts in race, ethnicity, or situation. [5]

Clear examples of these cultural variations emerge in the employment of African-American musicians playing themselves to entertain white characters in the Beach Party series. Little Stevie Wonder's famous appearances in *Muscle Beach Party* (1964) and

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[5]

In truth, bokeh spaces often display pinto that encompass varying degrees of different types of contrasts. For example, while *Safe at Home!* overwhelmingly frames its non-cinematic figures as icons, Mantle and Maris also incorporate degrees of Otherness in their cultural position as athletes and as performers from another medium (from televised baseball games). Despite this, the major attractiveness of the two baseball stars remains their iconic status. The reason the spectator desires to see the film has less to do with Mantle and Maris's social Otherness and more to do with celebrity fixation.

Bikini Beach (1964) are the epitome of this crossover phenomenon.[6] Such performance

sequences provide racially-acute textual disruptions. As Gary Morris maintains about the

fictional world of the Beach Party series, blacks "do not exist . . . [outside] the

traditionally acceptable role of guest star" (7). Since the lead characters of the series are

uniformly white teenagers, portrayed by such middle-American stars as Frankie Avalon

and Annette Funicello, it is safe to assume that a similar demographic defines the

productions' intended audiences. In their brief guest appearances, African-American

musicians present a contrast of cultural Otherness for the intended audience; therefore, the

whiteness of the supporting cast becomes a defining bokeh element. Such racially

distinctive disjunctures also materialize in other films, such as the cult classic *The Girl*

Can't Help It (1956), where black performers as themselves, such as Fats Domino, Little

Richard, and The Platters, seem especially removed from their white co-stars. The same

logic holds in the 1950s sex comedy subgenre of this film.[7] Within its fictional spaces,

whiteness dictates the defined racial condition of the world, yet these white characters

periodically go to nightclubs to watch black performers. The appearance of black

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6

Little Stevie Wonder also differentiates from the fictional and actual spectators through his
physical disability, his blindness. It can be argued that stunt casting that displays physical
Otherness constitutes a manner of not only exhibitionism, but exploitation. Such
excessive and troubling contrasts in bokeh (through displaying physically abnormal
individuals) will be addressed in chapter three.

7

Many of Hollywood's post-World War II comedies had a preoccupation with sexual
politics, often severing as modern versions of a bedroom farce. But unlike the screwball
comedies of the 1930s, this period's sex comedies remain distinctive in how they portray
women as primarily physical sex objects, tempting male co-stars without the use of wit or
intelligence. In *The Girl Can't Help It*, this trend is seen as star Jane Mansfield plays
another variation on the sexy "dumb blonde," a comic stereotype popular in the 1950s.
See Beach, 125-29.

musicians in specific performance sequences (performing seventeen songs in total) calls

attention to the heterogeneity of the text, since the fictional white world of the nonactual

persons and the actual black musicians unsuccessfully coexist in the same scenes. It is as if

the (black) "real-life" performers and (white) actors are in different films, unconvincingly

processed into a single heterogenous story space. Such racially-distinctive bokeh focuses

on cultural contrasts, performers removed from an audience's usual cinematic

expectations through racial difference.

Such textual disjunctions become even more complicated when considering pinto

comprised by a distinct *subculture* as opposed to only a different culture. In other words,

Little Stevie Wonder's performance easily indicates its contrasts between temporary

bokeh (the fictional white listeners) and momentary pinto (the actual black performer)

through the standardized cultural marker of race. The disjunction defines itself through

the spectator's awareness of cultural norms. The performer is black and audiences

normally only view white performers in an A.I.P. Beach Party film. Thus, the distinction

created feeds off viewers' cultural understandings of race. Culture, as Dick Hebdige in

Subculture: The Meaning of Style maintains, represents significance because it is "traced

and re-traced along the lines laid down by the *dominant* discourses about reality, the

dominant ideologies." Consequently, the spectator's acknowledgment of racial

differences remains a recognition of dominant discourses that tend to "represent . . . the

interests of the *dominant* groups in society" (15). When the contrast between the real-life

performers and the story space bases in subculture, a complication arises because the

group's defining motivation exists to *subvert normalization*--interrupting the process that

determines our expected socially-dictated ideologies. Hebdige defines subcultural

subversion as follows:

> Style in subculture is, then, pregnant with significance. Its
>
> transformations go 'against nature,' interrupting the process
>
> of 'normalization.' As such, they are gestures, movements
>
> towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority,' which
>
> challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts
>
> the myth of consensus (18).

As a result of such a subversive intent, Hebdige contends that subculture, by its very

definition, remains "an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary

blockage in the system of representation" (90). The pinto (both momentary and

continual) already discussed in this study associates with typically linear systems of

representation--either by proving iconic, associating to another medium, or indicating

cultural differences. Mantle and Maris in *Safe at Home!* indicate dissimilarity from their

surrounding bokeh frame through their celebrity. The radio performers of *The Big*

Broadcast of 1938 momentarily interrupt the audience's illusion of voyeurism by revealing

the institution of film itself. In the Beach Party series' employment of African American

musicians, the real performers and the fictional characters clash because of racial

differences. All of these crucial examples of spectator acknowledgment revolve around

the understanding that the audience will logically follow the systems of representation

defined by culture and medium that anchor the textual disjunctions. This leaves open the

question of how the addition of a knowing *subversion* of normalization, achieved through

displaying pinto from a subculture, alters the viewing process of bokeh spaces. How does

the addition of such *subversive pinto* transform the constructed spectatorship of musical

performance sequences?

To explore this deviation in pinto, I will examine a film text that does not contain temporary bokeh and, instead, follows a structure more closely resembling the prototypical *Safe at Home!*. The film *Rock n' Roll High School* proves structurally similar to that baseball fantasy in its housing of attractive actuality of a singular focus, the cartoonish New York-based punk band The Ramones. The production sells that focus as its primary attraction, albeit with a layer of irony added to its presentation. Advertising for the film prominently employs the phrase "featuring The Ramones" above any of the film's unknown costars. The poster art for the production centralizes cartoon representations of the band framed by caricatures of the cast (fig. 2.4). In many ways, this cartoon image mirrors the intent of a bokeh structure. Much like the diegetic elements of the film frame the real-life pinto, the cartoon representations of fictional characters enclose drawings of an actual band. Also, the film maintains the band's presence throughout, even when they do not appear on-screen. Within its storyline about an obsessional fan's, Riff Randell, (P.J. Stole) quest to see her favorite band, the film remarkably parallels the journey of Yankee-crazed Hutch in *Safe at Home!* by having its protagonist mirror the spectator's need to see the film's "stars." Other basic structural correlations emerge throughout the production as the promise of celebrity actuality and the fulfillment of this promise ultimately define the story space. For example, the credits feature the music of The Ramones while a group of fictional high school students dance in the parking lot of Vince Lombardi High, a promise of the celebrity display to follow. The film significantly places the band's image on album covers, posters, and even life-size cardboard cutouts throughout many of the scenes not featuring the actual musicians. Much like *Safe at*

Home!'s Little League daydream, there is an early fantasy sequence where Riff imagines interacting with the band long before she ever makes actual contact with them backstage. This common plot point seems to appropriately fit the motivation behind the bokeh structure, to display non-cinematic stars. By having a character who is basically the same age of the film's intended spectatorship dream of encountering the pinto, the film solidifies the attractiveness of its display as being desirable to young people. This film contains a defining bokeh composition as opposed to periodic examples of temporary bokeh seen in *The Big Broadcast of 1938.* I wish to examine the musical showcases of *Rock n' Roll High School* not because they provide any variation in the film's defining bokeh structure, but because of their distinctively *subversive pinto.* As the focus of the entire production, The Ramones exemplify this particular manner of pinto deviation, while the fictional spaces of the film remain well-rehearsed (i.e. constructed) just as seen in the other cinematic examples. The punk credentials of The Ramones base themselves in being unrehearsed (i.e. non-constructed), thereby producing intensely unconventional contrasts (textual disjunctures) on-screen.

These contrasts challenge many of the heterogeneous distinctions typically found in bokeh space. For example, the band's first appearance illustrates how the film continuously redefines perceptions of "normal" throughout its fictional spaces. The sequence begins with Riff and groupie Angel Dust (Lynn Farell) arguing over a place in line to buy tickets to The Ramones' next show. As the argument ends, Angel asks, "By the way, who do you like?" Riff responds, "Well, I think Joey is kind of cute." The scene then quickly cuts to a close-up of a novelty licence plate reading "Gabba Gabba

Hey!", The Ramones' nonsensical mantra.[8]   The soundtrack now blares with loud guitar

riffs, as the camera pans up to a moving Cadillac convertible where the band sits "playing"

their instruments to the song "Tonight."   Unlike the contextualized performances in *The*

Big Broadcast of 1938--featuring radio stars in a fictional broadcast--this sequences

emphasizes how the sounds of the music could, in reality, never match the situation since

the instruments have no plug to provide power or amplifiers to produce sounds.   For

example, lead singer Joey Ramone initially sings not into a microphone but into a chicken

leg and the electric guitars remain disconnected throughout the performance (fig. 2.5).   As

the Cadillac moves down the street, the film cuts to long panning shots of the delighted

fans waiting before the venue.   The crowd, many dressed in colorfully flashy clothing and

having brightly-colored dyed hair, provides no physical identification with the real-life

performers and structurally offsets the pinto's subcultural distinctiveness (fig. 2.6).   The

film manipulates the fictional space consisting of the fans to accentuate the Otherness of

the band's appearance, the primary appeal behind their attractiveness.   Even the chosen

setting of a city street signifies intent from the filmmakers, altering elements of the bokeh

frame to highlight the disjuncture.   This choice of setting presents a contrast to the dark

club venue expected for such a display of musical subculture and proves more disjointed

than pinto placed in baseball training camps and radio broadcasts.   Therefore, the band

literally drives into the manipulated "normalcy" of the story space--diegetic elements

altered by the production to showcase a stark contrast between bokeh and pinto.

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[8]

The term "Gabba Gabba Hey!" is taken from The Ramones' "Pinhead," a song inspired by
real-life sideshow performers in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932).   Later in the film, a
cartoonish pinhead appears onstage during a performance of the song.   Fittingly enough,
Freaks is also another film blatantly defined by bokeh spaces.   The pinto of this film,
actual sideshow stars, will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

As the sequence continues and these contrasts become more pronounced, the production further highlights the "unreality" of the musical performance. When the Cadillac finally parks in front of the theater, the band wanders among the fans as they continue "performing" the song. Once again, the *lack* of amplifiers and instruments become comically apparent, as drummer Marky Ramone--without drums--has no choice but to simply tap his two sticks together. The sequence provides an illogical musical performance, with the band floating around on-screen untied to any venue or even amplifiers (fig. 2.7). The film continues to heighten the band's subcultural Otherness by surrounding the musicians with the fictional fans, many of whom seem to resemble cartoonish versions of punks. The extras continue to provide no physical correlation with the band, who are dressed in their black leather jackets and faded jeans, thereby heightening the contrasts between the fictional and real figures. The story elements of Riff and Angel also continue to bleed into the space, as the film cuts to shots of the two actresses still struggling to position themselves closer to the band. The entire sequence emphasizes the pinto's inability to provide a believable masquerade of an actual performance, an illusion other musical showcase films at least attempt to maintain. Forced with these ridiculous extremes in story space, the viewer must confront the commercial motivations of the production to display a subculture. To refer once again to Metz, these musical moments are where the institution of cinema (here in the form of the commercial intention to display a subculture) becomes apparent despite the presence of a narrative structure in the film. Since the spectator must acknowledge that the story space has been altered to accommodate the pinto, the viewer becomes aware of the motivation behind the production--to display a real-life punk band. The primary difference from the

sequences of *The Big Broadcast of 1938* lies in how The Ramones' performances indicate

an institution more precisely defined just by the bokeh structure itself. A Radio Musical

emphasizes the addition of images to what once was only the sound of radio performers,

therefore highlighting images--an attribute common to all cinema. With its adoption of

subversive pinto, *Rock n' Roll High School* highlights discourse common only to the

bokeh structure. This difference appears in the overall ironic tone the film takes towards

its own exhibitionistic nature, seen in the heightened "unrealness" present throughout the

performance of "Tonight." The cartoonish fictional fans and lack of appropriate venue

for the musicians confronts the viewer with the absurdity involved in showcasing a musical

act as subculturally bizarre as The Ramones. Unlike *Safe at Home!*, the celebration of

The Ramones takes on ridiculous degrees, as fans push each other to position themselves

closer. The entire scene, with such extreme reactions from cartoonishly dressed fans,

adopts a tone more akin to farce than any realistic celebrity appreciation. As a result, the

sequence makes the viewer question the legitimacy of even positioning the real-life band

as icons.

In comparison to this punk band, the non-cinematic performers discussed in the

other films provide contrasts to the bokeh frame or the intended spectatorship through

typically linear systems of representation--proving iconic, medium-aware, or culturally

dissimilar. With *Rock n' Roll High School*, the pinto signifies through a much more

complicated set of criteria. The subcultural Otherness of The Ramones bases itself not in

mainstream veneration, normally pertaining to another medium, nor cultural differences. [9]

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[9]

As stated earlier, pinto often exhibit some degrees of all three of these characteristics. For
example, it can be argued that The Ramones provide links to another medium through
their recordings and obtain veneration through a cult following. Despite these

Because the band members are not mainstream celebrities, especially in 1979, The

Ramones fulfill the exhibitive roles of pinto because they historically and visually link to a

subculture rarely seen in typical Hollywood fare of the period or, in a larger sense, most

popular media (including television and radio). The band was the first of the mid-1970s

New York punk-rock uprising to receive a major label contract, providing to the

mainstream record-buying public a distinctive link to an outside subculture not expected in

a sunny teen comedy. The Ramones' status as pinto only aggravates the on-screen

compositions by formalizing the ideology of punk subculture, basically framing *distortion*

in a clean Hollywood production. Since a punk band promotes its performances as being

largely unrehearsed, the idea of presenting the musical act in a narrative world--a story

space usually built on the planned actions of rehearsed actors--appears especially irregular.

The reason for the creation of story space in *Rock n' Roll High School* is to house The

Ramones; therefore, the band remains the primary originating force behind the diegetic

elements of the film. [10] The production's metalanguage originates from the subversive

subculture of the punk band. Therefore, the adoption of The Ramones as pinto subverts

the way spectators must perceive the entire story space of *Rock n' Roll High School.*

The heightened unrealness of the "Tonight" performance illustrates this overwhelming

subversiveness, as not only the band but the surrounding context for the performance feels

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distinctions, the film itself appears primarily concerned with framing them as subculturaly
different, thereby establishing the band as *subversive pinto.*

[10]

The Ramones position as pinto is similar to Mantle and Maris in *Safe at Home!.* As
outlined in chapter one, the real life celebrity of the two baseball icons dictates the creation
and the nature of the fictional world that surrounds them. Without the icons, there would
be no need for the film that frames them. Just like within a photographic portrait, without
the plane of focus, there would be no need for the out-of-focus-ness (the bokeh) that
encloses it.

distorted.

The performances featuring the subversive pinto (The Ramones) exist as self-aware proto-music videos--sequences disengaged from the narrative, yet continually exhibiting their own awkwardness in playful nods to the spectator. The heightened unreality appears throughout not only to offset the band's subcultural Otherness but to caricature the entire exhibitionistic motivation of the production itself. The extended performance sequence at the Rockatorium would seem, by its very implication, to lend credence to the exhibitive purpose of the pinto. Just as the fictional radio broadcasts of *The Big Broadcast of 1938* create a context for performers, a club venue would seem to substantiate the band's disengaged performances. But the Rockatorium concert never allows the spectator to forget the intensely unrealistic nature of the bokeh space. Just like the spectators of the earlier convertible entrance, most of the venue's fictional crowd wear clothing that clashes with the band's distinctively subcultural style. Once again, the desired effect is to contrast the fictional fans' colorfulness with the real-life bands actual style, made-up of dark leather jackets and faded denim. Unlike the singing of "Tonight," the band's performance does seem properly realistic. Yet the scene accentuates the unreality of the surrounding bokeh space to compensate by saturating the auditorium with surreal elements, such as a giant white mouse, an Indian Chief, two nuns, and a cartoonish pinhead. When such heightened fictional elements fail to appear, the production superimposes unrealness over the performance. Throughout the concert, song lyrics flash across the screen, such as "LOBOTOMY" and "DMUB" [sic], reminding the audience of their place as observers (fig. 2.8). As Tom Conley explains in *Film Hieroglyphs: Ruptures in Classical Cinema*, the appearance of writing in any diegetic space compels

the spectator to acknowledge a film's heterogeneity. When superimposed over a

cinematic text, writing "imposes binds such that in the act of viewing, the spectator is

forced to work in various directions at once" (1). Outside of opening and closing credits,

most narrative cinema rarely employs superimposed writing unless it clarifies narrative

points--such as providing translation for different languages or indications of time and

place. In *Rock n' Roll High School*, the motivation is not only to display The Ramones

within bokeh space, but to playfully recognize its own exhibitionistic nature. In this

manner, it toys with Conley's definition of cinematic writing by playfully promoting its

overall dissimilarity (as a bokeh structure) from classic narrative cinema. Unlike most

narrative films, the viewer must accept that the writing conveys an acknowledgment of

spectatorship within the diegetic space, especially since the words (lyrics of the songs) are

provided for a sing-a-long from the spectators. [11] By having the performance sequence

continually interrupted by such distinctive bokeh elements, the production knowingly calls

attention to its own exhibition-based structure. The viewer must contend with the

promotion of the attributes of bokeh space and, in a broader sense, the institution of

cinema itself.

This heightening of contrasts between The Ramones and an altered depiction of

"normalcy" derives from the sole originating force behind the production, to frame and

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[11]

In this rare case, the bokeh elements actually draw focus *away* from the pinto. While still
cinematic elements, the writing becomes a focal point and divert attention from the band.
Despite this odd distinction, the words still remain bokeh elements, since they consist of
formal components adding perspective upon non-cinematic performance. In photography,
such an attribute could be termed as "bad bokeh," an out-of-focus blur that--for reasons
such as choppy patterns of light or jumbled shapes--manages to draw the eye away from
the intended subject of a portrait. Yet in the case of *Rock n' Roll High School*, such an
evaluation seems unwarranted since drawing the eye away from The Ramones appears to
be the intention behind the superimposed words. See Kenderdell, "What is 'Bokeh?'"

limit subversive pinto. Since the punk band proves subcultural by relating to a system that subverts "normalization," the film's fictional spaces reflect this attribute. A clear example of this phenomenon emerges in Riff Randell's bedroom fantasy with the band. Long before the appearance of the musicians, The Ramones' subcultural status adds significance to many of the items in Riff's room, such as posters and record albums. This celebrity-fixation remains throughout the entire sequence, as Riff gazes in theatrical awe of her idols as they materialize within the fictional space. As the scene continues, the appearance of the leather-clad band in the bedroom associates many of the frame's elements to a subcultural tradition of interrupting socially-dictated meanings. For example, pink curtains fill the frame as lead singer Joey Ramone looms over Riff's bed, thereby re-associating the typically feminine innocent color as an ironic or sexually aggressive color. Along with this subversion, the sequence becomes disorienting through its added layer of self-aware unreality--consistently drawing attention to the posed nature of the performers. Throughout, the musicians individually appear in increasingly absurd places that highlight the disjointed nature of the bokeh space, including playing the drums in the backyard and playing the guitar in a running shower. The sequence concludes with a clash between the real and fictional, with the half-naked P.J. Soles as Riff fainting onto the lap of a genuinely uncomfortable Marky Ramone. Here, the unrealness of Marky's pose reaches its pinnacle as the drummer's reaction highlights the incongruent "real" and unreal elements within a purposely framed moment (fig. 2.9).

When considering both temporary bokeh and subversive pinto as separate concepts throughout all these musical showcase films, it is important to remember the principle similarity between these two deviations from the original model. Both anomalies help to

further illustrate the bokeh structure's fundamental challenges to the typical conceptions of narrative cinema. The two deviations similarly intensify disruptions in the voyeuristic illusion of narrative cinema as a closed object. They both emphasize the exhibitionism prevalent in all prominent examples of stunt casting. As a result, these motion pictures contains the remnants of the earliest of cinema. In explaining the origins of his choice of the term "the cinema of attractions," Tom Gunning discusses Sergei Eisenstein's search to find a new model and mode of analysis for theater:

> In his search for the 'unit of impression' of theatrical art,
>
> the foundation of an analysis which would undermine realistic
>
> representational theatre, Eisenstein hit upon the term 'attraction.'
>
> An attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to 'sensual or
>
> psychological impact.' . . . I pick up this term partly to underscore
>
> the relation to the spectator that this later avant-garde practice
>
> shares with early cinema: that of exhibitionist confrontation rather
>
> than diegetic absorption (59).

With the challenges to "diegetic absorption" highlighted by the bokeh structure, the cinema of attractions can live in narrative films, albeit in a different form. The two crucial deviations of temporary bokeh and subversive pinto strengthen the original model's adoption of audience-awareness. Ultimately, they overtly force the spectator into confrontations with exhibitionism different from the cinema of attractions. The "attractions" of bokeh prove significant through their unrealness in comparison to the surrounding fictional space. These are attractions notable for their ability to be non-cinematic.

Images for Chapter Two:

Figure 2.1. - Ben Blue and Bob Hope "perform" for the fictional radio listeners of *The Big Broadcast of 1938* (1938).
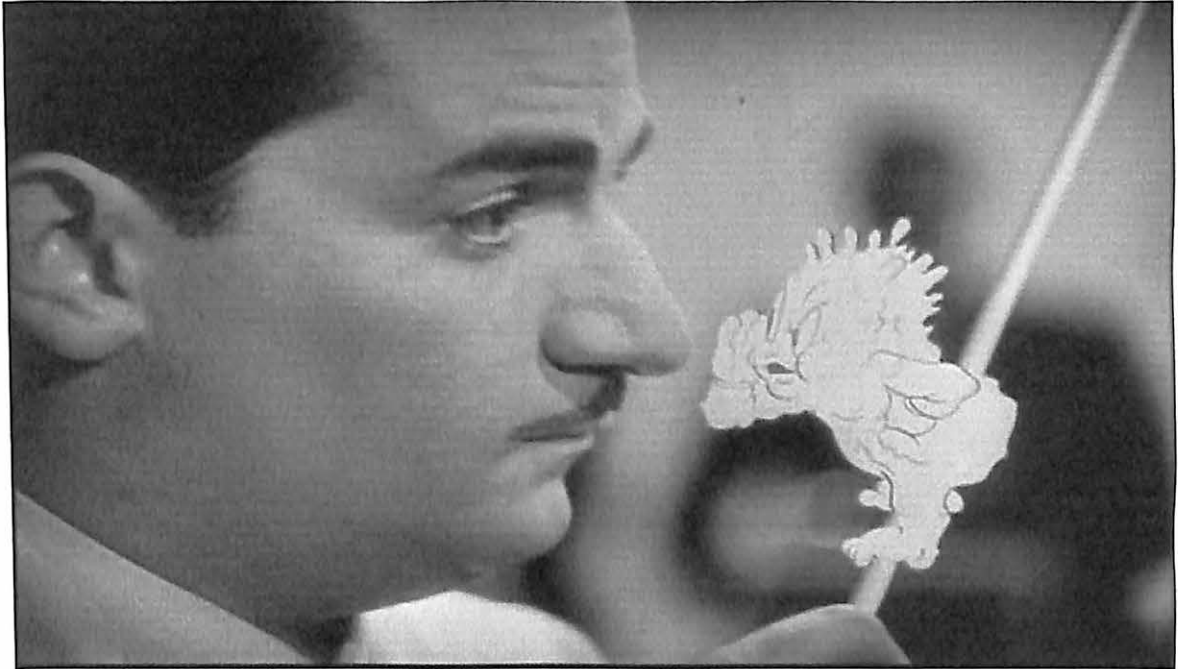
Figure 2.2. - Bandleader Shep Fields with the cartoon "little ripple" of water.

Figure 2.3. - Conductor Wilfred Pelletier stands before the projection of a fictional crowd.
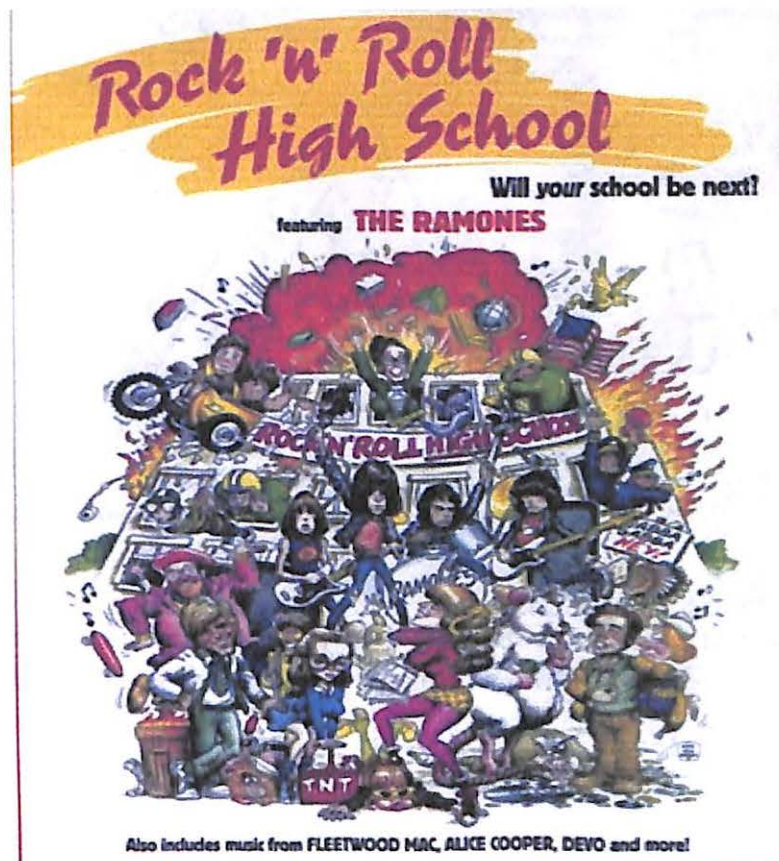
Figure 2.4. - Poster art for *Rock n' Roll High School* (1979) depicts cartoons of the real-life band The Ramones framed by caricatures of the fictional co-stars.

Figure 2.5. - Lead singer Joey Ramone "sings" into a chicken leg, as the band drives into the fictional space of *Rock n' Roll High School.*

Figure 2.6. - Cartoonish "punks" cheer the band's entrance.

Figure 2.7. - The Ramones wander through the story space, a moment that highlights the band's *lack* of instruments and amplifiers.
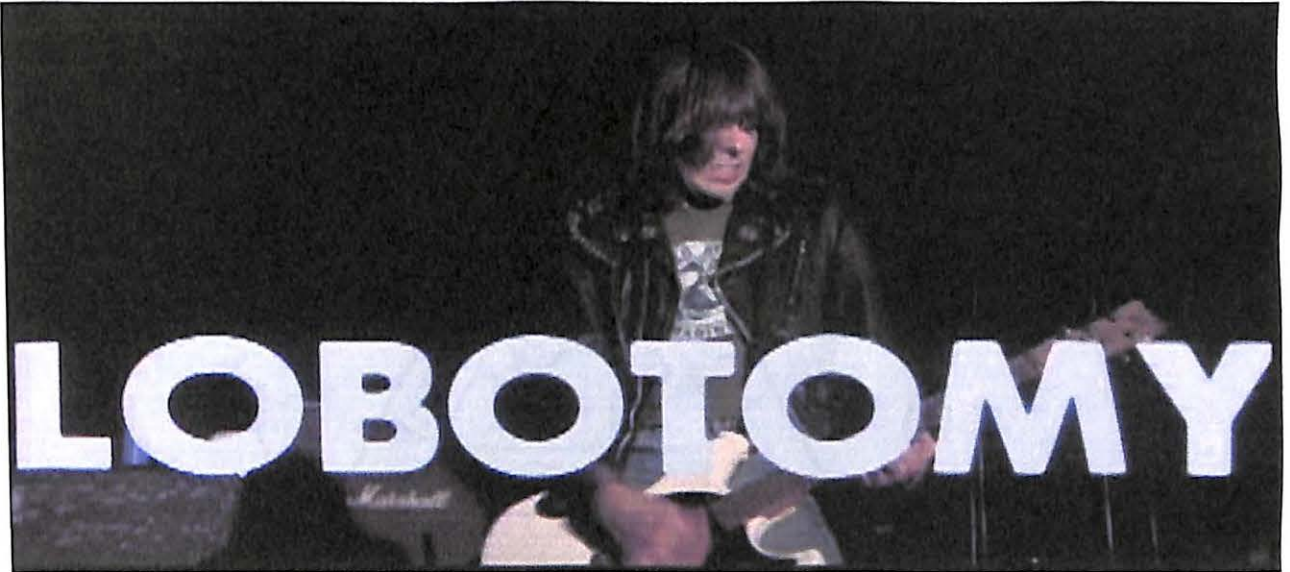
Figure 2.8. - Song lyrics superimpose over the Ramones' realistic
performance at The Rockatorium.

Figure 2.9. - Riff Randell (P.J. Stoles) falls into the lap of a genuinely uncomfortable Marky Ramone.

Chapter 3:

Confronting the Ethical Gaze:
The Extremities of Elemental Bokeh in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932)

Appearing primarily during the photographic rage of the nineteenth century, the

tradition of *cartes de visite* provides many fascinating and bizarre examples of portraiture.

These cardboard-mounted photographs were popular souvenirs from freak shows of the

period, often including on their backs a written description of the subject's condition and a

short biography. Featuring such sideshow superstars as the dwarf Tom Thumb and

Charles Tripp, the Armless Wonder, these photos prove so fascinating not just because of

the subjects themselves but also because of how these attractions are framed. The

photographers of *cartes de visite* positioned their subjects not before an exotic or

abnormal settings that, to a Victorian viewer, might compliment the subject's overall feel

of Otherness, but within an eminently familiar context. For example, photos feature

dwarfs posing beside a baby, armless/legless men dressed in formal attire, and various

other freaks in the typical nineteenth century portraiture surroundings of parlors or faux

gardens (fig. 3.1). [1] The basic goal of such photographs is twofold, simultaneously

confirming the subject's perplexing reality and emphasizing its excessive Otherness by

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[1]
Sideshow promoters already employed this tradition of exhibition within their tents, where
they would feature a freak beside a "normal" person or another freak of opposing
extremes of height, skin color, or weight. For multiple examples of such photographic
compositions, see William C. Darrah's *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth-Century
Photography.*

framing opposites. As examples of portraiture, these souvenirs represent troubling

extremes in the principles behind photographic bokeh space. If the blur outside the plane

of focus intensifies the photo's subject, then *cartes de visite* follow this model to excessive

degrees. The bokeh (both literally and figuratively out-of-focus) adds perspective by

framing profoundly shocking subjects in an intensified "normal" space, composed of such

everyday items as tea sets, wardrobes, or baby carriages. Such photographs take the

formal conventions of portraiture to extremes, directly challenging the viewers'

perceptions of normalcy--the limits of their own subjectivity. The compositions directly

contrast a distinctly "abnormal" figure (a freak) with a manipulated "normal" environment

(the backdrop of a garden or parlor).

If *cartes de visite* provide the extremes in photographic bokeh, then their motion

picture equivalent presents the same for the cinematic version of the phenomenon. Tod

Browning's *Freaks* (1932) exists as a bokeh-defined production highlighting extreme

contrasts between the fictional and the real, featuring real-life sideshow performers with

developmental, physical, and possible mental disabilities framed by a fictional carnival.

The film remains one of the true novelties of the era, a major studio production that

candidly promises unadulterated exhibitionism for the audience in the form of a sideshow-

like production. This sense even surrounded the film's original promotion, with the Rialto

Theater advertising "'a horde of caricatures of creation--not actors in make-up--but *living,*

breathing creatures as they are and as they were born!'" (Hawkins 265). Critics who

denounced the film upon its release understood its disturbing intention and disapproved in

their own callous manner by often attacking the disabled performers themselves. John C.

Moffitt of the *Kansas City Star* complained that there "'is no excuse for this picture. It

took a weak mind to produce it and it takes a strong stomach to look at it. The reason it was made was to make money.'" Elinor Hughes of the *Boston Herald* also attacked the film's performers, stating that "'any who enjoy watching the pitiful, grotesque mistakes of nature may behold them in *Freaks*'" (Skal 178). The film's exhibitionism also dismays modern critics, but for different reasons. John Hawkins writes that "*Freaks* remains a troubling film to watch largely because of its own internal demonization of the freaks and because of the demands it makes on the audience (first we sympathize with the freaks, then with their victims, then with the freaks again)" (271).

All these critical responses sidestep the most logical reason why viewing *Freaks* proves troubling. Since cinematic bokeh allows for the emergence of exhibitionism (blatant awareness of the spectator) over narrative, the viewer must uncomfortably contend with his own role within this reception process. Much like a sideshow, the constructed spectatorship of a bokeh-defined production requires an intention from the viewer to seek out the guaranteed pinto (the non-cinematic performer). The viewing process cannot exist without the knowing engagement of the spectator. The viewer understands the guarantee of the film, seeks out the promised display and therefore takes responsibility for partaking in the exhibition of the advertised non-actor. In accord with Bill Nichols' definitions of spatial constructions in documentaries, *Freaks* forces the spectator to confront his gaze in ethical terms by promoting the production's own attitudes and motivations. Since this bokeh-defined structure frames and intensifies documentary-like reality by couching it within a story space, the viewer must confront not just the freaks, but his own "perverse" desire to view real-life human oddities. While similar physical abnormalities serve as the basis of other productions, such as seen in the

casting of deformed horror star Rondo Hatton, they fail to provide the unadulterated and disturbing displays found in *Freaks*. These attractions produce examples of *ambiguous pinto*, non-cinematic abstractions that seem to belong neither to the cinematic world of narrative nor the real world of the viewer. When contrasted to other examples of the bokeh phenomenon covered in my study, this production pushes the cinematic structure to the limits of exhibitionistic motivation and spectatorship. While *Safe at Home!* and *Rock n' Roll High School* bases the attractiveness of their pinto in the appeal of viewing a celebrity or a subculture (atypical in a social sense to what the viewer sees on an everyday basis), *Freaks* frames only physical abnormality. It invalidates all of the socially-constructed reasons for viewing by forcing the viewer to confront his need to "gawk" at the basest of attractions, the human body itself. As a result, the film creates *elemental bokeh*--cinematic space that appeals to an urge underlying the spectatorship of an exhibition, the desire to view an atypical attraction.

    Freaks provides examples of some of the most jarring textual lesions between on-screen "realness" and "unrealness" ever created by the bokeh structure. The first introduction of the sideshow performers begins by focusing only on the fictional characters of a groundskeeper and his employer walking through the forest. The dialog of the two character reminds the audience of the film's exhibitive motivation, as the groundskeeper tells his employer of a group of strange creatures he spotted--a thinly-veiled promise of the freakish exhibit to quickly follow (fig. 3.2):

        At first, I could not believe my own eyes–the horrible twisted things,

        you know, crawling, whining, laughing!

The film then cuts to an assortment of different sideshow freaks all in a single shot for one

of the few times throughout the film, including Half-boy Johnny Eck, Human Torso Prince Randian, Human Skeleton Pete Robinson, and a collection of pinheads (individuals whose medical condition is known as microcephali). Believing they are alone, the sideshow stars frolic in a sunny clearing. The film cuts to a close-up of the oddities dancing in a circle as they sing a nonsensical song, which loudly blares over the soundtrack (fig. 3.3). When the groundskeeper and his employer (fictional characters and, therefore, bokeh elements who contrast the pinto) finally enter the frame, the freaks run to cling to the fictional Madame Tetralini, as if truly disturbed by the characters and the viewers' peering glances. The groundskeeper yells at the freaks, who continue to hide behind the skirt of Tetralini, who, in this sequence, appears to be their protector from the outside world. As the sequence continues, she explains that the freaks are just harmless "children," an explanation that eventually satisfies the landowner into allowing the group to stay on his property. As the first major appearance of the sideshow performers, this scene fully illustrates the displacing effects of the cinematic *pose* (the unnatural placement of actors and non-actors in a singular cinematic space) in one of its most excessive cinematic examples. There is a circus scene featuring dwarf actors Harry and Daisy Earles (as Hans and Frieda) that directly precedes this moment, but it never matches the potency of the sequence in the forest. This lack of effect might be because dwarfs were and remain familiar players in motion pictures. Browning himself had already cast dwarf Harry Earles in the major role of Little Willie in *The Unholy Three* (1925). With the forest scene, the director presents freaks unfamiliar to motion picture audiences, covering a wide array of physical abnormalities and, thereby, creating a shocking effect on the viewer. The sideshow stars' collected impact is so great that the presence of the three "normal" fictional characters

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(i.e. bokeh elements) feels diminutive in comparison.

The effect of this sequence, just as promised by the groundskeeper, unsettles the spectator unlike any other bokeh-created displacement. Just like its photographic equivalent (*cartes de visite*), the scene proves troubling by pushing the contrasts typically found in cinematic bokeh to exhibitionistic extremes. Similar to all my other illustrations of pinto, the sideshow stars do not follow James Naremore's definition of "public figures playing theatrical versions of themselves." Appearing disjointed from the surrounding fictional space inhabited by actors, the pinto exists as an altered form of "documentary evidence" (15). The unadulterated nonfictional qualities of the sideshow performers was briefly noted by Peter Stastny in his study of psychiatric disorders in early documentary films. While contextualizing his discussion, Stastny presents only one example of narrative film, *Freaks*, as a documentary-like illustration of the relevancy of an "ethical gaze," a concept originally defined by Bill Nichols (Stastny 71). In *Representing Realities,* Nichols explains that "the subjects of documentaries--social actors and historical events--have a life that persists beyond the frame of the text, that camera and its gaze invoke a set of moral/political issues distinct from those associated with fiction." [2] He also relates the typical gazes of documentaries to a filmmaker's implied regard for his captured subject--a quality that, unlike in fictional films, exists as a more tangible concern. Nichols considers

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[2]

Nichols roots his definitions of the gaze in Laura Mulvey's landmark "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," which modifies Jaques Lacan's original discussion of the concept to address how classic narrative film constructs a male gaze. Mulvey argues that the audience naturally takes the point-of-view of the camera, which, in turn, often alienates female viewers in its gaze. While Nichols uses this scholarship to adopt the term "gaze," he ultimately dismisses many of Mulvey's definitions, since they are inherent to fictional systems of representation. He argues that the "[v]oyeurism, fetishism, and narcissism are present [in documentaries] but seldom occupy the central position they have in classic narrative" (76).

the role of the filmmaker crucial in the constructed spectatorship of nonfiction cinema. He contends that, in documentaries, style "implicates the documentarist as a human subject directly; what we see, unlike what we see in a fiction, does not offer the conjectural space of metaphor. . . . In documentary, we see how filmmakers regard, or look at, their fellow humans directly. The documentary is a record of that regard. The implication is direct." Therefore, the style of such a film "attests not only to 'vision' or to a perspective on the world but also to the ethical quality of that perspective and the argument behind it" (80). To Nichols, understanding this linkage between style and moral outlook can be achieved through considering the relationship between the camera and its subjects in documentaries, a concept he describes through the use of an ethical grid. In this system, the categories outlined range from an "accidental gaze," where the camera's position creates the feel of curiosity for the spectator, to a "clinical or professional gaze," with the camera appearing ambivalent in its distance from the subject (79-89).

. While Stastny is correct in associating the film's exhibition of sideshow performers to documentary-style viewing, these definitions must be altered when considering *Freaks* as a bokeh structure. In *Representing Realities,* Nichols defines the formal space of documentaries as follows:

> Since documentary does not address the fictive space of
> classic narrative but historiographic space, the premise and
> assumption prevails that what occurred in front of the camera
> was not entirely enacted with the camera in mind. It would
> have existed, the events would have unfolded, the social
> actors would have lived and made a presentation of themselves

in everyday life irrespective of the camera's presence (78).

As specified by this definition, the formal space of the forest sequence cannot completely be classified as documentary, nor can it be dismissed as the constructions usually present in classic narratives. Instead, the spectator of this bokeh space must contend with a hybrid of both definitions. The pinto are, as Nichols defines them, "social actors," with an existence outside the camera's presence. Within the forest scene, the spectator must contend with the displayed social actors--the pinheads, the half-body, and the other freaks--who lived and eventually died irrespective of the camera and the viewer's gaze. These are realistic elements usually only prominently framed in documentaries. But along with these social actors, there remains the established fictional characters of Madame Tetralini, the groundskeeper, and his employer, figures that cease to exist outside the context of a finite fictional system. As a result, the space on-screen prominently frames elements of both established categories of cinema (documentaries and fiction) by prominently framing social actors and fictional characters.

As a result of this conflict in defined receptions, the bokeh structure heightens aspects of the ethical gaze, where the point of view of the camera must be dealt with through Nichols's ethical grid. By providing a contrast, the sense of figures who--as Nichols defines--exist "in everyday life irrespective of the camera's presence" intensifies in comparison to the fictional space circumscribing them (78). As such, the presence of ethics involved in such a display equally intensifies. The forest sequence not only incorporates the ethical qualities of the gazes defined by Nichols, but magnifies these distinctions. For example, the sideshow performers enact a surprised reaction to the presence of the fictional characters and viewers' gazes by seemingly frolicking without

self-consciousness before being interrupted by the presence of outsiders. As Nichols states, the "accidental gaze depends on an ethic of curiosity for its duration. . . . As with the other ethical codes suggested here [in his chapter], an ethic of curiosity may also entail a pathology. A thin line separates the accidental gaze from morbid curiosity" (83). Since the spectator and the fictional characters correspond in their gazes, the sequence provides a viewer response unlike those found in documentary films. The contrasting effects of the surrounding fictional space enhance this ethically-defined gaze, which adopts a heightened sensation of intrusiveness. Similar manners of ethically-distinctive moments appear in all cinematic bokeh spaces. For example, when the fictional character of Hutch watches Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris practice in *Safe at Home!*, the cuts to the real-life baseball players adopt what Nichols defines as a potent "interventional gaze," where the point of view provided by the camera adopts a feeling of correspondence with the social actors caught in its gaze. While still documentary-like, the practice footage appears staged for the benefit of the camera as the athletes throw and catch before fixed set-ups. As Nichols states, "the camera abandons the precondition of distance, transforming the detachment of a gaze into the involvement of a look" (85). While still providing a realistic practice, the social actors seem aware of the placement of the camera and the intervention of the filmmaker--distinctions that, following Nichols' ethical grid, constitute an interventional gaze. Since the ball players run and then stop on specific marks, the intervention of the camera's position becomes apparent to the viewer.

Freaks proves problematic as a bokeh structure not in this intensification of social actors, but in how it forces the spectator to *confront* the ethics of his gaze. This distinction differentiates the production from other bokeh-defined films. In the forest

scene, the experience of an accidental gaze directly challenges the viewer to question his own desires as an active seeker of the freakish pinto. As many scholars contend, the motion picture clearly exists as a remnant of a sideshow aesthetic.[3] In her book-length exploration of the cultural significance of freak shows, Rachel Adams devotes considerable attention to *Freaks* as a film defined by spectacle rather than narrative:

> [E]arly portions of *Freaks* are characterized by an aesthetic
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> of spectacle that is only heightened by the stiff, self-conscious
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> performances of many of the disabled actors. These performers
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> do not "act" in traditional ways; their wooden delivery subverts
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> the conventions of classic Hollywood cinema by preventing
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> the spectator from becoming absorbed in the drama (67).

This subversion of classic narrative, of course, constitutes the production's bokeh-defined structure. At the beginning of the film, after a sprawling message promoting tolerance for "the abnormal and the unwanted," a title card reads "Tod Browning's production of *Freaks*." Then a carnival barker tears this down, stating that "we didn't lie to you, folks" and introducing "the most amazing, the most astounding human monstrosities of all

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[3] While most modern critics seem content to, if not completely, at least partially link *Freaks* to some kind of exhibitionism, many shed a positive light on the production's presentation of the disabled. Danny Peary stresses the film's focus on the sideshow stars as performers, as opposed to simple physical oddities. He writes, "Browning's point is that people needn't pay to see them [freaks] just because of their 'differences'--with the exception of the pinheads, these freaks are talented show people" (107-08) Robin Larson and Beth Haller, in a detailed analysis of public response to the film, ultimately conclude that "moviegoers were not yet ready to see people with disabilities within the context of equal humanness to nondisabled persons" (171).

time." [4] The film's sideshow aesthetic becomes cemented in this prologue, overtly revealing the spectacular and not narrative intention behind the production. As exemplified by this introduction, the very implication of a freak show motion picture directly links to the most exhibitive of showcases—nineteenth and early twentieth century sideshows. [5] Performance, such as the musical or sports-related talents seen in my other cinematic examples, fails to explain the attractiveness of such a viewing experience. When defining this sideshow aesthetic, Robert Bogdan writes, "'Freak' is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people. It is the enactment of a tradition, the performance of a stylized presentation" (3). [6] Therefore, the freak show presents pureness in entertainment, cutting through a spectator's constructed aesthetic or intellectual reasons for seeking an exhibit. The only "performance" is the presentation itself—the manner in which the human body is displayed.

This clarity in motivation explains why *Freaks'* narrative contains multiple "moral" stances. As seen in Madame Tetralini's reference to the freaks as "children," the sideshow

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In the biography *Dark Carnival: The Secret World of Tod Browning*, David J. Skal and Elias Savada point out that this character is "dressed, rather uncannily, like Browning in any number of his publicity photographs" (175). This observation lends credence to the view that the film exists as a true sideshow exhibition, with the director himself playing barker to the viewer.

[5]

This blatant "sideshow aesthetic" also clearly links to the earliest "cinema of attractions," a non-narrative cinematic structure defined by Tom Gunning. Bokeh's ability to contain remnants of this structure was discussed in chapter two.

[6]

In *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*, Robert Bogdan's primary interests are how the *venues* illustrate social perceptions, as opposed to the freaks themselves. The manner of a freak display characterizes "the place and meaning of the freak show in the world of which they were a part." In his study, "the social construction--the manufacture of freaks--is the main attraction" (3).

performers sometime appear as helpless innocents in need of care. Other times, the film

depicts them as human beings who should be respected and not given the attributes of

children. Throughout their courtship, the "normal-sized" Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova)

continually relates Han's behavior to that of a child and ultimately humiliates him by

forcing a "horsey-back ride" during their wedding feast. Finally, they appear as monsters

when they crawl through the mud seeking revenge on Cleopatra and her lover, the

strongman Hercules (Henry Victor). This lack of a stabilized moral position indicates the

production's understanding that the primary motivation of the spectator is to simply view

the freaks, not necessarily gain any real insight into their lives. Even though the viewer

sees the freaks in various day-to-day activities throughout the film, such as having dinner

and discussing circus business, most of these moments remain untied to any linear

narrative. Instead, these instances periodically appear without context, simply as short

showcases for the freaks. In sideshows, performance remains stripped of actual talents

warranting respect through established societal norms. The stylized presentation itself (the

abnormal on display) becomes the performance. As a film epitomizing such unfeigned

exhibitionism, *Freaks* strips the spectatorship involved in a usual bokeh-defined

production of similar constructed reasoning. In other words, productions such as *Safe at

Home!* and *Rock n' Roll High School* allow viewers to seek athletic or musical

performances, talents accepted through societal definitions. *Freaks* never permits for such

socially "legitimate" spectatorship as it confronts the audience with their own motives as

viewers, that of simply gazing upon the dissimilar. The forest sequence displays oddities

simply *existing* without a performance-based context, thus the jarring effect created bases

itself in our sense of taking part in an undiluted presentation. There are no socially-

accepted illusions in the present gaze, only the unadulterated desire to "gawk" at a human body. It is this unfiltered form of exhibitionism that forces the viewer to confront the reasons for seeking the display, the ethics involved in desiring to view bodily difference. By having the deformities of its stars as its only attraction, the production creates a structure defined by *elemental bokeh*. These portraiture-like spaces purely accentuate a basic underlying urge involved in exhibitionistic spectatorship, indulging the spectator's desire to view the unfamiliar.

When moving beyond the shocking forest scene, the production does attempt to fictionally contextualize its pinto by placing the performers in a faux sideshow setting. Oddly enough, this does little to diminish the intensified ethical gaze present throughout most of the film. The attributes of the accidental gaze—an ethical distinction defined by Nichols that closely relates to "morbid curiosity " (83)—still emerge in key sequences because of the production's refusal to showcase the sideshow performers in theatrical venues. While the displays of Mantle and Maris in a training exhibition or The Ramones at The Rockatorium allow the viewer to identify with a fictional spectatorship (the crowds in the story spaces), *Freaks* purposely never adopts performance venues where fictional spectators also view the sideshow stars. Instead, the film provides the "behind-the-scenes" lives of the oddities as a fictional framework for the freakish spectacle. For example, these glimpses include minor subplots such as Human Skeleton Pete Robinson and bearded lady Olga Roderick celebrating the birth of their daughter and Siamese Twins Daisy and Violet Hilton arguing over Daisy's choice in husbands.[7] In separate sequences,

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[7] Daisy and Violet Hilton star in another fascinating example of stunt casting in *Chained For Life* (1951). Besides continuing to capitalize on many of the perplexing sexual issues explored in *Freaks*, this film also showcases numerous sleazy real-life novelty acts in the

the production's two armless ladies perform impressive tasks with their feet not within the fictional context of a sideshow performance, but through daily activity. While speaking with dwarf Angelo Rossitto in a near static two-shot, one armless lady sews with her stockinged feet, then drinks wine in the same manner. Later, in a more involved sequence, the other armless performer (Martha Morris) cuts meat, eats, and eventually drinks beer without the use of hands. This time, the film initially frames the performer in a three-shot with a fictional circus worker and the Stork Woman, then cuts to a tight shot of the armless girl as she "performs" her everyday activity of simply eating a meal (fig. 3.4).[8] The actions of the armless ladies do not constitute actual performances *per se,* since the spectator simply watches them behave in the most logical manner considering their afflictions. Without hands, the armless women make the rational choice to use their feet at the dinner table. Such an action would constitute a performance only when a person impersonates an disabled individual, such as Lon Chaney in *The Unknown* (1927) or Daniel Day Lewis in *My Left Foot* (1989).[9] In *Freaks,* the performers' use of feet

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constructed bokeh space of a vaudeville club.

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Oddly enough, this sequence only contains one legitimate "freak." Betty Green, the Stork Woman, was not physically disabled but simply an extremely unattractive person who decided to capitalize on her appearance (Skal 167). This provides a fascinating deception in the production by presenting to the audience a freak that, in actuality, does not have any medically-defined disability.

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Tod Browning's *The Unknown* provides an interesting deception in Chaney's "performance" as an armless man. While the actor portrays a con-artist impersonating a disability, he was unable to perform the impressive tasks with his feet needed for the production. Therefore, Browning employs a real armless man named Paul Dismute to portray the bottom-half of the actor in key scenes. Despite the presence of Dismute's legs, the film never adopts a true bokeh structure because its intent is to deceive the spectator into believing Chaney performed the footwork himself. The formal motivation of these scenes encourages this deception as opposed to exhibiting the lower half of

solidifies their roles as social actors, not performers, since the audience understands that the two women perform these tasks daily outside of the gaze of spectators. The formal motivation of the scene remains to frame bodily dissimilarities and the resulting spectacle of freakish daily activities. By failing to provide a traditional performance, the viewer still must confront the accidental gaze involved in viewing a non-performing body, a sensation that epitomizes elemental bokeh. As Nichols contends, such a gaze depends on "an ethic of curiosity" (83). The desire in the spectator to view the armless ladies' activities is to fulfill his curiosity, answering the question of how such an individual manages to eat on a daily basis.

As implied by such sequences, not only the construction of elemental bokeh in *Freaks* but the pinto itself creates a troubling effect on the spectator. As described by Elizabeth Grosz, "the freak is an ambiguous being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions in social life" (57). The societal paradoxes of such popular attractions clearly appear throughout a real freak show settings and, therefore, within the pinto of *Freaks*. As Grosz describes:

> They [freaks] occupy the impossible middle ground between
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> oppositions dividing human from animal [*Freaks'* "The Stork
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> Woman"], one being from another [Daisy and Violet Hilton,
>
> the Siamese Twins], . . . one sex from another
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> [hermaphrodite Josephine/Joseph], adults and children
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> [the film's numerous dwarfs], . . . and the living and
>
> the dead [Pete Robinson, the Living Skeleton] (57).

Dismute (Skal 113-14).

When displayed in a carnival setting, the human oddity purposefully displaces these

monumental perceptions of the commonplace, such as the limits of life, death, gender, and

nature. In essence, freaks are a limit case when contemplating the uncountable "ways in

which the body is lived and represented, the inputs and effects of the subject's corporeality

on its identity" (55). Grosz further defines the fascination with human oddities as based

in the "pleasure and fascination with our mirror-images . . . the mirror image threatens to

draw us into its spell of spectral doubling, annihilating the self that wants to see itself

reflected." As a result, the abnormal person "confirms the viewer as bounded, belonging

to a 'proper' social category" (65).

In a cinematic sense, *Freaks* frames such displacing figures, but the effect does not

prove as monumental as within the true sideshow displays discussed by Grosz. While

displaying a freak such as Josephine/Joseph does highlight the attraction's refusal to

follow a pivotal separation between male and female, the hermaphrodite's returned gaze

does not confront the viewer in the same manner as in an actual freak show. The pure

exhibition of a sideshow, where the freak literally stares back at you, directly challenges

the viewer to engage his own mirror-image—questioning such fundamental distinctions as

living/dead, human/animal, and child/adult. In this context, what ultimately becomes

disturbed by the displayed attractions is the spectator's narcissism. In *Freaks*, as with all

bokeh-defined productions, something wholly different defines the displacement for the

viewer. The hermetic story space of the film unsettles with the appearance of actual

sideshow performers, creating textual lesions within the closed narrative world on-screen.

Much as in *Safe at Home!*, where the stiff mannerisms and awkward positioning of Mantle

and Maris fail to merge successfully with the other actors, the effect is similar as the freaks

awkwardly attempts to interact with "normal" co-stars. For example, after the birth of his son, Pete Robinson, the Human Skeleton, passes out cigars to fictional circus workers. As he walks to each co-star, his jerky movements and stuttering dialog appears noticeably different from the other figures on-screen, all of whom possess no physical disability. As this real-life freak appears in the frame, the disruption of story space actually provides the *fundamental* displacement to the viewer. The appearance of a freakish "real" element disrupts the unity of the on-screen composition.

Despite this structural disruption, the sideshow performers of *Freaks* do manage to contribute to such disjunctures in a manner unlike my other examples of cinematic bokeh. As social actors, the freaks prove less of a mirror-image, as is the case with fictional characters, and more of a piece of documentary evidence--a display of Otherness removed from cinematic convention and, thereby, unable to provide representative gazes. Throughout the film, the sideshow stars accentuate their own inability to be defined, making them unlike any other social actor (or any other "real" thing). This ambiguousness greatly distinguishes *Freaks'* pinto from the other cinematic examples covered in this study. Unlike Mantle, Maris, or The Ramones, the freaks fail to exist within any iconic, medium-defined, cultural, or even subcultural system of representation. The elemental bokeh of the film confronts the spectator with *ambiguous pinto,* figures unable to follow or even challenge any system of representation. By proving physically undefinable through their deformities, the film's oddities serve as abstractions--figures that seem to neither belong in the cinematic world of narrative nor the world of the spectator. Since the figures seem removed from the narrative world--as seen through their inability to successfully interact with their "normal" co-stars--the viewer must acknowledge that the

sideshow stars are "real" (i.e. documentary evidence) in contrast to the "unreal" nature of the surrounding fictional space. But along with this acknowledgment, the spectator must also recognize that the figures do not follow any normal definitions of the human body—thereby making the pinto ambiguous in nature.

To promote such abstractions, *Freaks'* story space (its bokeh) consistently allows for moments where the abnormal performers (the pinto) exhibit an excessively ambiguous nature. In a sequence similar to the casual showcasing of the armless performers, the Human Torso Prince Randian impressively lights his cigarette without the use of any limbs as his fictional colleague discusses circus life, stating "It isn't only our act that gets them [the crowds], we got personality." As the unreal character leaves the frame, Randian, cigarette in mouth, yells out an incomprehensible phrase. A similar instance occurs when fictional clown Phroso (Wallace Ford) playfully flirts with a pinhead, stating "When I get to Paris, I'm going to buy her a big hat with a long feather on it." Another pinhead Sissy's jealous response, much like Randian, proves unintelligible. Such incomprehensible dialogue establishes two crucial sensations for the viewer. Firstly, as commonly seen in the bokeh structure, it accentuates the difference between the cinematic world and the real coexisting within the same diegetic space by contrasting the actor and non-actor's difference in verbal skills. In this manner, it proves similar to the subcultural Otherness highlighted in contrast to the normalized story spaces of *Rock n' Roll High School*. Much as The Ramones' style visually fail to correspond with the fictional teenager's clothing, these freaks fail to verbally communicate with the unreal characters. Secondly, the indecipherable dialogue confronts the viewer with the freaks' ambiguousness, a failure to fit any on-screen or off-screen system of representation. Randian and the pinhead's

inability to utter an understandable line reenforces the excessive vagueness of the ambiguous pinto. The garbled sounds neither follow any conventional system nor does it even challenge one. The muttered dialogue itself exists as a type of conspicuous audio blemish on the soundtrack, open to interpretation and creating different meanings for different viewers.

Since it displays ambiguous pinto, *Freaks* must contend with a problem not present in my other cinematic examples of the bokeh phenomenon. The jarring effects created by the pinto upon the spectator in the early scenes (the confrontations with the ethical gaze) lessen as the film continues. In the simplest terms, the longer one gazes upon a freak, the less freakish the figure seems. This deterioration of impact is why, on a purely sensorial level, the production's most potent scene remains the early forest sequence, where the effects of initially seeing the abnormal deeply unsettle the spectator. By the time Browning stages his emotionally powerful wedding feast, the central storyline of Hans and Cleopatra finally dominates the film, as opposed to briefly interrupting the "behind-the-scenes" life enacted throughout the earlier sequences. In essence, the final quarter of the film adopts a more traditional narrative motivation, thereby drifting away from its earlier exhibitionistic bokeh form. Once again, similar to the forest scene, the sideshow oddities all assemble and revel together. But this time the intense shock of gazing upon something unfamiliar to motion pictures and completely ambiguous in nature has diminished. To counter this reduction, Browning must heighten the returned gaze of the freaks by having the oddities collectively stare into the camera following their humiliation by the "normal" Cleopatra. After she insults the wedding party by declaring, "Dirty–slimy–freaks! Make me one of you, will you?," the film cuts to Cleopatra's point-of-view–the freaks

collectively staring back at her and the film's spectators (fig 3.5). This jarring moment consists of the sideshow stars wielding the power of the gaze, thereby no longer conveying the accidental gazes seen throughout the other sequences. As a result of forgoing the exhibitionistic tone of earlier scenes, this sequence now establishes the freaks as being more smoothly integrated into the story space, moving the film away from its earlier bokeh structure.

After this crucial moment, the narrative transforms into a more traditional horror film, as the freaks crawl through the mud on a stormy evening to exact revenge. While still an overall bokeh-defined film, these final sequences no longer have the oddities blatantly promote the accidental gaze seen in the "behind-the-scenes" context of earlier sequences. The figures now appear less as pinto and more as logical additions to the story space on-screen. Browning individually frames the oddities during this scene, removing them from any contrasting elements except for the surrounding dark and stormy evening. While this setting still constitutes a faux cinematic environment, it remains one that has familiarly housed Hollywood-created Otherness (i.e. monsters) in horror films and, therefore, no longer illustrates an intention to blatantly exhibit. This adoption of a classical narrative motivation allows the production to confront the viewer with the freaks as a distinctive example of subculture—still challenging the viewer, yet making the oddities a less ambiguous display. Martin F. Norden discusses how this turn contains a "chilling contradictory quality." In the sequence, the vengeful sideshow stars manage to mutilate Cleopatra, turning her into a freakish "bird-lady." Since a traditionally disempowered minority uses collective force to disempower a majority member, turning a "normal" female into one of them, this leads the viewer "to wonder if she [Cleopatra] is truly

disempowered or empowered in a new way" (116). Such a paradox ultimately leaves the spectator questioning the distinctions that define such a dilemma, the societal definitions of "normal" and "abnormal."

While the exploitation of disfigured individuals constitutes one of the reasons for *Freaks*' troubling effect on the viewer, it is important to remember that this element alone does not dictate why the production illustrates the extremities of the bokeh phenomenon. The film's adoption of elemental bokeh--an intensified promotion of its own exhibitionistic nature--actually establishes why it holds this position. Other films with disabled performers, even when containing sequences that tend toward exploitation, never manage to fully produce the confrontations with the ethical gaze found in *Freaks*. For example, the argument might be made that William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) exploits Harold Russell's lack of hands as an emotional appeal. Russell, an actual disabled World War II veteran, had only been featured in *Diary of a Sergeant* (1944), a short film made under the direction of the Veteran's Association. Here, he portrayed himself in a non-speaking part that largely illustrated how he learned to use his artificial hands. [10] Wyler, impressed by Russell's ability to use his hooks, decided to cast him as Homer Parrish in his big budget drama--which focuses on a group of solders returning to the homefront after World War II. While his casting seems dictated by his lack of hands, stating that the film's true motivation is to solely display Russell's abnormalness proves problematic since the production also features such attention-grabbing stars as Myrna Loy, Frederick March, and Dana Andrews.

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[10]

In the 25 minute short, an off-screen narrator reveals Russell's thoughts--though this narration is supplied by another person. The makers of the film believed non-actor Russell's thick Boston accent was inappropriate for the production. See Norden, 164.

In the film, Wyler also makes a conscious effort to not objectify Russell, a hurdle the director for the most part overcomes by having him continuously integrated into the story space. Martin F. Norden discusses how cinematographer Gregg Toland uses deep focus photography techniques to frame the non-actor in a similar manner as his co-stars. These moments "show Homer and others in the same shot, often through triangular compositions (i.e. three characters in each shot given relatively equal weight). People in the movie do stare often at Homer's prostheses, but Wyler and Toland's visual strategies rarely prompt the audience to do the same" (166). Despite this intention, some minor exhibitive disjunctures do appear in the film when the real-life veteran performs minor tasks with his hooks. For example, Russell's introduction in the film has the non-actor hiding his hands in his coat pockets. When co-stars March and Andrews introduce themselves, Russell displays his hooks then continues to light a cigarette--an action partly framed in a close-up on the prostheses. Since this sequence ultimately remains unrelated to the film's more traditional narrative motivation, it briefly exists as an example of *temporary bokeh* (momentary exhibitive lapses in narrative that fail to define the entire production). Even if the film contains minor exhibitive scenes, it allows the viewer a constructed "legitimate" reason for spectatorship through its sentimental narrative about returning World War II soldiers. As such, the production never allows for the confrontations with the ethical gaze present in the constructed spectatorship of *Freaks* and permits the viewer to become absorbed in the narrative world of the film.

An interesting variation upon the casting of actual disfigured persons emerges in the films of B-movie horror star Rondo Hatton. Due to a worsening disfigurement caused by acromegaly, Hatton grew to minor fame for his ability to portray "monstrously"

deformed characters with the use of no substantial make-up.[11] The performer's disfigured appearance, which included physically enlarged hands and facial features, constitutes his attractiveness. This peculiar position in cinema history complicates his purpose when considering physical Otherness as a form of pinto. Since he proved an actor of minor abilities at best, Hatton's fame bases itself in his disfigured appearance—a manner of actuality that lends many sequences of his films to the bokeh phenomenon. Yet when viewing his motion pictures, these formal spaces often soften any truly unsettling confrontations with the ethical gaze, sensations that are created throughout the unadulterated bodily exhibitions of *Freaks*. While displaying Hatton's (non)attractiveness constitutes the reasoning for some of the productions, the films' formal motivations often redefine this Otherness as a cinematic element. This redefinition clearly emerges in Hatton's only starring motion picture, Jean Yarbrough's *The Brute Man* (1946).[12] Much like *Freaks*' sideshow performers, Hatton, with his disruptive appearance, remains the promised focus of the production. Even the credits prominently centralize the star,

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[11]

After military service in France during World War I, the actor's exposure to poison gas eventually led to the onset of acromegaly, a slowly progressive deforming of bones in the head, hands, feet, and internal/external soft tissues. These conditions are caused by a disease of the pituitary gland that onsets when the individual has reached full genetic height. The growth hormones resume, yet the bone structure can no longer produce symmetric growth. Though typically caused by a tumor on the pituitary, Hatton's condition most likely was linked to the poison gas. To read more on the disease and Hatton's tragic life see Fred Olen Ray's "Rondo Hatton: Beneath the Skin."

[12]

Before *The Brute Man*, his last motion picture before his death, Hatton had many prominently featured supporting roles. He played the Oxton Creeper in the Sherlock Holmes film *The Pearl of Death* (1944), a supporting role that typecast him in a series of performances as The Creeper. In *House of Horrors* (1946), while he only received featured billing, Hatton had considerable screen time as the central monster. Despite such prominent roles, *The Brute Man* remains the only time he received star billing.

featuring his disfigured silhouette in shadow and briefly providing a closeup of his face

beneath the title of "and Rondo Hatton as The Creeper." In key moments, the film

places extensive focus upon framing not only his disfigured face and body, but reaction

shots of various supporting players. During an early moment in the film, Hatton's Hal

Moffat (The Creeper), stands before a window separating him from a group of shocked

college students "gawking" at his disfigurement. Other moments also highlight a blind

character, Helen Paige as Jane Adams, whose inability to see Hatton's disfigurement

features prominently within the plot by allowing her to exhibit nonjudgmental sympathy

toward The Creeper.[13]   Therefore, unlike the intentions throughout *The Best Years of*

Our Lives, Yarbrough does prominently employ distinct compositions and plot points that

objectify the non-actor.

Despite a definite centralization of a disfigured star, there remains a clear

motivation to counterbalance what could easily become a type of intensified exhibitionism

similar to *Freaks*. For example, the film frames Hatton's disfigured form with stylistic

shadows, a cinematic technique meant to offset his displacing actuality. During repeated

nighttime ascensions up Helen's fire escape, Yarbourgh includes a variety of formal

shadowy effects upon the deformed face, often allowing the shadows from the steel bars

to float across the skin (fig 3.6). Also, the battered hat worn by the non-actor throughout

the film creates a shadow that covers his forehead and allows the remainder of his face to

gradually emerge into the light. In effect, Hatton's disfigurement remains a type of thinly-

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[13]

This plot point connects the film to traditional horror narratives, since a similar
sympathizing blind character appears in the classic *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).   The old
blind hermit in this film (O.P. Heggie) sympathizes with the monster (Boris Karloff), a
subplot taken directly from Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818).

veiled exhibition as opposed to an undiluted pose, thereby only scarcely adopting the guise

of "legitimate" spectatorship. Throughout his interactions with other actors, Hatton's stiff

mannerisms and oddly-articulated dialogue do provide bizarrely uneven interactions,

moments that create definite bokeh spaces as the disorienting actuality of his medical

condition detaches itself from the scene's other formal elements. But the production

keeps these interactions to a minimum by often separating Hatton from the other actors

through physical partitions, which provide the effect of two separate frames--one shadowy

for the abnormal Hatton and one less atmospherically lit for the supporting players.

Outside the waterfront hideout, Yarbrough plays with this technique by eventually having

Hatton hide underneath the darkly shadowed dock as the police walk above him in the

bright daylight, all within a single set-up. Other moments feature the disfigured performer

hiding behind bushes, closed doors, in alleys, and in a variety of shadowy locations

removed from his supporting cast. Often, the split on-screen space seems like two

different films with one based in traditional narrative motivation and the other in the

excessive exploitation of the physically abnormal.

Such a masking of true intent never appears in *Freaks*. Browning's film is a pure

exercise in such excessive exploitation, rarely offsetting its own motivation to push the

limits of exhibitionistic spectatorship. Such an ambitious concept caused Metro Goldwyn

Mayer producer Irving Thalberg and director Tod Browning to originally misjudge how

the masses would accept the film. *Freaks* cost MGM roughly $316,000 to produce and

lost the studio $164,000 upon release. The public's ultimate rejection of the motion

picture cemented its fate as the last blatant exhibition film made by a major studio. Today,

the production exists as a distinct cinematic cousin of *cartes de visite*, which, in

themselves, are photographic embodiments of the sideshow aesthetic. As Robert Bogdan contends, the freak show is an "enactment of a tradition, the performance of a stylized presentation" (3). As a result of adopting this tradition, *Freaks* emerges as a rare example of the extremes possible within a bokeh-defined production by literally challenging the spectator to confront his motivations for viewing. Through its employment of elemental bokeh and ambiguous pinto, the film provides a clear illustration of the basest of motivations involved in the spectatorship of exhibitions. No illusions of socially "legitimate" performance or narrative emerge within the constructed gazes of the film, only the unadulterated desire to "gawk" at the abnormal. This becomes a cinematic experience defined by the audience's desire to simply view the unfamiliar and little else. As the embodiment of unadulterated exploitation, *Freaks* revels in its ability to simply show an attraction without context. In doing so, it exists as the most honest example of cinematic bokeh, ultimately causing the spectator to question not only the structure itself but his role as a spectator of such blatant exhibitionism.

Images for Chapter Three:

Figure 3.1. - An example of *cartes de visite*, this souvenir photo of "Armless Wonder" Charles Tripp shows the performer posing in a Victorian parlor, drinking from a tea set, drinking from a tea set.

Figure 3.2. - The fictional groundskeeper informs his employer of "the horrible twisted things" on the property in *Freaks* (1932).

Figure 3.3. - The freaks dance in a circle, singing their nonsensical song in the forest sequence.

Figure 3.4. - The armless girl's (Martha Morris) use of her feet while eating dinner does not constitute "performance" in a traditional sense. The viewer understands that such individuals perform similar tasks regardless of a spectator's gaze.

Figure 3.5. - No longer conveying an "accidental gaze," the freaks wield the power of the gaze back at Cleopatra and the spectator.

Figure 3.6. - The shadows of the bars provide a cinematic technique meant to offset Rondo Hatton's actual deformed face in *The Brute Man* (1946).

Conclusion:

This study has shown how the peculiar Hollywood tradition of stunt casting--primarily focusing on star-vehicles for non-actors portraying themselves--draws connections to photographic portraiture in its structure and function. Throughout, Japanese concepts of photographic composition. bokeh (blur) and pinto (focus), served as key considerations in my analyses of cinematic spaces. Through using these distinctions, I defined a peculiar cinematic structure I dubbed *cinematic bokeh*. This formal distinction appears in motion pictures that de-emphasized their fictional elements (bokeh) to frame their atypical star attractions (pinto)--celebrities traditionally removed from the world of film. Through my examples, I illustrated not only how on-screen spaces could prove theoretically analogous with portraits, but how the manner of casting nontraditional celebrities and the nature of these celebrities itself can challenge our responses to narrative cinema. The deviations outlined in the study--temporary bokeh, subversive pinto, elemental bokeh, and ambiguous pinto--only further helped to show how the original bokeh model challenges our usual perceptions of on-screen persons. Through the use of this established structure, this study explained how we perceive figures in fictional film that fail to be categorized as fictional characters.

But in the final analysis, how are we to approach this cinematic bokeh structure? In relationship to some of the other components of film, cinematic bokeh might seem a type of anomaly--unable to be simply defined or categorized. The phenomenon emerges in no singular cinematic period, but makes sporadic appearances throughout film's history.

Productions have long employed unconventional celebrities in their films, as is evident in how my textual examples range from the early 1930s to the late 1970s. In actuality, this structure will continue to surface as long as productions wish to capitalize on a non-cinematic star's notoriety. Also as evident by my film choices, the phenomenon appears unrelated to the traditional views of film genre, appearing in sports films (*Safe at Home!*), musicals (*The Big Broadcast of 1938* and *Rock n' Roll High School*), and even horror films (*Freaks*). In theory, bokeh could emerge in any genre simply because storyline, the defining characteristic of genre, appears less of a consideration in bokeh than the promoting of a film's own stars. The best way to approach this structure is to understand that what links these films together is not any established period, genre, or even aesthetic consideration. The texts prove structurally analogous in their ability to build entire productions around non-actors. *Casting* becomes the key component that motivates the phenomenon. The commercial intention to showcase celebrities usually unseen to moviegoers dictates the nature of this cinematic structure, creating the distinctive portrait-like compositions outlined in my examples.

Throughout this study, when considering the nature of non-actor casting, I employ James Narmore's three definitions for how spectators regard on-screen people--as "actors playing theatrical personages, as public figures playing theatrical versions of themselves, and as documentary evidence" (15). But even Naremore admits that these categories, in a way, only begin to specify the complex manner in which a viewer considers on-screen persons. In the final chapter of *Acting in the Cinema*, he explains that "we can make distinctions within these larger categories. Because movies are a specific form of cultural production with a relatively long and complex history, we typically notice whether an

actor's presence in a film seems to correspond with his or her *professional* role" (263).[1]

In this regard, many cinematic figures incorporate within their on-screen presence an

audience's understanding of a star's public self, created by his or her fame. The films

covered in my study often adopt a pure bokeh construction, having easily identifiable non-

actor stars (pinto), famous in some manner completely outside the world of film. A

theoretical analogy to portraiture readily fits such productions as *Safe at Home!* or *Freaks*

because they obsessively frame real-life baseball and sideshow stars in an objectified

manner. In their opening credits and advertising, the films promote the significance of

their showcased attractions above anything else. When understanding that bokeh does

exists as a very real and tangible cinematic structure, the question arises of how this

newly-defined phenomenon forces us to reconsider other examples of unconventional

casting. As Naremore asserts, various kinds of actors create a variety of responses from

audiences that originate from off-screen influences. In this regard, how does the

recognition of films defined by bokeh space--or, in the case of my musical showcase

examples, defined by periodic appearances of temporary bokeh--require us to reexamine

the various incarnations of unconventional casting in narrative films?

    To answer this question, let us consider how many appearances by major motion

picture stars appeal to the audience's understanding of that figure's notoriety outside the

narrative context of the film. These situations become even more complex when

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[1]

In his final chapter, Naremore analyzes Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* (1983),
featuring Robert DeNiro, Jerry Lewis, and Sandra Bernhard, as his primary example of
how the shifting relationship between public images of actors can affect a narrative film.
He discusses how this tale of an obsessive smalltime comic (DeNiro) who kidnaps a talk
show host (Lewis) has its "most interesting formal effects arise from casting, or the art of
playing off personae and roles" (263).

contemplating how motion pictures often playfully acknowledge this understanding. For example, Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets* (1968) features Boris Karloff as Bryon Orlok, an aging horror film star. The film continuously draws upon the audience's understanding that Karloff, in many ways, portrays a nearly identical fictional counterpart to his off-screen persona. Throughout, Bogdanovich acknowledges this correspondence through distinctive moments highlighting the similarity between the real Karloff and the fictional Orlok. Clips from previous Karloff films *The Criminal Code* (1931) and *The Terror* (1961) appear in key scenes and are prominently referenced (through their original titles) by fictional characters. A similar blatant acknowledgment of an audience's understanding of star persona also emerges in Billy Wilder's casting of Dean Martin in *Kiss Me Stupid* (1964). Here, Martin's character is called "Dino," which appears as a blatant reference to the famous singer's actual nickname. Throughout the film, Wilder never clarifies if the figure is supposed to be the singer himself or a character remarkably close to Martin's off-screen persona--which corresponds with the film's depiction of "Dino" as a boozy ladies-man. If we consider such distinctively bizarre examples of casting with the cinematic bokeh structure in mind, the possibility arises that such motion pictures could serve as more complex versions of the phenomenon--incorporating into their structures a less clear distinction between fictional and non-fictional persons. These films significantly frame in their narrative worlds heightened aspects of a movie star's persona, highlighting Karloff's appeal as a horror movie celebrity and Martin's notoriety as a swaggering ladies-man. While bokeh frames the non-actor as its primary attraction, these unusual films frame the off-screen appeal of famous actors--providing another possible variation upon the bokeh model that is linked more to the image of the traditional Hollywood movie celebrity.

The bokeh structure also opens questions as to other types of unique casting traditions. While I explore in my first chapter the peculiar subgenre of autobiographical films--where famous figures portray themselves in their own life stories--there are film biographies that also overtly play with the audience's awareness of off-screen celebrity. Milos Foreman's *The People Vs. Larry Flint* (1996) tells the story of real-life pornographer Larry Flint. During a crucial sequence, Flint (Woody Harrelson) is tried in a courtroom ruled over by a Cincinnati judge, portrayed by the real-life Flint. A similar instance occurs in Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991), where actor Kevin Costner portrays New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, who mounted the first substantial investigation into a possible conspiracy to assassinate President John F. Kennedy. Oddly enough, one of the character's obstacles during his investigation is the head of the famous Warren Commission, Judge Earl Warren, portrayed in the film by the real-life Garrison. Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini's *American Splendor* (2003), which tells the life story of cult comic book author Harvey Pekar, experiments with merging "reality" and "un-reality" in ways that challenge even further the bounds of cinematic space. Throughout the film, the real-life Pekar is shown being interviewed as his life story plays-out with actor Paul Giamatti in the lead. In one sequence, the character of Pekar (Giamatti) waits backstage before a television appearance on *Late Night With David Letterman*. When he finally walks before the cameras, the film provides footage of the real Pekar during one of his numerous appearances on the nighttime talk show from the 1980s. Films such as these blatantly promote their recognition of an audience's awareness of real and fictional persons. Through the employment of the real person on-screen, these filmmakers consciously acknowledge the limits of the fictional counterpart. This technique appears to

provide the possibility of yet another manner of variation upon cinematic bokeh space. These films do not frame fictional elements (bokeh) to offset a real person (pinto), but frame a real person to add perspective on his fictional counterpart. Here, the film plays with the difference between the actual person and the non-actual person in a manner that challenges even the limits and variations upon the original bokeh model set forth by this study. The productions stress the fictional representation more heavily than the real-life person, thereby defying the original contention that the recognizable real figure will garner more attention from the spectator than the fictional surroundings.

The bokeh structure also forces us to reconsider films that employ fictional and nonfictional persons in even more complicated fashions. Director Robert Altman sometimes creates highly complicated on-screen worlds where multiple notable actors play characters beside real-life figures. In his Hollywood satire *The Player* (1992), such well-known actors as Tim Robbins, Whoopi Goldberg, and Fred Ward play fictional characters in an on-screen universe continuously incorporating walk-on appearances by such real-life celebrities as Cher, John Cusack, Julia Roberts, and Bruce Willis (all as themselves). A similar technique appears in the director's satire of the fashion world *Pret-a-Porter* (1994), where actors such as Kim Basinger, Sophia Loren, and Marcello Mastroianni play fictional characters in a film incorporating such real-life designers and models as Jean-Paul Gaultier, Sonia Rykiel, and Claudia Schiffer. Other motion pictures even place real historical figures in their fictional worlds through the use of archival footage. Orson Welles famous faux newsreel at the opening of *Citizen Kane* (1941), where the director assimilates himself as the fictional Kane into actual archival footage, prominently injects famous historical figures such as Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson

into a fictional context. Robert Zemeckis' *Forrest Gump* (1994) performs such trickery throughout its narrative, by using computer effects to place Gump (Tom Hanks) beside such historical notables as Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. These films use the audience's awareness of the off-screen significance of historical figures and popular celebrities to build their fictional worlds. They employ these heightened aspects of a "real world" to frame fictional characters, either by having multiple walk-ons by or integrating archival footage of notable real-life figures. In a manner, these films almost appear as a type of inversion upon the bokeh structure. While the examples outlined in this study provide a fictional world (bokeh) to frame a real person (pinto), these films appear to invert this structure by creating realistic surroundings in the form of "real" people to frame their "unreal" characters.

In the most basic sense, bokeh space can allow us to reexamine how we view on-screen figures in a number of diverse and challenging story structures. The phenomenon illustrates that the people we view in films do not always exist inside a closed world of narrative but, instead, offer a variety of types of representation. With bokeh, I have illustrated how a form of narrative cinema can derive from a motivation to simply showcase in a photographic-like composition something essentially non-cinematic in nature--the non-actor. But in a larger sense, acknowledging that such a structure exists ultimately forces us to reconsider the concept of casting itself. In essence, cinematic bokeh opens the door to a whole new manner of analyzing on-screen persons--focusing on the point where cinematic representation ends and "reality" begins.

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The Big Broadcast. Dir. Frank Tuttle. Perf. Stuart Erwin and Bing Crosby. Paramount, 1932.

The Big Broadcast of 1936. Dir. Norman Taurog. Perf. Jack Oakie, George Burns, and Gracie Allen. Paramount, 1935.

The Big Broadcast of 1937. Dir. Mitchell Leisen. Perf. Jack Benny, George Burns, and Gracie Allen. Paramount, 1936.

The Big Broadcast of 1938. Dir. Michael Leisen. Perf. W.C. Fields, Bob Hope, and Martha Ray. Paramount, 1938.

Bikini Beach. Dir. William Asher. Perf. Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello, and Stevie Wonder. American International, 1964.

The Bride of Frankenstein. Dir. James Whale. Perf. Boris Karloff, Colin Clive, and Elsa Lanchester. Universal, 1935.

The Brute Man. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. Perf. Rondo Hatton, Jane Adams, and Tom Neal. PRC, 1946.

Citizen Kane. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotton, and Ruth Warrick. RKO, 1941.

The Criminal Code. Dir. Howard Hawks. Perf. Walter Huston, Phillips Holmes, and Boris Karloff. Columbia, 1931.

Follow the Boys. Dir. A. Edward Sutherland. Perf. George Raft, Vera Zorina, and W.C. Fields. Universal, 1944.

Freaks. Dir. Tod Browning. Perf. Harry Earles, Daisy Earles, Wallace Ford, and Olga Baclanova. MGM, 1932.

The Girl Can't Help It. Dir. Frank Tashlin. Perf. Tom Ewell, Jane Mansfield, and Little

Richard. 20th Century Fox, 1956.

The Greatest. Dir. Tom Gries and Monte Hellmen. Perf. Mohammad Ali and Ernest

Borgnine. Columbia, 1977.

Hollywood Canteen. Dir. Delmer Daves. Perf. The Andrew Sisters and Jack Benny.

Warner, 1944.

House of Horrors. Dir. Jean Yarbrough. Perf. Martin Kosleck, Virginia Grey, and Rondo

Hatton. Universal, 1946.

Ivan the Terrible. Dir. Sergei Eisenstein. Perf. Nikolia Cherkasov. Alma Ata, 1945.

The Jackie Robinson Story. Dir. Alfred E. Green. Perf. Jackie Robinson and Rudy Dee.

Eagle Lion, 1950.

JFK. Dir. Oliver Stone. Perf. Kevin Costner, Kevin Bacon, and Tommy Lee Jones.

Warners, 1991.

The Kid From Texas. Dir. Kurt Newman. Perf. Audie Murphy and Gale Storm. Universal,

1950.

The King of Comedy. Dir. Martin Scorsese. Perf. Robert DeNiro, Jerry Lewis, and Sandra

Bernhard. 20th Century Fox, 1983.

Kiss Me Stupid. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. Dean Martin, Kim Novak, and Ray Walston.

Lopert Pictures, 1964.

The Man of a Thousand Faces. Dir. Joseph Pevney. Perf. James Cagney, Jane Greer, and

Dorothy Malone. Universal, 1957.

My Left Foot. Dir Jim Sheridan. Perf. Daniel Day Lewis and Brenda Fricker. Ferdale

Films, 1989.

Muscle Beach Party. Dir. William Asher. Perf. Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello, and

Stevie Wonder. American International, 1964.

Olympia. Dir. Leni Riefenstahl. Olympia Films, 1938.

The Pearl of Death. Dir. Roy William Neal. Perf. Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, and

Rondo Hatton. Universal, 1944.

The People Vs. Larry Flint. Dir. Milos Foreman. Perf. Woody Harrelson, Courtney Love,

and Edward Norton. Columbia, 1996.

The Player. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Tim Robbins, Whoopi Goldberg, and Fred Ward. Fine Line, 1992.

Pret-a-Porter. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Marcello Mastroianni, Sophia Loren, and Kim Basinger. Miramax, 1994.

The Pride of the Yankees. Dir. Sam Wood. Perf. Gary Cooper, Walter Brennan, and Babe Ruth. RKO, 1942.

Private Parts. Dir. Betty Thomas. Perf. Howard Stern, Robin Quivers, and Paul Giamatti. Paramount, 1997.

The Red Badge of Courage. Dir. John Huston. Perf. Audie Murphy and Bill Mauldin. MGM, 1951.

Rhapsody in Blue. Dir. Irving Rapper. Perf. Robert Alda, Joan Leslie, and Oscar Levant. Warners, 1945.

Rock n' Roll High School. Dir. Allan Arkush. Perf. The Ramones, P.J. Stoles, and Clint Howard. New World, 1979.

Safe at Home!. Dir. Walter Doniger. Perf. Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris, and William Frawley. Columbia, 1962.

Singing in the Rain. Dir. Stanley Donen. Perf. Gene Kelly, Donald O'Connor, and Debbie

Reynolds. MGM, 1952.

Stage Door Canteen. Dir. Frank Borzage. Perf. Judith Anderson, Kenny Baker, and Edgar

Bergen. United Artist, 1943.

Sunset Blvd. Dir. Billy Wilder. Perf. Gloria Swanson and William Holden. Paramount,

1950.

Targets. Dir. Peter Bogdanovich. Perf. Boris Karloff, Tim O'Kelly, and Peter

Bogdanovich. Paramount, 1968.

The Terror. Dir. Roger Corman. Perf. Boris Karloff, Jack Nicholson, and Sandra Knight.

AIP, 1963.

A Time For Dying. Dir. Bud Boetticher. Perf. Audie Murphy and Peter Brocco. Corinth,

1969.

To Hell and Back. Dir. Jesse Hibbs. Perf. Audie Murphy, Marshall Thompson, and

Charles Drake. Universal, 1955.

Top Hat. Dir. Mark Sandrich. Perf. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. RKO, 1935.

The Unholy Three. Dir. Tod Browning. Perf. Lon Chaney, Mae Busch, and Harry Earles. MGM, 1925.

The Unknown. Dir. Tod Browning. Perf. Lon Chaney, Joan Crawford, and Norman Kerry. MGM, 1927.

Wes Craven's New Nightmare. Dir. Wes Craven. Perf. Heather Langenkamp, Robert Englund, and Wes Craven. New Line, 1991.

Young Mr. Lincoln. Dir. John Ford. Perf. Henry Fonda and Alice Brady. 20th Century Fox, 1939.

Young Thomas Edison. Dir. Norman Taurog. Perf. Mickey Rooney and Fay Bainter. MGM, 1940.

The Unholy Three. Dir. Tod Browning. Perf. Lon Chaney, Mae Busch, and Harry Earles.

MGM, 1925.

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Young Thomas Edison. Dir. Norman Taurog. Perf. Mickey Rooney and Fay Bainter.

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EDUCATION

Bossier Parish Community College
Field: General Studies
Degree: Transfer Credits Toward Bachelor of Arts. Fall 1995-Spring 1998

Louisiana State University in Shreveport
Field: English
Degree: Bachelor of Arts. May 2001(graduated *cum laude*)

Oklahoma State University
Field: English with Film Studies Concentration.
Thesis: "Actor-less Attractions: Bokeh Space and Stunt Casting in Narrative Cinema."
Completed the Requirements for Masters of Arts degree at Oklahoma State University in May 2004.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Harry S. Campbell Scholarship. Spring 2004.

Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. Spring 2003-present.

Diana Cox Award for the best paper on the images of women in popular culture. Southwest-Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association. Spring 2003

Outstanding English Major. Louisiana State University in Shreveport. Spring 2000.

Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society. Spring 1999-present.

MEMBERSHIPS

Oklahoma Film & Video Studies Society. Fall 2003-present.

Vice President, English Graduate Student Association. Fall 2003-present.

Popular Culture Association. Spring 2003-present.

President, Oklahoma State University Film Appreciation Society. Fall 2002-present.

Society for Cinema Studies. Fall 2002-present.