AND THE STUDY OF FILM

The Attainable Text

Mark Parker and
Deborah Parker

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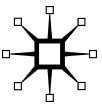

THE DVD AND THE STUDY OF FILM

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Preface

In a 1976 article in *Screen*, Raymond Bellour framed a suggestive discussion of the ontology of film with a thought experiment. Critics and scholars tend to recall the middle section of this essay, which uses Roland Barthes's distinction between "work" and "text" to set the particular modality of film against those of literature, painting, music, and theater. But this theoretical argument, with its gemlike and sharply defined facets, has a setting worth our attention as well. Bellour begins "The Unattainable Text" with a brief evocation of the basic difficulties of film study in 1976: the relative lack of access to the object of the study—the material film itself—or at least to the "proper conditions" for such study, which Bellour stipulates as "the editing table or the projector with freeze-frame facility."[1]

Bellour's thought experiment (possibly fired by recording technologies already on the horizon) imagines a new, fantastic availability of film:

> One day, at the price of a few changes, the film will find something that is hard to express, a status analogous to that of the book or rather that of the gramophone record with respect to the concert. If film studies are still done then, they will undoubtedly be more numerous, more imaginative, more accurate and above all more enjoyable than the ones we carry out in fear and trembling, threatened continually with dispossession of the object. (19)

The possibility of this plenitude, which might put film study on a par with other scholarly efforts, leads Bellour to his theoretical argument, with its suggestive opening aphorism: "The text of the film is unattainable because it is an unquotable text" (20).

We will return to the questions posed by Bellour's meditation on quotation and the ontology of film later, but for now we prefer to linger on the material questions he chooses to postpone. The last

paragraph of his essay provides a vivid picture of how film studies, its text finally made available, might become "more imaginative." After concluding his argument on quotation and film ontology with a resonant restatement of his insistence on unattainability, he returns to the frame of his thought experiment ("*a contrario*," as he wittily but, we think, inevitably puts it). Bellour recalls the "wonderful impression" received "when confronted with two quotations in which film was taken as the medium of its own criticism" (26). He then describes these instances, from television programs on Samuel Fuller and Max Ophüls, in which "one saw, and then resaw while a voice off emphasized certain features, two of the most extraordinary camera movements in the history of cinema" (26). Here, we find an evocation of what might be termed "the attainable text" of film.

Recent technology has now fulfilled the basic condition of Bellour's thought experiment. Indeed, we now have an attainable text that, while not solving all problems of access, alleviates many of them.[2] Moreover, the kind of seeing and reseeing that Bellour mentions with such enthusiasm has now become more possible. Within ten years of the introduction of the DVD, viewers could expect that even the most commercial film would come replete with special features. Take, for example, *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007, DVD 2007), the third installment of a capital-intensive, mass-cultural thriller, in which plot has dwindled into a series of chase sequences, character diminished to leading-man Matt Damon's pinched grimaces, and technique narrowed to a near-incomprehensible pointillism of rapid cuts and jittery camera movements. The DVD offers a lavish account of the five locales used in the film; short features on the preparations for fighting, car stunts, and a long rooftop chase sequence; and a dutifully descriptive audio commentary by director Paul Greengrass. Although one cast member—with the optimism of a genuine trouper—offers the rationale that "if you want to see what culture and filming is in the midst of a local population, you're going to get it in this film," viewers might nevertheless wonder, as does Steven Soderbergh in the opening remarks to his commentary to *Out of Sight* (1998, DVD 2002), "Who is going to listen to this except a bunch of film students?" The production seems as excessive as the pyramids, and perhaps even more pointless.

This book asks that viewers look past this sense of repletion to moments of powerful analysis and insight into film and filmmaking made possible by DVD supplementary features. The DVD embodies a bold experiment in not only the delivery of film but also its history—a

contextualized presentation that offers unusual advantages to students of film, to critics and scholars (especially those seeking to document the history of film), and to directors and other creative figures who wish to enter a dialogue with their audience.

In fact, the infamous superfluity of supplemental features might better be seen as a precondition for such moments of grace. As long as there is a budget for such material, there is the opportunity for Bellour's "wonderful impressions," the kind of work that allows film to become "the medium of its own criticism." A market that can produce a movie like *Blow* (2001, DVD 2001) can also enable the production of features such as Susan Ricketts's accompanying documentary on the drug trade in Columbia, in which she deftly follows the implications of Ted Demme's film by interviewing one of the guerillas involved in trafficking. The profits from home video can permit the construction of a making-of documentary (MOD), like Mark Rance's lavish study of the preproduction and shooting of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia*. And sometimes, the bare expectation of features for the DVD can allow the production—albeit on a modest budget—of a fascinating additional feature to the film, such as Dawn Kuisma's intelligent extension of the thematics of Paul Haggis's *In the Valley of Elah*. If, as Tyler Cowen argues in *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, a healthy market can sustain cultures of both elite reception and mass consumption—the opposition between the two being largely illusory—so did the burgeoning market for DVDs enable a range of supplementary materials. Productive markets create larger niches and wider opportunities, as the history of the DVD shows clearly.[3]

Let us consider one of these felicitous moments. Midway through the commentary track on the DVD of *Fitzcarraldo* (1982, DVD 2004), director Werner Herzog reveals that the Amazonian Indians offered to kill his star Klaus Kinski. Herzog jokingly adds that he had wanted to kill the actor himself while working on an earlier movie with Kinski, whose manic tirades were famous in the industry, and that he briefly considered the present offer. This is an amusing and memorable anecdote, told with great brio by Herzog. But it provides more than incidental charm; it adds another layer to the film itself, as Herzog, moving from raconteur to director, explains how he took artistic advantage of the situation. The smoldering hostility registered on the faces of the Indians as they surround Fitzcarraldo and his remaining crew during a meal on the ship provides a powerful expression—perhaps a culmination—of the menace with which Herzog tried to imbue his film. The anecdote also reveals the complications in

Herzog's stated project of recording the faces of the Peruvian Indians, whom he well knew would be changed forever by the incursion of other cultures and modernity. To render a reality and to create an artistic object are not easily separable.

Herzog's recollections begin as a recovery, an instance of how the circumstances of the shooting, both interpersonal (his long-standing and volatile relation with Kinski) and material (the presence of indigenous peoples), affect the finished product. As such, considered simply as an informative account of opportunistic directorial brilliance, it embodies a small but powerful lesson on the cinematic process: how means and ends can diverge, how intention is shadowed by chance, and how the film ultimately records an artistic process even as it embodies an artistic vision. Herzog's anecdote is part of a conversation about how to view the film, carried out in the most practical and experiential terms. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to see this simply as a transparent and definitive description; it becomes another text, intimately related to the film, complicating the experience of the film, yet not quite the film. With it come considerations barely discernible in the film, more abstract, but just as compelling, as Herzog reorients the viewer's relation to the material. The anecdote, working in concert with the film, becomes a performance in itself, extending the thematics of the film, which concerns the elaborate aspirations of its main character in the face of enormous difficulties. The commentary is not so much a framing device or a neutral critical account, but an imposition on the existing text that creates a related yet distinctly different experience for the viewer. It might well be seen as a kind of deformation of the text, one whose critical force lies in its ability to spark a reconsideration of the terms under which critical inquiry is carried out. Here, in Bellour's terms, the text has been quoted, and the commentary shrewdly exploits that quotability.

Such an anecdote, drawn from a printed book, would be suggestive, but in this particular form, as part of the commentary track to the scene that it describes, it has an unusual immediacy. First of all, it asks to be evaluated at once in aesthetic terms, as part of a colloquy about the film that allows for expatiation, wandering, consideration, and self-correction as it unfolds. By contrast, the nature of a review is to allow a cultural middleman to deliver expert advice on consumption; an interview mimics the contours of a conversation between artist and audience, allowing the latter the vicarious pleasure of questioning the work's maker; a critical article, in its drive for total coherence, must interpret forcefully or organize the features of

the work that it brings into consideration as critical fact. By contrast, the commentary track does not, as might a good critical article, send us back to the work for verification; or give us the interview's heady illusion of access and authority; or allow us to choose our entertainment or aesthetic pleasure wisely, as a review should. Second, and perhaps more decisively, the means of the audio commentary, the human voice, allows for the deployment of a wide array of affective devices to accompany discursive argument and exposition. We can study the words of a printed text to reclaim what might be figuratively termed its "voice," but an audio commentary affords us direct experience of this information. When Martin Scorsese tells us on the audio commentary to *Taxi Driver* (1976, Laserdisc 1991) that he wants to "tak[e] the eyes and heads of the people in the audience by the back of the hair and forc[e] them to see things by different cuts and camera moves, the way I see them," the words themselves do not convey the excitement, determination, and forcefulness in communicating this vision that his tone and rapid-fire delivery do.

Or, to take another moment in which, by means of a DVD commentary track, we have a film "taken as the medium of its own criticism" (26), let us consider the implications of a remark made by director John McTiernan in his commentary to the first of the *Die Hard* series. McTiernan essentially provides what Bellour called the "voice off" to his own flamboyant camera movements, likening them to techniques of European directors, implicitly those of the French new wave.[4] Now such a claim, in the context of an explosion-rich, star-driven Hollywood blockbuster like *Die Hard*, admits of many constructions, from a humorous overstatement (conscious or not) to an awkward grasp at the legitimacy of the auteur, or perhaps to the reflexive patois of an industry insider at a certain moment in Hollywood. But to a scholar, especially in a field that has seen remarkable reversals of critical fortune in its short history, such a remark should be a provocation to further inquiry. This is not to say we should take McTiernan at his word, but we might give a provisional respect to his intention. Rather than dismiss the claim, we should prove it. Does *Die Hard* incorporate, programmatically and deliberately, what might be called new-wave camera movements? If so, to what end? And what might such a technical choice mean? That low has become high art, a reversal familiar to film study? Or that yesterday's avant-garde has become routine? That McTiernan, like Hollywood directors John Ford or Samuel Fuller before him, is ripe for a critical reversal? That, yet again, critics might follow their taste or inchoate sense of what is

good to develop a criticism adequate to the film itself? Our purpose in this book is not to answer these questions, but to argue that the DVD, by greatly increasing the amount of materials surrounding film, opens scholarly inquiry in useful and largely unexamined ways.

The fact that theatrical viewing persists should not blind us to the decisive nature of this stage of technological development in film distribution, which began in 1976 with the introduction of the video home system (VHS) format and continued, unabated, with the release of the first DVDs in 1997. For all the pleasures of film—its shimmering beauty, its ability to poeticize all it records—by the early 2000s, the end product of both Hollywood and independent production had become the DVD, not celluloid, and the final destination the home, not the theater. The huge profits of DVD distribution transformed theatrical release into a way of creating value for a product in the marketplace, and even distributors of independent film relied on limited theatrical release as a low-cost marketing tool.[5]

One might, given the relatively straightforward advantages of the DVD over VHS (in both production and distribution costs), have expected the new format to follow the pattern set by the old one: just as a VHS cassette presented the movie (with the occasional addition of trailers), so would the DVD provide the film itself. No medium, however, is without its particular tendency. The DVD afforded viewers a level of interactivity new (albeit limited, as we shall see in chapter 1) to the experience of film. François Truffaut's distinction between theatrical VCR viewing—"Cinema and video, that's like the difference between a book that you read and a book you consult"—has even greater salience in the digital medium. The VHS user was restricted to linear modes of interactivity (fast forward, reverse, freezing frames); the menu structure of the DVD, which allows materials to be addressed spatially, as an archive or array, added new tools for the "consultation" envisioned by Truffaut. In addition to the implications of physical form, the DVD also brought a cinematic culture, a well-developed range of supplements and features, the products of The Criterion Collection's elite audience, and the informed curiosity of its producers, to a wider audience. A combination of circumstances—none, in itself, determining—led to the evolution of the form into the supplement-laden product typical, at least until very recently, of the DVD. As this study will show, the particulars of the DVD revolution, its virtual adoption of the format set out by the tiny, high-end laserdisc market of the late 1980s and early 1990s, complicate this narrative in interesting ways. The earliest special edition DVDs tended

to replicate the format of the laserdiscs produced by The Criterion Collection, whose scrupulous transfers of art films, judicious selection of classic Hollywood movies, and timely releases of the campy, quirky, or bizarre had given it considerable acclaim among connoisseurs of cinema and the video equivalent of the audiophile. Rather than simply a migration of film from analog VHS to digital DVD, the new format was infused with something of an ethos, an attitude toward film that mingled the enthusiasm of a fan, the nostalgia of a cinema lover, the responsibility of a teacher, the precision of a bibliographer, and the insight of a scholar.

This complexity can be seen in the interests of the founders of The Criterion Collection. One partner, Bob Stein, adopted a critical attitude toward new media; the other, Roger Smith, a former vice president at RKO, was an ardent cinephile.[6] Stein was engaged with the question of open and closed media (which he contrasted as "user-driven" and "producer-driven," respectively), and he saw the laserdisc as an opportunity for intervention. Smith, however, envisioned a small, intense market of cinéphiles, one in which a sale of 60,000 copies of a film would be considered a great success. The Criterion model matched an innovative form with a receptive and particularly demanding audience. Hence, there was considerable complication and intricacy to the laserdisc format, much more than might have developed in response to a larger or a mass audience. While it is useful to think of DVDs in terms of VHS, as an improvement of an already established form of distribution, it nevertheless retains features, often unconsidered, that follow another logic entirely. There are two competing narratives that define the DVD: the surprisingly small and personal context of The Criterion Collection, in which laserdiscs set the form of the DVD, and the large and more impersonal history of home video, in which DVD replaces VHS as an obvious technological improvement within an established mass market.

The force of these competing narratives can be seen most clearly in the paradoxical situation of the DVD producer. On the one hand, producers speak eloquently and thoughtfully about their work, and they have clear ideas about how they wish to present film. They position themselves between critics and fans, combining the acumen of the former with the enthusiasm of the latter. Yet viewers and many scholars are likely to know as little about the ways in which a DVD is produced as how their DVD player is manufactured. The work of DVD producers is largely obscured in the rigorously commodified world of the medium, in which industry executives routinely accept

awards for the DVDs they commission and where the names of producers often do not appear on the discs they oversee and help to craft. The questions of by whom and how the special features on a DVD are produced are important in understanding how such materials mediate the way we view and study film. In addition, legal and guild constraints upon what materials can be included as well as how they might appear shape the presentation. The effort involved in producing a "making-of" feature or a commentary track—which often includes extensive preparation and postproduction work—is largely invisible as well. An understanding of such constraints and shaping activities is crucial to any critical account of the form.

Accordingly, this study of the special edition DVD will begin with three chapters that seek to provide an overview of DVD production. Chapter 1 examines the DVD in the context of new media. The argument, a selective one particular to the forms most closely related to the DVD, draws on Lev Manovich's distinction between the "computer layer" and the "cultural layer" of new media in order to explore the tension between the forward-looking material form of the DVD (its data structures) and the relatively retrograde uses to which it has been put. By comparison, the older, analog form of the laserdisc was exploited more effectively, and the CD-ROM—another older form—is arguably a more robust demonstration of new media. The history of the DVD exemplifies one of the basic tenets of new media, that a medium is a combination of both physical object and a set of social, cultural, and economic practices. In fact, this history provides a kind of cautionary tale: the "cultural layer" of the DVD, unlike its related predecessors, the laserdisc and the CD-ROM, received less sustained attention.

Chapter 2 places particular emphasis on DVD producers, whose work and attitudes have shaped the relation between DVD and film. This relation is an explicit one; it is spelled out in the supplementary features that producers develop. This chapter relies on interviews with these producers in order to clarify DVD production—who makes DVDs, how supplementary features are assembled, and how DVD production has evolved since the introduction of the format in March 1997. The chapter draws on interviews with several prominent DVD producers, among them Mark Atkinson, Mark Rance, Van Ling, David Prior, Laurent Bouzereau, and Michael Mulvihill.

After the wide view of the previous chapter, we narrow the focus in chapter 3 to provide a history of The Criterion Collection, whose laserdisc editions not only influenced the format of the special edition

DVD but whose alumni were often hired to produce the first DVDs. Our account draws on interviews with Bob and Aleen Stein, the founders of Criterion (and its associated media company, Voyager), as well as many of those who worked on laserdisc and DVD production for the company (Curtis Wong, Morgan Holly, Michael Nash, Isaac Mizrahi, Maria Palazzola, Bruce Eder).[7]

These three chapters argue that the effect of a film is now, at least potentially, intensely mediated by supplementary materials, which include extensive commentary by directors and writers, the reminiscence of actors, the technical remarks of camerapersons and set designers, and the critical remarks of scholars. The DVD edition is essentially a reorientation of the film, often carried out by a variety of agents and subject to a wide variety of choices made by the eventual viewers. More importantly, supplementary features tend to reengage basic issues in film, but in ways that are less theoretical or even interpretive than concrete, pragmatic, and local. The mode of inquiry encouraged by the special edition DVD combines a raw empiricism with a refined sense of craft and artistry.

The fourth chapter examines one aspect of audio commentaries by directors and others involved in production: the near-ubiquitous recourse to notions of intention in their discussions of film. Intention has long been a suspect category for critics, but directorial commentaries show how surprisingly flexible and useful such a concept can prove. The auteur almost inevitably reemerges in directors' commentaries, but the role is taken up with a self-consciousness and a circumspection that makes any programmatic rejection of the approach seem naive. Intention in these tracks is not used in the abstract and broadly thematic sense in which it is invoked in other forms, such as interviews, *manifesti*, or more general statements by directors. Rather, what emerges in this form is the intentional practice carried out by a particular director from scene to scene, what we might call the specifics of intention. The informal, and at times desultory, quality of the commentary allows us to see how each director uses the concept, not so much how he might wish to use it. It also allows us, if we wish, to address other moments in the film in terms of the particular use of intention practiced by its director.

We follow the previous chapter's wide-ranging discussion of directors and intention with a narrower case study. Chapter 5 examines the power of directorial commentary to clarify the demanding artistry of a particular filmmaker, Atom Egoyan, who has taken unusual pains in the presentation of his work. In his hands, audio commentary

provides a capacious medium for discussion of his art, a medium which, unlike the tendentious and constricting form of the interview, allows for a forceful examination of not only the aspects of his work that he finds salient but also a meditation on the surprisingly aleatory aspects of the critical venture. Egoyan's analysis not only provides a model that could be applied by other directors in their audio commentary but also demonstrates the advantages of a film criticism that shares the medium of its object.

The next two chapters shift from the director to the work of critics, scholars, and DVD producers in framing the cinematic experience. Chapter 6 examines a few of the best audio commentaries by scholars with an eye toward the reshaping of scholarly discourse in this new format for an uncertain and emerging audience. The five scholars we have chosen address the problems of moving from print to audio commentary in different ways, but in each case, the status of the audio commentary—at once extrinsic to yet intimately entwined with the film, as an "extra" competing with other features, and, more generally, as a new entry into the largely disregarded field of criticism—shapes the particulars of each scholar's treatment. It is at just such moments, when older forms of cultural transmission lose salience and mutate into new shapes, that we can gain some perspective on critical practices that have long gone unremarked. Audio commentary is a subtle challenge to film scholarship, one that implicitly asks existential questions of the interpretive enterprise. The successes of audio commentary, by both directors and scholars, are few, but they allow us to glimpse something of what print forms of film criticism tend to occlude and what another medium might provide.

Chapter 7 examines the way in which the special edition frames the cinematic text. Given that there is a tradition to such archival activity on DVD, one that stems from the partly pedagogical goals implicit in the earliest features on Criterion laserdiscs, the questions then are what particular producers have made of such a tradition, how their work shapes the interpretation of film, and what limitations such a model might pose for the study of film. To this end, we offer three case studies of archival anthologies (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Bubble*, and *The Battle of Algiers*). The cases are chosen not only to display obvious successes but also to represent the range of such initiatives. At times, the special edition amply fulfills its promise, becoming, if not "film school in a box," then at least an advanced study center for the interpretation of film.

Our presentation of DVD commentaries and features in these four chapters is necessarily selective. We seek to establish that the format has answered, at times, to Bellour's aspirational vision, not to provide a representative account of supplements on DVD. Hence, these chapters skew toward the releases of The Criterion Collection and other high-end companies, such as Kino, New Line, and Anchor Bay, just as they favor Criterion alumni from the laserdisc era, who largely set the form. Our interests here are in the successes of critical acumen, aesthetic appreciation, and archival collection, and not in an industrial account of DVD production or in the sociology of DVD viewership.[8]

For ultimately the success of the DVD as a means of critical discussion depends upon the vitality, energy, and perspicacity displayed in its exemplary editions. If our tone in this book is at times celebratory, and our approach empirical, it is because we choose to focus on the agency of the DVD producer, a cultural mediator whose work is carried out in direct engagement with the material circumstances of temporal constraint, technological possibility, and financial limitations. To discuss special features without an understanding of these particulars is to risk building an elaborate and engaging fantasy on impressions at a remove from the activities themselves. We have accordingly chosen to frame our analysis, at least in part, in terms of the aims set out by our interviewees, who express themselves eloquently on this score and whose work demonstrates the salience of a more empirical approach to the task.

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Chapter 1

The DVD and New Media

The acronym DVD is something of a mystery. Both "Digital Video Disc" and "Digital Versatile Disc" can be found in early media releases and references to the format—the latter, having the virtue of being a somewhat more precise description, has won out over time. The DVD Forum, an industry organization that defines format specifications, attempted to resolve the ambiguity by decreeing in 1999 that the letters stand for nothing at all, but use seems to have trumped this revisionist tale of origin.[1] Nevertheless, as the salient aspects of the DVD are clearly "digital" and "disc," a more general consideration of the history and implications of digital form is in order before we turn to the work of DVD producers and the supplements themselves. Where does the DVD fit into the landscape of new media?

The moment is propitious for such a consideration, because it is now possible to see beyond the DVD as a format. Even if its successor cannot be named precisely, one can begin to speak of the DVD *era*. Taking such a view tempers the uncritical enthusiasm for the form that made the DVD initially seem like a revolution, and not an episode in the history of film. Although the DVD might have marked a decisive break in the history of film—a moment when, like other modern industries, Hollywood went fully digital—the advent of the DVD was complicated by a variety of factors that effectively provided a counterpoise to the potentially revolutionary aspects of digital form.

The remarkable speed with which the DVD replaced existing forms of home distribution made such considerations difficult. The first DVDs went to market in early 1997, and the last VHS release for North American distribution, David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence*, appeared in 2006. Sales of DVDs showed explosive growth: for 2000—a scant three years after the introduction of the

format—the market was 4 billion; in 2002, this had nearly doubled; two years later saw levels of 12 billion; finally, in 2007, the market seemed to settle at 16 billion.[2] Combined with rental income, grosses reached 23 billion.[3] The number of titles in circulation grew robustly as well, from 4,000 in 1999, to 34,000 in 2004, to 70,000 in 2006.[4] The fifth year of the DVD era proved magical: by 2002, more than 40 percent of all U.S. households had adopted the technology—the fastest penetration rate of any new consumer electronic product.[5] In five years, this new format had sold 1 billion units, reaching this milestone twice as fast as the previous form, the VHS.[6] DVD sales topped domestic theatrical gross by 2003, and earlier in the same year, rentals of DVD surpassed those of VHS.[7]

From the present, the advantages of the DVD format seem decisive. For industry executives in the mid-1990s, however, the DVD cued a troubling replay of the anxieties raised by an earlier (and equally unexpected) success—the VHS. Perhaps the ultimate commitments among industry executives, historically, had been their aggressive retention of copyright and a tight control of their product. Hollywood had famously resisted home video, citing worries about piracy and the threats to copyright that the taping and sales of this new technology might bring about. Although the enormous profits realized by VHS had transformed the industry, shifting the balance of power from studio heads to home entertainment divisions, such success did little to mollify these fears.[8] In fact, VHS, as a technological threat, had been managed not so much by an articulated strategy, but by clever tactics and some unforeseen luck. Fortunately, the sheer amount of time it took to copy a videotape served to limit the number of pirated units, and the quality of the copies was often poor. Revenues lost to piracy were significant, but these were dwarfed by the growth in the market.

There were, however, unforeseen consequences in the switch from videotape to DVD, some of which have produced problems yet to be resolved. The speed of the shift caught executives by surprise, disrupting carefully structured and profitable arrangements for VHS rental.[9] The proliferation of supplemental materials put pressure on existing arrangements for profit sharing among studios, actors, and writers.[10] Although the lowered costs of production and distribution initially made the DVD seem a better venue for small, independent films, ultimately increased costs of marketing made for a chillier reception for these films. And most critically, the collapse of distribution "windows"—that is, the time between theatrical and DVD releases,

or releases in different markets—disturbed long-standing models for sales. At times, DVD versions of films have appeared while the movie is still in theatrical release (*Lost in Translation* is a notable example of this new asymmetry in distribution), and DVDs often appear before theatrical release in foreign markets.[11]

The industry's resistance to the format was overcome by a powerful but reductive argument, one articulated early by Warner Home Video president Warren Lieberfarb and repeated with telling force throughout trade magazines. By enlisting influential directors, such as Steven Spielberg and Martin Scorcese, to extol the virtues of the DVD's "superior sound and picture quality," Lieberfarb linked two durable rhetorical appeals: narratives of technological improvement and the primacy of the director as the creative and decisive force behind film. A September 22, 1997, article from *Variety* exemplifies the case made for the format. It begins with a graceful, compact variation on the first appeal ("The picture gleams, the sound surrounds"), but quickly turns to the second line of argument: "Visionary digital producers are starting to fill the discs with specially produced commentaries, outtakes, behind-the-scenes footage and other content that reaches beyond what normally unspools between the titles and the credits of a feature film."[12] Clearly what remains to be unspooled is the director's vision, or at least the way he manages the creative forces of others. As one director remarks in the article, "Making the DVD is a chance to continue making the film because you can explain a lot of things and get even more of your intent across." The article clinches the case for the DVD by combining these appeals in a coded reference: "Directors and producers are gushing over DVD's ability to surpass the sorts of products that have previously only been seen on some of the best Criterion Collection laserdiscs." The Criterion Collection—at that time the industry standard for a cinephile treatment of film, and then in the midst of its "Director Approved" campaign—is a shorthand notation for an intense focus on director and, by implication, director commentaries.

This argument, which recurs in a variety of forms, has become received opinion about the adoption of the DVD. But it deserves scrutiny, despite its currency and apparent efficacy. For while the DVD is touted as revolutionary technological change, it does not, at least in the format that it quickly assumed, go as far as other new media in digital form. What is not said in the arguments for adopting the DVD is striking, and the rhetorical appeals that proved so compelling about this new technology are surprisingly retrograde. The appeals imply

an intense reconsideration of old ideas about film, not an exploration of the capacities and implications of digital form. This reconsideration, as we will argue in other chapters of this book, is an important one—one that yields significant insight into the nature of cinema as a medium. But the shift to digital form, while undertaken with an acute awareness of past approaches to film, was relatively untroubled by the implications of this new form in itself. In many cases, the supplements developed by DVD producers display an exquisite sensitivity to what might be termed the analog history of film and film reception, but little self-consciousness about digital form.

The differences among film, videotape, and DVD are not readily apparent to the eye, as the highly subjective arguments waged about the merits of each form demonstrate. Such formulations as "The picture gleams, the sound surrounds" obscure the nature of the shift between analog and digital forms of storage by implying continuous technological progress, not a break. While there are significant differences among the kinds of reproduction provided by film, videotape, and laserdisc, ultimately these forms all simulate the original signal. Videotape and laserdisc technology do this by registering a continuously variable waveform; film does this iconically through the wholesale registration of individual images, the conventional 24 frames per second that mechanically produces the illusion of continuous reproduction of reality. A DVD works in a markedly different way. It stores information in purely numeric form, and a series of calculations is necessary to produce the ultimate image. There is no one-to-one correspondence between some salient aspect of the signal and the registration. An analog form is a direct physical simulation of the original signal; digital form involves an operation that recreates that original signal. With digital form, indexical has become numeric, the continuous has become discrete, and the image is the result of complex mathematical formulas applied to binary code.[13] Analog form passively mirrors the world, physically registering its contours; digital form both records and reproduces it actively. Simulation has become transformation.

The successive transformation of the cinematic image from celluloid to magnetic tape to the pitted surface read optically by the laserdisc to numeric files raises several questions for students of film, from ontological (What exactly are we seeing as we watch? Do different renderings of film make any difference in our experience of this art form?) to methodological (What part might the 24 frames per second that make up the initial instantiation of cinema—elements

not recoverable in digital form—play in film study? Is the frame a significant unit of film study?). One might note that other new media have made such questions about their predecessors urgent. The digitization of literary texts, for instance, has forced a reconsideration of what a book is and does that has led to a deeper understanding of the form itself.[14] The implications of digital form for film deserve similar exploration.[15]

We might start by clarifying the nature of digital form more generally. Lev Manovich, in his 2001 *The Language of New Media*, sets out five "principles" of new media: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding. The slipperiness and difficulty of this undertaking are evident in Manovich's choice of terms: his five headings are at once "principles" of new media and "key differences between old and new media" (27). He likens his list, in which the last three principles depend upon the first two, to the theorems and axioms of a logical presentation, but Manovich understands that such a list—insofar as it distinguishes "general tendencies" rather than presents "absolute laws" (27)—is an exercise in rhetoric, not logic. Nevertheless as a description, Manovich's list of principles provides a great deal of clarity for a murky subject.

Manovich's first two principles make manifest the dependence of new media on computing, or at least on models drawn from computing. Numerical representation of data and modularity form the plinth course on which new media are built. The first principle reminds us that film, when reproduced as a DVD, is a very different kind of copy, one that is the result of mathematical functions applied to binary data. Hence, as Manovich makes clear, it is "subject to algorithmic manipulation" (27), that is, it can be systematically transformed to take different forms. A film projected on a screen takes one form; the raw material of a DVD, the numerical representation of the film, can be addressed in different ways to produce various outcomes. In other words, a DVD presents film in a way that is programmable. Second, the DVD encodes its data in a modular form, as objects that are combined to produce the effect of the film. These two principles, which describe what might be termed the material basis of new media, allow for the second two principles—automation and variability. A numerical representation of reality that takes modular form, unlike an analog representation, can be subjected to numerous operations, which allows for recombinations that older forms of storage and representation do not permit. Since the data is now in a numeric form, the transformation can be effected by an agent that can handle amounts

of data that humans cannot manage—a computer. The DVD, for example, employs mathematical functions to produce the cinematic image; other functions might render the data in different ways.

These second two principles, derivable from the first two, prepare for Manovich's ultimate principle—essentially his book's main claim—that as the digitization process of the computer shapes new media, so too do new media shape computing. "Transcoding" is Manovich's shorthand for the way in which new media come to us, embodied in "two distinct layers—the 'cultural layer' and the 'computer layer' " (46). Conventions drawn from the former, such as organizational schemes that mimic the printed page or cinema, are shaped by the operations made possible by the latter. (For example, web pages initially had the limited expanse of a printed page; now that we can move endlessly down a given page, the "page" has taken on the qualities of a "scroll." The organizational metaphor of the book has become less exact as the operational capacities of the computer layer have expanded.)

Manovich has shrewdly extrapolated powerful tendencies from computer programming, which has drawn an ever sharper distinction between data structures and the algorithms that are applied to them, to clarify what is distinctive about new media. The implications will prove quite fruitful. For example, under this scheme, old categories such as form and content are reconceived and redistributed in terms of the "cultural layer" and the "computer layer"; terms such as "audience" must be reexamined as users employ different algorithms or "cultural layers" in their experience of new media; and, in the limited case of the artistic production, such terms as "art object" lose their critical force. Even when new media generate a static form for examination—a picture or a text, for instance—that outcome, because it is one of many permitted by the separation of algorithms and data structures, is more akin to an event or performance than a fixed entity.[16]

Applying Manovich's categories to the DVD brings a number of peculiarities about the format to light. First of all, one notes the deep continuities of the format with new media. A DVD fulfils the basic material conditions set out by Manovich: it is indeed a numerical representation of a film and it does separate its data into modules. But, as Manovich's model implies, these are simply the axiomatic preconditions of new media. The exploitation of this material form matters as well in the "newness" of new media. Put another way, the "computer layer" is fully developed in the DVD, but the "cultural

layer" has languished. The data structures are in place, but the algorithms are not robust. The DVD, despite the advanced nature of its deepest material form, has settled for "superior sound and picture quality," essentially mimicking the look and feel of an old media form—theatrical presentation. In the case of the DVD, automation and variability are relatively undeveloped capacities. For example, users might vary the aspect ratio of the film, they might settle on a different audio track (or toggle among different tracks), or they might choose to begin viewing at different chapters. But the wider potential of the format cannot be engaged (at least without ripping the film from the DVD).

The paradox here is striking. The DVD seems strangely positioned within the world of new media. Its material form, its data structures, looks forward, but its ultimate appearance bends to an earlier form. Its status as a computer-era artifact is hidden by the particular choices made on what Manovich calls the "cultural layer." The representation of film on the DVD is an exercise in nostalgia, but a nostalgia maintained by the latest technology.

Nowhere is this nostalgic turn more evident than in the gap between early celebrations of the possibilities of interactivity among advocates of the DVD and the eventual range of functions developed for the form. Interactivity, as we shall see later in chapters 2 and 3, had been an attraction for many early producers, both of the DVD and of the laserdisc. But despite abundant enthusiasm and considerable ingenuity, at no point in the history of either form do we find the kind of interactive engagement that other new media provide. In the case of the DVD, the "cultural layer" has lagged behind.

The cultural interface, as Manovich makes clear, is largely made up of elements and ideas already at hand. For instance, the organizing metaphor of the "desktop" that dominated computing in the 1990s was not a logical development of the data structures and operations made possible by the computer. It was a shaping metaphor whose familiarity allowed users to make useful assumptions about how one might engage the computer (i.e., a "file" is something that contains data, just as a manila folder on one's desk might contain various related materials that could be stored compactly and easily retrieved). But, as is evident in the case of the "desktop" (or, perhaps even more usefully, the "page" as guiding metaphor for the World Wide Web), the backward-looking nature of the concept need not limit its efficacy, which is, after all, a function of both machine and human capacities, as "interface" implies.

Hence, a close examination of the DVD's "cultural interface" is in order. It is best to proceed with a brief history of the format's predecessors—the VHS tape and the laserdisc. The former needed only a rudimentary interface. One put the tape into the machine, pressed play, and then sat back to watch. One's interaction was limited to a few buttons on the remote, and the operations (play, stop, rewind, fast forward, reverse) all addressed the film linearly. The laserdisc, while still an analog form, differed from the VHS in two important aspects—technical and cultural. Unlike the linear VHS, material on a laserdisc could be addressed in a nonlinear way. One could jump to different points on the disc. While not the random access allowed by computerized data, this technical feature allowed for a different conceptualization of the format. That is, humans could address the technology by means of a shaping metaphor. This, as we shall see in chapter 3, was done brilliantly by Bob Stein, who applied and developed the metaphor of the book to the films that he put onto laserdisc. From this conceptualization came much of the familiar nomenclature for the DVD—division into "chapters," for instance, as well as the development of supplemental features that function like a preface, a table of contents, or even explanatory materials.

The laserdisc, albeit an analog form, might well be seen as a transitional form between VHS and DVD. One of its technical functions mimics digital form in particular. The sound and image of the laserdisc (like that of celluloid film itself) are registered separately. This rudimentary modularity, and the sheer luck of having extra audio capacity, allowed for commentary tracks to accompany the film. That a format likened to a book harkens back to the early history of the book, in which texts were often bound with elaborate scholarly commentary, is no surprise. Such recapitulations remind us of the power of metaphor to shape thinking. The cultural layer is not only an operational shorthand or a procedural device; it is also a powerful spur to development. The cultural layer, largely made up of elements and ideas already available, is particularly amenable to the process of adaptation. In fact, the bricolage essential to the cultural layer ensures that the process of implementation—that is, as past concepts are fitted to present technologies—will elicit such adaptations.

The DVD, by virtue of its shift from analog to digital, boasts expanded technical capacities. It fulfills the basic material requirements for new media: numerical representation of data and modularity. The experience of the DVD almost at once mimicked that of the computer screen: the earliest titles released in 1997 feature an

opening menu that allows viewers a choice of options, subsequent releases quickly embedded menus within menus, and fairly sophisticated branching menus followed. For example, for the ultimate edition of James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, DVD producer Van Ling created an elaborate menu system that combines the feel of the computer screen with a computer game.

But the reality of the DVD's cultural interface lags behind the possibility: the interactive menus of the DVD use prefabricated MPEG sequences and a series of subtitled stills to create the effect of the computer screen. Rather than performing an operation on the data structures they contain, they simply invoke loops and sequences previously rendered. The basic features of new media—numerical representation and modularity—are simply a compact and efficient means of storage, not preconditions enabling a wider exploitation of the database. Unlike the book metaphor of the laserdisc, the metaphor of the computer screen functions largely at the decorative or even affective level: data on the DVD are like data on a computer, but the data are not available for any real computer operation.

This, in itself, is not a failure. A cultural layer might well function less in terms of material capabilities than in more suggestive terms. For instance, the laserdisc could not emulate fundamental features of the book. Simple but powerful options such as comparing passages by holding places with one's fingers (or using bookmarks, or turning down pages) were not possible. But the power of the book metaphor lay not so much in the laserdisc's ability to do everything a book could do as in the suggestive ways in which early laserdisc producers refit the book onto the new form. As we shall see in chapter 3, the rapid development of laserdisc features was enabled by the process of fitting the cultural interface of the book to the form.

We might best situate the DVD among new media by comparing its development with that of a slightly earlier form—the CD-ROM. The similarities of the two forms are many: the material basis of each lies in the numerical representation and modular disposition of data; each has a computer layer and a cultural layer. But the development of each form was markedly different. The CD-ROM, because it was addressed by a computer, permitted more complicated access to its data: the operations that could be performed were far more varied and powerful than those offered by a DVD player. But the CD-ROM also had more clearly articulated purposes—in most cases, largely educational—and, in addressing data, designers drew on a number of powerful concepts from old media. As a result, although the

CD-ROM is an older form, it is arguably a more robust example of new media.

We choose, as a basis for this comparison, one of the finest examples of the CD-ROM format—the 1994 introduction to the Barnes Collection, *A Passion for Art*. This disc amply demonstrates the capacities of the form. (Moreover, Curtis Wong, who oversaw this venture, has spoken and written about the conceptualization of this project, and our analysis can draw upon his remarks as well.)

A Passion for Art serves as an introduction to one of the most important private collections of postimpressionist painting. After making a fortune with a new drug, Dr. Albert Barnes, a shrewd and fortunate connoisseur, acquired paintings by Renoir, Cézanne, Matisse, and a host of other painters, ultimately leaving them to a foundation that bears his name. Barnes's interests lay not only in conservation and casual appreciation: he was deeply engaged in art education as well. He supported an art school in Merion, Pennsylvania, at which he housed the collection, and he cowrote a book, with educational theorist John Dewey, detailing his theories on art. The CD-ROM was conceived as an extension of Barnes's interests.

Users of *A Passion for Art* first encounter a short audiovisual presentation that introduces the CD-ROM. Next, one sees a menu that mimics the appearance of a computer desktop. An array of button icons on the left side of the menu allows the viewer to navigate the CD-ROM, much as one might find on a DVD. But close examination of this array reveals that the viewing experience is organized at a deeper level. A DVD menu typically separates material into different classes (supplements, film) and indicates operational settings (languages). The menu of *A Passion for Art* is built hierarchically, each button implying a different kind of relation to the source material. This can be seen most clearly in the top three buttons. At the uppermost layer, the "Tours" button allows viewers a choice of four topical arrangements of the material in the Barnes Museum. The "Gallery" button provides the viewer with a replication of the paintings as they are arranged in the museum—a spatial model that simulates a visitor's walk through the rooms. The "Paintings" button provides an alphabetical array of paintings by artist's name. Put another way, the database of paintings is arranged in three broad ways, each with a different level of abstraction. The material comes to us in more or less raw ways, from a basic alphabetical array, which allows ease of access, to the personal arrangement of the paintings made by Barnes in the museum, to the more restricted examinations of the "Tours."

The raw information of the "Paintings" level, in which high-quality digital representations of each art object are accompanied by basic contextual materials (artist's name, date of completion, brief critical note, artist's biography, links to other arrangements of material on the disc, and so on), forms the basis for the "Gallery" level (in which each painting on the wall is also an icon leading to the material of the lower "Paintings" level) and for the more selective arrangements of material on the "Tours" level.

A Passion for Art exemplifies the value of Manovich's model for the analysis of new media. To distinguish the cultural and computer layers makes it clear how designers exploited the CD-ROM in ways that DVDs do not match, despite the close relation of the two formats. The database—that is, the digitized images and textual materials that make up the plinth course of *A Passion for Art*—is subjected to a variety of combinations and arrangements, as various art historians draw upon them for selective "tours" or as the designers of the CD-ROM recreate the hyperlinked space of the museum. The cultural level provides a series of encounters with the material by means of differing levels of physical interactivity. The "Tours" option implies a fairly passive viewer, one who follows a short film on some aspect of the museum. The "Gallery" interface requires the give-and-take of exploration, as the user moves through the museum space, occasionally clicking on individual paintings. "Paintings" works more like a database, implying a user who searches more purposefully among basic materials. As one moves down these menu options, one must take more control of the encounter: "looking at" gradually becomes "looking for."

The "Slide Show" and "Archives" buttons further exemplify this organizational structure. The former allows users to create their own presentation of the paintings, their own tours of the gallery; the latter presents documents concerning Barnes's acquisitions. As users approach the level of the database, they are encouraged to make their own decisions about the organization of the material or the quality of their research. The structure of *A Passion for Art* reminds us that interactivity can be presented in two distinct forms: as physical movements involved in the construction of an artifact, such as a slideshow, or in the cognitive activity of examining primary documents and building an interpretation upon them.

Wong has discussed his work on *A Passion for Art* in numerous lectures and articles about the architecture of interactive media that he calls "ECR—Engagement/Context/Reference."[17] His abiding

concern is to provide layers of interaction for the user, beginning with an introductory narrative to engage the user (the "E" of the acronym), proceeding through options that permit the exploration of context (the "C"), and then offering more direct access to the information that forms the basis of the earlier encounters (the "R" for "reference"). Although his terminology stresses different aspects of new media than that of Manovich, the two are fundamentally in agreement about the importance of the cultural layer in addressing the database.

The care that distinguishes the conceptual structure of *A Passion for Art* is matched by a concern for interconnectivity. The disc presents the viewer with a variety of options at many junctures that exploit the capacities of the computer to link materials. For instance, viewers who select the "Gallery" option can select individual paintings during their exploration of the museum space. One click moves them to the "Paintings" interface, which in turn allows them access to information about the particular artwork as well as the artist. Here the options multiply, as one might interrupt one's gallery tour to examine all the works by a given artist in the museum. Similarly, the "Timeline" option represents the basic materials of the disc with added historical information. Clicking on any of the icons recalls a short historical or biographical treatment, at times augmented by an audio clip. Although *A Passion for Art* never allows direct access to what might be termed the database, the entire conception of the disc is founded upon the separation of data and various operations that can be performed on the data. The CD-ROM represents the Barnes Collection in several ways at various levels of abstraction and selectivity, and it ultimately encourages such activity in the viewer. There are limits to accessibility, of course, but the structure of the project makes these limits manifest. The viewer is led, gradually, into greater interactivity—both physically, in terms of manipulation of the interface, and cognitively, in terms of how one might think of the artwork and Barnes's display of it.

The DVD, by comparison, rarely undertakes and almost never fulfills such goals. Few of the features one typically finds on the DVD take significant advantage of digital form, in part because the cultural interface developed for the form—which it shares with the CD-ROM—does not address its materials with equal efficacy. Often, the DVD experience replicates the functions of the desktop computer in ways that are more decorative than suggestive.

This is evident even in DVDs that successfully combine considerable technical sophistication with a relative abundance of capital. Few

DVDs can match the resources of New Line's Special Extended DVD Edition of *The Lord of the Rings (LOTR)*. Director Peter Jackson possesses an acute understanding of the ways in which theatrical and home venues presuppose different kinds of viewing, and he tries to exploit the specific opportunities that this latter mode of appreciation affords. Jackson clearly considers the DVD release an important moment in the life of the film, a point at which he can add additional material to the film itself, provide contextual materials about the creative and work processes, and shape a kind of narrative about the project.

It is not surprising that the Special Extended DVD Edition of *LOTR* won several industry awards: few releases have so careful a transfer, so thoughtful a presentation, such comprehensive documentary materials on preproduction and filming, or such gorgeous menus. But the success of this edition lies in its acquiescence in a set of presuppositions that were fully worked out in an older form of media—the book. The Special Extended DVD Edition of *LOTR* celebrates digital form and interactivity, and it often mimics the appearance, feel, and experience of new media, but the logic of its presentation follows an older formulation. *LOTR*, like many of the best DVDs, occupies an ambiguous place within new media: in Manovich's terms, its computer layer is in place, but the cultural layer harkens back to older media.

This choice is as deliberate as it is unmistakable, and it serves to organize almost every aspect of the DVD. The packaging echoes the form of the book, in both the jacket, which replicates a spine, and the way in which the packaging materials unfold. The color scheme recalls the faded browns of old books. The menus persist in this scheme, taking the form of pages from the presumably even more redolent form of pages from a manuscript book. The supplements are designated "appendices"; clicking the "index" button provided on several menus leads one to a replica of a print index.

The menu system of the Special Edition, created by Company Wide Shut, has been justly praised for its organization as well as its appearance. The *LOTR* appendices—like the film and book themselves—are vast, drawing on a remarkable amount of behind-the-scenes material and interviews of production staff. The menu system gives clear shape to this material, not only by providing well-chosen categories—neither too restrictive nor too general—but also by affording viewers a graded progress through each disc. The topmost menu offers a "Play All" function, which concatenates many of the documentaries, as well as an "Introduction" by Jackson that explains the menu system

and frames the supplemental features. This concern with beginnings is matched by a desire to provide the sense of an ending as well: the second supplemental disc to each of the three films also offers a short, closing documentary. Viewers might not avail themselves of the linear structure of these discs, but that structure is nonetheless there, as a default—and intelligent—path through these materials. The menus and structures of the Special Extended Edition *LOTR* are an efficacious answer to the question of how to present an overwhelming amount of material efficiently and cogently.

Nevertheless, our present focus is not on the power and utility of the book as a concept, but on the relation of the DVD to new media. *LOTR*, like all DVDs, possesses the rudimentary features of new media—numerical representation of data and modularity—but how does it exploit these necessary but insufficient conditions? In other words, how does this edition go beyond the expressive capacities of the book?

Only a few features explore the possibilities of digital form. While video clips have often replaced text, they are deployed within a structure long familiar to readers, in what is basically a series of chapters. The "Play All" button does provide a kind of alternative to the linear structure of each disc, but it is essentially an abridged version of a larger text, a very common feature of the book. There are some notable efforts, such as the "Editorial Demonstration" on the second disc of the appendices to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which mounts the raw footage from each camera in the "Council of Elrond" scene together with the final cut, indicates by a lit frame which take was ultimately employed, and allows viewers to toggle among full-size presentations of each element using the angle button. Such a rich demonstration of the complexity of editorial work is a welcome addition to the appendices. It is both not possible in other forms and not, without the digital platform, useful as a demonstration of the craft of editing. Sound editing receives similar treatment on the appendices discs of *The Two Towers*. Finally, and most effectively, the "Middle Earth Atlas" found on the first of each supplemental disc in the trilogy maps the journey taken by Frodo and by Gandalf. Clicking on set points produces an inset screen on which relevant portions of the film are displayed. The feature, unlike many of the supplements, focuses more on reformulating material in the film than on adding background material. "Middle Earth Atlas," despite the spatial orientation implied by its name, cleverly addresses the temporal aspects of *LOTR*, clarifying the plot. Yet again, despite the success of such moments, the possibilities of the

format are barely touched. The scenes recalled from the film are not generated from a common database; the clips here are previously rendered. These features, like their more linear counterparts elsewhere on the discs, look backward to older forms of viewerly engagement.

The supplemental features to the Special Extended Edition *Lord of the Rings* are thoughtful and suggestive, but they do not display the functionality of a CD-ROM like *A Passion for Art*, which can not only store a database but also address it purposefully. In fact, the *LOTR* Special Edition tacitly acknowledges this. Like many other DVDs, this edition offers a DVD-ROM feature. One might expect this function, which is built around a combination of Internet access and a software program designed by InterActual, to open new kinds of options to DVD producers. Instead of the more limited capacities of a standard DVD player and the conventional practices of DVD authoring, this arrangement, in theory, might provide the more robust computational layer available to the CD-ROM.

Yet, despite considerable touting of the "interactivity" that the DVD-ROM extension allows, here again the possibilities are undeveloped. The Internet tie offers little new material, and, while the software does allow selected access to the individual discs (albeit with the awkward requirement of changing the discs), these new supplements simply provide a *rifacimento* of what is already available through standard DVD playback. The software layer does allow programmers the option of addressing the material on the disc as a database, but none of the features exploit this powerful function. Yet again, even with the capacity to operate with the range of other new media, the DVD and DVD-ROM remain constrained.[18]

In fact, one might say that the DVD industry has been imagining various escapes from the impasse under which it currently operates for some time, but without success. The initial promise of interactivity was never fully realized, but never quite forgotten. If the DVD-ROM represents one attempt, Infinifilm, a style of presentation developed by New Line, offered another abortive but suggestive possibility. Introduced in 2001, Infinifilm sought (in its trademarked assertion) to "Go Beyond the Movie" with "supplemental material that can be accessed through navigation menus that pop up while watching the film, offering viewers more control of their movie watching experience."[19] Icons no more obtrusive than subtitles allow viewers to choose various supplemental materials, some simply parts drawn out of more lengthy features long familiar on DVD (documentaries, audio commentaries, MODs, etc.), others, often narrowly contextual, prepared

for the particular moment in the film.[20] Ultimately, Infinifilm approximates the nonlinear experience of much new media. The experience of Infinifilm mimics the database/interface division of the computer and other new media, the film itself becoming part of an apparatus that approximates the desktop model of the personal computer. As in the case of the *LOTR* menus and supplements, the interface is not a computing environment, but the simulation of such an environment. Like the book metaphor exploited by the earliest laserdisc producers at Voyager/Criterion (as we shall see in chapter 3), the desktop metaphor adopted by Infinifilm was an astute but undeveloped experiment in the presentation of supplemental materials, one that shrewdly deployed the limited capacities of the DVD.[21]

As this book goes to press, yet another opportunity has been afforded to producers of home video. Blu-ray, whose bid to become the default form for home video was recently strengthened by the demise of a rival format, high-definition DVD (HD-DVD), has not only the advantage of much greater storage capacity but also a more powerful computing system than the DVD. Blu-ray players employ Java, an object-oriented programming language that operates across platforms. Hence, menus can be generated on demand, unlike current DVD menus, which employ prefabricated segments. This is not only an elegant solution to the problem of menus, one that uses disc space more efficiently, but one that also accords with the database/operating system structure characteristic of new media. This capacity, combined with Internet access, would allow producers of DVD supplements not only to update but also to expand their content. Instead of mimicking the feel of a computational environment, home video can, at last, take its place among other new media.

The issue here, however, remains the cultural and not simply the computer layer. It is not merely a question of the new robust capacities of the latter format but how the format has taken shape over time. The earliest Blu-ray players were introduced in 2006 as a response to the rival and more technically mature format of HD-DVD, and by almost all accounts, these early players entered the market too soon. In this fraught atmosphere, in which Sony feared that Blu-ray would be stifled by wide acceptance of a cheaper and smoothly functional format, supplemental materials did not take priority; most materials were either imported—essentially in their old format—or took forms already familiar on the DVD. Few supplemental features on Blu-ray discs took any real advantage of the new technology. History appears to have trumped technology, and Blu-ray has yet to offer more than

a sharper picture: the familiar mantra—"The picture gleams, the sound surrounds"—has carried the day, and paradoxically, the more home video takes on the capacities of other new media, the more it strives simply to achieve, on a smaller scale, the impact of theatrical performance.[22]

Hence, the relation of the DVD to other new media is a complex one. It richly exemplifies one of the basic tenets of studies of new media, that a medium itself is a combination of both a physical object and a set of social, cultural, and economic practices. It is to this world of human action that we turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

DVD Production and DVD Producers

While Manovich's model allows us to give a brisk account of the DVD's limitations compared with other new media, it does not open the discussion to a more elusive and important question: the relation of the DVD to the older medium of film. Here we must move from the intrinsic analysis of Manovich's typology, which asks, "What is it?" to a more widely ranging, relational analysis, which asks, "What does it do?" The relation of the DVD and the film is not only fraught but also unstable, as film increasingly incorporates digital processes as well as a technical level of digital production. A film might well be digital in both apparent ways (special effects) and concealed ways (film stock transferred to digital for processing and then back to film for theatrical release). But for our purposes, in tracing the history of the DVD, we can limit the discussion by treating film and DVD as distinct media.

In their 1999 book *Remediation*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin trenchantly examine the relation between new and existing media, providing an extrinsic analysis that complements the intrinsic approach of Manovich. For Bolter and Grusin, the physical manifestation of new media is even more secondary to the work of culture than in Manovich's model. The relation they posit is essentially a rhetorical one, in which the new form seeks to compel the assent of the viewer: "What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media."[1] The mainstays of this rhetoric are appeals to immediacy and transparency, which downplay or deny "the presence of the medium and the act of mediation" (11), or counterintuitive appeals to hypermediacy, which "makes us aware of the medium or media and . . . reminds us of our desire for immediacy" (34).

Remediation transpires at different intensities and with different attitudes toward the earlier medium. At one extreme it can be reverential, simply re-presenting an earlier medium and in the process striving to render itself transparent, or it can be quite hostile, seeking to obliterate the predecessor. Between these extremes lies a wide variety of attitudes and approaches. A new medium might conceive of the relation as one of improvement, combining reverence with curatorial aspirations (a move that conveniently legitimates the new through the cultural capital of the old). The presentation of paintings in the CD-ROM *A Passion for Art*—which aims at a combination of access, encyclopedism, and translucence—exemplifies this posture. But a new medium might also take a more aggressive stance, one that emphasizes the current interface or decontextualizes the old medium in order to refashion the predecessor.[2]

A relational question like this one can be approached variously. One can focus on audiences and habits of consumption, as Barbara Klinger does in her discussion of the DVD in *Beyond the Multiplex*.[3] Or one might well begin with the contextual detail provided by industry itself as it sought to articulate a place for the DVD within the entertainment market.[4] But in the case of the DVD, the two strands of reception and distribution are complicated by the activities of those directly involved in the making of the DVD itself—namely, the DVD producers, whose efforts by turns adopt and combine the perspectives of viewer, industry, and critic. The work of the DVD producer is largely obscured in the rigorously commodified world of the medium, in which industry executives routinely accept awards for the DVDs they commission and where the names of producers often do not appear on the discs they oversee and help to craft. Nevertheless, their work and attitudes have shaped the relation between DVD and film. This relation is an explicit one; it is spelled out in the supplementary features that producers develop. In the case of the DVD, the best way to clarify its particular act of remediation is to clarify DVD production—who makes DVDs, how supplementary features are assembled, and how DVD production has evolved since the introduction of the format in March 1997.

Between Fan and Critic: The Role of the DVD Producer

The approach taken by DVD producers toward their material combines a deep understanding of cinematic technique with a determination

to exploit the possibilities of the DVD. The unabashed enthusiasm of Mark Atkinson, formerly general manager of Worldwide Creative Services at Deluxe Digital Studios, is typical of many producers:

> I've always loved the movies, and growing up, loved reading about movies and watching "behind the scenes" featurettes about movies, and learning about the process of making movies. So what I suppose I love most about producing DVDs is having the opportunity to create the sort of features and content for a movie that I would love to watch.[5]

Atkinson's emphasis on process and his trust in his own taste have yielded some engaging and thoughtful supplemental features. For Cameron Crowe's semiautobiographical *Almost Famous* (2000, DVD 2001), Atkinson allowed viewers to consider the relation between life and fiction by including Crowe's mother on the commentary track and reproducing a number of Crowe's reviews for *Rolling Stone*. Another featurette, "Cameron Crowe's Top 10 Albums of 1973," encourages viewers to think about the film's representation of the era. On Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* (1999, DVD 2000), Atkinson produced a featurette in which Mendes and his cinematographer, Conrad L. Hall, discuss their collaboration for the film, revealing much about the complexities of such creative processes. Similarly, his work on the deleted scenes to Mendes's *Road to Perdition* (2002, DVD 2002) allowed the director to give viewers an intricate account of his deliberation over the final cut.[6] Atkinson's sense of "what he would love to watch" can lead to very different kinds of supplemental features—some expansive and edifying, others more discursive and critically focused—but this approach, that of an intelligent and well-informed fan who follows his own sense of what is interesting, has a directness and detail that serve the material well.[7]

Other DVD producers vary Atkinson's combination of enthusiasm and attention to process. Mark Rance's interest in DVD production, like that of many of his colleagues in the DVD business, began as a romance with film and the creativity of directors.[8] But Rance's knowledge of film history makes him an unusually self-conscious DVD producer. Noting that "the DVD has shifted the social event of watching movies from theaters into other spaces (physical and technological)," he argues that supplements have made this "a thoughtful, meaningful change."[9] Having long contended that film is one of the "least documented of art forms," Rance adheres strongly to the belief that

the supplementary materials on DVDs offer an "oral history" of filmmaking.[10] Like Atkinson, Rance's procedures address the problems of filmmaking directly and empirically, often in terms of specific decisions made on the set. But this collection of information and anecdote transpires within the context of a larger archival function; the interest here is less local and occasional—such as that of a chronicle, for instance—than that of a historian.

The much-lauded documentary *That Moment*, which Rance directed for Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* (1999, DVD 1999), presents an unusually rich account of the making of this film over a period of almost two years.[11] A moody and contemplative piece, *That Moment* presents the strain and uncertainty of a film production without ever allowing the viewer to forget the complexities of the documentary form—the insistent presence of the camera and its inevitable effects on its subjects. Rance's film is as much a meditation on the collection of archival material as it is archival material itself. Equally valuable is the record of the "moment" itself, at which a talented young writer-director negotiates the move to large-budget filmmaking. While many DVD producers characterize their work as educational in a broad sense, Rance's productions over the years exemplify this practice. Indeed Rance coined a widely used expression for the particular instructional capacities of the DVD: "film school in a box."

Rance's archival approach tends to make the digital technology behind the DVD invisible; other DVD producers revel in the technical possibilities of the medium. Van Ling typifies this exuberance:

> When I started in the medium, there was a standard set of things that were being done on DVD: trailers, maybe a featurette or two. More creative producers…knew what they wanted but not necessarily the specifics of how to make the technology achieve it; the authoring folks and programmers knew their software inside and out but didn't understand what the creatives wanted.…I was one of the first in a long line of producers who wouldn't take "no" for an answer when we had an innovative idea…. There were actually a lot of us who said no, we do not accept that it cannot be done, but I made a point of learning enough about the process to state cogently how it could be done on a technical level…. It also helped that I was willing to roll up my sleeves to make it work from my end as well, creating menus and navigation and knowing how it was all supposed to work together.[12]

Ling's approach is evident in his work on the various editions of James Cameron's *Terminator 2* (1991, DVD 2000) as well as on the

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Star Wars Trilogy (1977, 1980, and 1983; DVD 2004). The sweeping camera movements and new visual effects shots found on the menus for the *Star Wars Trilogy* and its prequels are largely owing to Ling's extensive background in film production, honed from both his work on Cameron's films and as the creative director for Banned from the Ranch, a small boutique effects house.[13] Among DVD producers, Ling's knowledge of the technical side of DVD production—authoring and programming protocols—is exceptional.

Other DVD producers exploit the somewhat undefined nature of their position. If Rance finds the archival and critical opportunities of the DVD most congenial, and Ling emphasizes the formal capacities of the medium itself, David Prior prizes the unusual purview intrinsic to the role of DVD producer.[14] Prior, whose credits include the highly lauded two-disc set of David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999, DVD 2000) and Peter Weir's *Master and Commander* (2003, DVD 2004), appreciates the opportunity for a ringside education in filmmaking:

> What I like most (about producing DVDs) is everything I learn about doing it. Every job is an opportunity to learn something I didn't know before, whether it's some technical aspect of craft I hadn't come across, or the way in which different personalities handle the tactical and logistical, problem-solving side of things. . . . When I'm working on a film while it's in production, that makes for great people watching. The pleasant dissembling that goes on in meetings, all the scheming and the machinations, the methods different people employ to get what they want. It's all very interesting, and I have a strange sort of privileged view of it, because a DVD producer is often invisible in a way. You don't fit cleanly into the studio side or into production, and you aren't really post-production. Often no one has a clear idea of what you're doing until it's finished and if you're quiet and keep your eyes and ears open, you can really learn a lot.[15]

The benefits of such curiosity about the details of process can be readily seen in the features on *Master and Commander.* One documentary, "The Hundred Days," which covers much of the preproduction work on the film, furnishes a lavish account of Weir's painstaking efforts to achieve authenticity in the design of the ships, costumes, selection of minor roles, training of actors in seamanship, and other particulars. Similarly, another featurette, "Multi-Camera Shooting," provides a complex introduction to the way sequences are constructed. Prior permits the viewer to toggle among footage of the same action

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sequences by different cameras. By labeling different lenses and film speed, this interactive feature succinctly allows users to find their own way through this wealth of material. To this consideration of sight, Prior adds a feature on the creation of cannon fire through which viewers can learn something about the intricacies of sound design, at least as it affects decisions about the final presentation of sound track. All these features are linked, as Prior prefers, through logical internal references:

> My intention in exploring technique and methodology to the extent that I do, apart from being instructional, is to hopefully reveal the deep connectivity between form and content. For example, a director or editor may not be able to articulate exactly why they chose to cut to a close-up at a particular moment, but by showing that they did, and what lens was used, and then comparing how the scene would look had it been shot or edited differently, you can get a glimpse into the way technique creates emotional resonance, which leads to other conclusions when considered in the overall context of the film.[16]

These statements from Atkinson, Rance, Ling, and Prior reveal a remarkable convergence of approach and aims among DVD producers. Each combines a palpable enthusiasm—a conscious lack of critical distance—with an appetite for the more empirical aspects of film, the details of problem solving and the intricacies of production. Their re-presentation of film offers viewers a complex kind of immediacy, in which one approaches the film by achieving a keener sense of the medium itself. While DVD producers are not dismissive of more affective responses to film—enchantment, rapture, reverie—their practice seeks transparency at another remove, in the realities of production and the creative process.[17]

This transparency is achieved through what, as Bolter and Grusin note, is a "double logic" in the act of remediation: viewers often accept an insistence on the medium itself ("hypermediation" in their model) as if it were unmediated. This paradoxical logic can be seen at work in the commentary track produced by Charles de Lauzirika for Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), in which one of the most gripping effects in the movie is briskly deconstructed. In discussing a memorable scene in which astronaut Kane (John Hurt) stands transfixed by the ominous quivering movement within one of the alien pods that he has just stumbled upon, Scott coolly notes that the quiver was supplied by the director's own hands.

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The remediation here elicits and shapes a complex response from viewers. Few could watch the film again without thinking of how the special effect was achieved. But this hypermediation produces its own kind of immediacy: viewers who have heard the audio commentary might well feel closer to the process of production. They are not simply insiders who penetrate a surface to apprehend some gritty, industrial truth of the cinematic process, but they are now capable of a different kind of appreciation of the film, in which the success of a special effect (paradoxically a success in terms of other, naive viewers) can be savored for itself.[18]

This kind of re-presentation amounts to a critical choice, one that prefers the investigation of form, style, and craft to explaining or interpreting the film's meaning. Even cursory attention to DVD supplements and features enforces a more self-conscious attitude on the viewer. In a sense, the seemingly paradoxical position of the DVD producer, between fan and critic, seems to enable a shift in attention, from what films *mean* to what they *are*. Ultimately such work encourages a more knowing audience, one more likely to interrogate the image than to submit to it uncritically, simply because they are more familiar with the process by which images are produced.

This shift in attention echoes other movements in the study of film. Its empirical bias—most evident in its focus on directors and on the problems they face and the choices they make—aligns it, most obviously, with André Bazin and *la nouvelle critique* as well as auteur theory. Consider this statement by Bazin, from his canonical 1957 essay in *Cahiers du Cinema*:

> The cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial. These conditions, which are necessary to its existence, in no way constitute a collection of hindrances—no more than in architecture—they rather represent a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with.[19]

While not formally articulating some version of the "*politique des auteurs*," DVD supplements give lavish attention to the constraints and opportunities of the "circumstances" of production—an attention that is consistently cast in the form of the director's reckoning and stylistic choice. Criticism here is less thematic than formal, less a question of what is being said than how material is presented.

The attention to directorial choice among richly detailed circumstances so prominent in DVD supplements also fulfills recent calls for

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a film criticism that reinstalls stylistics. As David Bordwell cogently asserts,

> From a filmmaker's perspective, images and sounds constitute the medium in and through which the film achieves its emotional and intellectual impact. The organization of this material—how a shot is staged and composed, how the images are cut together, how music reinforces the action—can hardly be a matter of indifference. Style is not simply window-dressing draped over a script; it is the very flesh of the work. No wonder that rich craft traditions have grown up to guide filmmakers in choosing technical means that best serve stylistic ends. By centering our inquiry on film style, we are trying to come to grips with aspects of cinema that matter very much to how films work. No adequate theory of film as a medium can neglect the shaping role of style.[20]

Many supplemental features and making-of documentaries (as well as many commentary tracks) address such matters, often with obsessional precision. In fact, the enthusiast's fixed gaze becomes a positive asset in such a program of recovery: since such an inquiry must be open-ended, gathering over time toward generalizations about the history of style, what is most needed is the loving collection of fact, not a theory-driven selection among them. In fact, if, as Bordwell remarks, "The commonplaces of practical filmmaking offer important leads for studying the history of style,"[21] the oft-lamented complaints of repletion and repetition in DVD supplements might better be seen as assets.

Like laserdiscs, DVDs are capable of offering a wealth of information to students of film. Supplementary materials such as commentaries by directors, writers, and cinematographers provide what Mark Rance terms an "oral history" of a film—a collection of material that recalls the governmentally subsidized archival activities undertaken during the Great Depression by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Such materials, particularly with older films, can give us a very rich account of the film's originary moment: the intentions of directors, their success in realizing these aims, and the constraints under which they operated. This kind of material encourages viewers to consider the film from a less purely formal perspective. Documentaries on the making of the film, deleted scenes, and explanations of technical effects also tend to break down the surface of the film. They ask us to pay more attention to the construction of images, and less to simple consumption of them.[22] This concentration on means asks us to consider the essentially mediated nature of the image.

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The Evolution of the Special Edition DVD

Any consideration of supplements found on DVDs must begin with the history of the laserdisc. The first laserdisc players appeared on the market in 1978, and the earliest laserdiscs contained little aside from the film itself. As we will see in chapter 3, The Criterion Collection pioneered many of the features that routinely appear on the special edition DVD. In 1984, the company issued the first laserdiscs with supplementary materials, Merion C. Cooper's *King Kong* and Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Although the company initially hired film historians and scholars to write liner notes and record commentaries for its productions, beginning with Martin Scorsese in 1990 it began to invite filmmakers to discuss their works, a policy that resulted in Criterion's Director Approved Series.[23] In addition to pioneering the director commentary track, Criterion laserdiscs included a wide range of supplements—deleted scenes, texts of screenplays, promotional materials, trailers, and visual essays on the creation of special effects, costuming, or score. The Criterion edition of David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988, Laserdisc 1996), released virtually on the eve of the DVD era, shows how well-developed the full Criterion treatment had become. Karen Stetler's production of the laserdisc contains a multiperson audio commentary that includes the director, Jeremy Irons, editor Ronald Sanders, production designer Carol Spier, and cinematographer Peter Suschitzky; features on the film's twinning effect and motion control footage; the electronic press kit (EPK); and "Crimes of the Future," a complete early Cronenberg feature. One need only look at other laserdiscs produced during these years to see how quickly Hollywood-based studios adopted this model. 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment's laserdisc of Sydney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* includes two commentary tracks (one by Pollack, the other with producer Irwin Winkler and members of the original cast and crew), a featurette on the making of the film, and an archival still gallery. MGM's laserdisc of Stanley Donen's *Singing in the Rain* includes the trailer and a deleted scene of Debbie Reynolds singing "You are my lucky star."

The first DVDs appeared in the marketplace on March 25, 1997, in seven test market cities—Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington, D.C.[24] A few studios—Columbia TriStar Home Video, Sony, and Warner Home Video—had announced plans for upcoming releases of the films they would make available in this format at the winter Consumer Electronics Show in

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January 1997. Sony executives declared that their initial slate of titles would include *Jumanji, In the Line of Fire, Legends of the Fall, Close Encounters of the Third Kind: The Special Edition, Taxi Driver, Matilda,* and *Fly Away Home*.[25] John Briesch, president of the Sony Electronics consumer audio/visual group, announced that 20 titles were slated for release by the end of 1997. Warner-owned studios began with a slate of 32 titles, among them *Batman, The Mask, Space Jam, Twister,* and *The Wizard of Oz*.[26]

With the advent of the DVD, the number of titles that were accompanied by bonus features proliferated. The reasons for this are partly technical. The storage capacity on laserdiscs was limited to 30 minutes for constant angular velocity (CAV) discs and 60 minutes for constant linear velocity (CLV) discs; a DVD disc can hold data sufficient to generate two to four hours of material, making it ideally suited for the addition of supplementary materials at little or no cost. Hence, what might have required another disc (which, in the case of the laserdisc, was a relatively expensive proposition) could now be contained in a single DVD. Moreover, the physical size of the DVD allowed further economies in distribution and storage.

The first DVDs contained the film alone, with subtitled versions in French or Spanish. One of the first DVDs to boast bonus materials was Chuck Russell's *The Mask* (1994). Released on August 22, 1997, this disc included deleted scenes, a director's commentary, a trailer, and background information on cast and crew—all conveniently taken from the earlier laserdisc of this film. By June 2000, the number of extras provided on special edition DVDs had grown exponentially.[27] The two-disc Collector's Edition of David Fincher's *Fight Club* contains four commentary tracks, three theatrical trailers, 12 American TV spots, seven deleted scenes, 17 featurettes, storyboards, the film's EPK, the transcript of an interview with Edward Norton, and cast and crew bios—and this is just a partial list. One can watch the film several times over in the time it would take to view all the supplements. The abundance of materials in this particular case reflects the vision of the disc's producer, David Prior, who "used my own sense of what I wanted to see, my status as a fan," to assemble a DVD that ultimately raised the bar for extra materials.[28] Through canny expansion and refinement, producers and distributors transformed the DVD into one of the most successful commercial products of the electronic age.

Making a special edition DVD is an elaborate process. While some studios produced DVDs of their theatrical releases internally, many

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preferred to hire someone from outside. As Michael Mulvihill, formerly senior vice president of content development at New Line Home Entertainment, explains, the solicitation process (at least in 2004, when the market had begun to reach its peak) began with the DVD producer, who made a proposal after being informed of the film's content, director, and cast. He or she then proposed a budget and suggested an array of features appropriate to the film's content. Once the preliminary suggestions were approved, Mulvihill and the producer then determined additional details, such as the number of discs and the amount of original programming any featurettes (documentaries shorter than 30 minutes) or documentaries would contain. Mulvihill then forwarded the proposal to other divisions at New Line—marketing, the head of finance, the president, and head of sales—for approval.[29] After the director approved the proposal, the producer signed a binding agreement with the studio. Peter Staddon, formerly senior vice president at 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, described a similar process at his company in a 2004 interview. Once a producer was hired and a budget set, the producer returned with a proposal to Fox delineating the disc's contents.[30] If the process sounds fluid, it was, as the profits were so immense, so crescent, and so unexpected that speed of release trumped other considerations. Many DVD producers from the era felt that oversight was slight as sales took off: executives and marketing divisions were more concerned with having a long list of features on the package than with the particulars of these materials. Clearly, some DVD producers were able to exploit this relatively loose scheme of control, at least in the early days of the DVD era.

While the production of a DVD involves numerous persons who handle the different technical, creative, and managerial tasks involved, the producer remained at all times the key figure. He or she oversaw an array of tasks—determining the contents of the disc, shooting and editing documentaries and interviews, supervising audio and video transfers, overseeing the creation of menus, and devising chapters or segments into which the film will be partitioned for viewers seeking to locate particular scenes.[31] Determining the number of working producers at any time is not easy: estimates by producers themselves range from 30 to more than 70. This imprecision reflects the heterogeneity of those involved, which includes independent producers with their own companies, producers who work for studios, and those on the periphery of the film business, who might include someone as occasional as a director's nephew.[32] The backgrounds of producers vary as well. DVD producers tend to divide themselves between

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those who began their work producing laserdiscs and those who commenced with the DVD format. While many were involved in laserdisc production, others have backgrounds in video mastering, compression for earlier formats such as CD-I or Video CD, CD-ROM production, or video games. Some are film school graduates or have backgrounds in documentary filmmaking: Van Ling and Charles de Lauzirika[33] attended the University of Southern California's School of Cinema and Television; Mark Rance received his degree at MIT, and Michael Pellerin[34] at CalArts. Some of the veteran figures in this field (Mark Rance, Laurent Bouzereau, Eric Saks, Michael Kurcfeld, and Alita Holly[35]) worked at some point for The Criterion Collection.

The precise combination of extras on any given disc depends on a wide variety of factors ranging from the nature and genre of the film, the budget allocated for the DVD, the targeted audience, preferences indicated by the marketing division of studios, and the inclinations of the DVD producer. Sources of the various supplementary materials vary. Storyboards and still galleries are taken from preproduction materials; "making-of" documentaries are made during the production of a film, often on days on which not a great deal is going on so that disruption is minimal. Deleted scenes, gag reels, outtakes, and original material typically come out of the editing room during postproduction; the commentary track is usually recorded after the theatrical release. Catalog titles and anniversary editions draw on archival material. Frequently, the genre dictates the nature of the extras: virtually all action, adventure, alien, robot and science fiction films include a featurette on special effects or stunts for the DVD.

Decisions about how work is to be carried out once the nature of the supplements has been determined are complicated. Laurent Bouzereau,[36] who favors the inclusion of comprehensive "making-of" documentaries, begins his preparation by reading the script and identifying key scenes, keeping an eye out for ones that will be especially "visual" or represent well the "spirit" of the film.[37] The shooting of documentaries is then scheduled for the days on which these scenes will be shot. With older films, Bouzereau begins by watching the film repeatedly. Next, he breaks it down scene by scene and then gathers a "bible" of materials, which might include reviews, articles written about the film, drafts of the screenplay, and the source on which it is based. He then contacts the studio to see what might be available in their archives.[38] Michael Kurcfeld,[39] who has also worked on older catalog titles for Fox (*The Sand Pebbles, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Blood and Wine, An Unmarried Woman*), follows a similar procedure.

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Kurcfeld determines the nature of supplements to be included based on the availability of materials and persons, especially the director, director of photography, and screenwriter. If there are enough "choice archival assets" such as storyboards, annotated scripts, on-set production B-roll (alternate footage shot to intercut with the primary shots used in a film), news footage, and existing interviews with principal crew and actors, Kurcfeld will then make a documentary.[40]

Mark Rance stresses a somewhat different skill for DVD producers—in addition to the ability to conduct research and a knack for identifying and locating nonfilm elements, a capacity for telling a story. Rance's work is distinguished by original documentaries and audio tracks, some of which do not feature the director or other talent. Rance's production of Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* includes a feature on serial killers, the DVD of Mike Leigh's *Naked* includes a documentary on chaos theory, and the one of Alex Proyas's *I, Robot* includes two documentaries, *Sentient Machines: Robotic Behavior* and *Three Laws Safe: Conversations about Science Fiction & Robots*. Similarly, Susan Ricketts[41] prefers building special features around a theme in the film to standard "making-of" documentaries. For Ted Demme's *Blow,* she produced two superb documentaries—*Lost Paradise,* an investigation of the drug trade in Columbia, and *Addiction: Body and Soul. Lost Paradise* contains more somber materials than most DVD documentaries, including an interview with a FARC guerilla who openly admits to involvement with the cocaine trade.

Documentary-style supplements are a staple of special edition DVDs, and this feature, along with audio commentary, links the format most clearly with the laserdisc. But with the advent of the DVD, this feature has become uneven. The more traditional documentary approach, such as that of Ricketts, has become less common, and the more thoughtful making-of features, such as those of Rance, have become more rare. Often the making-of supplement seems less archival in its aims than simply an extension of the EPK, and at times the two are combined in preproduction and during the shooting of the film, with the same crew and producer performing both functions.[42] Many DVD producers lament this tendency, which they see as one that relies more on a marketing strategy than on any archival or critical outlook.[43]

Laurent Bouzereau, however, in a 2000 interview with Todd Doogan in *Digital Bits*, provides a more productive frame of reference for apparent changes in the nature of DVD supplements. Bouzereau's

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remarks emerge in a discussion of the rerelease of a documentary done for the laserdisc edition of *Jaws*—a feature that Bouzereau reedited and shortened for the DVD version. According to Bouzereau, laserdisc viewers were "a lot more like film scholars than your average viewer."[44] The larger, more various demographic of the DVD requires a different approach: to reach these viewers, one must "get them in with something that is less dry and with a less scholarly approach." Essentially, the DVD replaces VHS, not laserdisc, in terms of its audience. Bouzereau explains:

> Here I am, in a completely different medium, talking to a much wider audience, a young audience. You're trying to cater to a newer audience, an audience that's used to *The Matrix*—an audience that's used to quickly paced and quickly cut mediums. You have to adjust to that if you want to transcend the market—if you want to reach a much broader audience.

Bouzereau has put his finger on an important wrinkle in the development of the special edition: supplements were developed for one audience, but they now reach a much larger one with different expectations and a decidedly different formation.[45]

The repertoire of supplements was largely set by the laserdisc. The budgets of high-end DVD production afford producers new opportunities to pursue their craft as documentarians, allowing them access to the director on the set, funding the occasional trip to a distant location for interviews, and permitting lavish explorations of cinematic technique. But while these circumstances have produced some memorable supplements, the uneasy fit between the existing repertoire of DVD supplements and the preferences of a mass audience was never quite resolved. As long as sales grew exponentially, there was little desire for such reflection. The picture, so to speak, needed a frame; a highly praised pattern was available; well-trained craftsmen were at hand; and these fixtures were ordered up routinely, at least through 2007.

Few new supplementary materials were developed for the DVD itself. Perhaps the most important, and paradoxically little noticed, was the menu, which provided the feel—if not the reality—of a fully digital medium. Menus, the interface between the user and the other materials on a disc, have undergone dramatic changes since the laserdisc days in which a menu (if one existed) displayed little other than the film's chapters. While DVD producers generally do not create the

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menus on a DVD (this work is typically outsourced to an independent DVD authoring and compression company such as Deluxe Digital Studios, or programmers in a studio), menus, especially for blockbuster titles, developed into strikingly creative, and often animated, extensions of the film itself. The static, utilitarian menu occasionally appended to the laserdisc became an ingenious framing device in its own right. For the ultimate edition of James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day,* for example, Van Ling created a menu imbued with features of the Cyberdyne Systems Terminator machine, whether it be the skeletal frame of the first Terminator or the THX notice, which cleverly exploits the ability of the T1000 Terminator to recombine after being shattered to pieces. Similarly, the menus for the boxed set of *Die Hard: Five Star Edition* dramatically evoke the locales of John McCain's (Bruce Willis) heroics—in succession, the roof of the Nakatomi plaza, the air traffic control tower at Dulles airport, and the inside of a New York subway. The menu to *The Anniversary Party*, on the other hand, serves as a sophisticated comment on the film's craft. This small film is a hybrid of independent form and the collective power of the actors (Jennifer Jason Leigh, Alan Cummings) who directed, produced, wrote, and acted in it. A subtle work, it explores somewhat insular themes that come out of the film industry: the unfairness of a system that cannot find roles for women of a certain age, that distributes opportunities almost whimsically, and that trumps aesthetic pretensions with brutal recourse to commercial and budgetary concerns. Company Wide Shut, the company that produced the menu, created a model of the house used in the film. Jean Paul Leonard, the CEO, created striking graphics—the different rooms of the house are lit up during the menu loop, a design feature intended to orient viewers to the film's multiple plot lines. The menu, in fact, serves as a critical comment; hence, our first look at the film on DVD points us to a particular aspect of the film. While not every menu is as subtly eloquent as this one, clearly they, like trailers, shape or frame our response to the work.

A similar philosophy underlies the menus created by Company Wide Shut for Peter Jackson's three *LOTR* films. To ensure that the menus would provide a seamless visual, thematic, and cultural extension of the films, Leonard flew to New Zealand several times to confer with other members of a consortium that Jackson had formed—the director's department, Michael Pellerin (the trilogy's DVD producer), and the disc's packaging designers. Leonard's associate, Angela Du Bois, employed Alan Lee's and John Howe's conceptual designs and

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calligrapher Daniel Reeves's replication of the Dwarvish and Elvin script to embellish the journal motif, which unites the four-disc extended editions of the films (the theatrical release DVD in contrast deploys the motif of the ring).[46] Alan Lee created new drawings for the menus in order to ensure design continuity throughout all the DVDs: one finds drawings of Gollom and Samwise Gamgee (Frodo Baggins's devoted servant) on the menu pages, which link to features on these characters. Intended to immerse the viewer in the world of Middle Earth and the film's creation, the evocative menus for *LOTR* exemplify the complexity of menus created for blockbusters, boxed sets, and anniversary editions.

The Commentary Track

Just as DVD producers are responsible for the creation of documentaries on a disc, so are they intimately involved in the production of the commentary track. As subsequent chapters will address commentary tracks in considerable detail, we wish to devote particular attention to how additional audio tracks are created. The circumstances surrounding their preparation are largely unknown, and critical discussion of such tracks often betrays a misunderstanding of their production and consequently the content found therein.[47] In many cases, commentary tracks give the impression that the process consists of little more than putting directors in a sound booth, running the film, and letting them talk. This is hardly the case.[48] Assembling a good commentary track, whether it includes one speaker or multiple participants, requires artful manipulation. With few exceptions, what one hears in a good commentary has been carefully assembled and thoroughly edited. Often such tracks weave commentary made while participants are watching the film with material from interviews done by the producer.

In this respect, commentary tracks differ greatly from print interviews in film journals in which the questions as well as the answers are available. One must, when listening to a good commentary, imagine the activity of the producer, who shapes and arranges various materials. The best commentary tracks, in addition to the elements of surprise and insider detail, have a strong narrative line. Often, those done long after the fact provide the most satisfying results. Peter Brook's commentary to *Lord of the Flies* (produced by Mark Rance), which focuses on the guerrilla tactics required by this low-budget film, demonstrates exuberantly that in filmmaking, "freedom [is]

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strictly related to cost."[49] Mike Nichols's commentary to *Catch-22* (produced by Susan Ricketts and abetted by Steven Soderbergh's incisive prompts) functions as a superb postmortem for an unusual film that the director concludes to have been out of character—a piece too straightforward for a director largely interested in subtext. For one of the most highly praised of the early Criterion laserdisc commentaries, that of *Brazil,* producer Morgan Holly boiled down a torrent of Terry Gilliam's recollections into a relatively spare account of the film's troubled release that makes a cogent case for the sanctity of directorial vision and prerogative. Commentary tracks are an intensely mediated form.

Eliciting an animated, illuminating, and coherent discussion from directors is often difficult. As Bryan Ellenburg, vice president of distribution technology at Paramount Studios, observes: "Commentary is often a pretty uncontrolled situation. The talent is varied; there's no script and no rehearsal, and the prep is uneven."[50] According to many DVD producers, few directors prepare in advance. At times, they arrive at the recording session exhausted from postproduction. Directors can be uncomfortable speaking of their work or surprisingly inarticulate about it, and some directors are reluctant or unwilling to dissect their work. While some directors can reel off stories effortlessly, eloquence cannot always be summoned on demand. Others evince skepticism over the prospect of such a feature. Mark Rance recalls that when Mike Leigh was asked to record a commentary for the laserdisc of *Naked,* his initial response was "sounds like a fucking stupid idea." But Rance adds, "Ultimately he did prepare and wonderfully so."[51]

Perhaps more insidious are the effects of the marketing campaigns that accompany the theatrical release. Directors often hone their accounts of film through the trial and error of the numerous interviews that accompany its release. Such comments, while appropriate to the constraints and exigencies of these exchanges, where compression, speed, and impact are crucial, are less well adapted to an audio commentary. While such a shaping process might provide a smooth and ready stream of remarks, it might result in a commentary that is valuable more as a documentation of the selling of a product than as a director's meditation on his work. Equally insidious is the effect of brute contingency on the director's performance. As Atom Egoyan admits, "What you say one day may be completely different from what you would say on another, and there are different factors that come into play. I remember with that particular commentary [to

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Felicia's Journey] I was quite tired and wasn't necessarily prepared for it."[52]

Even the simple recollection of the particulars of a film released many years ago can be difficult. As Charles de Lauzirika observes, "If they [directors] haven't seen the film in a long time, they often end up watching it. And that's when I really have to earn my money and pop in with questions, 'Hey, do you want to talk about this person, or what do you think of that scene?' That's why, personally, I hate commentary sessions. Nine times out of ten, you're trying to draw blood from a stone. Occasionally, you get someone who just has so much to say that you can sit back and enjoy."[53] Such frustrations have prompted some DVD producers to forego the commentary track: "I now try to steer away from audio commentaries," admits Michael Kurcfeld, "unless the key people, director foremost, are highly voluble and dynamic."[54] Laurent Bouzereau has also expressed less interest in recording commentary tracks, preferring to showcase the director in an interview or documentary. It goes without saying that the more informative and incisive the commentary, the better the record left to posterity. An audio commentary is in many ways a conversation. But what kind of conversation? An entertaining, bantering, analytical, or serious one?

At their best, a good commentary track can establish the foundations for future critical discussions of a film through an incisive discussion of casting, character motivation, camera shots, lighting, score, script, and other topics related to production. Moreover, the commentary track is one of the few features of a DVD to take full advantage of the digital medium. The commentary track is a substantially new form of exposition, blending reminiscence, anecdote, close reading, and criticism (and sometimes considerable savvy in personal presentation by those involved). It offers a sustained and focused discussion of defined instances of content and image. Unlike discussions of a frame or even a series of frames in print, the commentary track allows for the discussion of the experience of visual mobility, different focuses, camera movement, and the flow of film time and sequence. There is no better way to discuss technique, and it remains for directors and scholars of film to either exploit the distinctive possibilities of this medium or perform a different kind of critical work altogether. Sam Mendes's commentaries to *American Beauty* and *The Road to Perdition* exemplify the possibilities of this form when comments are carefully cued to what viewers see as they hear the commentary. Preparation is crucial, a detail that Mark Atkinson, who recorded the

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commentary tracks for Mendes's two films, confirms:

> With Sam recording a commentary was effortless. Not all commentaries go that way, but I tend to play it by ear, and be ready for anything. If I need to prod the filmmakers with questions, I try to be prepared for that. If they start watching the movie and forget to talk, I hold them after and get them to talk about making the film so I have some "wild tracks" to fill in the blank spots with—usually it's not hard to ask a few questions and get them reminiscing. But in the case of Sam, he was totally prepared, knew what he wanted to say for every scene in the movie, and just sat down in front of the mic, and started talking…[the] editing was extremely limited. When he listened to *American Beauty*, he asked if we could make maybe two edits (as I recall), and I think that for *Road to Perdition*, he asked to re-record one section…I thought [it] sounded great as is, and then he re-did it, and it sounded better.[55]

Mendes's degree of preparation is rare. Remarkably scene specific, his commentaries contain no digressions, filler anecdotes, or rhapsodic tributes to actors.

Despite such obstacles, it is the responsibility of the DVD producer to elicit discussion. How this is done varies. Michael Kurcfeld, who has produced DVDs of many older films, sometimes dealing with persons whose memories are faulty, implores directors to watch the film prior to the recording session, advice that is seldom heeded. Kurcfeld arrives with a full slate of general and scene-specific questions as well as a copy of the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) and a copy of the cast and credit list should directors forget names of those involved. Eric Saks, a former Criterion producer, reveals that he typically begins with 20 minutes of "wild" or free-flowing conversation before showing the director the film followed by a number of prepared questions. Often a bit of guile is helpful. To prompt an initially reticent Louis Malle to talk about *My Dinner with Andre,* Saks deliberately "misremembered" a detail, which "miffed" Malle, who then proceeded to clarify his intentions.[56] Despite such preparation and pleading, at times producers are unable to obtain more than 20 minutes of useable material. In such cases, the producer is then obliged to integrate comments from other interviews, TV spots, or the EPK. Attentive viewers of supplements invariably notice the degree of repeated material. For instance, the commentary track to Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator* contains material inserted from a featurette on a discussion of obsessive-compulsive

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disorders at UCLA to which Scorsese and Leonardo di Caprio were both invited.

Multiperson tracks often provide the surest means to fill an audio track. After asking all participants the same set of questions, the producer then edits and assembles all the voices together for the commentary track. Although this may be evident on some commentary tracks where different speakers all address the same question, it is most apparent in making-of documentaries in which one person after another addresses the same topic in rapid succession. If the participants are voluble, the producer must edit the material so that it complements and enhances the scenes as they unfold. For Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop,* Morgan Holly recorded four hours of conversation with each of the speakers on the commentary track (Verhoeven, cowriter Edward Neumeier, executive producer Jon Davison, and film scholar Paul M. Sammon), and then mixed selections from all the participants. For the Criterion laserdisc of *From Russia with Love,* Holly first showed the film to director Terence Young, screenwriter Richard Maibaum, editor Peter Hunt, and Steven Jay Rubin, author of *The Complete James Bond Movie Encyclopedia*. Questions and answers then followed. In all, 15 hours of material was taped, which Holly then cut down to 90 minutes for the audio track. He emphasizes the role of the producer in prompting directors to provide coherent discussion. Holly sent directors questions before the recording sessions. As he notes, good producers, even when doing a "run through" commentary will stop the tape, coach the speakers, and then go over the material again. Continuity must also be maintained on a more local and technical level. Mark Rance typically tapes participants saying phrases such as "this is" and "let me depart from what I was saying," which he can then splice in at key transitional moments. As such interventions reveal, the producer is a crucial facilitator, someone whose unheard questions shape much of what we hear on tracks. The exceptions come from highly articulate and focused directors such as Atom Egoyan and Bertrand Tavernier, who produce the special editions to their own films. Drawing on an excellent memory, Tavernier records his comments as he watches his films. After hearing the track, he adds more details that he forgot to mention during the first taping.[57] Egoyan prepares extensively: he rereads reviews, recalls key ideas, watches the films again, looks over his own notes, and tries to prioritize the information he seeks to relay to what he generously imagines to be "an infinitely curious viewer."[58]

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While viewers may have the impression that interviews with the director and other talent involved in a film are spontaneous conversations, all features have been edited, often extensively. After collecting all the interviews he has conducted, Laurent Bouzereau obtains transcriptions of each interview, edits these print copies, and then gives them to his editor, who is instructed to assemble them on video. After watching this first pass together, the two then decide where there are "structural problems" and what excisions they must make. The editor then reedits the interviews following Bouzereau's notes, whereupon they are edited again. In making documentaries of a film's production, Bouzereau typically uses the interviews as his guide, and then incorporates production footage, behind-the-scenes clips as needed to illustrate the comments made by the persons interviewed.[59] To enhance these features, a DVD producer might employ attractive backgrounds, quicken the pacing, or employ music to "conjure a defining mood."[60]

The commentary track to Steven Soderbergh's *The Limey,* produced by Susan Ricketts, exemplifies the importance of an editor's shaping hand to the remediation of the film on DVD. This track has garnered considerable notoriety because of the apparent hostility between the director and screenwriter, Lem Dobbs, who disagree on Soderbergh's considerable changes to the original script.[61] In the commentary, Dobbs repeatedly points out and laments the excision of material that would have made the film a meditation on the spirit of the 1960s. (The casting of iconic actors of the 1960s such as Peter Fonda, Barry Newman, Lesley Ann Warren, and Terence Stamp attests to the earlier inclusion of such themes in the script.) The resulting commentary is unusually frank: at one point, an exasperated Dobbs accuses Soderbergh of being incapable of dealing with the inner character of a film's protagonists.[62] The director tartly responds by asking Dobbs, "So when are you going to direct?"[63]

Susan Ricketts's recollections offer unique insights into the production of *The Limey*'s commentary track. The recording was made in December 1999, about two months after the film was released. Ricketts interviewed Soderbergh before he and Dobbs watched the film together, after which she interviewed Dobbs. Ricketts notes that they "were bringing a lot of history into the room with them," and she decided to foreground these tensions:

> It's a revenge story and Steven wanted revenge on Lem and Lem wanted revenge on Steven. They were the characters in the movie. We (my

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> editor Val Kuklowsky and I) cut the track to mirror the movie because they really are the movie. They had had a prior working experience on Kafka. Their relationship is actually quite deep in many ways and not as superficial as many working relationships can be in Hollywood.[64]

Since the two "were the movie," Ricketts opted to use "the same audio techniques" (that is, out-of-sequence audio takes) on the commentary track in order to "mirror" the film. The track, like the film, begins in medias res and proceeds nonsequentially. While apart from the opening and closing montages, few viewers would be aware of the degree of intervention, as they hear what appears to be a free-flowing albeit contentious conversation, closer scrutiny of this track shows the deft manipulation used to reflect both occasional differences between Dobbs and Soderbergh on the track and the more manifest antagonism between Wilson (Terence Stamp) and Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda) in the film. "Almost every second" of the track, according to Ricketts, was edited. Ultimately, Ricketts and Kuklowsky created an audio montage in which the voices of a highly animated Dobbs and a passively aggressive Soderbergh overlap to deepen the contentious thematics of the film and to reveal the complex dynamics of the shooting process.

The effects of this presentation are unusually felicitous. Soderbergh subsequently revealed to Ricketts that he had received more calls about the commentary track than the film.[65] Dobbs has participated in two screenings of *The Limey*, one at the Austin Film Festival and the other at the George Eastman House, in which the track was discussed.

While the audio track to *The Limey* is more extensively edited than many tracks, it is important to remember that virtually all tracks undergo significant editing. Typically, the ways in which the DVD producer facilitates the conversation are not evident—studios do not like second-party interventions; nevertheless, students of film should be aware that what they hear is not a spontaneous outpouring but a carefully assembled performance. To judge the force of what is said, we must know something about the circumstances that shape the content.

Trends in DVD Production

Ultimately, a commentary track like that to *The Limey* provides an index to what is lost in audio tracks and commentaries produced more recently. The commentary to this film recalls the more open

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discussions of film possible during the laserdisc years and the first three years (1997–1999) of DVD production. According to Ricketts, "We would never get away with editing a track like that today. It would never pass either the studio marketing people or the legal department."[66] Bryan Ellenburg, who oversaw laserdisc and DVD production at Artisan Entertainment (1994–1999) before moving to Paramount Pictures (1999–2003), to DreamWorks (2003–2005), and then back to Paramount (2005–present)—where he is currently vice president of distribution technology—shares this nostalgia for the early days of the DVD: "What I like about the job pre-1999 was the ability to deal directly with the filmmakers, and put compelling content on DVD without it being decided by a committee of sales, marketing, and legal [people]. The early DVD producers came from a world of laserdisc, and quite a bit of the early DVD content had almost a 'documentary filmmaker' feel to it."[67] Comparing work done before 1999 to the present, Ellenburg observes, "The special edition treatment was given to films that deserved it. Now, almost every DVD released is packed full of extras and considered a special edition, which makes it harder for the truly deserving special editions to stand out."

Such observations hint at the way in which the marketing and legal divisions of studios have affected the content of supplementary features. As the income from theatrical releases dwindled and DVD sales increased in the early 2000s, executives in home entertainment divisions moved up the release dates of DVDs, initially to within six (and later to even three) months of a film's theatrical release. To meet these deadlines, a DVD must be complete and ready to replicate within a few weeks of theatrical release. Hence, all interviews and other materials for supplements must be collected before the film has even been reviewed. While such a timetable ensures that interviews with the director and other talent are fresh, no historical perspective is possible. Many supplements were valuable as responses to the reception of the film; such tight release windows preclude this kind of exchange. Moreover, those working under such compressed schedules are often still in "PR mode," to quote Van Ling. As Ling further clarifies:

> At this point, everyone is still in marketing mode, everything is great, the film's going to be a big hit, and there's no true perspective on the film itself or its strengths. It's like interviewing the player before the big game and not airing that interview until after the game. The good news is that everyone is upbeat and memories are fresh and you're viewing

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> things for what they might be; the bad news is that it can all come off as marketing fluff that bears no relation to the final product.[68]

At times, such dismal prospects were palliated by the studios' quest for increased profits. Sales for DVDs were so strong—at least until 2006—that studios were able to sell the same title in different versions across successive release dates. Often a special edition that included more well-developed features followed the immediate release of a basic DVD with limited extras (trailers, bloopers, making-of documentaries, or some version of the EPK).

Compressed release dates are not the only obstacle to thoughtful supplementary features. The entire distribution process has been transformed, beginning with the VHS, from an emphasis on theatrical release to the DVD as a cinematic end product. Home marketing executives, who usually control the budgets for DVDs, increasingly shaped the content and casting of films. Retail outlets such as Walmart, Best Buy, Costco, and Target provided studios with information on which titles sold well and which actors attracted buyers. The studios in turn informed the stores of forthcoming releases. As Mike Dunn, president of 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, with ready wit, admits: "If they asked me for my input, we'd never make a drama. Nobody would ever die at the end of a movie. Nobody would ever get sick. . . . And the dog would always live. In fact, he'd be the hero."[69] Notwithstanding Dunn's hyperbole, such acute attention to what sells and appeals—and what does not—has led to the careful monitoring of the extra features. DVD producers uniformly acknowledge a "dumbing down" of supplementary features as well as a preference for puff pieces laden with "star input."

Legal issues have also become more troublesome. In the laserdisc days, when the market was under 250,000 units, few restrictions on content were enforced. But as profits swelled to gigantic proportions, anxiety about lawsuits led studio lawyers to insist that no material on the disc contain any mention of brand names, personal criticism, or discussion of anyone who worked on a production but was not credited.[70] Material shot during production for a documentary can usually be easily cleared (largely by making such interviews contractual), but anything shot after production requires approval. The result, yet again, is the repression of some of the information most interesting to posterity.

One of the greatest impediments to producing a DVD is obtaining clearance on copyrighted music. This single issue lies behind Fox's

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failure to release DVD versions for a popular television show such as *Ally McBeal,* which features songs on virtually every episode, until October 2009. The problems of music clearance can be insidious as well. Mark Rance recalls that while working on the DVD of Peter Cattaneo's *The Full Monty,* an actor revealed that he constructed his performance around a particular song. But because clearance for the mere mention of the song could not be obtained, the song is never named. The result is the omission of an obvious element crucial to the actor's performance. In addition to the necessity of adhering to restrictions imposed by studios, various organizations, such as the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), Directors Guild of America (DGA), and Writers Guild of America (WGA) also impose regulations concerning their members. Each guild has lobbied strenuously for the compensation of actors, directors, and writers who appear in documentaries on DVDs. The WGA, for example, regulates closely the content of supplementary features.[71] These increasing restrictions and regulations, in force since approximately the end of 2000, have influenced greatly what can and cannot be shown in the supplementary features. As Van Ling sums up the situation: "People used to contribute photos and materials for the love of the project. Now, sadly but understandably, they all want a piece of the DVD profit pie.... The truth is that most of the time, the studio knows that paying for extra clearances won't sell any more DVDs, so a lot of cool things that could be on DVDs never get used or seen, and the folks holding off for a payoff won't see a dime or any recognition from materials that will now sit in their closets because they can't use it anywhere else without the studio's permission anyway, because they may own the photo or videotape, but the studio owns the creative content."[72]

While it is difficult to register the loss of what never appears, we can imagine what such constraints preclude by recalling what did appear in earlier commentaries and what we know to have appeared only after some conflict. Novelist Howard Fast's colorful yet incisive comments on Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus,* for example, would not survive current legal protocols for DVD production. Consider, for example, the remarks that emerge in the midst of Fast's discussion of the notorious bath scene between Crassus (Laurence Olivier) and Antoninus (Tony Curtis), in which the former, using suggestive allusions to snails and oysters, reveals his own sexual preferences and seeks to impose his desires on his slave. Fast expands his commentary to address what he considers truly "decadent," observing that "our... audiences for the most part are quite brain damaged.

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You see we in America have elevated actors into gods. We take a dimwitted second-rate actor and make him president of the United States." Needless to say, such remarks today would likely be summarily excised.[73] Other observations unlikely to survive the scrutiny of studio lawyers are more subtle. In his commentary track to *Die Hard,* John McTiernan provides a provocative discussion of the function of language in film, claiming that the emotion, and not the meaning conveyed by speech, is decisive. Hence his decision—unusual in an American action film—not to translate the German of the criminals who invade the Nakatomi building. He defends his claims about the essentially emotional force of speech with a suggestive anecdote about autistic children, who, lacking affect, do not learn to speak because they find no use for it:

> My notion is that a lot of time what is expressive in words is the sound of the words rather than the specific meaning of them.... There's this shrink who's done all this work with autistic children...and he's found that the reason that they don't speak isn't that they don't have the mechanism to speak, it's because their emotional equipment is fucked up, and consequently they have no reason to speak. Because speech is first of all not a coded meaning, not a way to communicate with others; it's purely a way to translate emotion into noise. And if you have no reason to express emotion as noise, you won't speak.[74]

Such passages as this are important; one comes away from the commentary track with considerably more awareness of the sophistication behind this blockbuster. But as the DVD's producer David Prior reveals, the passage was almost removed several times during the production process. "There was a strong desire on the part of the legal department," Prior explains, "to remove the passage out of some misguided, politically correct notion that speaking frankly about autism is somehow 'offensive.' I fought this very hard, not only because it was one of the most interesting parts of the commentary, but because it was such a blatant and cowardly attempt to stifle the director's expression of his well-informed opinion." In the end, at Prior's urging, McTiernan threatened to involve the DGA, a move that ultimately resolved the issue.[75]

Such commentary is now all but nonexistent except on titles of smaller films, leading some DVD producers to remark that the "golden days are over." Susan Ricketts recalls, "It was really fun in the early days...we could be really creative," a comment that reaffirms Bob

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Stein's contention that the "early developments of a new form are always the most interesting."[76] It remains to be seen whether such restrictions, while obstructive in some ways, can also spur the development of different forms of engagement or modes of discussion. With the loss of candor and freewheeling commentary, DVD producers will be pressed to develop other ways of discussing and presenting film. Susan Ricketts's artful editing of Dobbs and Soderbergh's discussion, which essentially creates a marketable and thought-provoking spectacle out of hard feelings, exemplifies what a canny presentation can impart to the discussion of a film.

There may well have been no golden era of the DVD; there were at best only a few talented DVD producers who took advantage of the limited oversight and relatively healthy budgets for supplements available during the early days of the format. The result has been a few golden nuggets in the stream of films. More certain, in retrospect, is the marked deterioration by roughly 2005 of the conditions that enabled successful and thoughtful special editions. The next few years brought more uncertainty and contraction, as sales for DVDs seemed to crest, as format wars loomed, and as the long economic boom ended. By 2009, the model for profits in Hollywood, which centered on home video, was under pressure, as DVD sales weakened and theatrical profits unexpectedly increased.[77] Such uncertainty will certainly affect the kind of supplements included on a DVD: in fact, even before the downturn, it was clear that such material was no longer automatic, and titles began to appear more regularly with little or no accompanying material.[78]

One can now begin to see the DVD as an episode in film history, one that had less to do with some technological determinism than with a partial fulfillment of the demands of a particular phase of late capitalism, in which—as Richard Sennett explains in his 2006 *The Culture of the New Capitalism*—consumers are attracted to the potential and potency of new products.[79] If that potential lies in a preference for experience, and not things, and potency in a reflexive celebration of items that have far more capacity than consumers can reasonably employ, it is easy to see the DVD, which allowed individuals unparalleled access to films that were largely unavailable a mere 30 years ago, as fulfilling the latter desire far more than the former.[80] With a shift toward experience, and not possession, the DVD might well seem inferior to the spectacle of the IMAX, the disembodied presence of video on demand (VOD), or the circulation of goods in rental.

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Predictions about home video have been famously unreliable, and we do not wish to venture any here. But it is clear that the conditions for the kind of work done by the best DVD producers, with small exceptions, have deteriorated steadily, almost since the beginning of the DVD era. And, since the entire venture of the special edition is partly reliant on the huge profits realized so quickly after the DVD was introduced, it is hard to see how the work of the DVD producer could survive in a distribution model that emphasizes VOD, even if the DVD persisted as a residual form. The future of supplements might well lie in a return to the model of boutique, high-end, cinephile distribution seen in the laserdisc days of Criterion.

Even if so gloomy a scenario comes to pass, and, notwithstanding current limitations on content, the medium of the DVD has illuminated the art of filmmaking.[81] Whatever the initial misgivings of some directors about commentary tracks in the first few years of DVD production, few can be unaware today of the opportunity that the form provides for transmitting their films into a durable 4K transfer. Directors realize increasingly that the extra features offer them "another canvas."[82] "They're very conscious," observes Peter Staddon, "of the fact that there are now two different roles that the movie has to fulfill. One is the opening and the theatrical performance, and the other is the archival record of what can be, in some instances, a couple years' worth of their life's work."[83] Moreover, as viewers become more film literate through watching extras, directors will realize that they can make their films more dense, knowing that the DVD offers—indeed invites—closer scrutiny of their films.

It is fitting, as the DVD format reaches its maturity, to recall Bob Stein's original intentions in the early days of The Criterion Collection, which were neatly summed up by the original corporate logo, in which a book morphs into a disc. The point of the laserdisc, which the DVD at once conserves and now in some ways has begun to obscure, was not simply to transfer film to disc, or a theatrical experience to the home, but to transfer the distinctive and valuable functions of the book, the archetype of open and user-driven media, to another medium. If it is the convenience of the DVD that seems most prominent now, it was the allure of interactivity that drove the imaginations of those most closely involved in the initial application of laserdisc technology to film. This history is the subject of the next chapter.

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Chapter 3

Setting the Standard: The History of The Criterion Collection

Criterion's success and the enduring nature of its mission to publish "important classic and contemporary films" can be credited to the strong figures among the company's founders, beginning with Bob Stein.[1] Prior to forming The Criterion Collection, Stein had become interested in work being done on optical videodiscs at places such as the Architecture Machine Group, later renamed the Media Lab, at MIT.[2] Convinced that the medium's capability to layer and store text, sound, and images could be effectively harnessed to engage the user more actively, Stein and his wife, Aleen Stein, decided to test these possibilities with film. They formed The Criterion Collection with Roger Smith, formerly a senior vice president of Warner Brothers Studio, himself interested in an entrepreneurial venture that would exploit the capabilities of laserdisc technology. The Steins had the ideas, and Smith the means and business connections to finance the making of the company's first two titles.

In many respects, the famous Criterion ethos began with the telecine transfer of Merian C. Cooper's *King Kong*. Having procured the rights to produce laserdiscs of both Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* and *King Kong* from RKO for $10,000 in 1983, Bob Stein elicited the assistance of Ron Haver, director of film programs at the Los Angeles County Art Museum, to supervise the transfer from celluloid to laserdisc.[3] During the tedium of the transfer process, Haver, a gifted storyteller, offered up stories and information about *King Kong*. Both Stein and Jennifer Scanlin, who assisted in the technical aspects of the process, were struck not only by Haver's volubility but also by his insight. Seizing the moment, Stein declared, "We should be recording this." As Scanlin recalls, "The capability was there in the

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format, and Haver's comments made [adding a second audio track] obvious."[4] Scanlin recorded, edited, and placed Haver's commentary on the laserdisc's second audio track. Hence, behind the serendipity of the birth of the audio track lies a powerful impulse to exploit the laserdisc's capacity to integrate visual, audio, and technical files. Although the best possible transfer of a film was part of Criterion's mission from the onset, the content (here the film) was arguably secondary to Stein's goal of exploring a technology with interactive possibilities.[5] Like the originary moment of many innovations, the birth of the commentary track was as much about recognizing the value of accident as it was the culmination of a design process.

The laserdiscs of *King Kong* and *Citizen Kane* epitomize the Criterion ethos, at least in the company's early days. The driving forces were an insistence on high-quality transfers from film to laserdisc, and a desire to explore and exploit the new technologies at hand. A review of the material available on these discs shows just how precocious these two ventures were in terms of anticipating the content of present-day supplementary features. In addition to Ron Haver's audio commentary track, which addresses the construction of the screenplay; a colorful biography of the film's director, Merian C. Cooper; and a piece on the creation of special effects, the laserdisc of *King Kong* includes a visual essay (again by Haver) containing preliminary sketches, special effects, model design and construction, script pages, and original footage from an earlier Cooper production, *Creation,* an RKO project from 1931. Albeit in the form of still frames followed by text, Haver's commentary on how the "remarkable feat" of transforming an 18-inch toy gorilla into the terror of New York anticipates documentaries on special effects on DVDs.

The supplementary materials on *Citizen Kane* are even more extensive. They include short biographies of the many actors Welles employed from Chicago's Mercury Theater; Robert Carringer's "The Making of a Film Classic: A Visual Essay," which consisted of storyboards and stills of numerous scenes; and deleted scenes. The disc also features visual essays on the make-up techniques used to transform Welles's appearance over the course of Charles Foster Kane's life, cinematographer Gregg Toland's use of new camera techniques intercut with clips from the film, special effects (exterior of Xanadu, Kane's last home), and Bernard Hermann's score. Like many editions of printed books, the disc also provides some sense of the art object's initial appearance and reception by appending materials from the initial publicity and advertising campaigns, a trailer, and selected

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reviews. In addition, the disc includes information one would never see on a DVD today, such as documents detailing the film's expenses and revenue. The presentation concludes with a select bibliography. The visual essays on Criterion's first laserdisc pioneered in microcosm the documentaries now found on DVDs. The content of supplements (storyboard and film comparisons, explanation of special effects, sound, camera angles, interviews with actors, and so on) has remained remarkably consistent even as the format and its mode of access have changed.

Notwithstanding the prescience of these first two productions, Roger Smith found it more difficult to obtain financial backing to produce additional titles than he had anticipated. Rather than continue in an entrepreneurial venture with an uncertain future, Smith opted to return to the corporate world, leaving the Steins without the means to procure additional films. One year later, however, this impasse was overcome. In 1985, Bob and Aleen Stein formed a new partnership with Saul Turell, his son Jonathan Turell, and William Becker—owners of Janus Films, a distribution company of largely foreign film classics—and renamed the new venture Voyager, after the satellite probe.[6] Shortly after this new alliance, Roger Smith ceded the original name of the company back to the Steins, at which point The Criterion Collection became a division within Voyager.

Criterion and Voyager in Los Angeles, 1985–1994

The partnership with Janus Films brought the company important and distinguished content. Janus, in its early years, had acquired the rights to distribute films by renowned directors such as Ingmar Bergman, François Truffaut, Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Jean-Luc Godard, and Luis Buñuel. It had done much to introduce American audiences to foreign classic masterpieces and had kept these titles in repertory. William Becker and Saul Turell, who later acquired the company, negotiated the rights to many of the films that would become Criterion's most esteemed titles, among them *The Seventh Seal, 8 1/2, The Third Man, The Four Hundred Blows, The Seven Samurai,* and *Grand Illusion*. Such masterpieces form the basis of Criterion's strength today, its status as an important archive of film. In addition, Jonathan Turell's and William Becker's deep ties to the film industry, combined with their business acumen, helped stabilize the new company after the dissolution of the partnership with Roger Smith.

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Becker and Turell have been intimately involved in The Criterion Collection's operations from the onset of the new partnership. Once the new partnership with the Steins was formed, Becker and Turell, while based at Janus's office in New York, were closely involved in all productions: both participated in the selection of titles, negotiated access to supplementary materials with studios, facilitated contacts with a wide range of people in the film industry and film scholars, reviewed the ancillary materials and liner notes for each laserdisc, and approved the marketing materials. Turell made monthly trips to the company's Los Angeles office and was regularly involved in discussions on the selection of supplemental materials for films, particularly after 1988, when Bob Stein had largely turned his attention to Voyager's other products.

Like many in the company's early days, William Becker and the Turells shouldered a wide variety of tasks. Becker continues to purchase film distribution rights for the company today. Saul and Jonathan Turell have also been involved in some of the production of the company's laserdiscs and DVDs. Saul Turell wrote and edited the documentary "The Art of Film—The Many Roles of Alec Guinness," which appears in the two-disc set of Ronald Neames's *The Horse's Mouth* and *Tunes of Glory;* Jonathan Turell was an associate producer of the documentary *For All Mankind* on the Apollo space missions. Jonathan Turell, in addition to assisting Becker in making selections of new film purchases, oversees all contracts with studios, distribution, accounting, and the packaging of titles that Janus films already owns or intends to acquire for television and theatrical release. Becker and Turell have been fundamental in initiating and maintaining relationships with directors such as Peter Bogdonavich, Nicholas Roeg, François Truffaut, and Martin Scorsese.

The presence of strong personalities in its early days was crucial to the company's growth. If the interests of the Turells and Becker lay in film itself, Stein's focus was on new technology in a broader sense. For him, one of the most attractive features of laserdisc technology was its still frame capacity and the possibility the format offered viewers to select what they could see and hear. The capacity of this new technology to provide an interactive relation to film was more important than the delivery of film itself. In Stein's view, laserdiscs, like books, could engage users actively. The company's first logo, a book morphing into a disc, epitomizes Stein's pervasive and determined commitment to interactivity. The icon encapsulates one of Stein's most well-known

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dictums: "Books are random access—you can read a sentence twice or go back and look up a reference. Books are a user-driven medium versus a producer-driven medium like film. What we do [at Voyager] is to transform a producer-driven medium into a user-driven one."[7] Interactivity was a mandate at Criterion and Voyager, and this emphasis was instilled insistently upon its employees. Isaac Mizrahi, head of production in 1986–1991 and currently vice president of broadcast-video production and postproduction at the Weinstein Company, recalls Stein urging him to "take the laserdisc and remote and lock yourself in a room for a day and figure out all the things you can do with it." Working alongside staff who were producing Voyager's interactive CD-ROMs and Expanded Book projects, employees from the company's different divisions often competed to see "who could be the most interactive."[8]

Until 1990, when she opened the international division of Voyager in Paris, Aleen Stein organized the day-to-day operations of the company in the widest sense: she proofread essays and liner notes; coproduced and edited laserdiscs and CD-ROMs; participated in discussions of supplement choices; devised novel ways of marketing the company's products; and oversaw sales, distribution, employee relations, and bookkeeping. For the collaborative work that took place at Criterion, certain conditions had to prevail, and Aleen Stein was fundamental in instituting and maintaining them. Before becoming one of the partners of The Criterion Collection and Voyager in 1985, Ms. Stein had organized dozens of chapters for the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s, formed a West Coast chapter of the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association, and led its first women's delegation to China in 1974. Such organizational skills were fundamental to the collaborative work that took place at Criterion. Stein's summary of the company's strengths in its early years implies the difficulty of this task: "The identification of great content, the allowing of creativity without bureaucratic or arbitrary limits set on it, the talent of all the contributors, and the community which attracted these talented and creative people, and who in turn created it."[9] Her efforts combined a deep understanding of organizations as well as a willingness to implement her plans personally. Until the staff grew to about 45 people, she cooked lunch for everyone. The communal lunch enabled staff from both divisions of the company to exchange ideas on a variety of projects daily. Such interventions were crucial to creating a community of people "around a principle."[10] As Ms. Stein

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further clarifies,

> Bob and I started the collection, but without Jon [Turell] and Bill [Becker] and Janus, it wouldn't have been significant, merely an eclectic collection of films with supplements. Janus' collection of films, Jon's, Bill's, and Peter's [Becker] film knowledge, along with the unique team built up, with each of our various contributions, resulted in a "magic" combination that made it something enduring and highly respected. As such, it was more than the sum of its parts, more than the sum of each of our contributions as we all made it something unique in the history of film.[11]

If one considers the volatility inherent in this mix of founding personalities—on one side a deep knowledge of a particular product and its place within a niche market, on the other a dedication to the open-ended pursuit of such abstractions as interactivity and new technology—one appreciates the alchemy necessary to the maintenance of the organization.

The organization that emerged was an unusual one. The Steins sought to create a working atmosphere consonant with their political convictions—one that minimized hierarchy and allowed for personal autonomy. While managers and producers had business cards, their titles did not appear on them. Opposed to the idea of secretaries, the Steins encouraged laserdisc and CD-ROM producers, video graphic designers, and technical staff to do their own clerical work. Women were able to bring young children to work; hours were flexible for those with young families. Some employees arrived as early as 6:00 A. M., whereas others did not leave the premises until 4:00 A. M. While there were different areas of responsibility—creative, technical, and administrative—work on special edition laserdiscs was a process in which everyone involved collaborated: the producer, assistant producers, film-to-tape supervisor, audio essay recorders and editors, still frame designers, supplement designers, and interviewers all had input.

From 1985 to 1986, the staff consisted of six to eight people, some of whom were family members. Bob Stein was head of laserdisc operations from 1984 to 1986, after which point his attentions were focused largely on Voyager's other products. He was succeeded in this role by Isaac Mizrahi (1986–1991), Curtis Wong (late 1990–1991), Michael Nash (1991–January 1994), and Peter Becker (1994–present).[12]

Criterion's early days were rambunctious, colorful, and intense. Production had more in common with high-tech start-up companies

than with the film industry or high-end audiophile firms. The company's first address, printed on the laserdiscs' back cover, was 2139 Manning Avenue, Los Angeles—the Steins' home. While the company also had a warehouse, all the production work was initially conducted here. As more employees were hired, the Steins rented a nearby house to create additional office space. Aleen's son by an earlier marriage, Morgan Holly, strung a wire 25 feet in the air so that phones and computers would operate in both houses. After the fire department ordered the dismantling of the wire, the Steins moved operations in 1988 to 1351 Pacific Coast Highway, the site of a former Veterans of Foreign Wars hall on Santa Monica beach, a space that would ultimately accommodate staff when the Voyager Company, at the height of its CD-ROM production in the early 1990s, grew to more than 100.

Open floor plans and large rooms with desks rather than cubbyholes or smaller offices further enhanced possibilities for interaction among the staff. We mention these particulars to highlight the way in which the working environment at The Criterion Collection, while it was based in Los Angeles from 1984 to 1994, differed from what prevailed at Hollywood studios and other film distribution facilities. Collaboration by design, an emphasis on interactivity, exploration of a new technology for delivering "great content," a "communal," "bohemian," "laid back," and "vibrant" environment all combined to make Voyager an unusually stimulating place to work.[13]

As word of mouth spread about the innovative work taking place at Voyager, the company had little difficulty attracting employees. Aleen Stein characterizes the company's hires broadly: "There wasn't a 'type' of person we were looking for—just creative people who weren't afraid of an unusual company like ours."[14] Initially the Steins placed help wanted advertisements in free venues. Isaac Mizrahi, an English major at UCLA, discovered that the company had openings from an advertisement posted on the university's job board. Having worked on documentaries at UCLA, Mizrahi's skills dovetailed perfectly with Bob Stein's desire to produce laserdiscs with well-edited supplements. Some hires came through the company's Janus connection: Karen Stetler, now a senior DVD producer at Criterion, had assisted William Becker and the Turells with film distribution. Film journalist Bruce Eder, who was to record a number of commentary tracks, had been a writer-in-residence for Janus. In some cases, hires took place through internal connections: Eric Saks, a laserdisc producer, recruited and trained Mark Rance, who had studied documentary

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filmmaking in college. Sean Anderson, another laserdisc producer, began working for the company as a summer intern after studying film at the University of Colorado. Anderson in turn recruited Susan Arosteguy, also a film studies graduate of the University of Colorado. Julia Jones, another Colorado recruit, began working for the company as an intern in 1986 after meeting Morgan Holly at a peace march, later becoming the video graphic design director and producing or assisting in the production of laserdiscs from 1988 to 1994.

Bob Stein occasionally sought out and hired some persons directly: he convinced both Michael Nash, then curator of media arts at the Long Beach Museum of Art, and Nash's then wife Rebekah Behrendt (now Rebekah Audic) to abandon their museum jobs to work at Voyager. Behrendt was the company's art director from 1991 to 1994. Nash, in turn, hired Michael Kurcfeld, the art editor of the *LA Weekly*, to work as a laserdisc producer. Curtis Wong, a graduate of UCLA and technology consultant, was recruited by Stein to work on both CD-ROMs and laserdiscs at Voyager after the two met at the Los Angeles Unified School District to which Wong had invited Stein to give a talk on interactive videodiscs. If some hires were affected by design or through internal connections, at least one significant hire occurred by chance. Bob Stein met Maria Palazzola, Criterion's now-legendary telecine engineer, while editing Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* in 1987.[15] Palazzola has worked steadily for Criterion and remains one of the company's most important members, nothing less than the person, who, as Stein declares, "makes everything look so damn good."[16]

The contributions of Palazzola and Morgan Holly, two of the company's "unsung heroes,"[17] cannot be overestimated. Production on Criterion titles usually begins with a search for the best available film elements for the creation of the transfer (sections of film negative culled from release prints). Such elements are often scattered and fragmentary, kept in storage in major studios in Los Angeles or in institutional or family film archives elsewhere in the world. Palazzola's tenacity in tracking down long-lost film elements is formidable, and her visual memory prodigious. Moreover, her determination to produce the best transfer possible has led to many innovations. Karen Stetler credits Palazzola with being the first telecine engineer to invite cinematographers and directors to collaborate on the process. Palazzola made a personal visit to Eastman Kodak's headquarters in Rochester, New York, in order to convince the company to develop low-contrast film so that dark scenes in films could be properly viewed on television,

a high-contrast medium. Palazzola's highest priority echoes that of Criterion's founders—to present the film as the filmmaker would have wanted. But her own words, here taken from a short essay appended to the laserdisc version of Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, demonstrate the difficulties inherent in Criterion's often-repeated and deceptively simple aim:

> Film-to-tape transfer is an interpretive art form. Many artistic decisions must be made without resorting to scientifically established criteria. You have to do the best research to identify the premier element, communicate extensively with the filmmaker about his/her vision for the film, and try to recreate in a different medium something which was originally created for film.

To achieve these goals, Palazzola quips: "We don't tweak the image, we tweak the technology."[18] Her abiding commitment to this principle, and the complexity of the transfer process, has occasionally resulted in challenging moments. Palazzola recalls showing Tak Fujimoto, the cinematographer for Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs,* a first-run transfer she had made (still lacking the interpositive) from a duplicate negative. When Fujimoto showed reluctance to help with the timing (color correction) of the film,[19] Palazzola explained, "We (Criterion) are doing this to preserve the look of the film. It's better if you help." Ultimately, the interpositive was furnished, and when Fujimoto returned two months later to see a rough version of the transfer, he became so excited that he began assisting with the timing of the telecine immediately. Upon leaving the screening room, he queried Palazzola on her opinion of the best laserdisc players on the market.[20] Fujimoto's conversion is revealing: initially skeptical, he became a laserdisc convert after seeing the quality of Palazzola's transfer.

Fujimoto's confidence, while perhaps more hard-won than that of other cinematographers, is not rare. Curtis Wong's recollections further attest to the gratitude that many filmmakers felt upon seeing their works restored: "One of the great joys of producing a Criterion film was the occasional time when I'd get to go through the finished laserdisc with the director. Their films had suffered 'death by a thousand cuts' over the years, and for them to see their work restored in beautiful detail and color with the commentaries and supplements to tell the back story gave them an immense feeling of satisfaction. It was their legacy and it was an incredible honor [for me] to be able play a part in preserving it."[21]

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The transfer of *Jason and the Argonauts* exemplifies the pains taken by Criterion. Studios typically release prints that have themselves been copied from others. In each generation, the resolution is degraded. The Criterion practice, which recalls that of editing printed texts, was to find elements as close to the original material as possible—a negative, if available, or an interpositive. While this means that the transfer must be color timed—an onerous undertaking—it also ensures the best possible copy. Wong recalls that the negative for *Jason and the Argonauts* was unavailable, but that two interpositives, both somewhat deteriorated, were obtainable. A composite, formed from the best elements from each interpositive, was produced. During the timing, Wong worked closely with Ray Harryhausen, associate producer of the film and special effects designer, to ensure that scenes printed incorrectly in the release prints (such as a day-for-night scene, rendered as a daylight sequence, and made incongruous by the presence of torches) were restored. As a result, the laserdisc transfer, according to some who worked on the original film, looked better than the release in terms of both resolution and color.[22]

Morgan Holly has been no less indispensable. Something of an engineering whiz as a teenager, Holly was technical director for both The Criterion Collection and Voyager. He oversaw several of the company's early innovations, such as the use of computers in the editing process as well as the early introduction of software programs such as CoSA (later known as After Effects). For Holly, the most engaging aspects of the work were "researching the materials, coming up with an intriguing presentation, and utilizing the technologies in unique ways."[23] Holly's ease with technical material enabled him to develop new ways of eliciting viewers' engagement with film. These skills were especially helpful under the tighter constraints of the laserdisc, which has much less capacity than a DVD and is essentially a linear format. Often some ingenuity is involved in getting the most out of a laserdisc player, an ability to rethink the presentation of the remote or a clever reorientation of existing functions. To present the two versions of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind,* Holly programmed each side of the laserdisc so that viewers could insert scenes from the special edition by using the search function of the remote. In addition, Holly also devised a way to incorporate 90 minutes of interviews into the 30 minutes of space remaining on the laserdisc by creating a split screen that showed a scene and two different speakers, each with his own audio channel. For Francis Ford Coppola's production of *Bram Stoker's Dracula,* Holly created an editing workshop that

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presents different takes of a scene in which Mina Murray (Wynona Ryder) and Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves) bid one another farewell. After viewing different deliveries of each line of dialogue, users select their preferences by keying in the chapter numbers superimposed over the letterbox at the bottom of the screen, and then watch the resulting version. Holly, who adheres closely to Orson Welles's famous dictum, "The enemy of art is the absence of limitations," found many ways of circumventing the restrictions of laserdiscs.

The communal atmosphere the Steins sought to inculcate, a conflation of workplace and home, made for a working environment that was unique and memorable.[24] In this heady atmosphere, as Rebekah Behrendt recalls, "you were as likely to see Bob and Aleen's daughter viewing a VHS tape of her own birth on the common television as you would be to hear 'David Bowie on the line for Michael Nash' over the speaker phone."[25] Michael Kurcfeld, who worked at Criterion from 1991 to 1993 as a laserdisc producer, adds, "It felt like a lair of tech-enamored bohemians. . . . The company style was '70s laid-back mixed with intense intellectual ferment and communalism, reflecting the style of visionary-founder Bob Stein."[26] Named one of "25 cool companies" by *Fortune* magazine in 1993, Criterion attracted a wide range of eminent visitors.[27] Among the visitors to the Santa Monica offices to participate in projects or simply to learn more about Voyager's activities were techno-thriller writer Michael Crichton, counterculture icon Timothy Leary, cognitive scientist Donald Norman, president of Apple Computer John Scully, computer scientist Alan Kay, physicist and Nobel laureate Murray Gell-Mann, biologist Steven Jay Gould, cellist Yo Yo Ma, and film critic Roger Ebert—not to mention numerous directors. Open house, held every few months, offered venues for visitors to view the company's latest products. This freewheeling, energized atmosphere, in which employees felt themselves to be figurative voyagers, engendered great affection for the company. Many former employees characterize each production, be it a laserdisc, the Expanded Books Project, CD-ROM, or the packaging of these materials as a "genuine labor of love," invariably adding that the emphasis was "never about the money" but developing the best product possible.[28] As Michael Nash recalls:

> The work environment was frenetic, at times even a little chaotic. This wasn't a "management by objectives" corporation; we were making up the rules as we went and there was little formal managerial process outside what was necessary to deliver the projects themselves. People

> worked insanely hard because we cared so much about what we were doing. The company's ownership prized innovation and excellence, and in the end ideas and passion always prevailed over resource limits or workplace politics. In many ways [Criterion] was a prototype for the new media entrepreneurship that transformed the entertainment business in the '90s.[29]

The conviction that all involved were working toward one end, the fervor to follow the imperatives of a new technology, the insistence on excellence, and the latitude to pursue projects with little interference have left many former employees with memories that verge on a kind of nostalgia. There is nothing comparable to being on the cutting edge, in terms of both organizational structure and technology.

Bob Stein conceived of himself as a publisher and the company's laserdiscs as "definitive editions" worthy of inclusion in a library or film archive.[30] The notion of a definitive edition was no less an informing principle than the commitment to making every product as interactive as possible. The icon of a book morphing into a disc suggested this implicitly; the scholarly bibliography on many of the laserdiscs produced in the first years is an example of the transformation of theory into practice. To follow the company's productions after *Citizen Kane* and *King Kong* is to trace the birth of a new critical form—the annotated film or special edition laserdisc.[31] Although the next few laserdiscs (Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* and *The 39 Steps,* and Carroll Reed's *The Third Man*—all released quickly in 1985 upon the formation of the partnership with Janus) were not accompanied by special features, the following year saw the release of a wide range of acknowledged classics with supplementary materials (George Stevens's *Swing Time,* Ronald Neames's *Tunes of Glory* and *The Horse's Mouth,* Orson Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons,* Fred Zinneman's *High Noon,* and Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*).[32] The titles reflect a shrewd mixture of great Hollywood films and foreign classics from the Janus collection. As Stein explains, "When introducing a new format and concept, we weren't going to sell the content too." Stein's objective was to take a "cultural warhorse"—be it *High Noon* or *Beethoven's 9th Symphony* (Voyager's first CD-ROM, published in 1991)—and "return it to the people," hoping that users might look at these works "with a new eye."[33]

Taking advantage of the storage capacity of laserdiscs, the production teams added an ever-widening array of materials to their

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productions—trailers, text interviews with directors, storyboard and film comparisons, information on the screenplay, and behind-the-scenes materials. *Swing Time* includes a lively commentary by John Mueller, author of *Astaire Dancing: The Musical Films* (1985); behind-the-scenes production stills; and an excerpt from the musical *Hooray for Love* (1935), featuring performances by Bojangles Robinson and Fats Waller.[34] *The Magnificent Ambersons* offers a commentary and three-part visual essay by film scholar Robert Carringer. Neames's two films are accompanied by an excerpt from a documentary, *The Art of Film—The Many Roles of Alec Guinness*. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* provides a commentary by film scholar Maurice Yacowar, the original trailer, and the text of an interview with director Don Siegel. *High Noon* includes a commentary by UCLA film scholar Howard Suber; the original trailer; storyboards and photos from producer Stanley Kramer's personal collection; screenwriter Carl Foreman's notes on the story of *High Noon;* and the entire text of John W. Cunningham's "The Tin Star," the short story on which the film is based. Ultimately, the production of the supplements was a somewhat fitful venture: of the 384 laserdiscs produced by Criterion between 1984 and 1998, less than one-third contain ancillary materials.[35] The reasons why some films have no supplements vary. At times, cost and availability of staffing was a factor; at others no elements were available. Some directors, notably Ingmar Bergman, were uninterested in participating in the production of laserdiscs of their films. Other directors, preferring that their films speak for themselves, found the concept of special features either problematic in itself or distracting to viewers. Finally, Criterion was frequently under duress to issue works at announced release dates.

While most laserdiscs were issued in the CLV format, the overwhelming majority of Criterion's releases emerged in CAV. This latter format, which permitted freeze frame and variable slow motion, allowed viewers to examine the mise-en-scène and camera movements in ways that had been reserved largely for film professionals. The temporal flow of film—ungovernable in theatrical presentation, only crudely accessible in videotape exhibition—was now under the control of the viewer. The "new eye" sought by Stein for audiences had a technical as well as a figural dimension, as such tools allowed for a different kind of viewing.[36] It's clear what Stein had in mind from one feature he developed for *Citizen Kane,* the "Five-Minute Kane," which presents an accelerated version of the film. One might dismiss this feature as a bit of childishness, something on the order of toying

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with a film projector, running it backward or changing the speed for the sheer joy of making the familiar strange. But this misses the real point behind this venture. The accelerated version is a critical tool by which students of film can gain a rapid understanding of the sequence of scenes and even the arrangement of shots. By distorting the film, we can see something of its deeper patterns and continuities.

To highlight Criterion's innovative and interactive presentation of films, Stein commissioned two new icons for the company—a hand-held remote with buttons and a projector. The first encourages viewers to explore the extra materials on the company's CAV discs by employing the laserdisc player's different functions; the second highlights the company's commitment to presenting films in their original aspect ratio. As has been well documented, The Criterion Collection was the first company to implement this practice. While letterboxing (preserving the original framing with black bars used at the top and bottom of the television screen) is common today, so-called pan and scan versions of films, in which the sides of a frame were cropped to fit the dimensions of a television screen, were the norm in the 1970s and 1980s.[37] Since *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the company's seventh title, Criterion has been firmly committed to presenting every film in its original aspect ratio.

The practice of inviting film historians and scholars to record audio commentaries represents another example of the company's efforts to engage and educate viewers. Howard Suber was one of the first film scholars to collaborate with Criterion. Having long been an advocate of close readings of films, Suber was eager to participate in a medium that would allow for the inclusion of a commentary "in real time."[38] He recalls preparing his commentary to *High Noon* for months. Using a stopwatch, Suber practiced at home, timing his interventions in such a way that his remarks would not interfere with key dialogues in specific scenes. (Unfortunately, these efforts proved futile once Suber saw that conditions in the recording studio, at that time, were far more rudimentary than what he expected.) Suber was deeply involved in the work on *High Noon*: he accompanied Stein to the studio vault in which reels of the film were stored and worked with the telecine engineer on the transfer. He recalls the entire enterprise as a "labor of love."[39] Criterion's practice of eliciting the involvement of film historians, journalists, and scholars continues to this day. Over the course of more than 20 years, numerous film historians, scholars, and journalists—among them Rudy Behlmer, Andrew Sarris, Peter Bondanella, Marshall Brickman, Peter Cowie, Bruce Eder, Molly

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Haskell, Roger Ebert, Ian Christie, Pauline Kael, David Erhenstein, and Elvis Mitchell—have written essays or recorded commentary tracks on films for The Criterion Collection.[40]

Among these critics and scholars, Bruce Eder has been one of the most frequent contributors. After reading an article Eder had written on a lawsuit Janus had filed over unlicensed showings of *The Third Man, The Lady Vanishes*, and *The 39 Steps* for an alternative New Jersey newspaper, *The Aquarian Weekly*, Jonathan Turell hired him as writer-in-residence for Janus films. Eder began by preparing press releases, writing catalog copy, and evaluating film-to-tape transfers. Initially his involvement in the company's laserdiscs was peripheral. But after Janus acquired the rights to Richard Lester's *Help* and *A Hard Day's Night*, Eder, also a music critic, became gradually more involved. He oversaw the transfer for *Help* and determined the chapter divisions. Subsequently, Eder wrote liner notes for numerous laserdiscs; suggested titles for possible future laserdiscs (*The Blob*, *Jason and the Argonauts*, and *The Devil and Daniel Webster*); and later recorded commentary tracks for a number of films, among them Michael Powell's *49th Parallel* and *The Tales of Hoffman,* Anthony Asquith's *The Browning Version,* Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts,* John Sturges's *The Great Escape*, and Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People*. Eder, whose work was always conducted in Janus's New York office, recalls his working procedures vividly. For *Jason and the Argonauts*, Eder recorded his commentary around "gaps" that had been keyed to a time-coded edition of the film by coproducer Curtis Wong, who had earlier interviewed the film's producer and effects designer, Ray Harryhausen. Eder recorded his comments around Harryhausen's answers. The circumstances of the recording exemplify the improvisational flair of many who worked on Criterion's laserdiscs. Recording the commentary at a professional facility in New York in the early 1990s would have cost $500 an hour. To save money, Eder rented a digital audio tape (DAT) recording machine for $150 a day, located the only acoustically dead spot in Janus's New York office (the space under Jonathan Turell's desk), and recorded his commentary when Turell was out of the office.[41]

In fact, Eder's accounts of the preparation for his commentaries, like those of others who worked on Criterion laserdiscs, reveal an extraordinary commitment. For such an undertaking, which he compares to "running a marathon" or "scaling Mt. Whitney," Eder would typically immerse himself in the film for two to six months. After screening it seven or eight times, Eder would then proceed to the

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research stage, much of which was conducted in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.[42] Eder's recollections reveal the difficulties of condensing rich material for CAV laserdiscs, which were limited to 29 minutes of material on each side. Tourneur's *Cat People* was among the most challenging. According to Eder:

> Like almost all of Val Lewton's movies it is very tightly structured and edited, yet it is incredibly thick with content—images that demand comment and analysis, ideas that are put there in front of you, in the foreground in certain scenes and the subtext in other scenes. But there are hardly any openings of more than a few seconds before something else is coming along that demands comment.... Sometimes, you just end up discarding whole sections of observations that you started with...as you realize that there's no chance to use it, and also that you may well have discovered levels of meaning in the course of your work that make your original direction and content less important.[43]

Viewers familiar with Eder's commentaries would readily accede that he has realized admirably his goal of illuminating "something of the humanity behind the films, the thought processes and some of the elements from life and work that went into what we're seeing."[44] In comparing the differences in recording commentaries between laserdiscs and DVDs, Eder notes that commentaries for the latter format require more preparation because of their greater storage capacity. With more space available, Eder concedes that it is more "daunting to try and fill it. I feel like a pointillist, like Seurat, only the canvas has grown to ten times the size—and that's a lot of little blobs of paint." Like the notes to an engaging scholarly edition, the richly detailed commentary tracks served to fulfill Bob Stein's belief that classic works, be they films or books, could be reenvisioned by viewers who availed themselves of the supplementary materials included on Criterion's laserdiscs. Just as the curious reader might reread a book with new eyes after reading essays on or hearing a discussion of it, so might the engaged viewer attend to new particulars after hearing information about the aims and intentions of a film's creators.

Stein was instrumental in encouraging his staff to think broadly about supplementary materials and the viewer. As Isaac Mizrahi recalls, Bob Stein would often initiate work on a new film by asking, "What is the best thing we can do with this?"[45] Such exhortations inspired the staff to find new ways of exploiting the capacity of laserdiscs to store multiple audio tracks, and to develop new ways for users to engage the various audio, textual, and visual information

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inserted among the supplementary materials. While a general procedure eventually took shape, various early producers—among them Julia Jones, Karen Stetler, Morgan Holly, Mark Rance, Curtis Wong, and Sean Anderson—underscore that the process of production for laserdiscs was "organic" and that there were often variations in the order in which work proceeded.[46] Julia Jones recalls the enthusiasm, pride in workmanship, and freedom of the early days at Criterion vividly: "We were a group of people with a lot of freedom and did not have to bow to anyone's approval but our own. We also loved the materials we were working with so making them look bad was not an option."[47]

Procedures for supplements varied widely, depending on the age of the film and availability of elements relating to preproduction, production, and postproduction. In the case of some contemporary films such as David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers,* Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters,* and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil,* "boxes and boxes" of materials were available. Work on *Dead Ringers* proceeded smoothly from the onset. Producer Karen Stetler and coproducer Susan Arosteguy found abundant materials in Cronenberg's Toronto storage bins—all meticulously labeled—including models of the twins' famous "Mantle retractor" as well as the infamous tools for operating on mutant women. The content of the supplements, such as the feature on how Cronenberg achieved the "twinning effects," was decided upon after Stetler examined what the director had saved from behind-the-scenes footage. Stetler interviewed David Cronenberg, Jeremy Irons, cinematographer Peter Suschitzky, editor Ronald Sanders, and production designer Carol Spier separately for the audio commentary and then edited these materials to give the impression of one seamless track. The materials for Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters* were no less carefully organized. The two producers, Aleen Stein and Morgan Holly, drove to the home of Joe Medjuck, one of the film's producers, and packed everything into a van. The boxes contained everything from storyboards, miniatures, and correspondence to drawings of the ghosts. Stein and Holly then spread the materials on the floor and divided them into related "story piles": "You must mold a story around a mass of material," Holly explains. The eventual release (on CAV) offers two deleted scenes, split-screen comparisons of a number of scenes before and after the special effects were added, storyboards, and a screenplay that included scenes and dialogues excised from the film. In this particular case, the ideas for some of the supplements were derived from Don Shay's *Making Ghostbusters* (1985), which

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is listed in the bibliography. All supplementary materials were edited in-house using Mac Paintbox for graphic design and layout using techniques honed by Morgan Holly and Julia Jones. Doing this work in-house enabled the company to cut costs considerably. Jones, who worked on numerous titles from 1986 to 1994, helped reduce costs further by photographing and digitizing material for supplements and visual essays.[48]

With respect to older films such as Michael Powell's *The Red Shoes* and *Black Narcissus,* producer Karen Stetler located elements for the supplements from surviving members of the crew, their estates, and film archives. Much research was also conducted in libraries. For Peter Brooks's *Lord of the Flies,* producer Mark Rance, working in conjunction with Maria Palazzola, obtained outtakes from the original negative to illustrate how the director shot the film using cinema verité techniques and makeshift dollies. In some instances, new materials were created for older titles: Rance, for example, made biographical documentaries on the director (Anthony Mann) and producer (Sam Bronstein) of *El Cid*. When no materials existed, as was the case with Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, producers had to be more inventive. The two producers, Morgan Holly and Julia Jones, decided to illuminate the social context and era of the film's content by assembling a fascinating array of commercials, advertisements, and documentaries pertaining to the Cold War scanned from archival material in libraries. The numerous public service announcements among the visual stills urging Americans to "duck and cover" in the event of a nuclear attack evoke a nostalgia, albeit a disturbingly eerie one. As the above examples show, virtually none of the extra features one now encounters on DVDs had not appeared in some form on Criterion laserdiscs. At least one Criterion production, Barbra Streisand's *Prince of Tides,* includes the gag reel that has recently become so ubiquitous on DVDs. Curtis Wong created a prototype of the first Easter egg (a hidden feature on DVDs) for *Jason and the Argonauts* by appending production footage of the skeleton sequence that he had found on the original negative of the film to the last disc after the color bars.

The production of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* is legendary among Criterion staff not only for its excellence but also for the unusual amount of time required for completion. Unlike most laserdiscs, which were produced in three to four months, work on *Brazil* took more than two years. Having produced Gilliam's *Fisher King* earlier, the company had secured the rights to produce laserdiscs of his other films by assuring the director that each title would receive the

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by-now-famous Criterion treatment. Gilliam could not have been disappointed. Produced by Sean Anderson, the five-disc set includes the 142-minute European theatrical release, the 131-minute American release, and the 97-minute version released by Universal Pictures. The three screenwriters (Tom Stoppard, Charles McKeown, Terry Gilliam) provide interviews in which they speak openly about their mixed experiences in preproduction. The composer and costume designer furnish less fraught but equally revealing accounts of production. In addition, the edition features an unusually frank documentary shot during the film's production, and, in a second documentary, *The Battle of Brazil: A Video History*, *Los Angeles Times* film reviewer Jack Mathews recounts the struggle between Gilliam and Universal for control of the final cut of the film.[49] There are two audio tracks: Gilliam on the 142-minute European release (his authorized version) and film scholar David Morgan on the studio's 97-minute one.[50] The disc is well worth watching for an understanding of what has been lost in current DVD supplements—candid discussion of problems related to the making of any film. *The Battle of Brazil*, in tracing the disagreements between director and studio, has a directness and antagonism that would certainly be excised in today's litigation-averse climate. Gilliam's original interview, six hours of material covering preproduction, production, and postproduction of the film, was edited to fit the 142-minute version, and it stands as one of the richest and most dense audio commentaries to date. Detailed visual essays provide analysis of everything from props, publicity stills, and shooting locations, to summaries and storyboards of the film's dream sequences. The plethora of ancillary materials for *Brazil* anticipates multidisc boxed sets of DVDs for films such as the *Star Wars* and *LOTR*. Ultimately Anderson's success in acquiring such an abundance of documentary material for this particular film helped establish another Criterion procedure, namely a preference for acquiring documentaries from other sources rather than creating them internally.

The increasing complexity of supplements required considerable rigor in planning. Once producers completed documentaries, the recording and editing of any audio tracks, and other extras, they had to calculate exactly how much material there was in terms of frames of materials for still frame examination, and then key and time code this material for each side of the laserdisc. Producers typically created detailed schematics or worksheets to chart every detail. Yet again, considerable ingenuity was involved in exploiting new technologies. As Curtis Wong recalls, "Back then [in the early 1990s] it

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was a pretty innovative process of using Macintoshes to do almost everything. We had all the images and composites of still frames with text all generated as individual image files on the Mac that we would then lay on to master digital videotapes that we would combine later with the master of the film. We also edited all the commentary tracks digitally on Macintoshes with hugely expensive five gigabyte drives and then took the edited audio files and laid that to the D1 digital video master."[51]

Some innovations are technological: others were enabled by technology. In 1990, Criterion pioneered another important and now familiar feature—the director commentary track. Up to this point, film journalists or scholars had provided virtually all audio commentaries.[52] During the brainstorming session on Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver,* however, Karen Stetler, who had had previous dealings with the director while working at Janus Films, proposed approaching Scorsese directly for the commentary track. To everyone's surprise, Scorsese agreed. The entire incident is etched in the minds of those involved—not only Stetler, who produced the disc, but also Isaac Mizrahi and Morgan Holly, who flew to New York to record the commentary. This milestone event took place in the most unprepossessing of locations: a dusty storage room in Janus's New York office. In addition to being impressed by Scorsese's sartorial splendor—he arrived wearing bell-bottom trousers and a big buckled belt—Holly recalls that he wired the director with a lavaliere microphone because Scorsese wanted to walk around as he watched the film (on a 12-inch television monitor, another reminder of working conditions in the early days). Shortly after revealing that he had not seen the film since its release, Scorsese announced his cinematic objectives in his inimitable rapid fire delivery: "I see things quickly.... I've tried to formulate it into a style. It's literally like taking the eyes and heads of the people in the audience by the back of the hair and forcing them to see things by different cuts and camera moves, the way I see them."[53] This excited declaration became one of the first statements one hears on the audio track. Scorsese's comments had an immediacy and precision that made the resulting commentary electric. As Holly sums up the experience, "it kicked us into a new gear." The ultimate result was Criterion's Director Approved Series, a new label, prominently displayed with the filmmaker's signature, which appeared on all productions that featured director commentary tracks.[54]

By 1988, Criterion was generating about $3,000,000 annually in laserdisc sales.[55] Michael Nash estimates that between 1991 and

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1993, the company was producing 40 to 45 laserdiscs a year with a staff of four to six producers.[56] Notwithstanding this success, by the late 1980s, laserdisc production had become, in Holly's phrase, something of a "red-haired stepchild" to Voyager as its CD-ROM products assumed prominence. Greater divisions and changes ensued soon after. In 1990, Aleen Stein moved to Paris to set up the European office of Voyager. In 1994, Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrinck, a German company anxious to expand into the electronic realm, purchased a 20 percent share of Voyager for $6.75 million.[57] The four principal founders (Bob Stein, Aleen Stein, Jonathan Turell, William Becker) each retained a 20 percent share. In 1994, The Criterion Collection transferred the production of their laserdiscs to Irvington, New York. One year later, in 1995, Morgan Holly, Alita Holly, and Julia Jones left to create a new media venture, Organa, with Aleen Stein. The Steins divorced in 1995. In 1996, Bob Stein left Voyager as a result of disagreements over the future direction of the company, subsequently focusing his attentions on Night Kitchen, a multimedia publishing company.[58] With his departure, the company's holdings were now divided among the three remaining principal partners: Aleen Stein, William Becker, and Jonathan Turell.[59] Voyager, like many CD-ROM publishing ventures, did not survive the twin threats of the advent of the World Wide Web and a market glutted with mediocre CD-ROMs. By the late 1990s, the company had broken up. Criterion was now on its own, albeit with a wealth of distinguished productions under its belt, a solid reputation based on its commitment to excellence, and finely honed procedures for fitting supplements to film.

Criterion in New York, 1994–Present

Although the staff was considerably reduced, enough key personnel remained to ensure continuity. Under CEO Jonathan Turell and publisher Peter Becker, who headed production, The Criterion Collection continued producing laserdiscs until 1998. Morgan Holly, Julia Jones, Sean Anderson, and Mark Rance were among the staff who moved to New York in 1994. Maria Palazzola and Lee Kline continued to work on the film-to-video transfers. But despite its success and reputation, Criterion faced difficult decisions as DVD technology matured. While the first DVDs were released in the United States on March 25, 1997, Criterion did not issue a DVD until roughly one year later.[60] On November 10, 1997, the company issued a press release announcing what would be their first films on DVD—Alfred Hitchock's *The*

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Lady Vanishes, Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, Federico Fellini's *Amarcord*, Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*, François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Jean Renoir's *The Grand Illusion*, John Woo's *Hard Boiled* and *The Killer*, and Roy Baker's *A Night to Remember*.[61] The selection of titles represents a canny mix of some of the most distinguished works from the Janus holdings and two contemporary hits for which Criterion had negotiated DVD licensing rights. There are many reasons for the company's comparatively slow move to DVD. Sean Anderson, who was involved in overseeing the switch, describes 1997–1998 as a "transitional period for the company."[62] Comments from Peter Becker in a December 1999 interview reveal his preoccupations with a variety of issues:

> We had to be sensitive, honestly, to our laserdisc customer base. And one of the questions was "should we abandon the laserdisc and run for DVD?" Or should we hate DVD, because it's jeopardizing laser? There's an awful lot of discussion going on there. And our first concerns about DVD compression were enormous. We were used to looking at an uncompressed video signal, an analog. One big, fat analog signal, which when it was clean was gorgeous and when it was noisy, it was noisy. And we worked really hard on making sure that our pressings were as clean as they could possibly be.... I think there was a lot of discussion about whether DVD was going to be as good as laserdisc. And I think our concern was that we didn't want to be in DVD until we felt we could make it as good or better.[63]

As Becker's comments reveal, a certain apprehensiveness underlay the company's initial response to the new medium. The company was anxious not to alienate its customer base of both cinéphiles devoted to laserdiscs and "digitally obsessed" fans, who were keen to see Criterion titles on DVD.[64] During this transitional phase, technical director Lee Kline showed the New York staff a split-screen comparison of New Line Cinema's DVD of David Fincher's *Se7en* to Criterion's earlier laserdisc of the film. The demonstration was compelling: the superior picture quality of DVDs was patently manifest.[65] The choice of *Se7en* to demonstrate his argument was, in its own right, fitting: the fact that its producer was Criterion alumnus Mark Rance, recently hired by Michael Mulvihill at New Line Cinema to head its platinum series of DVDs, subtly underscores the continuities under this apparent shift to the new medium.

Archived answers to questions on the merits of the two formats on an earlier version of the company's website offer a glimpse into

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the animated discussions that took place between the company and its clients. After one particularly detailed critique of DVDs from one fan, the final response in this thread comes from Morgan Holly. While Holly was no longer with the company, this intervention from the company's former technical director was nothing less than preemptive. It solidified authoritatively Criterion's move to DVD production.[66]

Other concerns underlay Criterion's cautious move to the DVD format as well.[67] In the early days of laserdisc, Bob Stein's much repeated insistence on innovation and experiment matched the variety and urgency of a number of problems inherent to an emerging technology. As Criterion met these challenges and established procedures, technical innovation understandably became less of an imperative. With maturity and an established market, caution and incremental improvement of a product had replaced the vertiginous pleasure of novelty. A mature company tends not so much to exploit technology in new ways as to employ new technology to do the same things better. The swift acceptance of the DVD format was anything but assured in 1997, and Criterion, with its robust customer base, could be assured of revenue from laserdisc sales for at least another year from its loyal adherents.[68] Moreover, as Aleen Stein recalls, the remaining partners were also aware that offerings in the new format would be more limited. The growth of home video meant that the company would not be able to procure licensing rights for DVD with the same facility with which they had leased titles from studios for laserdisc production.[69] While Criterion had been able to procure nonexclusive rights to Hollywood classics when studios had little interest in the sales generated from a niche product such as laserdiscs, this was not the case with DVDs.[70] The roughly $600,000 in sales generated by one of Criterion's best-selling laserdiscs, *Blade Runner,* pales in comparison with the revenue generated from DVDs of blockbusters such as Peter Jackson's *LOTR* or the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix*, figures bolstered by massive advertising campaigns. Sales from various DVD releases of *The Fellowship of the Ring* alone were $498.4 million in mid-2004.[71] In such a market, Criterion cannot hope to obtain licensing rights to produce DVDs of popular studio films.[72]

As a result, The Criterion Collection has had to delve deeper into its holdings from the Janus archive. While the company continues to issue DVDs of "important contemporary films," there are significantly fewer major studio films on its DVD list. The most distinctive features of Criterion's first DVDs—as well as all subsequent ones—lay in the

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eminence of the film and the magnificent quality of the transfer. Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* furnishes a particularly stunning example of the company's commitment to film restoration. The film's DVD was delayed as a result of the discovery of the original camera negative just before work on a new transfer commenced. Before the DVD could be released, a new print of the film had to be created. Accompanied by the commentary Peter Cowie had recorded for the laserdisc, an introduction to the 1958 restoration by Renoir, a 1938 radio segment with Renoir and actor Eric von Stroheim, and a feature describing the film's restorations, the production of *Grand Illusion* epitomizes the high standards attained by Criterion's best special edition DVDs. In this particular case, the final product was momentous enough to warrant the theatrical rerelease of the film in American theaters in the summer of 1999, a venture that garnered the company a film heritage award from the National Society of Film Critics.

While the excellence of its transfers remained a hallmark of Criterion's DVDs, producers did not generate much new ancillary and supplementary material for at least two years. Some DVDs appeared without any supplements or only trailers (Federico Fellini's *Amarcord,* Samuel Fuller's *Naked Kiss,* and Hiroshi Inasaki's *Samurai* 1, 2, and 3); many contained the supplements that had been imported from the laserdisc version of the same title (Jean Renoir's *Beauty and the Beast,* Roy Baker's *A Night to Remember,* Nicholas Roeg's *Walkabout,* Michael Powell's *The Red Shoes,* Peter Brook's *Lord of the Flies*, David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers,* Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev,* and John Woo's *Hard Boiled).* In most cases, incorporating the supplements from the laserdisc, many of which had been overseen by talented producers such as Karen Stetler and Mark Rance, was well warranted. The honing of the special edition DVD (as opposed to the special edition laserdisc) took some time.

By 2000, the company was well on its way to transforming the majority of its productions into special edition DVDs—capacious multidisc sets in which the original "film school in a box" has become a film school in a much bigger box. The considerably larger consumer market for DVDs allows the company to accord the same lavish treatment to lesser known works such as Carl Theodore Dreyer's lost silent film, *Passion of Joan of Arc,* earlier accorded *The Silence of the Lambs*.[73] Criterion's edition of Dreyer's film is based on a never-before-seen print discovered in 1981 in the janitor's closet of an insane asylum in Norway unearthed by the hospital's director, an amateur French historian. The DVD presents the film as Dreyer intended it to

be seen, unaccompanied by any score, as well as with an oratorio, "Voices of Light," by Richard Einhorn, which was inspired by the film. The result, as Peter Becker muses, "may be the most overproduced silent film DVD anybody's ever come up with," but it is also a fastidious and welcome recuperation of a masterpiece.[74] In this case, the concept of an edition combines the care of a bibliographer with the enthusiasm of a cinéphile.

Yet these constraints have their advantages. While DVD producers working elsewhere must yield ever more to the demands of the marketing divisions of studios or directors, Criterion, with its smaller audience and less commercial content, can remain true to at least one of its original principles: to serve the film above all. If anything, the company has become ever more elitist, more cinéphile than populist. Peter Becker and his fellow producers eschew the notion of supplementary materials as "added value:" "We never talk about 'added value' around here. The whole phrase just sticks in my craw. The idea that you're adding extras to increase sales is just bogus. That's a waste of time, I think. In fact, we are finding that there [is a] large audience of people out there who will, as a result of the work we do, take chances on films they might not otherwise have looked at."[75] Ultimately the ability to resist certain trends and an adherence to excellence are not without their rewards: the company sold roughly 15,000 copies of *The Passion of Joan of Arc,* largely fueled by excellent reviews.[76]

The Criterion Collection remains steadfastly committed to its longstanding mission of "publishing the defining moments of cinema in the world's best digital editions"[77] and "presenting the film as the filmmaker would have wanted." Virtually no article on Criterion or interview with any of its staff fails to mention the latter objective. The phrase has become something of a commonplace, one whose initial revolutionary force has been largely lost due to the success with which the company has achieved its goals. Few would question today the importance of preserving a film's original aspect ratio or the necessity of carrying out careful restorations of great classic films. The company that created the template for the "film school in a box" continues to set and maintain the standard against which other high-quality productions are judged. The Criterion Collection began with Bob Stein's initial, open-ended query, "What is the best thing we can do?" which prompted a series of innovations with new technology. Twenty-two years later, today's Criterion DVD producers offer elegant refinements on that original question: "If you had this film on your shelf,

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what would enhance your understanding of it and encourage repeat reviewing?" "What would enable you to see more in the film than you saw the first time you looked at it?" "What perspective and context would be helpful?"[78] More than any other company, Criterion has transformed the viewing of film into a dynamic user-driven medium through digital technology—just as Bob Stein dreamed it could.

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Chapter 4

Directors and DVD Commentary: The Specifics of Intention

In chapter 2, we clarified the process by which different components of special edition DVDs are produced. Particular attention was accorded to the commentary track since this is one feature specifically enabled by the format itself. At its best, commentary by directors and screenwriters can afford a glimpse of the care and deliberation behind the production of movies: how details are carefully weighed for significance, how patterns of meaning are built up and maintained, and how the editing process shapes meaning out of conflicting visions. It also shows the limits of intention, that is, the ways in which contingency and chance in shooting a film can become part of meaning. For those unaccustomed to thinking in terms of the deliberate processes of construction, selection, and concentration crucial to art, these commentaries—delivered by authoritative figures such as directors, writers, and set designers—can be a valuable, pragmatic introduction to the study and enjoyment of film. In this chapter, we would like to examine one facet of the DVD's reorientation of film, the new prominence it gives to questions of intention, both directorial and cinematographical, and to speculate on the curious fitness of this recrudescence for the present moment.[1]

Intention is as vexed a concept in film studies as it has been in the study of literary texts.[2] Nevertheless, in the last 20 to 30 years, both fields have seen a decided retreat from authorial or directorial intention toward analysis of interpretive conventions. According to more recent formulations, meaning is not inherent to a text, but something a community of readers or viewers, acting in loose accord with various interpretive protocols, agrees to infer. More recent scholarly

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turns to history, while applying specific historical contexts, have at the same time conceded that these very contexts are multiple, if not endless. Such reflexivity, which brings with it a plurality of meanings, is the hallmark of poststructuralist interpretation.[3] Directorial commentary tracks have a peculiar salience at such a moment. While directors, like authors, are not always the most accurate or reliable commentators on their own work, many directors provide a consistent set of protocols for their films and display a self-consciousness at least as well developed as that of most critics.[4]

Our approach to directorial commentary runs counter to the common critical practice of discounting the agency and intentions of authors, directors, and other artists. In any act of interpretation or reception, there are many suggestive connections that one can make between a given work and an earlier work of art, some external condition, or the circumstances of its production. Only too often we are faced with a superfluity of possible links, whether of influence or context, many of which seem, at least on their face, valid, and the choice among them impossible or at least indefensible. But there are some links that we are unlikely to make unless the author or director makes them for us. Our point is not to privilege directorial commentary, but to situate it.[5] Like all commentary and criticism, it deserves accord only when it is useful, and it is useful only when we understand the circumstances under which it was produced and the functions it carries out in a given circuit of reception. What is useful about audio commentary is that it tends to direct the commentator's attention to the film itself—to the experience of visual mobility, that is, to the flow of images, the movement of the camera, and to the sequence. Here directors, simply by virtue of their position, have certain advantages, not so much of having access to putative intention, but in their surer grasp of the circumstances of production than any outside commentator.

The question then becomes one of the nature of directorial commentary. We can better understand the particular situation of the director making an audio commentary by comparing this activity to that of giving an interview. As Timothy Corrigan notes, the interview is

> one of the few, documentable extratextual spaces where the auteur, in addressing cults of fans and critical viewers, engages and disperses his or her own organizing agency as auteur. Here, the standard directorial interview might be described according to the action of promotion and explanation: it is the writing and explaining of a film through the

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> promotion of a certain intentional self; it is frequently the commercial dramatization of self as the motivating agent of textuality.[6]

This notion of "extratextual space" seems particularly felicitous, in part because unlike "paratext," a term drawn from Gérard Genette that is often applied to commentary tracks, it has a less tendentious quality. Further, the recognition that an interview elicits a certain subject position from the director (one that Corrigan goes on to analyze in terms of what he views as problematic in the contemporary situation) does much to defamiliarize not only the interview but any transaction in which a transcript or representation of a conversation is eventually provided for a larger public. The structure of the interview, in which the interviewer almost always asks leading questions about the film, assumes that directors can, if they were minded to, provide the answer to any query. And inevitably the queries tend to be grand and abstract, if the interview is at all serious.

The interview, in providing the questions, allows us to read the director's responses with some understanding of how the questions might shape or incline them. There is a transparency to interviews, at least in terms of the presence of the prompts. The questions that elicit the performance of the "auteur" constantly remind us of the dynamics of the exchange. By contrast, a directorial commentary can be much less structured and somewhat more opaque. A director's choice of role is more fluid than in an interview. What one hears might be the answer to a question put by the DVD producer, one we never hear, but it might well be the less mediated response of the director to specific images or dialogue in the film as it unfolds before him or her. We believe this heterogeneity—when recognized as such—to be a strength of this form of discourse. Audio commentary provides a wealth of detail about the working habits of directors—an archive of empirical data about the process of creation that has yet to be examined closely. We offer a survey of some of the most suggestive discussions of intention by directors and cinematographers in order to show how fluid a concept it has become in practice. Directors appear less stringent than critics in their recourse to intention, often proceeding as if it were a tool useful in explaining the how of their craft rather than the why of their artistry or the meaning of their work. But this very looseness, this willingness to invoke intention in different ways at different times, and this preference for more instrumental uses of the concept than critics give these discussions their force. The specificity

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of the discussion allows us to begin to develop a typology of uses for intention.

The approach we take here is scholarly. But we hope also to suggest the value of directorial commentary (and by implication, all commentary, as long as it is intelligent) for general audiences and students of film. Even without recourse to the critical tools we employ, viewers might enter the discussion on intentions and meaning we address here. The true value of an archive of empirical material lies in the opportunity for imaginative viewers to develop their own critical skills and artistic sense, to participate in the "user-driven" experience lauded by Bob Stein. In fact, the prospect for this kind of homeschooling, in which the energy and agency of the viewer/user features prominently, is the most important legacy of the special edition DVD.

In addition to providing a splendid transfer of Bertrand Tavernier's 1988 *Coup de Torchon*, The Criterion Collection's 1998 edition of the film offers a series of interviews with the director that incorporate and comment upon specific scenes. Tavernier lucidly sets out some of his intentions in his adaptation of Jim Thompson's novel *Pop. 1280* to film in abstract terms as well as in terms of the minute particularities of production. Tavernier finds the commentary track most amenable to a discussion of "stylistic matters such as choice of camera shots and camera movements," and he prefers to place the "emphasis on the relationship between the camera and the emotions" in his audio commentary.[7] He speaks compellingly on the relation of *Coup de Torchon* to the genre of French film noir ("a film noir which refuses the conventions of the film noir") as well as his reliance on the steady cam (and complete avoidance of tracking shots) in order to create a thematically central "slight feeling of unbalance" and instability. His commentary on specific scenes insistently links his intention to formal features. For instance, his remarks on a scene in which the protagonist, a seemingly dimwitted policeman (Philippe Noiret), discusses his difficulties with the local priest clearly set out the means by which the film makes its critique of the French presence in Africa. As the priest puts the last touches on the task of replacing a termite-infested cross, carefully hammering nails through Christ's feet, his advice ("all in good time, each thing in turn, and one thing after the other") combines with the rich irony of his action to show at once the stupid, redundant, and complicit posture of the clergy. In discussing (in fact, defending) a troubling scene in which the sheriff murders a black man who has witnessed another of his murders, Tavernier not only outlines his intentions but links them to Thompson's aims in

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Pop. 1280.[8] Tavernier's intentions in the film are sharply delimited and clearly articulated throughout the commentary.

Such clarity about intention is also prominent in Tavernier's audio commentary to *A Sunday in the Country*. Speaking about the film 15 years after its release, Tavernier pays particular attention to misapprehensions of the film. For example, many critics found in the lush mise-en-scène of *Sunday in the Country* an evocation of impressionist painting and connected this visual style with the dilemma of the protagonist, an aging painter. Tavernier quickly dispatches this plausible but superficial response. In perhaps the central scene of the movie, in which the aging painter and his daughter dance and talk at an outdoor dance hall that recalls Renoir's *The Boating Party*, Tavernier carefully separates subject matter from technique. While the atmosphere of the dance hall recalls Renoir, it is "Jean Renoir more than Auguste Renoir, because the photography is again closer to the Lumiere Brothers than to the impressionist painting. Look at the definition, the depth of focus. For me the film is closer to Jacques Becker's *Casque d'Or*." Such a moment exemplifies the utility of the commentary track. Clearly there are several plausible links between Tavernier's film and earlier works of art, but here the director allows us to make an informed choice among interpretive contexts.

Tavernier elegantly extends his analysis of the scene, as he points out how the use of the camera undercuts the simple connection with impressionism: "I wanted to use the camera movement to delay the time, or to compress it. They had to be either very slow and wide, like this one, or sometimes very, very fast. But slow or fast, they are very far from any painterly imitation." Tavernier's remarks go beyond simple correction or contradiction; they tell us not so much about what is involved in a particular sequence but what approach to interpretation we might take up. In fact, Tavernier reminds viewers that impressionism is, after all, less about subject than technique and that his use of deep focus runs completely counter to impressionist practice. The lesson here seems metacritical. If critics often overlook technique, except in its most obvious manifestations, Tavernier recalls the importance of technique at every moment. While the lesson applies equally well to either medium, it is particularly incumbent upon the viewer of *Sunday in the Country* to pay strict attention to the movement of the camera and the play of light.

Much less pointed are the intentions that emerge in Alexander Payne's commentary to *Election*. Payne's discussion of the film presupposes a different notion of intention, one far more open in

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application. A comparison to Tavernier is revealing. Payne notes, for instance, the persistence of certain visual cues in the film—Jim McAllister's (Matthew Broderick) repeated frustration as he walks through circular enclosures, and the appearance of garbage trucks behind the main action—which function less as determinate objective correlatives than indications of atmosphere. The circles traced by the protagonist culminate in his return, at the end of the film, to something of his original, frustrated position, and the garbage motif slyly prefigures McAllister's ultimate demise, when the ballot he has stolen to change the outcome of the school election is found in the trash can near his desk by a janitor he had earlier annoyed by carelessly littering. Payne's intentions are more suggestive than precise, implying that a kind of rubbish persists in our lives, our attempts to beautify them notwithstanding, and that something of a trashy dark nemesis stalks McAllister in his pathetic attempts to transcend his mundane life. Intention, for these two directors, means quite different things.

These two ways of talking about intention are far different from that of Paul Verhoeven, whose commentary to the restored director's cut of *RoboCop* promulgates an entirely different set of interpretive protocols. Verhoeven's analysis of various images requires a much more energetic viewer, one thoroughly versed in what often goes without saying in a culture.[9] For instance, the commentary on the introduction of the ED 209—a policing robot built for what one of the executives terms "urban pacification"—at a corporate meeting connects the ED 209 with Vietnam, first by the term "urban pacification" itself; then by the shape of the robot, which recalls a Bell Huey helicopter; and finally by the name of the presiding scientist, McNamara. Ed Neumeier, one of the film's cowriters, describes the scene as "the American attitude in Vietnam brought to an urban situation" and notes that he was reading *The Best and the Brightest* as he conceived it. Through such commentary, what appears to be an extreme parody takes on a more discursive form. We perceive an argument, a method, beneath the apparent mayhem and madness. In fact, the speed and ubiquity of such allusions to contemporary events and culture make even humorous commentary seem more plausible. Neumeier's comments on a part of a scene in which Emile, a member of the murderous gang that tortures and murders Murphy (the policeman who later becomes RoboCop), watches television through a store window links Emile's actions to contemporary debates on the effect of television on criminality. As Emile, surrounded by rampaging gangs along the street, rises to throw his half-finished bottle of whiskey through the

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glass, the debate is rehearsed and satirized. Neumeier may well be joking here—the comment is very funny in context—but the structure of the parodic reading is really no different from the more serious reading of parody encouraged at other moments in the commentary. The movie is flooded with such lightning references—linking the decline in the quality of manufactures to the military-industrial complex; translating the warrior ethos of corporate boardrooms to an execution of a rival coworker, a ghastly accidental murder of an employee during the demonstration of the ED 209, and a climactic shootout between RoboCop and a particularly villainous executive; and repeatedly conflating persons with products.

Other commentaries solicit a far more measured interpretive stance from viewers. Sam Mendes's discussion of *Road to Perdition* is remarkably lucid and thorough in its systematic decoding of cinematic elements. Mendes's efforts are almost pedagogical, as his last comment on the audio track makes clear: "I hope this has been *instructive*." In this, one of the richest of audio commentaries, the director provides precise articulation of theme, a suggestive evaluation of source material (a pulp fiction that rises to the level of Greek tragedy), and an intricate account of the reasons for his decisions in shooting the script. But this kind of logic and rigor has limitations, as Mendes's discussion of the scene in which father and son, at the beginning of their journey, enter a church shows clearly. As the boy (Tyler Hoechlin) watches his father (Tom Hanks) praying, he takes up a small figurine of the Madonna. The gesture is wordless; it falls to viewers to infer the boy's thought. Mendes offers an account; the boy, in taking up the statue, asks, "Is there someone to help me, is there a purpose?" But this articulation of the boy's thoughts does not have the certainty of other interpretations of the film's action. "People see different things," Mendes muses, "that's what I see, but there are a multitude of interpretations, and deliberately so."

The commentary here is far more than the familiar appeal to interpretive freedom (which, in so precise and prescriptive a commentary by so deliberate a director, would be out of place). Mendes's remarks concern not the indeterminacy of meaning but the limits to determinate meaning. Amid much that is intentional, Mendes recognizes certain open moments, and he insists upon the intention behind them. Here, intention is not so much something behind the story or prior to it as abiding with it. The story comes to Mendes and he shrewdly sizes up the possibilities, favoring some, but acknowledging others as well. Intention here becomes something like a deliberate orientation of the

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raw material of the story, a particular telling that activates certain aspects of the story or possibilities within it.

The notion here might be peculiar to a director who comes from the theater, one accustomed to arranging given material for a certain effect. But the terms are suggestive: for most directors, the script is someone else's. It arrives full of the intentions of others and awaits the re-intending that a director might provide. Hence, the approach to intention here is akin to M. M. Bakhtin's "double-voiced" heteroglossic language of speech. Intention is a hybrid concept in every day life; it is, in Mendes's striking account, a hybrid concept in film.

The discussions of intention that emerge in these four commentaries are notable for their avoidance of abstraction. In each case, the director lays out a set of consistent and coherent protocols for working through his film, but in each case intention is invoked only in terms of specific situations. These accounts of intent are more pragmatic than those in most critical discussions—less rigid, more descriptive of certain choices made within specific contexts, and perhaps more thoughtful about how an audience might actually perceive a given sequence and the objects that make it up. In a sense, it is not so much that each director talks about intention itself than that the commentary track provides us with an opportunity to follow the director's application of such a concept to his work. Often, the question concerns where to apply intention, or how insistently to use such an interpretive strategy. Payne, one might note, is not nearly so purposeful in his selection of objects and in his recollection of past films as Tavernier. Tavernier is more likely to articulate more fully the context for some of his ideas than Verhoeven, who expects the reader to bring more of a contemporary sense of history and popular culture to his suggestive images.[10] Mendes, alive to the doubleness of intention inherent in filming someone else's script, carefully examines the swirl of intentions in the finished product. We can, through these commentaries, begin to think of intention as denoting a wide variety of practices, and to see that there are several kinds of intention.

Other commentary tracks complicate this picture of intention in productive ways. Tracks with multiple commentators often prompt a consideration of instances in which intention becomes collaborative—sometimes happily, as in the *RoboCop* commentary track, and sometimes with a residue of conflict. *The Limey* features an animated debate between director Steven Soderbergh and screenwriter Lem Dobbs over the eventual shape of the film. Their competing visions of the material as conceived and shot are resolved only, and then not

fully, by the editing process. In critical terms, the dispute between Soderbergh and Dobbs could be described as rival plottings of the same story, that is, a question of narration. Certainly Soderbergh's ultimate decision in the editing process, that a film incorporating the material in Dobbs's script that examined the legacy of the 1960s would be less successful than one cast more in the mode of a stylish thriller, supports such a reading. But some vestiges of the suppressed intentions persist in the film. When Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda) muses expansively about the essence of the 1960s ("when you were there though, you knew the language, you knew your way around") and then severely delimits the era ("it wasn't that either, it was just '66 and early '67, that's all it was"), the effect in terms of the final cut is whimsical, a kind of quirky break in the action. The immediate context of the speech, which he delivers while cleaning his teeth as his young mistress listens in the bathtub, becomes prominent, as does her amused response. The exchange between Dobbs and Soderbergh asks that we distinguish dominant, suppressed, and residual intentions, that we perform an act of recovery that is less critical than historical or archaeological.

Such discussions need not have the tension Dobbs and Soderbergh display. The supplementary materials to the DVD of *American Beauty* include a convivial exchange between director Sam Mendes and cinematographer Conrad L. Hall that illuminates a complicated play of intention and chance in the production of the film. The conversation is efficiently realized throughout by the use of storyboards and frames from the movie. The mood is justifiably congratulatory and amiable, but as the conversation develops, a certain gap emerges between the stated intentions of each party. Hall often deflates the very intention that Mendes praises in Hall's realization of the storyboards, offering purely visual pleasure or expedience as motivation for what Mendes infers as thematic. For example, commenting on an early scene in which Lester (Kevin Spacey) meets with the outside consultant who has been called in to downsize the workforce, Mendes praises Hall's improvement on the storyboard: "Conrad's added something so beautiful to the shot…the way the light hits Lester…it pulls him down away from the wall." Mendes eloquently sketches the effect here, that of isolating and diminishing Lester, which dominates the first sequences of the film. Mendes also notes one decided departure from the storyboard: "He's also done something very crucial, you've cut his feet off at the bottom of the frame." This angle effectively diminishes Lester both by cropping him and pushing him down the frame,

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making him even less authoritative in the face of Brad, the consultant, who is consistently shot from below. Hall confesses, however, that his intentions lay elsewhere: "I needed that lamp up there, above the picture . . . that's why his feet are cut off." Here decisions about the set, lighting, and camera angle appear overdetermined, and the process of decision making seemingly a felicitous conjunction of purposes (which Mendes terms "happy accidents") that need never intersect and, happily, never become cross. In this case, intention appears fully determinate, as each speaker clearly articulates the effect he desired, yet strangely anamorphic, as these effects are arrived at independently and serve different ends.[11]

The commentary tracks to *American Beauty* and to *The Limey*, unlike those to *Coup de Torchon*, *Election*, *Road to Perdition*, and *RoboCop*, do more than provide a set of coherent interpretive protocols. They provide a vivid picture of the complications that collaboration inevitably imposes upon the application of the concept of intention. The problems do not, however, disrupt or preclude the discussion of intention so much as require, at least for critics and scholars, a self-consciousness about the discursive use of the term. Other commentary tracks, though, do explore such contradictions and inconsistencies. Nevertheless, they pose these questions in pragmatic rather than theoretical terms, as a special kind of discourse on intention.

Such pragmatism need not preclude methodological complexity. The question of intention might again be pursued in a critical reading of Bill Condon's incisive commentary to *Gods and Monsters*. Condon's remarks suggest great deliberation and care on the part of this director. His analysis of the opening sequence examines different kinds of intention, from deliberate and planned to the "happy accidents" of Mendes. Condon begins by sketching the relation that structures the thematics of the entire film: that the story of Clay the gardener (Brendan Fraser) and James Whale, director of *Frankenstein* (Ian McKellan), will roughly recapitulate the Frankenstein story, Clay taking the part of the monster, and Whale the godlike scientist. Condon trenchantly analyzes the presentation of Clay as he begins his day: a series of shots of parts of Fraser's body is suggestive of both Clay's incomplete or fragmented character and the homage to the assembly of the monster from body parts. His analysis of the next sequence, in which Clay drives uphill toward Whale's house, begins the commentary track's meditation on the tension between intention and meaning. Condon notes that some viewers saw Clay's uphill

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drive in terms of the "Gods" of the title, as a kind of ascent. "People start to see things that you never really intended," notes Condon. However, he does not discard this kind of meaning, as his comments on a scene in which Whale and Clay go to a reception for the globe-trotting Princess Margaret at George Cukor's mansion demonstrate. This scene, the most lavish of the film, is full of allusions. Condon notes that a pair of swans, which dominate a few frames, form a reference to Hollywood's penchant for wide-screen films in the era, to Vincent Minnelli-like productions: "That's what I had in mind," he muses. Yet Condon informs the viewer that McKellan understood the swans in terms of the Princess's visit; in Britain, swans are protected animals owned by the Queen. Condon seems to acquiesce, "That was another nice little meaning to that." Most interesting here is the clarity with which Condon separates different types of signification. Some interpretations are planned, executed, and intended; some are accidental, incorporated, and intended; others are simply attached after (or in the case of McKellan's remark, alongside) the fact. Ultimately the tension between more and less open interpretive protocols is wound into the movie itself, when the characters of *Gods and Monsters* watch Whale's *Frankenstein* at the same time at two locales. Clay, a former girlfriend (Lolita Davidovich), and a bartender watch at a bar; Whale and his housekeeper, Hannah (Lynn Redgrave), watch at home. Here we see an audience with a variety of reactions: Clay, intrigued by his relation with Whale, responds to the monster and begins to see a poetry in the movie; his former girlfriend derides what she can only see as the old-fashioned techniques of the film; Whale recalls the touches he put in and the pleasures of being on the set; and Hannah, watching with more childlike appreciation, is pleasantly frightened. Hence, the commentary and film work together to examine some of the intricate problematics of interpretation.

The less happy contingencies of filmmaking can also illuminate the discussion of intention. The recent release of Atom Egoyan's early films on DVD has allowed the director to explore the problems and constraints of production with unusual precision. Most noteworthy about Egoyan's meditations is the way in which he explains how these difficulties eventually became interpretive cruxes for the viewer. In each case, Egoyan recalls his original intentions only to measure them against what others found in the experience of the film itself. In doing so, he sets out an interpretive practice worth some consideration, as we see the shaping force of his original intent work against the

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countervailing tendencies of the interpretive conventions brought to the film by viewers.

Family Viewing provides a relatively straightforward example of the irresolute quality this conflict can confer upon a work of art. In the film, the protagonist Van (Patrick Tierney) learns to his horror that his father Stan (David Hemblen) has been taping over videocassettes of Van's childhood and replacing these memories with homemade pornography—cheesy and somewhat robotic encounters with his current live-in girlfriend. Van wishes to retain this past, especially records of the past with his mother, whom he has not seen for a long time. By making Van's mother Armenian, Egoyan parallels Van's personal loss and denial with the wider losses of the Armenian genocide. Van's Anglo-Canadian father's erasure of Van's past echoes the erasure of Armenia and the Armenian people. In one sequence, Van's viewing of his happy past is interrupted by yet another erasure and retaping, a sadomasochistic sequence of Stan binding Van's mother. Egoyan, speaking roughly 14 years after the release of the film, now finds the image "problematic," and he considers it "way too moralistic." He did not intend a condemnation of such erotic practices, which might have been consensual, but he realizes that the context makes such a reaction inevitable. What the directorial commentary allows us to see is the way in which time affects the most basic interpretive acts. Egoyan clearly had intentions here that he no longer feels comfortable with, and the meaning of the image has changed, at least for him. For subsequent viewers, the ambiguity or perhaps awkwardness that Egoyan now finds in the image is less simply an error than a profound reorientation of this section of the film. Egoyan's commentary has effectively recut the movie, taking a forceful and seemingly unambiguous image and making it into a kind of metacommentary on interpretation. Here directorial commentary has essentially become a performance in itself, as Egoyan adds yet another layer of complexity to an already-complicated film. His reservations about his own intentions encourage a resisting kind of viewer, one willing to contest the image. In fact, one might argue that the older Egoyan encourages viewers to subject the image to much the same rigorous scrutiny that he does elsewhere in his work.

Egoyan's remarks in his commentary to *Next of Kin* present an even more penetrating case study of the flexibility of intention as a critical concept. Egoyan begins by framing his discussion as an examination of the particular demands of low-budget films, but in

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each case simple financial constraint becomes secondary to questions of intention. According to Egoyan, the film never managed to articulate clearly or plausibly his main conceit. The plot of *Next of Kin* concerns two troubled families—one European-Canadian, in which the son, Peter (Patrick Tierney), and his parents cannot get along, and the other Armenian, in which the loss of a son has made relations between the father and his daughter, who was born after the death of the son, difficult. The plot is clever, but complicated, and suffice it to say that visits by each family to a therapist allow Peter to pass himself off as the lost Armenian son (however implausibly). Egoyan intended to make Peter's insinuation into a new family problematic, and he tried to make this clear by a series of unusual camera techniques. In fact, at one point, he asserts that a noticeable shift from a fixed to a much more mobile handheld camera was intended to suggest the presence of the spirit of the lost son. Egoyan freely admits that no one got this conceit, and he spends much time in his commentary discussing this failure. As he does so, however, he takes the viewer through something approximating a master class on intention.

For instance, in an early scene in which Peter and his factitious sister talk on a playground, Egoyan notes a troublesome error made by Patrick Tierney. As the two swing, Tierney looks at the camera repeatedly. While Egoyan intended his protagonist to look at the camera at other moments, this is not one of them. It stands as "a clear mistake," which could not, despite some editing work, be salvaged in postproduction. Now this is useful in itself as a frank discussion of the problems of residual but ineffectual intentions as well as a bit of pragmatic advice on reworking problematic material in the editing process. It clarifies the scene, and thereby solves a critical problem, but it does so by simplifying it. Here the evocation of the originary moment, the director's intention, simply allows us to dismiss certain implications. What resists interpretation, once Egoyan designates it as "a clear mistake," is essentially irrelevant.

The discussion of misprision and intention continues throughout Egoyan's commentary. The sequence in which Peter meets his fictitious long-lost parents begins as a discussion of error, but quickly becomes a meditation upon a level of residual meaning in the film that is not recoverable by any means save authorial intention. Egoyan intended the use of handheld camera to signal the presence of someone else in the film—here the spirit of the dead or lost son. Again, the force of filmic convention, in which the handheld camera signals

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a more direct and accessible relation between viewer and the story, overruns this intention:

> What I was hoping in all of these shots is that you would feel that somebody else was there watching these people…for this moment where Peter is looking towards the lens, that he is almost recognizing the true spirit of the missing son that he's replacing.…none of this really works. You're so into these people, you so want to go on his personal journey, that you're not thinking about those things. You're just thinking about the physicality of the mother pinching the cheek of a boy who obviously does not look like their son.

Egoyan's conceit, once revealed, asks us to reconsider the film as well as the force of viewerly predispositions in overriding a particular theme. The handheld camera fuels our bias toward emotional warmth, toward a happy ending, and perhaps even to a strange denial of ethnic difference, which results in a film that is less a meditation on the power and privilege of Peter to enter into and transform the lives of this Armenian family than a kind of romance, in which a bad family situation is exchanged for a good one, and in which the exchange itself sparks a transformation of the new family. What Egoyan is asking us to do—albeit with little apparent hope of success—is to reconsider the film, to see the strangeness, contingency, and perhaps the fictionality of family life.

The audio commentary to a scene near the end of *Next of Kin* draws all these considerations together. The film culminates in a party given for Peter, after which he decides ultimately not to return to his birth parents. Here, Peter's look at the lens is supplemented by other characters, who all applaud as they look directly at the camera:

> I wanted to suggest here that the spirit of the camera, the actual missing son, has become completely integrated with Peter and that the two are completely synthesized into one. No one would ever look at the scene and figure that out.…As you've gathered by this point, it's immaterial what my intentions were. All you're completely overwhelmed by is the generosity and warmth that's in the room.

Again the commentary, rather than describing or simply explaining the action, becomes an extension of the performance. However "immaterial" Egoyan's intentions, the fact that these residual intentions now circulate in the DVD version of *Next of Kin* means that these considerations can and might well shape its reception. Egoyan

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invites us to examine the construction of meaning involved in acceding to the less complicated and troubled interpretation that audiences have found for the film. Even as Egoyan seems to submit to his audience's desire for a certain kind of resolution by giving up his intentions, the very statement of these intentions in the commentary means that in the next viewing of the film viewers cannot so easily overlook them. Egoyan has, in one sense, been tracing a conflict between intention and meaning in which the latter seems victorious, but one is left wondering whether audio commentary, a form so amenable to discussion of intention, does not allow him to make a forceful case for his original conception of Peter's strange journey home.

The consideration of intention ranges widely in these audio commentaries. Directors often set out rather conservative notions of intent, by which the film—virtually a system of signs—can be decoded. This kind of interpretive process, which focuses intently upon technique and on a shared set of conventions for viewing film, is applicable in most situations. But there are, predictably, cinematic moments that do not have so stable a meaning, and these tend to be recognized as such by the director, who builds the ambiguity and polysemy of such moments into the larger structure of the film. What emerges is a cinematic grammar that cannot resolve all the raw experience of film, despite being a perfectly suitable tool for most situations. Just as a grammar cannot account for all linguistic practices, a film grammar need not resolve all contingencies. But sharp attention to the game of intention is, in the hands of these directors, an important part of the viewing experience.

Directorial commentary can be most useful when dealing with abstruse narrative styles, such as the one adopted by David Cronenberg in *Spider*. In such cases, the barest description by the director can show viewers how they might interpret the action. For instance, when Spider (Ralph Fiennes), Cronenberg's mentally troubled and at times delusional protagonist, performs a characteristically puzzling series of actions early in the film—sniffing the gas heater in the fireplace, removing his own clothes, and finally wrapping himself in newspaper—Cronenberg takes care to explain Spider's action. In doing so, Cronenberg precludes an easy dismissal of the sequence as evidence that Spider is simply irrational. Spider is obsessed with gas and the gasworks that loom outside his window, and he fears that the gas he smells in his room emanates from his own body. Here, Cronenberg maps out a familiar interpretive route: he recovers Spider's state of mind by retracing (and partly anticipating) the action of the film. The

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explanation emerges from the film, and Cronenberg simply articulates it. But other moments in the film are more opaque. Later in the film, Spider creeps down the stairs of the halfway house he inhabits to find to his horror that the nurse (Lynn Redgrave) has been replaced by Yvonne, a woman whom he imagines that his father has taken up with after killing his wife. Frenzied, Spider roots out and destroys his journal at once. The interpretive problem here, at least initially, seems similar: viewers must resolve a puzzling sequence. Is there method to Spider's madness, or do we simply understand his actions as pitiable, perhaps even terrifyingly irrational? Cronenberg's explanation of Spider's destruction of his journal as an act of self-preservation—that he fears Yvonne will find it, read that Spider has revealed the secret of the murder in its pages, and kill him—while plausible, does not emerge from the film. Viewers could not know that Spider harbors this particular fear of Yvonne, or that his journal would move her to murder him, or even that Spider has written about the murder. There is a gap here in the film, filled by Cronenberg's commentary in ways that the film itself permits but seemingly does not authorize. Here, Cronenberg sketches out a relation to the film that is far more active, far more viewerly, as the production of meaning is less an act of decoding than filling gaps imaginatively. Interpretation is less a question of intent than plausibility, which leaves room for far more decisive interventions on the part of viewers. By laying out such an interpretive practice, Cronenberg authorizes a much more wide-ranging interpretive activity for viewers of *Spider.*

In the case of so deliberate a filmmaker as Cronenberg, questions of intention cannot fail to emerge in audio commentary. In his remarks on *Dead Ringers,* Cronenberg provides a most consistent and well-delimited discussion of intention, meticulously setting out not only his specific intentions but also the means by which he sought to communicate them. One considerable challenge in filming the movie was to find a way of showing the psychological deterioration of the protagonists (identical twin gynecologists Beverly and Elliot Mantle, played by Jeremy Irons in a virtuoso display of craft). Cronenberg's solution is a version of what T. S. Eliot famously termed the "objective correlative," that is, "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that *particular* emotion."[12] Cronenberg, through a series of shots, very deliberately emphasizes a "set of objects" in the film, the twins' strikingly modern apartment and offices, and he painstakingly traces the degradation of these environments through the film. The cold, "bruised" color of the rooms,

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the austerity of the modernist furniture, and the precise ordering of the objects all become readable signs of the twins' state of mind and their gradual deterioration. Cronenberg sets out a kind of grammar for the film, authorizing a coherent and deliberate approach to reading the psychology of his characters. For example, just as the twins' rationalist bias is challenged by the warmer, emotional Claire Niveau (Geneviève Bujold), so does her apartment present a far more complex play of textures, colors, and curved lines. Hence, as Beverly falls in love with Claire, we have more than a simple love story; we are also aware of this attachment as the eruption of Beverly's emotional life, a movement from an ordered, objective viewpoint to the messier world of subjectivity and affect. (The pattern is made emphatic by Claire's occupation as an actress, which contrasts with the scientific work done by the twins.) Cronenberg's analysis of the famous operating room sequences has the same lucidity. Invested in his gown with his hands folded calmly, dressed in a magnificent (if unreal) red, wielding instruments that look hieratic, his mask and glasses suggesting a cool removal from the visceral task at hand, Beverly is a modern high priest, presiding over the mysteries of creation as he brings fertility to his female patients. "You have to find physical representations of inner states of mind to convey what is going on inside your characters," Cronenberg explains.

Most evocative, however, are the tools designed by Beverly: the famous "Mantle Retractor" he builds while a medical student and the frightening set of "Instruments for Operating on Mutant Women" he designs and commissions later. These objects, examined in sequence, encapsulate the film's main themes. As Cronenberg explains, the first of these inventions expresses the twins' deepest desire, to analyze and to master nature: "I felt that I needed a physical symbol of the twins' efforts to deal with reality by their own version of creativity, by their own attempt to create something that could modify the human body and control it." The "Mantle Retractor" earns the twins professional accolade and prestige, which the "gold-plated" trophy they receive embodies; the latter tools bespeak "a man whose rationality is failing but in its failing is producing these strange kind[s] of works of art, horrific works of art." On one level, this sequence, like the gradual deterioration of the apartment, seems to reveal Beverly's disorientation and madness clearly. Cronenberg's commentary paradoxically invests the irrationality of this sequence with an airtight, Cartesian logic. The objects speak clearly and compellingly of Beverly's decent into a pitiable madness, one that fulfills all the tragic depths of Aristotle's

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famous formulation of "fear and pity." Yet, on another level, this sequence of objects, which embodies the thematic core of the film, is disrupted by the director's commentary. Cronenberg opens the discussion of these objects by revealing that, while working as an artist in France years before the film was conceived, he had created, in cast aluminum, an "Instrument for Operating on Mutants." Hence, the well-delimited sequence of the film, with its clear implications and intentions, is extended by an autobiographical revelation. The audio commentary track, with its insistent immediacy, distends the precise formulations of a formal reading of the film to include the imprecisions, silences, and ambiguities of an autobiographical approach. Viewed in these terms, Cronenberg's opening words on the commentary track take on a much greater implication: "This is gonna be maybe a lot more traumatic for me than for you, reliving the film." As we have seen in the instance of Herzog's commentary on *Fitzcarraldo*, the commentary track allows Cronenberg to create another, and perhaps a more complicated, text, one that, even as it resolutely pursues a formal reading of *Dead Ringers*, unsettles that reading with an equally powerful, if sketchier, autobiographical one. The discussion of intention—here so clear, so coherent, so carefully delimited—is framed by an admission that changes the protocols for interpretation utterly. Cronenberg's audio commentary retraces and transposes the movie's central conflict, as formal analysis (cold, detached, technical) is opposed yet again to the ambiguities, subjectivities, and perhaps ineffabilities, of affect.

The paradoxes of intention, which become more evident as the rigor of application increases, can take on more parabolic forms. Peter Greenaway's commentary to *The Draughtsman's Contract* exemplifies the way in which even the most lucid discussion of intention can be undermined by the obvious implications of the film's dramaturgy. Greenaway provides precise decoding of the mise-en-scène, gives detailed explanations of the work of the camera, and painstakingly connects the film with certain historical events, such as the shift from Catholic to Protestant monarchy, the Married Woman's Property Act, and the founding of the Bank of England. In a remarkable statement, he insists that viewers approach details in the film as fully conscious and deliberate:

> As is characteristic I suppose, of the genre of detective writing, certainly in the English tradition, the plots are surrounded by all sorts of red herrings, if indeed it's ever possible to have a red herring,

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> something which is completely irrelevant to the plot. And I sincerely believe that nothing ever is a red herring; everything can ultimately be related. But the deliberate writing of the detective novel is to send the reader off on scents which either end in cul-de-sacs or dribble away into insignificance and the circumstances of that particular way of organizing material is a characteristic too of this film. But there is no loose end, every single thread, every single hare that's started, that's bolted from the bush in some sense adds to the fabric of the total, if only to add circumstantial details, to create circumstances beyond circumstances which ultimately when the whole film is united will fit together very beautifully in a very, very full way to complete an entire jigsaw puzzle.

Such remarks are imbued with the classical hallmarks of intentionality: all the parts contributing to the whole, and this aesthetic culmination a function of the viewer's difficult recognition of this unity.[13]

This insistence upon the film realizing the artist's intentions, however, starkly contrasts with the plot of *The Draughtsman's Contract*. The artist inscribed in the film misunderstands not only his art but also his situation as an artist. He comprehends neither the full meaning of what he draws nor the social and economic relations into which he is drawn. He mechanically renders the clues to the murder of the husband of his patroness as he sketches, and he is later surprised to find that the contractual sexual relations he has fulfilled with her daughter concern her desire for an heir, and not simply her pleasure. *The Draughtsman's Contract* exposes a gap between an artist's intention and his execution that Greenaway himself takes pains to deny. Clearly Greenaway courts this paradox, as an autobiographical aside, in which he recalls a vacation spent sketching a country house from different perspectives under different light, makes clear. The reminiscence concludes with an insistence on the difference between art and life: the film is "a fictionalization of an autobiographical event." But while Greenaway can clearly and quite plausibly separate himself from his protagonist on one level, he cannot so easily shake the implications of the film's dramaturgy, in which even the most controlled act of artistic representation can result in the artist becoming, as the patroness's arch daughter puts it to the draughtsman, "an accessory to misadventure." If the film undercuts the intentions of the artist—with fatal results—Greenaway's commentary accords precisely with this position. He, like his protagonist, might be informed of and surprised by the ends of his work, but it would be pointless for the artist to try to assume a position outside such a circuit of misapprehension

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and misprision. Greenaway's audio commentary remains true to his filmic vision, which rigorously exposes the unreliability of an intentional discourse.

The emphasis on intention might well be a function of the medium itself. As a mode of critical address, an audio commentary tends to be scene specific—happily so, as these lavish surfaces are so suggestive. Just as all viewing must start with what the sequence offers most immediately—the mise-en-scène, the camera angles, the lighting, the motivations of the characters, the implications of their gestures and words—the remarks of directors tend to follow predictable interpretive patterns. And if the imperative of the voice-over tends to direct commentary to the realization of intention in a specific sequence, so too does the directorial function itself, which, however corporate the process of filmmaking might be, assigns to the director responsibilities like those that accompany any intentional act. The director, at least in the eyes of most viewers, will always have something like the last word on meaning, and this authority is not at all diminished by a director's refusal to discuss his intentions (like Jim Jarmusch, who in a supplementary feature to *Broken Flowers* insists that interpreting his films is not his job) or the designation of some sequences as deliberately open to interpretation. Audio commentary, when it addresses meaning, tends to address film as a series of signs to be decoded. Different directors might be more or less forthcoming about their interpretive principles, and they might be more or less willing to invoke intention in their discussion, but the form of audio commentary elicits a discourse that turns again and again to a consideration of intention.

Hence, perhaps the most formidable of the discussions of intention on DVD achieves its clarity and power by changing the form of audio commentary significantly. Abbas Kiarostami's *Ten on 10*, which accompanies his 2002 *Ten* on DVD, cleverly disrupts the tendencies of the audio commentary. Instead of simply providing a voice-over for the film, *Ten on 10* recreates the conditions of the original film. Like *Ten*, it is set in an automobile, the camera being trained on the driver, here Kiarostami himself. Just as the original film was divided into ten scenes, each preceded by a number on a dial accompanied by a clocklike sound sequence, so does *Ten on 10* feature this very self-consciously formal device, which insistently forecloses any suspension of disbelief in the fiction, or for that matter in the commentary, that unfolds.

Kiarostami's formal choices allow for a commentary that is free to proceed by categories. The scene-specific immediacy of audio

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commentary makes a close reading of the film almost inevitable; the discussion is bound by the dictates of recapitulation forced upon it by the images. Kiarostami has provided a reflection upon the form itself, adding a visual component to commentary, which allows for the possibility of analysis that need not follow the trajectory of the film. In a sense, Kiarostami, by occupying the position of his actors in *Ten* (as well as in the earlier *Taste of Cherry*), at once speaks to the work he created and, suggestively, within it. His initial move, critically, is to provide a visual comment on the film that estranges and, as we shall see, restages its concerns.

One might simply locate Kiarostami's master class in relation to its obvious forebears: Dziga Vertov's programmatic insistence on breaking the spell of Hollywood movies by opposing its stories to "real-life"; Bresson's cinematography of subtraction; and Gillo Pontecorvo's neorealism, with its careful use of nonprofessional actors. Viewed this way, many of Kiarostami's points seem familiar and, at times, somewhat reductive. But the logic of *10 on Ten*, like Kiarostami's other films, is at once relational and parabolic: the film is built on carefully elaborated connections among elements, yet it asks repeatedly that viewers consider the circumstances under which the commentary is performed. It at once requires viewers to pay the closest attention to his commentary, but it also directs the viewer—especially students of filmmaking—to larger, more open-ended considerations of the medium.

The themes of *Ten on 10* all converge on questions of intention. Kiarostami's remarks constitute a kind of manifesto. Every choice in *Ten* stems from Kiarostami's desire to produce a cinema of everyday occurrences that asks viewers to reflect on their own reality and not to lose themselves in the distractions of elaborate technique, the spectacle of special effects, and the excitement of storytelling itself. Such a program is enabled by the digital camera. Less intrusive, the digital camera helps to eliminate the unnaturalness of acting. Less costly, it frees one from the dictates of capital, production, and censorship. The mobility of such cameras allows a filmmaker to circumvent the elaborate conventions and artifice of current cinema. In fact, the digital camera eliminates the director from the film, although it ultimately "will return the auteur to the scene" and make filmmaking more like writing a book or painting a picture. *Ten*, seen according to Kiarostami's aesthetic program, is the fruit of an almost obsessive consideration of the circumstances under which the material would be developed: "Reality existed and was constantly being played out before me or out of my sight. I was merely there to record it."

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This aesthetic is evident in the last sequence of *10 on Ten*. Kiarostami caps his "master class" with a discussion of the dominance of American film and film technique, which has reduced directors like him to the awkward position of producing "vegetables in flower pots." Having articulated a cinema of explicit resistance to Hollywood production, he nevertheless reminds his students that the lessons of Hollywood success should never be forgotten. He then leaves the car, purportedly to turn off a camera, but while out of the frame we hear him urinating. When he returns, he offers two haiku poems and, given the restrictive camera work of the film up to this point, some surprisingly flamboyant images. First he focuses on a tree by the side of the road and muses, "A cedar tree atop the hill, on whom does it pride itself?" The lonely little cedar, then, seems an image of proud resistance to the colossal machinery of Hollywood production. But this image of integrity, one dependent on withdrawal, is cast aside, or at least revised, by subsequent action. The director then moves the camera to show us a shot of some ants, to which he appends another haiku:

> Light the fire and I'll show you something: something invisible, if you don't wish to see it; something which cannot be heard, if you don't wish to listen to its breath.

The haiku neatly sums up the realist bias of Kiarostami's aesthetic, with its insistent undermining of the Hollywood conceptions of moviemaking.

In a sense, the form of Kiarostami's commentary allows the director to address intention in ways that an audio commentary tends to preclude. The visual component of the commentary provides an insistent, wordless defamiliarization of his films, and it allows him to employ intention in wider terms. Instead of addressing particular meanings or decoding images, Kiarostami invokes intention as a framework for his eventual film, as conditions to which he adheres in developing his ideas and shooting his films rather than a set of decisions made at discrete moments. Kiarostami's brilliant reconfiguration of DVD commentary allows us to see that the intention that seems so prominent in audio commentary by directors is contingent, a product more of the situation, which elicits a certain kind of discourse, than an absolute necessity.

This selection—by no means an exhaustive one—of commentary tracks amply demonstrates the pervasive recourse to intention when

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directors explain or analyze film. The means of recovering or ascertaining intention may vary, intention may involve accident or seem curiously after the fact, and intentions may be multiple, but there seems to be no doubt about the utility of the concept among the producers of film. Each director wields the term with a canny sense of its potential for analysis and criticism as well as a sharply defined awareness of its limitations, as Condon's precise contrast of "intention" and "meaning" or Cronenberg's reluctance to pursue the intention implicit in his autobiographical reminiscences shows clearly. Viewed solely in these terms, the evidence from DVD commentaries by directors seems simply to support conventional and pluralistic notions of intention employed by critics and scholars of film, who have typically had recourse in their analyses to commentary by directors and others involved in production. DVD commentaries would thus seem to offer more evidence of the same kind—richer, perhaps, but no more conclusive or compelling.

To view DVD commentary in this way, however, is to mistake the particular virtues of this form. By its very nature, the DVD commentary track enforces a heightened attention to intricacies of intention as it plays out over the course of the film. Directorial commentary returns again and again to questions of intention that are local and technical, and the discussion has an unusual immediacy and density. Intention in these tracks is not used in the abstract and broadly thematic sense in which it is invoked in other forms, such as interviews, *manifesti*, or more general statements by directors. Rather, what emerges in this form is the intentional practice carried out by a particular director from scene to scene, what we might call the specifics of intention. The informal, and at times desultory, quality of the commentary allows us to see how each director uses the concept, not so much how he might wish to use it, and it allows us, if we wish, to address other moments in the film in terms of the particular use of intention practiced by its director.[14] We need not treat such commentary as final, but we err if we do not accord it some authority. Its privilege should depend upon the power of specific detail to enable us to reconceive and possibly to reimagine the film. At times, the process will yield something like certainty; at others, it will reaffirm the collaborative nature of the activity and the multiple meanings provided by tensions among director, writer, cinematographer, and editor; at still others, we will see only the rigor with which certain indeterminacies are intended in film.

Taken altogether, commentary tracks exemplify a practice urged by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*: "To bring back words

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from their metaphysical to their everyday use."[15] These discussions treat intention as a particularly useful kind of language game, one that organizes the production and experience of film, but which is capable of transformation as interpreters adopt different roles in the game, such as director, writer, cinematographer, critic, or fan. Their commentary sketches what Wittgenstein calls the "original home" in which the language game of intention abides. Commentary tracks create another text, one overrun with intentions, and one which—as it maps coherent and recoverable intention according to consistent and seemingly authoritative protocols—may bring the pragmatics of intention into renewed prominence.

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Chapter 5

Directorial Commentary and Film Study: The Case of Atom Egoyan

In the last chapter, our examination of intention drew upon the remarks and practices of directors in many audio commentaries. Our argument ranged among the rich archive of materials now available on DVD. In the present chapter, we would like to move from a study of cases to one case study, in which we focus not simply on statements of directors about a topic but on the deeper continuities in one director's discussion of his work. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate another particular strength of directorial commentary. We believe that the form of the audio commentary has certain tendencies and that, as students of film, we can profit from this discourse in ways largely unavailable in other forms of discourse. In following the remarks of a director who provides a series of serious commentaries to his films, we can learn things that the question-and-answer format of an interview might preclude, that the argumentative protocols of an essay might mask, and that a brief conversational exchange might omit. The particular advantages of an audio commentary lie partly in its length, which allows for more expansive development, and also in the form's tendency to elicit discussion that is more technical and pragmatic. When an articulate, engaged director—like Atom Egoyan—provides, over several films, 16 hours of commentary, we possess another kind of archive, one with a depth to match the range of the materials addressed in the last chapter. Such materials permit recourse to another kind of evidence, one based less upon the collection and orientation of summary statements than on the examination of the deeper commitments out of which such aperçus emerge.

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Many directors work in a cinematic lingua franca, using a set of existing, familiar, and fairly stable conventions of presentation. For such films, a commentary track typically provides detailed information on craft, technique, and the process of production. Such commentaries offer information critical to both scholars and more casual viewers. They remind us of the painstaking construction involved in such apparently transparent forms, and they effectively encourage viewers to examine images critically. Moreover, such commentary provides a wealth of detail useful in establishing current cinematic conventions, the period style of the film.[1] For a historically minded scholar intent on cataloging these surprisingly elusive practices, the descriptive accounts offered by directors provide the kind of detail sorely lacking in studies of earlier film.

For example, Sam Mendes's careful commentaries to *American Beauty* and *The Road to Perdition* set out the details of standard cinematic language admirably. Mendes clearly connects his use of the camera to the story in each film, detailing the "meaning" of particular shots. He notes the use of prominent images, such as water in *The Road to Perdition*, and explains how they mean and how that meaning is built up through the film. For Mendes, film concerns the revelation of character, and in each commentary he brilliantly examines how feeling and thought can be made manifest through basic cinematic convention.

But for other, less mainstream films, directorial audio commentary can play a very different role. For filmmakers less accepting of regnant cinematic convention, those who offer a cinematic grammar more idiosyncratic or unconventional, commentary affords viewers an introduction to their particular film practice. An audio track can help to settle the particular rules of the game applicable for a film or a director's entire body of work. The results are not simply educational; in such tracks, a director can solicit not only an entirely different audience but also an entirely different kind of viewer.

From one perspective, such efforts could take the form of sterile explanations, in which directors decode their films, cataloging prominent images and techniques. But the best of such tracks can provide viewers with a sense of process by which viewers make meaning, not simply some particular meaning for the film. For a filmmaker like Atom Egoyan, audio commentaries serve as ways of reorienting the viewer. While they function on some level as explanations, as almost all commentaries do, and at times serve to decipher and decode, they are most engaging at a more general and basic level, offering up rules for watching Egoyan's films.

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In this chapter, we seek to examine the most prominent of these rules, and also to consider both how Egoyan's own body of work adjusts and shifts these conventions and how the specific circumstances of certain films ask us to apply them differently. While Egoyan presents a coherent set of interpretive rules in his audio commentaries, these rules are flexible in ways that affect and ultimately disrupt any application of them. As a thinker, Egoyan is most rigorous in his determined exploration of the borders between the reliable and the unreliable, and he typically pushes any convention—even his own—to its limits.

Egoyan, unlike many directors who provide audio commentaries, seems most intent on telling us, first of all, what to watch and then how we might interpret or think about what we see. His practice recalls that of certain reader-response literary critics, who have designated such operations as "rules of notice" and "rules of significance."[2] His interpretive suggestions are less formulas for decoding than approaches to puzzles, and while the process of investigation has surprising rigor, the conclusions often remain ambiguous.[3] The "infinitely curious" viewer that Egoyan solicits for his films must combine a lucidity of application with a willingness to tolerate inconclusive results.

I

Egoyan has provided audio commentaries for nine of his twelve feature films—notable exceptions being *Exotica* and *Where the Truth Lies*.[4] The chronology of these commentaries does not follow the release of the films. Egoyan's first commentaries followed on the theatrical releases of his more mainstream films, *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997/1998) and *Felicia's Journey* (1999/1999). He then did commentaries for the subsequent rereleases of his earlier work on DVD: *Next of Kin* (1984/2001), *Family Viewing* (1987/2001), *Speaking Parts* (1989/2001), *Calendar* (1993/2001), and *The Adjuster* (1991/2001). Most recently, he has completed a commentary to *Ararat* (2003/2003). As might be expected from so self-conscious a director, Egoyan displays ambivalence about the medium of audio commentary. On the one hand, he revels in the pleasures of discussing his work with an audience that, by virtue of having already bought the DVD, is as "embedded as they will ever be in the project."[5] Moreover, the commentary tracks, unlike other venues such as interviews or appearances arranged before and during theatrical release, do not require so compressed a treatment of ideas. The combination of an unusually

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receptive audience and the opportunity to develop one's points more completely is both gratifying and effective:

> The film is unfolding and there's a momentum that's built up, and it's a cumulative process of watching the film and explaining it to your fantasy of a viewer, so as you're watching it you're speaking to someone who is infinitely curious and open and able to receive everything that's spilling out of you. And you can speak about it in a way that you haven't really been able to speak about it to anyone before.[6]

On the other hand, this very intimacy, so enabling for the director, can pose problems for viewers. It can preclude the skepticism about the production and reception of images that, paradoxically, is one of the abiding lessons of Egoyan's work:

> There's an orthodoxy to those commentaries which is a little frightening. When you are in the presence of the creator, you are obliged to believe that this is what and how the film must be interpreted and as we know that's open, and there are things that may occur to the creator that day as they are reflecting on it, things they may forget, there are particular convergent energies which may have been present during the shooting that can never be recreated in the isolation of a booth.[7]

There are two dangers here: the seeming authority of the director, which overruns the obvious contingencies of the moment and the unreliability of memory, and the illusion of immediacy, which promises more than the medium can deliver. "You cannot," Egoyan insists, "have access to a whole series of quite mysterious forces that bring a film together and make it work or not." No matter how real the illusion of unmediated access to the creative process, the confluence of energies that produced the image is always elusive.

Mindful of Egoyan's strictures, we have examined his commentaries less for local interpretations than for underlying principles. We have tried to locate what interpretive procedures emerge over the entire body of commentary. From these eight commentaries, we have gleaned seven rules or conventions that not only provide a kind of interpretive schema for Egoyan's films but also describe his particular approach to film. Some are related, but for the purposes of analysis and interpretation we intend to keep them separate. We will give them names for convenience of reference.[8]

The first, the Rule of Viewer Vertigo, is set out explicitly in a discussion of cuts between scenes that accompanies *Next of Kin*. The

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film shows Peter, the protagonist who has insinuated himself into an Armenian family, walking with Asa, his new sister, toward a house unfamiliar to the viewer. It is initially unclear just what we are seeing: is this a dream in which Peter revisits his old home, a return to his home in real time, or something else? Later, it becomes clear that Peter and Asa have arrived to see Sonia, Asa's mother, who works as a maid. Egoyan's commentary, however, gives this sequence a different significance, as he charts one of his characteristic obsessions in film: "These types of transitions fascinate me, and certainly this is something I've tried to develop and kind of explore in my recent work. These transitions where you think you're in one time and you're really somewhere else."

Even considered narrowly, as a comment on a tendency prominent in his first feature-length film, Egoyan's remark is suggestive. But given that he makes the comment 17 years and eight films after *Next of Kin*, this admission has considerably more force. While the ambiguities of situation are resolved in this particular scene by a subsequent shot, the irresolution of such moments persists in other films, to the point where the status of certain scenes is completely undecidable.

Closely related to this rule are two rules concerning Egoyan's fluid use of past time in narrative. Not only do his films freely move backward and forward but they also mix particular characters' memories with sequences in which the past is simply presented—without such perspective—to viewers out of sequence. At times, the point of view is so strong as to make us doubt the objectivity of the presentation: the sequence becomes a character's wish or desire. This handling of time and memory is unusually complex; few directors offer so open a text as Egoyan. Quentin Tarantino, whose films routinely and rather ostentatiously scramble time lines, nevertheless insists on the objective quality of his presentation. The reorganizations of time in *Reservoir Dogs* are not "flashbacks," he explains on the commentary to the film, and they are not tied to a particular character's perspective or memory. Even when Tarentino offers apparently different versions of past events, such as the two accounts of the exchange of money in *Jackie Brown*, the differences are apparently a question of the angle of observation by different characters, not a function of what either observer wishes to remember.

Egoyan's discussion of past time emerges on the audio track of *The Sweet Hereafter* in an exchange with Russell Banks, the author of the novel from which the film was developed. After Banks muses on what he calls the "collapse of linear time" in the town after the bus

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accident, Egoyan translates his remarks to film: "The great challenge of film language is to find the cinematic equivalent of these literary tenses." If we designate Egoyan's particular use of time, in which linear time is shuffled for effect and certain information is often withheld to great force, as the Rule of Tense, we might also extend his figurative language to designate the ambiguous use of memory and subjective recall as the Rule of Mood.

Were we only to consider the implications of these three rules, the complexity of Egoyan's cinematic language would be formidable. Even the most familiar and seemingly straightforward convention, the Rule of Tense, is routinely pushed to its logical limits. The immediate questions of temporality—the familiar pleasures of gradually discovering when events happen in the larger story—are often overwhelmed by unexpected revelations. "All my movies," Egoyan reflects in the commentary to *Speaking Parts*, "are based on the idea that information is withheld." The eventual revelations, then, encourage another viewing of the film, one that would provide a markedly different experience for the audience. For example, by withholding the relation between Noah and what is apparently his family in *The Adjuster* until the last scene of the film, where it is revealed that Hera, her sister, and her child are former insurance claimants—that is, Noah's clients—Egoyan seems to offer a solution to the puzzle posed by the behaviors of the characters. Yet reviewing the film with this information in mind hardly explains the emptiness and distance of Noah's household circumstances—the apparent cause does not make the effects any easier to understand. The proper sequence of events does not, as it does in *Pulp Fiction* or *Momento*, resolve the ambiguities raised by a particular ordering of the action.

Consider, for instance, Egoyan's most flamboyant bit of withholding—the last scene of *Exotica*, in which Francis (Bruce Greenwood) and Christina (Mia Kirshner) are shown to have a relation that precedes that of client and stripper in Club Exotica. It does not appear to be subjective: Egoyan does not present it as the memory of either Francis or Christina. Because it appears as the last scene, we take it, at least initially, as a culmination of the process of "stripping," of moving from appearances to some reality. But this piece of information hardly simplifies the story; what is withheld is less a key to the relationships of *Exotica* than a further complication. While conventional film grammar suggests that the last scene will be a solution to the puzzle, Egoyan carefully makes it clear that the attempt to penetrate appearances only results in a revelation of more surface.

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The final conversation between Christina and Francis gives value to certain ritual gestures—the exchange of money, the solace of listening and being heard—but while it encourages us to consider such moments closely in the film in subsequent viewings, Egoyan does not let us confuse depth with temporal priority. The truth of experience is not in some primal scene, but in the complex linkages among events.

While the Rule of Tense becomes, in Egoyan's hands, an expansive and decidedly nonhierarchical approach to experience, his approach to mood is even more complex. Again, his practice here begins in familiar film convention, in which a flashback is not simply seen through the perspective of a given character but is occasionally suffused with that character's feeling and desire. Egoyan's early films often relegate such subjective views to other media within the film, such as the videotape in *Speaking Parts*, which functions as a kind of unconscious for characters like Lisa or Clara, or the mysterious television screen from which Stan's wife's image confronts him in the last moments of *Family Viewing*. We clearly register the eruption of Lisa's desire to meet her brother, as the digital loop of the mausoleum ultimately contains Lisa (significantly wielding the camera, as producer and not simply consumer of images) as well as her dead sibling. But Egoyan's later films pose greater interpretive problems, as the director makes clear in his commentaries to *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Felicia's Journey*. The Rule of Mood, while related to that of Tense, adds a certain flexibility to the status of the image or sequence. It allows Egoyan to consider events in a subjunctive or, perhaps more exactly, an optative mood, in which images are the result of a revision of past experience in terms of a subject's desire or wishes—that is, of what might have been rather than an objective presentation of experience.

Egoyan's discussion of such moments in the commentary track to *The Sweet Hereafter* is precise, even as he unsettles perhaps the most durable of film conventions, the tacit agreement between director and viewer that what is shown should be treated as a given, or at least that viewers should be able to distinguish objective from subjective moments within the narrative. Egoyan's discussion of the incest scene, in which Nicole and her father play out a lyrical and disturbing sequence, sets the terms of engagement between director and viewer. Egoyan asserts that what we see is entirely from Nicole's point of view, an enhancement or fantasy. Hence, the candles and the carefully arranged guitar (which have led some critics to dismiss the scene

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as improbable: who, after all, would place so many candles on bales of hay?) are simply Nicole's elaborations, partly the investments of an adolescent girl's highly mediated sense of eroticism, and partly the defenses of a young woman who is beginning to understand that she has been abused.

Viewers not aware of Egoyan's practice might simply register such subjective presentations as continuity errors or improbabilities. But with the Rule of Mood in mind, the incest sequence yields a very different set of considerations. Nicole's clothes become much more complex signs. Her tight skirt, a hand-me-down once owned by a neighbor's dead wife, not only marks her sexuality but also suggests her assumption of an erotic role. The red blanket she wraps herself in as she leaves the car for the barn, which emphatically replaces the bland light-blue parka we see her in elsewhere, takes on a vivid significance as well. Seen in the light of Nicole's construction of the image, it recalls the cloak of Little Red Riding Hood, an apt extension of the film's other use of fairy tale as commentary, the Pied Piper story. Just as danger for Little Red Riding Hood is concealed by the appearance of a family member, the wolf as grandmother, so is the erotic intent of Sam Burnell masked by his conventional paternal role.

In fact, the Rule of Mood, in itself, revises entirely the pact between viewer and director. Its corrosive effect on the image cannot be contained in a single scene or sequence. Once challenged, the status of the image is forever at issue. Egoyan links the incest scene between Nicole and Sam to the image of the Stephens family that opens *The Sweet Hereafter* both sonically and visually. The camera sweeps up the stacked bales of hay in leading us to the embrace of Sam and Nicole, recalling the opening camera motion, which glides across a hardwood floor dappled with sun and shadow before revealing the sleeping Mitchell family. The second scene also recalls the flute that accompanies the slow sweep of the opening scene, albeit with a dramatic change in tone from the initial evocation of peace and contentment to the more grating, dissonant music of the scene in the barn. In each scene, wind can be heard, subtly undercutting the solace of the first scene, pointedly menacing in the latter. Even viewed by conventional approaches, each image is not what it seems: we learn later that black widow spiders inhabit the bed as well as the nuclear family in the Mitchells' idyll; incest belies the superficial glamour of Nicole's memory. But the Rule of Mood affords a further turn to this deconstructive movement—if the barn scene is revised according to Nicole's desires and needs, so is the opening scene revealed as a

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possible fiction, a creation of Mitchell's desperate need for a habitable past. All that is solid melts into thin air as one parses Egoyan's astringent cinematic grammar.

One might note that this analysis of *The Sweet Hereafter* could possibly have been reached by a determined viewer, one who begins with the unusual details of the barn scene (the candles, the misplaced eroticism, the prominence of the red blanket, and Nicole's melodramatic and prolonged hesitation at the barn door) and follows these as clues. Only the most vigorous and perhaps skeptical viewers, however, could follow this logical trail. Most viewers would welcome Egoyan's commentary for the instruction it provides, which does not in any case make the film any less open. But the commentary track to *Felicia's Journey* shows us just how necessary some sense of Egoyan's film grammar is to viewers. Scenes that have no apparent hints that they are to be taken as subjective memories or fond wishes are marked as possibly fictional by Egoyan, and the Rule of Mood becomes more urgent.

Felicia's Journey, at first viewing, seems to be Egoyan's most mainstream film. The plot is fairly straightforward, the action centers on two characters, and the development of character is prominently undertaken. Viewers of Egoyan's earlier films might note that the use of other media is predictably expository and expressive. The cooking shows that Hilditch slavishly follows suggest that the roots of Hilditch's character lie in his unusual childhood, and his taping of the "lost girls" allows his darker obsessions to emerge. But Egoyan's commentary puts much more into play than the status of these taped artifacts. When discussing the two scenes in which Hilditch sees Johnny, the boy who has deserted Felicia, Egoyan applies the Rule of Mood with unsettling results. We learn that the scene in which he watches Johnny playing tennis at the army installation, which at first seems to establish Hilditch's effectiveness as a serial killer (he has, after all, tracked Johnny down in an afternoon), his cool distance from events (he locates Johnny but withholds information from Felicia), and perhaps a strange connection in Hilditch's mind between himself and Felicia's lover, is possibly fantastic. There is little in the scene to suggest that it is not happening in real time: after all, we have seen Hilditch pursuing Johnny on the telephone, and his eventual discovery seems to continue this line of action. There is, of course, a slow-motion sequence in the scene, in which Johnny gracefully strikes a tennis ball, but that could easily be taken to suggest an erotic response in Hilditch. Yet in the audio commentary, Egoyan states that this scene

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might be in Hilditch's mind, a flight of imagination. This applies the Rule of Mood with a vengeance, and to admit this possibility puts every scene in a kind of abeyance. Viewers of Egoyan's earlier films, of course, would find the deconstruction familiar. Video and non-film images are put under enormous pressures in *Speaking Parts* and *Family Viewing*, and the entire structure of *Next of Kin* requires close attention to the movement of the camera as an indication of what Egoyan calls "the spirit of the dead son." But these themes are demarcated much more clearly in earlier films; they are recoverable from the experience of watching the film. Here, the treatment of the image is apodictic.

The second scene in which Hilditch and Johnny appear is, if anything, even more destabilizing. Here Hilditch takes Felicia to the Barton Arms, a bar presumably frequented by "squaddies," in hopes of finding Johnny. Ostensibly, the scene is an homage to Hitchcock, as Hilditch nervously watches Johnny enter the bar behind Felicia's back. Egoyan puts his audience into a classically Hitchcockian quandary, as we respond to the tension in Hilditch against our moral judgment, much as we feel the anxiety of Norman Bates as his victim's car hesitates before sinking in the lake. But Egoyan, in his commentary, suggests that Johnny is not there, that he is yet again a figment of Hilditch's imagination. We propose that few viewers would approach the scene in this way; the simpler interpretation, which accords with our expectations of the thriller genre, seems much more amenable. But Egoyan's position here is suggestive; it provides a richer reading of the material, one that opens questions about Hilditch's motivations and pathology. Moreover, Hilditch's fantasies, once realized, can be linked to Felicia's more conventionally marked dream sequences, which are immediately recognized as the emanation of her desires. The parallel of Felicia's seemingly innocent dreams with Hilditch's darker fantasy life provides yet another link between stalker and victim.

Egoyan's abrupt application of the Rule of Mood seems almost like a thought experiment, one calculated to lead to a rigorous interrogation of the image, and one intent on canceling the willing suspension of disbelief that a movie like *Felicia's Journey*, with its substantial budget, lavish cinematography, and recognizable star, seems at one level to invoke. His practice here puts the film to the kind of scrutiny so familiar in his early films, which examine questions of mediation, but the questions now seem to come not from the film itself but from the Egoyanesque viewer. The application of the Rule of Mood makes this film far less conventional, a meditation not so much on "bad

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faith," as one critic has characterized Egoyan's deceptions, but on the ways in which interpretive conventions shape the material we see on screen.[9]

We can only apply the Rule of Mood if we are conscious of the assumption behind it, that perception is an event in which predispositions shape the world as it comes to us. Egoyan's films often present viewers with extreme examples of the priority of the subject. Objects carry an almost unbearable weight in his films, as characters attach deep emotional and symbolic meaning to them. These investments are both excessive and ultimately the source of conflict among characters, as each character's search for meaning becomes a struggle to establish one's own meaning over that desired by others. This tendency, the Rule of the Subjective Priority, emerges most clearly in Egoyan's audio commentary to *Ararat*.

Egoyan begins his commentary with a meditation on this aspect of his films, remarking on the array of objects in Gorky's studio with which *Ararat* begins. The subject's investment in objects quickly becomes something of a key concern, as he traces the circulation of artifacts made by various characters. Ani's book manuscript, for instance, becomes a way of restaging the contest between Ani and Celia for possession of Raffi. Ani proposes her book as an act of cultural recovery, a reverential consideration of Gorky's masterpiece that explains the painting's historical significance. Celia, who has devoted herself to investigating her father's mysterious death, regards the book as evidence of Ani's perfidy and guilt: the story about Gorky that Ani tells is a disguised version of events in her own life. Similarly, other artifacts, once their circulation begins, become sites of contest. Saroyan, the director within the film, tells Martin, the actor playing Clarence Ussher in his movie, that the story is that of his grandmother, a survivor of the Armenian genocide. Rouben, Saroyan's writer, tells Marty that his character is contained in Ussher's book. Martin replies that he has done his own research and that his performance is, as he puts it, "up to me." Clearly these are not compatible investments; they can only persist uneasily until characters confront one another.

Closely related to these last two rules concerning subjectivity is the Rule of Transference. In an Egoyan film, all relations, whether those between humans or those between humans and objects, can be remapped onto other humans or objects. The basic conceit of Egoyan's first feature film, *Next of Kin*, in which the protagonist resituates himself in another family and that family accepts him as their

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lost son, is only the most obvious of these transferences. Egoyan's discussion of this tendency is perhaps most luminous in his audio commentary to *Ararat*, where he notes that David, the customs officer holding Raffi on suspicion of drug trafficking, has conflated Raffi with his son, transferring his incomprehension of Philip's actions to those of a stranger. David's cure is ultimately effected through the fortuitous combination of Raffi's need to testify about the Armenian holocaust and Canadian law, which allows David the time to hold and to question Raffi until he understands him. So wrapped up in the process of transference is David that Raffi simply cannot follow his musings on the loss of meaning, and it is abundantly clear that any relevance that David's comments might have to Raffi's situation is a matter of chance.

Such encounters have a magical quality when they succeed, a magic based upon the utter lack of intention and self-consciousness displayed by the interlocutors. The style of interaction, as many critics have remarked, recalls Samuel Beckett's plays, but there is a strange efficacy to the process as Egoyan conceives it. His characters may, at crucial moments, be talking to themselves, but this soliloquizing with others often brings them to a new accord with those around them. Language may indeed be a prison house, but the inmates can sometimes intuit what goes on in nearby cells.

Such a bold approach to cinematic grammar, in which the viewer is encouraged not simply to doubt on occasion but always to consider the possibility of doubt, would seem to make the Egoyan film the ultimate open text. Pure skepticism would quickly prove to be a reductive and repetitive strategy, one that would ultimately drain each film of any meaning beyond consideration of the structuring processes of cinematic convention. But against this, Egoyan offers a more positive rule that limits the play of such uncertainties. He articulates this in a discussion with Russell Banks during the audio commentary to *The Sweet Hereafter*. Banks and Egoyan disagree, mildly but persistently, on the ultimate disposition of Mitchell's character. For Egoyan, Mitchell, unlike other characters in the film, cannot change. Too old and perhaps too damaged to transform himself, he is simply stymied by the collapse of the lawsuit. Banks, drawing on a gesture made by Ian Holm (putting his hands over his eyes as he awaits his luggage), argues that while Mitchell may not change, he does see himself clearly. A subsequent encounter, in which the now-bespectacled Mitchell stares amazedly at Delores, the driver in the fatal bus crash, in her new capacity as airport shuttle driver, makes the optical code emphatic.

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The disagreement over Mitchell's development is slight; the themes of the movie concern questions of community and interpersonal relations, not the familiar journey of a character from blindness to insight. Egoyan nevertheless takes the occasion to address this tension by yet again setting out an interpretive convention: "It's for me the most exhilarating aspect of filmmaking to be able to allow something which is so predetermined as film to have space within it to accommodate the viewer's own trajectory and their own need to define the narrative for themselves." Egoyan's insistence here on play within a fixed structure, on what reader-response critics refer to as gaps in the narrative, sets the terms of the viewer's interpretive freedom lucidly. One might say many things about a given gesture or sequence in a movie, but one cannot say anything. In fact, the viability of the film depends upon the viewer's ability to sort elements of structure from the gaps created by such structure. A filmmaker, according to Egoyan, is "imposing something that will never change…these images will unfold in the way they were designed." Despite the prominence of the Rule of Mood and the Rule of Structure and Spaces in Egoyan's cinema, his work is not aleatory. While Egoyan posits "infinitely curious" viewers, who will actively engage and question what they watch, he nevertheless sets a limit to the centrifugal forces of response. He attempts, in a sense, to be as lucid as possible about undecidability, to situate it as far as possible, and to retain the old-fashioned potential of the auteur.

The position here is quite complex. Egoyan is trying to find the boundaries between what might be termed the "intended" and the "unintended" aspects of film. The extreme positions in this debate, while locally undeniable, are contradictory when applied consistently. Egoyan posits a form that would "allow the viewer to drift and to create their own strands of narrative, their own story," but he also has some very determinate things to say, even about the irreducible ambiguity in all forms of communication. Egoyan's precision can be seen in further discussion with Banks about Mitchell's gesture. The director reveals that the gesture was not planned, but added by Ian Holm, and presumably accepted by Egoyan; its very origins are equivocal. Significantly, Egoyan does not offer this circumstance as a counterargument to Banks's reading. It is simply another part of the interpretive process, another complication to a space in the narrative.

The Rule of Structures and Spaces underwrites one of the most unusual features of Egoyan's commentaries, his frequent recourse to "I think" when discussing motivation and character. At times he seems

willing to distance himself from the film, to become one commentator among others (however privileged). It is not unusual on audio commentaries for directors to welcome and explore interpretations that run counter to their stated intentions, but few posit such irresolvable ambiguity. Consider this surprising comment on one of the scenes in *Ararat* that concerns the adult Arshile Gorky. Egoyan quickly sets the vertiginous circumstances of viewing: "We are not, I think, in Ed's (Saroyan's) film." One might well ask, where then are we? Later Egoyan suggests that these scenes might take place in the mind of Ani, his biographer, an interpretation that one of the deleted scenes, in which Ani and Gorky discuss Saroyan's film, would support, but only if one were to disregard the problematic status of deleted scenes. Certainly nothing in the final cut of the film gives us any clear indication of whether these scenes are history, part of Saroyan's film, or a flight of Ani's imagination.

Similarly teasing are Egoyan's comments on the final scene of *Ararat*, in which Gorky's mother replaces the button on her son's coat as she sings a moving version of an Armenian song used prominently throughout the film: "This, I think, is a scene that isn't in Edward's film, it's a scene that's just, I think, the closest the film comes to actually showing pure history." The informality of audio commentary notwithstanding, Egoyan's insertion of "I think" twice in his remark registers his hesitancy in resolving some of the film's many ambiguities.

Egoyan's position can best be understood by comparison with that of another notably oblique filmmaker, fellow Canadian David Cronenberg. In the audio commentary to *Spider,* Cronenberg speaks with a precision and certainty about his characters' motivations that viewers might well find difficult to accept. Some of Spider's actions seem far more ambiguous than Cronenberg's comments suggest, and reasonable viewers might be unable to understand them in so direct a way. The basis for interpreting these moments in this way would have to derive from Cronenberg's authority, not from the film itself. While other directors welcome other interpretations of their work in the audio commentaries they provide, few seem so calculated in their openness as Egoyan. Bill Condon, for example, in his engaging audio commentary to *Gods and Monsters* seems amused and interested in other interpretations of his work, but at no point does he discuss the evocation of multiple responses as deliberate on his part.

The last rule is more technical. Egoyan develops a particularly complex kind of montage throughout his films, one in which

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multiple characters pursue parallel activities. Often there is a sense of speed to these sequences, as material developed slowly over the film bursts into full significance. The effect of such construction tends to emphasize ideas and situations over the demands of simple character development: like dancers in a complex ballet, the individual is subordinated to larger effects. Egoyan himself discusses these passages in the audio commentary to *Speaking Parts*, likening it to musical counterpoint (and noting the importance of the musical score to its success).[10] This privilege of structure over the individual is one of the more direct challenges to dominant Hollywood convention, in which the charisma of the star is rarely diluted. The Rule of Counterpoint asks us to examine carefully the links among strands of plot. The prominence of this technique varies in Egoyan's films: it reaches a kind of maximum of intensity in *Speaking Parts* and *Exotica*, only to vanish in *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Felicia's Journey*. But it returns with a kind of grandeur in *Ararat*, which raises this technique to an operatic pitch.

Of course one needn't ultimately follow such rules, which are, after all, only suggestions offered by the director. Each film is its own object with its own formal status, and interpretations may develop for the film that operate according to different conventions. The uses of a thing and its original purposes are not necessarily related. But scholars of film neglect such information at their own peril. Whether or not they accept these terms of engagement, they should be well aware of them, and it is to some extent up to them to make an argument for interpreting film against the director's stated intent. A director's intentions are not decisive in interpretation, but they have a certain weight and should be handled accordingly. The question here is not so much interpretive freedom, but self-consciousness about one's interpretation.

2

Exotica, Egoyan's fifth feature film and his first to receive wide distribution, is one of the films to which he has not provided an audio commentary. *Exotica* marks a transition between work of the more art-house variety, such as *Calendar* and *The Adjuster*, and more broadly accessible work such as *The Sweet Hereafter* and *Felicia's Journey*.[11] It is also the film that has attracted the most interest among critics and film scholars. As such, *Exotica* offers a perfect opportunity for the application of the rules developed from Egoyan's other

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categories. What might the viewer steeped in Egoyan's own approach to his work, as set out in his audio commentaries, make of this rich and provocative film?

Exotica explores the interwoven lives of three characters: Francis (Bruce Greenwood), a widower who frequents the Exotica, a strip club; Christina (Mia Kirshner), a dancer at the club who performs in the guise of a schoolgirl; and Eric (Elias Koteas), the club's announcer. There are two prominent time frames for the action—one in which Francis, goaded by a jealous Eric, touches Christina and is thrown out of the club. The other time frame, evoked lyrically as a kind of idyll at first, concerns the grim search for and discovery of a missing schoolgirl—whom we learn is Francis's daughter—during which Eric and Christina meet and begin an affair, which has since ended. There are three complicating subplots. Zoe, the club's owner, has contracted successfully with Eric to produce a child, and Christina discovers this. Tracey, Francis's niece, whom he has been paying to stay at his house whenever he goes to the Exotica, grows restive at her uncle's strange ritual of mourning and terminates the arrangement. Finally, Thomas, a pet shop owner under scrutiny for smuggling exotic animals, is employed by Francis as a means of getting access to the club in order to interrogate Christina.

So brief a summary, while only hinting at the complexities of the film, nevertheless prompts us to invoke the Rules of Tense and Transference. The opening moments of *Exotica*, which shuttle among the different characters, suggest that we should pay particular attention to the workings of the Rule of Viewer Vertigo as well. In fact, Egoyan's film cleverly mingles techniques familiar from his earlier work, as the strongly invoked time frames of the film act both to withhold information, as we have seen before, and as a kind of memory. On one level, the puzzles of *Exotica* resolve as we move through the double times of the plot: Eric and Christina discover the body of Lisa, Francis's daughter, and Eric's protective embrace of Christina at that moment compactly sketches their problematic relation (the confusingly mutual tenders of protection that animate not only their affair but Christina's relation with Francis). But on another level, the two times do not resolve so easily. Although the search story is essentially a memory, and presumably accessible as such to Eric, it has a more fantastic status for Francis, who seems to imagine it. Egoyan takes great care to leave the status of this material open: we are not sure whose memory or imagination is at work. Egoyan's fascination with tense and viewer vertigo are suggestively linked through the thematics

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of transference. In what follows, we would like to examine Egoyan's presentation of this sequence from the past.[12]

The search story, in itself, is linear, comprising five episodes. On the formal level, it is structured by two movements: the eventual discovery of Lisa's body and the growing intimacy between two of the searchers, Eric and Christina. It could, in fact, function as a complete narrative on its own, as Eric, who intimates that he is searching for structure in his life, finds Christina, a sympathetic listener, and takes up a position as protector to her, shielding her from the sight of the corpse. On its simplest level, the story seems to be a memory, specifically Eric's, of a previously blissful time in which Christina's innocence and questions allow him to unburden himself. Christina seems, as he will say in the film's other temporal sequence, to "soothe him."

But the first four invocations of the story do not place the story clearly within Eric's memory. The conventions for establishing a memory within a film are straightforward, and Egoyan has often used them in earlier films—albeit obliquely at times. In *Exotica,* Egoyan invokes the familiar prompts of a memory sequence in places where the character could not access such material as a memory. Only the last sequence of the field, in which the body is discovered, is tied to Eric as a memory according to the familiar conventions of flashbacks: the camera cuts from Eric's face to the field, and it ultimately returns to Eric's face. Egoyan's return to conventional cues here, at a moment of emotional intensity, has great force, partly because of his studied violation of such cues earlier. In a sense, Egoyan's film solicits our attention in certain ways that his audio commentaries support, and any reading of *Exotica* should begin with a close examination of this story line from the past. Particular attention should be accorded to particular cuts or montage patterns that surround the episodes.

The first segment of the search story line is a lyrical interlude of about 45 seconds. In a film previously dominated by indoor, urban settings, we suddenly open upon a gently sloping hill on top of which a line of people appear and move toward the camera. The music, spare and expressive, could not be more unlike the pulsating, synthesized rhythms of the club. By the time of this interlude, a pattern has emerged in the film. While we do not yet know whom to focus on—Thomas, Christina, Eric, or Francis—the parallel between Thomas's private voyeuristic appreciation of the man he has picked up at the ballet and the public voyeurism of the strip club is obvious. Display, desire, and looking dominate the dramaturgy, and Eric's

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sleazy narration of the delights of the Exotica, the pleasures of being "hot and bothered," press upon us with almost parodic force. The field and sky, and the recognizably human but not eroticized walkers pose a kind of relief, even a sense of transcendence from the commodified desire of the city. The cuts that frame the field, however, are more complex. Immediately before the cut, Francis has been watching Christina perform a table dance, and, seemingly at some kind of emotional limit, he stands up abruptly and goes to the restroom. The camera moves to Eric, who watches Christina, who gazes fixedly back at him while assuming a stereotyped Lolita posture—blouse unbuttoned as she puts the cherry from her drink in her mouth. The camera cuts at once to the field from her coolly erotic regard. The return from this interlude is equally equivocal: we cut from the field to Francis in the stall. His attitude—hand on forehead—seems to cue the field sequence as his, somehow, but we cannot yet connect him to it any more than we can connect it with Eric or Christina. At best, the field sequence seems to connect Eric and Francis through Christina. The field floats in a kind of abeyance, providing contrast to the other temporal sequence.

The second appearance of the field serves at once to initiate a coherent narrative and further estrange viewers from the sequence. The searchers emerge from the bottom of the screen and walk past the camera, which then designates Christina and Eric as central. Their oblique but earnest conversation provides a context for the scene—a search for a missing girl—as well as signals their interest in one another. But while one puzzle begins to resolve, the question of the relation of the sequence to the film's other time frame becomes even more enigmatic. Immediately preceding the sequence we see Francis, now at the pet shop, hand to his head, which clearly suggests that we regard what follows as his memory or fantasy. But the cut from the sequence belies this interpretation; the cut from the field goes to Christina, now in the Exotica, staring into a closet as she talks to Zoe. Moreover, Eric has no presence in the material that forms the immediate frame to the field sequence. We move from a troubled Francis through the conversation between Christina and Eric to Christina. One might note the formal elegance of one aspect of the pattern: the opening field sequence enacts a passage from Christina to Francis, the subsequent one from Francis to Christina. But while we may have uncovered a design, we still have not discovered the figure in the carpet. The relation of the two temporal sequences remains obscure.

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The third installment of the field narrative, at least initially, seems decisive. After a sustained exchange between Francis and Tracey, in which Francis speaks in ways that even the most casual viewer would find thematically resonant, the camera rests on Francis before cutting to the field. Again Egoyan implies that we are in Francis's mind, witness to some kind of emotionally charged reverie related to the previous discussion of "baggage" and the tension inherent in adult relationships. But not only do we emerge yet again in an unexpected place—in a wordless but emotionally fraught encounter between Eric and Christina—but the field story itself is intercut with a scene in which Eric, alone in a spare and bleak room, turns a bare lightbulb on and off. The field material seems to emerge from Francis's consciousness, but it seems to find application to the troubled relation between Eric and Christina. It seems to be Eric's memory, in which he reveals his vague sense of longing and his cloudy aspirations to Christina, then a very sympathetic and encouraging listener. This section seems to trace Eric's losses by counterpointing the intimacy of past conversation with the present, in which the two former lovers gaze silently at one another from a distance, one hostile and disgusted, one wounded and full of self-loathing.

In the next portion of the field narrative, the counterpoint of the previous section becomes more prominent, and the montage establishes Eric as central. Egoyan frames the sequence with a now-familiar bit of indirection—again we enter the field story directly from a shot of Francis, the morning after his expulsion from the club. The sequence seems to return to the very first invocation of the image: the camera, now moving, tracks over the browns and greens of the grasses of the field. This simpler, decidedly unexotic evocation of nature provides a respite from the urban reality and garishly bright hues that characterize the other time frame. But this separation between idyllic past and alienated present cannot be maintained. The sweeping movement of the lens is accompanied by Eric's voice, and he quickly appropriates the images to his own purposes. Description becomes symbolic narration, as Eric links the field to the innocence of young girls, to Christina, and to his past happiness. This movement is made emphatic by cuts from the field to Eric, alone at the Exotica, musing over the collapse of his aspirations and the passing of time. When we cut back to the developing story between Christina and Eric, the conversation takes on all the maudlin sentiment of Eric's later despondency. In a bit of anticipatory mourning, he laments to Christina that "things are bound to

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slip away" and wonders whether, since he wants Christina, she'll inevitably slip away as well.

If, as the logic of the sequence implies, this image begins with Francis, it appears that Eric has invaded Francis's dreams. Just as Eric narrates Francis's desire for Christina at the Exotica, significantly misunderstanding it in the process, so does he bend this possible memory of the field to the measure of his own desire. For Francis, the image of the field evokes his ultimate trauma, the loss of his daughter, as well as his subsequent search for her, which now includes the ritual trips to the Exotica and extensive ritualized interaction with his niece. But Eric has commandeered the image; it has become the site of his own trauma as well, the moment that at once seemed to offer some kind of transcendence—Christina—but also predicted the loss of this remedy. Happiness is born only to die.

The cut away from the sequence unsettles this view, however, by asking viewers to reconsider, yet again. As Eric's meditation reaches its lugubrious climax in his anguished premonition of loss he has sustained, we move to Tracey, who announces straightforwardly that she will no longer babysit for Francis. This further destabilizes the contextual logic of the sequence. While the kidnapping and murder of Lisa have effects on her, as she plays a role in Francis's rituals of grief, she has no direct relation to the material. "What does any of this have to do with me?" she asks her father, who can only reply tersely, "Nothing. Nothing at all."

The fifth and final installment of the field story has a different feel to it, both in its invocation and its relation to the scenes juxtaposed with it. It is an element in a kind of three-part fugue, in which separate lines of narrative development culminate. Most prominent in this montage is the final encounter between Francis and Eric, in which Eric's revelation that he found Lisa's body seems to bring some kind of closure to Francis's complex process of grief. From Eric's anguished face we cut to the field, where he shields—or, as the film would have it, protects—Christina from the sight of Lisa's corpse. The field sequence ends with a cut from the body back to Eric's face, and the two men embrace. This is the most conventional use of the field sequence, which would, at least in any other movie, be perceived as Eric's traumatic memory—the moment at which he at once found and paradoxically lost both Lisa and Christina: to find Lisa is to find her dead; to find Christina is to begin the inevitable process of losing her. Francis's relation to the story is clear as well; it locates, in a precise way, the origin of his trauma and suggests that he might now

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move on. But this seeming accord between the field sequences and the parallel stories of the two men is juxtaposed with another story, one not given so much attention in the film heretofore, but one that now asks us to revisit the film entirely. The third strand of this fugal pattern concerns Thomas, who has been suborned by Francis to touch Christina, and Christina's response to this violation of the rules at the Exotica. Egoyan cuts from Eric's protective embrace of Christina in the field to Thomas's hand on Christina's thigh. We then cut to the field again, this time to see the corpse; back to Francis and Eric, who embrace; and then to Christina, who in a slow and deliberate movement removes Thomas's hand, holds it while she closes it, smiles mysteriously, and then returns to her dance.

While this counterpoint serves to resolve one set of questions about this second time frame in *Exotica*, it also provides, if anything, a more pressing and elusive set of puzzles for the viewer. The grammar of the montage connects, for the first time, the two time frames precisely; no longer does the field sequence hang in abeyance. But as the situations of the two men resolve, that of Christina becomes far more prominent. Upon retrospect, it asks that we rethink *Exotica* or at least experience the film in an entirely different way. The stories of Eric and Francis receive conspicuously full representation; the embrace of the two men fulfills their need to articulate their pain. Both men, we might note, at a profound level, crave a listener, a young girl whose "innocence" allows for an absorption in what an older man might have to say. Nowhere in the movie does Francis seem so happy as when Tracey, whom we now identify as a substitute for the younger Christina, asks him questions, to which he provides thoughtful answers that are clearly incomprehensible to her. For all Eric's talk about the curative effect of watching Christina dance for Francis—the reflexivity here is complicated, as watching Christina soothe Francis soothes Eric—he seems most content when Christina listens closely to him as they search for Lisa. At the core of the stories of Francis and Eric lies a search for the ideal listener—engaged, uncritical, full of suggestive questions that help the speaker to articulate his feelings. But the final field sequence, which embeds the story of Christina's confrontation with Thomas, solicits another kind of attention from the viewer. Christina's story is less clearly articulated in *Exotica*, despite the fact that she is at the center of all the action, both in terms of her physical presence as well as her status as the object of the psychological investments and obsessions of others.

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This reconsideration is taken up in the final scene of *Exotica*, a memory in which another prehistory is revealed. Christina's sketchy remarks to Thomas, that she does things for Francis because he has done things for her, are given halting articulation, one notable for its gaps and troubling implications. In this scene, Francis's perfervid praise of his daughter's intelligence and talent prompts Christina to speak obliquely of her own life, and Francis at once acts to soothe and offer support to her. The possibility of abuse seems to hang over the exchange—Francis seems to intuit it, and the shot of Christina vanishing, after a long and somewhat hesitant walk, behind a closed door to music that recalls the overripe and sexually charged atmosphere of the club seems to confirm it. If this is the case, then Christina's story, which has until now been secondary to the stories of Eric and Francis, makes its own claim on our attention, and it asks us to look at *Exotica* in another way. The film is less a meditation on therapeutic mourning, the cures of Francis and Eric, than the coping strategies of Christina, who, unlike these men, does not appear to have the luxury of speech. As strange as Francis's rituals are, with their uncomfortable mixing of paternal care with fetishistic sexual desire, the morphology of Christina's rituals is even more complex and obscure. She seems to have taken Lisa as the model for her solo act at the club, adopting precisely the school uniform in which Lisa's corpse was discovered. And the choice of Lisa seems determined as well by the depth of Francis's affection for his daughter: Lisa has all the preciousness that the unwanted and troubled Christina covets. If Francis's trips to the Exotica are strange attempts to conjure his beloved daughter—his angel—from the dead, Christina's uniform and her hyperbolic erotic display are attempts to conjure up the kind of affection that Francis displayed for Lisa.

This gives Christina's response to Thomas's touch a depth that makes it the emotional core of *Exotica*. While in one culminating moment Francis and Eric collapse into each other's arms, Christina, in a more subtle conclusion to the film, gains a new power over her circumstances. The interpolated material from the field shows this clearly. There she needs the protection Eric provides in screening her from the corpse. But in the club, in the absence of both of her protectors Francis and Eric, she manages Thomas's transgression, perhaps even incorporating it into her performance. Christina's wordless response exemplifies the unexpected but resonant remark of another marginalized Egoyan character, Lisa in *Speaking Parts*. "There's nothing special about words," she says to a video store clerk who

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challenges her obsessive adoration of Lance, a struggling actor who appears only as an extra on screen. The establishment of Christina at the center of *Exotica* asks the viewer to wonder at the inadequacies of speech, however abundant, and the surprising eloquence of gesture, however subtle.

This interpretation of *Exotica* would be unlikely, if not impossible, without the audio commentary provided by Egoyan. The analysis turns on a selected application of rules of notice, signification, and coherence derived from his commentaries. And even if such rules could be developed from the scrutiny of Egoyan's films alone, they would be far less plausible than an argument that respects not only the occasional remarks of the director but also the deeper continuities and commitments he displays in his own critical practice. Just as there are some links that viewers are unlikely to make unless a director makes them, there are some interpretive practices that will prove elusive unless the director demonstrates them.

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Chapter 6

Scholarly Commentary and Film Study

Commentary by scholars has a long history, one now largely overlooked. But we might recall that the earliest manuscript books, in addition to performing the crucial scholarly tasks of transcribing and editing, provided commentary in the margins surrounding the text. These monkish lucubrations, the product of an age far more starved for information, sought largely to collect and treasure hard-won scraps of knowledge by which the abstruse references of ancient texts could be deciphered and understood.

Fittingly, the relatively young form of the DVD recapitulates this central feature of the transmission of medieval texts. Like these earlier instruments, it collects, glosses difficult passages, and addresses gaps between the film's articulation and its current audience, whether gaps of time or gaps in knowledge. But scholarly DVD commentary has a far more uncertain status. Although it harkens back to an older form, scholarly DVD commentary circulates in a world of superfluity and diminished authority. Unlike commentary by directors, which is essentially another primary text, scholarly commentary has little weight, especially if one takes the reviews it garners on the web as an indication of reception. Viewers/listeners generally display little patience with these features, and their remarks are quite consistent. Reviews tend to favor production anecdotes, detailed accounts of technique, and general historical context (if applicable). Put another way, the audience gives almost absolute privilege to fact and circumstance, to an annotation of the film that sticks as closely to the plot as possible. Most welcome is the recondite bit of insider knowledge, the striking detail that illuminates story and character or explains the trick behind a memorable

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effect. Viewers/listeners note their displeasure with commentators with the charge that they are "professorial" or that the commentary smacks of the "classroom," a "lecture," or, seemingly worst of all, "film school." A close reading of these reviews, however, reveals that beneath these charges of pedantry, abstraction, self-indulgence, and irrelevance lies a distaste for any explanation or analysis that is abstract, comparative, or extended. This is a tough audience: one that shows little appreciation or even capacity for the "wonderful impression" registered by Raymond Bellour as he imagines a new critical medium. A fast trade in detail and anecdote among web-savvy, self-appointed critics leaves little space for such criticism. Nor is it simply the commonsensical appeal of such preferences—long-standing ones among readers as well—that fuels the general audience's dismissal of scholarly comment. In a world characterized by a superfluity of raw information, a competition between directorial and scholarly commentaries—each itself already a marginal choice compared to the primary activity of watching the movie—might well be inevitable, and the outcome of such a struggle, given the commonsensical appeal of the former, is obvious. If Steven Soderberg's wry remark (on his commentary to *The Limey*)—"Does anyone ever listen to these things?"—reflects the poor prospect for an audience to directorial commentary, it is clear that scholarly efforts will fare much worse. Medieval commentaries were extrinsic to the text, but never simply an extra.

The deeper continuities beneath this reception have had one positive effect: they have made scholarly commentaries easy to parody, and such parodies seem to have emerged almost as soon as DVDs came to market. Take, for example, the puckish work provided by the Coen brothers on the DVD of *Blood Simple* (1985, DVD 2001), in which the fictional "Kenneth Loring" rehearses nearly every possible cliché of the genre. In a plummy English accent that recalls the pseudohighbrow introductions of Masterpiece Theatre's Alistair Cooke, Loring deplores the studio's recut of the movie, which suppressed its deeper politics in creating a simplistic thriller. He follows this predictable indictment of the power of money and suits over art and genius with a humorous exaggeration of the technical analysis that forms the staple of many commentaries. A discussion of how a scene was shot in a car builds to successively more absurd revelations: that the car was upside down and that the actors "mouth the words backwards." Later, the pithy, insightful production anecdote

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common to commentary is pushed to grotesque limits:

> Do watch these footsteps, because these are not the actor's feet, if you'll permit a mere technical aside about the filming, or rather excuse me, it was the actor's feet, but it wasn't in fact the floor. The actor was suffering from gout on the day of tournage and was unable to support his own weight. Well, "can do" is the motto of these filmmakers and the flooring was ripped out, tacked up against the ceiling and the crew, this marvelous, "can do" crew inverted the actor and hoisted him up and let him trace his footsteps across the ceiling, gravity defeated.

The tendency to offer advice to aspiring filmmakers, another common feature of commentary, turns bathetic:

> You must keep the movie camera out of shot at all costs, something these filmmakers knew so well, even though this was their first film, and that's a fact we haven't really touched on yet, but they were already so competent, so aware, that you must keep the movie's camera out of the film itself. It must be there, of course, to record the scene, but here's the paradox, you mustn't see it in the scene.

The Coens are relentless in their deflation of pretension and expertise. But it is worth noting that, unlike many parodies, their send-up of commentary is almost contemporaneous with the inception of the form. It is as if the essential features of commentary exist almost from the beginning, as a set of expectations not so much formed in the practice of recording commentaries but simply applied to them.

While the reception for scholarly commentary has as much to do with stereotypes of scholars and scholarship, the form of audio commentary has its particular tendency as well. Scholars who provide a commentary position themselves differently with respect to the artistic object than do scholars writing on a film. An audio commentary almost inevitably takes on aspects of an edition, in which annotations are provided to a presentation of a text or artistic object. The temptation of audio commentary is to address everything in the film as it passes, just as an editor, in theory, might address everything before him or her on a page. Unlike the scholar who writes, the audio commentator cannot simply build an argument out of selected textual moments. An editor's relation to a text is steady, focused, and measured; critics writing about a text deliberately vary their attention, and they quite consciously intensify the force of some episodes and

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textual features as they turn them into evidence for larger claims. Accordingly, some aspects of the text or film make no figure in his argument at all. An audio commentator, however, is continually impelled by the film as it passes. The word follows the image, often in the most literal sense. Moreover, the more problematic the film for an audience, the more distant in time it is from the contemporary audience, the more recondite its references or technique, the more the commentator will need to annotate, like an editor. (The *Blood Simple* commentary memorably parodies this impulse to name, when Loring addresses a new sequence by announcing, sonorously, "And now, a rather large cow.")

The best mode of entry into a discussion of a subgenre like audio commentary is neither through an empirical examination of the audience nor through an account of its formal features. Because the audience, at least in any useful sense, has not yet formed for such work, the specifics of its reception and its formal features are under negotiation. Audio commentary does have, however, a clear relation to earlier forms of discourse on film, one that we can recover.

The question then becomes how audio commentary reworks, or, as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin put it, remediates print forms of film discourse. Unlike MODs and other featurettes on DVD, this is a format that is tied to digital form (albeit by way of its earlier analog predecessor, the laserdisc). Short documentary features on the production of movies were made for both theatrical and television release, but nothing like an audio commentary existed before the shift to new media, with the possible exception of classroom performances by some professors, who simply spoke as a film was shown. The remediation begins with the audience. The print audience for a discussion of film, at its most general, is divided into two groups: one that has not yet seen the film, for whom the discussion must at once withhold certain information yet provide enough detail and context to prompt or dissuade attendance, and the other, in which the writer assumes the audience has seen the film and desires some deeper understanding of the film as a cultural and artistic artifact. Each audience's decision to read is separate from the immediate act of watching the film: there is, in each case, a distance between the print form and the moviegoing experience (unless one takes the piece into the theater). The audio commentary collapses these distinctions, neither preceding nor following viewing absolutely, but accompanying it. The viewing it solicits is far more complex than that enjoined by a review—urging, at best, a close reconsideration of a film—and as a

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critical act, it has an immediacy that print discussions cannot match. The experience of such commentary has in addition an unruliness that scholarly accounts of film cannot provide: any viewer/listener will testify to the ways in which the film itself can wrest one's attention from a commentary. A print article recounts certain sequences and describes certain formal features, but these are subordinated to the argument as examples, as evidence. An audio commentary does not have this hierarchical relation to the film, in which critical discourse subjugates the text.

To this end, we wish to examine a few of the best audio commentaries by scholars with an eye toward the reshaping of scholarly discourse in this new format for an uncertain and emerging audience. The five scholars we have chosen address the problems of moving from print to audio commentary in different ways, but in each case, the status of the audio commentary—at once extrinsic to yet intimately entwined with the film, as an "extra" competing with other features, and, more generally, as a new entry into the largely disregarded field of criticism—shapes the particulars of each scholar's treatment. It is at just such moments, when older forms of cultural transmission lose salience and mutate into new shapes, that we can gain some perspective on critical practices that have long gone unremarked. Audio commentary is a challenge to film scholarship, one that asks existential questions of the interpretive enterprise.

Stephen Prince, whose well-received book on Akira Kurosawa, *The Warrior's Camera*, appeared in 1991, has done several audio commentaries on Kurosawa for the Criterion label. Given his subjects, acclaimed and now even venerable art-house films, and the relatively elitist brand, Prince has the advantage of addressing a somewhat more focused audience than scholars working, for example, on noir titles released by studios, who might confront an audience with little tolerance of audio commentary. Moreover, Prince's method in *The Warrior's Camera*, which begins with broad historical and social contextualization, poses a critical question, and then proceeds with largely formal analysis, is very well served by the audio format. His commentary moves comfortably among scene-specific analyses of camera technique, historical material, and critical argument. Prince's smooth transition from print criticism to audio commentary demonstrates the potential strengths of this format.

For instance, Prince discusses the opening shot of *Yojimbo* (1961, DVD 2006) in both book and audio commentary. This sequence, in which the protagonist Sanjuro (Toshiro Mifune) walks along an

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open road, is one of the most visually striking sequences of the film. Prince notes the rigid geometries of Kurosawa's camera work, its constriction and its linear composition, and he develops the implications of these formal choices. Prince is a lucid writer, whose verbal descriptions are careful and effective, but by contrast the efficiency of audio commentary in making these points is telling. The commentary directs our eye, insistently and forcefully; no time is wasted in simply setting the scene and recalling aspects of it. The reader need not remember or construct a picture. So economical is the audio presentation that Prince has the luxury of adding evidentiary detail without any sense of surfeit. In noting Kurosawa's use of a downward camera tilt to inform viewers that Sanjuro is on an open road, Prince is able to show how the narrative is built through highly self-conscious movements of the director's tight camera.[1] Here is the moment Bellour imagined: one in which the critic, in possession of the critical object, exploits this accessibility to enforce an argument.

Prince's audio commentary reprises the main point of his book's treatment of *Yojimbo*: that Kurosawa fashions a fairy-tale resolution to the historical situation he represents, one in which nascent capitalism has made feudal relations, here recalled forcefully in the figure of the samurai, extinct. But Prince is also able to elaborate his points and make a more forceful case. As he revisits certain examples, he takes the occasion to note other evidence that supports his claims. At such moments, a brief mention of his argument suffices. But he can also linger over particularly rich moments, as when he describes perhaps the most fantastical moment of Kurosawa's plot of wish fulfillment—his protagonist Sanjuro's strange final triumph over the forces of history, as he risks death by returning a pistol to a wounded foe, Unosuke (Tatsuya Nakadai), who dies before he can kill him.

It is no criticism of Prince's briskly effective prose to note the advantages of this format. One might say, in fact, that Prince's critical approach and subject matter are particularly suited to audio commentary. Kurosawa's films, even as they recall the technique made familiar by John Ford's Westerns and look forward to Sergio Leone's spare aesthetic, present considerable difficulties to Region One viewers. Their specificity, both cultural and historical, makes them something akin to the puzzle films so popular in the DVD era. For such films, judicious, edifying commentary, intent on explaining various details, is most welcome.

A comparison of Prince's discussion of *Red Beard* (1965, DVD 2002) in print and as audio commentary is also instructive. Prince

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does not stray from his thematic point in *The Warrior's Camera*: that *Red Beard*, unlike other films by Kurosawa, has a deep commitment to spiritual and not simply material values.[2] Again, audio commentary is particularly well suited to Prince's method, one that seeks to ground Kurosawa's particular method of "visual thinking,"[3] by which the director searches for forms suited to his ideological message. Prince's opening remarks set out his goals for the audio commentary:

> I will concentrate on three things in my commentary: I'll be speaking about Kurosawa's filmmaking style, how he shoots his scenes, where he puts his camera, how he blocks the action for actors and camera, how he edits his shots, and how he uses sound. I'll be speaking about what Kurosawa wanted to say with this picture, those aspects of Japanese history on which he based the film, and the things that influenced him in designing the movie. I'll speak about the place that *Red Beard* occupies in his career.

This terse statement of intention could well be a manifesto for one kind of successful audio commentary: one that foregrounds technique.

The sheer length of the movie gives Prince time to expatiate. Hence his close attention to Kurosawa's use of tracking shots. In discussing an early sequence, in which Yasumoto, the young doctor, runs into an herb garden, Prince is able to examine Kurosawa's mastery of moving camera shots: how they are constructed and how they differ from the camera motion imparted by a zoom lens. In later scenes, he scrutinizes Kurosawa's reduction of space into a plane, and he takes the opportunity to demonstrate how the use of a telephoto lens distorts spatial relations. Ultimately, Prince considers the consequences of such choices: for example, the occasional continuity errors that can be introduced by shooting with telephoto lens from different angles. The result is a rich demonstration of some of the nuances of cinematic style.

Prince also details Kurosawa's striking use of sound. Instead of the monaural optical track, which has a narrow frequency that restrains the use of ambient sound, Kurosawa was able to employ a four-channel machine on *Red Beard*. The director seems to go out of his way to use this technology: providing spaces for natural sounds amid dialogue and music. Sound was a multiplier of the image for Kurosawa. For most listeners, now familiar with the elaborate sound effects of recent cinema, such an exposition would entail the development of a historical sense of cinematic change: we can only find Kurosawa's use

of sound "striking" if we understand the historical context for his activity. Here is a place where audio commentary works splendidly. Prince's remarks about sound, as a voice-over, constitute something like a demonstration, not a mere description such as one would find in an essayistic account. And clearly any discussion of sound—one of the more unremarked aspects of cinematic criticism—would benefit from the clearest possible demonstration. The claims in an audio commentary, by their very nature, are accompanied by the equivalent of a quoted example: a portion of the film is bracketed off by the critic and presented for examination. "This scene here is one of the wonderful examples of sound," notes Prince, as he remarks on the "rush of the bells conveying the rush of emotion" felt by two characters as they fall in love.

The embedded story of tragic romance, told by a dying man, exemplifies audio commentary's particular combination of concise and forceful exposition. Prince sets up the episode carefully, using an earlier scene to make preliminary remarks on Kurosawa's use of sound. Then, as one of the finest scenes in *Red Beard* plays out, one in which the dying Sahachi confesses his lost love, Prince deftly notes the combination of technical effects employed. As Prince concludes the lesson, his rather complicated final point—that "the camera tilt has taken us from a literal to a poetic meaning and has used sound and its image to put a period at the end of the scene"—seems to emerge effortlessly from the exposition. This kind of close reading might be effected in prose, but it would entail a much longer exposition. The satisfaction of an audio commentary lies in the speed of exposition and the clarity with which examples are provided.

Prince's audio commentaries on Kurosawa show clearly what the right combination of scholar and production can do. Prince's focus on technique suits a critical medium that does not favor abstraction; his method, which relies on the familiar critical categories of auteur and oeuvre, is fitted perfectly to what one might term the Criterion Collection audience; and his larger project, infused with a well-informed humanism, is well suited for the lecture that the audio track affords. Kurosawa's long takes allow Prince ample time to back up his claims with specific evidence and argument; the director's technical flamboyance provides plenty of critical opportunities; and the strangeness of Japanese culture (at least for the Region One audience) makes Prince's judicious contextualization and historical explanations welcome. Prince's approach accords perfectly with the audio commentary's strength, the immediacy and speed that it brings to

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discussions of technique. This is a shrewd exploitation, albeit incremental, of the DVD as a scholarly medium.

Other scholars take more unruly approaches to audio commentary, with results that are less efficient in the transfer of the positive knowledge that discussions of technique afford, but perhaps more suggestive. Peter Brunette's discussion of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up* (1966, DVD 2004) is a less scripted, less controlled, and ultimately more diffuse treatment of the film. Brunette often simply notes shots as they occur, associating them quickly with larger themes, but he seems uninterested in the more detailed development performed by Prince. He is often content to start larger arguments, such as the claim that Antonioni critiques the rampant, controlling maleness of his leading man or that as the director critiques the photographer's male gaze he is aware of his own implication in this critique, but there is no real argument or evidence behind them. Brunette approaches the film as a kind of puzzle to be decoded, and he at times mentions scholarly attempts at solutions only to dismiss them as unconvincing. His remarks on the opening scene, in which mimes revel through the streets of London, note the resistance of the sequence to any interpretative closure. The commentary works, in part, because of this apparent breeziness, in which the lecture format is abandoned for well-informed conversation.

But at other moments, Brunette provides much more tightly argued sequences. For Brunette, *Blow Up* is a meditation on the nature of meaning. His analysis of the sequence in which the photographer (David Hemmings) searches for the mysterious woman he has earlier filmed (Vanessa Redgrave) allows Brunette to bring together earlier remarks on Antonioni's film as a meditation on the nature of meaning. Here, a series of actions that might well strike viewers as random is resolved into an argument about the "interpersonal" nature of meaning: that something has meaning within an interpretive community—and even an "interpretive community" as loosely constructed as the affectless crowd watching the Yardbirds's ragged performance. Brunette shrewdly traces the meaning accorded to the guitar smashed by a member of the band and thrown to the crowd. The broken guitar takes on meaning (in the frenzied mob's desire to possess it) and, later in the street, is discarded as meaningless rubbish by the photographer and then by a bystander. Brunette aligns this bit of decoding, in which puzzling scenes or sequences are reduced to some logical claim, with the oblique ending of the film, in which the photographer first watches the mimes play a tennis game without equipment and then

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participates. And of course these moments, in which one person or group solicits the participation of another in the construction of some reality, echo the main action of *Blow Up*, in which the photographer desperately seeks confirmation of the murder he has discovered.

Such a critical procedure, an insistent and self-conscious decoding, is a suggestive one. But I would argue that the nature of audio commentary pushes the procedure to its limits. In a commentary, one's remarks must fit the format, the running time of the movie, and one is forced to speak of the entire film, not simply moments that support one's claims. Such an argument, pursued in print form, would be focused on evidence, and while ideally it might send readers back to the film to test its claims, it does not, as would an audio commentary, include a reviewing of the entire film. Brunette's method, pursued intently, elicits another set of questions, not so much about *Blow Up* but about decoding more generally. Brunette's commentary sets out an interpretive procedure that it ultimately undermines.

We can see this most clearly in Brunette's discussion of the way the passing of time obscures our basic interpretation of the action in a film. Brunette often hangs between two responses, suspecting that one thing was intended, but that viewers now would see something else. For example, he repeatedly notes that while the photographer's treatment of women might have signaled a certain debonair quality in the mid-1960s, it now seems to combine misogyny and superficiality. Brunette often hesitates before such alternatives, even as he recognizes that such moments, which frequently form the raw material for the audience's response, effectively short the interpretative circuit. Equally puzzling to Brunette is the moment in which the photographer gives Redgrave the film she wants so desperately: is his slow approach toward her, as she is hiding, topless, between sheets of colored background paper, intended to be sexy? One might note that just such instances of historical loss, in which what might go without saying at the original moment of the film becomes ambiguous, are precisely what a director's commentary or a commentary more immediately contemporary with the film might help us to record. But these are also the kinds of critical questions that audio commentary raises almost inevitably, whether implicitly, as viewers contest such claims as they hear them, or explicitly, as when the critical method of a commentator such as Brunette elicits them.

At such a moment, we can see how audio commentary, which encourages close attention to a stratum of data more immediate to response, poses a challenge to film scholarship. The minutiae of

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response, the automatic and often-unconscious understanding of the film image by its first audience, are as evanescent as they are basic to the interpretation of the art object. Such moments constitute the cinematic equivalent of an empirical fact, the raw datum of experience on which we base interpretation, yet, under the scrutiny made possible through the audio commentary, such facts become tenuous or perhaps dubious. Viewers are forced to ponder the constructed nature of such facts, and the movement from experience to interpretation becomes more complex. Response to the image is inextricably bound up with what Raymond Williams felicitously termed "structures of feeling," which, in the artistic experience, manifest themselves as "a specific structure of particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions, and, in what are often its most recognizable forms, particular deep starting-points and conclusions."[4] Brunette's commentary, as one would expect, presents many positive arguments and an abundance of contextual information about *Blow Up*. But his articulation of the uncertainties of response constitutes a forceful reminder of scholarly work to be done.

The value of sustained attention to the flow of impressions presented by film can be seen in Yuri Tsivian's audio commentary to Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, DVD 1996). Vertov's masterwork, with its frenetic constructivist style of presentation, asks much of its audience. The movie combines speed of reference with a punning sensibility, and one could imagine an audio commentary that would approach the film as a series of puzzles to be explained. Given the elusive nature of the images, compounded by time and, at least for the Region One audience, the geographic space of culture, viewers might be quite grateful for a simple naming of places and shots, and a rudimentary exposition on the implications of the images. But Tsivian smartly chooses to provide more of a performance than a lecture. He does name, but also elaborates upon the film in terms of Vertov's visual *manifesti* and artistic inclinations. Tsivian quotes the director and his critics as relevant images or techniques arise, allowing the viewer to test the experience of the film against abstract accounts of Vertov's intent. At times, Tsivian chooses to elaborate freely upon the film, as when he reads the poetry of Whitman (one of Vertov's favorite poets) against the flow of urban images in the film.

Tsivian understands that *The Man with a Movie Camera* requires multiple viewings. Each shot is overdetermined; knowledge of the entire film, which can only be achieved over time, is necessary to articulate the connections among shots and sequences.

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His commentary strives to equip the viewer for this arduous, but rewarding, activity. Hence his terse, almost caption-like designation of possible interpretive protocols, his attempts through repetition to awaken viewers to the visual patterns before them. Naming gives way to renaming, as Tsivian elicits what he asserts to be Vertov's protocols for viewing.

Tsivian presents himself not only as an informant but also as a model viewer whom we might follow in the act of sorting and coding the images as they pass before us. His succinct evocation of the pattern that binds consecutive images into a coherent series—"vertical transportation, horizontal transportation, along the screen, from the screen, towards the screen, exit, enter, dimensions, *z* axis, *x* axis, *y* axis, *x* axis"—shows us how one might respond. Similarly, the naming of places—"this shot shows Odessa, and this is Moscow, this may be Kiev or Cracov, Moscow again"—both lays the basis for interpretation and alerts the viewer to Vertov's brisk presentational style.

The Man with a Movie Camera is clearly a limit case. Few films have such speed and opacity of reference. The implications lifted onto this plinth of observation and pattern recognition are elusive. Tsivian fits the audio commentary not only to the insistent task of decoding and sorting images on the most basic level but also to a meditation on the inherent problems of this initial critical task. His commentary is at once a demonstration of interpretive success and cinematic resistance. If Tsivian can alert us to the patterns Vertov establishes in his use of the camera—for example, the typology of movement along the three axes mentioned above—he is also well aware of the way in which *The Man with a Movie Camera* can appear incoherent, or at least inconclusive, to even well-prepared viewers. Tsivian's performance is far from the "professorial" stance derided by some fans of audio commentary: by insisting on the most basic uncertainties of Vertov's masterwork, he does not appear so tendentious as some other scholarly commentators. But more importantly, this open position, made possible by the loose protocols of the audio commentary, shows what such a critical medium could make visible in the future. A DVD commentary by a well-informed contemporary, even if it only made the obvious remarks, would prove invaluable to the future understanding of the film. If it simply noted what goes without saying for an initial audience, the patterns of cultural association that can evaporate as soon as they are formed, the implications that vanish in successive cultural formations, we might make more reliable claims about, for

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instance, the aforementioned look between the Vanessa Redgrave and David Hemmings characters.[5]

The tendency of such audio commentary, then, is toward a heightened sense of critical reflexivity. The format insists on a more continuous attention to the film, not the selective focus and emphasis of a print argument. The remarks of the commentator are supported not simply by evidence she herself isolates and develops, but tested against the experience of the entire film. This close attention to the whole, nonetheless, has a countervailing tendency. No critical format so closely approaches the restrictions inherent in the literary practice of close reading, in which every technical inflection and each flutter of innuendo are parsed.[6] In audio commentary, the present image inevitably bends discussion to it. So while every general claim made by the commentator is, in practice, put to proof as the entire film passes, the present image insistently draws the discussion toward the specifics and particulars of the moment. There is, therefore, if not a kind of content to this format, at least certain tendencies that make it more amenable to some critical approaches and some films.

It comes as no surprise that two of the finest audio commentaries to date have come from a critic whose work blends this intense scrutiny of the image with an unusual attention to cinematic and critical reflexivity. Laura Mulvey's commentaries to Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1959, Laserdisc 1994) and Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (DVD 2003) exemplify the match of approach and film best suited to the audio commentary format.

In *Peeping Tom,* Mulvey uses the format as an effective way of presenting the kind of reflexive analysis she has espoused in articles such as "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." The advantages here are many: the gaze is mobile; so too, in an audio commentary, is the presentation. The complex play between still and moving, intrinsic to Mulvey's analysis, is easily obscured in print form, which relies on stills and cinematic memory. Here the nervous play of the camera, and even the different modalities of its presence (as documentarian absorbed in the detail of urban life, as fetishistic voyeur, as journalistic recorder at a crime scene, as conventionally "male" gaze), can be traced.

Audio commentary also briskly demonstrates Powell's use of space: his bold establishment of certain areas with particular meaning and his restless redemarcation of these places as characters move through them. For instance, Mulvey's account of the news agency that Mark (Karl Boehm) visits early in *Peeping Tom* is able to follow the way in

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which Powell marks the space as a venue for the "views" of pornography as well as a conventional shop. Again, neither stills nor memory can provide so forceful a presentation of Powell's craft and subtlety, as his fluid camera movements glide between transgressive underworld and everyday normalcy. Mulvey's interest in the transitions between these states finds clear expression in this critical format.

Another instance in which the temporal advantages of audio commentary are evident is when Helen (Anna Massey) visits Mark (Karl Boehm) in his upstairs apartment. Mulvey notes the use of the camera throughout the scene, following the rhythm of Powell's composition, in which wide, balanced shots at the beginning and end of the scene emphasize a central sequence of close-ups, the "pivot" of the scene. In a book or article one might, of course, juxtapose stills of the close-up and the wider shots to make the point, but, as Mulvey makes clear, it is the combination of camera mobility as well as the opposition of these shots that makes the scene so effective.

The next scene described in the audio commentary reminds us of how compact the form can be. Mulvey need only remark succinctly, as the scene begins, that "the scene is shot with a crane, so that the camera can follow Helen fluidly and without the disruption of cuts," to alert the viewer to Powell's deft technique. No description is needed here—only the viewer's direct attention to the scene as it unfolds. Again, a print account, with its nearly inevitable awkwardness and imprecision, cannot match the force of Mulvey's simple prompt in her audio commentary.

A later scene exploits these same advantages. When Mark and Helen return from their date, Mulvey notes how Powell's insistent use of the camera effects the scene that transpires in the hall: Mulvey notes that this pattern begins with "a single continuous take mirroring Mark and Helen's closeness and their exited collaboration. Without cutting, the camera stays with Mark, as he visualizes the photographs he'll take for Helen. And then it tracks in tight to frame Mark's anxiety as Helen turns his camera to face her." On the one hand, this is a straightforward listing of technical terms. On the other hand, the speed, immediacy, and specificity of audio commentary again allow the viewer to see something that a prose discussion, made prolix by necessary description and perhaps inaccurate by the translation of images into words, might obscure.

This determined exploitation of the format is evident in Mulvey's commentary to *Viaggio in Italia* as well. The commentary could not be more clearly laid out. She begins with a casual statement of

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purpose, "I'll be giving you a personal response to it…as well as some background as to how this strange film came to be made." But even as the credits roll by, her commentary begins to exploit the features of the audio commentary format: her remarks, even here, as various names slip by, are timed to the image, albeit almost subliminally. Once past the credits, this sensitivity to timing the image and the commentary becomes less simply one of cue and response than a thoughtful critical method. In the opening shot, Mulvey begins with the now-familiar description of "what's there," the bane of many a commentary track. But she builds upon the naming of the image at once:

> An open road. Traveling along it, a fast moving camera. With the first shot, the film shows us the movement of the cinema and its journey into the line of a story, a story, but one that has to share cinema with the real world around it. *Journey to Italy* starts with pure movement.

Mulvey weaves her commentary around both the image and bits of dialogue. As the two stars, George Sanders and Ingrid Bergman, motor down the road, she notes that they "locate the abstract image of the open road as a geographical place." Then we hear the couple banter about how far they are from Naples. Abstract critical commentary is immediately buttressed by compelling evidence. The hum and buzz of the movie takes on a rationale under the critic's carefully directed gaze.

Mulvey's presentation creates a dense combination of critical analysis and primary text. Her silences become part of a systematic reorganization of the film, in which exchanges and sequences, marked off by claims, become evidence in an unfolding argument. It is as if her remarks recut the film, making it a kind of second-order experience in which some parts are emphasized and others recede into the background, according to the needs of her presentation. Her silences serve to give great intensity to certain lines and looks:

> During this opening sequence the tangible reality of Italy starts to encroach on star presence and the artifice of the fiction. North and south, fiction and reality, come face to face in an encounter that prefigures the film as a whole. And the reality of the south begins to impinge on the fictional journey. Slowing it down, jostling against it, are two different sides of the film: the fiction that carries the story forward and the reality that slows it down, two different speeds.

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> And from this point, from their arrival onwards, the story will revolve between its two stars, its fictional protagonist, and Naples, the true star of the movie.

Note the use here of audio commentary to allow the viewer closer investigation of the purely cinematic aspects of film—on the nature of its representation of its subjects. As Mulvey explores ontological questions, the viewer is encouraged to test her remarks on a brief sequence in which Rossellini's stars glance back and forth in a series of tight shots at a Neopolitan trattoria.

> Both Bergman and Saunders were the epitome of Hollywood professionalism, script based and character orientated. Rossellini frustrated this very professionalism at every turn. He wanted them to be themselves, erasing the difference between Katherine and Ingrid, George and Alex. Perhaps this strategy works. The very narrow line between supremely professional performance and the actual person is constantly fascinating, especially as these actual people are also Hollywood stars.

Mulvey has made similar points in books and articles, but audio commentary provides particular advantages.[7] A still or a series of stills in a book might get some of these ideas across, but the chance for the viewer to test these ideas immediately against the moving image itself makes the point more forceful and more clear.

The value here is not only pedagogical. One of the great strengths of literary analysis is the ability of critical prose to include the object of its inquiry, not simply to refer to it. While quoted writing is decontextualized, it is still apprehended as text: it is neither invoked by the treacherous process of memory nor is it served up in a distorting form, as when moving images are cast as stills. In a moment like this, audio commentary need not simply refer to its evidence or dangerously transform it.

Another shrewd exploitation of the format of audio commentary can be seen in Mulvey's remarks on the scene in which Katherine (Ingrid Bergman) visits the archeological museum in Naples. Mulvey begins with a rather abstruse claim:

> The museum sequence revolves around a variety of reflections on movement and stillness in the cinema, the relation between the animate and inanimate, the living and the dead.

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But these abstractions become very real in the sequence that follows, as Mulvey explains the play between dead and living, past and present, representation and reality. The sculptures attempt to freeze living movement, just as photography did more efficiently later; but Rossellini's artistry compounds this interplay:

> For many theorists, the photograph's ability to capture and freeze a moment is indicative of a transcendence of time and of death itself. Here in the museum sequence, the camera brings the cinema's movement to the statues and attempts to revitalize their stillness, reaching a crescendo with the gigantic Farnese bull group. Here movement stilled finds an even more complex relationship with camera mobility.

Here again audio commentary provides an unusually incisive exposition of complex critical ideas. The form allows us to see the camera's movement, to grasp Mulvey's subtle point about motion directly. We need not imagine the sequence or watch the sequence as we recall Mulvey's words; both are experienced simultaneously in a smooth and economical marriage of example and claim.

Another example of Mulvey's careful keying of comment and image can be seen in one of the movie's many—and perhaps infamous—meandering conversations. When Alex comes home to an anxious, sleepless, solitaire-playing Katherine, their exchange has little of the narrative drive or depth of character that one expects in a movie.

> With this minimal plot line and two bewildered, unhappy actors, Rossellini managed to create in the eyes of many critics the first modern film. It's as though Rossellini used Bergman and Saunders, their off-screen and on-screen crises, to create a pivot point in narrative cinema. In the absence of the drive of a plot, the movement of action and event, a space for a more reflective form of art cinema opens up.... Out of these elements, the fiction in *Journey to Italy* looses its artifice. When Alex Joyce smokes a cigarette, we see George Saunders smoking a cigarette.

Again, we are invited by Mulvey's presentation to contemplate these abstractions about actor and role with great immediacy—and to test them against our own experience. We see, with Mulvey's prompts, the utility of Rossellini's deferral of narrative, and we glimpse the emergence of the new kind of film that Mulvey posits as the director's aim in *Viaggio in Italia*.

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A similarly rich combination of audio commentary and the image occurs when Mulvey addresses the scene in which Alex and Katherine watch as a plaster cast is made of the impression left by a victim of the eruption of Vesuvius. As the strange replica of a couple is unearthed, the film's protagonists undergo an emotional crisis. Alex, just before the expedition to Pompeii, has bitterly asked for a divorce. Katherine, upon seeing the plaster couple, caught and killed in the midst of life, is overwhelmed by her Italian journey's strange and insistent reminders of mortality. But Mulvey's reading of the film as a story of character gives way to another set of considerations, more abstract and somewhat more abstruse:

> The figures bring another, aesthetic level to the film. The fiction, the story, the characters, give way to allow a space for reflection, for thought, not just about history, but time and its imprint and image. These figures retrieved in the excavation are formed by an imprint left by the original. Film too is an imprint, but while the images of the people of Pompeii were preserved at the moment of death, film is able to preserve the appearance of life. The presence of the human figure on celluloid is one more layer, one more trace of the past fossilized and preserved. Rossellini's style of cinema had always been associated with realism, but here he seems to be taking a step beyond realism towards cinematic reality.

Again, the specificity of this critical medium lends the presentation great force. We are not being simply directed, as we might be by a book or an article, to look again at a film sequence or to perform the notoriously imprecise work of recollection, but to test the interpretation against the moving images before us.

Mulvey's work, perhaps more than that of most critics, has been an exhortation to look beyond narrative and character toward the aesthetic and ontological implications of cinema. Often her points, even her most famous ones, have turned on extremely subtle instances, fleeting moments where an ideology (such as patriarchal oppression) is made manifest in a look or gaze. An audio commentary provides a signal advantage to such an argument: it juxtaposes not only example and theory but also the mediating term in this relation, that is, critical practice. The specificity and immediacy of audio commentary allow us to follow the critic in the act of parsing a sequence.

Cinema, which combines motion and stillness, makes particular demands on critics and scholars who work in print, for whom the fundamental difficulty of translating images into words is only

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partly and often imperfectly eased by the use of photographs. All representations of an original in quotation, of course, have elements of distortion, whether that of selected emphasis or of decontextualization, but the burdens for the film scholar are acute. One of the great ironies of film study is that its "evidence" (a term itself derived from Latin and meaning "out of the seen") has so limited a visibility in print form. The successes of audio commentary are few, admittedly, but in such moments we can glimpse something of what print forms of film criticism tend to occlude and what the audio commentary might provide.

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Chapter 7

The Anthologizing Impulse

The format of the DVD was largely set by the laserdiscs released by The Criterion Collection in the 1980s and early 1990s, for which several producers established a durable repertoire of supplemental features. The persistence of this format, even as production has shifted from a company serving a small market of cinéphiles to multinational film distributors addressing a mass market, suggests a kind of evolutionary fitness to these features. Even as DVD production has fallen more and more under the sway of marketing, the familiar supplements abide, albeit sometimes in a parodic form. Audio commentaries might lapse into diffuse exchanges of gratitude and congratulation among directors, actors, and producers, while "making-of" documentaries might become rehashes of the EPKs that accompanied the theatrical release of the movie or vanity productions to assuage exalted egos. But even such questionable efforts pay silent tribute to the originals from which they are derived.

This repertoire of features constitutes a kind of tradition in DVD production. One might imagine other features—in fact, this repertoire is more enabled by the technology than determined by it—but there is a dominant model, and as such it deserves critical scrutiny.[1] This chapter argues that supplementary features largely fulfill archival and contextualizing functions and that they do so in an unexamined but tendentious way.[2] The dominant approach to features scants certain ways of thinking about film, even as it provides the basis for a suggestive reconsideration of how we approach such cultural products. Ultimately, this tradition is a choice not only about how audiences should engage with the films they watch but also about the nature of cinematic knowledge itself.

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The contours of this tradition can best be seen by a comparison with what might be termed its opposite—namely, approaches that stress analysis and critical inquiry. Supplements that contextualize film tend to leave much up to the viewer.[3] They provide the raw material for arguments that viewers might make about what they see. They seek to produce what historical thinkers of an earlier time termed "a picture of great detail." One can imagine, however, supplements that take a more directly critical approach: that address questions such as the nature of the image, the specifics of cinematic representation, the political or social implications of the dramaturgy, or the particular thesis of the film. Such approaches are more analytical than edifying, documentary, or historical. In them, the focus returns to the film itself, not to conditions and circumstances.[4]

It would be, of course, a mistake to push this opposition too far, as it represents tendencies and not exclusive categories. An archival approach cannot be undertaken without a principle of selection, which, in itself, presumes a kind of analysis. Some materials must be preferred, and there must be some logic to such choices. Conversely, no critical argument can be sustained without the benefits of evidence drawn from an archive, without the details and circumstances that give force to the argument's claims. But the distinction is clear enough for our purposes here.

This opposition brings into focus the role of the DVD producer, who more or less presides over the features that accompany the film. An analytical approach would call on the producer to sustain certain claims about the film; the features, taken as a whole, might present some argument (or arguments) with clear direction. The viewer would then simply follow the process, which, having a specific demonstrative or persuasive end in sight, might be termed closed. An archival or anthologizing approach, however, would be less oriented toward a given conclusion. It would shape a viewer's encounter with the material, but not with the finality of a critical argument. It would seek to be suggestive and edifying rather than argue toward an explicit conclusion, and it would enable viewers to form their own arguments or sustain their own theses about the work and its circumstances.[5] Here, a DVD producer would stand as a kind of mediator between a vast archive of related materials and relevant knowledge and the viewer, and not an authority with a particular viewpoint to present.[6] In such a case, viewers are called upon to do a certain kind of work, to produce meaning, and not simply to trace another person's production of knowledge. Such a producer

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would implicitly preside over a more interactive relation between viewer and material.

We do not argue that this choice was made deliberately. Its survival is credited to its fitness, its subtle accord with ideas about film current among both directors and audiences. For instance, the empowerment of viewers implicit in the anthologizing venture resonates with remarks about interpretation commonly made by directors. Consider, for instance, Quentin Tarantino's remarks on meaning in the audio commentary to *Reservoir Dogs*:

> I don't like to explain subtextual things in the movie because anything you've thought and saw and have come up with yourself I want you to just keep it…I do what I do and I know what [how] I felt about it and everything but then it's all for you now. I like the idea I'm like the opposite of an Oliver Stone concept where he has one idea that if a million people see his movie he wants a million people to come out with that idea…a million people see my movie I want everyone to have made a million different slightly different movies in their heads.

Tarantino's celebration of the open text—with its expansive, democratic faith in the participation of audiences in the creation of meaning—is something of a commonplace among directors and critics.[7] His assertion that audiences "make" a movie of their own is more notable for its exuberance than its singularity. But such a stance also harmonizes with more diffuse ideologies of consumption, in which participation receives often-outsized emphasis in the exchange of goods and services, making it particularly amenable to audiences in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.[8] Put simply, audiences currently prefer being led to being told.

The archivist tendencies in DVD supplementary features run deep. It is worth recalling that the development of The Criterion Collection was bound up with the ventures in educational software undertaken by its sister company Voyager, that both Bob and Aleen Stein had deep commitments to as well as backgrounds in such undertakings, and that many of the first DVD producers worked with Criterion within this early model. The questions then become what particular producers have made of such a tradition, how their work shapes the interpretation of film, and what limitations such a model might pose for the study of film. To this end, we offer three case studies of archival anthologies. The cases are chosen, first of all, to display obvious successes as well as to represent the range of such initiatives.

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The Battle of Algiers

Criterion producers often speak of their work in general terms—perhaps because their procedures are so well established. "You start with the film itself," says producer Kim Hendrickson, echoing the familiar company line: "We're never so much driven by what it's going to cost to get it done; it's about what works best for the DVD and if we can do it."[9] Typically, Criterion's attention to detail in the process of digital transfer—finding the best negatives, careful reconstruction of damaged or lost material, and so on—ensures that the films many of us have seen under less-than-optimal conditions will finally be available in a form that retains something of their original splendor. But Criterion's edition of *The Battle of Algiers* offers more than such timeless pleasures; its release after the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq invasion, and the abuse scandals at the Abu Ghraib prison make it a timely intervention. Criterion has added two discs of supplementary material as well as some printed matter that provide not only a compelling context for the film but also an astute meditation on the uses to which art is often put. Supplementary materials often seem superfluous, but in this case they provide a record of how Gillo Pontecorvo's film has spoken in different ways to different audiences.

The original release of *The Battle of Algiers* in 1966 was controversial. Pontecorvo, who had fought with the Italian partisans against the fascists in World War II, was a committed leftist, and he and his collaborator, Franco Solinas, were actively seeking a vehicle for their political ideas. Solinas had given up entirely on political activity in Europe, where he felt the working classes had become part of the status quo, and he turned to the colonies, where the experience of class struggle was still lived through the oppression confronted daily. Algeria, which had recently gained independence from France in 1962, offered the perfect material for an investigation of the confrontation between nationalist feeling and colonialism. While the movie received high praise—winning the Golden Lion at the 1966 Venice Film Festival—it was banned in France for nearly five years.

It is not hard to imagine the original reception of the film, at a time when Europe was steadily shedding its colonies, and these new countries looked optimistically to a future of self-determination. But Pontecorvo's film, while firmly in support of the Algerians, is far more ambiguous than one might expect. Although Pontecorvo worked with the new Algerian government as well as former insurgents, such as

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Saadi Yacef, who had organized the bombing campaigns so effective in the struggle, he did not follow Sergei Eisenstein down the path of heroic mythology. While Pontecorvo's camera catalogs the outrages committed by the French on the local population—the humiliations of checkpoints, arbitrary detention, torture, and execution for political crimes—it also registers the human cost of resistance. Few sequences in film are so gripping as Pontecorvo's recreation of the FLN's retaliatory bombings of two cafés and a Pan Am office, a montage in which female bombers ponder the faces of civilians they are about to maim or kill. Part of the message of the film seems to be that a revolution must outgrow its insurgents, who, while essential in kindling resistance, are perhaps best consumed in the process.

Most remarkable about *The Battle of Algiers* is its intricate portrayal of insurgent methods, an account so rich that it has subsequently been used by other revolutionary groups (famously, the Black Panthers in the 1960s and the IRA later) as well as screened at the Pentagon in 2003 (presumably defensively, and not for purposes of destabilization). Unlike other leftist films that have didactic aims, however, Pontecorvo integrates the story with the instruction. There are no overlong set speeches, such as in Costa-Gavras's *Z*, and exposition and incident never seem at odds.

Criterion began production of the DVD edition of *The Battle of Algiers* at a complicated historical moment. According to Abbey Lustgarten, who coproduced the DVD with Kim Hendrickson, the rights were acquired in 2002 and research for the disc began in 2003, with the eventual release in October 2004. This put the production squarely within the fraught public debates surrounding the 9/11 attacks, the second Iraq war, and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. "We couldn't just frame it in cinema history,"[10] Lustgarten recalls. *The Battle of Algiers* was not only "a film that was so stirring in its representation and so true to what had happened" but also "a part of history." Moreover, *The Battle of Algiers* had become insistently relevant yet again. Lustgarten notes that contemporary events consistently informed their work, or "at least their questions about the film." Lustgarten recalls the "visceral" force of seeing a screening of *The Battle of Algiers* presented by Julian Schnabel at the Grand Classics film series (a series arranged "as a way to bring people together after 9/11"[11]) as she began work on the film. For the producers, 9/11 "posed a lot of questions for us that perhaps we really hadn't considered before," and it led them to Richard Clarke, whose sharp criticisms of the Bush administration were prominent at the time.

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At such a moment, it is no wonder Lustgarten and her coworkers "spent a lot of time tracking the news coverage."

Many of the disc's supplementary materials are interventions in their own right, attempts to orient *The Battle of Algiers* to a particular ideology and to apply it to a specific historical moment. Three of these supplementary materials stand out—two documentaries, now archival, produced for different audiences, and a June 2004 interview produced by Criterion for the DVD of the film. On one level, these materials simply offer competing interpretations of the film, more or less persuasive. From another perspective, however, they tell us something about the nature of Pontecorvo's vision, the force of which can be aligned so variously and so productively.

Edward Said's 1992 documentary *The Dictatorship of Truth* offers the most subtly persuasive of the applications of *The Battle of Algiers*. Said, a well-known literary scholar and a supporter of the Palestinian cause, provides an informative account of Pontecorvo's career. Ostensibly the documentary examines Pontecorvo's notorious inability to complete projects, and Said's literary training serves him well in respecting the ambiguities of such creative mysteries. But never far from the surface of this investigation is the Palestinian intifada, which was well under way as Said made his film. The romance elements of Pontecorvo's film, in which the underdogs find a way to defeat the overwhelming force of the colonizers, in which the oppressed come to consciousness of the nature of their oppression, and in which individual leaders give way to crowds of spontaneous insurgents, all recall one view of the Palestinian struggle. For Said, the elements of resistance to colonialism and the nationalist struggle for freedom in Pontecorvo's film become dominant. The Algerian and Palestinian uprisings form different parts of the same long march to liberation. Hence the film becomes, at least from Said's perspective, a harbinger of success in Palestine. Said, noting that Pontecorvo had considered making a film about the Palestinian conflict, concludes that such a project would have been "the logical contemporary extension of the political situation represented in *The Battle of Algiers*."

This emancipatory view of *The Battle of Algiers* does not, however, exhaust its possibilities. That there are other interpretations of the film becomes clear in the May 2004 Criterion interview "*The Battle of Algiers*: A Case Study," which features Richard Clarke, former national counterterrorism coordinator under Presidents Clinton and Bush, and Michael Sheehan, former State Department coordinator for counterterrorism. If Said finds the pattern of romance in Pontecorvo,

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these two career intelligence officials find only tragic incomprehension and mistake. Clarke resolutely places *The Battle of Algiers* against the current Iraq situation, a choice that ominously aligns the American perspective with that of the French earlier. Clarke, like the French officers in the movie, does not consider the situation in terms of the indigenous population but in terms of the aims of the occupying power, and his logic builds on this assumption. His tragic take on Pontecorvo's film results in a resolute pragmatism.

The pragmatism displayed by both Sheehan and Clarke respects some aspects of Pontecorvo's vision. The director famously noted that he sought to impose a "dictatorship of the truth" through documentary-style realism. Clarke and Sheehan tend to accept the film at face value, as a case study. "It may have been the 1950s," quips Clarke, "but it's all happening now." Both officials agree that terrorism seems to work in the film because "there is no political strategy to counter it," that is, the French lose the battle not so much for the clichéd "hearts and minds" of the Algerians but for "values and ideas." For Clarke and Sheehan, failures in Iraq stem from the inability of the U.S. government to state clearly its aims in the region, to recognize the legitimate aspirations of Iraqis, and to craft some plan that balances the two successfully and isolates the terrorists. The deepest lesson of Pontecorvo's film, for these two analysts, is that one might, as the French did, hunt down the insurgents and yet create more powerful resistance in the process. Invoking another well-worn phrase, one redolent of American misadventures in Southeast Asia, Clarke notes that the French won the battle and lost the war.

But the "case study" approach illuminates *The Battle of Algiers* only up to a point. The pragmatism of Clarke and Sheehan, however precise and authoritative, has severe limits, and much in Pontecorvo's political vision goes unnoticed, or at least unremarked. (Of course, one should be careful in inferring such incomprehension from the careful language of two career bureaucrats; such omissions might well be strategic.) The discussion of torture prompted by the movie illustrates this limitation. While Sheehan mentions, in passing, that torture is "immoral and illegal," the analysis turns upon the utility of torture, whether information acquired through abuse is reliable or not. Clarke and Sheehan think not, and, stressing the resistance created by such abuses, they advise against it. Pontecorvo's strangely lyrical depiction of torture, in which victims display something of the ecstatic agonies of Christian martyrs and in which we hear liturgical music rather than screams, surely hints at something more than a

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lesson to be drawn or another item to be noted in a list of best practices for counterinsurgency. Working in the shadow of 9/11, which transformed a complex political situation into a sharp (if oversimplified) contrast between "us" and "them," Clarke and Sheehan take up the agonistic, tragic approach, in which analysis bends toward the extremes of "yes" and "no" and in which decisions feel less like choice than compulsion. The romance of *The Battle of Algiers* seems currently unavailable.

Part of Pontecorvo's genius lies in the way his film can sustain this variety of emphases. If its structure as a film is that of a romance, some of the most memorable sequences seem emphatically tragic. As the plot moves forward, the leaders of the FLN are taken, systematically, by the efficient and highly organized French paratroopers called in to restore order to the city. Viewers are unlikely to forget the cool precision and epigrammatic grace of Colonel Mathieu, Pontecorvo's fictionalized composite of several French officers, who—even as he applies his ruthlessly efficient techniques of counterinsurgency—knows that the tide of history, at least in Algeria, is against the colonialists. The scene in which Mathieu (played by Jean Martin, one of the only professional actors employed by Pontecorvo in the movie) defends his repressive measures to a group of journalists by posing to them a brilliant series of either-or choices reminds us of the power of such a perspective and its rhetoric. Either Algeria is a French department, Mathieu informs his audience, or the French leave. While the first choice seems unpalatable, the second seems impossible. "Therefore, to be precise," counters Mathieu, when asked point-blank about the use of torture, "it's my turn to ask a question. Should France stay in Algeria? If your answer is still yes, then you must accept the consequences." Such is the chthonic intensity of the divisive rhetoric of tragedy—lucid, and within its own narrow bounds, impeccable. Mathieu embodies the father figure that such wartime exigencies foster: implacable, but possibly offering the safety of decisive action. It is against this predictable urgency and trajectory of tragedy that Pontecorvo places the romantic birth of liberty: the swirling crowds that figure mass revolt and revolutionary consciousness. The film can only hint at the direction of this development, and the lyrical movements of the crowd, however fragmented, however irresolute, provide the final image of the movie. The revolution has passed beyond its eloquent but doomed spokesmen (themselves also the stuff of tragedy, like their counterpart Mathieu) into the far less familiar realm of collective action.

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Said's documentary and the Clarke/Sheehan case study, however, do not exhaust the capacities of *The Battle of Algiers* made manifest by the DVD's supplementary materials. The set includes a third documentary, *Return to Algiers*, made by Pontecorvo himself for Italian television in 1992. Pontecorvo revisits the city 30 years after its emancipation from the French, but he finds neither the film's original notes of romance, so prominent to Said, nor the tragic elements so prominent now. What the artist behind this masterpiece finds, unsurprisingly, is irony.

Return to Algiers, made for the Italian television show *Mixer*, is sensational in its own right. Recent events in Algeria had put the country back into a revolutionary moment. The victorious party in *The Battle of Algiers*, the FLN, had established a one-party state, and it faced its own insurgency from the fundamentalist Islamic FIS. Demonstrations by the FIS had been crushed, but, in a turn of events recalling the original revolution, the FLN had been forced to allow elections, which were won by the FIS and promptly nullified by the FLN. Three days before Pontecorvo's documentary was to be shown, Mohamed Boudiaf, the newly selected leader of Algeria, was assassinated. Pontecorvo's interview with Boudiaf for the documentary would then have been one of the last for this leader, a long-standing critic of the FLN who had been recalled from exile.

The ironies of the situation are not lost on Pontecorvo as he walks through the streets of Algiers, revisiting some of the places where he shot *The Battle of Algiers*. A particularly effective sequence shows a soldier dispersing a crowd of FIS supporters with machine-gun fire, only to see the crowd of demonstrators form again, much like the swirling crowds in the concluding scenes of the earlier movie. The leaders of the FIS are evidently as shadowy as Saadi Yasef and Larbi Ben M'hidi 30 years earlier: their supporters refer to them but they are not shown on camera. A visit to the infamous prison, at which one of the most riveting scenes of the film—the guillotining of a political prisoner—was shot, provides a glimpse of the more than 5,000 FIS members currently incarcerated. A walk through the Casbah, ground zero of both insurgencies, shows that conditions there have, if anything, deteriorated. The once-populist FLN leadership seems nearly as distant from the people as the French colonizers were in the 1950s.

Pontecorvo explicitly counterpoints scenes from the film with contemporary conditions in Algiers, splicing his pseudodocumentary into his documentary. For instance, he replays the sequence from *The Battle of Algiers* in which his cinematic representation of the historical

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figure Ben M'Hidi, one of the founders of the FLN, explains to Ali La Pointe, a kind of Malcolm X figure who moves from aimless petty criminal to committed revolutionary in the film, that the real test of the revolution is what comes after, the successful building of a state and a society. "It's hard enough," muses Ben M'Hidi, "to start a revolution, even harder to sustain it, and hardest of all to win it." What in the film was a measured statement of determination, a part of La Pointe's radical education, or a manifestation of the rebirth so central to the romance genre now seems ironic, an index of revolutionary failure. Most ironic of all is the position taken by Pontecorvo on Islamic fundamentalism. If the Casbah, with its narrow, labyrinthian streets and ways, served as the citadel for the FLN, 10,000 mosques, underwritten by Saudi money, serve as the breeding ground for a new insurrection. And what was presented as a popular rebellion deriving from the lived experience of oppression has now taken on the form of a religious conflict imported, at least in part, from without. In *The Battle of Algiers,* religion was part of the suppressed life of the Casbah, a hurried and makeshift ritual, but above all a matter of people meeting, however irregularly. Religion, at least as represented in *Return to Algiers*, takes the more inhuman form of mass worship. The highly individualized faces for which the earlier film is so famous do not figure in Pontecorvo's picture of the new religious fervor.

Most ironic in *Return to Algiers*, however, is the deterioration of the position of women in Algeria. Pontecorvo's film was remarkable for the agency it gave women in the struggle. We see women fighting and dying alongside men, delivering weapons in assassinations, abetting men in escapes, and ultimately, in one of the film's most memorable sequences, setting bombs in cafés. The ululating cries of the veiled women, so unearthly to foreign ears, are one of the most durable representations of both the film and the Algerian struggle. Pontecorvo, on his return, carefully examines the systematic withdrawal of women from the public sphere in Algeria, a repression characterized as a return to traditional values for which no extant tradition can be found. For Pontecorvo, there are only ambiguities and ironies in this new fundamentalism, in which girls who have taken the veil explain their decision with an unstable mixture of religious obedience and personal affirmation. Perhaps, as in *The Battle of Algiers*, repression ultimately will create the resistance necessary to defeat such oppression, but the ideologies at play seem far more complex than those that shaped the colonial context. In the interview that accompanies the documentary, Pontecorvo pleads for an understanding of

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this new insurgency, denouncing fundamentalism, but insisting that it has become a vehicle for the oppressed, and deploring the easy confusion of Islam, a tolerant faith, with fundamentalist appropriations of religion. But there is no romance ending in sight, no popular coming to consciousness that would match the millennial hopes of the earlier rebellion against French colonialism.

But these three plottings of Pontecorvo's masterpiece—as romance, as tragedy, and as irony—might well be overwhelmed by the brute fact of another aspect of the movie given prominence throughout the supplementary materials. *The Battle of Algiers* opens with a scene of torture, and behind the rationalizations of Mathieu lies a massive campaign of "interrogation by force." Behind every link in Mathieu's organizational chart, which allows the French to establish relations among insurgents and crush the resistance, are inhumane acts, in which men are beaten, electrocuted, held under water until they believe they are drowning, burned, or hung like meat until the muscles pull away from the bones. Every name, every line on the chart records this brutal process. Even more inhumane, of course, are the acts of torture not represented—the indiscriminate torture of innocents that reveals no intelligence and hence finds no place on the chart.

Torture, or, as Henri Alleg so memorably put it during the Algerian War, "The Question," runs through all these supplementary materials. Pontecorvo records it in *The Battle of Algiers* as a kind of penitential suffering on the way to the rebirth of Algerian society. Solinas, in an absorbing print interview provided with the DVD, dismisses it as purely "symptomatic," not so much a moral dilemma as an inevitable recourse that simply makes visible the inherent contradictions of colonial relations. But what persists beyond these responses is the face of Paul Aussaresses, who headed a special unit that carried out torture and summary execution of insurgents. More than 40 years after the Battle of Algiers, during which time he was nearly unknown, his activities omitted from accounts of the war, Aussaresses confronts the French public with the sinister details of a largely secret history. Granted amnesty by the French government, he unapologetically defends his role in a part of a documentary included in the Criterion edition. His unflinching discussion of the torture and murder he presided over, his scorn for the evasions of his superior officers—who connived in the torture—and the unmistakable hint of pride in his actions cast him as the degree zero of colonial oppression, as Joseph Conrad so eloquently put it, "the heart of an immense darkness."

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Rarely has the concept of a DVD as a "study center" been so well embodied. The organization of the material—disc two focusing on "Pontecorvo and the Film," the third disc on "The Film and History"—is clear, as are other goals articulated by Hendrickson: to demonstrate that Pontecorvo's vision was generally correct and to assess the truth of Saadi Yacef's story.[12] But the careful collection of materials tells yet another story, one about an artwork and its successive receptions, which goes beyond these carefully focused procedures. The archival impulse, given the range afforded by Criterion producers and their evident skill (and apparent indefatigability) at locating materials, can provide not only context but also the raw material for a meditation on the process of contextualization.

Reservoir Dogs

The "Tenth Anniversary Special Edition" of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* was produced by Mark Rance, who, while working at The Criterion Collection during the early 1990s, oversaw several projects with innovative supplemental features. Rance, who has directed several documentaries, often gives great prominence to the circumstances of production in his work. In a 2004 interview, he noted that filmmaking was "one of the least documented art forms in our society" and that DVD editions offer a "rare window of opportunity" for the creation of such materials.[13] Rance's edition of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia* contains a much-praised, 73-minute-long documentary, *That Moment: Magnolia Diary October 1998–March 2000,* in which he followed the director's work from preproduction to set to awards ceremonies, and the audio commentary to Rance's 1993 Criterion edition of *Lord of the Flies* centers upon the day-to-day details of director Peter Brook's low-budget, guerilla filmmaking tactics. The 2002 two-disc Artisan edition of *Reservoir Dogs* is one of the finest examples of intelligent archival work, in which a DVD producer stands between the film and a vast archive of materials, some of which are rapidly vanishing.

Reservoir Dogs had, by the time of this special edition, taken on an iconic status within the so-called independent film movement of the early 1990s. Enough time had also passed to give both occasion and perspective for a retrospective look at Tarantino's spectacular debut as writer/director, and Rance's production builds this into an overarching theme of the edition. He does this through a deft collection of testimony with different levels of specificity. On the first disc, a

feature entitled "Original Interviews" provides several chatty, incidental reminiscences by actors Chris Penn, Kirk Baltz, Michael Masden, Tim Roth, and producer/actor Lawrence Bender that emphasize the antic qualities of the production process. This section concludes with Tarantino himself, who provides a short recapitulation of his unusual path to success as writer/director, in which the caprice and happenstance of the film industry figure largely.

The second disc builds upon this more conversational material. In a section titled "Class of '92," Rance aligns *Reservoir Dogs* with its historical moment (or at least its moment in film history) through interviews with the directors of several films featured with Tarantino's debut at the Sundance Film Festival. The presentation, while framed with opening remarks by film reviewer Amy Taubin, is not crudely tendentious; Rance trusts viewers to make connections among this distinguished group of directors, which includes Alex Rockwell (*In the Soup*), Chris Munch (*The Hours and the Times*), Katt Shae (*Poison Ivy*), and Tom Kalin (*Swoon*), and perhaps to contrast Tarantino with some of the less well-known alumni of this class. The independent movement (if one can call it that) has apparently had a wide variety of destinations for the group, and the conditions that were so favorable to the emergence of Tarantino have, in the eyes of several of these directors, largely vanished.

Rance's archival predilections also inform features like disc two's "Tributes and Dedications," which takes shape from an almost-bibliographic impulse. Tarantino's original script contains a flamboyant list of dedications to a variety of filmmakers, actors, and writers who worked on classically noir material. In Rance's short, "Dedicated To…," Tarantino comments on each figure, identifying them and then remarking on their significance to him at the time. Such a feature briefly but suggestively sets out the coordinates for *Reservoir Dogs* in terms of film noir, crime literature, currently unfashionable subgenres of Hollywood film, and youthful but well-informed hero worship. Moreover, Rance's editing of the material (clearly taken, like much of the original Tarantino material for the disc, from one interview) emphasizes yet another of the disc's themes—the film's reliance on storytelling as a way of knowing the world. Tarantino's rapid, anecdotal sketch of each figure in the list recalls one of the central pleasures of watching *Reservoir Dogs*: each character's creation of a persona through acts of storytelling.

Other features on the disc echo Tarantino's contextualizing remarks. "The Film Noir Web" fashions original interviews and other

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footage into an excellent overview of the genre. An introduction in five parts traces its origins and rise, relying on remarks by directors Mike Hodges, John Boorman, and Stephen Frears; writer Donald Westlake; and critics Robert Polito and Woody Haut. This is a formidable collection of contributors, as each director made a movie that clearly defined the genre for its time. Notably, none of their comments addresses *Reservoir Dogs* directly; Rance again leaves the application of this material largely to the viewer. The format proves crucial to this presentation, as a glance at the menu to this section shows clearly. Viewers might simply chose the "play them all" function, but they also have the freedom to choose the order in which to view the interviews (or not to view them, as the case might be). Moreover, viewers who do choose the "play them all" button would find that the order of play does not match that on the menu presentation. This in itself indicates that the format here has begun to take further advantage of digital form, which allows alternatives to linear presentation. The interviews are not designed for a particular order of use; they form an archive for the viewer to explore in a more interactive fashion.

The last option on this menu exploits the digital form of the DVD further. "The Noir Files" offers another level of interactivity. The menu provides access to a series of biographies of directors, writers, actors, and characters. These are addressed both directly and indirectly, as some buttons link to mentions of a character or film within the biographies. The format here approximates a hypertextual environment, allowing viewers a choice of movement within the archive.

These features demonstrate the value of the archivalist tendency. Rance combines newly developed archival material with more general information presented in a new form—essentially addressing the double focus of the archival impulse. On the one hand, there are the interviews, valuable primary sources for film scholarship and appreciation; on the other, there is abundant evidence of mindfulness about the presentation of material for viewers. Between the raw archival material and the viewer is the producer, whose activities constitute an ongoing deliberation about the ends and efficacy of supplemental features.

Much the same self-consciousness about presentation appears in the production of other features to this edition of *Reservoir Dogs*. There is a perfectly competent audio track, one that blends many voices drawn from different interviews into an unusually smooth discussion of the film. But perhaps more interesting to students of film are three

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commentaries by critics that do not follow the usual protocols. Rance arranged for three critics (Amy Taubin of *Film Comment*, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone*, and Emanuel Levy of *Screen International*) to provide essays on *Reservoir Dogs* to which he would match clips from the film. Hence, unlike the usual head-to-tail audio commentary, in which the image largely determines the direction of the remarks, in these features the critic's argument dictates the accompanying image. Instead of describing the image, these features allow the image to exemplify the critic's points. The result is a compact presentation that allows for a sustained development of an argument that is very different from a commentary track. Taubin's essay zeroes in on Tim Roth's performance, which allows her to examine the film's reflexivity (Roth as an English actor who plays an American policeman playing a gangster, and the general performance of masculinity in the film). Travers is able to make a fairly complex argument about the role of music in the film that builds to a more general consideration of Tarantino's use of references to popular culture. And Levy is able to provide a genuine critique of *Reservoir Dogs*, examining the strengths of the film as well as its weaknesses.

This format, like others that appear on DVDs, is not entirely new. In addition to head-to-tail audio commentaries, some early Criterion laserdiscs offered so-called visual essays consisting of words on the screen alternating with film clips (see *King Kong*). But it runs slightly counter to the more general archiving tendency of this disc as well as that of current DVD supplements. These commentaries emphasize the critical function more than collection or development of archival materials. More importantly, such features imply different presumptions about the role of the viewer, who here is more in the position of being told than provided with contextual material. Rather than facilitators or mediators of archival material, this form presents Levy, Travers, and Taubin in the role of authorities.

This critical spirit, albeit in a playful form, is much in evidence in another of the disc's features. The first selection of "K-Billy Radio," entitled "Boat Drinks," appears at first to be an interview with Samson Beck, a Texas prison inmate queried by an interviewer from a French magazine about the authenticity of *Reservoir Dogs*. The selection is identifiable (though not immediately) as parodic: no such magazine or inmate exists. As the interview unwinds, one is amused by the witty and noirish patter of the fictitious prisoner as one is led to ask questions about the status of other archival materials on DVD and the archival function itself. "Boat Drinks," as the DVD producer credits reveal, is

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one of director Eric Saks's bits of "culture jamming," interventions that force a more reflexive attitude toward technology on audiences.

The *Reservoir Dogs Ten Years Special Edition DVD*, like the Criterion Collection *The Battle of Algiers*, shrewdly marshals an array of archival materials, both existing and new. Each uses experts not so much to establish an authoritative interpretation of the film as to engage viewers in the question of significance. Both excel in pointing out the limits of the archival function—*The Battle of Algiers* edition through the printed Solinas interview, and the *Reservoir Dogs* edition through the humorous intervention of "Boat Drinks." But the *Reservoir Dogs* edition pursues its archival goals with an eye to formal innovation that takes advantage of the digital format. It not only collects archival information; in such supplements as "The Film Noir Web," "The Noir Files," and "Critics Commentaries," it begins the process of thinking about how such material might be best presented on a DVD.

Bubble

The unusual production and release strategy of Steven Soderbergh's *Bubble* (2005) make it a particularly good object for the anthologizing treatment. One might go as far as to say that good as the film is in itself, it benefits considerably from its supplementary materials, which, by providing an excellent account of the particulars of its production, encourage a very sophisticated and self-conscious attitude in viewers. Even a cursory examination of these features would transform subsequent viewings, making a tight little murder mystery into a complex and suggestive examination of cinematic process and fusing the immediate pleasures of such entertainments with something like critical inquiry.

The circumstances of *Bubble* make it a kind of experiment. After working with politicians, political strategists, and lobbyists on *K-Street*, Soderbergh wished to use nonprofessional actors for a series of modestly budgeted films. The opportunity arose in the need of HDNet, a high-definition broadcast channel, for distinctive films that might gain recognition for its brand. "A penny dropped," as Soderbergh puts it in an interview included on the DVD, when he learned of this, and a deal was quickly put together:

> The whole idea for all these six films is to make them site-specific: to come up with a basic story, go to a town, preferably a town you haven't

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> seen in movies a lot, build the story to fit in the town, then cast with local people, then continue to build the story fusing their real lives with the premise, and then come up with something that's distinctive.

The implications of such a project are profound. Reliance on nonprofessional actors, for instance, is at once a shrewd marketing ploy (particularly timely given the current popularity of "reality-based" programming) as well as a recurrent feature in film history, recalling the practice of the Italian neorealists. The incorporation of material from the lives of the actors gives a documentary aspect to what—at least in the case of *Bubble*—superficially appears to be a genre film. Context is not simply a scholarly question here; *Bubble* cannot be experienced fully without the material provided by the supplements.

The production of the *Bubble* DVD is somewhat obscure. There were several producers, and the one whom we interviewed about the DVD wishes to remain anonymous. It was decided early on to concentrate on "the unique aspects of the film, like shooting with non-professional actors,"[14] and many of the crucial decisions were taken by writer Coleman Hough in consultation with Soderbergh. Nevertheless, the disc's narrowly focused themes make it perhaps the clearest example of the benefits of the anthologizing approach to supplemental features.

The supplemental features to *Bubble* provide ample documentation of the preparations for filming. "Bursting the Bubble: The Real Lives of the Actors" presents the recollections of Hough and the film's three principals. Hough sketches the unusually open script:

> We wanted to provide a bare-bones story and let the actors fill that with their stories. We didn't want to put words in their mouths. So we wanted them to come up with their own ways of getting from point A to point B. I mean, I provided point A, point B, and point C, but the way they got there was totally Debbie [Doebereiner], totally Misty [Wilkins], and totally Dustin [Ashley].

The script was fluid and composite, the result of an informal collaboration. Hough would talk with the actors between scenes, and she would then incorporate into the film "stories about their lives," such as Misty Wilkins's interest in tattoos or Dustin Ashley's struggles with a case of social anxiety so severe that he left school. This unusual emphasis on the needs of the nonprofessional actors can be traced in other features as well. We learn in the audio commentary

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that Soderbergh tried to avoid making his actors learn lines, which "locks them up," and that he simply told them what they needed to convey generally and left them to find ways to do it in their own words. "So much of their own backstory had been incorporated into the characters and so much of what they say in the film is based on their own experience that they were right in the right place," adds the director. In fact, the development of these particular backstories informed the process of casting as well. Another supplementary feature, "Finding the Cast," which concatenates selections from the interviews used to select the actors, allows viewers to gauge the ways in which even these first interviews provided material for the dialogue developed later.

Such attention to details of production might, in a typical EPK, simply be grist for the parallel universe of fandom. But it cannot be so easily dismissed in the case of *Bubble*, where every particular emerges at the intersection of material production and aesthetic choice. In fact, the lesson of these supplementary materials concerns the intimate relation of artistic intent and technical workmanship; each conditions the other. Essentially, the style of the film emerges from the needs of the nonprofessional actors. The look of the film has much to do with ensuring that they are successful, which basically means not asking them to do things for which they have no training. Their comfort informs choices about camera angles, equipment, shooting schedule, and crew size, as the audio commentary makes clear.

As one might expect in a film that blurs the boundaries between fiction and documentary, the question of authenticity looms particularly large in the supplementary materials. Actors often comment on the films in which they work, but few actors have the lived relation to the material that these do. For instance, when Misty Wilkins, who plays the murdered Rose in *Bubble*, talks to Coleman Hough about the action of the film, viewers might reasonably ask what added salience her comments might have: "And what happened in *Bubble* could easily happen. Just like for the characters in that movie, you try, you work, you save your money, and you still don't get anywhere. That's normal for a lot of people." Wilkins astutely frames the dramaturgy of *Bubble* in economic terms, perhaps more forcefully than does the film itself, despite the grimness and meanness evident in the factory setting. Such a comment would have been perfectly plausible within the improvised dialogue, and perhaps a welcome dimension to the film's meaning. In fact, Wilkins's remark might well be developed into a critique of Soderbergh's film, which strongly evokes particulars

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of factory life and its effects on individuals but does not choose to consider the wider ramifications of such labor and such conditions.

One of the two audio commentaries to *Bubble*, a conversation between Soderbergh and fellow director Mark Romanek (*One Hour Photo*), repeatedly examines the curious mix of authentic and fictionalized elements in the film. One of *Bubble's* finest scenes, in which a detective (played by real-life detective Decker Moody) interrogates Martha (Debbie Doebereiner), who has, perhaps without being fully aware of it, murdered a coworker, epitomizes the hybrid nature of the film's production. Soderbergh set the scene by withholding some information from his principals, again relying on their reactions to carry the story and dialogue. Moody, of course, had no need to get into character; he brought an intensity and authenticity to the scene derived from lived experience. His forceful interrogation drew an unusually vivid response from Doebereiner, who admitted that she momentarily lost herself in the role. "He could have made me confess something I hadn't done," she remarks on the other audio commentary: "It seemed real." Doebereiner's performance is gripping, but so too is the story behind that performance. Ultimately the supplementary feature elicits another kind of viewing for the film, one that prompts a meditation on the artistic process behind the finished product and one that encourages viewers to see the film as less a thing in itself than the record of a complex activity, the elements of which are well worth the recovery and examination.

Romanek skillfully plies Soderbergh throughout the commentary, but he also makes his own claims about *Bubble*. He lauds Soderbergh's methods, especially his exploitation of what was available on location. He justly praises the look of the visiting room at the jail, the windows of which allow only a partial view of each character's face:

> This film proves to me the value of research for when you're making a more traditional studio film…there's no way in a million years would a production designer design something so you couldn't see people's mouths, but it's so great, nor would they probably have left the paint on the glass.

Soderbergh takes the occasion to sum up his method in a kind of neorealist credo: "The path of least resistance is to be true.…it's like this velvet chute that lands you right in the right place." But just as the discussion seems to culminate with praise of the documentary impulse behind the film—here something like a suspension of the director,

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who simply records—Romanek makes a forceful case for the aesthetics of the film:

> But you're making so many directorial choices. You chose the actors, you chose the location, you chose the way it was lit, using the natural light as opposed to lighting it, you placed the cameras, you got everyone out of the room, you didn't tell her [Doebereiner] what was going to happen, you cast a real detective, you chose to put these upsetting photographs that you were going to surprise her with. There's a range of directorial choices here that are guiding this. What you're searching for is this directness and simplicity but you have to really make the choices to set the stage to make that work.

This is a clever reversal, one that subtly leads viewers to a more complex engagement with the film. The documentary elements so prominent in the decision to shoot on location, to use nonprofessional actors, and to incorporate their life stories are entangled with a series of artistic decisions. One returns to the film after these discussions, ready to follow the complex dialectic between the filming of reality and the realities of film.

Although such thoughtful productions as those of the supplementary features found in *The Battle of Algiers*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *Bubble* are rare, the planets can occasionally align to allow such presentations, even in the large and often unruly universe of the DVD, where stars can still prove malevolent and the reigning gods in marketing and distribution can seem absolute. Perhaps the greatest strength of the anthologizing impulse lies in its reliance on aggregation of materials rather than a formal, consecutive argument. More suggestive than ineluctable, this open form is as well suited to current modes of production as to the preferences of viewers. But while there are many ways through the supplements, the field of inquiry is demarcated strictly by the capacity of the disc itself, which, unlike the Internet, cannot offer an ever-expanding series of links, and the choices, however constrained, made by the producer. Just as Romanek insists on the artistic choices made by Soderbergh, even as his direction seeks simply to be "true," so do these anthologies remind us that the DVD producer does have a shaping, if not entirely free hand in the production of meaning on the DVD.

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Conclusion

Since the 1980s, various humanistic disciplines have experienced crises in which basic critical assumptions, prevailing methods, and even the objects of study themselves have been called into question. The study of film seems to be taking its turn as we write, with by-now-familiar responses to these challenges. Some scholars have sought deeper historical context, examining how the field itself came into being and developed.[1] Others have insisted on the crisis as material, one quickened by the turn from celluloid to digital form.[2] Others have called for a renewed attention to theory.[3] These investigations are all important and, even in a perceived crisis, signs of health. But we might well recall that such historicism, contextualizing, and theoretical speculation do not preclude more practical measures in criticism, which, at least within the humanities, perform a role analogous to that of experiment in the sciences. Self-conscious science, that is, the history of science, has long been aware of the complicated and essential relations among theory, experiment, and a third activity, measurement, in the pursuit of discovery.[4] Science moves by instrumentation as well as by theory and experiment. Digital form has, at least briefly, provided us with new critical instruments for the study of film.

During the brief period that we might now call the DVD era, Bellour's vision, his "wonderful impression" of a rich and unprecedented style of film analysis, has been approached, again and again, by various supplements and audio commentaries. To experience Mulvey's luminous treatment of cinematic movement in *Viaggio in Italia*, to follow Kiarostami's angular discourse on his work in *Ten on Ten*, to move through the thoughtful supplementary materials on the Criterion *The Battle of Algiers*, to examine Rance's documentation of the process of production in *That Moment*, or to contemplate Egoyan's deconstruction of his intentions in his early work is to experience what Bellour called "the obviousness of quotation" (26).

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The basic condition of Bellour's thought experiment—quotability of the text—has made new forms of critical discourse possible, and these moments of grace, however fleeting, also form the basis for a reconsideration of the adequacy of prose to film criticism.

Such work, we submit, is paradigmatic: it constitutes an intervention that employs new technology to address a perceived weakness in film criticism. It shows us how we might blunt, if not surmount, some of the real difficulties of access in film study, making available films that had been hard to come by, and, permitting, as it were for the first time, a "conformity of the object of study and the means of study" (20). Hence we can test our desire for the specificities of close study that have long been available to art historians and literary critics. The limitations of close reading have been well documented, and it has few adherents among current critics. But the experience of many scholars who have done audio commentaries, who have found that addressing the entire film closely makes summary statement far more difficult, deserves consideration. Close reading, or a version of such study, might well return as a necessary but not sufficient condition for critical statement, rather than a straw man in theoretically ambitious arguments.

Whether such a program is sustainable, of course, has less to do with the interests of scholars and critics than with the material form of cinema itself. Given the uncertain future of film distribution, which seems likely to follow the transformation of the CD from material object possessed by the listener, to digital file contained in an MP3 player, to the non-possession of access via streaming, the DVD era feels, as we write, over, and the brief moment in which supplements and audio commentaries were possible might be over as well. We might be left, as scholars, with the memory of an interlude full of potential but so brief as to have vanished before its possibilities were grasped.

Moreover, as Bellour intimates in his essay, the wonder he feels during the experience of cinematic quotation is itself less than enduring. His envious praise of literary critics, for whom quotation is a familiar part of critical discourse, is qualified by his recollection that the value of quotation is not absolute. While it can seem "perfectly satisfactory" (21) at some moments, at others, because of its inevitable reduction of the original to fragments, it can prove a distortion. The key term here is "satisfactory," and in that satisfaction, itself no doubt a product of the critical moment, lies our regard for quotation as powerful synecdoche or pitiable shard.

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Whether we will find not only satisfying but also enduring ways of exploiting the quotability that digital form provides, either as a discursive move or as a critical instrument, remains to be seen. But such forays into the realm of practical criticism, with their concomitant challenge to a more narrowly theoretical approach, stand as a reminder that new avenues of criticism are always possible and that such opportunities are always present to those with the ability to recognize them.

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Notes

Preface

1. Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text," *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975). The original title, "Le Texte Introuvable," has a wider range of meaning than "unattainable"; it might also be rendered "unfindable." But given the essay's aspirational character, we prefer the former to the latter.
2. See Stephen Prince's "The Emergence of Cinematic Artifacts," *Film Quarterly* 57 (2004): 24–33, for a thoughtful account of the implications of changes in the physical medium and on the viewer that the shift from celluloid to digital entails. Bellour's final thoughts on the "unattainable text" center on the tension between writing and speech that the newly "quotable" critical medium would bring to the fore.
3. See Tyler Cowen, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.
4. McTiernan, early in his commentary, makes this case bluntly: "I was particularly concerned with the sense of camera movement…technically, I suppose, it was my preoccupation." He returns to his program of "cutting on movement" throughout his commentary (a typical remark: "You'd never see that movement right there, in an American movie, a simple expressive or subjective move like that. It was only in European films at that point."). At one point he claims, "We set up a research program of what can we do and what can't we do."
5. Jeffrey Spaulding's 2004 "The 29th Annual Grosses Gloss" (*Cineaste* 40.2) is typical of this widely held conception of film production, hailing it as "the new paradigm" (53). As with any practice in the marketing of film, the preeminence of this paradigm is in flux as we write. Recent successes in 3D seem to have piqued audiences' interest in the theatrical experience yet again.
6. Stein released his early laserdiscs under the name Voyager, which he later changed to The Criterion Collection. For simplicity, we will use the company name more familiar.
7. This focus is not to slight the work of other DVD houses such as Kino, Anchor Bay, or the BFI. But we have found general consensus both in the industry and among audiences that The Criterion Collection set the standards for DVD versions of film.

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8. For a more sociological account of the DVD and its viewers, see Barbara Klinger's *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For an astringent account of the role of the DVD in the marketing of film, see John Thornton Caldwell's *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

1 The DVD and New Media

1. Paul Taylor, "DVD Frequently Asked Questions" in *DVD Demystified*, http://www.dvddemystified.com/dvdfaq.html#6.1, July 30, 2008.
2. See Michael Speier and Scott Hetttrick, "DVD Disc Jockeying," *Variety* 384.3 (September 3, 2001): 1; Dade Hayes and Jonathan Bing, "Discord over Dates: DVD Revolution May Force Embattled Studios to Compress Release Windows," *Variety* 389.7 (January 6, 2003): 1(3); "State of DVD," *Variety* 395.3 (May 31, 2004): 9(1); and "DVD Sales Spin Down in '07," *Variety* 409.8 (January 14, 2008): 2(1).
3. See Diane Garrett, "Can DVDs Find Holiday Spirit? Saturation, Uncertainty Plague Maturing Biz. (FILM)," *Variety* 409.1 (November 19, 2007): 5(2).
4. See Paul Sweeting, "DVD Success Spawns O'seas Sales Rethink," *Variety* 376.8 (October 11, 1999): 24; Carl DiOrio, "Discs Fly to New Height: Studios Cash in on DVDs While Looking Ahead to New Technology," *Variety* 396.4 (September 13, 2004): A9(1); Diane Garrett, "Long-lost Gems Finally Make Way to DVD," *Variety* 406.3 (March 5, 2007): 12(2).
5. See Scott Hettrick, "Discs Celebrate Fifth Anni with Increase in Business," *Variety* 389.9 (January 20, 2003): A13(1).
6. See Hayes and Bing, "Discord over Dates."
7. See Hayes and Bing, "State of DVD" and "DVD Milestone," *Variety* 390.6 (March 24, 2004): 6(1).
8. See Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), for a full account of the industry's shift from an emphasis on theatrical release to home viewing.
9. See Paul Sweeting, "Sell-through or Rental? The Rules Have Changed," *Variety* 372.8 (October 5, 1998): 14(1); "Biz Does Splits over DVDs," *Variety* 381.2 (November 27, 2000): 14; and "DVD Offers Tonic, but Homevid's Still Ailing," *Variety* 381.7 (January 8, 2001): 26.
10. See Scott Hettrick, "Studios Feel Pinched Discs as DVD Bonus Costs Bloom," *Variety* 385.5 (December 17, 2001): 7(2); and Claude Brodesser and Dave McNary, "It Takes Talent to Divvy Up DVD; Thesps, Helmers Profit While Writers Go Begging," *Variety* 394.2 (February 23, 2004): 10(1).
11. See Ian Mohr, "War of the Windows: Pic Biz Frets as Box Office Fades & DVDs Usurp Key Dates," *Variety* 399.6 (June 27, 2005): 1(2); and Hayes and Bing, "Discord over Dates."
12. See Adam Sandler, "DVD's Head Cheerleader," *Variety* 368.7 (September 22, 1997): 9(2).

13. Film has a discrete aspect as well—the series of individual frames. But the shift to digital removes the continuous elements within the frame.
14. See Jerome McGann, *Radiant Technology: Literature after the World Wide Web* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 137–91, for a clear account of this reconsideration in literary studies.
15. Laura Mulvey provides an engrossing meditation on such questions in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 17–32.
16. See also D. N. Rodowick's *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) for a useful extension of Manovich's point. Rodowick's use of "allographic" and "autographic" do much to make the distinctive qualities of digital form clear.
17. Mr. Wong has generously shared his time with us in interviews as well as the materials for his lectures, in which he describes his work on *A Passion for Art*.
18. Other DVDs provided DVD-ROM content (primarily through the InterActual software), but this capacity was largely undeveloped. There are some rudimentary games (all of which pale by comparison with interactive games now available), some additional production notes, but often simply links to corporate sites that provide information on coming cinematic attractions. One useful feature, available for a few films, is a side-by-side presentation of film and script. This is a promising addition, at least for more serious students of film (or perhaps aspiring writers). But often the films given this treatment are not the most compelling candidates for such presentation—the scripts do not merit such attention. For instance, see the visually striking presentation of the script of *Pirates of the Caribbean*.
19. Infinifilm publicity site: http://www.infinifilm.com/publicity.html.
20. New Line's first Infinifilm release, *Thirteen Days*, exploits this contextualizing function smartly. The film's action, set during the Cuban missile crisis, provides many opportunities for informative historical detail.
21. None of the Infinifilm titles is a complete success. Too often, instead of providing access to well-chosen contextual information, the menus lead only to tangentially related materials or factoids. At times, the Infinifilm experience seems like an unhip version of VH-1's Pop-Up Video—one in which the self-conscious revelry in the triviality of the information takes on a tiresome earnestness.
22. The ironies here are many. Blu-ray won out over HD-DVD largely because of the success of Sony's PlayStation 3, a device with a more robust computing layer that could also play Blu-Ray discs smoothly. So the retrograde novelty of Blu-ray is not only produced by a formidable technology, one that provides a robust computing layer, but it also gained market share through the PlayStation, a device at the forefront of new media.

2 DVD Production and DVD Producers

1. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 15.

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2. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation,* 45–48.
3. See Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 135–90, for an account of the results of surveys of the viewing habits of college students.
4. See John Thornton Caldwell's *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) for an attempt to provide a wider account of industry culture. See also Barbara Klinger's analysis of the marketing campaigns associated with home theater in *Beyond the Multiplex*, 17–53.
5. Mark Atkinson, e-mail communication, August 21, 2006.
6. Mark Rowan received credit as the DVD producer for *Road to Perdition*, but Atkinson produced the commentary tracks for the film as well as the deleted scenes.
7. Atkinson began work on the technical side of production. When DVDs first appeared on the market, he readily volunteered to work on the new format at DreamWorks. As head of video mastering at DreamWorks from September 1997 to August 2003, he oversaw a wide variety of tasks—both technical, such as telecine transfer (conversion of the filmed image into digital format) and digital mastering, DVD authoring and compression, and supplemental (the production of deleted scenes, menus, and documentaries as well as the recording of filmmaker commentary tracks). While at DreamWorks, Atkinson worked on the DVDs of Sam Mendes's *American Beauty* and *Road to Perdition;* Ridley Scott's *Gladiator;* Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous: Bootleg Cut;* Dean Parisot's *Galaxy Quest; Antz; Prince of Egypt;* and *Shrek*. As general manager of Worldwide Creative Services at Deluxe Digital Studios, one of the largest DVD compression and authoring firms in the world, Atkinson's attentions were largely devoted to supervising the company's production of special edition DVDs, although he continued to produce DVDs periodically.
8. One would be hard-pressed to find a more versatile and respected DVD producer than Mark Rance. Trained as a documentary filmmaker at MIT, where he studied with Ricky Leacock, Rance's considerable output shows an unusual range and depth of experience: he produced 14 laserdiscs for Criterion and more than 100 DVDs of films and television shows after leaving the company, many of which have garnered wide acclaim and prizes. Among his Criterion titles are Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev,* Akira Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala,* Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs,* Mike Leigh's *Naked,* Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, and Peter Brooks's *Lord of the Flies*. Among the DVDs he later produced are Lars Von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark;* the two-disc set of David Fincher's *Seven;* Bertolucci's *The Dreamers, Besieged,* and *The Last Emperor;* P. T. Anderson's *Magnolia* and *Boogie Nights;* the tenth anniversary edition of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs;* Bobby and Peter Farrelly's *There's Something About Mary;* Alex Proyas's *Dark City* and *I, Robot;* and Stephen Norrington's *Blade*.

   Rance began his work as a laserdisc producer at Criterion in 1991. In 1997, New Line Home Video hired him as its exclusive DVD producer. While at New Line, Rance produced most of the Platinum Series DVDs from

1997 to 2000. In 1999, he formed his own company, Three Legged Cat Productions. Having recently moved to London, Rance continues to run Three Legged Cat and a second company, Watchmaker Films. (Rance, in an e-mail communication of July 28, 2005, recalls the circumstances this way: "The phrase 'film school in a box' was coined by me. I first used it in a letter to Anthony Hopkins to explain what a special edition laserdisc was and to get him to participate on *The Silence of the Lambs*. He was very reluctant and gave in after several letters. I used it a lot after that. I think it became my signature in a way. It definitely felt lucky. Someone at a studio I worked for tried to use it in their marketing but warped it into 'film school on disc.' That died an early death.")

9. Mark Rance, e-mail communication, August 22, 2006.
10. Mark Rance, interview, June 15, 2005, London.
11. For Rance's comments on "That Moment," see http://www.dvdactive.com/editorial/interviews/mark-rance.html. Basic information on this documentary can also be found at http://www.dvdactive.com/editorial/interviews/mark-rance.html.
12. Van Ling, e-mail communication, August 25, 2006.
13. Ling's work in DVD production is closely allied with the work of particular directors, in this case James Cameron and George Lucas. After graduating from the University of Southern California's Cinema School in 1986, Ling worked for Cameron's production company, Lightstorm Entertainment, in a number of capacities—including story research, graphic design, and visual effects. By 1991, he was also involved in laserdisc production. Two years later, Ling oversaw the laserdisc production of *Terminator 2*. Inspired by much of the work done on Criterion productions by Morgan Holly, Ling sought to "match Criterion quality (or ideally exceed it) without being an actual Criterion disc." Drawing on the wealth of materials available to him at Lightstorm Entertainment, Ling succeeded in his aims, producing one of the two best-selling laserdiscs of all time: 250,000 units of *Terminator 2* were sold. In many respects, Ling is Holly's successor in the DVD arena. Like Holly, Ling has always sought to exploit digital technologies in new ways. Ling's versatility has served him well; his DVD credits include *The Abyss,* the "Ultimate" and "Extreme" editions of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day,* Phil Alden Robinson's *Field of Dreams,* and, his most well-known production to date, the first DVDs of the *Star Wars* films. Currently a freelance producer, designer, and artist, Ling has now focused his attentions on exploring what the new high-definition formats can do.
14. Prior, whose credits, in addition to *Fight Club* and *Master & Commander*, include Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor,* Julie Taymor's *Titus,* Brad Siberling's *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events,* and David Cronenberg's *The Fly,* readily admits that he has "wanted to make movies since the age of five." Before becoming a DVD producer, Prior worked in a wide range of jobs related to film production—in visual effects, production design, script reading, and as a segment producer for television.
15. David Prior, e-mail communication, August 21, 2006.
16. David Prior, e-mail communication, September 13, 2006.

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17. Recent critics have argued that supplements and special features, far from providing any insight into film, simply remystify the processes of production, giving viewers a mistaken sense of becoming "insiders." Klinger, in *Beyond the Multiplex*, notes the reliance of these features on "promotable facts" that are marshaled simply to maintain the "film industry's magisterial control of appearances" (73). Craig Hight, in an analysis of *LOTR*'s feature documentaries, laments that the viewer is "still very much embedded within the industrial agenda of contemporary cinema" (14). For Tom Brown, the DVD of *The Lion King* simply recreates the atmosphere of the Disney theme park, "fully formed as a tool for the multi(media) conglomerate" (96). Caldwell is perhaps the most relentlessly dismissive, arguing that DVDs tend to "merely redirected and 'repurposed' EPKs" ("Prefiguring DVD bonus tracks," 160) and offering a typology of market-wise acts of repurposing (see the appendices to Caldwell, *Production Culture*). In a discussion of an industry so capitally intensive, such cautions are welcome. Our argument here, however, concerns exemplary activities within the larger field of production—moments in which a few DVD producers took advantage of a brief opportunity in the transformation of the industry. We do not argue that these efforts, considered as criticism, achieve some total and unmystified transparency, a standard that, even applied to the traditional criticism and scholarship, is rarely, if ever, met. There is no outside, omniscient position from which to examine a work of art—only various critical and scholarly programs that, if taken up with some self-consciousness, aspire to such a vision.
18. Special effect MODs are now a staple of action, horror, and science fiction films on DVD, and fan sites routinely critique the production value of the special effects they employ.
19. André Bazin, "La Politique des Auteurs," in *The New Wave* ed. Peter Graham (London: Secher and Warburg, 1968), 142.
20. David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.
21. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 149.
22. While much has been written on how viewers consume film images, Laura Mulvey's many studies delineate the parameters under which subsequent discussions of this topic take place. See "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), first published in *Screen*; "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Pleasure Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 29–39; and "The 'Pensive Spectator Revisited': Time and its Passing in the Still and Moving Image," in *Where is the Photograph?* ed. David Green (Brighton, England: Photoforum and Photoworks, 2003).
23. Morgan Holly, interview, June 4, 2004, Los Angeles.
24. Mike Snider, "Movies for DVD Format Premiere in 7 Cities," *USA Today* (March 25, 1997): 1D. See also Katherine Stalter, "Sony, WB Set DVD Date: Handful of Eclectic Pix Slated to Make Digital Bow," *Variety* (January 13, 1997): 150.

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25. See Bill Hunt and Todd Doogan, *The Digital Bits: Insider's Guide to DVD* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 3, for other early DVD titles.
26. See Snider, "Movies for DVD Format," 1D.
27. The speed with which DVDs transformed the home entertainment industry is greatly owing to Warren Lieberfarb, former chief of Warner Home Video, widely considered the "father of the DVD." Through considerable effort, Lieberfarb convinced studio chiefs, computer companies, retailers, and heads of electronic companies to adopt a universal standard for DVD. In so doing, Lieberfarb was able to head off the format war that earlier plagued VHS and Sony's Beta, and what promised to be a similar division between Blu-ray and HD-DVD. For an account of Lierberfarb's activities on behalf of DVDs, see Johnnie L. Roberts, "One Man's Flight of Fancy," *Newsweek* (July 5, 2004), http://msnbc.msn.com/id/5305710/site/newsweek.

    The Blu-ray–HD-DVD confrontation, which seemed to loom so large in 2004, became moot in February 2008, when Toshiba, the chief backer of HD-DVD, conceded.
28. David Prior, interview, June 14, 2004, Pasedena. The DVD of *The Fight Club* was nominated for best overall original supplemental material by *Video Premiere* and won the 2001 Online Film Critic Society Award for best DVD, best DVD commentary, and best DVD special features.
29. Michael Mulvihill, interview, June 10, 2004, Los Angeles. DVD producers widely acknowledge Mulvihill as one of the leading pioneers in DVD production. For an account of New Line's Platinum series which he oversaw, see Jeff McNeal, "The Secrets of DVD Success: A Behind-The-Scenes Look at New Line's Platinum Edition Series," http://www.thebigpicturedvd.com/bigreport2.shtml.
30. Peter Staddon, interview, June 8, 2004.
31. While the DVD producer is generally responsible for the content of the disc, more technical procedures such as compression, authoring, and menu creation are often outsourced. As the producer and his staff prepare and edit the content of the disc, programmers work on the authoring and compression of the disc at postproduction facilities such as Ascent Media or Deluxe Digital Studios. Compression refers to the process whereby the original digital files—far too large to be contained on a single disc—are modified. DVDs use a compression format called MPEG-2 (established by the Moving Pictures Expert Group), an encoder that examines each frame of video in the source file closely, saving all the picture data for the first frame analyzed, but only differences for subsequent frames. (See Hunt and Doogan, *Digital Bits*, 11–12, for a concise discussion of DVD compression and authoring.) DVD authoring refers to the process of programming all the assembled elements—the compressed film, all bonus materials, and menus—so that they can be read by as many DVD players as possible. (At Deluxe Digital Studios, once the company receives the Beta master of the film, the telecine now complete, a quality control of the master is conducted, followed by compression and another round of quality control. A final quality check is made of all the files. The disc is then sent to a replicating company, which produces the "stamper" for the first version of the disc, which is then sent to the studio

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for an additional check. If everything is in order, the disc is then sent back to replicator for the final version.)

32. Mike Snider, "A-list Occupation: DVD Producer," *USA Today* (June 30, 2005), http://www.usatoday.com/life/2002-09-24-dvdproducer_x.htm. For a related article, see Mike Snider, "Video Craze Creates New Job: DVD Producer," *USA Today* (September 9, 2000), http://www.usatoday.com/life/2002-09-24-dvdproducer_x.htm.
33. Charles de Lauzirika has a wide range of experience in film, television, and music video production, having worked in development and postproduction for companies such as Lucasfilm Ltd., Silver Pictures, Lightstorm Entertainment, and Scott Free, Tony and Ridley Scott's production company. While at Scott Free, Ridley Scott asked Lauzirika to oversee the twentieth anniversary edition of *Alien*. Since then Lauzirika has produced almost all the special edition DVDs to Ridley Scott's films as well as other big titles such as Tony Scott's *Top Gun*, Sam Raimi's *Spider Man 2*, Robert Rodriguez's *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, Lee Tamahori's *Die Another Day*, and the boxed set of *Speed: Five Star Collection*. Lauzirika, like David Prior, works at the high end of the business, and each has gained unusual access to directors. Lauzirika combines the roles of film enthusiast as well as documentarian, stressing his "love and celebration of filmmaking" and the enjoyment of "learning the craft and history of filmmaking from the best people in the business and then passing on those stories to others." (For an interview with Lauzirika on the making of the *Alien Quadrilogy*, see Hunt and Doogan, "Inside the Alien Quadrilogy," *Digital Bits*, 85–128.)
34. Like Van Ling and Laurent Bouzereau, Michael Pellerin's activities are largely associated with the work of one director, in this case Peter Jackson. A film school graduate of CalArts, Pellerin produced laserdiscs (*Tron, The Lion King*) before turning to DVD production in 1999. His first DVDs include a number of popular animation films—*Toy Story, Fantasia*, and *A Bug's Life*. The work on these titles whetted Pellerin's desire to work on a major live action film, "but the right live action project. To me, it had to be something like the original *Star Wars* trilogy, something that justified a lavish treatment…and that was [an] amazing cultural zeitgeist." The perfect opportunity came his way shortly after New Line had agreed to produce *LOTR* as a three-picture deal. Friends of Pellerin who worked at the company, well aware that he was an avid devotee of Tolkien's work, encouraged him to speak to Michael Mulvihill, senior vice president of content development at New Line Home Entertainment. Shortly after the meeting, Pellerin flew to New Zealand to meet with Jackson. In preparation for the meeting, Pellerin "cooked up my best ideas and everything I wanted to do." The two clicked immediately: as Jackson had produced the supplements on the laserdisc version to one of his earlier films, *The Frighteners*, he had an unusual understanding of the possibilities of the medium. The director hired Pellerin immediately upon seeing that the two had very similar ideas about what the *LOTR* DVDs should encompass.

    Pellerin now produces the DVDs for all of Jackson's films under what are arguably the most enviable conditions in the business: budgets are large,

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and Pellerin is free to devote considerable time to the production of the discs themselves. He is in the fortunate position of working with a filmmaker who has an unusual zest for the documentation of his films. To this end, Jackson makes himself readily available for interviews for the documentaries, encourages cast and crew to do the same, and endorses Pellerin's plans for any DVD with studios. Such support enables Pellerin to "absorb the culture of the film, become a part of the project, and absorb everything from the storyteller's point of view." The importance of such open access cannot be overestimated: these are the conditions that enabled him to assemble the plethora of supplements and interviews found on the extended edition of the *LOTR* trilogy, a production that has become a hallmark in recent DVD production. More recently, the director and the DVD producer worked together to coproduce the Collector's Edition of Merian C. Cooper's *King Kong*. Among the documentaries in this set is "The Mystery of the Lost Spider Pit Sequence," Jackson's and Pellerin's speculative recreation of a famous now-lost sequence. The collaboration attests to Jackson's great interest in the DVD medium.

35. Alita Holly has held a number of positions in both laserdisc and DVD production. The daughter of Aleen Stein, one of the founders of The Criterion Collection, Alita Holly's first job was as sales representative of The Criterion Collection. Holly later became a partner of Organa, a media company. In 1998, she was hired as senior DVD consultant for Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment. She has produced numerous DVDs of popular contemporary films, among them Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters,* Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black,* Michael Bay's *Bad Boys,* Roger Donaldson's *Thirteen Days,* Jay Roach's *Austin Powers: Goldmember,* Brett Ratner's *Rush Hour 2,* and Doug Liman's *Swingers*. Currently the executive producer of Creative Services at Ascent Media, Holly oversees production of special edition DVDs and menus for various studios.
36. Laurent Bouzereau is a self-taught independent DVD producer. A native of France, Bouzereau worked in film distribution, as a journalist, and in feature film development before turning to DVD production. While working on feature development for Bette Midler at Disney in 1991, he learned that The Criterion Collection had obtained licensing rights to produce a laserdisc of Brian De Palma's *Carrie*. Having published a book on the director, *The De Palma Cut* (New York: Dembner Books, 1988), Bouzereau contacted Criterion to see if they would be interested in using some of the memorabilia he had assembled for the supplements. The company ultimately hired Bouzereau to record the commentary track to the film. After working on another Criterion title, Hitchcock's *Blackmail,* Bouzereau began working for Universal, where he produced the laserdiscs for Steven Spielberg's *1941* and *Jaws*. Since 1995, Bouzereau has produced laserdiscs and DVDs through his company Blue Collar Productions. The early connection with Spielberg proved fortuitous. One of the most active and well-known producers working today, Bouzereau has subsequently produced the DVDs to all of the director's films. In addition, he has also worked on Hollywood classics (Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window, Dial M for Murder, Stagefright,*

I Confess, The Birds, Psycho, Marnie, and *Shadow of a Doubt*; David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Bridge on the River Kwai*; François Truffaut's *Day for Night;* and Brian De Palma's *Untouchables* and *Dressed to Kill*). See also Christian Moerk, "The Powers Behind the Home-video Throne," Arts and Leisure, *New York Times* (April 3, 2005): 15, 36.

37. Laurent Bouzereau, phone interview, October 10, 2005.
38. Bouzereau cited in an interview conducted by Peter M. Bracke (November 11, 1999) for DVDfile. See http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/interviews/producers/laurent_bouzereau.htm.
39. Michael Kurcfeld is another Criterion alumnus. Before becoming a laserdisc producer at Criterion, Kurcfeld was the arts editor at the *LA Weekly* in the late 1980s. Having worked as an arts journalist and editor for roughly 12 years, the transition to laserdisc producer was easy. Kurcfeld is currently senior producer at Stonehenge Media, a Los Angeles- and Paris-based company that produces content for television, DVD, and Internet, and he is also a regular segment contributor to the *Huffington Post*. While at Criterion (1991–1993), Kurcfeld produced laserdiscs of Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus,* Robert Altman's *The Player,* Roman Polanski's *Repulsion,* John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood,* and François Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* and *The 400 Blows*. He has also produced a number of DVDs for 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, among them Elia Kazan's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,* Bob Rafelson's *Blood and Wine,* Robert Wise's *The Sand Pebbles,* Paul Mazursky's *Next Stop Greenwich Village,* and Frank Tashlin's *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (See also Robert Fischer, "The Criterion Collection: DVD Editions for Cinéphiles," *Celluloid Goes Digital: Historical-Critical Editions of Films on DVD and the Internet*. Proceedings of the First International Trier Conference on Film and New Media, October 2002, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2003), 99, in which Fischer cites an article in which Kurcfeld's edition of *Spartacus* designates the DVD nothing less than a "study center.")

    Kurcfeld, like Rance and Ricketts, applies the same blend of curiosity and respect to his work, and he too finds the DVD an excellent format for "getting on intimate terms with the creative process that led to an admirable film; playing detective in finding all the strands of people and archival material that combine to tell the production's story." Like Rance, he has exploited the opportunity to make a record of the process of filmmaking: "If the film is just being made, working ringside at the shaping of it and in the company of the creative souls who have formed its necessary and often giddy community" (Michael Kurcfeld, e-mail communication, August 21, 2006).
40. Michael Kurcfeld, e-mail communication, July 3, 2006.
41. After attending a theater school for acting and working as a director of classical theater, Ricketts began working on DVDs as a researcher. A self-taught DVD producer, Ricketts researched projects for Mark Rance while he was at The Criterion Collection and eventually became his coproducer on Alex Proyas's *Dark City* and Barry Levinson's *Wag the Dog*. She has worked with a number of pioneers in the business, among them Michael Mulvihill, who spearheaded New Line Cinema's early foray into DVD production,

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and Bryan Ellenburg, who oversaw DVD production and video mastering at Artisan Entertainment in the late 1990s. Ricketts's productions include Steven Soderbergh's *The Limey*, Mike Nichols's *Catch-22*, Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, Julian Temple's *Filth and the Fury*, Julian Schnabel's *Before Night Falls*, and Ted Demme's *Blow*. Currently, Ricketts works as a documentary filmmaker.

42. John Thornton Caldwell has noted the convergence of the EPK and the DVD. See his essay "Prefiguring DVD Bonus Tracks: Making-ofs and Behind-the-Scenes as Historic Television Programming Strategies Prototypes," in *Film and Television after DVD*, ed. James Bennett and Tom Brown (New York: Routledge, 2008), 149–71.
43. It is worth noting that there are some DVD producers who welcome the coordination of these efforts, arguing that it allows them greater access to the set and greater certainty in finances.
44. Laurent Bouzereau. "A Less Scholarly Approach: A Conversation with DVD Producer Laurent Bouzereau," interview by Todd Doogan, *The Digital Bits*, posted April 8, 2000, http://www.thedigitalbits.com/articles/laurent/laurentinterview.htm.
45. Todd Doogan, the interviewer, demurs from Bouzereau's stress on a "less scholarly approach," which indicates the degree to which the nature of the audience for DVDs remains contested among those who work closely with the form.
46. For an example of how Company Wide Shut exploited Alan Lee's drawings, see the elegant menus created for the opening chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Each time viewers click on a different chapter, they see a short film clip of the chapter's subject matter: the first chapter features the ring falling from Sauron's gloved hand over the Crack of Doom; the third showcases a close-up of Frodo; and the fourth shows Gandalf and Bilbo inside the hobbit's home.
47. Gary Crowdus's remarks in *Cineaste* are typical of this misapprehension: "What's needed is a commentary track director, someone who sets the agenda for the writer or director or whoever, to point out the issues they should be directing" (32). See "Cult Films, Commentary Tracks, and Censorious Critics: An Interview with John Bloom," *Cineaste* 28.3 (2003): 32–34.
48. It is easy to understand why many viewers might think that the speakers on an audio track do nothing more than ad-lib as they sit in the recording room. As Elvis Mitchell notes, one hears little more than "a constant stream of haphazard blather." See Elvis Mitchell, "Everyone's a Film Geek Now," Arts and Leisure, *New York Times* (August 17, 2003). Such blather is typical of poorly produced commentary tracks in which speakers have not prepared, have not been prompted effectively, or are simply unwilling to provide insights.
49. Peter Brooks, commentary track to *Lord of the Flies* (Voyager, 1983).
50. Bryan Ellenburg, e-mail communication, June 18, 2004.
51. Mark Rance, interview, June 6, 2004, Los Angeles.
52. Atom Egoyan, interview, August 2005.

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53. de Lauzirika cited in "Inside the Alien Quadrilogy," 98.
54. Michael Kurcfeld, e-mail communication, July 3, 2006.
55. Mark Atkinson, e-mail communication, April 2, 2005.
56. Eric Saks, interview, June 4, 2004, Santa Monica.
57. Bertrand Tavernier, interview, March 12, 2004, Paris.
58. Atom Egoyan, interview, August 2005. That Egoyan and Tavernier usually write or coauthor the scripts to their films seems more than a coincidence. Not surprisingly, many of the most articulate and lucid analyses come from directors who are also screenwriters.
59. For Bouzereau's description of his working procedures, see http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/interviews/producers/laurent_bouzereau.htm.
60. Michael Kurcfeld, e-mail communication, July 3, 2006.
61. The commentary track to *The Limey* has attracted critical attention as well as that of DVD producers who often cite it as an example of a contentious track. For a brief mention of this track, see Aaron Barlow, *The DVD Revolution: Movies, Culture, and Technology* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005), 119.
62. Lem Dobbs, e-mail communication, July 22, 2005.
63. Steven Soderbergh, commentary track, *The Limey* (Artisan: 1999). For a brief mention of this commentary track, see Barlow, *The DVD Revolution*.
64. Susan Ricketts, e-mail communication, June 30, 2005.
65. Susan Ricketts, e-mail communication, June 30, 2005.
66. Susan Ricketts, e-mail communication, August 21, 2006.
67. Bryan Ellenburg, e-mail communication, August 25, 2006.
68. Van Ling, e-mail communication, August 25, 2006.
69. Dunn cited in Jon Gertner, "How DVDs are Changing Everything about Hollywood: Box Office in a Box," *New York Times Magazine* (November 14, 2004): 107.
70. Here studio lawyers are simply following union rules.
71. For an account of battles between studios and the WGA, see Dave McNary, "Scribe Fight Heats Up. Studios Standing Firm on DVD Residuals Payoffs," *Variety* (March 30, 2004), http://www.wgaeast.org/mba/2004/articleindex/2004/03/30/variety/index.html.
72. Van Ling, e-mail communication, August 25, 2006.
73. Howard Fast, on the commentary track to The Criterion Collection's edition of *Spartacus*. This particular commentary was initially recorded for the laserdisc of the film. Elsewhere on the audio track, Kirk Douglas questions the extent to which Peter Ustinov wrote his own lines for his role of Batiatus. Ustinov is listed as one of the uncredited writers of the script. This comment too would be quickly excised by studio lawyers.
74. John McTiernan, commentary track to *Die Hard*, Five Star Collection (20th Century Fox, 1988).
75. David Prior, interview, June 14, 2004, Pasedena. Prior added further comments about McTiernan's remarks in an e-mail communication, September 14, 2006.

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76. Susan Ricketts, e-mail communication, July 4, 2005; Bob Stein, interview, June 16, 2004, Santa Monica.
77. A March 21 article in the *New York Times* notes that "ticket sales are up 14 per cent this year over the same period in 2008" as sales for DVDs have fallen, some as far as "40 per cent." (One gathers that this figure is a fall in expected sales, although, as is often the case with DVD sales figures, the numbers are inexact.) A May 19 article in the *Los Angeles Times* put the drop in sales at 15–18 percent.
78. In March 2009, Warner Brothers began to offer "custom-order" of films on DVD. Ostensibly a move to sell titles that might not warrant a full release, this nevertheless puts a new distribution model to the test, a model in which no extras, save possibly the trailer, would be commissioned. See "DVDs to Order from Warner Brothers," *Los Angeles Times*, (March 23, 2009), http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-et-warnerbros23-2009-mar23,0,4288760.story.
79. See Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 149–55.
80. Sennett's analysis is echoed by a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*: "You could also argue that we now live in a cultural moment where people don't want to own things as much as they want to experience them. That would explain why event-oriented entertainment—be it in the movie multiplexes and Imax theaters, the concert business or big arena sporting events—is enjoying considerable success while stay-at-home entertainment (DVD and TV) has seen considerable drop-off." See Patrick Goldsmith, "DVD Downturn Panics Film Industry," http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/19/entertainment/et-bigpicture19?pg=1.
81. On the new higher-definition formats and other modes of viewing film, Van Ling observes: "The DVD format itself has pretty much reached a maturation plateau in terms of what we as content providers can do with it and how consumers have accepted it, but I think the incredibly rapid ascent of DVD—in its digital quality and feature capabilities, as well as how easily it has become the norm—presented such a paradigm shift in home entertainment that it will inform how and what we choose to watch for many years to come. The HD formats, video on demand, iTunes, mobile phone entertainment—all of these new delivery formats are measured against the success of the DVD format in promoting the idea that entertainment—along with education and information—can be delivered in a digital, high-quality, multimedia fashion in which the content creators can extend their storytelling, their marketing, their style, their franchises and their brands while consumers can pick and choose where and how and what they want to see and hear. A lot of these ideas coalesced on DVD and provided a concrete point of departure for future directions.

    The spirit in which DVD was created and accepted—as a creative format, not just as a technical one—will hopefully carry through all of these new media and formats. Now that the settlers have moved in and towns are thriving on the plains, the pioneers move on to explore new territories." Van Ling, e-mail communication, August 29, 2006.

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82. Gertner, "How DVDs are Changing Everything about Hollywood."
83. Staddon cited in Gertner, "How DVDs are Changing Everything about Hollywood."

3 Setting the Standard: The History of The Criterion Collection

1. Stein coined the phrase "classic and important contemporary films." At some point it has been reworded as "important classic and contemporary films." One need only look at the back of any laserdisc box to note this slight variation.
2. Aleen Stein further traces the idea for The Criterion Collection to a conversation that took place among herself, Bob Stein, Joe Medjuck, and his wife, Laurie Dean, in 1983. Bob Stein proposed starting a company that would publish original material on laserdisc. Medjuck thought that assembling new material would be too expensive without financial backing and instead suggested putting existing films on laserdisc with extras. Having published a magazine, *Take Two*, while a film professor in Toronto, he was aware that there was "loads of stuff" available. Stein, however, is the person who acted on this idea. Aleen Stein further recalls that the name "Criterion Collection" emerged during a brainstorming session between Bob Stein, Joe Medjunk, and Laurie Dean the evening before Bob Stein had to file the name of the company with a lawyer.

   Articles on The Criterion Collection tend to focus on the DVD era under Peter Becker. For an overview of Voyager's activities in the early 1990s, see Bob Hughes, "Voyager: Cyberia's First Viable Community," in *Dust or Magic: Secrets of Successful Multimedia Design* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 97–113. For a study that surveys Voyager's activities more generally, see Daniel Todd, "Voyager Charts its Course Beyond the Horizon," *New Media* (November–December, 1991): 82–84.
3. An authority on film preservation, Haver had earlier located missing segments of George Cukor's *A Star is Born* (1954) and persuaded Warner to rerelease a restored version.
4. Interview with Jennifer Scanlin, October 8, 2005.
5. Roger Smith was no less insistent on issuing the best possible transfer of the company's first two productions. After noting a glitch on side one of the laserdisc of *King Kong*, Smith insisted on having the disc redone notwithstanding the considerable remanufacturing costs. (Bob Stein, phone interview, April 8, 2006.)
6. Janus Films was founded in the 1950s by Bryant Halliday and Cyrus Harvey, Jr. The films distributed through Janus were initially shown at the 55th Street Playhouse in New York and the Brattle Theatre in Boston. In 1966, Halliday sold Brattle as well as Janus. The company was later acquired by Saul Turell and William Becker. For a brief account of Janus Films, see Robert Fischer, "The Criterion Collection: DVD Editions for Cinéphiles," *Celluloid Goes Digital. Historical-Critical Editions of Films on DVD and*

the Internet, Proceedings of the First International Trier Conference on Film and New Media, October 2002, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Trier: SVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003): 99–108.

7. Bob Stein cited in http:/interactive.usc.edu/archives/000013.html.
8. Isaac Mizrahi, phone interview, April 2, 2006. Expanded Books were HyperCard stacks containing an entire book with ancillary contextual materials.
9. Aleen Stein, e-mail communication, April 6, 2006.
10. Aleen Stein, interview, October 8, 2005, New York.
11. Aleen Stein, e-mail communication, August 9, 2006.
12. Stein, Mizrahi, Nash, and Becker were the most important heads of production. George Feltenstein, an executive from MGM held the position for a few months. Curtis Wong assumed the head of laserdisc production for an interim period between the end of Mizrahi's tenure and the beginning of Michael Nash's.
13. The descriptions of the work environment here follow accounts furnished by Rebekah Behrendt, e-mail communication, May 12, 2006, and Donald A. Norman, e-mail communication, August 6, 2006. Voyager produced HyperCard versions of some of Norman's works. Norman visited the Santa Monica office several times and further notes: "It [the work environment] didn't strike me overall as being much different from the laid-back, creative work environments of many of the high-tech companies that were thriving in those days. Laid-back, informal, and highly collaborative. Those environments still exist today in many places, even in large company campuses such as at PARC, Apple, Yahoo, Google, Microsoft, IBM, research is a bit more stiff, even as it too is very informal."
14. Aleen Stein, e-mail communication, April 11, 2006.
15. Maria Palazzola had also had previous dealings with Janus Films. As a college student, Palazzola worked for a film society and rented films from the company for student viewing.
16. Bob Stein, phone interview, April 8, 2006.
17. Aleen Stein has made this observation about Morgan Holly. Karen Stetler and Michael Nash have declared the same about Maria Palazzola.
18. Maria Palazzola, phone interview, May 13, 2006.
19. During postproduction, color timing of film footage takes place in the lab by manipulating the intensity of the yellow, cyan, and magenta timing lights; cinematographers closely supervise this because it affects the overall color balance of the image. Lab timing provides a final step in color correction, but gives filmmakers only a relatively gross level of control that affects all of the image hues at once. This description of timing follows closely Stephen Prince's discussion of timing in "The Emergence of Filmic Artifacts: Cinema and Cinematography in the Digital Era," *Film Quarterly* 57 (2004): 24–33.
20. Mark Rance, e-mail communication, June 1, 2006.
21. Curtis Wong, e-mail communication, August 2006.
22. Curtis Wong's recollections readily attest to the gratitude many filmmakers felt upon seeing their works restored. Charles H. Schneer and Ray

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Harryhausen, producer and associate producer of Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts*, wrote both Wong and commentator Bruce Eder, warm letters of gratitude. For both men, the Criterion laserdisc had accorded the film the dignity it deserved. Schneer told Wong that he considered the laserdisc version of the film superior to the theatrical release.

23. Morgan Holly, e-mail communication, August 22, 2006.
24. Criterion is in many respects a family company: Morgan Holly, Criterion's and Voyager's technical director, 1989–1995, began working for the company stuffing envelopes while a teenager. Julia Jones, who later married Morgan Holly, worked for Criterion from 1986 to 1994 as a video graphic designer and laserdisc producer. Aleen Stein's daughter, Alita Holly, worked in sales for the company. William Becker's son, Peter Becker, became head of production in 1994 when Criterion moved its operations to New York. While the aforementioned names represent but a small fraction of the more than 100 people who worked on The Criterion Collection while it was based in Los Angeles, they represent many of the most important and influential contributors.
25. As Nash elaborates, Bowie called the company because he wanted Criterion to produce a laserdisc of Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Bowie assured Nash that he would help secure access to persons involved in the film's production. Michael Nash, phone interview, May 3, 2001.
26. Michael Kurcfeld, e-mail communication, June 19, 2006.
27. Sherman Stratford, "Fortune Visits 25 Cool Companies," *Fortune* 128 (Autumn 1993): 56.
28. In clarifying further what a "labor of love" meant in practical terms, Mark Rance reports that producers were paid $2500 for each laserdisc they produced in the early 1990s.
29. Michael Nash, e-mail communication, May 14, 2006. For further information on Nash's role in the creation of interactive CD-ROMS, see Ralph Lombreglia, "What Happened to Multimedia," *Atlantic Monthly* (June 5, 1997).
30. Stein frequently intoned "We want to be the Random House of tomorrow" when speaking of Voyager's CD-ROMs and Expanded Books. See Bob Stein cited in Stratford, "Fortune Visits 25 Cool Companies."
31. Chris McGowan deems Criterion's productions the "world's greatest film seminars" and credits them with inventing the "annotated movie, replete with subtext, missing text, and might-have-been text." See http://www.laserscans.com/essays/crit2.htm.
32. *Tristana* was issued with a new translation.
33. Bob Stein, interview, October 7, 2005, New York; Bob Stein, interview, June 6, 2004, Santa Monica. The CD-ROM of *Beethoven's 9th Symphony* was published in 1989 on the Mac by Robert Winter and Peter Bogdanoff, and on Windows in 1991 by Curtis Wong.
34. Meuller's comments on the thematic implications of the dance sequences are particularly well suited for the form of audio commentary. He is able to point to a detail and connect it immediately to its significance in the dramaturgy with a speed that print accounts, which would require long exposition and description, cannot match.

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35. Part of the research for this chapter was based on an examination of 270 laserdisc covers in the Robertson Media Center in Clemons Library, University of Virginia. We divided the titles into their year of production. Study of production credits reveals that less than a third of the films produced each year contained supplementary features.
36. Some films were issued in both formats. *Swing Time, High Noon,* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* were all recorded on the costlier CAV format.
37. On this innovation of Criterion, see James Kendrick, "What is Criterion? The Criterion Collection as an Archive of Film as Culture," *Journal of Film and Video* 53 (2001): 128–29. As Kendrick notes, letterboxing on home video was spearheaded by Woody Allen in 1985 with the VHS release of *Manhattan* (1979). While Kendrick notes that difficulties in obtaining licensing rights to some titles of films affects what gets into the Criterion Collection, he does not take into adequate consideration other external factors such as the input of film scholars and Criterion's laserdisc and DVD producers. In another study, Kendrick looks at more recent viewer interest in aspect ratios: See his "Aspect Ratios and Joe Six-Packs: Home Theater Enthusiasts' Battle to Legitimize the DVD Experience," *The Velvet Light Trap* 56 (2005): 58–70.
38. Suber also provided the commentaries to Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* and Billy Wilder's *Some Like it Hot*.
39. Howard Suber, phone interview, April 14, 2006.
40. This list does not include directors such as François Truffaut, Jean Cocteau, and Roman Polanski, who have also provided essays for their films.
41. Laserdisc production was expensive; in the early 1990s, budgets ranged from $20,000 to $50,000 depending on the features, including film-to-tape transfers, the most costly work in any production.
42. Bruce Eder, phone interview, July 10, 2006.
43. Bruce Eder, e-mail communication, July 2, 2006.
44. Ibid.
45. During another exchange that took place years later when the company had commenced producing CD-ROMs, Curtis Wong recalls that during a staff meeting Bob Stein declared: "Other companies have more money and technological expertise than us but what they don't have is passion and imagination for the material and the patience to do justice to the material." Curtis Wong, e-mail communication, August 16, 2006. While the context differs from the statement recalled by Isaac Mizrahi, the latter declaration shows Stein's enduring commitment to excellence and the inspirational effect it had on the company's staff.
46. Conversations with the aforementioned producers suggest this as a general procedure for laserdisc production: (1) Once the assignment of the film has been made, to watch the film repeatedly and to come up with ideas for extras based on that initial experience. (2) Organize telecine transfer. (3) Determine extent to which director is willing to be involved. (4) Research available materials by talking to studio, director, producer, and cinematographer. (5) Brainstorm on ideas using the materials/people available; create

a "wish list" of materials. (6) Put together a list of special features taking into account time and space on the disc. (7) Contact director, producer, cinematographer, and other crew members to see if they are willing to be interviewed for the commentary track. (8) Prepare questions for interviews and commentary track; follow up on materials and ideas that emerge from interviews. (9) Edit documentaries, interviews, and commentary track; proof essays. (10) Oversee packaging and cover art. Notable here is the recursive quality of the work.

47. Julia Jones, e-mail communication, March 13, 2006.
48. Holly further recalls that most of the commentaries were recorded in the field on portable DAT machines. "Editing and mixing generally cost around $5K before I brought the process in-house. We spent between $1,500 and $7,000 in online sessions for typical supplementary assembly. We saved a lot of money by implementing in-house Mac Paintbox for graphic design and layout." Morgan Holly, e-mail communication, July 11, 2006. Michael Nash adds: "Budgets for production of special editions, not including physical disc manufacturing, which was very expensive (maybe $8 per disc) and a big limiting factor in the format's adoption, ranged from perhaps $20,000 to $50,000 depending on features, including film-to-tape transfer, the biggest cost factor." Michael Nash, e-mail communication, July 11, 2006.

    With respect to Criterion's marketing strategies, the best advertising the company received included excellent reviews for its productions in laserdisc newsletters or later in online review forums such as Doug Pratt's *DVDLaser*. Bob Stein would periodically send a laserdisc to directors whose films he hoped to produce in this format. Aleen Stein recalls other marketing strategies: in order to attract customers and generate a mailing list, the company placed advertisements in magazines such as the *New Yorker* offering a free newsletter about films, laserdiscs, and related matters; Stein herself generated a list of videodisc stores to whom the company wrote about their products; Stein and Alita Holly supplied complimentary sets of bin cards (large, still black plastic cards with the title of each film) to encourage stores such as Tower Records to reorder new units. Many stores now have their own Criterion Collection section. Aleen Stein, e-mail communication, August 3, 2006. Occasionally, video stores held special events with in-store appearances of a director whose film was just released on laserdisc. Another tactic was to align with the studio street date on new release features to leverage the studio's marketing for the VHS video and sometimes its own laserdisc without special features.
49. Mathews later published a book, *The Battle of Brazil* (New York: Applause, 1998), on this same subject.
50. For Peter Becker's comments on the delayed release of *Brazil*, see the interview at http://www.thedigitalbits.com/articles/criterionpb.html.
51. Curtis Wong, e-mail communication, August 23, 2006.
52. There is one precedent, but in a different format: Michael Powell and Martin Scorsese are the discussants in the audio tracks for *Black Narcissus* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. The discussion was recorded in 1988, one year before Powell's death.

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53. Martin Scorsese, commentary track to *Taxi Driver* (The Criterion Collection, 1990).
54. Criterion's second website lists all directors involved in this series. See http://dvduell.de/criterion_website/criterion/director_approved.html. It was Morgan Holly's idea to affix a "director approved" sticker on the laserdisc covers with the director's signature.
55. Prices of Criterion laserdiscs ranged from $29.95 to $124.95. Sales ranged widely. The ballpark figure of the lowest to highest number of units sold ranges from 500 to more than a 100,000 units for popular titles such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Ivan Reitman's *Ghostbusters*. The two best-selling laserdiscs ever produced were James Cameron's *Terminator 2* and *Fantasia*, which sold 250,000 units.
56. Production numbers have remained fairly steady since: In 2005, Criterion released 49 DVDs. For these works, see http://www.criterionco.com/thegrid/newsletter_2005_grid.html.
57. Voyager sold half its CD-ROMS and the name Voyager to the Von Holzbrincks in exchange for their 20 percent share. Aleen Stein, e-mail communication, August 3, 2006.
58. Night Kitchen's website: http://www.nightkitchen.com/aboutnk/index.phtml. Bob Stein, e-mail communication, May 22, 2006.
59. According to an article in *Wired Magazine*, there was considerable turmoil within Voyager in 1996. Revenue from the company's CD-ROM sales had plummeted drastically. There was considerable personal turmoil within the company as well. For an account of some of the discussions that took place, see http://wired.com/wired/archive/4.07/stein.html. In addition to being the CEO of Night Kitchen, Stein is the founder of the Institute for the Future of the Book (1994). Stein is currently a visiting fellow at the Annenberg Center for Communication at the University of Southern California. For the Institute for the Future of the Book, see http://www.futureofthebook.org/.
60. Jonathan Turell reports that the company's first DVDs were released between March and May 1998. Jonathan Turell, phone interview, August 2006.
61. For the press release, see http://dvduell.de/criterion_website/criterion/dvd-press.html.
62. Sean Anderson, phone interview, September 1, 2005.
63. Peter Becker cited in an online interview, "Inside The Criterion Collection. A Conversation with Peter Becker, President of The Criterion Collection," http://www.thedigitalbits.com/articles/criterionpb.html.
64. The phrase "digitally obsessed" is taken from an online site for DVDs: http://www.digitallyobsessed.com/index.php3.
65. As Mark Rance recalls his work on *Se7en*: "I was with Fincher as he retransferred the film from the original negative to undo and redo the bleach bypass process he had made famous with fifty or so prints that had it on the first go-round of the theatrical release. The sound was remixed for near-field home video systems. In one fell swoop, New Line surpassed Criterion in quality control and commitment to excellence. No wonder [Kline's] demo was such a wakeup call." Mark Rance, e-mail communication, June 1, 2006.

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66. The string can be followed at http://dvduell.de/criterion_website/criterion/archive.html.
67. In a phone interview (September 1, 2005), Sean Anderson concurs. "We had to do it right from the start," explains Anderson, "look at how others were handling design, look at picture and sound quality…and avoid mistakes."
68. As Hughes in *Dust or Magic*, 110, notes, the excellence of Voyager's products engendered a loyal fan base: "People would try anything that Voyager produced, whether it was music, film, or 'fun stuff for kids,' simply because it came from Voyager." Hughes's observation concerning consumers' trust in Voyager's products could easily be extended to The Criterion Collection. Many cinéphiles readily purchase films produced by The Criterion Collection, confident in the quality of the company's productions.
69. Aleen Stein, interview, October 8, 2005, New York.
70. The number of laserdisc players in U.S. homes never exceeded a million; as of 2005, 57 million households have at least one DVD player. On this fact, see Kendrick, "Aspect Ratios," 58.
71. Craig Hight, "Making-of Documentaries on DVD: *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy* and Special Editions," *The Velvet Light Trap* 56 (2005): 5.
72. One unfortunate result of this situation is that many of the excellent supplements available on the company's laserdiscs languish without an outlet. Some of the scholarly essays, while not available on DVD, can be read on the Criterion website.
73. Peter Becker cited in Gary Crowdus, "Providing a Film Archive for the Home Viewer: An Interview with Peter Becker of The Criterion Collection," *Cineaste* 25 (1999): 49.
74. Ibid.
75. Peter Becker cited in "Inside the Criterion Collection."
76. Anthony D'Alessandro, "Criterion Committed to 'Special' DVDs," *Variety* (February 2005): 5. The company's best-selling title to date, Terry Gilliam's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, with an estimated 300,000 units sold, has overtaken their previous best-selling title, *The Seven Samurai*.
77. The phrase is taken from the company's current mission statement on its website; see http://www.criterionco.com/asp/about.asp.
78. Peter Becker cited in "Providing a Film Archive," 49.

4 Directors and DVD Commentary: The Specifics of Intention

1. In the ensuing discussion, we also include directorial commentaries that were imported into DVD form from laserdiscs, such as *RoboCop*.
2. Intention in film study is bound up with the concept of the "auteur" (which is itself a troubled critical concept). It is remarkable how debates on auteurs and auteurism restage literary debates on intention, arguing by turns for an intention that resides in authors, in patterns found in films, and then in viewers, and specifying sometimes overt and sometimes symptomatic articulation.

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Remarkable too is the tendency of commentators to disregard the qualifications made by others in the debate; the self-conscious intervention implicit in "*la politique des auteurs*" becomes a cruder, more programmatic application—however many times commentators recall Bazin's original formulation. On different views of authorship in film, see the various essays in *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*, ed. John Caughie (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), especially those by Edward Buscombe and Peter Wollen as well as those by Colin MacCabe and Timothy Corrigan in *Film and Authorship*, ed. Virginia Wright Wexman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

3. We would note that this move is as critically productive as it is pervasive: by calling into question the relation of subjects to their words, a critic creates a need for criticism—amid the confusions, dissembling, and unconscious motives such a move produces, the critic emerges as a clarifying agent and perhaps even an authoritative voice. We readily concede that the respect we counsel is also a critical strategy, but it is no less an enabling move than a hermeneutics of suspicion that programmatically sets aside such statements.
4. The return of the author, or the desire for such a return, has recently become something of a familiar topic. See Colin MacCabe, "The Revenge of the Author," in Wexman, *Film and Authorship*, 30–41, and more recently Dana Polan, "Auteur Desire," *Screening the Past* 12 (2001), http://www.latrobe.edu.au/www/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0301/dpfr12a.htm. The concern for authorial agency has also become prominent among critics with commitments to identity politics, queer theory, or feminism. (See Janet Staiger's "Authorship Approaches," in *Authorship and Film*, ed. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger (New York: Routledge, 2003), 49–52.)
5. See Ginette Vincendeau's comment in an interview published in *Film and Television After DVD* (New York: Routledge, 2008): "The academic community should be able to situate the author's positions and situate one's voice in relation to other critical material" (127).
6. Timothy Corrigan, "The Commerce of Auteurism," in Wexman, *Film and Authorship*, 102.
7. E-mail to the authors, September 15, 2006. In an earlier interview with the authors, Tavernier confessed himself disinclined to speak about the motivation of characters on his commentary tracks, noting, "If it's not apparent in the scene, there is no point in speaking of motivation or meaning."
8. In an e-mail to the authors, Bertrand Tavernier further adds: "I wanted to say a few things, to speak of Jim Thompson, of the metaphysical and political implications avoided by the American directors who have adapted his books."
9. The *RoboCop* commentary track features three speakers—the director Verhoeven, one of the cowriters Ed Neumeier, and executive producer Jon Davison. As they appear to agree, we treat their intentions as identical.
10. Of course there is an irony here in the fact that Tavernier's literary bias is built partly around the recuperation of pulp fiction like *Pop. 1280*.
11. This account of collaboration, one might note, offers a purely empirical assault on the idea of a single, originary author in film as well as any real theory of auteurism. It accords with the equally empirical approach taken by

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Jack Stillinger, and it reminds us that a practice can lead us as far as a theory in such destructive work and that experience can prove as disruptive to critical orthodoxies as theory. See Stillinger's chapter on film, "Plays and Film: Authors, Auteurs, Autres," in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

12. T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," *Athenaeum*, September 26, 1919, as reprinted in *Critiques and Essays*, ed. Stallman (New York: Ronald Press, 1949), 387.
13. Greenaway repeats this insistence later in the commentary: "A lot of my audiences, certainly people who have had no sympathy with the film, were very much confused about all the puzzles not being completed, but I assure you if you pay full attention to all the circumstances of the film, there should be no ambiguities left at all in your mind."
14. As such, the best of these commentaries does much to further the project of "historical poetics" enjoined by David Bordwell in the conclusion to *Making Meaning*. Such a project, which the author defines as "the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects" (266–67), is well served by this medium, which at its best enforces close attention to technique. Bordwell's conclusion is laced with a bracing nostalgia for empiricism and problem solving, what he elsewhere terms "the *concrete* assumptions embedded in the filmmaker's craft" (269, emphasis ours).
15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1968), 48.

5 Directorial Commentary and Film Study: The Case of Atom Egoyan

1. David Bordwell's remarks in the concluding chapter of *Making Meaning* would imply this, and in his recent *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) make this explicit: "The rapid adoption of DVDs should encourage a closer attention to technique, not only because of the format's fidelity to the original film but also because a filmmaker's commentary tracks sometimes take us into the problem-solving process quite tangibly" (267).
2. The terminology here is that of Peter Rabinowitz, who develops them in *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987). Rules of notice emphasize certain textual details (always at the expense of others), and rules of significance suggest ways of extracting meaning from such moments. We have found Rabinowitz's approach quite suggestive in framing this account of Egoyan's commentaries and films.
3. Egoyan is no less demanding of his viewers in the interviews he has given. In an exchange with Richard Porton, the director explains that viewers "simply can't sit back and have a story told to them and lose themselves. They have

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to be always aware of their position and their relationship to these images" (15). See *Cineaste* 23.2 (1997). Given such expectations of viewerly engagement, the specific examples of such interaction Egoyan outlines in his audio commentaries are even more welcome.

4. As this manuscript went into production, a DVD version of Egoyan's twelfth film, *Chloe*, appeared. The commentary track features Egoyan, Erin Cressida Wilson (the screenwriter), and Amanda Seyfried, (who played the film's title character). The commentary is a fluid one, Egoyan taking the up the role of moderator for much of it. This commentary might well be considered a provisional resolution of the ambivalences Egoyan expresses about the commentary form (which we outline in this chapter): Egoyan often asks his co-commentators what they think about a given character's motivations, feelings, or perceptions, and he seems pleased with the range of their responses, some of which are directly contradictory. Moreover, he appears particularly engaged by how his audience might consider various sequences in the film (as either flashbacks or fabulations).
5. Interview with Atom Egoyan, August 2005, Toronto.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Such an exercise might be perceived as overly formal. Again, we take Egoyan at his word on this, noting his declaration in an interview concerning such an approach: "Formalism is a concern with the process of depiction and that informs every gesture I'll ever make in movies," See "Family Romances: An Interview with Atom Egoyan," in *Cineaste* 23.2 (1997): 15.
9. See Jonathan Romney, *Atom Egoyan* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 156.
10. Peter Harcourt develops this musical analogy in "Imaginary Images: An Examination of Atom Egoyan's Films," *Film Quarterly* 48.3 (1995): 5. Egoyan himself refers to his musical conceptualiztion of film, notably in his "Director's Statement" to *Sarabande Sutie #4: Yo-Yo Ma—the Films*. See http://www.sonyclassical.com/music/63203/films/direct_4.html.
11. For a markedly different approach to Egoyan's work before and after *Exotica*, see David L. Pike, "Egoyan After *Exotica*: Four Films in Search of an Author," *Bright Lights Film Journal* 52 (2006), http://www.brightlights-film.com/52/egoyan.htm. We do not share Pike's evident disappointment in Egoyan's post-*Exotica* films.
12. Jonathan Romney notes the ambiguity of the cuts surrounding these sequences. (See *Atom Egoyan*, 116–17.) He suggests they be treated as "collective memories" or another instance of the "missing observer" in Egoyan's films. Critics often approach the field sequence in terms of repetition. See Adam Knee, "*Exotica*: The Uneasy Borders of Desire," in *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities*, ed. Eva Rueschmann (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 2003), 170–71; and Monique Tschofen, "Repetition, Compulsion, and Representation in Atom Egoyan's Films," in *North of Everything*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 172–76.

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6 Scholarly Commentary and Film Study

1. See Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 220–33. Prince discusses the opening shot of *Sanjuro* on 225ff.
2. See Prince, *The Warrior's Camera*, 235–47.
3. See Prince, *The Warrior's Camera*, xviii.
4. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134.
5. It is true that such an account only amounts to testimony by a contemporary. But the question here is not certainty, but greater or lesser reliability, and, even more fundamentally, how one might construct a range of possible interpretations. A historical report (which an audio commentary by a contemporary would be) can only tell us what someone at the time thought; it does not provide certainty. But the absence of such accounts presents a far more difficult problem for interpretation.
6. See Caroline Millar's suggestive remarks on the value of close reading enforced by audio commentary in James Bennett and Tom Brown's "The Place, Purpose, and Practice of the BFI's DVD Collection and the Academic Film Commentary: An Interview with Caroline Millar and Ginette Vincendeau," in *Film and Television After DVD*, ed. James Bennett and Tom Brown (New York: Routledge, 2008), 121.
7. See the chapter on "Viaggio in Italia" included in Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 104–22 passim.

7 The Anthologizing Impulse

1. Kay Hoffman's 2004 remarks in a review of a 2001 conference are still apt: "Given the critical mass of educational and intellectual material now available on DVD, it is surprising that only now have academics, film historians, archivists, and people involved in educational media begun to reflect on the social, political, aesthetic, and economic value of DVDS, DVD-ROMs, and the Internet" (162). Aaron Barlow, in an overview of special edition DVDs in *The DVD Revolution*, notes rightly that while "the range of possibilities for special edition movie presentation on DVD is quite extensive" (108), the capacities of the form have not yet been fully exploited.
2. Often the special edition or anthology receives welcome but uncritical praise, as in Tim Page's celebration of Criterion's offerings: "Which might be described as some sort of fantasical combination for motion pictures of the honor roll, the Louvre, the Modern Library, and the Norton Critical Editions." The shaping power and framing effects of "making-of documentaries" have been examined by Craig Hight in "Making-of Documentaries on DVD: *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and Special Editions," *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (Fall 2005): 4–17. Hight draws upon work done by Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, "Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The *Fight*

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Club DVD as Digital Closet," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 19.1 (2002): 21–43.

3. Patrick Vondereau, building upon François Truffaut's distinction between reading a film and "consulting" a video, defines the DVD thus: "I understand the DVD primarily as a box of materials, a collection of sources and essays about those sources" (127).
4. Calls for the cinematic equivalent of bookish philological rigor have come from Kurt Gärtner and Stephan Dolezel. Gärtner writes: "An electronic edition should be more than an electronic archive of the transmitted documents of an author's work; desirably, it should also be the product of an [*sic*] critical analysis of its transmission." (53). Dolezel takes a slightly different methodological approach: "A modern film edition must naturally follow the history of production and—whenever possible—of reception, and it should embed the film studied in its respective historical and journalistic context" (57). See Gärtner, "Philological Requirements for Digital Historical-Critical Text Editions and Their Application to Critical Editions of Films," and Stephan Dolezel, "Methodological Standards of Historical-Critical Editions of Historical Film Sources Held at the IWF." Both articles appear in *Celluloid Goes Digital: Historical-Critical Editions of Films on DVD and the Internet*. Proceedings of the First International Trier Conference on Film and New Media, October 2002, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Trier: WVT Wissenshchaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003).

   We do not wish to overlook some excellent critiques of film on DVD. Laura Mulvey's splendid and penetrating audio commentaries to *Peeping Tom* and *Voyage to Italy* amply demonstrate the more analytic approach, and David Bordwell's commentary to *Alexander Nevsky* shrewdly exploits the pedagogical opportunities offered by the form. Our point is that supplements and audio commentary generally tend toward the contextual, not the analytic.
5. Robert Fischer sketches a similar modality for the DVD in "The Criterion Collection: DVD Editions for Cinéphiles," in *Celluloid Goes Digital*, 99–108. In a discussion of The Criterion Collection's edition of *Spartacus*, he offers the descriptive term "study center," a phrase that he develops from a passing reference in *Cahiers du Cinema*.
6. One need not, of course, exaggerate the DVD producer's authority to make this argument. Clearly, producers do not have complete control of supplementary material. What interests us here is the limited, but telling, agency involved in the production of some editions.
7. Steven Masters, in an engaging letter to the editor of *Sight and Sound*, articulates these feelings neatly. Praising the "textual democracy of the DVD form," he asserts that an "interest in DVD need not be reflexive consumerism: it should be a valuable commitment to the future of film form" (64). See "DVD'd We Stand," *Sight and Sound* 8.7 (July 1998): 64. An editorial response to Masters's letter in the next issue reaffirms this stance: "Digital technology will never satisfy the purists, but it may now be the only way the riches of the cinema's history will find a new audience" (3).
8. Will Brooker, recalling the activism of many fans of *Star Wars*, notes that "fans have the stubborn determination to resist the revisions they

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dislike" (38). He also discusses new forms of viewing, in which fans use DVD functions like slow motion to create different and personal engagements with film. See Derek Johnson, "Star Wars Fans, DVD, and Cultural Ownership: An Interview with Will Brooker," *Velvet Light Trap* 56 (Fall 2005): 36–44.

9. Phone interview with Kim Hendrickson, May 19, 2006. Ms. Hendrickson's formulation of the oft-cited Criterion ethos is quoted from Wendy Mitchell, "The Perils of Prepping DVDs: Distributors Find Challenges in Releasing the Likes of *Swoon*, *The Battle of Algiers*, and Iranian Classics," *Indiewire*, http://www.indiewire.com/biz/biz_040823swoon.html.
10. This information, along with subsequent quotations in the paragraph, is taken from an interview with Ms. Lustgarten on December 12, 2006.
11. From the Grand Classics web page, http://www.grandclassics.com/about.shtml. Schnabel presented the film for the series on June 11, 2003, and he later appears on the Criterion DVD in one of the supplements.
12. Phone interview with Kim Hendrickson, May 19, 2006.
13. Interview with the authors, June 15, 2005, London.
14. This information is from a September 26, 2006 e-mail exchange with the anonymous producer.

Conclusion

1. See *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) or Dana Polan, *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
2. See *Film and Television after DVD*, ed. James Bennett and Tom Brown (New York: Routledge, 2008).
3. See D. N. Rodovick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), and, perhaps most perspicaciously, Laura Mulvey's *Death 24x a Second*.
4. For a bracing overview of this relation, see Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 149–85. Hacking's account relies on Thomas Kuhn's earlier essay, "A Function for Measuring in Modern Physical Science," reprinted in *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Thought and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

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