From Camera Lens To Critical Lens

From Camera Lens To Critical Lens
A Collection Of Best Essays On Film Adaptation

Edited by

Rebecca Housel

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This volume is dedicated to all individuals who support movies; movies invite imagination and encourage story-telling among all peoples. Film helps to enlighten and enliven the audience beyond the boundaries of society, and also opens sometimes closed doors on the human condition.

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AND SPEILBERG SAID, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!"
AN INTRODUCTION BY REBECCA HOUSEL

Film adaptation is a vehicle for life experiences. From memoir, like Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*, to adapting history in movies, like *Gladiator* with Russell Crowe, the mass-audience is along for the Hollywood-driven ride of their life. Because of the inherent uniformity with all film, the movies make for an almost automatic societal mythology. Twenty-first century gods, like Brad Pitt and Colin Farrell help guide "the people" with their tales of how to deal with the epic nature of life. Leading ladies in Hollywood, like Angelina Jolie, Nicole Kidman and Halle Berry, are goddesses with heavenly looks and talent and who continue to forge new frontiers in feminism as some of the most highly paid and respected actresses in Hollywood. But the caveat, as with any mythology, is to remember that while film is vibrant and larger-than-life, it's not a mirror.

Much of film, from even the earliest years of Hollywood, has an agenda. Nothing is an accident. Use of color, light, shadow, narration, even use of specific actors to fill a character's shoes, deliberately leads the audience to certain societal conclusions. Sure, everyone understands that movies aren't real, except, that's not exactly true.

As a professor of literature for the last decade, I can't even begin to count the number of students who truly believe that *Titanic* and *Gladiator* are historically accurate, or the seemingly endless student sexist comments (both male and female) from a subliminal embedded message on gender from some musical and brightly-colored anime film. Even Disney's in on the act with their adaptations of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales of motherless children. Think of the messages these movies are sending ….

Film adaptation is a subject deserving of serious study by academics and movie-audiences alike. How many Christians were steeled upon seeing Gibson's *Passion*? How many of us seek the escapism of a heroic film to feel empowered during a time when terrorism knows no bounds? We live by what we see in the movies. Even when we're not watching movies, we're watching movie stars on television networks like HBO and E! that highlight the lives of the rich and famous. Celebrity hot sheets, or magazines, like *Us* and *Entertainment Weekly*, are reporting skyrocketing sales. People host Oscar parties during the Oscar Awards show—I mean, we just can't seem to get enough. Though sixty percent of American women are overweight, women continue to try the latest fad diets or drugs to look more like the incredibly thin and beautiful starlets of Hollywood. Even morning news shows like Today and

CNN have caved in to the pressure, highlighting the ridiculous antics of Tom Cruise, and, will Katie Holmes become a Scientologist? Please! Though Buddhism is an ancient philosophy, the ideas are still quite pertinent today: Be mindful. Don't take the movies for granted. Audiences need to beware of moving pictures offering easy answers to difficult societal issues.

I'm no different than anyone else though—I grew up on Disney movies in the seventies and the brat-pack teen romances of the eighties. When I was offered the area chair of film adaptation for the Popular Culture Association, I jumped at the chance, having loved film of all varieties my entire life. Movies are even a mandatory part of my writing and literature classes—nothing else makes the same kind of impression. A fan of film adaptation forever, my long-time dream is to see more female hero films, like *Elektra* and *Catwoman*, only much, much better. *Everafter* with Drew Barrymore wasn't bad, but female heroes are few and far between in film. The recent slew of comic book adaptations has sometimes been disappointing, but more often quite thrilling. Videogames are a newer popular genre of film adaptation from *Resident Evil* to *Tomb Raider* to the more recent *Doom*. Film adaptation is only limited by the human experience. Illness narratives like *Wit* and *Terms of Endearment* bring messages about female health and healing. There are seemingly endless adaptations genres to explore. Film adaptation has the ability to reflect on the infinite facets that make up the human condition—let us, as audience, not sit idly by in our hubris mindlessly munching on nachos and popcorn while taking in the incredibly life-like computer generated images (CGI) and messages on the silver screen.

The fourteen essays in this book examine different areas of film adaptation from Alfred Hitchcock to Charlie Kaufman and everything in between. The scholars who authored each essay first presented their thoughts on the following film adaptations at the 2005 San Diego Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference. Each essay reveals exciting new theory in the area of adaptation and brings audiences, both academic and movie-goers alike, closer to more fully realizing the meanings behind the movies. So grab your popcorn and hang on tight! The ride you've so often taken visually in theatres is about to get dangerous. You will be traversing alone in your mind on an individual quest to rival any hero's journey you've seen on the silver screen.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM FILM TO LIFE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY IN *ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND* AND *I "HEART" HUCKABEES*

by Erin Hill-Parks

> "I'm just a fu**ed up girl looking for my own peace of mind. Don't assign me yours."
>
> Clementine, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

> "How am I not myself?"
>
> Brad, *I "Heart" Huckabees*

Adaptation in terms of film is usually thought of as the process of taking a pervious work, be it a novel, play, or television show, and transforming it for the cinema. What is not as often discussed, however, is how an audience member may take cinematic lessons and adapt them to everyday life. The early Surrealist films of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali incited violent reactions and political furor (Decherney 86), but can films impart more subtle messages to audience members, especially in this day and age of market-driven Hollywood blockbusters? This paper will explore the construction of identity, and how we can use film via philosophy to help understand and define our personal identities and interactions with the world. By looking at philosophy through the filter and construction of film, we are afforded a comfortable distance to properly analyze and ask questions about what it ultimately means to be an individual in the world. This discussion will center on two recent American films, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004) and *I "Heart" Huckabees* (Russell 2004), focusing on their duel positions of being Hollywood films done in an independent vein, and both films' central concern of de-constructing identity in their characters in able to better understand individuals. Once a character finds the essential element, or core, at their center, they can effectively construct an identity and build relations with others. By showing the journey the characters must go through, the audience can take away some semblance of how to get to their own core.

In "The Social Function of Philosophy," Max Horkheimer wrote: "The opposition of philosophy to reality arises from its principles. … Philosophy has set itself against mere tradition and resignation in the decisive problems of existence, and it has shouldered the unpleasant task of throwing the light of consciousness even upon those human relations and modes of reaction which have become so deeply rooted that they seem natural, immutable, and eternal" (257). Building from this, if we, for the moment, look at these two films as philosophically informed meditations on reality, instead of merely vehicles of mass entertainment, we can attempt to decipher what the films tell us about the deeper meaning of life, so to speak. (Max Horkheimer famously derided the cinema as not being a true art form, but rather essentially being a vehicle for financial gain, and one of the lowest forms of mass entertainment. In this article, however, I am taking the liberty of using some of Horkheimer's meditations on philosophy for a discussion of film, as it seeps apt.)

I posit that film, like philosophy, can lead to a somewhat enlightening of the soul. While each film holds a wealth of material for discussion, due to the scope of this essay, I will focus on only one aspect–what do these films tell us about how we build an identity? (Although volumes of literature are available on the issue of identity politics, this essay will rely on close readings of these individual films and how identity is constructed, so this literature will not necessarily come in to play here.)

Understanding the Films

To properly understand the argument and discussion, a brief summary of each film is necessary. These films, however, do not lend themselves easily to simple or concise descriptions, which is one reason they both beg a more thorough investigation both in this paper and beyond. *I "Heart" Huckabees* is the more obviously philosophical film of the two. Billing itself as an "existential" comedy, *Huckabees*, directed and co-written by David O. Russell, espouses theories of, among others, nihilism, zen, commercialism, environmentalism, and, yes, existentialism in a barrage of colorful visuals and wordplay. With its conflicting theories and philosophies the film has been hailed alternately as brilliant and horrible. Many see it as a didactic, unfocused rant on the meaning of existence, while others see it as a clever call to arms to question reality. Apart from the issue of the film's final merit, it is hard to deny that there are genuinely interesting questions underlying the film.

Generally the film focuses on the crises faced by Albert (Jason Schwartzman), an environmental crusader losing his coalition to Brad (Jude

Law), an executive at Huckabees, a chain of department stores. Albert enlists the help of married existential detectives Bernard (Dustin Hoffman) and Vivian (Lily Tomlin) to help him make sense of his life and discover a deeper meaning in his recent coincidences. Also helping Albert along the journey are Isabelle Huppert as a rival detective leading him down the path to nothing, Mark Wahlberg playing Tommy, Albert's so-called other–a fireman recovering from the "big September thing," and Naomi Watts as Dawn, the face, body, and voice of Huckabees in their advertising–she is literally the model for corporate commercialism. Throughout the film all of these characters, plus about a dozen others, attempt to discover the "ultimate truth about reality" through any means, or philosophic borrowing, necessary.

The more commercial and widely seen of the two films is *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, an untraditional romantic comedy with hints of the fantastic. Directed by Michel Gondry with a screenplay by Charlie Kaufman, *Eternal Sunshine* basically follows the relationship of Joel (Jim Carrey) and Clementine (Kate Winslet). Joel has discovered that after a fight Clementine chose to erase all of her memories of him and their relationship. Joel then enlists the team from Lacuna, Inc, the company that does such specific memory erasure, to perform the same operation on him. As the erasure occurs the audience witnesses Joel and Clementine's relationship backwards–from the final fight back through to when they first met. Midway through the procedure, as Joel re-lives the good memories along with the recent bad ones, Joel realizes that he does not actually want to erase Clementine and attempts to hide her in memories in which she did not originally appear. The audience then witnesses both the events within Joel's head–his fight to keep the memories of his relationship alive–and the technicians in the "real" world attempt to remove them while dealing with their own relationships and issues.

Upon first glance there may not seem to be an obvious reason to address this particular issue of identity construction using these two films together besides the more obvious similarities; they were both released in the same year, made by young directors, star a mixed cast of established Hollywood stars and those on the rise, and feature quirky visuals and a non-typical narrative structure. (In an odd coincidence–perhaps–the two films also both feature original scores composed by Jon Brion and poster art featuring a similar motif of scenes from the film interspersed with colorful squares.) Despite the differences and superficial similarities, the films ultimately have the same notion of how we interact with others and what makes up an individual, namely that we must discover what is at the center of our being before we can properly relate to the rest of the world or participate in any sort of relationship with others.

The Journey in *I "Heart" Huckabees*

It is hard to discuss one part of *Huckabees* without getting caught up in other parts of the film. This is mainly due to the myriad theories floating around and the oft used tactic of having various characters scream at each other all at the same time instead of speaking in turn. Near the beginning of the film existential detective Bernard explains existence and perception to Albert using the example of a blanket. Holding up the blanket, he says, "… this blanket represents all the matter and energy in the universe, okay? You, me, everything–nothing has been left out … this is everything." (All quotes from *I "Heart" Huckabees* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* are transcribed by the author from the film.) In Bernard's world everything is connected, all matter is part of one grand scheme–giving meaning and purpose to all parts of life. Both Albert and Tommy rebel against this theory opting instead for nihilism and the idea that nothing is connected and that there is no meaning to anything. At the core of both of the theories, however, is the idea that you need to "dismantle your day to day reality to see the big picture." In other words, you need to break down your identity into its various components, finding what the essential element is, so that you can see how it does–or doesn't–relate to the rest of humanity and the world.

When Bernard confronts the rebelling Tommy with the ideas of connectivity in the universe, Tommy counters, saying that the world is actually chaos, "identity is an illusion," and "we are all alone." It is in his journey to find the "reality" of his identity, along with corporate shill Brad's journey, where the most interesting points for our discussion lie. Brad and Tommy begin as seemingly polar opposites. Tommy feels as though nothing makes sense and he constantly questions every aspect of his world. Brad, however, does not see himself as questioning or unhappy at the beginning of the film–he approaches the existential detectives simply out of spite for Albert, not for a deeper meaning or soul search. Brad has the perfect girlfriend, Dawn, the perfect house, the perfect car, and the perfect job. Tommy and Brad appear to be on separate journeys, but end up at similar realizations.

At the end of the film, Tommy finds that he is not alone in the world and that he needs people, but it takes him losing it all to discover this. His "other," Albert, the person that he is supposed to share his journey with, betrays and deserts him for a woman. Tommy decides that he must feel pain, including the physical pain of hitting himself in the head with a giant ball, and raw emotion to ultimately find who he is and how he interacts with the rest of the individuals in the universe.

Brad also finds that he must lose the things he thought important before he can discover his true identity. It is when the detectives question his perfect life that Brad's reality and identity starts to disintegrate. Vivian plays an audio tape of Brad telling the same celebrity story multiple times over several months, and with that Brad realizes that he is playing out a role, not being himself. Brad then asks, "how am I not myself?" This question, first asked to the detectives and then to himself over and over and then echoed back to him by the detectives, becomes the mantra not just for Brad, but also for the film. In the next few scenes Brad offends his bosses in the middle of a meeting–thereby most likely losing his job, loses his girlfriend to Tommy, and loses his house to a fire. All of the external trappings he used to define himself are removed, and he is forced to confront his emotions. For both Tommy and Brad, it is in confronting emotion and "dismantling" themselves to an essential part that they are able to find their true identities and start acting in the world. Brad is then able to speak with Albert as an equal while Tommy and Dawn discover that they have more in common than they originally thought.

The Core of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Eternal Sunshine is a bit easier to discuss than *Huckabees*, though it certainly has its own interconnected theories in each frame. While ostensibly being a story about love–how we fall into and out of it–this film is also about how we lose our identity and what it takes to get it back. In *Eternal Sunshine*, Dr. Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson) is the inventor of a process that erases selected memories from the brain. Explaining the process to Joel, which will occur while Joel sleeps, he notes: "We start from your most recent memories and work backwards from there, more or less. There's an emotional core to each of our memories and when you eradicate that core, it starts its degradation process. By the time you wake up in the morning, all of the memories we have targeted will have withered and disappeared. As in a dream upon waking." Once we find and remove that core, the memory is gone and that experience–and emotion–is no longer part of who we are. In his theory, this means that a person never has to live with painful memories or emotions. Life can just be happy!

Even after Joel and Clementine erase each other from their respective memories there is still some lingering part of each other there. The film begins with Joel and Clementine meeting on the beach at Montauk in the middle of February–the morning after Joel's procedure, which the audience learns was the location of their original meeting two years prior. Despite the removal of this memory, the two are drawn to each other and the resilience of the past. We see also that this is not an isolated case. Dr. Mierzwiak's assistant Mary (Kirsten Dunst) is quite obviously obsessed with him, and at one point near the end of the film painfully confesses this to him and they kiss. The audience quickly discovers that the doctor and assistant have already had an affair, but Mary had the procedure done to erase the relationship, so she has no memory of it. The emotional core of each person and personal history remains intact despite the surrounding emotions and memory having been deleted. Perhaps then, Dr. Mierzwiak's theory of the emotional core is correct to an extent. We all have an identifiable emotional core, and it lies at the center of who we are. It cannot be removed, and is difficult to pinpoint, but it is when we can find that emotional core–of a memory, of a thought, of a relationship–that we can discover our true identity. If we try to irradiate these emotional cores instead of learning from them, however, we run the risk of losing our identity, as the emotions are so tightly entwined with who a person is.

Joel finds his main emotional core just before waking, in one of the last memories to be erased, one of the first originally created. As mentioned, the technicians erase his memories from the most recent to the oldest, so this is a memory of Joel and Clementine's first meeting. The scene starts with them meeting at a winter beach party, both outcasts by choice, not quite being able to fit in with the rest of the crowd. Throughout the film the audience has seen Joel fight to save Clementine and their relationship, something he failed to do in real life, but now he has given up for the second time. He knows that the memories are about to be gone permanently. Clementine, or Joel's impression of her, interrupts his remembrance, saying "this is it, Joel. It's going to be gone soon."

As Joel's memory continues to play out to the end of their first meeting, the audience sees Joel and Clementine break into a house on the beach's edge. Clementine searches for the liquor cabinet and then runs upstairs to search for clothing, while Joel gets nervous and debates leaving. Clementine yells down "so go." As Joel paces, about to run out of the house, the memory starts to disintegrate. Large chunks of the house fall away. The floor is replaced with sand and the ocean rushes in around Joel's feet. Clementine can no longer be seen, but her voice surrounds Joel as they discuss what happened

> *Clementine*: I wish you'd stayed.
> *Joel*: I wish I had stayed, too. Now I wish I'd stayed. I wish I had done a lot of things. I wish I … I wish I had stayed. I do.
> *Clementine*: Well, I came back downstairs and you were gone.
> *Joel*: I walked out. I walked out the door.
> *Clementine*: Why?
> *Joel*: I don't know. I felt like a scared little kid. I was, like, above my head; I don't know.
> *Clementine*: You were scared?
> *Joel*: Yeah. I thought you knew that about me. I ran back to the bonfire trying to outrun my humiliation, I think.
> *Clementine*: Was it something I said?
> *Joel*: Yeah. You said, "So go" with such disdain, you know?

> *Clementine*: Oh, I'm sorry.
> *Joel*: It's okay. (Runs out the door as he did in the actual memory.)
> *Clementine*: Joely? What if you stayed this time? (Appears at top of stairs)
> *Joel*: I walked out the door. There's no memory left.
> *Clementine*: Come back and make up a goodbye at least. Let's pretend we had one. . (Joel returns and kisses Clementine.) Bye Joel.
> *Joel*: I love you.
> *Clementine*: (whispered) Meet me at Montauk.

It is not just the memory of Clementine that he has lost here–he has lost it all–but at the same time he has discovered the core of the memory/emotion. It is at this moment, with his memory crumbling around him and at the point where he is most alone and lost, that can find his own identity.

Here Joel is most himself. The memory, even more visually present as the crumbling house and ocean rushing in, crashes around him. He admits he is scared; he is nervous within his skin, unable to stand still; and that he needs someone. At this point Clementine re-appears in the memory, something that did not happen in "reality." Now that he has been "dismantled" as the folks in *Huckabees* would say, Joel is open to the emotions and pain of life, and realizes that it is necessary before he can relate and live in the world. As this is a love story, we see that his love of Clementine is very much related to his emotional core that cannot be erased without losing his identity. In reality Joel let Clementine walk out of his life, just as in this final/first memory, he walks out of her life. In his altered memory, they both stay, making up a goodbye they never had. Joel and Clementine–or at least the Clementine of his memory–acknowledge that life and relations will bring pain, but it's the rest of it that makes it worth it. (In a sign that their cores are intertwined, something not discussed at length in the paper, both parties end up obeying memory Clementine and go to Montauk the next day.) Joel and Clementine eventually find out about their past relationship, thanks to Mary who mailed back all files to their owners, and decide that, despite knowing that their relationship fell apart before, they want to try again.

Who Am I?

Tommy, Brad, and Joel all chose to break down their identities to find who they really were and help make sense of the world. They see the flaws and faults in their lives, the excess, and are able to react to the environment through an emotional core. Once this core has been found, they can find who they are and interact with others. Tommy realizes he should be, and can be, with Dawn, Brad becomes friends–or at least stops fighting–with his previous enemy Albert, and Joel is able to start again with Clementine.

This comes back to the two quotes listed at the beginning of this essay: Brad's question/mantra, "how am I not myself?" and Clementine's admonishment to Joel, that she is "just a fu**ed up girl looking for [her] own peace of mind." It is in these two statements that we return to Horkhemier's claim that it is through philosophy that we can shed light on the most mundane and seemingly innocuous problems of life, that, in fact, "today our task is rather to ensure that, in the future, the capacity for theory will never again disappear" (272). By not just passively viewing film, but actively watching and intellectually participating in cinema, the audience can take up the task and keep philosophical inquiry as part of our daily struggle to discover identity and our place in the world.

The characters in *I "Heart" Huckabees* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* question everything, from the use of petroleum, to the betrayal of love and self. Through their journeys and pain we can perhaps attempt to better understand how we can focus our own identities and live in the world.

CHAPTER TWO

BLOOMSBURY BLUES: VIRGINIA WOOLF'S MOMENTS AND MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S *HOURS*

by Suzette Henke

Stephen Daldry's award-winning 2002 film version of *The Hours* makes use of a brilliant screenplay by David Hare to adapt Michael Cunningham's novel of the same name for a cinematic audience, thus proving the "permeability of the borders between high and popular culture" (Chatman 269). Both film and novel use Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as the substratum for a multifaceted narrative and celluloid framing of 20th-century malaise—from Woolf's own manic-depressive battle with headaches and haunting voices, through a housewife's suburban entrapment in postwar America at mid-century, to the millennial *angst* of a homosexual artist battling the ravages of AIDS. All the principal characters confront, in different ways, the vacuous hours that threaten to engulf their psyches and asphyxiate their spirits. They take refuge from perilous hours of anxiety or boredom in the exhilarating sensations provided by those heightened "moments of being" described by Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past." Woolf had originally entitled the working manuscript of her novel *The Hours*, and various manuscripts of the draft versions of *Mrs. Dalloway* have been collected and edited by Helen Wussow in a scholarly volume (now out of print) called *The Hours*—a doubling of titular reference geared to baffle readers and reference librarians for years. As Karen Levenbeck points out, Cunningham has omitted this germinal text from the bibliography supplied at the end of his novel.

As a Woolf devotee and a literary scholar currently co-editing a collection of essays on *Woolf and Trauma*, I have spent a great deal of time over the past several years immersed in Woolf's biography, essays, letters (6 volumes), diaries (5 volumes), and literary texts. Consequently, I find my response to Cunningham's double(d) narrative, as well as to Daldry's film, highly perplexed and uneven. I cannot help sharing Hermione Lee's "squeamish reluctance to see a real person made over into a fictional character, with made-up thoughts and speeches" (50), especially in light of the many thousands of words that Woolf herself penned. Lee complains in *Virginia Woolf's Nose* that both novel and film encourage their audiences to interpret Woolf's life backwards from her suicide and perpetuate tragic, distorted, highly sentimental and melodramatic portraits of the artist as a middle-aged woman. The film suppresses Virginia's "gleeful comedy" and "evacuates her life of political intelligence or social acumen, returning her to the position of doomed, fey, mad victim" (Lee 54-55). To an uninformed reader or spectator, it would seem that Woolf was a neurotic, hysterical authoress who killed herself immediately after completing *Mrs. Dalloway*; whereas, in reality, she remained relatively stable until her final psychological crisis in 1941. What strikes me as extraordinary about Woolf's biography is the fact that from 1915 until 1941—a period of 26 years—she suffered from persistent migraine headaches, flu, pulmonary distress, and recurrent toothaches. She did not, however, have a severe breakdown during that period, and she endured the vicissitudes of chronic illness while continuing a prolific reading program, travel and social engagements, grueling labor alongside Leonard at the Hogarth Press, and most importantly, literary creation.

Cunningham's novel moves into the tormented mind of the suicidal author and follows her to the banks of the River Ouse, whose amniotic torrents would devour her 59-year-old body. He re-creates, with sensitivity and compassion, the pain of her panicky consciousness seeking solace in death by water. And he quotes, in full, the suicide letter that Virginia left for Leonard in the sitting room of Monk's House the day of her death.[i] Both novel and film vividly portray the anguish and conflicted emotions that must have motivated Woolf's desperate decision to put stones in her pockets and drown herself. Neither novel nor film, however, truly represents Virginia's suicide in the context of British politics in 1941. Cunningham makes a few laconic references to Woolf's anxiety now that "[a]nother war has begun" and "the bombers have appeared again in the sky" (3-4). But readers have little cognizance that a war is being waged on the continent and German planes are buzzing overhead. Virginia's diaries and letters offer abundant evidence of her severe psychological distress in reaction to impending catastrophe. The Woolfs' house in London was bombed and burned during the infamous *Sitzkreig* that preceded Hitler's more aggressive *Blitz*. Bombs were exploding around Monk's House, and Virginia and Leonard, along with the majority of the British public, feared invasion by Germany. As a Jew, Leonard could anticipate deportation or death. And Virginia, along with Freud and E. M.

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[i] For information about the dating of the three suicide notes, see Nicolson and Trautman's edition of the last volume of Virginia Woolf's *Letters*, as well as Panthea Reid's 1996 book *Art and Affection*, which challenges the premises of Nicolson and Trautman and offers a speculative "Redating of Virginia Woolf's Suicide Letters" in an Appendix. I discuss Virginia's three suicide notes in the "Afterword" to a forthcoming co-edited volume on *Virginia Woolf and Trauma*. In terms of genre, Bret Keeling labels Cunningham's novel a postmodern homage and "continuation" of Woolf's original text.

Forster, was on Hitler's "blacklist" of subversive intellectuals to be executed after occupation. The couple made a suicide pact and kept a supply of gasoline in the garage, with plans to asphyxiate themselves through carbon monoxide poisoning should German storm-troopers reach the British mainland. On 28 March, 1941, a month after her 59th birthday, Virgina plunged into a river torrent that would spare her the threat of Nazi occupation.[i]

As Hermione Lee complains, Woolf's "death has been simplified, or Ophelia-ised, by the film of *The Hours*, as the romantic immersion of a young woman with a very long nose in beautiful still waters, with music playing" (121). We see Nicole Kidman "slowly entering … the green, sun-and-shade-dappled waters of a gently flowing river, to the accompaniment of birds calling and a pulsating, emotional score by Philip Glass" (40). Like Lee, I take exception to Cunningham's nostalgic evocation of the author's lyrical extinction in *The Hours*, as well as to Daldry's .romantic rendition of her death. The reality of Virginia's drowning must have been otherwise. The water of the River Ouse would have been frigidly cold in March; the sludge of the riverbank viscous and muddy; the stones, desperately gathered, solid anchors to oblivion. Surely Virginia's helpless body struggled against fluid suffocation and her lungs gasped for air, as she would have instinctively fought the engulfing current that swept away a lifetime of traumatic memories.[ii]

Paradoxically, Woolf's novel about a tormented war veteran and a sensitive British matron would serve as the "pre-text" (or inspirational text) for Cunningham's fictitious character, Laura Brown, to abandon her husband and children in a postwar Los Angeles suburb at mid-century. When Laura's grown-up son Richard capriciously labels his friend and bisexual lover, Clarissa Vaughn, with the monicker "Mrs. Dalloway," Cunningham invokes a *tour de force* that binds Virginia, Laura, and Clarissa in a seamless web of love and loss, tragedy and bereavement, homosexual desire and personal regeneration. As Lee explains, "Septimus's hallucinations are re-enacted in Richard Brown's terminal illness: shellshock and the traumatic aftermath of the Great War are translated into the trauma of the AIDS epidemic and its effect on individuals. Woolf's own struggle against suicidal depression colours the story of Laura Brown" (Lee 50-51). Lee judges Hare's screenplay "more polemical" than Cunningham's novel, in which the three kisses prominently exchanged by women suggest that bisexuality is the "normal condition of life" (54).

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[i] Hermione Lee confirms that Virginia "and Leonard knew they were on Hitler's blacklist, and . . . had made suicide plans" (120).

[ii] When Lee challenged Daldry about the inaccuracy of the film's representation of Virginia's death, he protested: "We only had Kidman for four weeks in June, and we couldn't exactly strip the trees" (56).

Both novel and film arbitrarily situate Virginia Woolf's bisexual impulses in the scenario of her sororal affection for the more flamboyant Stephen sibling, Vanessa Bell. From an affectionate kiss shared with her vivacious and voluptuous sister, Virginia feels inspired to portray the incipient, somewhat muted lesbian relationship between Clarissa Parry and Sally Seton. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, their budding female friendship would be eclipsed by Clarissa's ostensibly "safe" marriage to Richard Dalloway, a conservative member of Parliament. In contrast, Cunningham's Clarissa defines her sexual identity principally through her "stable and affectionate [lesbian] marriage" (*H* 97) to a long-term partner named Sally Lester—a relationship romantically overshadowed by Clarissa's youthful moment of passionate affection for Richard Brown, a gay writer with omnivorous appetites and youthful bisexual inclinations. Their liaison transpired in the Cape Cod village of Wellfleet in 1965, when Clarissa Vaughn's bedtime reading conspicuously included Doris Lessing's feminist classic, *The Golden Notebook.* From this inspiring text, she apparently managed to wrench a late-century script for personal liberation and the free choice of (homo)sexual identity. Such literary intertextuality would seem slightly ironic, insofar as Lessing provides a penetrating critique of western society's limitations with respect to traditional marriage, conservative politics, and cultural conventions of every kind, but she exhibits a glaring blind spot in her representation of homosexuality as a deviant, clichéd, and emotionally suspect life-style. In contrast, Cunningham presents a more balanced perspective when he remarks in an interview with James Schiff that "the notion of human sexuality is titanically complicated, enormously idiosyncratic. No one person's sexuality in any real way resembles somebody else's, and the terms 'gay,' 'straight,' or 'bisexual' are so inexact and crude as to be virtually meaningless. In *The Hours* I am pleased with the fact that … there is no character who can accurately be described as gay or straight" (126).

Both Cunningham's *Hours* and Daldry's .adaptation offer a contradictory and somewhat paradoxical representation of the highly conventional conjugal partnership shared by Clarissa and Sally, though both suggest traditional patterns of monogamous affiliation, which are challenged in the novel by Clarissa's daughter Julia and her queer feminist mentor, Mary Krull (a cruel pun). "You respect Mary Krull," Clarissa muses, "living as she does on the verge of poverty, going to jail for her various causes, lecturing passionately at NYU about the sorry masquerade known as gender, … but she is finally too despotic in her intellectual and moral intensity, her endless demonstration of cutting-edge, leather-jacketed righteousness" (*H* 23). Krull, in turn, condemns Clarissa as a fool and considers her a smug, "self-satisfied witch." She despises the lesbian couple for being "queers of the old school, … bourgeois to the bone" (*H* 160). For the sake of cinematic economy, Daldry has deleted Cunningham's embittered “dyke” from his film adaptation. It might seem to middle-class or midwestern American audiences that only in New York City at the turn of the 21st century could such gay conjugal liaisons prove so easily acceptable and, indeed, normal to the point of reactionary critique. Mary Krull feels that Clarissa and her partner have “sold out” to the Establishment by self-consciously replicating traditional connubial arrangements. In contrast, Richard Brown’s self-pitying narcissism sets him apart as a suffering soul both mentally and physically afflicted and traumatized by his mother’s seemingly heartless desertion of her prepubescent son, without a word of explanation to soothe his heightened filial sensitivities and obsessive Oedipal attachment to Mom. As a boy, Richie “is transparently smitten with her; he is comic and tragic in his hopeless love” (*H* 44). And Laura herself entertains voracious fantasies about the cannibalistic incorporation of her son: “she could devour him, not ravenously but adoringly, infinitely gently, the way she used to take the [Catholic] Host into her mouth” (*H* 76).

One can appreciate *The Hours* as Cunningham’s gracious tribute to Virginia Woolf as lyrical author, modernist prophet, and spiritual guru to men and women of the 20th century. The author explains to James Schiff: “I never thought of myself as rewriting *Mrs. Dalloway* …. What I wanted to do was more akin to music, to jazz, … to both honor it and try to make other art out of an existing work of art” (Interview 113). One feels gratified that Daldry’s cinematic adaptation called attention to Woolf’s 1920’s masterpiece and made it a best-selling paperback in America in March 2003. Reluctantly, I confess a personal preference for certain aspects of Daldry’s film adaptation over the fictional text on which it is based.[i]

The Laura Zielski Brown sections of Cunningham’s novel, for instance, though modeled on the author’s own mother, seemed to me extremely *boring*, especially in contrast to Virginia Woolf’s rich, palimpsestic prose. In what appears to be a torturous version of Ivor Winters’ pet peeve, the myth of imitative form, Cunningham has replicated the tedium and asphyxiating boredom of middle-class American life at mid-century by using a narratological style of such utter, deadpan simplicity that it might strike a contemporary reader as bland and uninteresting—though Seymour Chatman judges these sections the most successful in the novel. Laura’s impassive but depressed consciousness rarely transcends the drabness of her suburban Los Angeles surroundings, despite Cunningham’s intention “to do for [his] neighborhood in Los Angeles

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[i] Lee argues that the film of *The Hours* “is much more vulnerable to charges of vulgarization, inaccuracy, and sentimentalisation” (53). She complains that Nicole Kidman, “doesn’t look very much like Virginia Woolf. She looks like Nicole Kidman wearing a nose” (53). A fairly quiet discussion between Leonard and Virginia about moving back to London becomes, in the film, a histrionic conjugal battle.

[where he grew up] something like what Woolf did for London in the '20's" (Interview 127). It might prove difficult for readers to generate significant interest in the minor domestic drama of Laura's (twice) baking a birthday cake, fleeing to a local hotel to find sanctuary for her bibliophilic compulsions, ministering to the Oedipal anxieties of a devoted but pathologically sensitive son, and successfully, perhaps artistically, staging a birthday celebration for her boyish and libidinally voracious husband, who comes across as a shell-shocked veteran of World War II.[i] Sporting a meaty frame and *Vitalis*-slickened hair, he exudes "a deep and distracted innocence, with sex coiled inside like a spring"(*H* 213), a snake, or a jack-in-the-box—startling, and ready to attack.

In Daldry's .cinematic *Hours,* Julianne Moore, luminescent in her second pregnancy, adds vivacity and interest to an otherwise dull, insipid role by conveying a schizoid fragility that emanates neediness and a sense of the utter futility of her subject position as a 1950's housewife. Trapped in a life of quiet desperation, she "can't always remember how a mother would act" (*H* 47). She feels helpless and alone—a victim of the unnamed and unnamable "housewife's disease" diagnosed by Betty Friedan in her 1960's classic, *The Feminine Mystique*. But before Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, before the second wave of the women's movement and the inauguration of the National Organization for Women, a thoughtful, independent female ensconced in American suburbia at mid-century might very well, like the isolated artist depicted by Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, have gone mad, been labeled a deviant, or felt tempted to commit suicide. Cunningham's Laura Brown fits all these categories. She goes to a hotel, where she considers ending her life. In the film version of *The Hours*, the visual impact of oceanic engulfment during Laura's afternoon hotel adventure beautifully and powerfully conveys the urgency of her suicidal impulses. But unlike Septimus Smith,, Laura is inspired to "choose life" by an auspicious reading of *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel that engenders the kind of redemptive egotism requisite for her escape from suburban claustrophobia. Laura realizes that, like Woolf's Clarissa, she "loves life, loves it hopelessly" and feels reassured, through her bibliophilic tryst with *Mrs. Dalloway*, that she can find "comfort in facing the full range of options; in considering all your choices, fearlessly and without guile" (152).

In the "Mrs. Dalloway" sections of *The Hours*, Cunningham models his prose on Woolf's limited omniscient authorial point of view and "indirect free style" of writing, but translates particular scenes from Woolf's modernist novel into a contemporary scenario. The crowd's mindless awe and reverence at following the progress of what purportedly appears to be the Prime Minister's car in *Mrs. Dalloway* is replicated in Cunningham's text when curious spectators watch, with predatory fascination, trailers set up in Greenwich village to house celebrities for the onsite shooting of a film that captures the attention of mesmerized pedestrians.[i] Late 20th-century film stars, the author suggests, have appropriated the glamour and brio that once emanated from political figures decades earlier, in the patriotic wake of World War I. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf pulls her authorial lens far back, to delineate a panoramic perspective on evolutionary eons engulfing the few fragile hours of each human lifespan on a godless planet vertiginously spinning out of control. Her modernist meditation on human mortality proves poignant and somber, though somewhat lugubrious. In contrast, Cunningham's postmodern rendition of the evanescence of human life seems trivialized by its contemporary gloss on meteoric celebrity. Although this particular scene has been omitted in the film, the fictional spectators' query about the identity of the star, similar to the British crowd's tentative identification of the Prime Minister's car, raises convoluted postmodern speculation about the woman emerging from the trailer—putatively Meryl Streep, who does, in fact, play Clarissa Vaughn in Daldry's .rendition of the story.

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[i] For a provocative essay on Cunningham and Daldry's mutual emulation of Virginia Woolf's "pragmatic" aesthetics, see Birgit Spengler, who argues that both novel and film "provide instances of 'versioning' Woolf" via "an updated version of Woolf's novel that modernizes and liberalizes its hypotext" (52, 53-4). *The Hours*, Spengler argues, in both textual and cinematic incarnations, reflects "an egalitarian and pragmatic concept of art that recalls John Dewey's theory of art as aesthetic experience" (63).

My question, however, echoes some perplexing issues investigated by Seymour Chatman: how does one distinguish mimetic reverence from sardonic pastiche? How should one analyze the tone of Cunningham's imitative prose, as well as the aesthetic impact of Daldry's adaptation? Is Cunningham celebrating Woolf's prophetic vision or satirizing her modernist naivety, even as he flagrantly adapts her lyrical meditations to the parameters of late 20th-century American society? Do the extravagant metaphors he invokes bear the weight and serious tenor implied in Woolf's text? Or does such literary intertextuality inadvertently mock and minimize the serious resonance produced in the modernist prose model so cunningly, and ingeniously, revised? In other words, is Cunningham's contemporary novel *The Hours* related to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* in the same way that Henry Fielding's parodic *Shamela* echoes Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*?[ii]

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[i] For a discussion of Woolf's fragmentary novella, which became a first-draft version of *Mrs. Dalloway*'s opening scenes, see Henke, "The Prime Minister." Cunningham seems oblivious of Woolf's germinal text.

[ii] See Chatman for a provocative narratological analysis of complex distinctions among terms such as "parody," "pastiche," "caricature," "satire," "travesty," "imitation," "*forgerie*," "transformation," "transposition," and "rewriting."

Chatman poses similar queries in his essay on "*Mrs. Dalloway's* Progeny" and places Cunningham's novel in the schema of "what Gerard Genette has dubbed 'second-degree' narratives, those bearing a more than passing resemblance to some original" (269). *The Hours*, Chatman suggests, might be considered a "serious transformation" that "imitates another text on sustained and explicit grounds" (270). It "announces a contract with Woolf's novel" to "preserve serious elements of the *story*, but move it to a new spatiotemporal world, a new *diegesis*" (270). Although Cunningham himself prefers the term "rewriting," Chatman categorizes *The Hours* as an "extension," "*complement*," or "complementary transposition" of *Mrs. Dalloway*. "What goes oddly unexplained, however, is why Clarissa Vaughn, despite her manifold associations with Clarissa Dalloway, including Richard's calling her by that name, should be oblivious of these parallels" (Chatman 273).

Can a late 20th-century author successfully adapt and revise a modernist prose model by vividly plagiarizing a text whose reiteration must necessarily be repeated and remodeled in the mode of sophisticated satire? Jonathan Dee thinks not and, in an article entitled "The Reanimators," likens the "coincidences that pile up" in Cunningham's text to a "particularly highbrow episode of *The Twilight Zone*" (76). He complains that the postmodern "practice of conscripting flesh-and-blood people into novels has become a veritable epidemic" and that "every psycho-historical novel furthers fiction's abdication of its own uniquely, transcendently unreal power to apprehend, and meditate on, the nature of our existence" (77, 84). Roberta Rubenstein echoes this objection by complaining that such reanimating practices offer audiences melodramatic versions of what she acerbically calls "Virginia Woolf lite" (3).

How, finally, can one translate into contemporary fiction—or film—the shimmering instability of Woolf's masterpiece? Can the indefinite deferral of an open-ended plot be transferred to the postmodern stage and repackaged under the ambiguous aegis of poststructural *différance*? In deferring to Woolf as his model, Cunningham has replicated a modernist text in the haunting shadow of late 20th-century skepticism. In so doing, he re-inscribes *Mrs. Dalloway* into the contemporary register of postmodern pastiche. And Daldry, it would seem, perpetuates that ambiance in his cinematic adaptation. Are these bold artistic experiments, in both film and fiction, intended as tributes or satire, laudatory elegies or brash examples of literary appropriation? For Cunningham's fictionalized Virginia, "sanity involves a certain measure of impersonation" (*H* 83). Imagining Woolf impersonating one of her fictional characters, then becoming a character in his own text, Cunningham, via "the androgyneity of authorship," creates radical art from the perspective of a "homosexual male writer impersonating a bisexual woman writer and writing about the lives of lesbians and homosexuals" (Lee 50-51)

Like Woolf's war veteran, Septimus Smith, Cunningham's scapegoat-protagonist, Richard Brown, leaps from a window to free himself from the weight of a body tormented and a mind ravaged by the effects of AIDS—a role played brilliantly by Ed Harris in the film, in response to a universal health crisis that reached pandemic proportions in the last decades of the 20th century. In responding to both film and fiction, however, I find it difficult to generate empathic concern for this truculent, narcissistic, character, who plays the role of sociopathic artist with unnerving pathos. Daldry's film further accentuates the passive aggression motivating a suicidal act that shatters and defies the genuine hospitality behind the party that Clarissa so tenderly prepares for her erstwhile lover. She discerns in Richard "some combination of monumental ego and a kind of savantism" and realizes that other people are, for him, "essentially fictional character[s]" (*H* 60-61). The feast, the well-wishers, the prize, and the celebration are overshadowed by Richard's defiant act of self-destruction. Friends and former lovers feel devastated by the tragedy and painfully disappointed that their doomed comrade refused to persevere for the few additional hours that would have offered them the most precious gift of all, the space of time required to utter an affectionate "good-bye." Woolf's Septimus Smith, was threatened by two authoritarian physicians, Dr. Holmes and Sir William Bradshaw, and feared incarceration in a sanatorium that he perceived as a penitentiary for lunatics. Richard Brown, in contrast, has nothing to fear from the evening's festivities but roses, crab dip, and a literary prize. When Richard angrily refuses these offerings of love, laurels, garlands and celebrity, it becomes challenging for either the reader or the film spectator to feel the kind of compassionate identification that his tragic suicide should warrant. Even in death, he has alienated far too many people, both fictional and spectatorial, to evoke bereavement or tears.

Two other aspects of the novel and film trouble me, and both are related to the political unselfconsciousness of Cunningham's experimental text. Hermione Lee, in *Virginia Woolf's Nose*, and Seymour Chatman, in "*Mrs. Dalloway's* Progeny," raise similar objections. As Sue Thomas observes, *Mrs. Dalloway* was probably composed as an "angry response to the *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-shock*,' presented to the British Parliamentin August 1922, and to the publicity given the *Report* in *The Times* in August and September, 1922" (49). The novel was, among other things, a work of protest against the jingoist politics that sent idealistic young men like Septimus Smith, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, and Siegfried Sassoon to fight in the Great War of 1914-1918—a conflict emblematic of the mass psychosis that fuelled the tragic slaughter of a generation. *Mrs. Dalloway* is not simply a private meditation on suicide. It is a politically prescient text that decries the psychological consequences of military aggression and "calls into question any rosy prognosis of the British empire's future" (Chatman 279). The role of shell-shocked veteran is transferred, by Cunningham and Daldry, to Laura Brown's brutish and unselfconscious husband, who returns from the second World War to claim domestic and conjugal privileges in a 1950's America about to explode in the cultural dysphoria characteristic of the turbulent 1960's. It is not Brown *pater* who is suffering symptoms of constriction and mental dissociation, but Laura, the suburban housewife who struggles with psychological asphyxiation in a postwar, pre-feminist era.

Cunningham's *Hours* suffers, uncannily, from the author's reluctance to embed the "beautiful caves" of his characters' biopics, revealed through memory and flashback, into the dense historical reality of America in the second half of the twentieth century.[i] As Chatman complains, "his novel lacks Woolf's breadth of social and political resonance …. *The Hours* seems so much less a social critique than *Mrs. Dalloway*" (279). He goes on to observe that "Cunningham does not achieve the broad cultural sweep of *Mrs. Dalloway*," whose "purview is the whole of London's population, indeed the whole of a British empire in decline" (280). In contrast, "*The Hours* seems too sealed off …. And while it may be true that the AIDS epidemic has been as great a scourge as World War I, it has not led to the sort of political and social consequences that afflicted Britain in the 1920's" (280-81). Chatman concludes that "to match the scope of the original, Cunningham needed a broader canvas and a set of Woolfian techniques he didn't utilize" (281).

When teaching this text a year ago, I realized, to my shock and chagrin, that Richard Brown (born in 1946) and Clarissa Vaughn (born in 1947), would virtually be my contemporaries. They belong to the generation of "baby-boomers" who came of age in the late 1960's and early 1970's and whose youthful concerns were situated squarely within the cultural cataclysm provoked by the Vietnam War. For anyone of my generation, male or female, the military draft was a primary, pressing, and overwhelming concern—either a serious personal threat, or a source of severe anxiety for one's friends and life partners. How did Richard and his mate Louis avoid the army? Did they "come out" as homosexuals in protest of service to Uncle Sam? And how could characters as astute as Clarissa and Richard harbor pastoral memories of heterosexual experimentation without once remembering the pervasive anti-war sentiments that inflected this controversial period of U. S. history? A "generation gap" was the epoch's watchword, and revolution against Nixonian authority the *cri de coeur* of "hippies" and college students.

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[i] In 1923, Woolf expressed her excitement at discovering an innovative technique for psychological exploration: "how I dig out beautiful caves [of memory] behind my characters" (*D* 2:263).