Travelling philosophy: from literature to film

Biermann, B.C.

Citation for published version (APA):
Introduction

Longing to Know the Self and Other Through Narrative

In The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity (1988), Canadian philosopher G.B. Madison claims that what makes humans human is:

...an overriding concern for their being and an insatiable desire to know who they are, to be themselves, truly, understandingly. This is why, ever since humans have been humans, they have sat around the fire telling and listening to stories about themselves and other selves — many of which were fictional selves, gods, demons, demigods, heroes, and other deified humans. It is only natural, therefore, that philosophy, that supremely human undertaking, should from its inception have concerned itself with the question of what constitutes the humanness of human beings (155).

In a similar vein, at the beginning of Metaphysics (1998), Aristotle addressed this "supremely human undertaking" when he wrote: "By nature, all men long to know" (4). French philosopher Michael Foucault envisions philosophy as a way of "interrogating ourselves" in order to "become other than one is" (1984: 329). In The Self and the Dramas of History (1955), American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr sees this intrinsic yearning as the metaphysical endeavor to discern the "mystery and meaning" above and beyond our rational faculties (61).

This epistemologically-charged yearning to know the answers to metaphysical questions informs my central objective, which is to critically examine how narratives philosophize through juxtaposing the ontological categories of "self" and "other."¹ In light of this principal aim, I view these categories through the lens of moderate realism in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense.² As the union of body and soul, moderate realism

¹ C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 26. Lewis sees these categories as prerequisites for "self-consciousness." He writes: "There is no reason to suppose that self-consciousness, the recognition of a creature by itself as a 'self,' can exist except in contrast with an 'other,' something which is not the self."
² Norman Kretzmann, Eleonore Stump, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11: "Again, even scholars entirely friendly to Aquinas and impressed with his achievements as a philosopher have sometimes presented him as simply the consummate Aristotelian, adopting the term 'Aristotelian-Thomistic' as the best short characterization of Aquinas' philosophical positions." With this point in mind, for the purposes of this study, I employ the philosophy of moderate realism in the Aristotelian-Thomistic sense. Thomas Aquinas, Questions On The Soul, translated by James Robb (Marquette: Marquette University Press, 1984). "Aquinas - clearly Aristotelian - generally argued that all knowledge originates in sensation, but sensory information can only be made comprehensible by the mind, which elevates thought toward a preliminary apprehension of such immaterial realities as God and the soul. However, revelation is required to reach an understanding of the highest truths. While in opposition to Platonic extreme realism (conceptualism, nominalism), which holds that universals exist independently of both particular things and human minds, Aristotelian moderate realism holds that universals only exist as they are instantiated by particulars. Like Aristotle, Aquinas saw a foundation for transcendent universals in immanent things. Warren Austin Gage, The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 75. Aquinas is echoed by American theologian Gage who wrote: "As an observer of nature man discerns the metaphysical by the means of the physical, the transcendent by the immanent." New American
places the self in an intermediate position between the purely spiritual and the wholly material. As for the “other,” it may also be a human blend of the spiritual with the material, mere substance like the “impenetrable” jungle in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1960: 39) or entirely celestial like the Holy Spirit that fell on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:2 as a “violent rushing wind” (NASB 1999: 1037).

Whatever physical form the other – a particular, immanent incarnation of a universal abstract concept – may take, what is of true consequence is how the self cognitively processes its physical interaction with the other. To put it differently, a story merely records how the self has mentally processed its material interaction with some particular form of other. In Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other (1999), South African philosopher Derek Attridge sees this material interaction premised on a kind of “relation” with the other that leads to an “encounter”:

Another virtue of the phrase the other – which it shares with the new – is that it is premised on a relation. To be other is necessarily to be other to. What is the same to me is other to someone else and vice versa. Moreover, it is other only in the circumstance within which the encounter takes place (22).

What is more, the self’s encounter with another’s uniqueness is, at the same time, an affirmation of other as other. Attridge writes that this affirmation is not essentially unlike the experience of the other as one attempts to produce an “original work of art” (24). Theologian Anthony Thiselton sees the relationship this way: “Interaction with ‘others’ provides material for ‘telling our story’” (1995: x). These relations with others result in a cognitive interface between the abstract concepts of self and other that is reproduced – with varying degrees of accuracy – in any number of narrative media. Niebuhr sees the cognitive interaction as an internal dialogue and writes that the self:

...could not carry on this dialogue without using its ‘reason’; for the dialogue means that the self in one of its aspects is making the self, in another of its aspects, its object of thought. It uses conceptual images for this procedure (1955: 6).

In one sense, a narrative is a record of this internal dialogue and may possess a philosophical component as the self seeks a deeper understanding of both itself and the other. In these cases, a story may inspire the viewing subject to enter into a similar internal dialogue that directs it toward metaphysical questions that humans, according to Aristotle, are naturally disposed to ask. In this way, a narrative can help us better understand the meaning and mystery beyond our senses as we attempt to sharpen and clarify, or “make” what we see as the universal, transcendent concepts of self and other come alive within our imaginations.

Standard Bible (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1999), 1071. Expressing this same idea in Romans 1: 20, the apostle Paul argued that: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (NASB 1999: 1071).

Désiré Joseph Mercier, Critériologie (Louvain: Philosophical Series, 1906), 343. Mercier describes the situation this way: “The latter (incarnations of other) are particular, but we have the power to represent them to ourselves abstractly.”

Mieke Bal, Travelling Concepts in the Humanities (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 9. I align the concept of “object” used in this study with Bal’s view that objects should not be seen as isolated jewels, but as things always-already engaged, as interlocutors, within the larger culture from which they emerged. The analysis of these objects looks to issues of cultural relevance and aims to articulate how the objects contribute to cultural debates; hence, the emphasis on the object’s existence in the present.
With this philosophically creative potential in view, the preponderance of the work in my study is devoted to a sequence of close textual analyses and descriptions of six objects of culture in the present, which are all narrative texts. A narrative text is a text in which an agent relates ("tells") a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof (Bal 1997: 5). I present these six narrative texts, which are all postmodern cultural artifacts, in three dual-medium pairs; each pair consists of a novel and a Hollywood adaptation of that novel. I analyze Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange (1962) and Stanley Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange (1971); Chuck Palahniuk’s Fight Club (1997) and David Fincher’s Fight Club (1999); Stanislaw Lem’s Solaris (1961) and Steven Soderbergh’s Solaris (2002). Coupling the texts in this way resonates with a method of analysis that employs an interdisciplinary approach in order to develop a concept-based methodology that has the potential to unify such (relatively) diverse fields of interest as literature and film. Thus, this study is rooted in the practice of a cultural analysis that prioritizes cultural processes over objects, intersubjectivity over objectivity, and concepts over theories.

Using narratology as a heuristic tool, I construct descriptions of the novels and their filmic counterparts in order to expose what I consider to be the philosophy that radiates from the binary tension inherent in the dialectic between self and other. After the philosophies have emerged through narratological description, I reveal the consistencies and variations between the texts that constitute the dual-medium pair in order to determine the measure in which the philosophy of the novel travelled into film. Simply stated, in a philosophical sense, I want to know how watching the film is "like" reading the book.

While any film will almost certainly exhibit at least a small degree of philosophical variation from its literary antecedent, I argue that any deviation invariably stems from the film’s distinct treatment of an oppositional relationship that remains unchanged as it moves from novel to film. For example, while Kubrick’s film may treat the nature of the self’s relationship to the state differently from the novel by emphasizing aspects the book did not or, conversely, underemphasizing aspects the book valued, the self ultimately remains in an oppositional relationship with the state. This larger consistency allowed me to arrange the pairings in a manner that demonstrates a kind of progression in the way this central antinomy is treated through narrative expression. In other words, the arrangement exhibits the self’s movement from its grappling with the external, political question: "What is the self’s place in society?" to the more internal phenomenological

---

5 It may be useful to distinguish a new term, "dual-medium," from an existing one, "intertextual," because of the connective implications of intertextuality. This is important because the term dual-medium implies a "distinction within" the connective pairing that contains two texts (literary and filmic). However, I also, at times, employ the term intertextual which implies, for instance, a "connection between" the two texts within the pairing. In addition, from time to time I refer to a particular pairing with regard to the title shared by the two texts; for example, the "Clockwork pairing."

6 Bal, Travelling Concepts (2002), 23: "If explicit, clear, and defined, concepts can help to articulate an understanding, convey an interpretation, check an imagination-run-wild, or enable a discussion on the basis of common terms and in the awareness of absences and exclusions."

7 Bal, Travelling Concepts (2002), 44: "Theory can only be meaningful when it is deployed in close interaction with the objects of study to which it pertains. Concepts tested in close, detailed analysis can establish a much-needed intersubjectivity, not only between the analyst and the audience, but also between the analyst and the "object."

8 Anthony Thistlethwaite, Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995). ix. Thistlethwaite notes that this idea can also be seen in the work of such thinkers as French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and German theologian Jürgen Moltmann who both envision the self as drawing its full personhood from a dialectic between a self and its relation to an other.
question: "What is the self?" to the even more deeply personal existential question: "Who am I?"

More concretely, in the Clockwork pairing, the self (Alex DeLarge) rarely enters into any meaningful self-examination. Rather, Alex's struggle to find his place in opposition to an authoritarian state generally remains on an external level. The Fight Club pairing demonstrates the self's (Jack / Joe) transition from an external effort to realize his place in an emasculating consumer culture, to a more internal conflict as he attempts, albeit unconsciously, to gain a deeper level of self-awareness than the protagonist of Clockwork exhibited. Finally, the Solaris pairing presents the self's (Kris Kelvin) most profound effort to answer phenomenological and existential questions as Kelvin's conflict -- a profound grappling with his own finiteness -- exists on an almost exclusively internal level. Thus, not only will I examine the measure in which the philosophy of the novel travels to film, but also how these three pairings exhibit an evolution in the way the self must ultimately deal with limits of its own subjectivity.9 When taken as a set, the three pairings argue that humans, as body-mind composites, must cognitively contend with both their empirical and transcendental qualities, and subjectivity is inescapable because we will never really be free from one to deal objectively with the other that will always remain within us.

Prior to the chapters devoted to each pairing, a brief prelude frames the general philosophical considerations from which the novels' more specific dialectics originate. For example, preceding the Clockwork chapters, I have included a discussion of political philosophy as it relates to the concepts of free will and original sin, which are framed theologically by the adversative arguments of Augustine and Pelagius. These chapters supply a broad philosophical context for the more specific philosophies that emerge from the self and other dialectics knitted into the objects. Bal sees philosophical activity as consisting primarily of creating, arguing, and modifying concepts (2002: 316). Based on this view, I argue that a fundamental objective of a novelist is to transform the fruits of this original philosophical activity into a literary narrative -- a form of philosophizing in its own right.10

Lastly, in the concluding chapter, I further trace the movement of the literary dialectic and the measure it manifests in its narrative filmic counterpart. The initial analysis in the body chapters lays the groundwork for a larger discussion of the degree the films did or did not "filmatize" the philosophy presented in the novels, which indicates the measure the literary dialectic is made readily available to more mainstream Hollywood audiences.

Cultural Analysis and the Cave of Postmodernity

The relevance of the work I propose in this study manifests itself in light of the critical practice of cultural analysis as well as Socrates' cave analogy found in Book VII of Plato's Republic. Dutch literary and cultural theorist Mieke Bal defines cultural analysis as a practice different from what is commonly understood as "history" and sees it as:

9 G.B. Madison, The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 159: "Subjectivity is a fact, as indubitable as the fact that I exist, ego sum."

10 Allan Bloom, "The Ladder of Love," in Plato's Symposium (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 57. Addressing the classical quarrel between poetry and philosophy, Bloom states: "And the situation depicted by Aristophanes, where philosophy is practiced by unerotic, unpoetic atomists, is not unlike the one faced by Rousseau, who undertook to reintroduce eroticism in the context of Enlightenment materialism. Plato's Socrates performs the role that Rousseau himself played in response to this condition. Not only is Socrates the most erotic of philosophers, his spokesman, Plato, is the most poetic of the philosophers. Plato's depictions of Socrates establish on a new basis the link between Eros and poetry."
...based on a keen awareness of the critic’s situatedness in the present, the social and cultural present from which we look and look back, at the objects that are always already of the past, objects that we take to define our present culture. Thus, it can be summarized by the phrase “cultural memory in the present” (1999: 1).

Cultural analysis centers on the thoughtful consideration of cultural artifacts as part of the present. Referring to the material availability of these artifacts, Bal asserts that they are communal and that the event of showing involves articulating in the public domain the most deeply held views and beliefs of a subject. In other words, an “exposition is always an argument” (1999: 5). American social theorist Allan Bloom contends that the exposed objects are not natural, but produced to serve the special interests of the artist (1968: 404). It is this artistic opinion, or the philosophical statement conveyed through narrative that this study seeks to expose and then measure as it migrates from one medium to another. The close textual examinations aim to achieve a measure of the epistemic authority that forms the basis for my statements of what these gestures of showing have to say as discursive acts.11 This study, then, is a form of cultural analysis that employs narratology to uncover the traveling philosophy of narrative texts and how it might inform present culture.12

While providing a methodological structure for expository discourse, narratology also provides an integrated account of the discursive strategies of the writers and filmmakers, and, on the other hand, the process of meaning-making that these strategies suggest to the analyst. However, the texts are silenced by the discursive situation that moves back and forth between the first person exposers and the second person analyst. While mute, the text remains the central element, the only thing visible in the discourse and it is this visibility that, paradoxically, makes it possible to make statements about the object that do no apply to it. In The Practice of Cultural Analysis (1999), Bal sees this as the discrepancy between object and sign, which, in the case of exposition, is blatant and empathic, because it is the presence of a thing that recedes into invisibility as its sign status takes precedence to make the statement (1999: 8).

It is precisely this notion of the sign status of an object (narrative text) and its ability to make a statement that brings me to Socrates’ ingenious cave analogy. In the following passage, Socrates invites the reader to envision the cave:

They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets. (...) Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of

11 Bal, Travelling Concepts (2002), 18. The close textual examinations, or “close readings,” I perform in this study spring from the type of close reading Bal advocates. It is different from the old close reading where the text is alleged to speak for itself, and it is also different from cultural studies where critique is more important that the object; rather, this newer close reading is informed by both.

12 Bal, Travelling Concepts (2002), 10: “Narrative is a mode, not a genre. It is alive and active as a cultural force, not just a kind of literature. It constitutes a major reservoir of cultural baggage that enables us to make meaning out of the present world and it can also be used to manipulate. In short, it is a cultural force to be reckoned with.”
men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind material... (Bloom, trans. 1968: 193).

Here, almost predicting the inevitability of film, Socrates tells his interlocutor, Glaucon, of a prisoner who is bound in the darkness of a cave and forced to look at signs of signs, images of replicas cast as shadows on the wall. According to Socrates, the prisoner uses an unreliable imagination to apprehend the distorted images that exist on the lowest level of reality. The prisoner believes that the reflected images (shadows) actually are what their source only signifies, and thus the faculty of imagination apprehends a sign of a sign to be reality. In his interpretive essay of Plato’s text, Bloom considers the key question implied in Socrates’ analogy:

But who regularly believes that images are real things; who mistakes reflections for what is reflected? Why does Socrates insist that our situation is that of men who mistake images for realities? (...) How can it be said that we are bound to the lowest level of the line? The answer seems to be that the cave is the city and that our attachment to the city binds us to certain authoritative opinions about things. We do not see men as they are but as they are represented to us by legislators and poets (1968: 404).

Bloom asserts that the city, which I also broaden to mean culture, we inhabit is circumscribed by objects and images of objects that are created by artists such as novelists and filmmakers.

In World Spectators (2000), theorist Kaja Silverman notes that the parable of the cave sustains other dreams than that of Socrates. Silverman employs it to dream in an anticipatory way about what she calls “world spectatorship,” or a kind of: “looking which takes place in the world, and for the world – a kind of looking which not only stubbornly adheres to phenomenal forms, but also augments and enriches them” (2000: 2). She argues that:

...to be a world spectator is not to content oneself with seeming to exclusion of Being, but rather to commit oneself to remaining within the only domain where Being can emerge, the domain of appearance – the locus within which Being unfolds, rather than its binary opposite (2).

Here, Silverman takes up Aristotle’s contention with Plato’s suggestion that the metaphysical Forms exist apart from their objects. In Metaphysics (1998), while Aristotle agrees with Plato in that the Forms are objectively real and not just abstractions in our minds, he does not see the Forms as self-existing substances separate from matter. Silverman appears to comply with both Plato and Aristotle who affirm the existence of a metaphysical reality. However, she, like Aristotle, is anti-Platonic in her stance that the

---

13 Allan Bloom, “Interpretive Essay of The Republic” (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 402. In describing Socrates’ divided line, Bloom writes: “On the basis of what we know of the visible world with its sun, we can conjecture about the intelligible world with its idea of the good. This Socrates does by drawing the divided line which described the being of things and the faculties which apprehend them.” The following pairs of faculties and beings of things are listed lowest to highest: imagination apprehends images, faith apprehends objects, reason apprehends math, and understanding apprehends the Forms.

14 Although Bloom also mentions legislators as image-makers in this passage, the focus of this study is on the artists as image-makers and, in particular, novelists and filmmakers.

Forms are not separate from physical objects, but rather emerge in the domain of appearance. I also take this to mean that while appearance forms the locus for the unfolding of Being, they are not necessarily the same thing.

In the following passage, Silverman specifically addresses the metaphysical question raised by Socrates:

What is concealed is not Being, but rather the world itself. This is not to say, however, that Being has no part to play in this drama. On the contrary, Being is precisely what the world loses when it is eclipsed in this way. Darkness precipitates the loss of Being because it is only insofar as creatures and things appear that they can Be (2000: 7).

Here, Silverman contends that the central drama of Book VII is concealment, rather than revelation. Silverman claims the transcendental character of Being when she writes that phenomenal forms shine with a "more-than-reality" quality when they are allowed to appear (7). Thus, Silverman seems to advance an Aristotelian-Thomistic moderate realism, a view Gage articulated as the practice of discerning the metaphysical by the means of the physical, the transcendent by the immanent (1984: 75). While I agree with Silverman, I must qualify her claim with regard to darkness and the loss of Being in that the transcendental quality of an immanent form is only temporarily lost when the form is eclipsed from our vision. This qualification stresses the paradoxical nature of the metaphysical, which is both conceptually beyond the physical and also bound to it in the realm of phenomenal forms. In other words, it is through the body that the soul is allowed to become on a kind of phenomenal, rather than metaphysical level. This point brings us back to Socrates who claimed that it is the soul that moves from the "realm of becoming to the real of what is" (521). In order to make such a claim, I argue that one must have already transcended the realm of images. For how would one be able to see the "more-than-reality" quality of a phenomenal form if one did not know it existed?

So, while I will apply Silverman's notion of the world spectator whose vision is informed by the importance and beauty of phenomenal forms, I want to keep in mind the transcendental quality of Being that can be known through appearance, but it only provisionally lost when eclipsed from vision. In other words, the great value of a phenomenal form's appearance is that it does not necessarily conceal, but rather invites the viewing subject to see its transcendental character of Being once one has been educated in how to look. The prisoner is unable to bring into Being, or see the more-than-reality quality of phenomenal forms Silverman suggests by merely opening its eyes, for world spectatorship is not an innate capacity. So, for the prisoner, world spectatorship is impossible until s/he has transcended the realm of images and can juxtapose a higher reality of Being with the lower level that once formed the limits of its perception.

On a phenomenal level, the corporeal reality of these objects and their images is not to be diminished as appearance allows their transcendental character to fashion culture and form the horizons of the individual minds that dwell within it. The prisoner cannot see the objects directly and only learns of them through the partisan lenses of the artists. Applied to my corpus, Socrates' allegory suggests that narrative texts exist as subjective reflections of reality and contain philosophies that spring from an agenda the artists may or may not be fully cognizant of themselves. It is precisely the operation of these philosophies – wrapped within the narrative structure of the texts that center on the dialectic between self and other – this study endeavors to reveal. As artifacts of culture, the texts represent philosophical concepts folded dialectically into literary and filmic narratives that have the capacity to shape the cognitive horizons of those exposed to (and potentially interacting with) them. The reactionary furor over such films as
Clockwork or, more recently, Michael Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004) is indicative of the power films have to carve the tunnels of our vision.10

The cave analogy demonstrates the relevance of cultural analysis as a critical practice based on an awareness of the critic’s situatedness in the social and cultural present from which we look, and look back at objects that we take to define our present culture. Holding to this brand of analysis, the epistemic authority of the expository agent presupposes that s/he has moved out of the cave and beyond the level of imagination. Only the keen awareness that an image is an image makes it possible to judge its character, and in order to achieve that awareness imagination must be aided by trust. Bloom writes that trust: “resists doubt of the existence of what it apprehends” (1968: 404).

Imagination alone does not lead to knowledge because it cannot distinguish between shadow and object. In other words, it would be impossible for the analyst to expose the object if s/he still believed that only its images were real and was unmindful of the object itself. The creation of the objects examined in this study – here considered as narrative concretizations of philosophical concepts – also presupposes that the artist has transcended the realm of images. Framed in Socratic terms, novelists and filmmakers are object and image-makers. In this capacity, thanks to the philosophical dynamic between the narrative media, they have the capacity to transform the present cultural situation.

In light of this dynamic, I have constructed an updated version of Socrates’ cave analogy. In this modernized adaptation, the cave is signified by the typical cinema where Hollywood films are screened and the prisoner is represented by the demos, or the film-going citizenry that generally exists in the realm of images. Due to the global ascendance of Hollywood, the demo is viewed in an international context. While Hollywood is originally an American cultural form, German film theorist Thomas Elsaesser writes:

Hollywood cinema is a world industry, just as much as it is a world language, a powerful, stable, perfected system of visual communication. As such it represents real power, not just in and through the cinema: the coding of images of TV, the imaging of politics, advertising, lifestyle, etc. goes via the encoding of messages and meaning in and through images, and the image-word combination (2002: 4).

Behind this “real” power, Elsaesser argues, is a massive economic engine that has enabled Hollywood to shape not only American culture, but also to colonize other parts of the world through the messages encoded in its images. The light behind these global prisoners emanates from the film projector (the fire), and the physical source of the projected shadows is the narrative text, which is a celluloid strip of film that passes through the light to produce the images seen on the cave wall, or film screen. Behind the camera are the image-makers, the Hollywood filmmakers who attempt to translate the literary narrative into the visible, audible, and more accessible medium of film.

Although there are obviously exceptions to this process, I argue that films commonly work with philosophical concepts – devised to apprehend the nature of ultimate reality – that circulate within cultures. The metaphysical claims of philosophy are inexorably intermingled with art as cultural artifacts. Although his writing concerns both science and art, Polish mathematician and poet Jacob Bronowski notes that:

---

10 Roger Ebert, “A Clockwork Orange,” Chicago Sun Times, 11 February 1972, sec. 1e, p. 2: “Stanley Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange is an ideological mess, a paranoid right-wing fantasy masquerading as an Orwellian warning. It pretends to oppose the police state and forced mind control, but all it really does is celebrate the nastiness of its hero, Alex.” Lou Lumenick, “Moore is Less,” New York Post, 22 June 2004, sec 5e, p. 1: “Michael Moore’s much-hyped and very heavy-handed polemic against George W. Bush, is basically a two-hour argument for regime change that isn’t half as incendiary or persuasive as its maker would have you believe.”
There exists a single creative activity, which is displayed alike in the arts and in the sciences. It is wrong to think of science as a mechanical record of facts, and it is wrong to think of the arts as remote and private fancies. What makes each human, what makes them universal, is the stamp of the creative mind (1965: 27).

As creative agents, novelists weave philosophy into narratives by structuring them into a dialectical form that invariably pits a self against some other. Hollywood filmmakers adapt many of these novels in an attempt to filmatize, or “Hollywoodize,” the literary narratives and project them to audiences in the theater. Considering this transformation, this study aims to qualitatively assess the measure mainstream audiences are exposed to a literary philosophy in order to better understand the way these adapted films inform the present cultural situation. This situation is known as “postmodernity.”

Employed temporally, postmodernity is the term I use to describe the cultural situation, or awareness of the current postmodern age. Postmodernity, then, is a term of periodization, a rhetorical formation that constructs a present in relation to a past, or the cultural situation known as “modernity” that preceded. While one cannot neatly divide the two periods aesthetically, philosophically, or temporally, I limit myself to the latter principle of division. As a consequence, I chose to foreground the status of the narrative texts as postmodern cultural artifacts simply because they were either published (novels) or released (films) between 1960 and the early twenty-first century, or the commonly accepted time frame of postmodernity. By framing this discussion temporally, I avoid an extensive and potentially problematic argument to justify calling these texts exclusively postmodern in either aesthetic or philosophic terms.

The cultural bearing of this study is made apparent in the way we, in postmodernity, relate to the past and how it informs the present. British essayist Lloyd Spencer notes that in postmodernity, every aspect of the past is made “accessible, available.” What is more, the past is not only made more readily available, but it is “mediated, packaged, presented, and represented.” Spencer further asserts that postmodernity is marked by cultural activity dominated by media industries defined by new technologies that feature unlimited reproducibility of objects and images (2001: 158). French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1983b) contends that the result is a “hyperreal” society where the distinction between the real and the unreal is eradicated and drowned in an endless flood of signs and simulations. Baudrillard’s notion of a hyper-real society appears to portray a postmodern cultural situation where the unlimited reproducibility of fabricated objects and images functions similarly to Socrates’ description of the cave. In other words, the “hyper-realness” that characterizes postmodernity functions to keep the prisoner confined to the lowest level of reality—perpetually in the realm of becoming. Thus, this study is undertaken in light of the international influence of Hollywood, the increasingly significant role of film in postmodernity, and its ability to make literary dialectics more available to mainstream audiences. It is the enormous accessibility of these communal artifacts that lends itself

---

Barry Lewis, “Postmodernism and Literature,” in The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 2001) 122. While the dates that frame postmodernity are far from absolute, it is generally accepted that it began around 1960 and continues through at least the end of the twentieth-century, although there are some who feel that the postmodern era has ended. Malcolm Bradbury, Richard Ruland, From Puritanism to Postmodernism (New York: Viking Press, 1991) 33. For example, Bradbury and Ruland believe that: “Postmodernism now looks like a stylistic phase that ran from the 1960’s to the 1980’s. Therefore, a large portion of writing published after 1990, which is dubbed postmodernist, is really ‘post-postmodernist,’ or ‘post-pomo’ for short.”
to, indeed, invites the critical practice of cultural analysis that seeks to understand how these texts might inform postmodern culture.

From Literary High Art to Mainstream Hollywood

While the distinction between "high" (literature) and "low" (film) art is a key feature of modernity, a central characteristic of postmodernity is the attempt to eliminate this division. American philosopher Frederic Jameson (1988) and German literary scholar Andreas Huyssen (1993) both see the refusal to set high art above pop culture as a defining feature of postmodernity. In What Was Literature? (1982), Leslie Fiedler's tagline "cross the border, close the gap" expressed the postmodern venture to place all forms of art back into the mainstream (17). This postmodernist attempt to cross the border is diametrically opposed to the binary distinctions seen in British literary critic F.R. Leavis' work For Continuity (1933). In a modernist fashion, Leavis suggested that a select group of English, American, and European writers represent the "finest consciousness of the age" and argued that it is the charge of critics like himself to endorse the works of high literary art. In Leavis' view, the minority culture must continually protect itself against the proliferation of Hollywood and other "Americanized" expressions of the popular culture. Likewise, for sociologist Daniel Bell, the postmodernist intent to blur the lines combined with the advent of the mass media threatened to destabilize the entire social fabric of advanced societies. Bell writes: "What was once the property of an aristocracy of the spirit is now turned into the democratic property of the mass" (1978: 52). He contends that it is this democratization of libertinism that constitutes the primary significance and danger of postmodernism as it forms the basis for a widespread cultural movement that undermines the values and motivational patterns of "ordinary" middle-class behavior (52).

Positioned antithetically to the modernist posture of Leavis and Bell, American cultural critic Susan Sontag imagines a "new sensibility" that values the common ground that blurs the seemingly clear boundaries between high and low art. Sontag claims: "One important consequence of the new sensibility has already been alluded to—namely, that the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture seems less and less meaningful" (1986: 302). Sontag derives this conclusion from, among other things, the prominent role of the mass media (including film) in postmodernity when she writes:

This new sensibility is rooted, as it must be, in our experience, experiences which are new in the history of humanity—in extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene; in the availability of new sensations such as speed (physical speed, as in airplane travel; speed of images, as in cinema); and in the pan-cultural perspective on the arts that is possible through the mass reproduction of art objects (296).

Here, Sontag envisions a sensibility derived from the escalating availability of "new sensations" such as cinema that result in the eradication of the old divide between high art and the mass-produced objects more characteristic of postmodernity. In particular, Sontag challenges the modernist notion that the works of popular culture, such as films, are new in the history of humanity in extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene; in the availability of new sensations such as speed (physical speed, as in airplane travel; speed of images, as in cinema); and in the pan-cultural perspective on the arts that is possible through the mass reproduction of art objects.

---

18 Glenn Ward, Postmodernism (London: Hobber Headline Ltd., 1997), 28: "Many versions of modernism present high and low culture as two very distinct spheres; and while there might be degrees of influence from one to the other, they are essentially worlds apart." Stanley Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 25. Grenz argues that modernism in art follows "the univalence" impulse and one of the great virtues of modernist artists, then, is stylistic integrity. In contrast, postmodernist art embraces stylistic diversity, or "multivalence," and chooses impurity rather than the purity of modernism.
“were seen as having little value because they were manufactured objects” (297). While this notion was fashionable among many cultural critics and literary scholars who viewed film as a lesser medium, the modernist divide between high and low art has also breached the film world itself. In *Vanity Fair* magazine, director of *The Exorcist* (1973) William Friedkin stated: “What happened with *Star Wars* was like when McDonald’s got a foothold, the taste for good food just disappeared.” (2005: 116). In line with Friedkin’s modernist view, film critic Pauline Kael argues that (George) Lucas “infantilized” public taste, and fellow critic David Thomson believes that discerning film fans lose their ability to enjoy their “Saturday-night rental of Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* after having enjoyed *The Empire Strikes Back* the night before” (116).

In response, George Lucas, the American director of the *Star Wars* (1977-2005) films, expresses a more postmodern position when he asserts that many viewers of his popular films may have overlooked the deeper levels of meaning typically associated with high art:

> The interesting thing about *Star Wars* – and I didn’t ever really push this very far, because it’s not really that important – but there’s a lot going on there that most people haven’t come to grips with yet. But when they do, they will find it’s a much more intricately made clock than most people would like to imagine (116).

In *Subjectivity in the New Hollywood Cinema: Father, Sons, and Other Ghosts* (2001), Lucas’ belief in the deeper levels of his films is confirmed by film and cultural theorist Sasha Vojkovic who wrote that Lucas has:

> ...clearly spelled out his personal motivation and his conscious employment of cinematic means to transform the future, the outer space, into a mythic universe. According to Lucas, in the case of America, the hero’s wanderings across the vast universe emerged as a necessity, after all the “mythical spaces” in the country itself were already settled (166).

It appears that Lucas expresses Sontag’s new sensibility, which echoes Huysen’s (1986) refusal of the divide that insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture. Jameson demonstrates this notion by pointing to the fact that contemporary artists draw on achievements in advertising, television, Las Vegas strip architecture, grade-B Hollywood films, and airport paperbacks for inspiration in the same way that they consult modernist masters (1984: 112). For modernists like Leavis and Bell, infusing both high and low art in order to form new artistic creations such as Hollywood films would be a particularly problematic aspect of postmodernity.

If this assertion is correct, then the modernist dilemma is especially acute in light of the worldwide popularity of Hollywood films with condensed narratives able to expose an individual to the literary dialectic in a much narrower time frame that the literary text itself can do. In general, it takes an individual a considerably shorter amount of time to watch a film than it does to read a novel. The viewing of a film is most often completed within the span of a few hours while a novel is typically read over the course of a period of days, weeks, or even months.
maintenance of contemporary social order as economic or political processes. Hence, a fundamental question of my study concerns the extent a vast film-going audience is confronted with the philosophical gist of a novel it would have taken many more hours as well as a rarified occupational attitude to read. This travel from one medium to another thus also entails a demographic shift.

While the shift in audience demographics is one rationale for pairing the texts, I am not arguing that understanding a film is necessarily easier than grasping a literary text. However, since it takes significantly less time to watch a film than it does to read a novel, it stands to reason that in the frantic pace imposed upon members of the late capitalist market economies of Western society, the demos is generally more disposed to watch the film rather than to read the book. This is not to say that films are always more popular than the novels they were adapted from or received in the same fashion. For example, in literary critic Barry Lewis’ essay *Postmodernism and Literature* (2001), the author notes that one of the benchmarks for literary postmodernism is William Burrough’s *Naked Lunch* (1959), a novel that— in what has become generally accepted postmodern fashion— “challenged every norm of narrative unity and decorum” (121). Lewis goes on to mention that the Boston Superior Court created a sensation when it concluded that the novel’s depiction of the hallucinations of a drug addict was “nasty and brutish.” Despite its lurid depiction of talking anuses, the 1992 release of Canadian director David Cronenberg’s filmic adaptation of Burroughs’ novel was greeted with “apathy and not apoplexy” (122). By and large, however, because of film’s ability to captivate a larger audience (at least in the case of my corpus) it is the film that sparks more public debate and controversy than does its literary predecessor. *Fight Club* is representative of the manner the broad appeal of a film can bring more attention to socially and politically charged issues originally conceived in the novel. It was Fincher’s film, released only two years after Palahniuk’s novel was first published, that was the center of significantly more media interest and public discourse on the subjects of consumerism and violence than the novel had aroused.

Of course, not every novel becomes a film nor is every film adapted from a novel; however, there is an undeniably familiar, if sometimes cloudy relation between the media. Sontag writes: “The fifty years of the cinema present us with a scrambled recapitulation of the more than two hundred year history of the novel” (1996: 242). Placing this recapitulation in general terms, she notes that films voiced many of the same moral conceptions as their literary predecessors. I undertake this study in light of the juxtaposition between Sontag’s observation and film historian John Tibbet’s assertion that the ultimate failure of American motion pictures is commercial and the economic bottom-line has nothing to do with the fidelity to art (1999: xviii). To put it another way, I endeavor to critically investigate whether or not films philosophically misrepresent and corrupt literary art for the entertainment of mass audiences.

Regardless of economic and artistic considerations, Sontag claims that there are valuable technical analogies to be drawn between the cinema and the novel. For example, like the novel, the cinema (unlike theatre) presents us with a view of action that is absolutely under the control of the director at every moment (1996: 242). It is also worthy to note that the modern novel anticipated the temporal, causal, and spatial disjunctions typically regarded as cinematic. Russian filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein claimed that Charles Dickens wrote with a kind of “camera-eye,” realizing his scenes with ultra-sharp focus and clarity achieving the literary equivalents of close-ups, long-shots, and soft-focus (Tibbets 1999: xv). It is this type of technical correlation that provides a point of departure for a deeper understanding of the shared narratological features of the media and how those features may function to express differing views.

While there is certainly debate among theorists as to the extent of the association between the media, there is little disagreement that a relationship exists, and one that is
based on a transformation process where a novel in some way "becomes" a film. Although it does not always happen in identical fashion, this conversion process classically occurs along similar lines. Specifically, a screenwriter attempts to condense and translate, or adapt the novel into a screenplay (the narrative skeleton), which the filmmakers then translate into film; however, adaptation is not an exact science. As Bal asserts, the translation of a novel into film is not a one-to-one transposition of story elements into images, but a visual working-through of the novel's most important aspects and their meanings (1997: 164). In this artistic alteration, the assessment of precisely what is most important is a highly subjective enterprise. In addition, film's operative differences from literature, including its restricted length, further dictate what will be translated into film. While not every thing is translated, the notion that some things are informs a central objective in this study, which is to examine the degree the filmic philosophy is consistent with its literary counterpart.

A brilliant example of an adaptation philosophically faithful to its source resulted in New Zealand director Peter Jackson's three films that comprise The Lord of the Rings (2001-2003). The attempt to adapt one of the most popular novels of the twentieth century is no small task in light of the fact that it took British novelist J.R.R. Tolkien fifteen years to write his thousand-page work that encompasses a host of geographies, cultures, and races of beings. Despite the epic scope of Tolkien's vision, Jackson, and screenwriters Fran Walsh (Jackson's wife) and Philippa Boyens (2004 Academy Award Winners for "Best Adapted Screenplay") attempted to translate Tolkien's novel into a screenplay. Of course, no novel, especially one of this magnitude, can be adapted literally. So, the screenwriters must decide what material needs to be included to drive the narrative and remain loyal to the thematic thrust of the novel - if that is the intention of the film. A corollary of this process can be seen in the ten-minute prologue that opens the first film and captures the expositional material scattered throughout the novel. Although no such prologue is seen in the book, it is essential to ground the viewer in the faster and more concentrated narrative world of the film. Not only was a prologue added, but the chronological sequence of the literary narrative was altered as well. In the novel, events that take place in the second book actually occur simultaneously with events that occur in the third book. In the film, Jackson ironed-out the concurrently operating timelines and brought all the action together by including events from the second book in the film adaptation of the third. Here, I allege Jackson's films to demonstrate that it is possible for filmmakers - with a deep familiarity and a driving passion for the narrative - to attempt to stay true to the spirit of the novel and allow the mythology to take a life separate from its author.

It is this adaptation process, of which the majority of Hollywood films - arguably the most commercially successful artistic medium of postmodernity - are a product, that motivates the analysis of three dual-medium pairs of postmodern artifacts. This study is

---

20 J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings (St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin Publishers, 1954). Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (1954) was actually written as one work. However, disconcerted by the tremendous length of Tolkien's novel, his publishers decided to break it into three separate books: The Fellowship of the Ring, The Two Towers, and The Return of the King. Jackson's films were subsequently adapted from each of the three books.

21 Peter Jackson, "The Return of the King - Supplemental Material" (Los Angeles: New Line Home Entertainment, 2004). Discussing Tolkien's novel, Jackson states: "In fact, Tolkien himself said that his novel was 'highly unsuitable for the process of dramatization' and let the film rights go for next to nothing." Most likely, Tolkien could not envision the advances in technology and filmmaking that would some day allow his ambitious novel to be adapted for the screen.

22 Peter Jackson, "The Fellowship of the Ring - Supplemental Material" (Los Angeles: New Line Home Entertainment, 2001). Discussing the process of adaptation, Jackson states: "although we did all the things we had to do to adapt a book, we wanted to be as true as possible to Tolkien's thematic material."
informed by Baudrillard’s key argument that it is the production of images and information, not material goods, that characterizes postmodernity (1983b: 22). Hence, a critical examination of how the works in each medium philosophize, and how the nature of their interrelation helps to understand how postmodern culture “thinks.”

**Tempering Between Structuralism and Poststructuralism**

Narratology — the theory of the narrative — is a field of text semiotics. My particular brand of textual analysis is inspired by Bal’s narratological theory as it is laid out in the second edition of *Narratology* (1997) in which she writes: “Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that ‘tell a story.’ Such a theory helps to understand, analyze, and evaluate narratives” (3).

I employ Bal’s theory as a heuristic instrument that allows me to describe the way each narrative text – the concretization of a narrative system – is constructed to posit a particular philosophy generated by the oppositional tension between self and other. However, the textual description obtained through narratology can by no means be regarded as the only adequate description because another analyst may apply the same concepts differently, emphasize other aspects of the text, and, as a consequence, produce an entirely different textual description (4). Although the descriptive vocabulary seen in Bal’s theory is generally derived from more literary traditions, such as the distinction between “fabula” and “suzet” first used by the Russian Formalists, its efficacy is not restricted to this medium. It can also be used to describe the narrative constructions found in other mediums – such as film. Here, I briefly contextualize and discuss several of the principal terms that connect narratology and film theory.

Structuralism is commonly defined as a mode of analysis of cultural artifacts that originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics (Barthes 1967: 897). In general, the development of narrative semiotics was fueled by the structuralist adaptation of the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who argued that linguistics provided the “master-pattern for all branches of semiology” (1966: 68). Saussure’s principal interest was in language as a system and a social phenomenon and he separated the linguistic language system, or *langue*, from the individual act of speech, or *parole*. Likewise, I also distinguish between a narrative text (parole) as a kind of individual “speech act,” or concretization, and the abstract narrative system (*langue*) from which it springs.

---

23 Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Decameron narratologie* (Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1969). The term narratology is a translation of the French term “narratologie,” and was first introduced by Todorov. As a theory, narratology historically belongs to the traditions of Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. It exemplifies the structuralist tendency to consider texts as rule-governed in the ways human beings refashion their universe. Pier Luigi Cerisola, *La Critica Semiotico-structuralistica* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1980), 149. Cerisola believes that in the field of textual studies, scholars such as Roland Barthes have seen no rupture in the development from structuralism to text semiotics. An indicator of the continuity in this transition is the gradual replacement of the term “structural” by “semiotic” in this field, which appears in designations such as “semiotico-structuralist” criticism. It has also been referred to as “structuralist-semiotic” criticism by Angelo Marchese (1981: 149). François Wahl, *Qu’est ce que le structuralisme?* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), 10. Wahl states: “Structuralism is the name under which the sciences of the sign and of sign systems are classified.”

24 Donald E. Hall, *Literary and Cultural Theory*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 18. “Individual disciplines contain their own standards and methodological demands. Just as a sociologist may be required to conduct fieldwork and amass statistical data, so, too, is the analysis of literary (and filmic) texts discipline-specific, deploying a vocabulary suited to the ‘nuances’ and ‘idiosyncrasies’ of the particular subject matter.”

25 Jonathan Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 40. American literary theorist Culler renders Saussure’s view when he states that “langue” is the system of a
describe the structure of each speech act in order to disclose the text's philosophical thrust as it is expressed through the narrative's particular oppositional arrangement. The primary function of this description is to reveal the deeper semantic system of cultural associations and relationships that are shaped in the narrative form.26

As a brand of semiotic inquiry, then, narratology provides the tools and methodology to unveil the philosophy centered on the dialectic between self and other that lies beneath the surface of literary and filmic narrative artifacts. It is through the heuristic value of narratology that the abstract philosophies of the narrative texts can be (partially) articulated and then didactically juxtaposed. This juxtaposition will inform me to what degree the dialectic of the novel was kept intact as it was transferred from a literary medium to a filmic one. Although I believe that a more structural methodology centered on the meaning derived from differences best suits the objectives outlined in this study, I wish to address a chief concern of poststructuralism, which is the rigidity of the structuralist tendency to focus on the fixity of relations at the expense of temporality, or the text's diachronic dimension.27 Any methodology centered on narratology has a tendency to be rather inflexible in its application.28 However, my approach attempts to loosen its inherent rigidity by keeping in mind some poststructural considerations that may benefit my narratological analysis and make it more functional in the manner Prague structuralism is functionalistic, or its preference of dialectic over reductionism.29

Poststructuralism is a generic term used to refer to all those theories that came to take issue with the principles of structuralism, and included in this is Derrida's theory of deconstruction.30 The root or (at least) the point of departure of Derrida's philosophy is a critical engagement with structuralism and Saussure's theory of the sign. Deconstruction develops one of Saussure's insights that language consists of a system of relations among language, the language as a system of forms, and "parole" is actual speech, the speech acts that are made possible by the language.

26 Robert Burgoyne, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, Robert Stam, New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Poststructuralism, and Beyond (London: Routledge 1992), 76: "The influences of formalism and structuralism led to two different schools of narrative inquiry: 'syntactical' – the study of syntagmatic ordering of plot events as a kind of armature of narrative progress and development, and 'semantic' – which deals with the relation of the signs and messages produced by narrative to the larger cultural system which gives it meaning."

27 Culler, Ferdinand de Saussure (1986), 45. Culler defines the two studies of language as "synchronic," the study of the linguistic system in a particular state, and "diachronic," the study of its evolution in time. While Culler concedes that Saussure has been attacked for privileging the synchronic by distinguishing it from diachronic, Culler argues that it was because Saussure recognized the radical historicity of language that he asserted the importance of distinguishing between the two.

28 Stuart Sim, ed., The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism (New York: Routledge, 2001), 341-342. "For poststructuralists, structuralism was at once too neat and too oppressive, since it seemed to allow little room for human agency or the workings of chance."

29 Josef Vachek, ed., A Prague School Reader in Linguistics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 469. "As opposed to the 'pure' structuralists such as Saussure, the Prague school refused to consider language as an isolated synchronic system of pure form." The Prague school reconciled Saussure's opposition of synchrony and diachrony, or the linguistic system in a particular state and its evolution over time. Roman Jakobson, Krystyna Pomorska, Dialogues, trans. by Christian Hubert (Boston: MIT Press, 1983), 58. Discussing the departure from Saussure, Jakobson wrote that:

"Saussure attempted to suppress the tie between the system of a language and its modifications by considering the system as the exclusive domain of synchrony and assigning modifications to the sphere of diachrony alone. In actuality, as indicated in the different social sciences, the concepts of a system and its change are not only compatible but indissolubly tied."

30 Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 10-18. Derrida's theory rejects the "objectivist" idea of a structure inherent in the text and also the assumption of textual universals or codes of interpretation. Derrida notes that the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.
arbitrary signs whose meanings are defined by the differences that set them apart from one another. It is this structuralist foundation that induces some philosophers to discuss Derrida as a neostructuralist, or even a superstructuralist (Groden, Kreiswirth, eds. 1994).

Poststructuralism in general and deconstruction in particular appear to be paradoxically both related to and disconnected from structuralism through the revision and reversal of it. Culler sees deconstruction as Derrida’s term for a critique that demonstrates how the hierarchical oppositions of Western thought are “undone, subverted, or ‘deconstructed.’” exposed as constructions or ideological impositions...” (1986: 139). Deconstructionism, then, is a method for revealing the radical contextually of all systems of thought. One typical procedure of deconstruction is its critique of binary oppositions and a central deconstructive argument holds that, in all classic dualities of Western thought, one term is privileged over the other such as speech over writing and order over disorder. Since modernity is essentially about order and rationality, modern society is characterized by the pursuit of an increasing level of order and it is constantly on guard against everything labeled “disorder.” Thus, modern societies rely on doggedly establishing a binary opposition between order and disorder, the latter of which, in Western culture, is commonly branded as the “other.” While deconstruction (theoretically) upends certain binary oppositions and, in this way, provides a useful tool for questioning the hidden motivations behind oppositional privileging, Derrida’s deconstructive view is not a denial of the oppositions themselves as he uses their reality as a kind of springboard for his theory.

In The Gift of Death (1995), Derrida coins the motto “Tout autre est tout autre,” or “every other is completely other” (68). This single opposition is absolute in the sense that human beings as individual selves are unable to transcend the time and space that constructs their finiteness. In an engaging description, Derrida addresses the absolute limit of human nature that is reflected by our desperate attempts to surpass it:

...one word’s move to cross over to the other, to the other side of the mirror. Of the desperate and unhappy speech to move beyond the specularity that it constitutes itself and of the possibility of stating the other or speaking to the other, this moment is most difficult and a kind of death when the breaking of the mirror is most necessary and also the most difficult. The most difficult because everything we say or do or cry, however outstretched toward the other we may be remains within us... (...) ...let us weep no longer over ourselves alas when we must no longer be concerned with the other in ourselves, we can no longer be concerned with anyone except the other in ourselves (1987: 203).

Despite our awareness of an external other, we are powerless to transcend the borders of our finiteness and can only attend to the concept of the other within ourselves – a notion provocatively examined in the Solaris pairing. Thus, the self is not arbitrarily favored, but (paradoxically) motivated by necessity since there is no way to absolutely

31 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, translated by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill. 1969), 69. Saussure specified that the term “arbitrary” means “ unmotivated.” In an arbitrary sign, the signifier “ actually has no connection with the signified.” Culler adds that there are exceptions to this principle and gives two examples: onomatopoeia and secondary motivation (1986: 29).

32 Culler, Ferdinand de Saussure (1986), 145. This view is in line with Culler’s interpretation of Derrida’s argument with regard to the hidden motivation of apparently arbitrary linguistic signs. Culler wonders with Derrida: “...whether the language one speaks or writes is not always exposed to the contamination of arbitrary signs by suggestions of imitative motivation, whether effects of motivation are not inseparable for the workings of language.” Along these lines, Culler suggests that: “arbitrary signs of the linguistic system may be part of larger discursive system in which effects of motivation, demotivation, and remotivations are always occurring” (146).
comprehend or “cross over” into the other.ATTRIDGE supports DERRIDA’S view when he writes that he sees: “...the others person’s subjectivity as impenetrable to mine” (1999: 24).

The privileging of this particular opposition cannot be inverted the way other ones can because it includes all other antinomies, which are derivatives that find their origin in this opposition, which can therefore be considered a kind of “meta-opposition.” The self and the other are defined by the sum total of their arrangement on one side or the other in a pattern of smaller “micro” oppositions such as female and male, black and white, rich and poor. While one may deconstruct these oppositions and extract a transsexual, a person of observable mixed descent, or the bourgeois, these deconstructions leave intact the self that is positioned against the other. In other words, while the self can concurrently be female, white, and poor, it can never simultaneously be self and other except in the kind of experiential, encountering surrogate ATTRIDGE suggests. In the SAUSERRIAN view of the self, its most precise characteristic is that it is what others are not (1969: 162). Considering both SAUSSEE and DERRIDA, I argue that all narratives spring from the meta-opposition and center on various types of conflict that invariably pits a self (a human or an agent personified) against some other that may be human or an abstract entity. One example would be the consumer culture depicted in Fight Club.

Narratives, then, can all be ultimately distilled down to a single ontological opposition where the subjectivity of the self is not accidental, but the logical result of the human inability to transcend the realities of its position in time and space. Paradoxically, it is through fiction that a human can intellectually probe, or encounter the prospect of transcendence and speculate about the other that exists beyond finite physical and intellectual borders. It is for this reason that, as Madison, Aristotle, Foucault and Niebuhr all previously noted, narratives exhibit a mental grappling with transcendence. It is this grappling that is of primary interest here, for it is the cognitive blaze that gives life to the philosophies shaped in narrative texts. Accordingly, my endeavor to reveal the narrative’s philosophy through the analysis and interpretation of this antinomy adheres to the idea of a structure that, for the sake of analysis, I assume to be inherent in the text. On the other hand, I also acknowledge that this opposition conveys a meaning that can only be partially determined because the analyst (self) is unable to fully transcend the boundaries of the text (other), and this leaves an inexorable gray area between A and B. This gray area, a consequence of the analyst’s own intellectual finiteness, can only be partially resolved through a functional structuralism that relies on dialectic rather than reductive means. The hazy middle ground also serves as the primary connection between my brand of functional structuralism and the poststructural emphasis on the fragile link between signifier and signified.

33 Jacques Derrida, Psyche: Inventions of the Other (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1987), 203. In Psyche, Derrida implies that the “mirror” is representative of human finiteness when he asks: “Or is it what I imagine of the other who is still held in my psyche, my soul or the self of a mirror?”

34 Derek Attridge, "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other," in PMLA 114 (New York: MLA Press, 1999), 24: “It is in the acknowledgement of the other human being’s uniqueness and therefore of the impossibility of finding general rules of schemata to account fully for him or her that one can be said to encounter the other. At the same time as it is an affirmation of the other as other, therefore, the experience is an encounter with the limits of one’s powers to think and to judge, a challenge to one’s capacities as a rational agent.”

35 Sim ed., Postmodernism (2001), 201. The gray area that exists between binary oppositions is a primary reason why it is the aspect of structuralist methodology that is most vigorously attacked by poststructuralist critics.

36 Derrida, Of Grammatology (1997), 13. Derrida emphasized the fragility of the conventional link between signifier and signified, thus rendering “meaning” a more elusive than the structuralists had supposed.
The poststructural notion of fragility challenges the relative stability of language and the production of meaning based on unmotivated, conventional signs. This destabilizing concept is also demonstrated in Derrida’s “undecidables,” which disrupt oppositional logic and slip across both sides of an opposition while not fitting in either. Derrida refers to undecidables as:

...unities of simulacrum, “false” verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics (1981: 42-43).

Deconstruction challenges the explanatory value of oppositions, reveals the asymmetry in the opposition and suggests an implied hierarchy, reverses the hierarchy, and then displaces one of the terms in the opposition in the form of a new and expanded definition. While this exercise encourages the analyst to reconsider meaning and hierarchy, Derrida’s classification of the undecidable, while not necessarily constituting a third term within the original opposition, does represent a new term in another opposition and is thus not freed from remaining in an oppositional state, but merely realigns itself against that which is decidable.

This is also the view of British cultural theorist Terry Eagleton. In *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996), he writes:

...for all its talk of difference, plurality, heterogeneity, postmodern theory often operates with quite rigid binary oppositions, with “difference,” “plurality,” and allied terms lined up bravely on one side of the theoretical fence as unequivocally positive, and whatever their antithesis might be (unity, totality, universality) ranged banefully on the other (1996: 25).

Here, Eagleton describes the inability of postmodern theory to eliminate the objects of its deconstruction because it cannot help but set up new oppositions. As a consequence, he sees the contradictory nature intrinsic in some postmodernist claims. Eagleton addresses the rather “absolute” rejection of the privileging of self-identity over otherness and difference:

...postmodernism tends to be dogmatically monistic about pluralism, which is of course very often good, but by no means always. One would have expected that the pragmatically-minded might have been a touch more contextual about their claims. A great deal of postmodern politics is based on an opposition between identity and otherness: what is to be fundamentally rejected. "absolutely" one might be tempted to say, is the dominion of self-identity over otherness and difference (127).

---

37 Donald E. Hall, *Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 165. Structuralists noted that signs often attempt to convey meaning through simplistic oppositions. However, poststructuralism not only isolates and describes those oppositions, it also seeks to probe their fragile, hierarchical nature and thereby challenge them. The poststructuralist critique demonstrates that such binary oppositions are only fragile social constructs, neither real nor fixed, that can be dismantled and discredited as foundational components of our philosophical, social, and cultural systems.

38 Culler, *Ferdinand de Saussure* (1986), 144. This view is supported by Culler’s interpretation of Derrida’s argument in regard to the provisional nature of the signified. Specifically, Culler interprets Derrida to mean that any signified may be seen as a signifier in turn.
It appears that the undecidable can serve as a kind of caveat with regard to an unquestioning acceptance of the meaning and hierarchy implied within the original binary opposition. Eagleton underscores this notion when he states that postmodern theory has "lent a voice to the humiliated and reviled, and in doing so has threatened to shake the imperious self-identity to the core" (24), which he claims is its most "precious achievement" (121). Against Eagleton's stark interpretation, I contend that the undecidable does not destroy, nor even temporarily suspend the network of oppositions, but merely creates another link in the chain of oppositions that underpins all systems of meaning. Thus, the poststructuralist undecidable is merely the logical result of a fractional awareness, a microcosmic and incomplete insight as to the totality of an absolute, infinite system of meaning – the Other.

Although the general theory of arbitrariness is still subject to discussion, there is a degree of arbitrariness as a semiotic principle in the linguistic as well as the filmic sign. The perceived fragility of the link between signifier and signified is intimately related to its degree of arbitrariness. Thus, Derrida's warning against the structuralist tendency to privilege the singular and definitive over the multiple and indeterminate appears to be a rational conclusion. However, the poststructuralist concern about the perceived existence of a text's deep structure should not be taken to mean that there is not a core of meaning in a text, but that an inherently limited insight should prohibit the analyst from making overly-definitive, totalizing statements as to what the meaning is. With this caveat in mind, I follow Derrida in his claim that the attempt to investigate structure implies the ability to stand outside and apart from it. I also endorse Derrida's notion of the analyst's inescapable subjectivity because s/he exists within culture. However, I contend that the analyst is not totally subsumed by culture. For, the analyst possesses a kind of paradoxical duality of an existence both "within" and "other" to culture. Although existing within culture, it is simultaneously the analyst's "otherness" to a cultural artifact that grants a degree of epistemic authority and permits a cultural analysis that seeks to disclose the philosophical relationship between novels and films.

Finally, I endeavor to circumvent the sense of nihilism commonly associated with poststructuralism, but rather apply its notion of the possible multiplicity of meanings to loosen and balance an inherently rigid and universalizing structuralist methodology. While one may infer that structuralist, narratological models are reductive, such an inference fails to take into consideration the fact that narratology endeavors to account for narratives only to the extent that they are narrative. Narratologists such as Gerald Prince (1997) have often made it clear that there are many elements other than narrative ones in a narrative text such as pathos, psychological insight, and philosophical force. Nevertheless, it is precisely through a narratological description that a "non-narrative" element, such as the text's abstract philosophy, can become manifest. This emergence permits an examination of the measure a specific dialectic is able to travel from literature to film, which allows me to trace the ways these various forms of philosophy legitimate themselves through literary and filmic narratives that center on the interaction between self and other.

---

39 Presently, the "arbitrariness" of the sign, while accepted as a general principle, is still widely debated with regard to its more specific characteristics and applications in both literature and film. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "La langue écrite de la réalité," in L'expérience hérétique: langue et cinéma. Paris: Payot, 1976), 171. Like Barthes, Pasolini considers the elementary filmic sign to belong to the level of represented reality. Jean Mitry, "D’un langage sans signes," in Revue d’esthétique NS 2-3, 1967) 143. In contradistinction to Barthes and Pasolini. Mitry describes the image as the primary filmic sign. Metz, Christian Metz, Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). 62. Metz supports this view and defines the filmic signifier as the image and its signified as "what the image represents."
The Predicament of the Postmodern Self

The meta-oppositional tension between the ontological categories of self and other has greatly interested me for many years, and it is also at the forefront of poststructural theory in a number of ways. First, poststructural theory sought to deconstruct this antinomy in response to the common ethic of modernism – the enhancement of the self – which was rooted in the fundamental concept of Western civilization since the sixteenth century that the individual, not the group, is the basic unit of society (Bell 1978: 16). Bell believes that the bourgeois entrepreneur and the independent artist together represent the embodiment of the Western ideal of the autonomous individual who attained freedom through self-determination.40

The dual development of the entrepreneur and the artist as autonomous agents, however, soon produced what Bell refers to as an "extraordinary paradox" whereby each came to fear the other and seek its destruction. As a result, the bourgeois, radical in the economic realm, became conservative in the moral and cultural realms. In contrast, the independent artists began to explore precisely those aspects of life set off-limits by the bourgeois and this gave rise to the changing view concerning the nature of consciousness about the self (17). Sontag sees this as a kind of seeking the self in the other; the other is experienced as a harsh purification of the self, but at the same time the self is busily colonizing all strange domains of experience (1996: 69). As a consequence, she envisions a modern sensibility that: "moves between two seemingly contradictory but actually related impulses: surrender to the exotic, the strange, the other; and the domestication of the exotic, chiefly through science" (70). Bell implies that this apparent contradiction results in an attack on rationality, a suspension of social and religious morality, and a preoccupation with limitless ends; additionally, with religiously proscribed boundaries erased, a bourgeois social structure was now based on a mass-consumption economy (1978: 22). As a result, in the 1960's a postmodern culture arose that Bell describes as the logical culmination of modernism and manifested itself in the "porno-pop" celebrations of the counterculture (51). In this view, postmodernism is the extension of modernist adversary culture into everyday life through the powerful mechanism of the mass media, which includes literature and especially film.

In postmodern culture, the self is not necessarily freed from its modernist angst, but is now bombarded in shotgun fashion with, among other things, the cultural consequences of capitalism. Bell implies that the adversarial forms of modern and postmodern culture have undermined bourgeois morality and that hedonistic lifestyles are promoted by the marketing system of contemporary capitalism. Thus, the postmodern individual now finds itself in a culture of waning affect best understood as the outcome of the fragmentation of subjectivity. The modernist problem of alienation and anxiety may no longer be at the vanguard of the postmodern world. However, Jameson asserts that a new one replaces it:

As for expression and feeling or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomic of the centered subject may also mean, not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling (1984: 64)

40 Thiselton, Postmodern Self (1995), 11: "Whether or not we agree with Jürgen Habermas (1988) in doubting if postmodernity brings the end of modernity, it is generally agreed that the postmodern self has lost the innocence which characterized the self of modernity which possessed a basic optimism about the capacities of human reason, social strategies, and scientific achievement. However, such optimism omits too many factors to provide hope for the postmodern self."
Jameson does not imply that contemporary cultural products are completely devoid of feeling, but rather that these feelings or intensities are now "free-floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria" (64). These intensities lead to a kind of "hysterical sublime" that, for Jameson, indicates a concealment of nature in postmodern culture where the other of Western societies is no longer nature but technology. It is this technology that drives the mass media and creates a kind of hyper-reality within which the postmodern self feels misplaced.

In line with Jameson's notion of hyper-reality, Baudrillard claims that postmodern culture distinguishes neither between reality or unreality, nor between true or false representation. Rather, it becomes a weightless simulation that "envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum" (1983b: 11). Postmodern culture is no longer conditioned by anything external to itself as it has broken with representation and is (supposedly) free to construct a purely imaginary universe (Dickens, Fontana, ed. 1994: 54). Taken to the extreme, Baudrillard contends that the media has so pervaded our everyday life with the ideological myths of late capitalism that reality itself does not exist and we are all trapped in a hyper-reality defined as a universe of images. While this may be too strong a claim, there is a theoretical truth to the appearance of a hyper-reality that seems to have replaced material reality. Technology creates a powerful illusion that makes it difficult for the postmodern self to find its bearings in a world where the boundaries of hyper-reality and reality are poorly defined. To frame this discussion in Socratic terms, the postmodern self is a prisoner whose field of vision is inundated with dazzling technological images that effectively serve to keep them bound to an existence on the lowest level of the divided line in the realm of images – the hyper-real.

As a corollary of this ontological uncertainty, the notion of the prisoner's emancipation is an integral part of postmodern theory. Postmodern emancipation has largely been considered a kind of freedom from an oppressive universal conception of self and other imposed by Western white males who assume that their own "idiosyncratic version of humanity should apply to everyone else" (Eagleton 1996:116). In his essay "White Mythology" (1971), Derrida calls this metaphysical tendency "white mythology," which reflects the culture of the West where the "white man takes his own mythology for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason" (213). I argue that this particular perception is to some degree imposed through the image-factory that is Hollywood. Consequently, the postmodern prisoner's emancipation does not spring from the elimination of the meta-opposition. Rather, emancipation results from the postmodern self's greater awareness of itself in relation to another that has become more transparent. The prisoner must transcend the realm of images in order to juxtapose the hyper-real with the reality it only signifies. Thiselton sees the postmodern self as the victim of competing groups' vested interest for power whose manipulation of mass advertising has contributed to the collapse of confidence in claims to truth (1995: 12). In Images of Postmodern Society (1991), American sociologist Norman K. Denzin argues that the postmodern self has lost confidence in its ability to control its own destiny because of a loss of trust in social planning and in universal criteria of rationality (vii). Such notions are profoundly expressed through narratives such as Fight Club that convey the grappling of the postmodern self to find identity in a world where a hyper-reality is imposed on him by the mass media through an inundation of images.

Although not in overtly narrative form, much of Derrida's work concerns the notion of emancipation and the nature of the meta-opposition between self and other. In Psyche: Inventions of the Other (1987), he wrestles with this ontological dilemma by means of a thought-provoking play on the word "psyche," from the Greek word for soul, but also, in French, an old-fashioned term for a kind of mirror set on a pivot. Derrida wonders if we can ever break the mirror and emancipate ourselves from ourselves in order to transcend into the realm of the other that may always remain "within us" (203).
In Of Grammatology (1967), Derrida aims to make inscrutable what we think we understand by the words "proximity," "immediacy," "presence," or the words we use to designate what is closest to us. He addresses phonocentrism and the privileging of speech because it was always thought by Western philosophers to be closer to psychic interiority than writing. In Derrida's expository texts, it appears that a philosophy is set forth through grappling with the meta-opposition similar to the ones I found in the narrative texts analyzed in this study.

In view of the pervasiveness of this antinomy that is woven into the narrative structure of postmodern artifacts, my focus is on the struggle of a postmodern self that exists in a world of relentless commodification accelerated by the expanding influence of Hollywood. Moreover, such an examination bears upon a postmodernist notion that the demise of community standards and their replacement with commodified images manufactured by mass media industries inhibits the construction of stable social identities, as suggested by their proclamation announcing "the disappearance of man" (Dickens, Fontana, ed. 1994: 11). In his work, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern identity (1992), Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor puts the postmodern crisis of the self this way: "To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space which questions arise about what is good and what is bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary" (28). Often imprisoned in a hyper-reality generated by the mass media that tends to confuse and invert our perceptions, it appears that the postmodern individual may lack a meaningful level of self-awareness because s/he is no longer oriented in moral space, which is to say that their position in relation to another, an external material reality, has become confused. Employing a vocabulary of literary narratology and film theory, I perform analyses and interpretations of cultural artifacts that fictionalize and problematize popular notions of the predicament of this postmodern self.

**Vocabulary of Analysis**

For the purposes of performing the textual analyses of both the novels and the films, I employ the following terms chiefly borrowed from Bal (1997:5): a narrative text is a text in which an agent relates (tells) a story in a particular medium. For example, the *Clockwork* pairing represents both literary and filmic narrative texts according to which the protagonist, Alex DeLarge, narrates the violent story of himself as a young man. Story is defined as a fabula presented in a certain manner. Traits that are specific to a particular story will be referred to as aspects. For example, an aspect of the film version of *Solaris* that differs from its literary predecessor is the film's frequent use of flashbacks or, more specifically, retroversions that inform the viewer of the protagonist's past.\(^{41}\) Fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by the actors. The distinction between fabula and story is based upon the difference between the sequence of events and the way in which these events are presented. For example, while the events are presented differently in the film, the revelation that Jack and Tyler in Fincher’s film are the same person can invoke a similar reaction in the viewer despite having previously read Palahniuk’s novel. To act is defined as to cause or to experience an event, which is the transition from one state to another state. In both *Clockwork* texts, Alex experientially acts as he is transitioned from his pre-conditioned state to his post-conditioned state through the event of the conditioning designed to make him experience a death-like paralysis when confronted with sex and violence.

---

\(^{41}\) Mieke Bal, *Narratology, 2nd* ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 84. Throughout the textual analyses, I employ Bal's more precise terms "retroversion" and "anticipation," and avoid the more common terms: "flash-back" and "flash-forward" because of their vagueness and psychological connotations.
Actors are agents that perform actions and are not necessarily human. For example, in the film version of Solaris it appears that the planet (Solaris) is an actor that performs several actions integral to the unfolding of the fabula. However, it is arguable whether or not Solaris sufficiently undergoes the process of characterization to become a character – an actor provided with distinctive human characteristics that exists on the story level. Events, actors, time and location together constitute the elements of the fabula.42

These definitions suggest that Bal’s three-layer distinction - text, story, and fabula - is a sensible basis for a further study of narrative texts. This does not mean these layers exist separately of one another; rather, they serve as “heuristic entrances into an analytical approach to narratives” (1997: 6). My analyses are grounded on Bal’s affirmation that a narrative text is one in which a story is related, which implies that a text is not identical to that story.43 In addition, no chronological series of events, no matter how interesting, constitutes a story unless it is made to do so by a double process involving both coding and decoding, or writing and reading.44 Therefore, subjectivity plays a tangible role in the textual analyses as I am intuitively selecting to describe certain aspects and elements I believe to be relevant to the discussion in order to form a description of textual construction and attribute meaning to the text. Furthermore, any interpretation of any narrative text is subjective, and any interpreter is relying on what they know, or think they know (which is not limited to the text itself) to form their proposal.45 What a reader knows, or thinks s/he knows, of the actual setting or author for example, influences their attempt at interpretation and subsequent proposal. For example, I openly incorporate Burgess’ theological convictions as they pertain to his own explication of Clockwork not because they represent the “truth” of the text, but because his insights can assist my own interpretation and subsequent proposal of meaning.

Similar to the chapters dedicated to the novels, I examine film as a multifaceted medium with its own medium-specific properties. A film is a multimedia narrative form based on a physical record of sounds and moving pictures and is a performed genre primarily designed for viewing in public. Whereas a dramatic play is realized as a live performance by actors on a stage, a film shown in a cinema is not a live event and theoretically can be repeated infinitely without any change.46 Although a film is represented through sight and sound and a novel is not, both media are based on analogous narrative structures.47 As mentioned previously, films are audiovisual

---

42 Bal, Narratology (1997), 5. Although I define other literary and filmic terms, these specific narratological terms form the basis for the textual analysis.
43 Bal, Narratology (1997), 6: “Only the text layer, embodied in the sign system of language, visual images, or any other, is directly accessible.”
44 Patrick O’Neill, Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3: “Telling” is a two-sided affair: the teller tells what happened so that the audience can also tell what happened.
45 Bal, Narratology (1997), 11: “If a proposal is to be accepted, it must be well founded (‘I think on the basis of the data shown that the text means this’). If a proposal is based upon a precise description it can then be discussed, even if, in practice, the intuitive interpretation preceded even the first step of the analysis. The use of theory presented here is an instrument for making descriptions, and hence interpretations, discussable. That, not objectivity or certainty, ‘being right’ or ‘proving wrong,’ is the issue.”
46 Manfred Jahn, Poems, Plays, and Prose: A Guide to the Theory of Literary Genres. (Germany: University of Cologne, 2001), (text online) accessed 30 September 2002, http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppn.htm, F1.2. Citations from this document (which can be accessed in its entirety on-line) will use the paragraph reference, rather than the page number. Moreover, to facilitate global indexing from this website, all paragraphs cited from Part IV are labeled “F” for “Film.”
47 Jakob Lothe, Narrative in Fiction and Film (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8: “The narrative aspect in not clear in all films (nor, incidentally, in all prose texts), but often the narrative aspect is absolutely crucial both for the way the film functions and for its effect on the audience.”
manifetsations of written adaptations of texts such as Clockwork, Fight Club, and Solaris. These adaptations (screenplays) can be understood as the transposing of literature to film and involve neither the staging nor illustration of literature, but rather a translation to film language that consists primarily of a film’s skeletal narrative and dialogue.48

The brand of analysis presented in this study is similar to the film theorist’s “challenge” which seeks to move beyond the commonsensical comprehension of Hollywood film as more than mere entertainment, but also as an ideological discourse that is integral to a deeper understanding of postmodernity (Buckland, Elsaesser 2002: 2).

Parallel to the chapters that directly precede them, the film analyses maintain a structuralist, object-focused approach and regard films as texts to be examined beyond my experience of them alone.49 The analyses do not merely intend to arrive at some new or startling interpretation of a film or a sequence of a film. Rather, I incorporate a structuralist methodology into close readings of the filmic texts in order to articulate the functioning of the film as a system of relations and interdependencies “complex in its means, obvious in its effects” (Buckland, Elsaesser 2002: 16). Since the films are narrative, I interweave narratological analysis and an engagement with film as a visual medium. The film analyses center on the premise that films, grounded in screenplays, are intimately related to the narrative textual form of the novel and can be analyzed similarly. However, the point of comparisons between literature and film is not to make aesthetic assessments of faithfulness to the source. Rather, taking the novel and film as equally embedded in the culture in which they function, the comparison can help to articulate what each, through their own narratological make-ups, “say” to their audiences. For instance, if a novel addresses political issues in a specifically powerful way, the film through totally different means and without following the visual indications in the novel, may still address the same issues with comparable power (Bal 1997: 164).

To produce a film, a team of individuals is led by the director who directs the use of a specialized camera and translates the screenplay’s written narrative into a filmic one. In this way, a film is a collaborative product, and on this basis it is apparent that sources other than the director contribute to the many parts of a film’s overall information. Rather than refer to the host of individuals who produced the film, I refer to the collective agency as the filmic subject. The filmic subject is a theoretical agent behind a film’s organization and arrangement and assumed to be guided by the maxims of giving adequate and relevant information. Based on this principle, the filmic subject selects what it needs from various sources and organizes, edits, and composes this information for telling a filmic narrative. A film shows us what the filmic subject has arranged for us to see, and, consequently, all filmic information is ultimately a corollary of its mediation, choice, organization, and arrangement. Although I employ the term “filmic subject,” there are a number of terms employed in film theory that have similar, but not identical meanings; for example: “filmic composition device” (Jahn 2001), “grand image-maker” (Metz 1974), “shower-narrator” (Chatman 1990), and an “implied director” (Kozloff 1988).

Filmic subject resonates with Jean-Pierre Oudart’s (1969) concept of the “Absent One” in a practical, rather than ideological sense. The filmic subject is the collective

48 Lothe, Narrative in Fiction and Film (2001), 8. Lothe adds that although film language is essentially different from language in literature, the most important components of the definition we have given of a narrative are central concepts in film theory as well.
49 Buckland, Elsaesser, Studying Contemporary American Film (2002), 16. Buckland and Elsaesser reinforce this notion when they state that “text” and “analysis” refer us to the study of literature, and this is a reminder that what we do in film studies is actually historically and methodologically related to the study of literature, and in particular to that tendency within literature which used to be called “practical criticism” or “close reading”: it regards novels, plays, and poems as free-standing, self-contained works, as “objects.”
agency that functions as the "speaking subject" of the narrative, cinematic text. In The Subject of Semiotics (1983). American film theorist Kaja Silverman maintains that the speaking subject, its fictional correlative located in an ideal paternal representation, finds its locus in a cluster of technological apparatus and possesses everything that the viewer, suddenly cognizant of the limitations on its vision, understands itself to be lacking (204). This sense of lack inspires in the object the desire for "something else," a desire to see more. However, Oudart insists that the classic film text must at all costs conceal from the viewer the passivity of their position, and this necessitates denying the fact that there is any reality outside of the fiction (204). To state this differently, the filmic subject’s manipulation must be veiled in order to maintain the suspension of disbelief, an achievement vital to the viewer’s cognitive immersion into the narrative world of images.

The absence of the filmic subject is effectively hidden by the hypothetical existence of the filmic narrator, a photographic narrative device (camera) that employs shot relationships, and the shot / reverse shot (SRS) in particular, to convey the impression that the gaze which directs our look appears to belong to a fictional character. The SRS formation is a cinematic device in which the second shot shows the field from which the first shot is assumed to have been taken. Through a particular transition of shots, the filmic subject is thus able to create the hypothetical existence of the filmic narrator and manipulate it in order to suture the viewer’s gaze to the filmic narrator or that of a fictional character. Silverman sees suture as a particular effect of shot relationships where the level of enunciation remains veiled from the viewer’s scrutiny, which is entirely absorbed within the level of the fiction (202). For example, at times, the gaze that directs our look seems to belong to a character rather than the camera in the point of view shot (POV).

According to this approach, the viewer’s gaze can be hypothetically sutured to a fictional character residing internally or to the filmic narrator that resides externally. Either way, the contrived internal gaze (or internal focalization) or external gaze (external focalization) within fiction serves to conceal the controlling existence of the filmic subject. Thus, the filmic subject interjects a “benign” other (filmic narrator) to obscure its presence as a “coercive” other embodied by the camera. Theorists of cinematic suture agree that films are articulated and the viewing subject spoken by means of interlocking shots. Shot relationships are seen as the equivalent of syntactic ones in linguistic discourse, and the junctures whereby meaning emerges and a subject position is constructed for the viewer. However, some theorists conceptualize those relationships differently from others. Nevertheless, as Silverman asserts, it is imperative that the camera deny its own existence in order to foster the illusion that what is shown has an

50 Stephen Heath. Questions of Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 83. For Heath, the Absent One it is the ‘mother’ in the mirror phase where the subject’s desire is first constructed in her discourse. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristen Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960 (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1985), 421. For Bordwell, it is narration which is always already absent from the frame: ‘I have treated the ‘Absent One’ entailed by the image as the narration, not another character in the fiction’ (421).
51 Kaja Silverman, The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 76. Just as the filmic subject possesses ideally paternal qualities, Silverman further argues that these qualities often manifest themselves in the form of a disembodied (male) voice-over.
52 Kaja Silverman. The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 201: “Whereas Oudart (1969) finds the SRS formation to be virtually synonymous with the operations of suture, Stephen Heath (1978) suggests that it is only one element in a much larger system, and emphasizes features of the editing process, which are common to all shot transitions.” Silverman’s notion of suture appears to associate more with Heath’s concept, and so does the one presented in this study.
independent existence, free from any technological interference, or any coercive gaze that would self-reflexively shatter the viewer’s “suspension of disbelief” (1983: 201).

In a narrative text, an agent relates (tells) a story in a particular medium, which includes not only literature, but film as well, and it is the material strip of film that constitutes the narrative text, or medium.\(^5\) Like a blank page or an empty canvas, in film, the narrative text is the strip of celluloid as the physical record of sounds and moving pictures.\(^4\) The visual and auditory components of film distinguish its narrative text from that of a written novel (or script) and these filmic components possess features. For example, lighting is a feature of the visual component and the musical score is a feature of the auditory component. I refer to the particular results of the filmic subject’s arrangement that comprise the film’s visual component as mise-en-scene and editing. Specifically, mise-en-scene is the observable expression of the filmic subject’s exploitation of space within the frame: the placement of the actors and props, the relationship of the camera to the space in front of it, camera movement, the use of color or black and white, lighting, the size of the frame itself. Editing addresses time and space by building the temporal structure of a film and breaking apart and reordering its spatial construction.\(^5\) Although editing possesses a temporal aspect, the viewer sees (rather than hears) the results of editing, which makes it a feature of a film’s visual component.

The result of the filmic subject’s arrangement that comprises the film’s auditory component is the soundtrack.\(^6\) The soundtrack is either an optical or magnetic band along the side of the celluloid strip that contains the recorded sound for the film. The soundtrack features include dialogue, special sound effects, and the musical score; moreover, each of these features falls into one of two basic categories – diegetic and nondiegetic. Diegetic sound is noise, speech, or music that originates from an

\(5\) Bal, Travelling Concepts (2002), 26: “There are, for example, many reasons for referring to images or films as ‘texts.’ Such references entail various assumptions, including the idea that images have, or produce, meaning, and that they promote such analytical activities as reading.”

\(4\) I have viewed the filmic texts covered in this study in DVD format to facilitate the textual analyses. A DVD original film images are transformed into analogue electromagnetic waves. These waves are recorded onto tape or digitized and burned into the grooves of a DVD (digital video disc), which are then read and reconverted into electrons. These electrons bombard the red, green, and blue phosphors of a television screen (Kolker 2002: 26). The rationale for this decision is twofold. First, although there is not a one to one correlation, a DVD is similar to a novel in that it is divided into chapters and can be referenced accordingly. Secondly, with the push of a button, the individual images (or “frames”) of a DVD can be fast-forwarded, reversed, or played frame-by-frame; furthermore, any frame can be frozen with nearly zero visual distortion and, in some cases (depending on the DVD), a particular segment of the frozen image can even be enlarged. When viewing a film in a theatre, the analyst’s comprehension is bound to the movement of the text as it relentlessly passes through the projector. Conversely, the temporal authority permitted by the DVD format grants the analyst a kind of “equivalent” to the close reading of a novel where the reader can pause in order to contemplate a difficult passage or idea. Bal writes: “Neither texts nor images yield their meanings immediately. They are not transparent, so that images, like texts, require the labor of reading” (2002: 26). Incorporated into the close readings, I synchronize narratology with film theory and terminology to better articulate the filmic dialectics that contain the visual and auditory components that the novels lack.

\(5\) Robert Kolker. Film, Form, and Culture (St. Louis: McGraw-Hil l Companies, 1999), 34: “The formal expression of editing is the cut, a literal severing of the shot. If a shot is an actual or apparent unbroken light of film, editing is what breaks it. But editing joins together as well as cuts apart. Through editing, filmmakers build the structure of a movie by arranging its shots. At its simplest, editing is what is done to a shot. Editing is cutting; but an edit usually refers to the joining together of two shots.”

\(6\) Jahn, Prose (2001), F3.1. Although the visual channel contains a film’s essential source of information, this must not be taken to mean that sound (especially in the form of music and speech) is in any way less important than the visual signs.
identifiable source in the current scene. For example, the viewer hears a news report and sees that it originates from a television that has just been turned on. Conversely, nondiegetic sound is noise, speech, or music that does not emanate from an identifiable source in the scene. For example, in Kubrick’s epic 2001: A Space Odyssey, the viewer sees a ship moving through space and, concurrently, hears a full orchestra version of Johann Strauss’ The Blue Danube (1867). One can undoubtedly enjoy a film despite the absence of sound; however, the soundtrack (which, for example, can be used as an auditory form of anticipation) has become an integral part of how one views the fabula and interprets the story.57

The human longing to decipher metaphysical questions drives my critical examination of how narratives philosophize through juxtaposing the ontological categories of “self” and “other.” For it is the binary tension between self and other that provides the raw material for narrative discourse. With this antinomy at the center of my study, I perform a sequence of close textual analyses and descriptions of six postmodern narrative texts. It is the adaptive interaction between literature and film that motivates the analysis these artifacts in three dual-medium pairs. Using a functional narratology heuristically, I construct descriptions of the novels and their filmic counterparts in order to expose their philosophy, or, more specifically, the textual dialectic that radiates from the meta-oppositional friction. After the philosophies of have emerged through narratological description, I reveal the consistencies and differences between the texts in order to determine the measure in which the philosophy of the novel traveled into film.

In view of the pervasiveness of this antinomy that is woven into the narrative structure of the texts, my focus is on the struggle of a postmodern self that exists in a world of relentless commodification hastened by the expanding influence of the technological mass media. Such an examination bears upon a postmodernist notion that the collapse of community standards and their replacement with commodified images manufactured by mass media industries inhibits the construction of stable social identities. Thus, this study is undertaken in light of the international influence of Hollywood, the increasingly significant role of film in postmodernity, and its ability to make literary philosophies more available to mainstream audiences. It is the enormous accessibility of these filmic artifacts that lends itself to the critical practice of cultural analysis that seeks to understand how the travelling dialectics of these texts might inform present culture.

57 Buckland, Elsaesser, American Film (2002). 14: “The most basic functions (of sound) are to serve as spatial markers, either synchronous, to indicate co-presence of sound source and presentation or in counterpoint to indicate off-screen space. As a temporal marker, synchronicity signifies simultaneity, but sound can often structure the future of the narrative (anticipating events through musical motifs, for instance), or it can act as narrative memory (an echo or reminder).