SYSTEM AND SPECTRALITY: INVESTIGATING DAVID BORDWELL'S MANUAL(S) OF CLASSICAL NARRATIVE CINEMA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: "SPIRIT" AND "THE CUT"

The inspiration for this project stems in part from two different sources: the first was a paper that I wrote during the fall semester of 2007 for Dr. Brian Price's seminar on Avant-garde cinema. Taking Antonin Artaud as its focal point, the paper sought to come to terms with what I was then calling "the surgery of spectatorship," but which I now more precisely think of as the spectrality of film-viewing. As I began to research this topic, I discovered that spectrality has a long and troubled history—not only in film theory, but also within wider debates within continental philosophy and its various post-structuralisms. At its core (in the context of my own readership) lies the thinking of Jacques Derrida, particularly his work on the question of "spirit" in Heidegger's rectorship address.[1] Although far too complex for me to do it justice within the span of a mere introduction, Derrida's intervention has been foundational for my work on two levels: Firstly, that "spirit," as a concept and as a thing, is always constitutively spectral—it is, in other words, a figure of the double. It is this status that the quotation marks surrounding it attempt to account for—a gesture that Derrida eventually finds both inadequate and seductive. In Heidegger's thought, the quotation marks serve, in part, to intervene in order to ensure the reader that "spirit" is something that he wishes to revise, to come to grips with in order to move beyond its connotative adherence to a philosophical tradition.

[1] In Derrida, Jacques. *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question,* trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

He purports, perhaps, to *not* speak of it in its association with a Hegelian logic of onto-theology; that is, a conception of "spirit" that defines it as a unifying and transcendent principle of signifying and historical meaning, concentrated within the cyclical reasoning of the dialectic. What Heidegger wishes to "avoid,"[2] in this case, might be that eventual moment of the dialectic that sees spirit ascend and become sovereign, retroactively positing the stubborn dialectical ruptures as inevitable moves towards a higher resolution in religious spirit. This move would seem to be strictly at odds with Heidegger's ontological conception of being as a function of spacing—as itself defined as "nearness" to itself.[3] In seeking to refine and depart from Hegel's spectrality, then, Heidegger conceives of a ghost that is both new and old—both, because the exact status of "spirit" and its quotational prison will have always been up for decision, not least of all because of its unbounded appearance within the announcement of Heidegger's political downfall. "Spirit," then, is a figure of the double in Heidegger's writing because of what Derrida introduces as the moment of "avoiding" that suggests both a phobia and a secret predilection for its connotative force(s). Answering one phantom with another, Heidegger splits him-self into two competing acts of thinking, which function in a way very similar to, but not synonymous with, the dialectic. Derrida stages the question of such a conflict : "What does "avoid" mean…I'm thinking in particular of all those modalities of "avoiding" which come down to saying without saying, writing without writing, using words without using them: in quotation marks, for example…."[4]

[2] Ibid, 1-7.

[3] This formulation is famously articulated in: Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 213-267.

[4] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 2.

This idea of "spirit" and its silence (through *not* being spoken about in a particular sense) have remained with me beyond the bounds of that original paper because of its resonance across filmic discourses as diverse as historicist archival research, genre studies, feminist theories of spectatorship, certain psychoanalytic perspectives, and cognitive psychological approaches to film form and film viewing. For instance, "spirit" is most pervasively at work (although seldom explicitly named) when we talk about the mythological underpinnings of a genre that is burdened with representing a seminal moment of the national imaginary. I am thinking particularly of the Hollywood western, especially its place in the writings of Robert Warshow:

> Above all, the movies in which the Westerner plays out his role preserve for us the pleasures of a complete and self-contained drama—and one which still effortlessly crosses the boundaries which divide our culture—in a time when other, more consciously serious art forms are increasingly complex, uncertain, and ill-defined.[5]

I choose this quote not to single Warshow out (in fact, I have found this essay endlessly fascinating and surprising), but because I see within it a conflictedness that typifies the process of writing about something that cannot be manifested: the unspoken, unrepresentable "spirit" (of an age, a decade, a people, etc.) that peeks out from behind the corners of the text in question; in this case, the figure of the classical Hollywood Western. What is particularly note-worthy about Warshow's conclusion is its attempt to take seriously the paradox that the Western performs: on the one hand, 'crossing the boundaries of culture' and providing a certain unity of experience; on the other hand, a

[5] Robert Warshow, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner," in *Film Theory and Criticism (5th Ed.)* eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 667.

conception of the modern world that now sees the Western as somewhat outdated, even "archaic," to quote Warshow.[6] What resonates from within this essay (and particularly this quote), then, is the enticing relationship of a figure (the Western) to its ground (culture). The fact that the latter goes so unqualified—indeed, is virtually taken for granted—indicates, not conceptual or intellectual carelessness, but a certain (un)canny relationship to the knowledge that we may or may not have about the time and place that we live in, and the meaning that we may accordingly make therein. What Warshow's piece expresses—what it attempts both to take for granted and to take very seriously—is a relationship to the art object that stresses the spacing it represents: the distance it has not only from our own work-a-day experience of modernity, but also from that unqualified double of "culture" that makes its way into the tail-end of a discourse, virtually announcing itself as an old friend. It is this constitutive tendency that continues to fascinate me, not only about film theory in particular, but *thinking* in general. Where, when, and in what way will "we" have been able to conceive of our relationship *to ourselves*. That is the question the Western really asks, according to Warshow, and it is also the question that haunts this essay.

The other, later impetus for this piece is the thinking of my advisor and mentor, Dr. Brian Price. In a talk entitled "The Sacred and the Violent" (a chapter from a forthcoming project entitled *Fables of Causality: Cinema After Metaphysics*), Price teased out the political and philosophical import of traditional accounts of film theory and history, and concluded that they often function logocentrically—that is, as forms of apophatic reasoning: in seemingly innocent discussions of cinematic development, a

[6] Ibid.

regressive conception of history is at work—one that is determined to see an absolute and unified narrative that can only be "produced" negatively—that is, through its apparent metonymic relationship to the operations of form and style that the specific film text engages in. What film is coerced into expressing, then, is an indexical relationship to a certain conception of "spirit." Significantly, Price "begins" with the cut—that most basic unit of film editing:

> I am particularly interested in the ways in which we use this word, the cut. I am interested in what the word hides in or between images; how it announces what it hides; and how the sacrificial connotations of the word *and* the practice have thus far eluded our understanding. What I am interested in is the paradox of the cut, this practice that binds two images, and in doing so, cannot be seen.[7]

It is this initial observation that forms the basis of Price's contention that our attitude to film form is apophatic: that it works, like Saussure's signifier, to negatively define something else in relation to itself, and that this something else is often conceived of religiously, as providing a synthesis or "essence" of experience that binds the abject particularities of a discourse together. Price speaks of the "sacrifice" of the cut, how it "gives itself to the ghost" in order to ensure a higher signification. He also speaks of faith—that which we must have in order to believe that the cut works in the way that it does, and that it expresses what it *must*.

"Spirit" and the cut. These two "concepts" (if such a word is even appropriate) have formed what could be considered the basis for the present work. It is no accident, then, that this paper engages so insistently with the work of David Bordwell. I have been

[7] Price, Brian. "The Sacred and the Violent." Chapter from a forthcoming manuscript, 3.

driven towards Bordwell's work for a number of reasons, but by way of a beginning let me simply say that Bordwell is always thinking about continuity, both aesthetically and institutionally; both about what it looks like and about its conditions of possibility. In doing so, he is also a thinker of the cut, but in a way that Price would no doubt call severely apophatic. It is my opinion (I hesitate to call it a "belief!") that Bordwell's corpus, because it is so stringently apophatic, is an instructive example of the spacing that must exist between a thinker and his work: how one must eventually depart from what one has written, essentially letting the text speak through itself in the imminent break of a reading. Bordwell's work dramatizes this, first of all, because of its repetitive nature; always, as I have said, about continuity on one register or another. In book after book, Bordwell seems to agonize over the inevitable moment when he will have to leave films to themselves again, never entirely accounted for within his feverish archival studies. But Bordwell's work is also of unique interest today because of what it wishes to ensure—a systematic conception of self and other that takes both against the background of a certain familiar ground: one that is never directly representable, but which is called forth in the interstices of writing and reading film. It is Bordwell's attempt, not just to "prove" the existence of this ground, but to take it for granted, that I will be investigating here. This ground is almost invariably referred to by Bordwell as "classical narrative," but he often speaks synonymously of Hollywood; of its system(s), its style, and its influence. Continuity, then, refers not only to the continuity of a specific film narrative, but continuity writ large—across a spectrum of texts that Bordwell encloses within a haunting schematic of "classical" force. This notion of the "classical," moreoever, is also marshaled by Bordwell in the service of analyzing the scholarly institution in which he

works—a "system" that bears many remarkable similarities to the aesthetic paradigm that Bordwell will never, apparently, stop describing. The structures and strategies in place that both constrain and permit his labor (for, indeed, labor is what I take it to be) are an endless source of both fear and fascination for him, not the least because they serve as the locus of both his scholarship and the work of certain others that he would like to dismiss: psychoanalytic thinkers, semioticians, Marxists, cultural critics, and all of the other purveyors of his so-called "Grand Theory." "Continuity," "classical narrative," Hollywood, the institution of film studies and its prescriptive conditions for having and "making meaning: it is the spectral operation of these "systems" that eventually makes Bordwell's writing so instructive, not the least because it works to problematize the very legitimacy of his project. But, more of that later.

My project (you have probably realized) is a deconstructive one, but I hope that will not deter the reader from thinking that this work is also haunted by a certain practicality—the imminent possibility that it might be picked up and *used*, driven into service by an-other. I feel very close to Bordwell in this regard, and I wish to say it in the introduction, at the risk that I might forget myself during the course of a writing: I am jealous of Bordwell. I believe that he has demonstrated something fundamental about "making meaning." In doing so, however, what place will there have been for the system(s) that he so earnestly wishes to exist? Indeed, what place will there have been for any of us?

CHAPTER II
SYSTEM AND SPECTRALITY

THE SYSTEM AND ITS DEVICES

Judging from the title, one might expect David Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006) to represent a typically uncomplicated explication of his much-cherished "Hollywood Style." This is, in fact, the stated point of the text. However, perhaps more urgently a matter of concern for Bordwell (and for us) is the nature and progression of what he terms "intensified continuity": that tendency of new Hollywood cinema (post-1960, according to Bordwell) to accelerate the so-called "devices" of seamless narrative (dynamic cuts, multiple lenses, mobile cameras, and frequent close-ups) in the name of energizing the viewing experience. The progression of this trend is (for Bordwell) a provocative source of both interest and anxiety: on the one hand, the panorama of post-1960s American film offers him an enticing opportunity to re-describe and consolidate his conception of the Hollywood "system"; a task at once historical, aesthetic and—despite Bordwell's implicit claims to the contrary—deeply political.[8] On the other hand, the very description of that system results in a vision of Hollywood that, while as seamless and historically static as ever, has nevertheless gone out of control; it has, in

[8]Although writings on Bordwell are numerous, critiques that actually tease out the political import of his scholarly project are relatively few in number. One of the most high profile attempts is made by Slavoj Zizek in: Slavoj Zizek, *The Fright of Real Tears (*London: British Film Institute, 1999). Zizek offers an initial series of provocative (and, I think, correct) attacks on Bordwell's school of Neo-formalism before predictably degenerating into a scattered rehearsal of dialectical torsions and anti-historicist revolt. For a much more cogent and sustained engagement with the politics of Bordwell, see: James S. Hurley, "David Bordwell's Iron Cage of Style", *Film-Philosophy* . 2, no. 26 (1998).. For a terrific critique of Zizek's critique, see: John Orr, "Right Direction, Wrong Turning: On Zizek's _The Fright of Real Tears_", *Film-Philosophy* 7, no. 30 (2003).

short, become "too" Hollywood for Bordwell's liking. This apparent paradox, then, urges him to engage in a circumspective but continuous polemic; in describing the prevalent "tools" of intensified continuity, he cannot help but describe how easily they can be abused. This polemic, significantly, carries the benevolent concern of a *diagnosis.* Take, for instance, this deflated evaluation (one of many) of a scene layout from Peter Jackson's *The Two Towers* (2002):

> In our sequence, the cuts and camera moves display no overarching pattern…The result of cutting to every speaker for each line and fleeting reaction is a haphazard shot-snatching. Every shot is interrupted by another, as if to display a little of each angle of coverage; but no image can develop much power. Oddly, a strategy designed to amp up energy serves to dissipate it.[9]

This example, then, serves as one of the innumerable symptoms of a "new" system that respects and continues the logic of Bordwell's Hollywood, but whose most prevalent devices frequently serve to constrain the choices and range of expression of directors. Here, the overwhelming interruption of each shot by the cut results in a strange double gesture: on the one hand, it speeds up the action; on the other hand, it discharges the potential "energy" of the sequence. This paradox, moreover, manifests itself in the strange conflict between the continuity of the macrocosmic Hollywood system itself, and the "interruption" that the individual device (here, the cut from shot to shot) achieves in the proper functioning of that system. Both agent for and contamination of Hollywood, the device plays a role in a narrative that Bordwell does not, perhaps, realize he is telling. It is the apparent paradoxes of that narrative that I will attempt to address in this chapter.

[9] David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 165.

In particular, I am interested in the doubled nature of the "Hollywood system" that Bordwell's book articulates. Specifically, I believe the figure of the double implicates Bordwell's argument in an unwitting experiment in deconstruction. This deconstruction, moreover, attends not only to Bordwell's individual text, but also to his corpus as a whole, and by extension to the very idea of writing (a) cinematic ontology(s) of film form. More explicitly, I believe that Bordwell's conception of classical cinema(s) results in a spectral logic that renders each movement doubled—each system at once constituted and haunted, that is, by its opposite.

To begin with, we must attend to the historical break that Bordwell posits in Hollywood history: The first half of the twentieth century, typified by the dominance of high classical narrative practices; and the second half, in which intensified continuity attains dominance. The first period, as famously described by Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, is conceptualized as a three-tiered system, wherein the primary system of narrative logic dominates the particular devices of spatial and temporal logic (three-point lighting, parallel editing, jump-cuts, etc.). A cohesive system unto itself, Hollywood style is also, then, an interrelationship between systems and devices of systems:

> In the Hollywood style, the systems do not play equal roles: space and time are almost invariably made vehicles for narrative causality. Moreover, specific principles govern that process. At this level, even irregularities in the various systems can be seen as purposeful. For instance, if we do find a passage of discontinuous cutting, we can ask whether it is still serving a narrative function (e.g., to convey a sudden, shocking event). In such a case, the relation among

systems would remain consistent even if the individual device or system varied from normal usage.[10]

Significantly, then, Bordwell limits the evolution of the Hollywood system with respect to which devices become popular for specific functions. In other words, the defining system of narrative and the secondary systems of spatial and temporal logic remain fixed through the whole of Hollywood history. Therefore, the era of intensified continuity simply represents a shifting of philosophy with respect to which devices shall fulfill which narrative duties. Underlying the historical change of devices, then, is a hallowed ground that remains always the same; in each and every case, the system of narrative logic will have overseen the operations of spatial and temporal construction through a placement that is both before (in the sense of a grounding and constitutive principle) and through (because it is manifested in the relationship of spatial and temporal devices) its manifesting devices.

However, we may ask: Why this concern over the excessive cutting of intensified-continuity? If the devices remain consistent in their usage (and Bordwell does not suggest that the sequence he describes is excessive in any "radical" way), then how can they still generate a dissipation of the *effect* that they were intended to have in the first place? How, in other words, can the frequency of the cut still account for a certain level of discomfort, however "comprehensible" it still remains? The answer, I believe, is simply that the device (in this case, a simple cut) begins to signify something other than what it should: it becomes, then, a spectral figure. What this means, is that while still (apparently) signifying "system," the device begins to also signify its antithesis: the

[10] David Bordwell; Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 6.

destruction or—more worrisome—even the non-existence of system. When Bordwell expresses anxiety over the ways in which a device works, then, what he is really fretting over is no small matter of slight deviation from a norm, but in fact the calling into question of any kind of cohesive, schematic logic.

The double complicates, then, Bordwell's narrative. On the one hand, we have a Hollywood system that never changes; on the other hand, there is apparently a decisive break between "old" (classical) and "new" (hyper-classical) Hollywood; a break that also signals a new status for its devices. This ambivalent break, moreover, is very much a matter of the relationship of figure and ground. In this context, the Hollywood device is the manifest figure that acts as the singular sign of the system, whereas seamless narrative is the ground and horizon defining the limits of what a given figure can and cannot do. However, even as narrative logic apparently dictates the teleology of its elements, it is the devices themselves that not only articulate that system, but act as its explicit metonymic signifiers. In other words, there is no Hollywood system without its devices. This figuration of the system, then, calls forth what for us will be the primary importance of the double: even as the figure in question is dictated by its ground, the former is always and simultaneously the calling into question of "system" *as such*. This *operation*, then, results in a perspective in which the universal (system) and the particular (device) are indistinguishable from one another. The import of this for Bordwell's argument is clear: he wishes to assign cinematic devices a secondary status because they *follow* from the dictates of the Hollywood system. However, there will have been no proof of system without devices, and accordingly there will have been no deciding on the

originary status of either.[11] What Bordwell does, however, should not hastily be seen as a mere conceptual weakness. Indeed, it is this paradoxical quality that makes his schema as seductive and *haunting* as it is. The extent to which this haunting quality of system can be accounted for, moreover, leads in the direction of what Bordwell can least afford to (not) talk about: the spectral possibility of the double as an *automatic* effect of inscription in any form, whether it be a filmic device, a speech act, or the loaded process of historical and aesthetic decision. The Hollywood system itself will have been a matter not of unity or balance, but of *spacing*. Bordwell himself begins with this assumption, although its import for his project is vastly (and necessarily) underplayed: "The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention…[I]t is unlikely that any Hollywood film will perfectly embody all norms..No Hollywood film *is* the classical system; each is an 'unstable equilibrium' of classical norms."[12] The "classical Hollywood style" proper does not, *in fact*, exist. It functions as an idealized placeholder that frames *every* cinematic output. It is, in other words, a *specter,* both of form and meaning. How, then, can it be the objective historical phenomenon that Bordwell wishes it to be? The answer lies, I believe, in a foray into deconstructive analyses of rhetorical devices and their role in language and meaning. It is

[11] The confusion of figure and ground is central to Bordwell's anxiety, I argue, because it problematizes the security of the referent on which his argument hinges. An enlightening analysis of this essentialist tendency in cognitivist schools is undertaken (from a Wittgensteinian perspective) in: Bryan Vescio, "Reading in the Dark: Cognitivism, Film Theory, and Radical Interpretation," *Style* 35, no. 4, 2001. Similar in some respects to my argument, Vescio argues that Wittgenstein's notion of "radical interpretation" makes the "language games" (which Bordwell and others wish to restrict to discrete institutional realms) that we play pervasive across the spectrum of human truth-making, thus deeply qualifying the notion of a fixed a priori referent.

[12] Bordwell et al, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 5.

here that an intervention can be made in the continuity that Bordwell so insistently constructs.

The germ for this intervention stems in no small part from Paul de Man's conception of allegory within the context of philosophical and literary texts. For de Man, a text "allegorizes" itself in so far as it must always rely on the rhetorical tropes (one might say the *devices*) that it wishes to call into question. In *Allegories of Reading*, one of his major examples is a fragment from Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, a compilation of notes that was published posthumously. The fragment affords de Man the opportunity to make one of the seminal claims of his text: that rhetoric and the tropes that comprise it (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, etc.) are not simply developed out of a fixed set of rules on oratory or persuasive "eloquence." De Man explains:

> The dependence of eloquence on figure is only a further consequence of a more fundamental observation: tropes are not understood aesthetically, as ornament, nor are they understood semantically as a figurative meaning that derives from literal, proper denomination. Rather, the reverse is the case. The trope is not a derived, marginal, or aberrant form of language but the linguistic paradigm par excellence. The figurative structure is not one linguistic mode among others but it characterizes language as such.[13]

For de Man, Nietzsche's re-formulation of the status of figural language has cataclysmic implications for philosophical texts. If tropes are not restricted to specific discursive modes (oratory, persuasion, polemic, etc.) but function ontologically as the very "stuff" of language, then there is no such thing as a text that is not figural; and therefore, there is

[13] Paul De Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 105.

no such thing as a work of philosophy that is not also a work of *literature*. De Man's argument represents a sustained critique of the traditional distinction drawn between philosophical texts (which attempt to transcend their finite circumstances and reach some form of absolute knowledge or "truth") and literary texts (which are degraded as a result of their inauthentic representation of the events of history, culture, and society). In de Man's view, the ontological primacy of figural language effectively suspends this distinction, since there is no meta-language with which a text claiming to be philosophical could speak. In other words, there is no existing outside of language or history, and accordingly there is no polemic on language that can prevent itself from being contaminated by rhetoric.

In making figural language a "paradigm" of expression, Nietzsche demonstrates not only that there is no "pure" language, but also that the binary oppositions so well-known in logocentric discourses are equally untenable. In another fragment from *Will to Power*, de Man analyzes an example that will be particularly relevant to the present argument: Nietzsche's assertion that, chronologically, we experience a sensory *effect* (pain, pleasure) before the cause of the sensation itself. This is because we cannot be conscious of the way in which external impressions effect us; in fact, the retroactivity by which we assign a cause its place becomes for Nietzsche (and for de Man) itself a proof of the reign of the trope, because the discovery of the cause is exposed as a speech act that simply organizes an event into the institutionalized realm of familiar presentation—in other words, we can only "know" a cause by giving it a name and assigning it a place temporally and spatially. In doing this, we make metaphors of the world, metonymies of sense impressions, and synecdoches of the self. In each case, the substitution of one thing

for its supposedly privileged referent is revealed as "the thing itself"—but only to the extent that this thing is, to paraphrase Nietzsche, 'mere appearance.' Accordingly, the binary of inside/outside (from external sense impression to inner reaction) is problematized at the same time as the temporality of cause/effect.

What this means for Bordwell's text hinges on the temporality of his "Hollywood system" that was gestured towards earlier. Bordwell wishes the devices of Hollywood to be dependent on an *a priori* set of clearly defined and sovereign rules. However, the temporal nature of knowledge as studied by de Man reveals that at the moment when Bordwell wishes to lay claim to an "origin" of seamless narrative, the (inevitable) result will be an element (the device in context) that paradoxically "gives birth" to the system as such. In effect, the device is that which constitutes the "trace" of system—in each singular manifestation we have (to paraphrase Derrida) an "origin of the origin"; or, in de Man's terms, "the effect of an effect."[14] For our purposes, de Man's deconstructive move towards allegory has serious implications for the idea of an automatism built into discursive acts, because what the unpredictable operations of Bordwell's argument produce is the phantasm of a system that, through a similar reversal, gains autonomy and manifests, through the figural device, as *working by itself*. Effectively, then, we might provisionally say that Bordwell wishes to become *the* Hollywood writer par excellence—that is, he wishes to have the last word on it. An impossible task, no doubt. However, it is the overwhelming sameness of Bordwell's work—the unfailing return to the specter of system—that perpetuates the (im)possibility of his ambition. We might call it (flatteringly) a certain madness at work within his logic.

[14] De Man, *Allegories*, 7.

In deciding for Hollywood, then, Bordwell also proposes to 'let Hollywood speak for itself.' The allegorical import of this can be summed up as follows: In the very moment of his sovereign authorial decision, Bordwell also elides the very agency of that decision: Hollywood is rendered creature-like, haunting the decision as its mutated and mechanical double. The role of the device as an abject particular, then, will always be doubled in the undecidable logic of part and whole, machine and human, cause and effect. The spectral logic of the trope, and the logic of the device as regards "the" Hollywood system are, in my opinion, one and the same.

ON THE (ARCH) MANUAL

A comprehensive discussion of what I will call the Bordwellian decision is beyond the purview of this chapter. What I will seek to do instead is isolate what I see as a fundamental figure or "motif" at work in Bordwell's corpus. This motif will hopefully evoke the spectral decision as such and the Bordwellian decision in particular. I am speaking of the figure of the director's manual, both as historical object and as figural *device*. The manual is, in my view, what enables Bordwell to provisionally grant his Hollywood system a ground within objective, empirical history.

Bordwell invokes the manual as empirical object several times throughout his argument, and it fulfills two important functions for him: it justifies historical claims about the Hollywood system's emphasis on certain principles of causality, cohesion, and simplicity; and, it serves to demonstrate that the practices of intensified continuity exist externally as pressure from the industry itself. The manual stands both for the range of choices that a director is allotted and for the potential constraints that it places on his

activity. We have here, then, what will become the privileged aspect of the manual as figure: it gives choices and provides principles, but it is also a harbinger of *law*; speaking with the voice of Hollywood, it restricts and excludes anything that falls outside the bounds of acceptable aesthetic practices. Both generous and imperious, the manual is a doubled figure. This double, moreover, has to do here with the mysterious relationship between subject and object; or, perhaps more appropriately, between the human (*physis*) and the machine (*techne*). Recourse to etymology, that favored domain of searches for origin, will help us here. 'Manual' derives, "originally," from the Latin *Manualis*, meaning "of or belonging to the hand," which in turn derives from *manus*, meaning "hand, strength, power over, armed force, handwriting" (Online Etymology Dictionary). Manual, then, expresses a relationship between the activity of the hand and the act of inscription itself; handwriting. It is a root that captivates origin and conflates the privileged artisanal activity of the human (manual labor, containing connotations of a military operation or an act of violence, but also gesturing towards protection, as in having something "safe in hand," or "taking something in hand." The German root *Vormund* expresses this even better, meaning "Guardian"), with the spectral result of its "handiwork"—the "*Handbook.*" Following a secretive genealogy, then, the manual is at once the activity of the hand and its absence made visible in the aftermath of an object of labor. It is, in other words, "living-dead" proof of the human work itself, simultaneously a vessel of presence and absence.

This spectral quality of one of Bordwell's privileged sites of the Hollywood system has several deeply important effects. However, for now, I will emphasize the extent to which the manual as "handbook" implicates Bordwell's project in an oscillation

between the literal description of Hollywood history (an evolution of individual directors, industrial practices, and so forth) and a more abstract articulation of the figurative aspects of the "new" Hollywood aesthetic itself (devices, plot structure, actors and acting, etc.). The manual, then, serves as proof of the institutional status of Bordwell's classical Hollywood system, and as a gesture towards the empirical realm of historically-privileged objects.

This movement from the grammatical articulation of Hollywood history to a sustained engagement with the tropes of individual films is, therefore, in all cases a matter of the manual, but in a form which results from the internal logic of Bordwell's narrative project: for, in describing at once the history of Hollywood as a history of an aesthetic system, he unwittingly articulates what, from here on out, I will describe as an "arch-manual": that is, a systemic horizon of (im)possibility in which Bordwell's historical narrative is *automatically* integrated into the discursive texts that he wishes to remain distinct from the metaphysical and transcendent project of objective history itself. The arch-manual, then, is the ventriloquizing agent of Bordwellian history articulated in *The Way Hollywood Tells It* , rendering it identical in form, structure, and import to the most conventional and synthetic of aesthetic structures—the classical narrative that it both describes and becomes. At once a history of Hollywood practices, Bordwell's book also becomes a figure of history *as* Hollywood—that is, as an operation that loses the referent in the very process of the former's inscription, as when Bordwell dramatizes the ambitions of young directors in post 1960 Hollywood. In this doubled context, Bordwell's book is at once a "handbook" produced by the author Bordwell *and* a ventriloquized example of automatic writing: a work of particular creative and scholarly

significance *and* a generic production of a system of industrial inscription that jealously guards the boundaries of its suddenly autonomous nation-state.[15] Both author and puppet, Bordwell is rendered a *character* in his own text. In describing this strange result of the arch-manual, one might have recourse to a well-known idiom: "On the one hand…and on the other." This phrase, so familiar and so omnipresent across discourses, also goes straight to the heart of the Bordwellian problem; *on the one hand*, there is history, *and on*

[15] Brian Price provides an invaluable analysis of Bordwell's neoformalism and its project of mastery that ties the latter's emphasis on structure and system (at the expense of content) into the logic of capitalism: "In Bordwell's work, art derives from system and order. And, as such, art never has a content; it is only a system of possible formal relations…Neoformalism, in my view, involves itself in its own practice of punning in a celebratory mimesis of the structural logics of capital and cultural authority…Seen as such, neoformalist patterning evacuates both meaning and politics" (101).,(in: Brian Price, "Labor Thought Theory: on Frampton and Beller," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 6, no. 1 (2008): 97-109.) I heartily agree with Price's conclusions here, and I would add that this "celebratory mimesis" of capitalist logic exposes Bordwell's mastery as also an example of willing subjection to the demands of capital's spectacular agency; describing a structure and thus performing its sovereignty with relation to one(-)self. What is more, Price's critique also exposes some of the problems that crop up in engagements with the regressive politics of neoformalism, specifically Daniel Frampton's attempt to replace cognitive hyper-formalism with a conception of what he terms the "filmmind." Price explains:

> All of the theoretical ground clearing that Frampton performs in the first part of the book is done expressly to give each film, as opposed to its makers and/or implied authors, a sovereign state of consciousness and intention…Frampton does acknowledge the creative role of directors, but only insofar as they become "conduits for film thinking" (75)…He does so, by his own admission, so that spectators are better able to feel the meanings created by a film (75). And thus Frampton is caught in the unusual place of trying to account for something like a normative conception of what every audience should be capable of understanding and a highly intentional view of the creative intelligence that generates those messages; an intelligence that is – to make matters worse – artificial. Even though he voices his opposition to the cognitive strain of film theory at many points in the book…and he further attempts to privilege the single film as a uniquely constituted work of art, art itself is strictly figured as the intentional act of a non-human mind (102-3).

In conceptualizing an alternative to cognitivism, then, Frampton inadvertently perpetuates the very things that make Bordwell's work so suspect—its privileging of a secure referent in the form of a system (Hollywood, the filmmind, etc.) that is represented as self-propelling, a supposition of historical transcendence that simultaneously privileges filmic singularity while overcoming difference, and a cinematic corpus that is marshaled in the service of a single arcane idea, one that the author claims to 'let speak for itself.' On the register of this essay, we might say that it appears as if Frampton is reading/writing his own (arch) manual.

the other hand there is writing history. This is not a simple relationship between referent and sign; on the contrary, what the "two-handed" idiom describes is the spectral logic of a *choice*, and the unpredictable results of that epistemic inscription which blurs the binary poles of "reality" and discourse. The Bordwellian problem, in this way, might be most accurately described as the problem (again, following Derrida) of always having to write with *two hands*. What Peter Jackson's "mishandling" of the filmic cut suggests, I think, is that the inscription which the latter manifests begins to signal the excess of an authorial presence—not, this time, merely dictated by system, but also provocatively recalcitrant to it, even within its comfort zone (a big-budget blockbuster). By the same token, Bordwell's own presence as author is both something he would like to efface—in the name of system (historical, aesthetic, institutional, etc.)—and what he will most earnestly insist on at every turn.

To demonstrate the extent to which the (arch)manual haunts Bordwell's project, an example from *The Way Hollywood Tells It* is now necessary. Bordwell's "over-arching" goal is to describe a history marked by the obstacles confronting the new directors of post-1960s Hollywood, a system that had already produced an illustrious global tradition dominated by the glorious names of its most revered *auteurs*: Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, Howard Hawks, John Ford, and so on. These directors (among many others) serve as proper names that denote an awesome level of accomplishment and artistic success. In Bordwell's conception, the traumatic reality confronting the apprentices of his new Hollywood is one marked by "belatedness":

> Starting out, the young director naturally asks: What is there for me to do? During the studio era, he could tackle this problem by finding out, through routine

assignments, what genres he had a flair for. But in 1970 the young filmmaker faced a much keener sense that certain niches had already been occupied.[16]

The sense of belatedness, then, stems from attempting to work within a system in which, apparently, there is nothing left to be accomplished. The "manual" these masters have left behind, then, functions as a guide by which the apprentices of Bordwell's narrative will come into their own as a creative force within the Hollywood industry. Accordingly, the goal of these young directors is to practice fidelity to a mighty tradition while at the same time making it their own. It is the complete success of this progression that Bordwell attempts to demonstrate in numerous singular examples. Take, for instance, the "belated" young director Cameron Crowe's story: "Out of the premises of classical construction, writer-director Cameron Crowe has fashioned an intricate plot and a rare density of implication and motif. He need not *apologize* for being belated; he hasn't *betrayed* the legacy of Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder. *Jerry Maguire* is a masterpiece of tight 'hyperclassical' storytelling" (63, italics added).[17]

We have, then, a progression from apprenticeship (to the spectral Hollywood system) to mastery. The crystallization of the latter is vividly suggested by the section's framing title: "The Me I Always Wanted to Be" (63).[18] It is here that I believe the spectral presence of the arch-manual threatens the legitimacy of Bordwell's history. Upon first reading the chapter heading, I mistakenly thought that it applied to the "real-life" director Cameron Crowe. My rationale for this was that the sentiment expressed exactly the dilemma of new Hollywood that Bordwell described: that is, the belatedness of a

[16] Bordwell et al, *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* 22.
[17] Ibid (italics added), 63.
[18] Ibid.

young artist faced with the task of formulating a personal and professional identity. However, the section actually describes the film *Jerry Maguire*, and the header refers to the struggle of the film's title character. Rather than distrusting my initial impulse, however, I would like to suggest that my slippage as a reader is due in no small part to the striking analogies one can draw between Cameron Crowe and his creation. One might say, for instance, that Bordwell's articulation of the fledgling Crowe renders the latter as a *device* of history; that is, as an element in the grand narrative that Bordwell wishes to generate. On another register, this operation involves a sustained engagement with *Jerry Maguire* as exemplary of the best impulses of new Hollywood: at once honoring the past while constructing a vital personal vision upon stable ground. In doing this, Crowe will have become (like Jerry Maguire) "the me I always wanted to be." The stakes of this struggle are vividly expressed in Bordwell's perhaps unconscious imbuing of Classical Hollywood with a mysterious agency. It is something that Crowe "need not apologize" to. Its feelings, then, can be hurt. It is also, apparently, something that one can "betray."

The supposition underlying the whole of this section is that Crowe's construction of a self is at once dictated and constrained by a "legacy": a "manual" for success drawn up by the likes of Billy Wilder and Ernst Lubitsch: "In the mid-1990s, Cameron Crowe decided to write 'a movie with a real story, the kind that shows up on TV at night, usually in black and white'…He studied Ernst Lubitsch, Howard Hawks, Preston Sturges, and 'the incomparable Billy Wilder.'"[19] It is this grand template that Crowe must simultaneously honor and make his own. In Bordwell's account, his attempt is entirely successful: Crowe's film is a "masterpiece" of "hyperclassical storytelling." However, let

[19] Bordwell et al, *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* 21.

us attend to a substitutive reversal that Bordwell's narrative engages in. Bordwell must repetitively ascribe the structure and aesthetic of Crowe's film to a pre-determined system. During his analysis of *Jerry Maguire*, the reader is constantly treated to passages like the following: "It seems 'pure Hollywood, recycling many clichés: the predatory agent, the wisecracking sister (heir to Joan Blondell and Eve Arden, the cool image of Tom Cruise (Ray-Bans now hiding a black eye)"[20]; or: "As in the studio era, people are characterized through facial expression and movement"[21]; and, finally: "Crowe effortlessly maps this fairly complex plot across the four-part structure traced by [Kristin] Thompson."[22] The intention is clear: Bordwell is adamant in his construction of Crowe's film (and it director) as a "mouthpiece" of an aesthetic history. However, he is also described as "coming into his own" as a director, and this entails a putatively "personal" style: "Out of the premises of classical construction.,Cameron Crowe has fashioned an intricate plot and a rare density of implication and motif" (63).[23] Crowe's fidelity, then, is also what ensures his artistic mastery. But, in truly Nietzschean fashion, the proof of Crowe's identity is also what retroactively "generates" him—as an artist, and, more importantly, as one of Hollywood's *artisans*. Bordwell can only describe Crowe through the predicative object of his body of work. Temporally, then, Crowe's labor will have preceded him; it will, in other words, have functioned as his (prosthetic) origin, at once

[20] Bordwell et al, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 63.
[21] Ibid, 65.
[22] Ibid, 64. Thompson's four-part structure is a schematic specifically designed to describe "hyper-classical" narratives, or what Thompson calls "The New Hollywood." See: Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Analyzing Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999). Thompson is always a reliable resource for Bordwell, since they are both devoted to the notion of a basic stylistic continuity over time.
[23] Ibid, 63.

the trace of his labor and the only proof of his ipseity.[24] The person Cameron Crowe is substituted by the figure "Cameron Crowe," purveyor (and re-mark) of the Hollywood system. The figurative device, then, is what stands as both an element of and the origin for "self" and "system." In this way, Cameron Crowe is implicated in a chain of metonymic signifiers that he can no longer definitively stand out from: constrained not only within the tomb of quotation marks, but also by "Billy Wilder," Ernst Lubitsch," and "Jerry Maguire."[25] Effectively, the authorial presence of the director is simultaneously consolidated and obliterated in one and the same section. Crowe is a director, but he is also a motif of Bordwell's history; he is "living proof." At the same time, however, this living proof will have only been available from within the scission of a narrative inscription.

The arch-manual as a figure of the double works, then, to render Bordwell's history identical to the individual filmic narratives it describes. This results in two contradictory manifestations that work simultaneously. On the one hand, the problematization of Cameron Crowe implicates Bordwell's work in the synthetic narrativizations that it wishes to articulate on a meta-level—wishes, because Bordwell must be able to look at the system from "outside" in order to have proof of the latter. We

[24] Peter Brunette and David Wills provide invaluable insights into the precarious status of the authorial signature in: Peter Brunette and David Wills, *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989). In their engagement with Hitchcock, the authors describe a process of doubling in which Hitchcock's presence in his own films (and even his name in the credits at the film's beginning and end) results in a promiscuous dissemination that effaces his meta-physical status as a transcendent and controlling signifier. Likewise, Crowe's dissemination throughout Bordwell's book (and, inevitably, within the former's filmography) renders him an inscription—a proper noun that is disastrously transmogrified into a common noun.

[25] For some invaluable close readings of the "author mark" in film form, see as well: Tom Conley, *Film Hieroglyphs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

have, then, an example of the contamination of history by the literary. However, Bordwell's haunting labor also consolidates (imperfectly) his status as a *writer of manuals*—or, perhaps more appropriately, *the* writer of *the manual*. Indeed, I believe that the "over-arching" goal of David Bordwell the writer is to become a generator of the arch-manual. That is, the first and last word which (in panoramic fashion) surveys history and assigns each element its place in the system. Haunted by the great directors of classical Hollywood, Bordwell's young apprentice (and the films he produces) is also directed by an arch-manual that he wishes to make his own. This is only possible, however, if the transcendent project of a meta-narrative is also possible. The present essay asserts that it is not, and the conclusion that I draw from this ontological fact is the following: There is no system. Not, at least, anymore. Bordwell wishes the system to be—not only *alive and well*—but fundamentally unchanged. What is more, this wish is based on the assertion that the (arche) manual, *in fact*, is real; is, somehow, identical to the art objects that it forces into existence. However, because Bordwell must admit that no film will ever coalesce into a perfect expression of the Hollywood style proper, what truly defines (or, perhaps more accurately, what renders any definition problematic) "Hollywood" as it manifests is its spectral placement—its fantasmatic spacing in proximity to an aesthetic (and capitalistic) ideal that haunts and is haunted by it.

That Bordwell's description of *Jerry Maguire* articulates a layered process of self-explication by its director is an interesting turn, considering the status of such an operation within the former's own corpus. The question of origin will again become important, for I take the following passage from *Making Meaning* (1989) to be central to Bordwell's ongoing (and sub-textual) project of mastery: It is, however, a project that

moves within the framework of a totalizing institutional presence. The passage follows a cursory description of the interpretive "skills" that a given scholar uses in order to "make" a text produce its meaning. The speculative presentation of these skills is significantly written in first-person:

> By using such skills, I can make stubborn data meaningful. I can posit that such data function implicitly or symptomatically, and I can show how they participate in unified patterns or how they operate at privileged moments. All these are interpretive skills which the institution has passed on to me, chiefly through ostension and imitation.[26]

This fragment, typical of the book, represents not only a sustained description of the institutional framework in which "we" all work; it is also an occasion for Bordwell's "I" to manifest it-self. Describing a monolithic network that precedes and dictates his activity, Bordwell also announces his freedom by virtue of his assimilation into the former. It is a gesture that foregrounds both definite constraint and infinite possibilty. Again, like the crisis of identity which he describes in *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, Bordwell is dealing here with the enduring problem of belatedness: "My construal of this or that film is a product of my problem-solving skills applied to a task largely defined by forces lying outside my personal history, according to norms of thought and writing established long before *I came on the scene*."[27] How to generate a self from out of the abyssal structure of the institution? Bordwell's unconscious answer to this question is a sustained gesture of epistemic violence that has as its object an auto-biographical end.

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[26] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 32.

[27] Ibid (italics added), 33.

The play of the "I" that Bordwell institutes here, it must be noted, has explicit connotations for him. We have described a frequency of Bordwell's writing that wishes to be assimilated into an institution—a process that will ensure the particular figure (the director, the author) its legitimacy within the benevolence of a system. However, the personal pronoun also signifies the bad other of this eventuality: that the "I" might be ventriloquized by the *wrong* system. In *Making Meaning*, this bad other is explicitly named and attacked: "interpretation." This term comes to denote the tendency (at the moment that Bordwell was writing) of film theory to engage in what Bordwell would later term "grand theory"—that is, a brand of interpretation that relies on association and intuitive connections, always linguistic in nature, having to do with positing semantic, intertextual operations in the filmic text that result in contradictory meanings, exposure of ideological viewpoints, and the articulation of principles of unity and differentiation. For Bordwell, this institutional tendency is wrong-headed not because it is institutional, but because it has effectively limited and constrained what a given scholar can say about a film:

> This is not to say that for contemporary critics anything can mean anything. Actually, a handful of things will mean even fewer things. One lesson of this book is that while the particular results of any interpretive act are indefinitely numerous, the textual clues, the procedures that rank and organize those cues, and the semantic traits which are assigned to them have become quite limited. And the limits are, by and large, not logical but institutional…These are constraints of habitual practice and reigning rhetoric. To use Todorov's term, film interpretation has become almost wholly "finalistic," based upon an a priori condification of

> what a film must ultimately mean…Many of the film's nuances now go unremarked because the interpretive logic in force has virtually no way to register them.[28]

For Bordwell, the project which calls him is one of replacement— replacement, that is, of "grand theory" with what he disingenuously terms "theory," pure and simple. He falls short (in the present volume) of insisting on an end of "interpretation"; however, what becomes clear is that the authors (Bordwell does not, for the most part, bother to name them) Bordwell implicitly describes have betrayed cinema through their staunch fidelity to a system that has failed to *get at* it properly. They are not to be critiqued for being ventriloquized; only for becoming enslaved to the wrong system of scholarship. When Bordwell says "I," then, he is calling forth not only himself, but also the "for instance" of another—a bad other, perhaps. The doubling of personal pronouns becomes an occasion at once to describe both what must happen and what should not happen: on the one hand, the inevitability of system and institution; on the other hand, the error of offering fidelity to the wrong kind of system. In asserting that "I can make stubborn data meaningful," Bordwell is describing both a process of success and failure; both the condition of possibility of scholarship, and the process of delimiting said scholarship through an unnecessarily small reserve of scholarly moves or devices. That this "I" doubles itself in the 'for instance' of an example is all the more significant in that such an example will have worked to describe Bordwell *and* what he wishes to polemicize.

Let us attend once more, in this context, to the temporality of the manual, because it serves as a powerful contrast to the narrative of linearity that Bordwell attempts to

[28]Bordwell, *Making Meaning,* 260.

describe. The manual is an object that precedes the "I"; it is out of the past, divorced from an individual author and invested with the authority of an institution. However, it is also "at hand"—that is, the manual, we might say, is always lying about, waiting to be picked up by someone. That this "taking into hand" is a doubled gesture of power and debasement is what calls for the precarious project of an auto-biographical inscription. And Bordwell, despite his most urgent attempts, represents this precariousness perhaps better than any other film theorist. What is the status of the "I", after all, in his discourse of the institution? Nothing more nor less than the particular thing that will always be subsumed into the *framework* of its history. However, this "I" is also that which asserts its truth—or, more appropriately, it asserts that it speaks "the" truth. And what might this mean, exactly? As the excerpt from *Making Meaning* suggests, the "I" is that which simultaneously affirms and denies its effacement. Preceded by an institution, it is also the phallic protrusion that insists on its own epistemic privilege. Bordwell, in other words, recovers his insignificance by implicitly asserting that he, the "I," *knows* what is happening to him. He knows from where and in what manner he speaks, and he knows how and in what manner he *means to say what he does.* He is ventriloquized (and ventriloquizing) to be sure, but he can at least lay claim to knowing what pulls his strings. One might say, tautologically, that Bordwell claims to be aware of "meaning to make meaning." At the moment that it is obliterated, the "I" "*comes on the scene*"; it is staged as the doubled locus of its own spectral (im)possibility:

> I have sought to keep the social nature of interpretation at the forefront of even so "individual" a process as problem-solving because the two aspects are inseparable…The critical institution—journalistic reviewing, essayistic writing, or

> academic criticism—defines the grounds and bounds of interpretive activity, the direction of analogical thinking, the proper goals, the permissible solutions, and the authority that can validate the interpretations produced by ordinary criticism.[29]

The assured self-presence of ipseity, then, is victimized and exposed as a tropic operation—the "I" is a metaphorical placeholder for the ordinary critic, but only as a prelude to the reign of a system, with its determination and establishment of "proper goals, permissible solutions, and authority..". Bordwell's "I" is also tropic because it functions, I must reiterate, within the explicit framework of an example; a 'for instance' that permits Bordwell to demonstrate his point. How significant, then, that his example is his own self, rendered rhetorical through the ironic logic of authorial spacing; to write of oneself, to use the mark of ipseity as a deferred and routine example, partakes of the rhetorical undecidability between the grammatical and denotative progression of the example and its spectral, paralyzing self-automation—its quoted and ghostly (co)presence. It is an identity that is ensured, moreover, dialectically—indistinguishable from, but also abyssally different from its antithesis.

What is at stake in this operation is nothing more nor less than the Derridean conception of language and discourse as "dissemination"—that is, as contingent operations that function just as much through loss and lack as through plenitude. In the analysis we have thus far undertaken, this is clear in the precarious (co)presence of Bordwell's Hollywood system and its devices, the promiscuous interchange of abject particularities and the promise of universal systemic dominance; between the fleeting loop of the signs and omens of the system and the fantasmatic system proper—the arch-

[29]Bordwell, *Making Meaning,* 33.

manual in all its nebulous and abyssal glory. A pensive game of hide-and-go-seek, Bordwell's corpus is also a demonstration of the *play* of language proper. And as his phallic and spectacular ipseity makes clear, it is a play (one might say a "staging") that partakes of an undecidable suspension of inside and outside, universal and particular, self and other, author and text, writing and reading. Derrida elaborates in *Dissemination*:

> The old theatrical organization has become unjustifiable, is no longer answerable to anyone; the old phantoms called the author, the reader, *the director*, the stage manager, the machinist, the actor, the characters, the spectator, etc., have no single, unique, fixed place (stage, wings, house, etc.) assigned to themselves by themselves, except in the representation they make of it to themselves, of which an account must be given[30]...he who says *I* in the present tense, in the so-called positive event constituted by his discourse, would be capable of only an illusion of mastery. At the very moment he thinks he is directing the operations, his place—the opening toward the present assumed by whoever believes himself capable of saying *I*, I think, I am, I see, I feel, I say (you, for example, here and now)—is constantly and in spite of him being decided by a throw of dice whose law will subsequently be developed inexorably by chance.[31]

If the "I" is contingent, then this is because a discourse cannot be controlled by a static and clearly defined point of reference; a "single, unique, fixed place," if you will. Once the personal pronoun has been "put into play," the operation of the trope begins, and the decision is dispersed into the nether regions of an accumulating and elusive discourse. The inevitable discursivity of speaking, thinking, and acting as such will have meant that

[30] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 296 (italic added).
[31] Ibid, 298.

the author, director, etc.,— in short, the subject under discussion, will have been only manifest as a *device*—of language, history, the cinema, and so on. Bordwell's "I" partakes of an illusion of mastery—"I may confront the recalcitrant data problem…I can call on a range of empirical knowledge."[32]However, eventually its continuity of purpose is subsumed into a play of signifiers that renders the text fundamentally *literary*; that is, at once inside of the frame of reference of and for which it writes, speaks, and echoes. Bordwell's mere "description" of his place within the scholarly institution (and his description of new Hollywood directors) is also an operation of removal—of the trace of his impotent ipseity, a repetition of the "I" that is also its effacement, a denial of the dispersal and perpetual motion of history and of the discourse(s) that we will always be compelled (not) to speak. If such an operation produces a paradox of the self, then it also does something more fundamental: it gives it-self as a guarantor of and sacrifice for the institution of which it is composed and by which it is constrained. This gift is, moreover, not solely a gesture of faith or sycophantic love; it is, rather, the only living proof there will have been of the system. The scission which signals a violence done in the form of a protrusion, an erecting projection through the bedrock of an institutional ground, is also that which spectrally presents (in the only way it can) the ground which it must take for granted in order to exist. Bordwell's throbbing, phallic ipseity, that abject mark of person-hood that repetitiously pokes itself out from the text, is also performative of the impossible operation of its own doubled movement; ventriloquized, one might say, by itself. I am driven to quote again: "*I* have sought to keep the social nature of even as "individual" a process of problem solving because... The critical institution defines the

[32] Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 31.

grounds and bound...and the authority that can validate the interpretations produced by ordinary criticism"[33] What status can the "I" have, then, if not a spectral one—at once obeying the logic of subjection and announcing a rupture in its very performance?

That the manual moves from empirical object to haunting horizon, and from there to the institutional bedrock of spectral signification gestures towards the fundamental status of the hand-book as a doubled object: like Derrida's *Differánce,* there will have been no deciding upon the manual apart from its abyssal placement within an inscriptive series. Denoting an act of the human hand, but also partaking of the tomb-like stasis of *technē*, the manual will have become "neither a word nor a concept" in its undecidability. One might even venture to say, moreover, that the manual contaminates its own absolute presence even more thoroughly, for there will not even have been the ghostly play of an unsayable difference to carry it— no silent, crypt-like change in spelling—from which a living-dead sign might resurrect itself.[34] Accordingly, the manual is always-already surrounded by the pillars of its spacing within the dying murmur of a (unfinished) sentence. The staging of ipseity, then, is simultaneously servant and assassin, the only proof and the visible absence of a totalizing logic of presence. Arch-manual, double, "I," auto-biography...a "murderer's row" of signifying elements whose arrangement portends

[33] Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 33.

[34] Derrida's conceptualization of *Differance* has to do with the paradigmatic difference built into language; that is, we can only make sense of a word with reference to other words, and so each "unit" of language has no positive content of its own, but instead (following from Saussure) is negatively defined in relation to other words different from it. Closely connected, I believe, to de Man's conceptions of the trope, what Derrida's formulation points out is the inherent blindness and lack of coherence built into language that functions as a constitutive principle, but at the same time presents never-ending problems of assignment, reference, and connotative potency. In the case of the word "manual," there is no deciding on its meaning apart from what de Man would term an "extra-textual" intervention, and accordingly the potential associations and spectral relationships that crop up in this "single" word problematize claims about essence, origin, and unity. See: Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-29.

the greater staging of a secret cataclysm built into the very "heart" of language—and yet always occurring somewhere else in space and time. Even as this healing assault precariously ensures the spectrality of system, it also functions to create "one-self"—that is, the signature of what will have been always-already dead or dying. In this context, the oft-repeated truism that "Meanings are not found but made"[35] should be amended; it would be more accurate to say that *identities*, as well, are not found but made.

ON THE KHORA

From where does the auto-biographical double emerge to commit its degraded, magnanimous murder? Bordwell provides us with a hint through his analysis of the tendency of the academic institution to conceptualize artistic objects as "receptacles"—that is, as things whose surfaces hide deeper meanings which can only be picked out by the educated critic. Again, we must understand this quote on the register of the double, describing both what Bordwell wants and what he would like to stand in opposition to. The following quote is from *Making Meaning*:

> Thus comprehension is concerned with apparent, manifest, or direct meanings, while interpretation is concerned with revealing hidden, nonobvious meaning...To speak of *hidden* meanings, *levels* of meaning, and *revealing* meanings evokes the dominant framework within which critics understand interpretation. The artwork or text is taken to be a container into which the artist has stuffed meanings for the perceiver to pull out. Alternatively, an archaeological analogy treats the text as having strata, with layers or deposits of meaning that must be excavated.[36]

[35] Bordwell, *Making Meaning*. 3.
[36] Ibid, 2.

That such a visual metaphor provides the basis for all scholarly endeavors is judged by Bordwell in the same fashion as he judges everything else—it is simply something to be explained, and then taken for granted. But, given the vulnerability of system(s) and of ipseity in their supposed given-ness, it would be foolish to simply pass over such a privileged metaphor. For, as will hopefully be shown, the "receptacle" metaphor indicates something primordial about the "self-evident" project of "making meaning." As has already been guessed, this indication is due in significant part to the transformation of system that Bordwell has described: initially an object, the manual becomes horizon, then ground: all and nothing. What will perhaps escape first notice, in the wake of epistemic crisis and metaphysical impossibility, is the transformation of *surfaces*. A thing among others, the manual-as-system has become a ground of signification and the substance punctured/constituted by ipseity. The ultimate and unchanging base, it is also paradoxically ruptured—at once by the spectral work of inscription, and *from below*, indicated in the erected memorial of the "I." If the apprentice scholar (or director) must establish his name within the established template, then so too the undecidability of that system's coming-into-being cannot foreclose the possibility of an even lower layer; a disjunction in the binary of surface and support, hidden and apparent. Indulging in a structural metaphor, the question becomes: does the "I" support, or does it push through, puncture and wound, the surface of its inscription? This has to do with the channeling of the double—with the "I" of the institution as well as the abjectly particular ipseity—but also with the double's ambiguous counterpart: the innate. It is a term encountered most elusively in the fractured work of Antonin Artaud. However, for the moment permit us to hold that name in reserve. For now, what the innate portends for the present discussion is

related to the alignment of the "receptacle" metaphor with the classical Greek conception of the *khora*, a concept that I take to be nearly synonymous with Bordwell's 'container,' in ways that Bordwell will not have been able to foresee or control—not even with the sovereign help of his spectral template.

The *khora* as a principle and progenitor of meaning was most famously posited by Plato in his foundational *Timaeus,* a work that continues to resonate wherever one finds an inscription that lays claim to a meaning above and beyond any question of its possibility.[37] At once support, system, and bottomless container, the *khora* is the idealized approximation of divine logos that allows for the properly spiritual and poetic transmission of gendered, political, and philosophical identity. At once locus and medium, "what is called the *khora*"[38] defies immediate self-presentation and defers its staging in favor of what Derrida would name negative theology: that is, a *mis-en-scene* of 'neither-nor' in which the momentary epistemic crisis of its receding will have even more thoroughly assured the monolithic status of a resolution of all finitude within the imminent reign of universal spirit—God, for our purposes, but also that which stands out from and ensures God while nevertheless being a part of him.[39] It is this paradoxical scission within the (non)identity of divine authorship that "the innate" expresses—or,

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[37] The *Khora* and its place in Plato's text is famously investigated in: Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-173.

[38] I have paraphrased this phrasing from Derrida's analysis of Antonin Artaud's engagement with "what is called the subjectile" (a formulation that Derrida takes directly from Artaud, first in a letter to André Rolland dated Sept. 23rd, 1932; and then two other times in texts supposedly written in 1946 and 1947. Derrida insists on Artaud's formulation because the subjectile functions like the *khora* and *differance,* in that all three are consigned (one might say privileged) to a negatively-defined identity, available only within the spacing of signifying discourses and aesthetic re-marks. All three, then, are proximate, prosthetic terms that institute the play of difference across the spectrum of discursive activity. Derrida sets up the status of the subjectile immediately at the start of his "To Unsense the Subjectile," 61.

[39]David L. Clark, "The Necessary Heritage of Darkness," in *Intersections,* eds. Tilottama Rajan and David L. Clark (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 79-147.

more appropriately, what is called the innate. It comes forth to express that scission, performing and testifying to it within a silent void of nameless meaning. The innate, it should be mentioned, is not exclusive from the *khora*; at once separate and supplement, it is an excretion and an even more primal locus.

This cataclysmic doubling of originary meaning has been traversed numerous times before. David L. Clark explicates one of the most fundamental and challenging of these strange interventions, in the context of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*. In this essay, Schelling attempts to decisively connect the possibility of human liberty with the very birth of divinity; what Clark calls (after Derrida) an "origin of the origin" that must guarantee God's existence while also remaining mysteriously distinct from him. Inherently connected to this question of a divine split of identity is the *khora;* the receptacle that, in Clark's analysis, also doubles itself:

> As Derrida argues...the disproportion and heterogeneity of the *khora* instantly results in the production of "two concurrent languages" in the *Timaeus*: in the first instance, the *khora* is represented..."as being *at the interior of philosophy*. For structural reasons, the exorbitant *beyond*-being of the *khora* is easily translated and palliated as *being*-beyond, a kind of "hypermetaphysical" essence that reinscribes "the grammar and the logic of onto-theology." In the second instance, the *khora* is more radically "postmetaphysical," if by this term we mean not what

> comes "after" the "end" of metaphysics, but the irreducible remainder or unavoidable fallout *of* metaphysical thinking, whether early or late.[40]

Clark draws a radical conclusion from this two-ness of the *khora*: *one the one hand*, it "operates in the *Freedom* essay as *both* an *Urgrund* or primal ground, the familiar object of speculative idealism, *and* [*on the other hand*] as an *Ungrund*, the abyssal nonground that lies somewhere between idealism and deconstruction."[41] What Schelling cannot avoid, then, is a conceptualization of origins that contaminates the transcendent beyond of divine creation with what Clark calls "a necessary heritage of darkness"—an inchoate, chaotic mass of non-meaning that roils and encompasses the creator, rendering him "creature-like"; born of a soupy stuff that is burdened, like the *khora*, with the ephemeral mark of gender. Derrida states:

> It holds itself, like the subjectile, underneath, and it is thus that it merits its name of receptacle: *hypodokhe*. And we *compare* this receptacle to a nurse: "What propriety (*dynamin*) must we oppose (*hypolepteon*) that she has naturally (*kata physin*)? Before anything, someone of this gender: of every birth (*pases geneseos*) she is the receptacle and like (*oion*) the nurse" (*Timaeus* 49a). *Like* the nurse: only a comparison, a figure.[42]

As Schelling and Clark both demonstrate, the *khora*-as-receptacle takes on even more weighty implications for Christian theology.

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[40] Qtd. in: Clark, David L. Clark, "The Necessary Heritage of Darkness: Tropics of Negativity in Schelling, Derrida, and de Man," In *Intersections*, eds. Tilottama Rajan and David L. Clark (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 94-5 (italics in original).

[41] Ibid, 95.

[42] Jacques Derrida and Paule Thevenin, *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud*, Ed. & trans. Mary Ann Caws (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 135.

But what has this to do with David Bordwell, we might now ask? He mentions and summarizes the "receptacle" model of critical interpretation, to be sure, but does he *mean* it? Indeed, what is apposite here is the extent to which Bordwell desperately attempts (in order to overcome?) to decide on this receptacle *once and for all*. It must be beyond any question and for a reason no less fundamental (on a Schellingian register) than the very possibility of human freedom. Freedom, it should be noted, is not just the freedom of the will and its progress through the spirit-ensured murk of its life-force; it is also freedom to *mean*, to *make* and *have meaning.* In traditional accounts, it is what is given by God and ensured by philosophy. I would argue, however, that Bordwell's trapped theory of film form takes us (again, paradoxically) into the decidedly secular terrain of this still theological question: that is, it is no longer a question of the universal, but of the particular: the Hollywood "system," and nothing more. What, then, does *this* system give as well as take? Bordwell (significantly citing Bazin) begins to answer us in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, in his analysis of the Hollywood "receptacle":

> Appointments, deadlines, causally dense scene construction, a balance of narrow and wider ranges of knowledge, passages of overtness balanced with less self-conscious ones—these narrational techniques work together to create the distinctive texture of the Hollywood film...The result is a stable, powerful body of conventions shaping virtually every film...Those conventions have remained in force throughout the poststudio era, constantly and sometimes ingeniously applied to fresh material. Hollywood as always updated its stories by building on current interests and emerging social trends...Such changing subjects and themes are worth studying in their own right, but a complete account of Hollywood

> storytelling needs to recognize how the dominant tradition assimilates them to its formal demands. Bazin was right: the "classical" art of the American cinema is most demonstrable in "its fertility when it comes into contact with new elements," integrating them into its distinctive "style of cinematic narration."[43]

The Hollywood manual, then, functions like the *khora*: giving its glorious tradition, "assimilating" the particular "elements" that come in contact with it—growing and ever-changing, and yet always fundamentally impregnable, unchangeable.[44] Like the primordial "origin" of divinity, the Hollywood manual is a wellspring of "fertility," a feminine pocket of meaning that both effaces and asserts itself in the epistemic violence of its operation.

Bordwell, then, is a fan of the *khora* when it speaks through the assimilative realm of cinematic convention. However, he is also explicitly critical of this self-same tendency in his polemic against "mere" interpretation: "Like many highly routinized practices, interpretation has tended to be deeply traditional in its assumptions…While not all societies believe that a symbol is inherently meaningful, Christianity has been a strongly

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[43] Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* 50.

[44] Bordwell is deeply indebted in this regard to Andre Bazin's foundational claims about the photographic and "realist" ontology of cinema. Laura R. Oswald provides an invaluable analysis of the political dimensions of Bazin's conception of cinema, and significantly contrasts it to Alexandre Astruc's *camera stylo.* Like Bordwell's manual, Bazin's reliance on classical narrative as the normative locus of all filmic activity results in a regressive and exclusionary conception of cinema:

> For Bazin, the material origin of film in photography determines both the spectator's belief in the truth of the representation and the filmmaker's responsibility to reveal rather than manipulate visual reality through montage. According to this logic, film discourse fulfills its ontological destiny in narrative realism. The ontological argument leads to the marginalization of film styles and genres that break with the model and perpetuates belief in a universal subject of cinema that transcends its inscription in specific films (250).

I would hasten to amend this by adding that Bazin is far more nuanced, generous, and insightful in his logocentrism than Bordwell is in his. See: Laura R. Oswald, "Cinema-Graphia: Eisenstein, Derrida, and the Sign of Cinema," in *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, Eds. Peter Brunette and David Wills (Cambridge University Press: New York, 1994), 248-264.

hermeneutical religion, seeking the *kerygma*, that latent sense waiting to be called forth."[45] In seeking this inner sense, then, grand theory has effaced the potentials of classical cinema. However, what effaces Hollywood narrative in one instance is what ensures its richness and legitimacy in another. Bordwell does not wish to think beyond a reductive replacement/reversal of film theory, and so what he wants is also what he hates. On the Derridean register, his *khora* is both poison and antidote, thesis and antithesis—but without a transcendent resolution that would provide a stoppage to the play of tropes. The manual, like the *khora*, speaks two languages: it is the receptacle of transcendent and originary meaning, and the inchoate darkness of originary chaos. For, as has been indicated, it waits for the "device" (its supplement) to represent it, to act as proof and as receiver of its meaning. The arch-manual is also an *un*-manual, deprived of its ground and punctured by the traces of its innate-ness, its plural and atemporal birth(s). "The me I always wanted to be," then, is also (to cite Artaud) "the me that is still to be"; the "I" is servant and master, presence and absence, universal and particular. It is both what is given and what is most precarious. It carries its violence in the emergence of its phallic signification, and returns inevitably into the inchoate fertility of the institution which gave it birth, and to which it gives birth. In each case, a decision of quality will have been exposed as purely and inevitably arbitrary.

Brian Price momentously invokes (without directly naming) the *khora* in his essay "The Sacred and the Violent," in which he engages and critiques what he sees as an "onto-theological" discourse that has come to define and typify the modes and contexts in which scholars, critics, students and teachers write about film form. Although Bordwell is

[45] David Bordwell, *Making Meaning,* 259.

never mentioned, it is clear that his analysis speaks very much to the hegemonic relationship that Bordwell's cognitivism has exercised over the discipline. Price's most brilliant intervention hinges on his careful conceptualization of "the" cut—held, for the moment, at a remove from its localization within a narrative sequence. Necessarily invisible and present only as an absence, the cut is conceptualized in direct contrast to Derrida's "visible in-visible": "An example of the visible in-visible would be clothing, that which conceals my nudity...The cut, by contrast, covers over nothing and does not appear...The film cut leaves no trace...For this reason the cut is—at best—an open secret, or a productive aporia."[46] Productive, that is, because this inexorable absence proves foundational for the sovereign referent that is made to speak through the blips and blinds of the ephemeral inscription—in this context, what Price terms "continuity," and specifically the discourses surrounding continuity editing. Speaking as he does of the onto-theological, this absence generated by the co-presence of blindness with the field of the visible is made to signify a negative relationship to the origin that generated it; Price speaks of "God" as that which is defined and ensured through this generative absence(s), but on our register we would switch this out ("God" is, after all, as interchangeable as any other signifier) and place the (arch) manual of classical Hollywood narrative in its place. And, like the onto-theological cut, the devices of Bordwell's classical cinema are meant to signify and negatively define the reigning omnipresence of his narrative system; as with the *khora*, such "proofs" are only ever provisional and immanently precarious. Their dominance within filmic discourse is a result of harried exigency and bland repetition; a repetition, moreover, that has just as much to do with the human as the divine. For, as

[46] Brian Price, "The Sacred and the Violent." Chapter from a forthcoming manuscript, 4.

Schelling attempted to demonstrate and could not end up denying, human freedom will have been irretrievably a matter of our relation to the absolute. Or, perhaps more correctly, our relation to the stories we tell about what we can never "see seeing."[47]

In Bordwell's account of the Hollywood system, then, we find a narrative that is above all an impulse towards establishing the sovereign referent of the self—the figure of the director; the author as manipulator of a pliant and accommodating "tool" for making *his* meaning. It is an operation, however, that must rely on the spectral evidence of texts. As such, it bespeaks a relationship to "origin" that is in every instant and every reading up for decision—a decision that inexorably circles around the empty center of a fantasmatic subjectivity, and one that waits for the imminent "role of a d(ev)ice"; the tropic movement of the device which will signify a presence through absence.

THE "STORY" WITHIN STORIES

The perpetual paradox of the self, then, could be called our "story." This is fortuitous, because if there is anything that Bordwell believes always bears repeating, it is that Hollywood is about telling stories—"by any means necessary," no less.[48] This exigency, as we have seen, is in each case carried by the "devices" of its production and dispersal. It is time for us, then, to linger on the object of these devices—namely, the oft-cited but seldom analyzed spectator of Bordwell's classical narrative. The fact that Bordwell mentions but never (in my opinion) rigorously defines his spectator is not arbitrary, for if telling a story is indeed "the point" of Bordwell's Hollywood cinema, then its implicit goal is categorically the unambiguous articulation (in time and space) of

[47] Ibid, 5.

[48] Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* 27.

knowledge structures that travel unpoblematically from transmitter (the filmic text) to receiver (the spectator). A story must be told, and for this to happen it must be appropriately accessible. To whom? His answer to our query is stunning if unsurprising, for it reveals the extent to which his Hollywood devices are burdened with a project quite in excess of the purported "frame" of his work: *the human.* This may sound strange to be sure, but it is nevertheless what allows Bordwell to rescue convention from the revilement of Structural and Post-Structural theorists.

In "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision" (1996), Bordwell discusses shot/reverse-shot sequences with the goal of moving beyond what he sees as the impasse produced by the "naturalist" position—which sees shot/reverse-shot as the closest approximation to real human vision—and the conventionalist position, which sees shot/reverse shot as culturally constructed, and therefore "arbitrary," to accommodate the contention that shot/reverse-shot, while not "realistic" in the naturalist sense, is nevertheless indicative of necessary developments and practices that are universal across the spectrum of human experience. Bordwell explains: "Our understanding of images could hardly be unconnected to our capacities to move through a three-dimensional environment and to recognize conspecifics. The individual's development of language...is as much a biological capacity as the inclination to grow arms rather than wings."[49] Convention, then, is a product of what he calls "contingent universals": "They are contingent because they did not, for any metaphysical reasons, have to be the way they are; and they are universal insofar as we can find them to be widely present in human

[49] David Bordwell, "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 91.

societies."[50] This by itself would seem to be a fairly uncontroversial claim. However, Bordwell extrapolates from this the following formulation, based on a continuum of perception ranging from the most universal of visual effects to the most unusual and culture-specific. At this point, it will perhaps go without saying that this singular quote is typical of Bordwell, reflecting, I believe, the essential ethos of his scholarship:

> [P]art of what we mean by understanding something "because of its context" is that in the representational package we are offered, the more contingently universal cues lead us to make sense of more esoteric cues in particular ways. This would obviously facilitate learning: not only do we need little exposure to certain effects, but in each image, the universal factors reinforce our hypotheses about the *proper* reaction we should have to the more culturally specific ones.[51]

What is most striking about this passage (other than the move from an "I" to a "we") is the missing definition which resonates silently within it: what, exactly, is a human being according to David Bordwell? He does not deign to tell us. Let us, however, formulate a provisional definition based on his own words: A human being is a creature that, to quote *Making Meaning*, "*makes stubborn data meaningful*."[52] When Bordwell refers to "norm-based" practices, he is essentially describing a process of coercion—a process of exclusion, assignment, and conformity. The knowledge structure produced by this operation is conventional and synthetic, but reflective of "real" human practices. When Bordwell speaks of a "proper" reaction, then, it is implicitly understood that coercion will

[50] Ibid, 91.
[51] Ibid, 96-7.
[52] Bordwell, *Making Meaning,* 32 (italics added).

have occurred on two levels: not only on the level of the art object in question, but also upon the mind (and body?) of the spectator.

Bordwell, it must be noted, does not wish to pass judgment on the human. All he wishes to do is *describe the way things work*, as if this could ever be a neutral or conventionally objective thing. Indeed, Bordwell's work is shocking for its systematic and unflagging dismissal of any question of the performativity of his writing; that is, that he seems unaware (or perhaps unwilling to admit) that his description of an aesthetic system is also essentially a process of *human*-making as well as "making meaning." We are reminded, at this point, of Nietzsche's allegorizing of human truth. Nietzsche articulates (you may remember) the ontology of human truth-making as a process of language; of grafting metaphors onto the brutish and recalcitrant sensory stimulations of the environment: "What is a word? It is the copy in sound of a nerve stimulus."[53] This degraded copying, however, is not for Nietzsche a precursor to some vague transcendence towards a greater or more "correct" truth—indeed, his whole project in this short text is to call into question the very truth/appearance split. In Nietzsche's view, metaphor is *the* human form of praxis par excellence, and accordingly it operates under an order of necessity. Unlike traditional metaphysics, however, this necessity is un-imbued with any sort of privilege; it is, in fact, a singular marker of the human's degraded and contingent status within the overwhelming chaos of the natural world. In other words, our only access to any kind of knowledge is always already a *knowledge-making*. Effectively, then, Nietzsche renders the celebrated "origin" of the referent as

[53]Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s,* ed. & trans. Daniel Breazeale (New York: Humanity Books, 1979), 81.

immediately a simulacrum of itself—the manifest doubling of a sensory stimulation in the form of an utterance. This is why de Man's investigation of the trope in Nietzsche's work is so radical—it emphasizes the epistemic crisis at the locus of any inscription, be it in the form of a speech act, writing, or even the impact of a scent upon our nostrils. Nietzsche and de Man turn the human into a writing machine—but one whose circuit is always (constitutively) broken.

What is objectionable in Bordwell's descriptive project, then, is not so much that he misses a greater truth, but that he fails to take 'truth' into account as a human category. Bordwell does the only thing he can do as a writing creature—with the following caveat: he wishes to evacuate the inscription of its crisis; wishes, in other words, for a description that puts an end to interpretation. His recourse in studying Hollywood devices, then, is the human physiological being as the sound referent of a study of cognitive "problem-solving." But we may ask, what is really "solved" in the process that Bordwell describes? Would it not be more "correct" to say that "making meaning" is in fact a process of more thoroughly *ignoring* the import of the data we are bombarded by? When, for instance, Bordwell describes his work as "making stubborn data meaningful," isn't it just as "correct" to describe his project as one of unmistakable violence? Indeed, a virtual colonization of and dominance of "truth" as a category, one that retroactively constructs a referent and compels a hierarchy?[54]

[54] The violence of Bordwell's project is nowhere more grimly visible then in his and Noel Carroll's controversial *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*. Several film theorists have remarked upon the epistemic violence committed by both the editors and contributors. Peter Lehman's numerous counter-arguments, for instance, emphasize the extent to which Carroll and Bordwell ignore or disregard important scholarship because it fails to conform to their theoretical agenda, while Bruce Bennett details the extent to which Bordwell in particular simplifies and misrepresents psychoanalytic and feminist discourses on film. In fact, Bennett sees such effacement pervading across the spectrum (with a few

In passing over the shattered origin(s) of his scholarship, Bordwell not only continues the long tradition of Western metaphysics; he also represses the political import of inscription. This effacement is, moreover, an ordering of meaning based on *number*. Nietzsche explains in "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense":

> Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept "leaf" is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects. This awakens the idea that...there exists in nature the "leaf": the original model according to which all the leaves were perhaps woven, sketched, measured, colored, curled, and painted—but by incompetent hands, so that no specimen has turned out to be a correct, trustworthy, and faithful likeness of the original model.[55]

What haunts the concept "leaf" is the overwhelming accumulation of differences that must be ignored in order for the model referent to come into being. In Bordwell's case, the Hollywood manual is his "leaf," one that is likewise haunted by an irreducible archival difference. In their stunning critique of Bordwell, Peter Brunette and David Wills describe this difficulty in Bordwell et al's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema.* The authors point out that the book's thesis hinges on the a priori positing of a unified category called "the Hollywood style" that is then subject to empirical and theoretical

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exceptions) of the book's contributors. Take, for instance, his criticism of Cynthia Freeland's contribution: "What Freeland's essay does, using a device employed throughout the book by several writers, is treat Theory (represented here by feminist theory) as a homogenous discourse which can be countered by a recourse to 'common sense' or 'middle-level' approach. In actuality, feminist film theory is a diverse field employing a range of historical and theoretical approaches to the study of films and their production and reception contexts." Bennett's essay is particularly valuable for its attention to the de-politicization attempted by *Post-Theory*'s contributors, particularly how this attempt essentially constitutes a regressive counter-politicization. See: Bruce Bennett, "Misrecognizing Film Studies", *Film-Philosophy* 4, no. 5, 2000.

[55] Nietzsche, "Truth", 83.

proofs. However, what troubles this project is the status of the film archive which serves as their case study. Brunette and Wills elaborate:

> Bordwell informs us that some 15,000 films were made between 1915 and 1960, and out of these 100 were chosen for close study...When the interested reader checks the appendix, however, he or she discovers that the random method employed by the authors actually yielded 841 films, of which only 100 could be found in various collections and archives.[56]

Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson provide an (inadequate) explanation for this dilemma: because certain films have not survived for study, "[Our] selection procedures represent *the closest a researcher can come to random sampling when dealing with historical artifacts*."[57] From this, Brunette and Wills make the following observation: '"The process, then, belies the claim that the sample can ever truly be random and thus ever be truly "typical" of that totality "film history" that remains forever out of reach."'[58] The authors go on to claim that this "random sampling" in fact constitutes an act of "epistemological violence." On our register, we might describe this violence as having to do with the approximation of a metaphor; even the most basic form of historical research (the random sample) turns out to be a dream of logocentrism, one that ignores the overwhelming data which refuses perfect categorization.

In reference to the empirical study of films, I assert that it is equally important to approach film devices and conventions of editing in this manner: with strict attention to the plural, finite, and contingent manner of their dissemination, and with vigilance

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[56] Peter Brunette and David Wills. *Screen/Play: Derrida and Film Theory (*New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 42-3.

[57] Qtd. in Ibid, 43. Originally from *The Classical Hollywood Cinema.*

[58] Brunette and Wills, *Screen/Play*, 43.

towards innumerable and unpredictable loci of their "introduction." More importantly, such devices must be seen as the politically-motivated *things* that they are. It is hardly neutral, for instance, that the apparent project of Hollywood devices is to express meaning as "clearly" and quickly as possible, and to the widest possible audience. This paraphrasing of Bordwell introduces numerous problematical categories, of which we have already said a little. But, as regards shot/reverse-shot specifically, perhaps we can say more. For if *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* represents a macrocosmic totalization of system, then "Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision" represents a microcosmic one based on the human body-as-system. It is a vision of the human as monolithic, homogenous, and uni-dimensional as anything produced under the auspices of Aristotelian poetics and Hegelian onto-theology; it is also what is meant to ensure the legitimacy of Bordwell's conception of system.

That the Bordwellian system should prove so comprehensive and totalizing in its logic is particularly shocking in light of his complaints against so-called "grand theory." Indeed, the pervasive dominance of classical narrative is nowhere more evident than in one of his earliest publications (a fitting "quasi-origin" of sorts): *The Films of Carl Theodore Dreyer* (1981). Here, 4 years before undertaking an explication of the Classical Hollywood System writ large, Bordwell effectively describes it ahead of itself: he does so, moreover, in aid of a discussion of a *single* director, Dreyer, who is effectively a director somewhere in between classical and radical. Before he can become the latter, however, he must emerge out of the context of the former. This is why the formative section of Bordwell's book (titled "Dreyer's Interest") outlines Dreyer's "challenge" to the viewer in terms of the director's relationship to classical narrative practices—a three-

tiered system that remains identical four years later in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985). Against the background of convention, Dreyer appears radical by virtue of his departures from the norm. But, we may ask, what sort of radicality does such a departure really describe? Bordwell's discussion of *La Passion De Jeanne D' Arc* (1928) will help us greatly in this respect. Bordwell describes Dreyer's epic as performing a "rupture,"[59] as "gratuitous by the standards of classical narrative,"[60] and as presenting an "unprecedented challenge to continuity editing."[61] This is so, in his analysis, because Dreyer's film is dialectical: using classical narrative as a template and point of departure, it both respects convention in some instances and rigorously subverts it in others. While there are occurrences of such well-worn practices as eye-line matches, shot/reverse-shot, and thematically-motivated camera movement, there are also numerous spaces in the film in which these devices are ignored and even turned on their heads. For Bordwell, however, the radicality of such gestures is possible only within a system of arrangement. That is: the radical practices of Dreyer appear within a classical template, and it is only by way of their dialectical import that they appear radical. In other words, it is only within their paradoxical *fidelity* to a system that such transgressions are possible—or, in Bordwell's language, "intelligible." Aesthetic transgression, then, is nothing more nor less than *where* one device is placed in relation to another; a matter of structural economy. We are reminded of Price's critique: "In Bordwell's work, art derives from system and order. And, as such, art never has a content; it is only a system of possible formal relations."[62] What this means is that, for Bordwell, the always-dominant

[59] David Bordwell, *The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 67.
[60] Ibid, 77.
[61] Ibid, 78.
[62] Price, "Labor Thought Theory," 101.

conventional system will have been the assimilative template upon which any aesthetic act (radical or otherwise) will have been possible. It will, in other words, have been intelligible in spite of its "unprecedented" transgressions. Dreyer is, then, reduced to what Price describes as a child re-arranging his toys.[63] In each case, then, Dreyer's "challenge" is domesticated and controlled.

Bordwell's policing of Dreyer is even more overt in his explanation of the final unity which allows the spectator to "comprehend" *La Passion de Jeanne D' Arc* in spite of its dynamic formal moves: In the first respect, the figure of Joan of Arc is described as "anchoring" the spectator in the narrative; and in the second, the film makes use the *shared stories* which "we" are all assumed to know. This second level of coherence functions through two closely connected storylines. Bordwell explains:

> In the first shot, hands turn the pages of a book. The shot is emblematic: we come to a familiar tale, equipped with considerable knowledge. Jeanne's peasant ancestry, her religious impulses, her military fervor, and her heroic death: Dreyer assumes that we know all this, takes it as the "pre-text" of his film, and frees the narrative of an expository apparatus. We are expected to recall that Jeanne fought to drive the English out of France, that she trusts that her alliance with King Charles will be honored, that the clerical courts is in league with the occupying army. Since we know all this, the film may organize itself around the last phase of Jeanne's life, and create that radical compression of action for which the film is so celebrated.[64]

[63] Price, "Labor Thought Theory," 102.
[64] Bordwell, *Dreyer*, 84.

This first story, then, might be described (for lack of a better word) as historical: "we," the audience, share this knowledge, and we may understand what the film does *not* show us on that basis. However, Bordwell does not stop here, for there is a second story that "we" all share: "Significantly, all these motifs—cross, crown, messages—reinforce a second text upon which the film's narrative depends: the tale of Christ's suffering and death. The outcome of the film is *programmed* from the beginning, not only because we know the historical Jeanne but also because we know the story of the Passion."[65] The significance of what Bordwell does here cannot be overstated: he writes, into the body of the film, a historical and theological storyline that attempts to dull the promiscuity of the transgressive devices and provides a closing level of unity for the spectator. However, in powerfully spectral fashion, it is what is *not* present that must be read in order for the film to properly come into intelligibility. Not the devices, not their mere arrangement, but only what is effectively *absent* from the text itself—and yet somehow what "we" all share and read into the film, regardless. Here, in the formative stages of his ambitious career, Bordwell engages in a bit of "mere" interpretation—necessary, however, in this case, for the system to make sense. We might ask (as numerous others have done already), however, why these storylines are thought to be so universally shared? Indeed, even if they were, would that in any way "guarantee" the project of unity that Dreyer supposedly intended? We might ask, for instance, what other stories might be brought to bear on this suddenly inter-textual narrative, and what effects might *those* (lesser known?) stories might have on our ability to "read" the film? I might, for instance, indulge in a personal obsession of my own and ask what the presence of Antonin Artaud in Dreyer's film

[65] Bordwell, *Dreyer*, 90 (italics added).

portends for such a reading? What if, for instance, "we" are familiar with Artaud's aesthetic and philosophical experiments in theater, his life-long struggle with madness and the clinical institution, and his premature death from cancer? What is more, what if "we" are also familiar with certain of Artaud's manifestoes—his "To Have Done With the Judgment of God," for instance, which virulently attacks just the sort of cohering storyline(s) that Bordwell writes into the *body* of Dreyer's film? I am tempted to say that "we" would have to place ourselves in quotation marks and decide that the spacing which separates "us" from Bordwell is perhaps at once too intimate and too abyssal to ever fully reckon with.

THE GHOST(S) OF DEVICE AND DENOTATION

As influential as Bordwell's system has become, it has been thoroughly counterbalanced by deconstructive criticism in the field. Brunette's and Wills's critique looms large here, but especially important to any discussion of film form in this context is Alexandre Astruc's conception of the "*camera-stylo*." Tom Conley's *Film Hieroglyphs* begins its project with an invocation of Astruc, and his point is apposite here: that what Astruc accomplished in his thinking was a profound historical gesture, one that "conflated cinema and literature."[66] In contrast to Bordwell, however, Conley does not dismiss such a gesture as a mistake or analogical error; rather, it opens up new fields of possibility with respect to the abyssal complexities of *reading* film. Conley's analysis of *The African Queen* (1951) is instructive in this respect. In contrast to the straightforward-ness of Bordwell's device, Conley's reading of a series of dissolves in one memorable

[66] Tom Conley, *Film Hieroglyphs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xxiv.

sequence has serious implications for a "straight" (I mean this in its sexually ambiguous sense) reading of classical cinema. Conley claims that the use of dissolves and the configurations of the editing during Charlie's (Humphrey Bogart) repairs on the boat result in a libidinous subtextual operation that contaminates Rose's (Katherine Hepburn) seemingly innocent comment: "Do you think we can do *it*, Charlie?":

> *It* becomes a shifter, a floating figure with numerous referents in the allegory (the trip, the political gesture of sinking the enemy boat), as well as the ineffable dimension of eros written into the lap dissolve and the filming of the two bodies engaged in fellatio. The film transliterates a scenic drama and mythic structure of voyage or quest into an erotic comedy whose basic enigma asks if two aging subjects, with their symbolically rotting pudenda, can find love in old age...The film confuses the political and erotic registers in its moments of transition and slippage. These effects, which both screen and reveal these dimensions, seem obvious wherever image and writing are combined. But in *The African Queen* a different grammar emerges from the overlay of images. The film cannot denote its overriding conflation of decomposing sex organs and death within its characters; it must shunt the confusion into the gaps between sequences and in the innuendo of speech that floats free of images that would otherwise locate its meaning. Hence, the indeterminate "it" of "Can we do it?" finds a referent only in the camouflage of montage.[67]

Conley's analysis refuses to reduce the viewing spectator into a unified and fantasmatic construct; what emerges instead is a strange process of discernment and inscription *in*

[67] Conley, *Hieroglyphs*, xxxv-xxxvi.

between the slips and movements of supposedly conventional techniques. A radically particularized reading, Conley's analysis de-familiarizes the cinematic text and powerfully demonstrates that there is, indeed, no (arch) manual for reading a film.[68] It is also an analysis that forecloses the possibility of grafting a unilateral system onto the aesthetic object or device.

Conley's reading also raises the cataclysmic possibility that those "invisible" devices which were meant to ensure meaning and invoke the *khora* may in fact be hiding something else—a forbidden and raging materiality that (like Schelling's God) is defined negatively even as it threatens to become irrepressibly (impossibly) visible. The poison that carries this leaden specter is *connotation*—that which the cut doubles, and which its surrounding discourses can never thoroughly account for.

We are driven to turn again to Price's (a friend and mentor, you will forgive me for not mentioning it earlier) analysis of the cut, specifically his discussion of D.A. Miller's *Anal Rope*. In Miller's account, traditional accounts of Hitchcock's famous experiment pass over the content of the film's plot in favor of a fetishistic focus on the singularity of the film's form, and in doing so incorrectly describe the very particularities and movements of that form. Seeing this as a significant blockage on the level of a

[68] An interesting and, I think, momentous anecdote is related by Conley in his revised preface "Hieroglyphs Then and Now," for the 2006 edition of *Film Hieroglyphs:* "An irony in the history of *Film Hieroglyphs* still resounds in the title. Because it intended to make *écriture* equivalent to cinema, the manuscript was initially sent to the editorial staff of the University of Minnesota Press under the title "Film Writing." The marketing department of the press quickly changed the title for fear of confusion with a *manual* whose purpose was to teach readers how to write a successful scenario or how to develop a screenplay from a first to a final treatment. The Book, the editors rightly reasoned, was anything but practical" (x, italics added). In this way, I think we can ascribe a singular sense of haunted-ness to Conley's book—the manual making its way into his text, albeit in the form of an ironic and easily dismissed (?) anecdote. I discover this anxiety in the text because it is decisively set off (however briefly and implicitly) as an antithesis to Conley's proposed project, a point made clear in his final statement that his work was "anything but practical." Every text has its double, it seems; and sometimes more than one.

disavowal, Miller concentrates on how form is infected by content; how, in other words, the story of two gay(?) men becomes a pervasive connotative force across the spectrum of the film's formal pattern. What is central in this secretive operation is the very nature of the question under discussion: are these characters, *in fact*, gay? Rather than assert a positive radical content that might be marshalled against the regressive denotations of pure form, Miller's essay describes a process in which homosexuality becomes an absent presence (or, to use Price's term, a "productive aporia") that is only signified negatively; in the register, in other words, of the divine. This inscription of homosexual materiality is graphically conceptualized as (by both Miller and Price) an anus: hidden forever in between the flabby field of visible in-visible images, floating promiscuously from device to device within the suddenly open limits of a formerly closed system. Content infests form and renders it no longer a mere manner of the technical—or the cognitive. Here, most of all, is where Price's critique is unmistakably a matter for Bordwell. Take, for instance, his contention in "Labor Though Theory": "In Bordwell's work, art derives from system and order. And, as such, art never has a *content*; it is only a system of possible formal relations."[69] What this means, for our discussion, is that Bordwell wishes his treasured devices to be fixed within the realm of the empirical and the denotative—that is, safely removed from the vagaries of mere "interpretation" (one of Bordwell's least favorite words). What Price's analysis of the cut makes clear, however, is that this imperative cannot be reduced to a straightforward concern for historical posterity (there is no such thing as a "straightforward" history); in fact, it speaks to a fear of the particularized device—particularized, that is, by the suddenly abject, material spectator

[69] Price, "Labor Thought Theory," 101.

that Bordwell's discourse so stringently elides. Like Conley's age-inappropriate scene of oral coitus, Miller's essay demonstrates the haunting specter of form's double—the supplementary content that renders system, meaning, history, and God anything but "straight."

Where, then, does this leave our journey through Bordwell's corpus? Can we, after having dealt with the vicissitudes of his manual, depart from the screen of phallocentric discourses and immerse ourselves in the thing-in-itself? Hardly. I do not know what Miller would say on this score (I flatter myself that I know what Price would think!), but, *for me*, the result of all of this will have resulted in a seemingly deflating conclusion: there is no leaving Bordwell or his manual behind. However, I say "seemingly" because it hardly follows from this that Bordwell will have succeeded in his impossible project of mastery. All it will have meant, *in the end*, is that in watching a film we will never have done with the discourses attending it—laid over or creeping under the image sequence, Bordwell and innumerable others will have inscribed their abject bodies within the absences and blinds of film form—they will, in short, have made themselves doubles of the negatively-posited absolute; which is not so different, in the end, from the (non)appearance of an anus.

CONCLUSION: TRUTH VALUES; OR, "THE MAN BEHIND THE DESK"

I find myself in the "final" section of my paper now, and yet it feels as if I have yet to say anything "in my own name," so to speak. That is, I have relied, been beholden to, a series of "masters"—Derrida, de Man, Nietzsche, Clark, Price, Conley, Brunette, Wills, Bordwell (how odd to see his name among these!), and on. Bordwell would no

doubt say that I have demonstrated the precarious ambitions of a young apprentice, and he would be stunningly right in this respect. Time, then, for an impossible encounter with my own ipseity—my own imminent scholarship—which will be identical to what "I" have been driven to find within the strange space of my own spectatorship.

This final section refers to "truth values"—a formulation that I found in Alenka Zupančič's *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (2003). Zupančič is crucially concerned with the import of Nietzsche's aphoristic style, its status and its operation—what she carefully refers to as his "truth"—or, more radically, as "the event Nietzsche." I must, for the sake of space, scandalously truncate the elegance and progression of her argument. What I believe it amounts to, however, is a figure of the double in the most fundamental respect—that is, as the (non)presence of spacing within a dyad that equals, not a third term, but a *specter*. One of her formative examples comes—significantly—in the form of avant-garde manifestoes. What Zupančič wishes to tease out in such documents is their status as performative acts. That is, that in making a manifesto, an artist also participates in a radical act—not least because she pays fidelity to the exigency to efface her particularity in the face of an imminent break with tradition. In order to do this, however, the radical artist must encounter and "abolish" the category "artist" itself. Zupančič explains:

> [T]hey accomplish this not be means of irony, but by substituting the subject-work in place of the ego. In other words, the subjectivity that so vehemently affirms itself in manifestoes is the art object itself...Does the declaration in which art is declaring *itself* (in the form of a manifesto) lack the Real? One would be hard pressed to answer in the affirmative. The point is that the declaration is part

> of the Real it declares. This is why it cannot declare the event as if speaking from the outside, but, rather, takes the form of "I, the event, am speaking."[70]

Zupančič is quick to point out that this double nature of the aesthetic declaration does not usher in a new reality that transcends the old binaries of inside/outside and so on. Rather, what the spectral performativity of the manifesto announces is the irreducible presence of *spacing* itself. That is, the omnipresent trace of a (im)possible access to what Zupančič calls the Real. While there is a spectral coincidence of declaration and event, this coincidence is a manifestation of "the two," which "is not yet multiplicity itself. It is perhaps best articulated in the topology of the edge as the thing whose sole substantiality consists in its simultaneously separating and linking two surfaces."[71] In the moment of access, then, there is neither completion nor even evolution, but only the reflective process of a contiguity (rather than continuity)—a coincidence that does not become a third term, but that is nevertheless "something else."[72] What this equation looks very much like is a hegemonic relationship between part and whole: in speaking "as itself," the individual, empirical manifesto becomes the art object itself—on the Kantian register, we might call it "an end in itself." However, what this means is that any ultimate decision will have been reserved within the spacing of such an operation. Like the Lacanian subject, it will have only occurred in a scission that institutes the figure of the double. The object is always, then, different from "itself." Like the Bordwellian manual, there is the particular Hollywood offering in question; but, framing it, there is the ideal, impossible arch-manual itself—the transcendent object of perfect coincidence between

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[70] Alenka Zupanžiž, *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Two* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 11.
[71] Ibid, 12.
[72] Ibid.

part and whole, inside and outside. It is a moment that lacks anything like clarity; in fact, it manifests as a blurring of conceptual vision that draws two things apart (as when one crosses one's eyes) and yet also signifies their relation.

We will be very close here to Tom Conley's encounters with writing in film—how the presence of text prepares and necessitates unpredictable operations of reading and textual play that will have been somewhere in between intentionality and contingency—and specifically, a very singular type of speech act: the reflexive declaration. I run up against this grammatical thing first of all because it serves to express a relation of self to self. A reflexive pronoun, for instance, instigates a movement from the spurring of the action of the verb to its completion, and does so to express that both moments will have had the same locus: "*I* have written this manifesto *myself*." The "I" begins to describe "itself," and in doing so must perform a figure of the two. The reflexive pronoun is the spectral speech act par excellence, and so it could be thought of as the "story" of our story. Let me explain through a film. I recently re-watched *The Proposal* (Anne Fletcher, 2009). As you might know, this film is a romantic comedy that often invokes a "classical" feeling—that is, there is much in this text that reminds the educated viewer of the Hollywood screwball comedy, that bizarre latter day generic offering that engages with questions of gender, ideology, institution, and love. The plot centers on a high-powered Chief Editor of a New York City publishing company, Margaret Tate (Sandra Bullock). As the film opens, we find that her visa application has been rejected (she is Canadian), and that she will be deported from the country. In order to circumvent this, she coerces her assistant Andrew (Ryan Reynolds) into participating in a sham marriage with her. In return, he will be promoted and given the ability to

advocate for manuscripts that he is personally invested in. The two sides in agreement, they proceed to the immigrations office, where they encounter Mr. Gilbertson (Dennis O'Hare), an immigrations officer who will be responsible for screening and legitimating their relationship. It is the sequence here that I am preoccupied with. As Margaret and Andrew enter Gilbertson's office, they are at first amiably (if hastily) greeted by the latter, who enters a moment after they do. After this relatively pleasant beginning, he proceeds to sit behind his desk, where he straightforwardly asks if they are attempting to undercut immigration policy by entering into a dishonest contract marriage. The sudden change in tone is signaled not only by the move behind his desk, but also by the introduction of Bordwell's hallowed shot/reverse-shot, which constructs a typical back-and-forth montage that alternates between a downward-angled medium shot of Gilbertson behind his desk, and Margaret and Andrew sitting uncomfortably.

I am fascinated, first of all, by how a conventional device (conventionally-used) nevertheless begins to play with the idea of relation, dramatizing not only a denotational relationship between characters, but also a connotative play of unequal power relationships that begins to reckon with the always non-normative play of elements within a supposed system. However, what makes this sequence especially note-worthy is the sticker placed front-and-center in the middle of the desk (and the frame); a sticker that announces, to whomever it may be relevant, the following reflexive verb that, like the reflexive pronoun, describes a relation of contiguity between subject and object: *se habla*. Translating literally as "he/she/ speaks," it might be completed by adding 'Espanol,' resulting in "Spanish is spoken (here?)." It is this gesturing that interests me. Ostensibly, the person at the desk is able to speak Spanish if necessary. However, the note also

comically engages in an anthropomorphic personification—the desk itself, it seems, is bilingual, for what matters in such an equation (as denoted by the declaration and determined by the structure of the sequence) is not the specific person sitting behind the desk, but the sticker itself. In other words, if someone else (another "Mr. Gilbertson) were to sit there, he or she would be (rightly or wrongly) imbued with the power to declare him/herself—in another language, no less (in this context, a language other than English). This specter of another language is appropriate within the sphere of an institution (the immigrations office) primarily concerned with boundaries between people, places, and things. What Mr. Gilbertson stands for, then, is not simply the "I" that speaks unproblematically as his own subject, but also the pronoun that "speaks" for the institution of law—in another language, if necessary. When he speaks, therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that he has (at least) two voices—his "own," and the institutional object itself, called into spectral presence through a combination of the silent play of language and the bureaucratic pass-filter of a large desk, one that significantly serves to flatten out one half of the shot/reverse-shot. Because of this flattening affect (the right-angled play of surfaces serving to contradict the spatial creation of "depth" through the presence of geometric lines), the switching of shot/reverse-shot results in a two-dimensional game of "peek-a-boo" with the reflexive verb: disappearing when Margaret and Andrew are represented, and disjunctively appearing again within the institutional field of "Mr . Gilbertson"; an effect that echoes the alternate opening and closing of one eye and then the other. Disappearing and reappearing, the reflexive verb stands in hegemonic relation to the institution: ghosting and channeling the pull of "system" while also speaking as/with/for the man sitting behind the desk. What shot/reverse-shot and the

figure of writing offer us, then, is the double—a spacing between part and whole, inside and outside, presence and absence. It is this performative dimension of the device that I refer to as its "truth value": in showing us "Mr. Gilbertson," the shot also gestures towards that which cannot be represented, but which must be negatively manifested within the person of a privileged part. Just as the reflexive verb begins to experiment with the play of difference, the "switching" effect of the shot/reverse-shot device results in a here/there of the reflexive that invokes the impossible coming-into-being of the institution: the super-egoic non-presence that legitimates the transaction (marriage) that the device references.

This initial example serves to demonstrate the manifesto-like tendencies of the simple Hollywood device, even when used "properly." What I mean by this, is that in seeking to denote an event, the device also performs a rupture—not only as regards the doubled break with continuity that the cut signifies, but also as regards the play of identities: of "Mr. Gilbertson" and his other, that which is at once him and not him. In seeking to make meaning, then, the device over-extends itself. The play of writing in the sticker and the inscription of the cut result in a reference to an outside that is no longer transcendently, divinely absent, but impossibly indexed in the interstices of the cut and the here/there reflexivity of "se habla." A silent and invasive reflexive pronoun haunts this sequence: "I, the art object, am speaking (Spanish)." It is here that I see a device from "the" manual becoming its antithesis: a manifesto. The system, then, *manifests*; but only within the troubled space of a cut that has suddenly become a rupture, describing a space of difference that must reach outside itself in order to—to what? To hold continuity, or to ensure the chasm of its transgression even more irrevocably?

The reflexive device as a figure of the double is of particular interest to me not only because I believe that it is intrinsic to the experience (my own, that is) of film-viewing, but also because it allows me to trace my way back to a privileged example from Bordwell's *The Way Hollywood Tells It*: I am speaking of Cameron Crowe's *Jerry Maguire*. It is a film uniquely concerned, I believe, with what it might mean to speak from behind a desk. Indeed, the idea of being "behind" in general is something this film wants to concern itself with—as the title character himself says (by way of an introduction): "I'm the guy you don't usually see. I'm the guy behind the scenes. I'm the sports agent" (Jerry Maguire). The plot centers around Jerry's disaffection at the money-grubbing capitalistic impulses of the institution in which he works, and it is this sense of alienation that spurs him to write what he terms a "mission-statement," but which we might just as easily call a manifesto. The film deals in a very explicit sense, then, with the idea of rupture—in this case, from the vicissitudes of an institution that has gone bad. However, while Jerry may in once sense be a radical of sorts, he is also a purveyor of continuity, as is demonstrated by his frequent hearkening back to a vague moment in the past when the work he did was not quite so corrupt. The agent of this past is our concern, not the least because he is a man behind a desk: A harbinger of Jerry's desire to move on from the dehumanizing affects of capitalism, he is also an almost parodic invocation of the old-timey career man. Even his name bespeaks a close proximity to a certain kitschy vision of old: "Dicky Fox."

Jerry very early on speaks of his mentor. He is an old sports agent that intrudes upon the narrative proper from time to time, providing clichéd sounding advice in a decidedly aphoristic form. Fox, it must immediately be said, is not properly a character

in the film, if by "character" we mean someone who engages in relationships with other characters on the same spatio-temporal plane. Indeed, we only ever see "Dicky" in what *might* be a point-of-view shot; the suggestion throughout is that we are viewing him through Jerry's perspective at some formative point in his past, but the device of shot/reverse-shot never intervenes to definitively prove this hypothesis to us. As such, his appearances are always accompanied by a question: is he inside or outside of the story we are watching? It is an open question, even if we accept the hypothesis that he is indeed only a figure in Jerry's memory. The device of the flashback itself is, after all, something that is never entirely accounted for *within* the span of a classical narrative. In that case, he would be accounted for on the terms of psychological realism, certainly, but nevertheless he would also be somewhere "inside" (of Jerry's consciousness) and "outside" (of the progression of events in the film's causally-directed time space). As such, "Dicky" is always something approaching an intrusion, even if we might be happy to see him.

The status of "Dicky" as a figure is augmented by the unflagging consistency of his presentation: always in a cleanly-framed medium-shot behind his desk, broadcasting his folksy wisdom ("the key to this business is personal relationships!") to whomever. His appearance, then, registers as a form of direct-address; and, as the preceding analysis suggests, this address partakes of a kind of reflexive status. It does, for instance, possess a kind of "truth value" in the form of the art-object of the film itself. Like "Mr. Gilbertson," "Dicky" is something other than a mere individual. He is also, however, not merely the institutional figure head that the film's diegesis projects him as. Bordwell himself provides us with a clue as to what "Dicky's" status might be: '"He [Cameron Crowe] studied...'the incomparable Billy Wilder." *The Apartment* (1960) was Crowe's

favorite film...He even tried to persuade Wilder to play the part of Dickie Fox (sic), Jerry's Mentor."[73] This anecdote not only sets up Bordwell's historical narrative of apprenticeship (or "belatedness"), it also establishes the narrative thread of *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, what he treats as a minor point: "I suspect...that these felicities are addressed to other filmmakers, as marks of virtuosity in the trade...with many films designed to appeal to a wide range of viewers, there are pressures to sprinkle in details that might be caught by only a few."[74] I am put in mind of Tom Conley's thoughts about such extra-textual references in *Cartographic Cinema*. For instance, his awareness of an historical inaccuracy in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (1999). A map appears in the background during the scene in which Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) grants the crown of Rome to Maximus (Russell Crowe). After this gesture, Aurelius asks Maximus to look at the map in question: "What we see...is a projection of Italy and the northern provinces...in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."[75] Conley takes this "flagrant disrespect for authenticity" as an indication that the film's preoccupations exceed its classical narrative project: "The cutaway shot of Ptolemy's *Italia* in Scott's epic makes clear the facticity of the map and the liberties taken with historical reconstruction...while it also indicates...not only one of the principle sources of the film's conception but also a dialogue between two different directorial stakes and styles...."[76] In connection with Bordwell's point about marks of expertise "in the craft," what comes out of a film like *Gladiator* (or *Jerry maguire*) is not a straightforwardly classical narrative, but the spectacle of a discourse between "experts" that has become generalized across the

[73] Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 21.
[74] Ibid, 62.
[75] Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 14.
[76] Ibid.

spectrum of filmic denotation. The doubled nature of classical narrative, then, is that it must always *exceed* itself in order to signify. In the case of Crowe's film, the figure of "Dicky" must now be partially grasped as a placeholder for Billy Wilder—a hallowed and (perhaps) disapproving father figure whose (non)presence in the film is the very condition of possibility of its existing in the first place.

The content of these sequences (men behind desks) in relation to the operation of the "classical" device of narrative logic admits a figure that partakes of the play of spacing, and what this spacing insists on invoking for us is the aphorism. Whether in the form of a reflexive declaration or the spectral logic of direct address, what is made to speak through the art object is a form of utterance that must remain sovereign even as it hooks itself onto a sequence (montage) of unpredictable destination. Because of this paradoxical double movement, the aphorism is a form that must always be at odds with the temporal moment in which it finds itself; it must explode into multiple directions, traversing a limit that enfolds atemporality into the span of an utterance. Derrida undertakes a dazzling engagement with the aphorism in the text of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Through a close reading of the two lover's pensive invocations of the other's name, a space is established between, on the one hand, the proper name of each that spells doom to the relationship (because their names refer to their families, who are blood enemies), and an insistence on the name as the privileged signifier by which their love is realized. As such, the moment of their romance is always deferred to some imminent moment that, rather than being within the future tense, is rather a relation of the between. Derrida teases this relation out within the metaphorical setting of night, in which the lovers recurringly speak of/at one another:

> Everything that happens at night, for Romeo and Juliet, is decided rather in the penumbra, *between* night and day. The indecision between Romeo and the bearer of his name, between "Romeo," the name of Romeo and Romeo himself...This drama belongs to the night because it stages what is not seen, the name; it stages what one calls because one cannot see or because one is not certain of seeing what one calls.[77]

While no doubt moving far too quickly, I would like to suggest that this temporal and epistemological paradox is the thing par excellence of Crowe's *Jerry Maguire*—and of Bordwell's "intensified continuity." What "Dicky Fox" stages is at once a coming-into-being of the name— that figure whose name and being transcendently coalesce—and the name of the name: the great master "Billy Wilder" whose presence remains undecidable, somewhere in between the aphoristic entrance of his fantasmatic proxy and the interstices of narrative logic that both promise and defer a fulfillment of that impossible coincidence. In classically poetic fashion, we might say that Crowe must wait a little longer for his name. So, too, Bordwell; and so, too, all of us.

Post-script

This thesis has been the preface to a book (about Bordwell?) I would one day like to write. As it is, I must momentarily resign myself to the strange, abortive, and crude document that it is. However, to say as much is to admit of a certain slippage in the progression of thought. In my own way, I have tried to pay my respects to this slippage,

[77] Jacques Derrida, "Aphorism Countertime," in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*: *Vol. I*. (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 135.

which is beautifully summed up by Georges Bataille in his *Theory of Religion*. As with so much of his work, it is worth quoting at length:

> The foundation of one's thought is the thought of another; thought is like a brick cemented into a wall. It is a simulacrum of thought if, in his looking back on himself, the being who thinks sees a free brick and not the price this semblance of freedom costs him: he doesn't see the waste ground and the heaps of detritus to which a sensitive vanity consigns him with his brick.[78]

This passage sums up my relationship to my own work. I say "my own," but the very idea is rendered impossible by the progression of thought itself—for, as Bataille posits, our thought is always the thought of an-other. This small and cataclysmic fact signals a reckoning that one is always in the process of (not) putting into operation. That is, what Bataille gestures towards is the doubled gesture of remembrance and forgetting of that otherness that must accompany a writing. It is an oscillation, a simultaneity, or a relation of and between two moments of being that must be accounted for.

When I speak of my work as "strange, abortive, and crude," I mean this not as regards the total work, nor to specific passages that might be judged as sounding more or less like "myself." Rather, it is (as always) somewhere in between the dyad that this uncanny feeling lurks. What Batialle indicates about this "between," however, is nevertheless definitive: that it will never have been a matter of clearly seeing one's way towards either the framing "assemblage" or the "brick" itself; rather, it will always have been a matter of minding the moment(s) of forgetting and remembrance that function as conditions of (im)possibility for any past, present, and future of scholarship:

[78] Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 9.

> In a sense the unlimited assemblage is the impossible. It takes courage and stubborness not to go slack. Everything invites one to drop the substance for the shadow, to forsake the open and impersonal movement of thought for the isolated opinion. Of course the isolated opinion is also the shortest means of revealing what the assemblage essentially is—the impossible. But it has this deep meaning only if it is not conscious of the fact.[79]

The status of the "isolated opinion" is momentous for me because it almost seems as if Bataille could have addressed this formulation *directly* to Bordwell (indeed, I wonder if Bordwell has ever read Bataille?). If there is one notion that I have tried to tease out in the foregoing work, it is that Bordwell reveals the "assemblage" as well as any scholar, and that he does so precisely because of the willful and malevolent gesture of forgetting—of history, politics, and meaning—that informs his work. In keeping with that other register of Bataille's formulation, however, what a remembering amounts to is a minding of the impossibility of thought—a "powerlessness" in the face of what has come before, and what must follow. As such, the intervention this work will have made remains contingent on the spectral hand of an-other—an imminent reading that will decide what the next roll of the dice might resemble. Perhaps, then, what Bataille reminds me to do is to make that obligatory call to remember to remember; or, perhaps, to forget to forget.

[79] Bataille, *Theory,* 10.

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