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Confluent auteurism: a psychoanalytic approach to adaptation

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Confluent Auteurism – A Psychoanalytic Approach to Adaptation

Submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters Degree in English by Dissertation Only

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Date of final submission: 22 February 2023

Supervisor: Professor Michael Titlestad

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It has been submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in English by Dissertation Only at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.



Simon David Wolfson

22nd day of February 2023

Ethics protocol: 'studies based on theoretical or secondary analysis alone… do not require full ethics clearance but an ethics waiver form must be completed if required by a university, faculty or external body' – **HREC (Non-Medical) Risk level categories definitions (updated November 2022)**

Signed ethics waiver form has been submitted with this dissertation and has also been received by Prof Anette Horn.

Abstract

When asked if they cultivate a particular style, the Coen Brothers – who are widely regarded as consummate auteurs, that is, directors with such a distinctive style that they are regarded as the authors of their films – replied: 'I don't think there's a thread, at least a conscious thread, anyway, between the stories we're telling… it's what you call style in retrospect only'. Despite this repudiation, filmgoers from the casual to the cinephile ardently affirm the Coens' 'auteur' status. While lauded for their original screenplays, the Coens' adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* has received wide critical acclaim. I contend it is such a successful adaptation that it seems both Coenesque and McCarthyesque – a perfect melding of two distinctive authorial voices. It may seem contradictory to group 'melding' and 'distinctive' in the same sentence, however, our imaginations are capable of holding and assimilating what seems 'black and white' into a general sensation of confluence.

When we read a novel, pictures are generated in our mind's eye. These images are called *phantasies*. The word phantasy is drawn from the field of psychoanalysis and is used widely across many theorisations. The Lacanian film theorist, Cristian Metz, deployed 'phantasy' most compellingly as a marker of the images we generate when we read texts. When we watch adaptations of novels we love, our phantasies are challenged by the potent medium of the cinema. Our most common reaction to the adaptation is: 'it wasn't as good as the book'. Rarer is the sensation of confluence that I experienced with the Coens' adaptation. I am interested in why we either 'spit out' the film or lovingly embrace it as a 'faithful' reproduction of the text.

Since this dialectic seems to have only been obliquely explored in the past, I have coined a new term: *confluent auteurism*. In this dissertation, I approach this experience of confluent auteurism from several psychoanalytically informed angles. What I reveal not only bears on adaptation and auteur studies but also reader-response and reception theory. Ranging from Lacan's theory of the gaze and Klein's object relations to Barthes' 'pleasure of the text', I engage in a hermeneutic voyage of discovery. Ideas, like phantasies, are malleable. My theoretical formulation will be advanced, problematised and reformulated throughout the course of this dissertation illustrating how the invention of a new terminology is as much enmeshed in existing thought as texts are in other texts.

Confluent Auteurism – A Psychoanalytic Approach to Adaptation

Simon Wolfson

Masters in English Literature by Dissertation

Under the Supervision of Prof Michael Titlestad



For Submission in 2023

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Introduction

Dear Mr Fugard

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this. I have admired your work for a long time and I feel immensely honored to be able to ask you a few questions.

I think it was in 2014 when my ebullient drama teacher informed us that we would be able to see Athol Fugard, the playwright we had so closely studied, perform live at the Market Theatre. The performance was 'The Shadow of the Hummingbird'. I sat, absolutely riveted by your performance, which carried both gravitas and an endearing tenderness that imbued a sense of delicate intimacy – as if you were my grandfather (who I sorely missed at the time, still to this day) telling me stories and allegories. It might be worth noting at this point that I was obsessed with 'The Hollow Men' by T.S. Eliot, especially the earth-shattering chant '*this is the way the world ends / not with a bang but a whimper*'. *There was another refrain that preoccupied me, however, that of* '*falls the Shadow*'. *I had no inclination what* '*idea*' *or* '*reality*', '*motion*' *or* '*act*' *referred to in relation to the Shadow, no more than I could apprehend how a shadow could fall between two abstract entities.*

It was during the scene where Oupa recounts Plato's Allegory of the Cave to a bemused and unimpressed Boba that I experienced a remarkable moment of synthesis. I realised that between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the Shadow on the cave wall. I didn't fully understand the full weight of that synthesis until a few months ago. After the performance there was a Q&A, and I thought '*this must be my chance*'. *However, I just couldn't muster up the courage to ask you. I even remember seeing you in the car park after the performance with your iconic pipe, and again, I wanted to ask you, but I couldn't. I was intimidated and shy. I regret not having asked you to this day.*

Now, I've managed to get in contact with you. I owe a great deal of thanks to Dr Fourie for that. My questions come from a place of deep curiosity more than any sort of academic impulse. I've been so immersed, as a Masters student, in a labyrinth of theory about authorship and intentionality. I suppose what I'm hoping to gather from this interaction is a more grounded understanding of what it means to be a writer, without the impositions of endlessly circular theorisation.

I never did receive a response from Athol Fugard. But having got as close as his partner, Dr Paula Fourie, inspired an excitement I'd never felt before. Her last response to me included this enticing promise: 'We haven't forgotten about you! ...You are on our to do list, and quite high up too.' The prospect of being on the 'to-do list' of one of the world's greatest living playwrights animated my wildest fantasies. While the encounter remained regrettably one-sided, it taught me something vital: curiosity and candour, in tow of compelling ideas, can entice anybody. This maxim proved to be true, when, about a month later, I emailed Prof Todd McGowan – a leading voice in the re-emergence of Lacanian film studies, in league with Slavoj Žižek and a prolific author of many books on the subject. His response to my email, wherein I detailed the current formulation of my thesis, was invigorating: 'that conception of auteurism in relation to symbolic, imaginary, and real makes a lot of sense to me. No one has written on this.' That last sentence has stuck with me throughout this project. I had a meeting with Prof McGowan over Zoom, and followed it up with some correspondence over email some months later.

These interactions, along with many others had with family, my partner, close friends and my therapist, helped foment a very particular phantasy, or as I called it, 'theoretical formulation'. I dubbed that phantasy: *confluent auteurism*. There's some crucial terminology I've raised here that needs to be defined before I can proceed. Phantasy (as opposed to fantasy), as used by Freud and other psychoanalytic theorists, can be described as a product of our imaginative impulses, mentalised expressions of things – either external or internal – that we need to assimilate. The term has wide-ranging uses in the field of psychology, however, I have co-opted the term in this dissertation to refer to the mental expressions generated by our encounters with artistic media. My most common usage of this term resides with the images we imagine upon reading novels. To clarify further, phantasy is a mentalised image whereas fantasy is a mentalised image in which we invest a narrative. When we fantasize, we imagine ourselves or others participating in a story of pure invention in our mind's eye. When we phantasize we generate images of things we have encountered in our world, in order to better understand them internally. There is obviously overlap between these two terms. For the purposes of coherency, I will use the word phantasy predominantly – although its overlap with fantasy is certainly a problem to unpick in further study.

My conception of confluent auteurism largely took on the valence of a phantasy. It became a term with which I hoped I could be associated as an emerging academic. Confluent auteurism was initially conceived to describe a particular phenomenon I noticed in the Coen Brothers' adaptation of McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*: that the film appeared at once as both distinctly Coenesque and McCarthyesque. My phantasy at the time turned on the idea of the auteur: a film director who has such a distinctive voice that they can be said to have 'authored' the film. The other critical point of enquiry was the idea of confluence – that it could be said that both film and text exhibited a confluence of authorial / auteuristic impulses. As my dissertation progressed into a more psychoanalytic framework, so too did my conception of confluent auteurism.

It is certainly worth noting that this is not a typical dissertation. From the very first chapter it will become clear that I have adopted a particular voice, one more akin to auto-ethnography than discursivity. I have found remarkable freedom in this voice, in that it allowed me to connect personal experiences, memories, even dreams, with broader academic concerns in the fields of literature, film and psychoanalysis. While it may be voiced unconventionally, my dissertation is appropriately apportioned into four chapters. The subheadings within each chapter (save for Chapter One) are derived from one of the three key texts: *No Country for Old Men*, *The Birds*, and *A Clockwork Orange*. Chapter One engages with the hermeneutic and auto-ethnographical approach to this project. Chapter Two concerns the adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* by the Coen Brothers; it commences a process of drawing out psychoanalytic resonances within the text and film and relating them to key theorisations (of which some are my own, and some are derived from other theorists). Chapter Three takes a distinctly psychoanalytic approach to the adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's *The Birds* directed by Alfred Hitchcock, furthering my exploration into Lacanian conceptualisations. Chapter Four operates mainly to problematise and reconceptualise my own theoretical formulations. Finally the conclusion, which returns to a more unusual approach, reconciles the various movements and shifts within my terminology with auto-ethnographical concerns rendered through hindsight. *Confluent Auteurism – A Psychoanalytic Approach to Adaptation* will emerge freshly on well-travelled ground. My phantasy of a new theoretical term will be approached from numerous vectors and idioms, ultimately arriving with a new cardinal awareness of what will constitute a rewarding doctoral dissertation in the future.

Chapter One – Encountering the Double

The return of the figural breast

> *How wicked, my brothers, innocent milk must always seem to me now.* (Burgess 26)

> *When one obtains any object that appears to promise the satisfaction of desire, one inevitably discovers that 'that's not it.' Or, to put it in other terms, the moment when the subject would see the gaze directly would be the moment when the gaze would cease to be the gaze.* (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* 23)

One of my earliest memories of reading for pleasure entails sitting atop an assembled 'tower' (a dining chair perched on a low blue plastic table), fervently absorbing J.K. Rowling's *A Goblet of Fire*. Why I felt the need to read from such a precarious height, I have no idea. What I do recall, though, is a prevailing feeling of self-importance. A harmless emergence of childish narcissism, coupled with a certain sense of imaginative totality, which sees me at the fulcrum of not just my external world, but my internal, introjected world. The latter world is especially interesting to me now, as I formulate a theory that seeks to account for the interaction between a reader's imaginary, idealised image of a text and their[1] 'real' sensory experience of a cinematic adaptation of that text. In this imaginary world of which I saw myself as the fulcrum of, I can still remember how I placed myself in Harry Potter's milieu. Meanwhile, in my external world, and fast approaching the age of eleven, I eagerly anticipated the arrival of the Hogwarts letter. When this awaited object did not arrive as hoped, my imaginary world, which hinged on the wish that it might possibly be real, was at risk of dissolution. In a frantic attempt to keep my idealised image of the text intact, I compulsively repeated the same daydreams in my head, long after I had finished the text. I imagined myself as an exceptionally talented young wizard, rivalling even the skills of Potter himself. I was so much a part of that world, so intrinsically woven into the fabric of its reality, that the fantasies preoccupied me for years. That is, until I saw the cinematic adaptation of *A Goblet of Fire*.

[1] I have opted to use gender-neutral pronouns throughout

While it was not the first Harry Potter film I had seen, it certainly made an indelible impact on me. In one fell swoop, it shattered my already tenuous imaginary relation to the text. Watching this 'real' image on the screen, I saw many things from the text that I had imagined: Hogwarts castle itself, the glittering Yule Ball, and of course the characters, with whom I imagined I was close friends. The shattering reality hit me: the only thing that was not represented on that screen was *me*. I had to come to terms with the sobering fact that my imaginary relation to Harry Potter's world was just that: imaginary. It was a figment of my overactive imagination, of my childish narcissism. The loss I felt must have been devastating at the time. It was the loss of my imaginary relation to the text, the near-instantaneous destruction of my fragile, introjected idea of the text and my projected, fanciful world, drawn from the text but very much its own thing, of which I was a part – which, in turn, posed a very real ego-threat. If I was not in the world of the text, then where was I? How could I be remarkably, magically gifted in the real world? A decisive split would have to occur between my imagined, introjected vision and my fanciful daydreaming. The former would become ever more idealised and sacred, while the latter would be ever more externalised, searching for something concrete to latch onto. To those versed in psychoanalytic discourse, this may have already begun to sound like Kleinian object relations. Indeed, this aforementioned dialectic can be mapped onto an infant's object relation with the breast.

As infants we have no desire, only unmitigated drive. The breast is the epicentre of our libidinal economy and satiates our most fundamental need: hunger. With no 'self-control' or law telling us how much milk we should imbibe, we overindulge – sometimes to the point of unbearable excess. This dynamic is known as *jouissance*. At some point in our infancy the Law is laid down: 'you can only have so much', 'no, you can't feed now'. This Law is symbolically instantiated by the Name-of-the-Father and ushers the infant into the symbolic order – irreversibly away from the real of the jouissance. This connection to the jouissance, that transcends language, is now forever lost to us and becomes the 'lost object' or 'the lack'. Throughout our lives, through infinite permutations, the lack manifests as an 'object' that causes desire. This object-cause of desire is known as *objet petit a*. This is not to say that the lack, as *objet petit a*, emerges only after the separation. It in fact irrupts as a product of that very jouissance.

When, as infants, we get that 'first hit' of the breast, it is pure jouissance. When the breast is removed we necessarily formulate a phantasy (an idealised image) of the breast. I tend to pronounce 'phantasy' as **fun**-tuh-see to avoid confusion with 'fantasy'; in this dissertation's theoretical orientation, which is predominantly psychoanalytic, phantasy and fantasy are two distinct concepts. Fantasy retains its common definition: a fanciful mental image that expresses both our conscious and unconscious wishes. Phantasy, as based on the Freudian and Kleinian conceptions, refers to specific mental activity in our imaginative registry. For infants, phantasies help them make sense of their external world: 'in Klein's concept, phantasy emanates from within and imagines what is without, it offers an unconscious commentary on instinctual life and links feelings to objects and creates a new amalgam: the world of imagination. Through its ability to phantasize the baby tests out, primitively 'thinks' about, its experiences of inside and outside' (Mitchell). According to Klein, phantasies continue into adult life. While we dwell on our fantasies, we actively inhabit our phantasies; they play a crucial role in our mental life. The contours of our phantasies, which compensate for the things we desire, are fomented in that crucial stage of infancy when we long for the breast.

When we cannot communicate that longing, or the breast cannot be provided at that time, we hallucinate a phantasy which offers temporary satisfaction. When the breast finally arrives it will either satisfy or not satisfy our phantasy. If our phantasy is satisfied, we accept the breast. It becomes, as Klein would put it, the 'good breast'. If our phantasy is not satisfied, we reject or 'spit out' the breast. It becomes the 'bad breast'. This dynamic does not end after we emerge into the symbolic order and start to language our reality. That early phantasy of the breast evolves into the fundamental lack – *objet petit a*, or, the object-cause of desire. The gaze of *objet petit a* hides behind every object of desire thereafter. This dynamic also, quite fascinatingly, emerges when we read a text and watch a film adaptation of that text.

When we read a text, we generate an idealised image of things within that text – this is the phantasy. We can liken this process to the infant generating a phantasy of the breast. How can this possibly be the case? As I mentioned, the lack manifests itself in infinite permutations throughout our lives. The lack is not just an absence of jouissance, it is also constitutes tantalizing brushes with that jouissance. After all, the lack as *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, is directing us towards the object of desire: the figural breast – the provider of the

jouissance. In my estimation, any phantasy is the internalised gaze of *objet petit a*. So to return to my earlier question, how can we possibly liken generating a phantasy of a text with generating a phantasy of the breast? We can turn to Barthes's seminal *The Pleasure of the Text* to answer this question.

> *Pleasure of the text, text of pleasure*: these expressions are ambiguous because French has no word that simultaneously covers pleasure (contentment) and bliss (rapture). Therefore, 'pleasure' here (and without our being able to anticipate) sometimes extends to bliss, sometimes is opposed to it. But I must accommodate myself to this ambiguity; for on the one hand I need a general 'pleasure' whenever I must refer to an excess of the text, to what in it exceeds any (social) function and any (structural) functioning; and on the other hand I need a particular 'pleasure,' a simple part of Pleasure as a whole, whenever I need to distinguish euphoria, fulfilment, comfort (the feeling of repletion when culture penetrates freely), from shock, disturbance, even loss, which are proper to ecstasy, to bliss. (Barthes 19)

> Here moreover, drawn from psychoanalysis, is an indirect way of establishing the opposition between the text of pleasure and the text of bliss: pleasure can be expressed in words, bliss cannot. Bliss is unspeakable, interdicted. I refer to Lacan ('What one must bear in mind is that bliss is forbidden to the speaker, as such, or else: that it cannot be spoken except between the lines . . .') and to Leclaire ('. . . Whoever speaks, by speaking denies bliss, or correlatively, whoever experiences bliss causes the letter— and all possible speech— to collapse in the absolute degree of the annihilation he is celebrating'). (Barthes 21)

What we see here are the operations of jouissance within the text. Bliss and jouissance, for Barthes, can be conflated. Barthes's pointedly psychoanalytic diction tells us all we need to know about the text as a provider (breast) of jouissance. Bliss, for Barthes, is delineated by 'an excess of the text', and what is jouissance but an excess? The text becomes that nourishment which we have craved ever since we were first separated from the jouissance of the breast by the name-of-the-father. When Barthes 'distinguish[es] euphoria, fulfilment, comfort (the feeling of repletion when culture penetrates freely), from shock, disturbance, even loss, which are proper to ecstasy, to bliss' is he not reflecting the nourishment, satisfaction and excessive overfeeding (repletion) that accompanies breastfeeding? Furthermore, Barthes implies that

bliss belongs to the order of the real: 'pleasure can be expressed in words, bliss cannot. Bliss is unspeakable, interdicted'. Bliss, jouissance, is undoubtedly beyond language, beyond symbolic apprehension – for can we ever truly articulate both our desire for and experience of pure sublimity?

Having suggested through Barthes that the text is somehow a pathway to jouissance, to bliss, I can now fully explicate how and why we develop a phantasy of the text. When we experience jouissance, we long to experience it again. When we are cut off from accessing that jouissance, we conjure up an idealised image of what provided that jouissance. This phantasy is precious and fragile – we hold it close and protect it – for it provides a facsimile of nourishment when the jouissance is no longer accessible (either permanently or temporarily). Put in Barthesian terms, a text of bliss generates 'the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, unless it is reached through another text of bliss: you cannot speak 'on' such a text, you can only speak 'in' it, in its fashion, enter into a desperate plagiarism, hysterically affirm the void of bliss (and no longer obsessively repeat the letter of pleasure)' (Barthes 22).

Put simply, when we experience pure ecstasy from a text we cannot articulate precisely what thing has aroused this brush with jouissance. What we can discern is our fervent desire to re-experience it. Infinitely deferred along the signifying chain, buried deep within (or without) the sign, is this object-cause of desire, from which the gaze emanates. We internalise this gaze as a phantasy of the jouissance-provider. The word phantasy is crucial here, for the phantasy is a mental image of the thing desired, arising from a place of lack. The process of generating this facsimile of the jouissance-provider, the phantasy, can really be described as a masturbatory, autoerotic endeavour. It is in this obsessive repetition of 'the letter of pleasure', that is, the imaginatively wrought phantasy that we ultimately begin to desire something more: the return of the jouissance-provider. The return of the figural breast. This is the promise of the film.

If we experience jouissance as an active process while reading, we conversely experience jouissance as a passive process while spectating. When we watch a film we encounter a deluge of audiovisual stimuli. This flood of images and sounds saturates our imaginative registry,

threatening to overwhelm all but the slightest traces of our preconceived phantasies. While the film always seems to promise the realisation of our phantasies, the opposite in fact occurs – without us even registering it: film erases phantasy. Because the text and the phantasy are so intrinsically linked, when the stronger current of cinema overwrites our phantasy, surely it overwrites the text? Not the text-in-itself, but our sense of it? Perhaps it may be useful to include here one of the most common responses to adaptation: 'it wasn't as good as the book'. If this sentiment is shared so widely, than surely we hold something of the text inside of us? What is that part of the text we hold on to so dearly if not the phantasy? I would argue it is the phantasy that we hold, which is after all that part of the received-text that we idealize. But surely if that idealization is wiped after having seen the film, then our sentiments regarding the film not being as good as the book is not grounded in any sort of reality, but rather in a feeling of something lost or deferred. We are after all lamenting the loss of the phantasy.

The closer a text and its adaptation converge, the greater the loss incurred to our phantasy. As Stam (54–55) puts it: 'we read a novel through our introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary mise-en-scene of the novel on the private stages of our minds. When we are confronted with someone else's phantasy, as Christian Metz pointed out long ago, we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of 'bad object''. So Stam has tread this ground, as has Metz – to whom Stam refers – to account for the adaptation being perceived as, or becoming, a 'bad object'. To synthesise these principles with my own, I would say that the reaction to the adaptation as being 'not as good as the book' stems from 'the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel', as Stam points out, which is – in other words – our phantasy. It is a reaction against loss. Of course we fear, probably unconsciously, losing that intimate relationship we develop when we absorb a text. We are indeed encountering not only a more potent medium which erases and erodes our phantasy, but also someone else's phantasy rendered visible. We are encountering the double.

The sense of dislocation that follows such an encounter can ultimately resolve itself along a few different vectors, depending on the nature and quality of our textual phantasy and our reception of the realised phantasy of the film. One of these vectors, as previously mentioned, is the rejection – the spitting out of aspects of the film that disappoints our phantasy. Another

vector would be the opposite: we may feel the film has satisfied our textual phantasy. This could come from a place of giving ourselves over to the more potent audiovisual medium. Or, and this is what especially interests me, we may feel as though the film and text are perfectly and harmoniously balanced. For example, the adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*, may feel both McCarthyesque and Coenesque. There is something of the one in the other and vice versa. More than that, it may feel like McCarthy has written the script or directed the film, or that the Coen brothers may have had some hand in composing the original text. It is that perfect of a marriage. What can one call such a phenomenon? Since, through my reading, I have not found a term or theoretical formulation that can account for this, I have devised my own: *confluent auteurism*.

This formulation, at least how I originally conceived of it, accounts for this 'both–and' quality of certain adaptations. These adaptations would need to bear the distinctive mark of the auteur that directed them, while also demonstrating a major degree of confluence with the original authorial voice. Arriving at this formulation was not straightforward. In fact, the term and its meaning had shifted so considerably and the designation of 'auteur' had become so troubled, that at later points in this dissertation I will begin to problematise the very terminology that seemed, at one point, to be foundational. By the very end, I will have arrived at a revised nomenclature, whereby 'confluent auteurism' has become 'phantasy conflation'. For now, I will explicate how my original formulation came into being and how I endeavour to resolve some of its finer abrasions.

I had a dream

> *In the field of the dream… what characterizes the images is that* it shows. (Lacan 75)

> *The dream responds to the wish with more exactitude and regularity: devoid of exterior material, it is assured of never colliding with reality (and reality includes other people's phantasy)*. (Metz 112–13)

It may seem misguided to continue a theoretically framed literary analysis with the words: 'I had an uncanny dream', yet the temptation, the desire, even, is irresistible. So I begin: I had a most uncanny dream. Like most nightmares it is the episode of something traumatic within the veil of the dream that persists into the waking hours. The before and the after have faded into nothingness. It is the thing itself, the traumatic thing that I saw, that has held me in its vice-like grip since I awoke in a cold-sweat in the early hours of the morning. The episode begins ordinarily enough: I am petting a plump, soft, black cat. At some point I become aware that the cat is looking at me and as I look back I notice that between its imploring pale-green eyes sits a third pale-green eye, embedded in the fur. As I look even closer, my morbid curiosity seemingly overtaking me, I realize that I am in fact looking at the back, not the face, of the cat's head. I quickly peer around the cat's head and see another three pale-green eyes staring back at me. Now gripped with a drive more than a curiosity, I begin to circle the cat, peering closer here, parting the fur there, and wherever I look are pale-green eyes with dilated deep-black pupils, gazing back at me. I begin to count the eyes; I distinctly remember the number coming to 27. I awaken with the traumatic image of something only Poe or Lovecraft could set to paper, a black cat with 27 pale-green eyes rooted in the silky, black fur, gazing directly at me. I've heard dreams being described as essentially 'brain-vomit'. This could not be more fitting for the 'cat-eye dream'. That night, before turning out the lights, I had been reading Lacan's Seminar XI, specifically the section on 'The Gaze as *Objet petit a*'. After overcoming the initial disgust that clings to one after a nightmare, I very quickly realized what I'd just experienced: none other than the gaze of *objet petit a*, an extreme, if not gratuitous, encounter with the traumatic real.

In the dream one encounters the gaze readily and unavoidably. For Lacan, dreams carry a symbolic resonance that *shows* itself to the dreamer. For instance, I dreamed of a many-eyed cat looking at me, surely it must *mean* something – what is it trying to *show* me? What does the uncanny cat want from me? It is in this line of questioning that I invoke 'the fundamental question of desire', according to McGowan ("Looking for the Gaze" 33): 'What does he want from me?' The reason why the dream evokes such a potent response from the dreamer, upon waking, is because of 'how desire emerges in response to the indecipherable gaze' (McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze" 33). In Lacanian terms, the many-eyed cat as *objet petit a* (the site of the gaze), 'is most evanescent in its function of symbolizing the central lack of desire' (Lacan 105). The many-eyed cat desires something of me, yet this desire is indecipherable, it is a 'blind

spot' (McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze" 33). As I cannot apprehend what this hidden desire is, I feel an overwhelming sense of lack. This lack is central to the gaze as an encounter with the traumatic real. To clarify why I have commenced this section with talk of 'the lack' and 'the field of the dream', I will have to recount an experience I had shortly before writing this. The expression of this anecdote is by no means fanciful, but serves a very real purpose: to elucidate the precise moment that my phantasy, that is, my dream-thesis, encountered very suddenly (and even violently) the remarkably similar phantasy of another.

More often than once I've experienced what I've subsequently come to refer to as 'Thesis Dreams'. The narrative arc of such a dream is always similar: I have a great epiphany and my mind is a flurry of neural activity, the most breath-taking thoughts whiz across the horizon barely within reach and I endeavour to grasp and hold onto each idea as desperately as the last. In an uncanny moment of meta-awareness I'll undoubtedly say to myself 'when I wake up I'll rush to my notebook and write all these ideas down, before I lose them forever'. Unfortunately my dream collides with the real at this precise moment, the indelible gaze of the object-cause of desire (*objet petit a*) which says to me without speech: 'that's not it'. I awaken every time with the same feeling of having been covered in precious sand and as I sit up the sand is blown away wistfully in a gust of wind. Whether or not the ideas I have in these dreams are actual epiphanies or not, I will never know. The ideas I've had are sealed in the unconscious, to be re-experienced in my next 'Thesis Dream'. I've been writing two theses: a thesis in the waking world and a subaqueous thesis in the realm of the dream.

While these two theses hardly came into contact – I could never remember the epiphanies – my waking thesis which, in a sense, was a kind of daydream or phantasy did, quite abruptly, collide with another phantasy. This moment occurred while I was reading *The Imaginary Signifier* by Christian Metz in the late afternoon, enjoying the jasmine-scented breeze coming through the open window. I mention my sensory environment because not only was this moment of great import, it also felt as if I were stepping into someone else's dream-state, or phantasy – that of Metz himself. To my simultaneous joy and dismay, I encountered in Metz's text, a near-exact copy of my own theorisations on the interaction of a spectator's phantasy with the represented phantasy of a film adaptation of a novel. It was the uncanny experience of the double, like the 'strange sense of shock and fear and nausea all combined' (du Maurier, *The*

Scapegoat 9) in the moment that John meets his *doppelganger*, Jean, in Du Maurier's *The Scapegoat*. I was indeed 'looking at myself' (du Maurier, *The Scapegoat* 9).

My encounter with the double took place primarily upon reading the following passage from Metz:

> These phenomena of the phantasy being disappointed are particularly apparent when an already known novel is brought to the screen. The reader of the novel, following the characteristic and singular paths of his desire, has already gone through a whole process of clothing the words he has read in images, and when he sees the film, he would like to find the same images (in fact to see it again, by virtue of that implacable force of repetition that inhabits desire, driving the child to play unceasingly with the same toy, the adolescent to listen unceasingly to the same record, before abandoning it for the next, which in its turn will fill a portion of his days). But the reader of the novel will not always find his film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy, a thing rarely sympathetic (to the extent that when it becomes so, it inspires love). (Metz 112)

The 'love' that Metz describes here can, almost seamlessly, be mapped onto my own, independently theorised formulation of confluent auteurism.

It is worth considering, however, that perhaps I give myself too much credit in my 'independent' formulation of confluent auteurism. Yes, it is a term I have coined. But I would be remiss not to acknowledge that while the term has remained the same, the substrate of meanings has radically shifted over almost three years of thinking. My current conception of confluent auteurism was initiated and, in fact, developed *alongside* Metz. In other words, Metz was always a stone's throw away. Why do I say this? First, the impetus must be acknowledged. Reading Robert Stam's 'Beyond Fidelity' exposed me to my first taste of Metz. It just so happened that what I was exposed to would lodge in my mind and act as a lodestone as my thinking changed. Referencing Metz's thought, Stam articulates that 'we read a novel through our own introjected desires, hopes, and utopias, and as we read we fashion our own imaginary mise-en-scene of the novel on the private stages of our minds. When we are confronted with

someone else's phantasy, as Christian Metz pointed out long ago, we feel the loss of our own phantasmatic relation to the novel, with the result that the adaptation itself becomes a kind of 'bad object'' (Stam 54–55). All the indices were there, very early on in my research.

There is, of course, the phantasy we construct on the 'private stages of our minds'. Then, there is the confrontation with someone else's phantasy invoking a loss: the loss of our textual phantasy as it becomes overwhelmed by the cinematic image. Finally, there's the idea that the adaptation becomes a 'bad object'. These traces, indelibly stamped (however unconsciously) in my mind, formed a 'text' that I *used* to articulate my own theoretical designs. The idea of text-use, or more accurately interpretation, as articulated by Umberto Eco, involves 'a process whereby the reader is constantly guided by the text in the construction of a plausible explanation' (Lefebvre 490). According to Eco's communication theory, I, as a Model Reader, embody 'someone who wonders what the text wants to communicate to [me]' (Lefebvre 490). The text acts as a guide, in this conception, through which the so-called Model Reader will arrive at the same interpretive point. The Model Reader will be guided not by their own interpretive impositions upon the text, but rather by what the text wants out of them. Put differently, and yes, this does verge on the intentional fallacy, the Model Reader will arrive within a specific proximity to what the author may have intended. To swiftly rescue this idea from the doldrums of theory, I would insist that we are indeed guided by the text to arrive at a certain intended point – however that point is purely an imaginary construction, a phantasy, of the author's intent.

To return, then, to this underlying text of Metz that I found in Stam, I must reluctantly admit that what I thought were my original formulations, were in fact *guided*, however unconsciously, by the impressions the text had made on me. These impressions, or mnemic indices, allowed me to think relatively freely while still remaining adjacent to Metz's thinking. Metz was always there. My encounter with the double – my theory, only realised fifty years earlier – was in fact my phantasy being disappointed by Metz's phantasy. It is crucial to emphasize, here, that while my phantasy seemed almost entirely my own, it was always *underwritten* by a mnemic subtext that I had absorbed from Metz's phantasy in the first place.

The reason I am emphasizing these dynamics is because they reflect precisely that confluence of phantasmatic relations I have previously described. Quite ironically, I have experienced a version of confluence not just in immersing myself in the adaptation cases to follow, but also in writing and formulating my thesis. My phantasy became bound up in another's. My desire to be distinct can account for how dearly I held onto my tenuous phantasy, and how intensely I defended my phantasy against the oncoming shockwave of Metz's. Desire, then, is central to the confluence expressed in confluent auteurism. This manifold desire can be traced across almost every text-reader/film-spectator interaction. Metz delineates the 'feeling' of confluence quite beautifully:

> But when chance permits this to a sufficient degree, the satisfaction – the feeling of a little miracle, as in the state of shared amorous passion – derives from a sort of effect, rare by nature, which can be defined as the temporary rupture of a quite ordinary solitude. This is the specific joy of receiving from the external world images that are usually internal, images that are familiar or not very far from familiar, of seeing them inscribed in a physical location (the screen), of discovering in this way something almost realisable in them, which was not expected, of feeling for a moment that they are perhaps not inseparable from the tonality which most often attends them, from that common and accepted yet slightly despairing impression of the impossible. (Metz 135–36)

Confluent auteurism, read (inevitably) through Metz, is thus an experience of remarkable and unprecedented 'amorous passion' that arises from seeing our phantasy *represented* by another, in reality. Seeing what was previously internal rendered on a screen to be physically perceived, is nothing short of 'a little miracle'. In the case of my phantasy of confluent auteurism being disappointed, it was to see what I thought were internal, original ideas as voiced through an earlier text.

There are, however, some knots to unpick here. Confluent auteurism, as I initially conceived it, was to be used primarily to describe the both–and nature of certain adaptations. For instance, the perception of a reader-spectator that the Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* is at once both Coenesque and McCarthyesque. However, as this recent encounter with Metz has demonstrated, confluence can occur between any phantasy that is seemingly your own and the

phantasy of another. So, the crucial point of contention becomes: why would I use the 'auteurism' qualifier for both kinds of interactions? It is here that I can perhaps allow myself to theorize freely, without much textual influence, for my reading into auteurism has been (perhaps intentionally) quite limited. Yes, I have read some of the influential essays from the *Cahiers du Cinema* and the Americanisation of the term 'auteur' by Andrew Sarris, however, I have tried to keep my understanding of auteurism as close to how I conceive of it. This may at first seem foolhardy, yet, I hope with further explanation my reasoning will become clearer.

I conceive of auteurism as a *perception*, not an authorial category. This idea may verge near existing thought, and I would gladly situate my thinking within the existing canon. In any case, I contend that we only perceive auteurism as an authorial category because we desire for our phantasy of a particular filmmaker to be recognised or represented in the world. I may think of the *Transformers* director, Michael Bay, as an auteur, justifying my phantasy by pointing out his abrasive, visually intoxicating style that is consistent across his pulpy films. However, as I would quickly discover, this is unlikely to be a *shared phantasy* since auteurism has always been an elitist category reserved primarily for the directors of 'high-culture'. Hardly anyone, I can imagine, would disagree that Wes Anderson is an auteur. Although there may be some who do. My question would be, who gate-keeps the attribution of the designation 'auteur'? Is it the institution of Hollywood? Is it a shared phantasy held by enough cinephiles? This is where auteurism, in my apprehension, becomes messy. The designation 'auteur' becomes vehemently defended by its proponents as a so-called 'higher', more evaluative category of film authorship.

The case of the Coen Brothers is especially interesting when it comes to the category of auteurism. As cited by Jeffrey Adams (2), 'when asked if [the Coens] cultivate a personal style, [Joel] replied: "I don't think there's a thread, at least a conscious thread, anyway, between the stories we're telling." Ethan finished the thought: "It's what you call style in retrospect only. At the point of actually making the movie, it's just about making individual choices. […] If there's some consistency to it, they say, 'Well, that's their style'" (Bergen 2000: 29)'. What the Coens are alluding to here is the notion that audiences and critics impose a perception (or phantasy) of style, of auteurism, onto the directors. The Coens do not see themselves as auteurs, but that does not seem to matter in the public eye.

The question arises: why do we accord the 'auteur' designation to specific film directors? I contend that this dynamic arises from a spectator splitting off their reception of shared phantasies of auteurism, marketing and publicity surrounding the film director, as well as their own personal investment in that public image. This splitting occurs through a dual process of introjection and projection. This process can be explained through the 'impressions' cinematic material makes on us and our response to those impressions. While we watch a film we are in daydream-like state, whereby images and sounds are absorbed, or 'impressed' upon us, with little self-referential thinking. As we absorb this perceptual material, we introject it, we 'take it on'.

Martin Lefebvre (483–84) describes this introjection not as a phantasy but as a 'figure': 'the figure corresponds to what the spectator retains from a film or film fragment which has made an impression on him. It is not the property of a film. It is not something that one may discover by examining the film frame by frame. The figure is a mental object, an internal representation, which belongs to the spectator and whose emergence rests on the way in which the spectator allows himself to be impressed by a film, appropriates it and integrates it into his imaginary life and into the systems of signs he uses to interact with the world.' As we introject this figure we in turn *project* our phantasy of it outwards onto the external world. So, auteurism as a perceived category of authorship can be described as the projection of a spectator's phantasy – derived from the figure, the impression, left on them by the film. The perceived phantasy of the auteur, which seems to intermingle with our own phantasy of the text, is in fact our own projection of what we think the auteur's phantasy is. A film adaptation that appears at once faithful to the original text and adheres to the distinct stylings of the auteur, is nothing but an intrasubjective experience, whereby our desire to see our phantasy realised is met, not by virtue of the auteur themselves, but rather through a complex process of introjection and projection that creates the *illusion* of confluence.

Hearing voices

> *Does it ever occur to us that whenever we get down to reading we actually 'see' and palpably 'hear' what we read – in our minds?* (Konurbaev x)

‘Authorial voice’ is something I’ve referred to obliquely but not yet fully explicated. Confluent auteurism is, after all, the perception of a seamless melding of the distinctive *voices* of author and auteur. When I say *No Country for Old Men* seems both McCarthyesque and Coenesque, what do I actually mean beyond the articulation of a certain style? For too long I conceived of textual phantasy as a purely visual, image-driven phenomenon that we ‘see’ in our mind’s eye. When I considered the presence of certain sounds that I ‘heard’ whilst reading the text, I dismissed them as either incidental or unimportant. After all, it was the image I was interested in, and it was the mentalised image of the phantasy that came into contact with the externalised image of the film. I dismissed the auditory dimension of phantasy while arguing for a perception of confluence between two distinct authorial *voices*. If confluent auteurism is located, or perhaps best described, as phantasy conflation, then surely phantasy in all its dimensions – especially that of voice – is patently relevant? Having reframed my understanding of the textual phantasy as consisting of image and sound, I can now begin to render what it is I mean by a perception of ‘confluent voices’. I can also begin to trace how it is that my conception of phantasy so directly excluded the auditory aspect.

Konurbaev (ix) insists that ‘confusion of the text’s logical and conceptual analysis with consideration of its holistic ontology is one of the most typical deficiencies of the way in which literature is often presented to students’. In other words, we are taught to perceive the gestalt (the whole) of the text because ‘*the author* wants us to understand *the whole*’ (Konurbaev ix). The problem with this understanding is that it elides vital considerations of the working components of the text. Konurbaev (ix) elaborates that:

> This [confusion] presupposes the analysis of how the elements of speech form recognizable holistic images as it were in flesh and blood, where the basic meaning of words is accompanied by contextual connotations. Eventually, these form a new reality of perception that is perceived by the reader through intellectual effort based on his or her cultural and social experience and the potential of the deeper semantic insight. Such mental images are formed as a synergy of the linguistic, cultural and rhetorical elements in speech, being supported by what the reader or listener considers to be of importance and makes prominent in the course of reading.

Here, then, we see a definition of phantasy that incorporates the sociological mesh that is the stuff of language itself. As mentioned earlier, we know implicitly when language fails us. We also know, implicitly, that language supports our conception of reality – that is, symbolic reality. Phantasy, as an internally perceived phenomenon, is thus as much stimulated by language as it is limited by it. What Konurbaev is saying here, is that mental images (phantasies) are formed via the interactions of language and sociocultural context that inform the ways in which we (as readers) alight on certain groupings of words that we consider to be more prominent than others: 'slowing down in the course of silent reading triggers the articulatory zone of the brain and causes the neurons in the auditory cortex of the brain to work and generate the sensation of hearing in the mind – voice and timbre (Zhinkin, 1958, cited in Konurbaev 3). The more automated and familiar the text is, the more 'mute' it is in the mind of the reader' (Konurbaev 3). It is in those pauses, what Barthes (11–12) refers to as 'the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface; I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again', that authorial voice – as an 'orchestration' of different timbres – is realised in the mind of the reader.

This arrangement of a 'multiplicity of timbres' that the author, 'in his or her own individual way… make[s] his or her voice clearly heard [,] forms the essence of the author's individuality and shapes his or her unique message to the reader' (Konurbaev 117). There are two elements at play here, both of which contribute to phantasy-formation: 'mental hearing' and mental images. The dialectical relationship between the voices we 'hear' and the images we 'see' are realised through the physical act of reading. To put it simply, my understanding of Konurbaev suggests that when we read a text, we accrete a perceptual sense of image and voice. While it is tempting to delineate between phantasy and voice as separate phenomena, in my informed estimation they are covalent. Throughout the following chapters, I will continue to touch on voice as deeply imbricated both in our textual phantasies and our perception of confluent auteurism. The terrain becomes murky when I introduce the idea of the auteur's 'voice'.

Indeed, when our textual phantasy encounters the adaptation, it is coming up against a number of 'voices': the voice as released through the syntax and style of the auteur, the actual grain of the voices of characters and narrators, as well as that ineffable voice that escapes linguistic apprehension: the music score. What do I mean, though, when I say that an auteur's voice is

released through their distinctive syntax and style? Surely these terms apply to language alone? I turn, here, to Alexandre Astruc's conception of *camera-stylo* – the camera-pen:

> To come to the point: the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of *camera-stylo* (camera-pen). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language. (Astruc 604)

I liken the idea of the 'tyranny' of the image to 'phantasy erasure', that is, the consumption of the imaginative phantasy by the stronger current of the cinematic image. I'm fascinated by Astruc's assertion that cinema is '*becoming* a language' [emphasis mine]. That would surely inscribe a teleology in which cinema tends from the fully visual experience of the silent-movie era, towards the auteur cinema of his time and beyond. While this is not a debate to be had here, for fear of too far a tangent, I do think that Astruc's idea of the camera-pen as an instrument of the cinema 'becoming a language' is useful in approaching the idea of the auteur's 'voice'. If voice is instantiated through language, and cinema has become a language through the operations and movements of the camera, then surely an auteur's voice can just as easily be traced as an author's voice in a text? While it may be tempting to say so, I would be eliding a crucial aspect of 'hearing voices': the real gaze of *objet petit a*, which plays a crucial role in fomenting our phantasies.

McGowan argues that, in the mode of spectatorship, we encounter *objet petit a* more readily when we *hear* it:

> When we consider the usual fate of the gaze, we can begin to recognize the unique value of the cinematic experience. Our look – the scopic drive – obscures the objet petit a more than any other of the drives because of the extent to which we seem in control

> of the visual field. Vision gives us an implicit sense of mastery over what we see insofar as we direct where and how we look. It is, for example, much easier to hear the objet petit a in the form of the voice than to see it in the form of the gaze because we are more often confronted with sounds that we would rather not hear than sights that we would rather not see. We can close our eyes but not our ears, with the result that the gaze is much more difficult to discern in the visual field than the voice in the aural field. This difficulty causes the gaze to play the most intense role in the structuring of our fantasies. We fantasize about the form of the objet petit a – the gaze – that we can access least. (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* 16)

The real is most obfuscated by sight, precisely because of our sense that we have a full grasp over whatever we see – if we see something unfamiliar, we surely have a referent against which we can compare it in order to better assimilate it. Hearing something unfamiliar in a film is so deeply disorienting and unsettling because we cannot locate it in space – we desperately want to see where that unnatural scream, for example, came from and so we phantasize about its origin in order to placate our anxiety that the eruption of the real arouses. Here lies a problem: can confluent auteurism as a theory explain our encounter with the gaze of the traumatic real? I argued earlier that phantasy can be read as the internalisation of the gaze of *objet petit a*. While that sounds fancy, does it hold when we consider that the real, as Lacan (ix) puts it, 'is supported by the term of the impossible – and the little we know about the real shows its antinomy to all verisimilitude'? If the real is 'the impossible', then how can I theorise that we internalise its gaze as phantasy? It feels as though I'm merely treading water in a sea of uncertainty.

My general disillusionment with 'theory' at many stages in this project can almost certainly be pinned to the seeming ineptitude of theorisation as a rampart against the siege of the real. As I tried to stitch my dense web of symbolic 'order' around the frightening irruptions of the real within it, a larger gap in the explanatory power of 'theory' emerged. Why is it that I was constantly searching for something? What exactly was the lack? What was this tantalizingly ineffable quantity that seemed to explain everything and nothing simultaneously? Instead of merely sitting with the lack as lack, I would probe ever deeper into the crevices of Lacanian gaze-theory, trying to derive an 'answer'. My thesis became a kind of symbolic rampart against the real of the lack in my own life. My turn away from collective ideas of authorial categories

towards individual perceptions, could be a product of this inward-turning dynamic. Because I couldn't find the 'answer' in 'theory', I had to phantasize my own theory, unwittingly evolving beside the theory of Metz.

The 'traumatic encounter' with the real of Metz's theory, the 'this has been done before' realisation, was both uncanny – in that I was seeing myself – and deeply validating. I was on to something, even if it was trodden ground. Perhaps the desire hidden within Metz's gaze was 'complete me: finish my ideas'. This relates directly to Bloom's (14) notion of 'Tessera, which is completion and antithesis… a poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough'. I, perhaps unconsciously, saw gaps in Metz's ideology, in order to insert myself and 'complete' his seemingly inchoate ideas – to me, at least. It would have indeed been demoralising to have to succumb to the theorisations of the other. I had to reassert myself into this space. I found freedom as a subject within ideology, by not only apprehending the gaze of the other, but further appropriating it.

Throughout this experience of a certain degree of confluence, when my phantasy of the theory came up against the earlier phantasy of the other, my phantasy was not only disappointed, but it was also directly challenged. This was by no means a universally-positive experience, nor was it universally-negative. This experience had no legible binary. On the one hand it crushed me, representing an ego-death. On the other hand, it invigorated me, spurring me into a veritable flow-state of writing-fury. In other words, it was a both–and experience. In the same way, my experience of confluent auteurism having watched *A Clockwork Orange* adhered to no binary. While many aspects of Kubrick's representation frustrated me, those very same moments animated an enrichment of my own phantasy. In saying 'that's not it' to certain representations in the film, through a process very akin to reaction-formation, I further enhanced my phantasy.

It will emerge, in the discussions of three adaptations to follow, that confluent auteurism accounts for more than merely the *both–and* perception of an adaptation. I propose that, no matter how we experience an adaptation (as either confluent or divergent to our phantasy), we

will always, however unconsciously, work to stitch that phantasy ever tighter. There is something of the traumatic real in our encounter with someone else's phantasy. Recall the 'that's not it' negation that *objet petit a* brings about: the failure of desire to fill the lack. I may desire a product that I think will satiate the insatiable lack within me, however, as we all know, as soon as I acquire that product, my desire will soon (if not immediately) latch onto another thing. A similar claim can be made for our reception of adaptations. The adaptation becomes a thing in itself, which brings with it the promise of rendering our phantasy in some sort of reality. As mentioned earlier, an encounter with the text can bring about an experience of jouissance. We long to experience that jouissance again as it filled something inside of us momentarily. The cinematic adaptation offers something that our phantasy, no matter how often it is repeated, can simply not provide: a tangible, sensory experience of an alternate reality.

This is what at stake when we watch an adaptation of a novel (especially a novel we love). If our perceived phantasy of the auteur fails in any way to coalesce with our own phantasy of the text, we 'spit it out' – we reject the figural breast. All of this occurs intrasubjectively. When we spit out the adaptation, we do so defensively – to retain our precious phantasy, our sense of omnipotence over the received, internalised world of the text. That sense of omnipotence will always be challenged, not only by what is represented on the screen, but also by what is not represented. I'm not just alluding to omission, where meaning is hidden from us, or rendered just beyond reach. There's something far deeper occurring. Our phantasy is a symbolic and imaginary rampart against the real. The real can only be perceived as those cracks and fissures in the symbolic – we can only see what surrounds the real. We know implicitly when language and comprehension fail us, when our affective reality gestures towards something uncannily absent.

Chapter Two – The 'incomparable monster'

And then I woke up

> *In the so-called waking state, there is an elision of the gaze, and an elision of the fact that not only does it look,* it *also* shows. (Lacan 75)

If film can be read as a dreamlike experience, then the end of the film is the 'waking up'. The credits roll, the lights in the cinema slowly fade in, there's usually a soundtrack to accompany the credits, and the audience either get up to leave or sink back in their seats, absorbing what they've just watched. I do wonder what prompts either of the two responses – the desire to escape the darkened room and fully enter the wakened world or allowing the influx of some degree of submission to the film's lasting stamp. From my experience, indifference or dislike towards the film (especially the ending) often hastens me out of the cinema, while enjoyment or astonishment (*jouissance* in both senses) compels me to take in what I've just watched.

Watching the Coen Brothers' adaptation of *No Country for Old Men* elicits submission to the potency of its cinematic apparatus from the very first opening montage depicting vast expanses of Big Sky country, to the quiet closing shot/reverse shot in which Sheriff Bell – the icon of a flagging law and order – utters the lines: 'and then I woke up'. As the first adaptation to be discussed regarding the operations of confluent auteurism, I'd be remiss not to acknowledge that my textual phantasy going into the film was already 'stained' quite markedly by traces of the film's iconic imagery I had seen on the internet. The faces of Bell, Chigurh (the 'incomparable monster'), and Moss (the everyman protagonist), were already imprinted in my imaginative registry; no matter how vigorously I'd mark the paper with soft graphite, the coin underneath would invariably show through.

In chapters three, and especially four, I will refer to this 'imprinting' as a 'proto-phantasy', that is, an inchoate phantasy that has been formed prior to engaging with the target material. In the internet age, where paratextual media surrounding film adaptations are abundant, it is almost impossible not to have our textual phantasies marked in some way by promotional images, trailers and video-essays. These considerations are, of course, in light of a context where one

chooses to read a text before watching an already existing adaptation. That is certainly the case with all three adaptations I cover in this thesis. To varying degrees, I had accreted a proto-phantasy prior to engaging with each text – I always read the text first, followed by watching the adaptation.

Perhaps proceeding in this order – text and then film – speaks to a broader problem inherent in the ways in which we generally conceptualise adaptations, which are measured against their textual counterparts rather than being seen as independent cultural objects. Indeed, this dissertation is premised on how our textual phantasy interacts with the cinematic representation which we attribute as the reified phantasy of the auteur. By continuing to maintain the text's primacy, am I not perpetuating an ostensibly 'neat' division of text and film to the point at which the text is always valued as the standard? It is a given that an adaptation is *based* on a text and, as such, its form belies its function. However, surely there is also space for interpenetration? If I am approaching McCarthy's text having already been exposed to cinematic materials which have, in fact, very likely *inspired* me to read the text in the first place, is it possible that such an abundance of crosspollination between mediums has emerged to render both text and film as interdependent objects? I certainly cannot think of them independently – one is always already imbricated in the other in the realm of phantasy.

As this chapter proceeds into more analytical territory, text and film adaptation will be necessarily conflated. Not only will this reflect broader patterns of confluent auteurism, it will also allow for a more elastic approach to critical analysis that turns on my phantasies of text and film. In centering phantasy, textual meaning becomes a dialectic of interdependency that circumvents the perils of 'textual superiority'. With that being said, in order for each adaptation to be clearly contextualised, it is also necessary to first split text from film and discuss some of their discrete elements independently. After all, while text and film can remain conflated in phantasy, in practice they are still distinct works that have been produced by different authors/auteurs. The novel, *No Country for Old Men*, was written with a particular structure and mode in mind by Cormac McCarthy – an author with an idiosyncratic voice that is both its own thing and has been co-opted in various ways by the Coen Brothers. The film adaptation of McCarthy's novel exploits the Coens' own peculiarities of style and voice while still, in effect, *translating* textual elements into audiovisual ones. The text is not the standard against which

the film adaptation must be measured, they are both independent objects of cultural production that become an interdependent 'unity' in our phantasy of the adaptation.

At its centre, McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* turns on a Neo-Western pursuit narrative, set near the border between the U.S. state of Texas and Mexico. Framed around climactic explosions of violence, interspersed with italicised sections of Sheriff Bell's own reflections and hindsight, the novel unravels as a sustained 'cat-and-mouse' chase. Within the first two sections of narrative plot, Anton Chigurh brutally escapes police custody and Llewelyn Moss stumbles upon a lucrative drug deal gone wrong while hunting game amongst the 'baked terracotta terrain of the running borderlands' (McCarthy, *No Country* 8). From these seemingly isolated events, the narrative gains momentum. It will sustain this momentum throughout, reflecting much of its critical reception as 'vastly readable' (Scotland on Sunday), 'cutting from one frightening, violent set piece to another with cinematic economy' (Scotsman). The appearance of a 'cinematic economy' to the narrative makes sense when viewed in light of the fact that 'McCarthy originally wrote this story as a screenplay, then went back years later and rewrote it as a novel. In its frequent, lengthy passages of dialogue, the resonances of the original text can be easily discerned' (Wallach xxii).

Besides having discernible cinematic resonances, *No Country for Old Men* exemplifies McCarthy's distinctive linguistic style that has distinguished him as an inimitably recognisable voice in the American literary canon. Decidedly whittled down, McCarthy's peculiar grammar (or lack thereof) makes him almost immediately identifiable through his writing alone, across his oeuvre. As Woodward (2) points out: 'a page from any of his books – minimally punctuated, without quotation marks, avoiding apostrophes, colons or semicolons – has a stylized spareness that magnifies the force and precision of his words'. McCarthy's 'absolutely overpowering use of language, his life-giving and death-dealing sentences' (Saul Bellow in Woodward 2) has established him as 'a cult figure with a reputation as a writer's writer' who has 'been compared with Joyce and Faulkner' (Woodward 2). He does not dispute the debt he owes to his literary forebears. In an oft-quoted axiom, McCarthy states that 'the ugly fact is books are made out of books… the novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written' (Woodward 4). Intertextuality is as much a part of McCarthy's oeuvre as is his distinct language.

First published in 2005 by Knopf, *No Country for Old Men* can be said to encompass many of the elements of what Richard Woodward (1), in 1992 for *The New York Times*, calls 'McCarthy's venomous fiction':

> Each of his five previous novels has been marked by intense natural observation, a kind of morbid realism. His characters are often outcasts – destitute or criminals, or both. Homeless or squatting in hovels without electricity, they scrape by in the backwoods of East Tennessee or on horseback in the dry, vacant spaces of the desert. Death, which announces itself often, reaches down from the open sky, abruptly, with a slashed throat or a bullet in the face. The abyss opens up at any misstep. (Woodward 1)

For the characters in *No Country for Old Men*, the spectre of 'bare life' looms just beyond the horizon. For Moss, the protagonist, the 'heavy leather document case' (McCarthy, *No Country* 17–18) stuffed to the brim with banktape-fastened packets of hundred dollar banknotes represents a tantalising way out of his trailer-park milieu. We hardly get a clear sense of Moss before his encounter with the money. Arguably, he's almost as much a vessel for the plot to unravel as an everyman archetype. Ultimately, the money and his need to sequester it becomes a primary driver of his actions, while his characterisation remains distant and vague – even his defensive love of Carla-Jean slips away towards the end, ignoring Chigurh's 'deal' and calling for a standoff.

On the other side of the spectrum is Sheriff Bell, who is a richly conceived character with well-defined motives, foibles and attachments. Much of this sense of him is conveyed through his recurrent monologues, distinguished by italics, which are interposed throughout the narrative. In these sections, Bell divulges and withholds crucial insights – both into his character and into his specific context. While Moss is archetypal of an everyman, onto which the reader can project their own phantasies without much impedance, Bell is very much an instantiated figure of the 'old guard' of law and order. He has inherited a legacy of law-keeping; his grandfather 'was sheriff at the same time' (McCarthy, *No Country* 90) as him. In steady degrees, Bell 'eulogises' the past state of civil law and order which, like Arnold's (21–28) 'sea of faith', 'was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore'. Bell laments its 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' leaving in its wake 'naked shingles of the world'. Indeed, with 'what might be headed this way' (McCarthy, *No Country* 40), the country that Bell knows now is far gone from the country he once knew.

What seems to be ‘heading this way’ is ‘a true and living prophet of destruction’ (McCarthy, *No Country* 4) – Anton Chigurh – representing a terrifying vision of gratuitous, senseless violence that seems to hold the borderlands in a vice. If it were argued that McCarthy is seeking to convey an apocalyptic-level moral panic, then Chigurh would be the very figural presence of it. Chigurh is pure drive without a referent, yet maintains his own set of principles – such as his relentless adherence to *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye. While Bell sees God as the overseer of all justice, Chigurh defers his perverted sense of fate onto a simple coin-toss. However, I think it would be all too easy to argue that ‘McCarthy works his Manichean worldview into the narrative’ with Bell being the figuration of light and Chigurh of dark. The text offers a couple of subtly veiled cues that gesture towards an unsettling doubleness between Bell and Chigurh where Moss figures as the intervening gray area. One of these occasions of uncanny doubling occurs when Bell performs the same order of actions as Chigurh did earlier in Moss’s trailer:

> He walked into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator and looked in and shut it again. He looked in the freezer.
>
> So when was he here, Sheriff?
>
> Hard to say. We might of just missed him.
>
> You think this boy has got any notion of the sorts of sons of bitches that are huntin him?
>
> I dont know. He ought to. He seen the same things I seen and it made a impression on me.
>
> They're in a world of trouble, aint they?
>
> Yes they are.
>
> Bell walked back into the livingroom. He sat on the sofa. Wendell stood in the doorway. He was still holding the revolver in his hand.
>
> What are you thinkin? he said.
>
> Bell shook his head. He didnt look up. (McCarthy, *No Country* 93–94)

Earlier in the narrative, Chigurh performs nearly the same actions in the same order:

> He opened the refrigerator and took out a carton of milk and opened it and smelled it and drank. He stood there holding the carton in one hand and looking out the window.

> He drank again and then he put the carton back in the refrigerator and shut the door. He went into the livingroom and sat on the sofa. There was a perfectly good twenty-one inch television on the table. He looked at himself in the dead gray screen. (McCarthy, *No Country* 80)

With McCarthy's trademark economy, we can see, if not sense inchoately, some uncanny version of mimesis occurring.

This notable instance of mimesis operates under the guise of contrasting two seemingly diametrically opposed characters. What's really happening is far more unsettling: Bell and Chigurh are being presented as doubles of each other. This may seem contradictory at first as Bell and Chigurh are on opposite extremes, yet upon further probing, the two characters share an uncomfortable affinity in terms of immediate motivations. Chigurh is relentlessly pursuing Moss. So is Bell. Bell is not pursuing Chigurh so much as following in his footsteps. Bell is of the 'old guard' of justice, while Chigurh represents another version of justice: pure chance. In other words, Bell defers greater judgement onto God, while Chigurh defers greater judgement onto what is essentially 'flipism' (basing his actions on a coin-toss). While they do exist on opposite poles, McCarthy is careful not to render them in purely black and white terms; both characters possess some degree of moral ambiguity. Chigurh offers a warped version of 'mercy' to his victims through that same pseudo-philosophy of flipism. Bell feels completely inept in the face of Chigurh's onslaught, to the point at which he quits his post. His inability to adapt to this 'new country' renders him both hapless and hopelessly ambivalent.

As discussed previously, Moss's characterisation does not seem to adhere to any legible binary. What I might perceive as 'underdevelopment' may very well be McCarthy's way of representing gray morality in the protagonist. Central to this dynamic are the novel's mercenary undercurrents. Ownership of and contestation over money animates much of the narrative's central conflict. I explore this 'blood money' in more detail later, but in a slightly different context. As far as Moss is concerned, his motives – from the time he takes the cache of money to the time he is killed by members of the cartel that were involved in the money's provenance in the first place – are predominantly mercenary and therefore morally gray. He operates in the interstice between total good and total evil, driven not only by his own self-interest, but by something else that is screened off from the reader. This hidden aspect means that it becomes

exceedingly difficult for the reader to demarcate the limits of his morality – these boundaries are ambiguous, *real* (in the Lacanian sense), beyond symbolic apprehension.

At this point I must pause, for I acknowledge that contextualising the novel has been more an exercise in splitting off the figures and impressions of the film adaptation in order to access some sense of McCarthy's concerns in isolation. Such an exercise, I've found, is indelibly marred by the 'adhesive' effects of the cinematic image: my phantasy of the text and the figure I have introjected from the film have become almost inseparably stuck together. This makes it so that I am constantly second-guessing whether an aspect of the novel's plot or characterisation I have described is in fact derived directly from the text, or conveyed via the more readily accessible impressions made on me by the film.

The stuck-togetherness of phantasy and figure that I've described above can be largely traced by the Coens' ostensible fidelity to McCarthy's text. I say 'ostensible' because, as has been convincingly argued by Robert Stam, fidelity is not only an 'essentialist' notion, it is also a chimera (an elusive fantasy). 'Fidelity' assumes that the novel 'contains an extractable essence, a kind of heart of the artichoke hidden underneath the surface details of style… a kernel of meaning or nucleus of events that can be delivered by an adaptation' (Stam 57). A text, at least as it is currently understood by prevailing schools of thought, is 'an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context' (Stam 57). Since a text is seen through 'ever-shifting grids of interpretation', feeding on and being fed into 'an infinitely permutating intertext' (Stam 57), a broader question arises that the notion of fidelity elides: 'fidelity to what?'

If the Coens were to be faithful to every detail of the novel's plot, we'd be in for an intolerably long film adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*. Plots have to be necessarily condensed. Can a filmmaker, realistically, be faithful to the physical descriptions of character? Chigurh is described to have 'blue as lapis' eyes that are 'at once glistening and totally opaque. Like wet stones' (McCarthy, *No Country* 56). To Moss's eyes there is 'something about him faintly exotic. Beyond [his] experience' (McCarthy, *No Country* 112). How exactly would the Coens interpret this in order to maintain fidelity? The eyes would have to be blue, that's easy enough.

What about his exoticism? What exactly makes someone 'exotic'? Surely that depends on who would be set as the 'standard'? Even if the Coens were to perpetuate McCarthy's apparent orientalism (which in their casting of Javier Bardem is arguably the case) is it actually possible to be faithful to a textual description of character in the first place? Given that texts are labile, whereby meaning is co-created by the reader, it follows that characterisation is an infinitely generative phantasy that is peculiar to each individual.

A common response to a filmic representation of a character from a novel is: 'that's not how I pictured them'. Not only does such a statement reveal its own fallacy by its very subjectivity, it also points to the impossibility of fidelity to character. How can a filmmaker faithfully reproduce a character if that character is realised in the individual imagination of the reader? Common sense would dictate such a thing would be impossible. In spite of these considerations, I still cannot escape the fact that the text and film seem remarkably, inseparably close. The boundaries between the two mediums blur, leaving me with a sure sense of confluence. It is this 'sense' of confluence that I will be examining as this chapter progresses. The Coens' film, *No Country for Old Men*, absorbs and enlarges upon its textual precursor. In a few notable instances, implicit semiotic connections between characters and narratives that are present in the novel are extruded and made more patently explicit.

'He looked at himself in the dead gray screen' (McCarthy, *No Country* 80). 'He looks at himself in the dead gray-green screen of the facing television' (*No Country for Old Men*). In these preceding two quotations we see three pivotal dynamics play out. Firstly is the Coen Brothers' obsession with fidelity, whereby the very diction of the screenplay is siphoned directly from the source text in this instance. Secondly is the more subtle delineation between the tenses: he *looked* versus he *looks*. While this may seem trivial, the distinction between tenses is vital to the third point. That is, the preoccupation with reflections in both text and film encodes the mirror as both a vital thematic element in both versions and a self-referential commentary on the very nature of cinema. Christian Metz argues that 'the cinema's signifier is perceptual (visual and auditory)' and that so too is 'literature, since the written chain has to be read, but it involves a more restricted perceptual register: only graphemes, writing' (Metz 42–43).

The difference in tenses that I mentioned earlier plays into this dynamic. When we read, the perceptual instance is ephemeral – shot through with absence, that is, a lack of visual and auditory stimuli. All that we perceive through reading is deposited in our mind's eye for a fleeting moment of recognition before the next image is absorbed. Furthermore, the perceptual instance of reading – what we imagine in our mind's eye – is transient precisely because it is so delicate. When we watch a film, the perceptual instance is continuous. We are rendered as passive subjects absorbing influential audio-visual stimuli that have the potential and indeed power to wipe our previous imaginative registry clean. In the cinema, we are rendered, 'as Jean-Louis Baudry has emphasised… like the child, in a sub-motor and hyper-perceptive state; because, like the child again, we are prey to the imaginary, the double' (Metz 49). In this case the imaginary is not the imagined, but a phantasy that elides the real. The idea of recognising on the screen a 'double' is key to my aforementioned third point – that the preoccupation with reflections and mirrors is tantamount to a thematic and self-referential commentary on the nature of cinema itself.

'Thus film is like the mirror', declares Metz, 'but it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass' (Metz 45). When we see a character on screen we project a certain degree of ourselves onto that character – we see ourselves as if in a mirror. However, Metz complicates this notion by suggesting that 'at the cinema, it is always the other who is on the screen; as for me, I am there to look at him. I take no part in the perceived, on the contrary, I am all-perceiving' (Metz 48). As spectators we take on the form of a god, omniscient to the degree that we are permitted to be. We become the camera. To return to Metz: 'when I say that 'I see' the film, I mean thereby a unique mixture of two contrary currents: the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I only need close my eyes to suppress it. Releasing it, I am the projector, receiving it, I am the screen; in both these figures together, I am the camera, which points and yet which records' (Metz 51).



Figure 1



Figure 2

The Coen Brothers and to some extent McCarthy are aware of this dynamic and play off it in two scenes that are distinctly mimetic. In Figures 1 and 2 we see what McCarthy describes as 'the dead gray screen' (McCarthy, *No Country* 80). Reflected on this dead gray screen we see Chigurh in Figure 1 and Bell in Figure 2. There are subtle echoes of Hitchcock's patent deliberateness here. For instance the 'Lovebirds' being metonymic for Mitch and Melanie's romantic trajectory, which I explore further in Chapter Three. The iconographic parallel here between Chigurh and Bell, that I have discussed earlier, is so pointedly obvious that it is almost excessive. This inordinacy is further exacerbated by the fact that they both drink from the same bottle of milk – albeit Bell uses a glass (see Figures 3 and 4). The heady sense of uncanniness is undeniable.



Figure 3



Figure 4

So what are McCarthy and the Coen Brothers doing here? Their commentary can be split into two parts: the screen-reflections seen in Figures 1 and 2, and the uncanny milk-parallel seen in Figures 3 and 4. In relation to the former, cinema is, in essence, a 'dead gray screen' onto which we project our deepest phantasies and desires. We may think that cinema is a mirror of our reality and ourselves, when, in actuality, 'the cinema is at once a weak and a robust mechanism: like the human body, like a precision tool, like a social institution. And the fact is that it is really all of these at the same time' (Metz 51). The semiotic possibilities released by the parallel in Figures 3 and 4 are connected to this dynamic. Milk is a well-established trope in cinematic history, and we do not have to look far to find a whole assortment of characters (benevolent and villainous) imbibing the dairy-product. Just as cinema is both 'a weak and a robust

mechanism' (Metz 51), an empty signifier onto which we deposit meaning, the milk-trope, too, is empty of meaning until it is filled by the transformative gaze of the spectator. This semiotic 'emptiness' does not, however, occlude specific latent associations, cultural and intrinsic codes that are inextricably tied to this seemingly innocuous substance.

Milk, and more specifically, Chigurh drinking (or in the case of the film, not drinking) milk, stages an encounter with the traumatic real. Milk is inextricably bound up in Lacan's order of the real. It is the very substance of jouissance. Milk is what the 'good enough mother' (Donald Winnicott) provides when the infant cries. Milk is what traverses the bodily boundary – signified in Kristevan terms as 'filth'. According to Kristeva: 'filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a boundary and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin. Matter issuing from them [the orifices of the body] is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body' (Kristeva 69). In traversing the boundary of the body, the emission becomes abject. Milk is an interesting case in that the neonatal infant desires and in fact cannot do without the mother's milk. It is the essence of their survival. Once the infant is weaned off the breast, which is in itself a forced but necessary separation, breastmilk loses its appeal. As adults we cannot possibly imagine suckling once again, the very thought may induce a visceral reaction. Milk has become abject.

Chigurh drinking milk stages an encounter with the traumatic real because the very instance itself is metonymic *of* the traumatic real. Both McCarthy and the Coen Brothers have fused the real with the traumatic, in Freudian terms the *heimlich* (homely) with the *unheimlich* (uncanny). *Heimlich*, according to Freud, is tricky to define. 'On the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 63). *Unheimlich* 'is customarily used, we are told, as the contrary only of the first signification of 'heimlich,' and not of the second' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 63). In keeping with Freud, *unheimlich* (the uncanny) is delineated most clearly through distinct instances. One particularly relevant instance is that of the 'double'. According to Freud, the 'double' has connections with 'reflections in mirrors, with shadows, with guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and with the fear of death… for the 'double' was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death,'… and probably the 'immortal' soul was the

first ‘double’ of the body’ (Freud, *The Uncanny* 70). The uncanny of the double has been explored more explicitly in texts such as *The Scapegoat* by Daphne du Maurier in which a man encounters his doppelganger and proceeds to switch places with him. However, it is the double as shadow that interests me here.

We have a number of shadow doubles at play in the Coens’ film. In Figure 1 we see Chigurh and his double in the ‘dead gray screen’, likewise in Figure 2 we see Bell and his double reflected in the same screen. This may not immediately strike us as uncanny, but the fact that it is there means that it does register on some level. Next we have Figures 3 and 4, the foci of the uncanny, in which Chigurh and Bell drink from the same milk. In Chigurh’s case we do not see him drinking from the bottle, but it is likely implied. In Bell’s case he most certainly sips from the glass. There’s a lot going on here. Milk, as mentioned before is a seemingly innocuous substance. While breastmilk becomes abject because it has traversed the boundary of the body, this is not breastmilk but the store-bought stuff which does not carry the same symbolic weight. However, there is something about the transformative nature of the screen, which adds a symbolic weight to what would otherwise be an ordinary object.

I liken this to Tarantino’s gratuitous close-ups of food which typically interrupt scenes of palpable tension. Think of the strudel in *Inglorious Basterds* for instance in which the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of the whipped cream accompanied by the crisp sound of the spoon scraping the bottom of the glass dish, followed by a cut to the strudel itself with the cream being dolloped on top. The intensity of this intercut adds considerable weight to the object. More than that, our very gaze in the cinema lends weight to the object. It could be said, then, that everything that graces the silver screen is significant. The milk, then is significant. The Coens want us to think about why both characters drink from the same bottle, they want us to feel the uncanny of this moment.

While this milk is of the store-bought variety, it is my contention that its depiction in the film animates an atavistic dynamic – a return to our early encounter with breastmilk. There is something remarkably infantile in the way that both Chigurh and Bell interact with the milk. Chigurh sits on the couch, eyes dead forward, holding the milk up in one hand as if ready to

drink, but hesitating. His body language releases this sense of the infantile. His pose is almost how a child would hold a juice box, their face impassive, not yet in the throes of satisfaction. Bell, on the other hand, takes this a step further. He decants the milk into a glass. It's as if he cannot contain Chigurh (the other) without actually, physically containing him. The milk has touched Chigurh's lips (ostensibly), and it would be overwhelming and unconscionable for Bell to drink from the same bottle. He thus contains the substance by decanting it into a new, clean, physical container – thus maintaining as Kristeva would call 'the clean and proper body'. However, they've still shared in the 'mother's' milk, and that is deeply unsettling.

Figures 1 through 4 all go some way in emphasising, almost excessively, a parallel between Chigurh and Bell. A doubleness that was implicit in the text but made explicit through the Coens' direction. But where is this parallel situated? I would argue that Jung's archetypes may be useful here. Bell embodies the archetype of the Father whereas Chigurh embodies the archetype of the Shadow. According to David Morgan, 'all fathers have a shadow… to be human is to possess or be possessed by one's shadow… the shadow, like everything else unconscious, according to Jung, is often projected upon others. These shadow qualities are usually those which on the conscious level a person finds reprehensible or unacceptable in others, but which are to be found lurking near the entrance to the dark cave of his own unconscious' (Morgan 223). As such, not only is Bell the Father and Chigurh the Shadow, Chigurh is Bell's shadow.

There is precedent for this in McCarthy's text. A compelling instance of this is a seemingly innocent one: 'Bell nodded. He sipped his coffee. The face that lapped and shifted in the dark liquid in the cup seemed an omen of things to come. Things losing shape. Taking you with them' (McCarthy, *No Country* 127). Similar to Figure 2, Bell sees his dark double. The very first page of the novel exemplifies Bell's potential for the same kind of apocalyptic destruction as Chigurh: 'I sent one boy to the gas chamber at Huntsville' (McCarthy, *No Country* 3). Later in this opening meditation, Bell remarks that 'somewhere out there is a true and living prophet of destruction and I dont want to confront him. I know he's real. I have seen his work… I think it is more what you are willing to become. And I think a man would have to put his soul at hazard. And I wont do that. I think now that maybe I never would' (McCarthy, *No Country* 4). Bell is tacitly aware that if he were to confront Chigurh, he may well see his own double. Bell's

diction here is also uncanny for me given that Bell says of Chigurh: 'I know he's *real*' (emphasis mine). Indeed Chigurh is not only real, but in Lacanian terms he is *the* real. He elides language, a chink in the curtain of the symbolic. Is he death incarnate? Such a characterization would be a gross oversimplification. The very point of Lacan's real is that we cannot truly know it. Like Lovecraft's Cthulhu, Chigurh is unknowable, unnameable, underdetermined – like the shadow he embodies.

Lovecraft puts it elegantly when he remarks: 'the most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age' (Lovecraft 381). Am I suggesting that Chigurh in some way embodies cosmic horror? Absolutely. While Bell tries to contain Chigurh in the biblical, 'a true and living *prophet* of destruction' (emphasis mine), there is no denying the breadth of Chigurh's horror. Lovecraft's 'black seas of infinity' could just as easily be the unknown reaches of the human mind. Surely an encounter with the traumatic real would be so inconceivable that we would indeed 'either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age' (Lovecraft 381)? I am also reminded of Bell's haunting dream at the end of the novel and the film, which plays with the binary of light and dark as well as the realm of the epiphanic (yet traumatic) real.

While I did not have the privilege of watching the Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* in the cinema, the ending left me captivated – to what, I could not quite work out. Could it have been in the lines: 'and then I woke up' uttered by Tommy Lee Jones's Sheriff Bell with a phlegmatic, penetrating intensity? Perhaps. I have certainly come to appreciate the polysemy of 'woke up' which could signify the simple waking up from sleep, or the realisation of either the insubstantial, or the epiphanic nature of the dream. I would proffer that Bell is wavering between resistance towards the real in the dream and the apprehension of its epiphanic value. As Lacan (75) states, the waking state is accompanied by an avoidance of the gaze experienced – a blindness towards it and what it is trying to show. However, Bell is describing waking *up*,

meaning that the dream, and the gaze of the traumatic real within it, still lingers like the sleep we brush from the corners of our eyes.

The symbolic potency of Bell's line is further engrained by the sound of a ticking clock that, having lurked in the background for most of the last scene, seeps into the foreground. The deployment of this motif as well as its seamless integration with the credit-roll score is nothing short of astonishing. To explain why, I ask: what does one typically hear upon waking up early in the morning? If one has a clock ticking away, it is usually that. We become aware of the ticking away of time, the physicality of the clock, usually in our waking hours. Yes, we can dream about time passing, but such a phenomenon, we know, is not reality. Awareness of time is a conscious phenomenon. Despite what I discussed earlier, regarding the ebb of the real in the conscious state, we can still encounter the gaze of the traumatic real while situated in this particular conscious awareness. From my experience, occasionally, if I listen to the ticking of a clock for too long, and I become acutely aware that with every second that passes, I am a second closer to my own death and the death of my loved ones, I am filled with an awful sensation of existential dread. In this moment I have encountered the gaze of the traumatic real in the form of time's own passing – I also find it interesting that we use the phrase 'time passing' without fully reconciling the euphemism. The deployment of the ticking clock motif at the end of *No Country for Old Men* not only produces this feeling of uncanny existential dread, it also infuses the film with a new symbolic value. If I were to express this value in aphorism I would say 'time is running out'. For whom? 'Old men' like Bell? The audience? Chigurh? Who can really say with any certainty? The point, of course, is no-one can. Such is the emptiness of signification that characterises an encounter with the traumatic real.

To elaborate further, notice how Bell's disposition subtly changes after he utters 'and then I woke up'. The instance of the utterance is straightforward enough; it is unlikely that he's gesturing towards any sort of symbolic meaning. However, it seems – judging from his shifting mien – that something dawns on him rather rapidly. This shift in affect cannot be seen in isolation from the shot/reverse shot that the Coens employ. Bell utters the final line, the medium shot lingers on his expression as he looks at his wife. Then, there's a reverse shot of Loretta. The diffused light from the window accentuates her piercing blue eyes, as does the blue shirt she's wearing. Throughout the film she's represented nothing but virtue and goodness. In the

novel, Bell waxes lyrical about his wife: ‘she’s a better person than me, which I will admit to anybody that cares to listen. Not that that’s saying a whole lot. She’s a better person than anybody that I know. Period’ (McCarthy, *No Country* 90).

The only other time Loretta appears in the film is towards the beginning. She seems to be wearing exactly the same thick-cotton blue shirt that she wears in the final scene. She delivers a few moral maxims to Bell before he heads out with the horses to the scene of the ‘colossal goatfuck’ (McCarthy, *No Country* 141) – the drug deal gone wrong in the middle of the desert, around which much of the action in the film (and text) revolve. I find it notable that the Coens dress her in the same outfit for both scenes. At first glance it would seem that they want to drive home the idea that she’s a ‘good American wife’ who wears the same comfort clothes every day. Below the surface, however, it would seem to me that the Coens are typifying her not only as the aforementioned trope, but also as a beacon of homeliness and comfort. She’s the very figuration of Freud’s *heimlich* (homely, belonging to the house). Her familiar and comforting aura is diametrically opposed to the abject and uncanny (*unheimlich*) violence wrought upon the landscape and witnessed (always after the fact) by her husband Bell. It would seem appropriate, then, that when she looks at Bell with those piercing light-blue eyes and warm, sympathetic affect that Bell (in the next shot) begins to tremble slightly and avert his gaze. Her gaze is too much for him. As alluded to before, something also dawns on him and it’s all in the gaze. While the gaze in the dream is elided, the penetrating gaze of his wife is not. It’s almost as if Loretta’s gaze picks up from where the dream left off. But what is the site of the gaze in the dream anyway?

I seen he was carryin’ fire

> *The essence of the relation between appearance and being, which the philosopher, conquering the field of vision, so easily masters, lies elsewhere. It is not in the straight line, but in the point of light—the point of irradiation, the play of light, fire, the source from which reflections pour forth*. (Lacan 94)

In his sardine-can anecdote, Lacan (95) stresses that he is 'not speaking metaphorically' when he declares that the can 'was looking at [him] at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at [him] is situated'. Why does he stress that he is not speaking metaphorically? Does he perhaps think that a metaphorical reading would undermine the actuality, the real (if you will), of what he is saying? In any case, if the gaze of the point of light is not metaphorically inscribed but an actual gaze, it has implications for the site of the gaze in Bell's dream. The site of the gaze, that is, *objet petit a*, is the point of light in 'all that dark and all that cold' (McCarthy, *No Country* 309): the fire that Bell's father carries in a horn. While this fire certainly forms part of a well-documented trope that McCarthy deploys in at least *No Country* and *The Road*, and can be read metaphorically, it is notably *not* a metaphor. It is an encounter with the gaze of the real – an ineffable quality which elides any sort of symbolic apprehension, as much as we try to stitch a web of symbolic meaning around the gaps and slippages it reveals.

In *The Road*, the trope of 'carrying' fire can be traced as a recurrent mantra that the father and son exchange to lift morale and remind each other that they are both moral agents to whom 'nothing bad is going to happen' because they are 'carrying the fire' (McCarthy, *The Road* 87). First published in 2006, a year after *No Country for Old Men* was first published, *The Road* shares in a similar vision of apocalyptic destruction that reduces human beings to 'bare life' – stripped of all the trappings of the symbolic order, left vulnerable and naked in the wake of the traumatic real. While in *No Country for Old Men* the traumatic real is instantiated by Chigurh, being a 'true and living prophet of destruction' (McCarthy, *No Country* 4), in *The Road* the traumatic real is not so much 'what might be headed this way' (McCarthy, *No Country* 40) but rather what has already come and gone:

> The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. (McCarthy, *The Road* 93)

With the reality of nameable things in the world being abraded, the father and son in *The Road* find themselves in a frighteningly meaningless milieu. 'Carrying the fire', then, is realised as a

compass of symbolic meaning whereby the real of the fire as the point of light becomes contextualised from without rather than from within.

Despite the fact that the fire, in *No Country for Old Men*, is merely an ineffable point of light, it nevertheless carries a symbolic valence, an attribution (contextually linked to the Name-of-the-Father) that allows the symbolic order to be reconstituted around the hole left in the wake of the real. The fire (while necessarily meaning-less) affords the interpreter (ourselves as readers, like Bell) the agency to create something meaning-full. As John Cant (51) states: 'the phallic symbolism of the horn of fire stands in this case for life, continuity, and civilization. Thus the novel closes with an image that is in contrast to its other phallic signifier, the ubiquitous gun, instrument of equally ubiquitous death'. The fire, as a point of light, is *objet petit a* – the site of the gaze. The horn is the contextual container that provides the phallic signification – that of fatherhood and giving life. The fact that the fire is being carried by Bell's father, and in light of how, in *The Road*, the fire is carried from father to son, the Name-of-the-Father dimension is further realised as a contextual envelope that surrounds the real of the fire.

To reiterate, the real can only be understood as meaning-full when seen in its context, when it is, in other words, contained in and retained by its context. The context that envelops the fire affords us the agency to reconstitute the symbolic around the gap of the real. It is crucial to note that 'the father functions, first of all, to support the symbol, i.e., to prop up the symbolic order' (Regnault 66). The father, or more specifically the Name-of-the-Father, is absolutely central to McCarthy's 'carrying the fire' tropology. As François Regnault (68) clarifies 'the 'Name-of-the-Father' can thus refer either to the father's name or the name the father gives his sons or daughters, the name by which we refer to our God or the names God gives his creatures. This is a precious ambiguity'. Furthermore, 'from the clinical standpoint, it is clear that a young child encounters its mother's desire, and that beyond that desire, it comes up against something which it feels its mother is obeying: the law of the father' (Regnault 66). The mother's gaze is thus mediated and restricted by the father as law. In McCarthy's novel, and by extension the film, the mother figure is sorely underrepresented. Carla-Jean's mother is a voluble annoyance who reveals to a complete stranger that they are headed to El Paso – an unwitting betrayal but a betrayal nonetheless. Her funeral is depicted by the Coens with their typical ironic distance: as the coffin is lowered the headstone is revealed, upon which is engraved 'beloved mother'.

Another possible mother figure is, of course, Loretta – despite the fact that she and Bell have no children. In the novel, Bell, in a rare break from his characteristic stoicism, reveals that he and Loretta 'lost a girl' (McCarthy, *No Country* 90). He then quickly re-stitches the symbolic order around that gaping absence by saying: 'but I won't talk about that' (McCarthy, *No Country* 90). In *not telling* he is *showing* so much more: the unassimilable pain of losing a child. As a reader of McCarthy's novel, having fomented a densely woven phantasy of Bell's character, encountering the fire in the final dream and his multivalent 'and then I woke up', I cannot help but feel as if the lost girl haunts this dream in both the text and the film. Yes, Bell sees his father, but, as Bell states, he is 'lookin back at a younger man' (McCarthy, *No Country* 308). He is the father in the dream. As Lacan would say, he sees himself seeing himself. It also bears mentioning that the fire in the dream, as well as the lost girl, evokes the well-documented dream that Freud discusses in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

> For days and nights a father has been watching at his child's sickbed. After the child's death, he lies down to rest in a room nearby, but leaves the doors open so that he can look from his bedroom into the room where the child's body is laid out, surrounded by tall candles. An old man has been set to keep watch, sitting near the body and murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father dreams that the child is standing at his bedside, grasps him by the arm and whispers to him reproachfully, 'Father, can't you see that I am burning?' He wakes up, notices a bright light coming from the room where the body is lying, hurries over, and finds the old attendant fallen asleep, the shroud and an arm of the beloved body burnt by a lighted candle that had fallen across it. (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 381)

The key link here, between this dream and Bell's, is the waking up. The dream that Freud describes comes so close to non-diegetic reality – that is, the reality outside of the dream – that the father is forced awake. It is likely that the light from the flames engulfing his son's shrouded body in the next room falls on his eyelids and triggers the vision in his dream of his child grasping his arm and whispering 'Father, can't you see that I am burning?'. The gaze of the real in the dream – the diegetic real – comes within a hair's-breadth of the non-diegetic real (the real outside of the dream). Notice, too, the similarity in diction to film theory. After all, the film, as I have previously argued, is like a dream. Like in a dream, the real within the film

may come so close to the real in the outside world that it snaps you out of your dreaming/spectating state. I'd liken this dynamic to a 'jump-scare' in a horror film. The gaze of the real, the object-cause of desire, the 'what does it (the horror-object) want from me', comes up on the spectator so suddenly that they have a physiological reaction. Is this jolt not similar to the jolt that forces one awake when confronted with something terrifying in a dream? Waking up is thus a kind of self-defence. A defence against the perceived threat of the traumatic real.

Bell wakes up from his dream at the point that he realises his father 'was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and [he] knew that whenever [he] got there [his father] would be there' (McCarthy, *No Country* 309). This is the point at which the non-diegetic and diegetic real come so unbearably close that Bell defensively wakes up. His father will not be there. His father is dead. It is worth noting that this is one of two dreams he has 'after [his father] die[s]' (McCarthy, *No Country* 309). As Lacan (75) states regarding the images in dreams: 'not only does it look, *it* also *shows*'. Bell is *shown* the gaze of the real in the fire that he must now carry, and the dead father that has bestowed it upon him. In the novel Bell laments that he has not done his father justice (McCarthy, *No Country* 308). The dream is an irruption of his own guilt, his superego bearing down on him.

Where does the lost girl come in? After all, this backstory is omitted by the Coens. A spectator of the film who has not read the novel would be none the wiser – they do not have the same phantasy I have. I assert that it is in the omission itself that the absence of the girl is most felt. It is in the line 'I think I lost it' when Bell describes the first dream after his father's death. In this case what he's lost is money. Recall how two other characters in the film hand over blood-soaked bills to boys – Moss in the first instance, on a bridge at the border, and Chigurh in the second instance, following his car accident. This could be read as 'blood-money' in simple, moralistic terms. The perpetuation of violence through the transfer of cash. However, I would argue that there's a deeper, more disturbing connection here. In both cases, Moss and Chigurh reach into their inner pockets to reveal the blood-soaked cash. It is also worth mentioning that it is likely that the cash in both instances derives from the cache that Moss discovers out in the desert at the beginning of the film. This provenance is significant. Blood signifies a lot more than just violence. Uterine blood is passed at birth, and this handing over of money in some

sort of sordid patrilineal ritual is a kind of birth. Birth can signify both the emergence of innocence and the loss of innocence into the realm of experience.

The corrupting influence of the money is clear in both instances. The group of older teenagers almost seem to take advantage of the injured Moss – caring more about the transaction (money for jacket) than Moss's patently serious condition. In Chigurh's case, the boys are younger and more innocent, however Chigurh's insistence on them taking the money in exchange for their silence seemingly inscribes a teleology. As Chigurh limps away, the boys begin to bicker over the cash. There's the implication that they, too, will succumb to the corrupting influence of money. The argumentative fragments I've established may seem disparate, however, bear in mind Bell's second dream about his father – carrying the fire – and how the context surrounding the real of the fire is more meaningful than the fire itself. Also note the patrilineal nature of this passing down. To synthesise these elements: Bell's dreams are absolutely central to my phantasy of the text's meaning, transcribed in the film. They both stage an encounter with the gaze of the traumatic real. The second dream has been explored – the gaze is the fire itself, and the context provides flesh to the bones of the real. The first dream's gaze is more oblique. It is centred not on a presence – the father (in the case of the second dream) – but a profound absence: 'I think I *lost* it'.

While the chronology of Bell's familial life is not laid out in the novel – it's unclear whether he lost his father or his daughter first – it is clear that he's lost more than money. The extended metaphor of the blood-money, which I've contended represents some instance of a patrilineal ritual in which the blood as uterine blood cannot be too easily occluded, signifies the human tendency to invest a life-force in money. Bell's father gives him money which he loses. He loses his daughter. The real enters the dream, not as the loss of a living subject, but the loss of a surrogate object. The symbolic resonance of the blood-money accretes throughout the film, preparing us for a greater awareness of metonymic possibilities. By the time Bell describes his dream, we have been prepped unconsciously to read more into the loss than just money. It is the loss of human life throughout the course of the film and Bell's failure to prevent it. It is the investment of a Manichean force in a handful of cash – the duality of it all to corrupt or save. While the child in the dream that Freud describes appears as an actual presence to grip his

father and reproachfully intone ‘can’t you see I’m burning’ – which forces the father awake – the lost girl (dis)appears in both dreams as a poignant index of loss.

If the order of the dreams were reversed, it could be surmised that what Bell lost – what his father gave him – is the fire. If the fire represents, in a deeply Manichean sense, the light of hope in ‘all that dark and all that cold’, and Bell loses it, thereby letting his father down, the implications of the dreams provide a surprising twist. I return to Loretta’s piercing blue eyes, the eyes that force Bell to look away. I contended that her gaze picks up where the dream left off. Her eyes, like their own points of light, illuminate every crevice, every fracture of Bell’s broken affect. While she looks on with care and sympathy, she cannot foresee the impact of her gaze. She gazes with all the goodness and light that Bell has lost, and might never regain. The real that forces him awake is not only the false phantasy of meeting his father by the fire he’s fixing to make, it is Bell’s tacit knowledge of his own failure. He will not meet his father at the fire, not merely because the father has died, but because he feels himself unworthy. It would be like meeting *the* Father: God. The waking up protects him from the gaze of his father, which throughout the dream has been concealed from him: ‘never said nothin. He just rode on past and he had this blanket wrapped around him and he had his head down’ (McCarthy, *No Country* 309).

From the way I have explored the deployment of the gaze in both novel and film, it should appear as though I have been discussing the two almost simultaneously. McCarthy’s original novel and the Coen Brothers’ adaptation are indeed almost inseparable. This observation was what first fomented my phantasy of confluent auteurism as a theoretical idea. As Craig Kennedy states, however:

> One key difference is that of focus. The novel belongs to Sheriff Bell. Each chapter begins with Bell’s narration, which dovetails and counterpoints the action of the main story. Though the film opens with Bell speaking, much of what he says in the book is condensed, and it turns up in other forms. Also, Bell has an entire backstory in the book that doesn’t make it into the film. The result is a movie that is more simplified thematically, but one that gives more of the characters an opportunity to shine. (Kennedy)

I would add that the omission of 'an entire backstory' goes beyond just giving the characters room to develop and simplifying the thematic elements. As mentioned already, the omission of Bell's lost daughter means her absence features ever more prominently in the film. She is the stain in the film. As with the painting, *The Ambassadors,* which Lacan describes, the girl is like the skull which you can only see when looking awry. In this case looking awry means not physically looking from a different angle, but having a certain astuteness – a critical sensitivity to what's not shown. We do not always know what form *objet petit a* takes, it could simply be a feeling that something ghostly is staring at us beyond the screen of the visible.

To conclude this point, I contend that Bell's deceased daughter is indexical of *objet petit a*. She is the reification of the real jouissance we *think* we were severed from as infants. As McGowan states:

> Though this prehistorical enjoyment did not exist, the idea of it nonetheless continues to have a power over the subjects of the social order. Having given up a part of themselves — albeit a part that did not exist until they gave it up — these subjects, insofar as they remain within the social order, are incomplete or lacking. Bound by this lack, they imagine or fantasize an object that exists in the gap left by their sacrifice. This object is what Lacan calls the *objet petit a.* The *objet a* constitutes the subject as desiring; it provides the lure that acts as an engine for the desire of the subject and also directs that desire in its circuit. (McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction* 16)

We thus desire what, in the case of the film, was never there. In the case of the novel, while the lost girl is mentioned, she too might as well never have existed. She exists now only as a cause of Bell's desire – to have her back. In both cases she exists for us as the lost object that we have constituted as that which we think we lack in ourselves. In other words, we are always desiring of *objet petit a* because we think it will fill a void – a void which we think was full in infancy. We project this desire onto absences and gaps in the symbolic and imaginary orders. We find *objet petit a* in the real. If the lost girl was mentioned in the novel and occluded in the film, why am I discussing them as if they occur simultaneously? The reason is found in my formulation of confluent auteurism.

Earlier I discussed how confluent auteurism can be seen as the perceived melding of the spectator's phantasy of the text, and their perceived phantasy of the auteur-other. What does this mean in practice? Let's take the end of both the novel and film. It is my contention that confluent auteurism in that scene does not lie in the Coens' fidelity to the original source material, though one might be tempted to say so. Even though the scene in the film reproduces what Bell says, there is not only an automatic difference produced by the medium, but also a distinct delineation in style between what is markedly McCarthy-esque and Coen-esque. In the novel, Bell describes his dreams in narration – he's not sitting in front of his wife recounting the dreams. The Coens subvert this narrative mode by turning it into a dialogue in which a version of a narration is present. Bell still narrates his experience, but the crucial addition is that of the interlocutor. The insertion of a listener, a penetrating gaze in the scene, affords the Coens creative liberty to accentuate those final lines: 'and then I woke up'. Hence the automatic difference is both by virtue of medium and directorial choice.

The other aspect that mediates the ostensible fidelity in confluent auteurism, besides the automatic difference, is the duality of style present in the film. As Kennedy remarks:

> The first thing that stands out in a direct comparison of the two is how faithful the Coens were to their source, yet how they still made a film with a recognizable Coen stamp. *No Country* is unmistakably a Coen movie, from the basic framework of McCarthy's noir plot, to the strong regional characters, to the dialogue; it's at home in the Coen canon, yet they seem to have changed very little. Much of the dialogue was delivered intact and even the structure of the narrative survived the translation. Somehow it's McCarthyesque and Coenesque all at the same time. (Kennedy)

Kennedy's observation gestures towards both confluence and divergence, fidelity and specificity. This is the essence of confluent auteurism. The formulation accounts for both the confluence, or perceived overlap, of text and film and the stylistic specificity inherent in the adaptation. This stylistic specificity encompasses both the auteur and the author, since the authorial voice echoes as its own distinct presence in the film and seems to meld seamlessly with the distinct voice of the auteur, as perceived by the reader/spectator.

It should be clear that fidelity is not key to this formulation. It will emerge in forthcoming chapters, such as that on *The Birds* that being faithful to the original text may have been the last thing on the auteur's mind. Yet in Hitchcock's adaptation of Du Maurier's short story one can perceive the melding of two distinct yet compatible voices. The adaptation turns on a fundamental conceit – 'why do the birds attack?' This is a question of desire: 'what do they want from me?' Desire, as has already been discussed, is central to that of the gaze of *objet petit a*, the gaze of the real. In *No Country for Old Men* the gaze is located in more than just the final dream, which I have focused on up until this point. The more obvious site of the gaze of the traumatic real is the most traumatic thing in the film, the 'true and living prophet of destruction' (McCarthy, *No Country* 4): Anton Chigurh. Chigurh, more than any other site of the gaze, is that which approaches the non-diegetic real (the real outside of the cinema) so closely that we are unavoidably forced to wake up.



Figure 5

I don't want to confront him. I know he's real

> *You see, one can say that there are always lots of gazes behind. Nothing new is introduced in this respect by the epoch that André Malraux distinguishes as the modern, that which comes to be dominated by what he calls* 'the incomparable monster', *namely, the gaze of the painter, which claims to impose itself as being the only gaze. There always was a gaze behind*. (Lacan 113)

I have been avoiding Chigurh. Throughout this chapter I have elided his gaze. A part of me keeps probing: 'but what about Chigurh?' Perhaps it is in the fact that his gaze is too gratuitous, too traumatic, that I instead retreat into subtlety – into the realm of dreams, instead of nightmares. I think there is more to my avoidance, and it lies in the 'gaze behind'. Crucial to this formulation is the 'terminal moment' which 'enables us to distinguish between a gesture and an act' (Lacan 114):

> What occurs as these strokes, which go to make up the miracle of the picture, fall like rain from the painter's brush is not choice, but something else. Can we not try to formulate what this something else is? Should not the question be brought closer to what I called the rain of the brush? If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves? What it amounts to is the first act in the laying down of the gaze. (Lacan 114)

Perhaps what Lacan is saying here is that between the act and the gesture, that is, between the act of the brushstroke and the gesture towards the other (the viewer of the painting), the painter's unconscious sheds off a part of itself and embeds it in the painting as gaze. The painter leaves parts of themselves in the painting.

Are we always consciously aware where every brushstroke is supposed to fall, or do we simply let the brush fall, let the rhythm of each brushstroke guide the next, sometimes impulsive, sometimes careful and delicate, yet all guided by an unconscious desire? What is this unconscious desire? To inscribe the gaze. Lacan (115) puts it like this: 'what we see here, then, is that the gaze operates in a certain descent, a descent of desire, no doubt. But how can we express this? The subject is not completely aware of it— he operates by remote control. Modifying the formula I have of desire as unconscious—*man's desire is the desire of the Other*—I would say that it is a question of a sort of desire *on the part of* the Other, at the end of which is the *showing*'. This sentiment fits well with McGowan's claim that the fundamental question of desire is 'what does he want from me?' It is also worth returning, for a moment, to the dream, in which 'not only does it look, it also shows'. When Lacan (113) alludes to ''*the incomparable monster*', namely, the gaze of the painter, which claims to impose itself as being the only gaze', he is uncovering the terrifying realisation, that 'there always was a gaze behind'.

At first glance Chigurh is the monstrous textual effect, the heart of darkness – so to speak. However, if Chigurh is a site of the gaze, then the gaze behind Chigurh would be of that who created him – the author. What about the gaze behind the 'incomparable monster' of the author? That would surely be the terminal moment – that unconscious effect between gesture and act? What I propose is a palimpsest of monstrosity, perpetuated through the gazes behind. 'There are always lots of gazes behind', so says Lacan (113), and indeed behind the monster Chigurh is the monster that created him – the author – and behind the monster that created the monster lies the individual unconscious and behind that lies…? This palimpsest stretches in both directions, centripetal and centrifugal, always perpetuating itself, yet haunted by immanent echoes.

This kind of palimpsestic repetition is exactly how Copjec apprehends the real as absent signifier:

> The real that is to be negated cannot be represented by a signifier, since the real is, by definition, that which has no adequate signifier. How, then, can this negation take place within the symbolic as the requirement demands? The answer is, through repetition, through the signifier's repeated attempt-and failure-to designate itself. The signifier's difference from itself, its radical inability to signify itself, causes it to turn in circles around the real that is lacking in it. It is in this way-in the circumscription of the real-that its nonexistence or its negation is signified within the symbolic. (Copjec 121)

As such, Lacan's 'gazes behind' are merely an emphatic repetition of the symbolic around the void of the real. We identify in these real effects, these irruptions into the symbolic order (like Chigurh), a myriad of explanations. Looking inward, towards the text's 'heart': who is Chigurh but a representation of the senselessly violent 'new age' in which McCarthy wishes to instantiate a moral panic? Looking outward, towards the text's non-diegetic milieu: who is Chigurh but a laying down of the gaze by the author? I can obsessively repeat the same explanations in either direction. Is this violent 'new age' not a product of historical violence wrought upon the landscape and its people? Is the 'gaze behind' Chigurh, that of the author, not the product of decades of conservative moral panics on the frontiers of American imperialism? I could go on until language fails me on either end. In those moments, the

explanatory power of the symbolic order would have failed me, leaving only an inchoate awareness of the gaps, the fissures, through which the real always irrupts.

It is tempting to argue that the way Chigurh is handled by the Coens, perfectly aligns with my phantasy of his character, as derived from the text. In keeping with this argument, the Coens represent Chigurh as a real effect, just as I see him in the novel – through casting, costume, lighting and dialogic choices (not to mention Javier Bardem's remarkable performance). However, this argument misses a crucial element, which I discuss in the first chapter: phantasy erasure. If I were to try to imagine Chigurh after having watched the film, or even after having been exposed to any cinematic material (trailers, video-essays), I would be unable to imagine Chigurh as anyone other than Javier Bardem's characterisation. The cinematic image is a far stronger current than our tenuously formed phantasy, which, seeming so rich and full at the time, gets all too easily overwritten by the audio-visual barrage of the film.

The traumatic real, and our encounter with it, is inextricably imbricated in this phantasy erasure. While it may seem inaccurate to call the gaze of the audio-visual elements in a film 'traumatic', such an attribution is, in fact, consistent with the definition of trauma – as it is conceived in theory. Susannah Radstone traces the delineations of trauma theory, citing Thomas Elsaesser, who elucidates that:

> The traumatic event has 'the status of a (suspended) origin in the production of a representation (...) bracketed or suspended because [it is] marked by the absence of traces'… In place of theories that emphasize the conventional, mediated, illusory, deferred or imaginary status of the relation between representation and 'actuality' or 'event', trauma theory suggests that the relation between representation and 'actuality' might be reconceived as one constituted by the absence of traces. For Dori Laub, this absence of traces gives rise to his formulation of the aetiology of trauma as 'an event without a witness'… — an absence of witnessing that derives, argues Caruth, from the unassimilable or unknowable nature of the traumatic event. (Radstone 12)

The audio-visual deluge of the film, which is traced by the real, has (as a consequence) an unassimilable 'absence of traces'. What this means, in practice, is that my phantasy of the text – which is fundamentally of the symbolic and imaginary orders – comes up against the

traumatic assault of the real gaze (the audio-visual gaze of the film). This encounter ruptures my phantasy as symbolic structure, whereby the closer the filmic imagination comes to my own phantasy, the more my original phantasy is destroyed.

My reasoning behind the above claims is derived from two directions: existing theory regarding the real, the gaze and trauma, and anecdotal evidence from my own experience and the experience of others I've talked to. While I realise that I should avoid universalising my own experience to corroborate a theory of reception and phantasy, the legibility of my experiences derives from previously encountered theory. Surely some portion of theory is based on a certain amount of inward looking from which gestures towards a new explanatory idiom emerge? The fact that my phantasy of McCarthy's text was all but erased while – as it will emerge in Chapter Three – my phantasy of du Maurier's text could be retained (due to the film's deviations from the source material), is, in my estimation, indicative of a broader pattern. As I have stated previously, confluent auteurism can occur in both instances of phantasy erasure and retention. In both cases our phantasy is encountering something of the double in the other's (auteur's) phantasy. It is the moment where the represented phantasy and our own phantasy can be partially or completely assimilated.

Where does the traumatic real come into all of this? Another vital aspect of trauma theory is in the notion of subjective repetition. Caruth (cited in Radstone) makes a remark about 'Freud wondering, in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves"' (Radstone 12). After having watched a particularly impactful film that has overwhelmed any previously-held phantasies are we not predisposed to repeat in our minds certain scenes, images and gazes over and over in our waking and dreaming hours? Such is certainly the case with Chigurh, where my mind repeats the hissing sound of his pneumatic cattle gun, his awful limp, his impenetrable eyes, and the grain of his voice. There is something in my encounter with Chigurh that I cannot assimilate, and so my mind repeats the traumatic 'event' (encounter) in an effort to begin to resolve the absence of traces. While such an absence can never be resolved, this repetition wipes any previously-held phantasy, supplanting it as the primary traumatic memory – memory and phantasy becoming almost inextricable.

When Bloom, in *The Anxiety of Influence*, articulates his final 'revolutionary ratio' – *Apophrades*, or the return of the dead – we can begin to see how these ideas may be synthesized. Bloom speaks thus:

> But the poem is now held open to the precursor, where once it was open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work. (Bloom 16)

In encountering the double, that is, the perceived phantasy of the auteur, the intrasubjective experience is one of remarkable confluence. What this sense of confluence occludes, however, is the fact that in order for it to emerge at all there has to be a loss. That loss is the original phantasy. It may appear that we are experiencing a profound overlapping of phantasies when, in actuality, we are merely experiencing some version of Bloom's *Apophrades*. In other words, what we are experiencing is, in fact, the uncanny sense that the auteur (as they are perceived) had always already written the precursory phantasy.

This is why *No Country for Old Men* feels at once both McCarthyesque and Coenesque. Not necessarily because of some Bakhtinian dialogism whereby texts communicate in a dense web of intertextuality. If we experience an overwhelming sense of such intertextuality, it is likely because such links are being made intrasubjectively. The reason why we experience confluent auteurism is fundamentally a question of desire: 'what does it want from me?' We know implicitly that what we want from the text or film is for it to fill in some of those gaps instantiated by the lack. Yet, the one thing that's missing from this equation is knowledge of the other and what it desires from us. Our unquenchable appetite for omnipotence over ourselves and the other forces us to confront the traumatic real of the gaze. As Lacan articulates:

> How could this *showing* satisfy something, if there is not some appetite of the eye *on the part of* the person looking? This appetite of the eye that must be fed produces the hypnotic value of painting. For me, this value is to be sought on a much less elevated plane than might be supposed, namely, in that which is the true function of the organ of the eye, the eye filled with voracity, the evil eye. (Lacan 115)

Through our phantasies, we somewhat satiate the insatiable. We hold onto our phantasies so dearly because they are a bastion against the real, which is, in a sense, a bastion against the real

of the lack. What Lacan is also saying is that we are predisposed as spectators to voraciously desire the thing-perceived. Surely in the act of seeing, we are implicitly trying to understand and assimilate what is being seen with as much depth as possible?

An instance that immediately comes to mind is 'rubber-necking', that almost instinctual turn towards the dreaded site of the gaze – a gruesome car accident, bodies covered with sheets, incomprehensibly contorted metal and glass. What is this turning if not an insatiable need to integrate what has passed by fleetingly in the visual field – the ambulance lights flashing, the inevitable slowing of traffic as almost every passer-by turns to look. There must also be something of the dreaded anticipation that rises within us as we approach the previously obscured site of the accident. We have already fomented a phantasy in our minds eye of what gruesome sight awaits. What we tend to anticipate at the moment before we fully, gratuitously perceive is that adrenaline-rush (a kind of perverted jouissance). This is the promise of the accident-scene that lures us into 'rubber-necking'. This is Lacan's version of the 'evil eye' at work.

The promise of the film (as the return of the figural breast – the jouissance-provider) elicits anticipation in us because our voracious eyes seek not only to see, but to *be* seen. When we watch a film, in that dreamlike state that McGowan describes, our defences are already down. We are primed for our phantasies to be saturated by the double. Or, in the case that our phantasy can be retained, we are primed for a different kind of satiation. Our phantasy expands, to hold more than one. I can simultaneously hold my phantasy of du Maurier's nuclear family along the Cornish coast and Hitchcock's triangle of oedipal desire (to be discussed in the next chapter). When we accept the film as figural breast and let it saturate our phantasies – either supplementing them or overwriting them, we are giving ourselves over to the other, while internally experiencing a feeling of confluence. When we reject the film and spit it out, we hastily draw up our phantasy-barricades against the tirade of the 'bad object'.

In some cases we may be able to retain and further enrich our original phantasy. In other cases our sacred phantasies are overwritten no matter what. We feel a loss, not only in our disappointment with the film, but also in our erased phantasy. While we may defiantly say: 'it

wasn't as good as the book', we cannot retrieve what aspects of our phantasy we have given up in our encounter with the film. While we have consciously determined that 'that's not it', it is too late to forget the traumatic encounter. Only through wilfully forgetting the film and re-reading (repeating) the text can we instantiate some semblance of symbolic order once again. But, as we will inevitably find, there are echoes and traces of the other waiting in the shadows.

The Coens' adaptation of *No Country for Old Men* is ultimately such a rich and immediate instance of confluent auteurism precisely because I did not spit out the adaptation; I ravenously imbibed it. I could say that 'the film was exactly how I imagined the text', but that would be dishonest. It would be more accurate to say that 'the text was exactly how I imagined the film'. Since I had already been exposed to paratextual material concerning the film, which likely inspired me to seek out and read the novel in the first place, I approached the novel with an awareness of my proto-phantasy of the film lurking at the back of my mind. I distinctly remember looking forward to finishing the novel so that I could watch the film that 'everyone was raving about'. It is likely my initial impetus for confluent auteurism was the misattribution of a remarkable fidelity and closeness to the text, whereas what I was experiencing was Bloom's *Apophrades* where it seemed as if the Coens' adaptation had in fact written McCarthy's text. As far as my perception of confluence goes, the film was always precursory to my experience of the text. Perhaps I experienced this distinct sense of the film being both Coenesque and McCarthyesque because I implicitly expected to.

Chapter Three – Oedipus Explains

The blood on their father's hands

> *It was a great marvel that they were in the Father without knowing Him.* (Bloom 13)

When the topic of textual influence was broached by Francois Truffaut in an interview with Alfred Hitchcock, in which he was asked how many times he had read 'The Birds' in preparation for directing the adaptation, Hitchcock responded:

> What I do is read a story only once, and if I like the basic idea, I just forget all about the book and start to create cinema. Today I would be unable to tell you the story of Daphne du Maurier's 'The Birds'. I read it only once, and very quickly at that. An author takes three or four years to write a fine novel; it's his whole life. Then other people take it over completely. (du Maurier, *The Birds* vi)

Looking past the apparent dismissive bravado that Hitchcock exhibits here, this response has fascinating implications when read through Bloom's 'Anxiety of Influence'. Bloom (39) declares that 'discontinuity is freedom', in reference to a poet's apparent (and necessary) misreading of the precursor, that is, an already extant poetic corpus that has influenced the current poet. In other words, a new work of art, influenced unavoidably by a precursor, is realised as its own thing when the artist purposely misinterprets the precursory artwork. Think of it as a version of 'reaction formation': 'I am this because I am not that'. Bloom elaborates:

> Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets, – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (Bloom 30)

Emphatic statements, certainly, but nonetheless applicable when looking at adaptation as being subject to a comparable 'anxiety of influence'. I could speculate on the possible 'anxiety' that underlies Hitchcock's 'performance' as a true and preeminent auteur, an anxiety that provokes a hasty misprision – or as Bloom would put it: *clinamen* (to swerve) – in order to assert his sole authorship over the story, drawing but meagre inspiration from the 'basic idea' of du Maurier's

text and thus '[taking] it over completely'. I will resist the temptation to pursue this particular line of argumentation, however, for it will likely get caught up all too quickly in a dense web of 'intentionality' – which I am strenuously avoiding. Like our perceived phantasy of the auteur, trying to delimit an intention – even if it is explicitly stated by the author/auteur – is vastly unstable and uncertain.

I would like to return to phantasy, *my* phantasy for, as Sartre (4) contends: 'reflective consciousness delivers us absolutely certain data'. In other words, the content of my textual phantasies and the character of my filmic impressions and the ways in which the two interact are not only more immediately accessible, but also far more certain – I can ascertain what I think because I am the one doing the thinking. So, for the first time in this dissertation, I attempt to answer the question that has likely been lurking in the background for far too long, unacknowledged: *what is my phantasy of the text?* In aid of a prelude to the forthcoming phantasy reflections, I must note that I can only access my original (yet labile) phantasy of du Maurier's text because Hitchcock's adaptation *swerves* so violently that I can more or less retain that phantasy, free of being overwhelmed by my impressions of the film. The question arises, however: what exactly am I accessing when I say 'I'm recounting my phantasy of the text'? The key is in the very diction I've been using; the words 'recounting' and 'accessing' both indicate a mnemic dimension. What I'm reaching for when I set about recounting my phantasy is not the phantasy in and of itself, but rather the *memory* of it. To return to the platitude 'it wasn't as good as the book', what are we really doing but recalling a memory of our precious phantasy in order to mediate the fine line between acceptance and rejection.

For the sake of explication, say I have just read the opening paragraph of du Maurier's text for the first time and since phantasy is fomented with an imperceptible immediacy, I can picture the last lees of autumn with a vividness proportional to what is shown:

> On December the third the wind changed overnight and it was winter. Until then the autumn had been mellow, soft. The leaves had lingered on the trees, golden red, and the hedgerows were still green. The earth was rich where the plough had turned it. (du Maurier, *The Birds* 1)

There are a few levels in which I can access my immediate phantasy, all of which can be best approached via a 'close reading' methodology. As I access these levels, I invite you, the reader, to hold whatever images percolate in your mind's eye and carefully, closely observe and describe them. I will examine these levels of phantasy over a number of 'passes' with each one moving progressively deeper into the subtextual folds of the text.

On the first pass, reading at medium-fast speed I can immediately picture the harrowed earth – the clods, traces of old roots and tubers – I can see the plough creasing and turning over the soil and I can hear it being drawn especially with the sibilant sound of metal cutting through loam. I can vaguely picture leaves on trees, and something about hedgerows but the picture is fuzzier, being not as accessible as the ploughed earth. It's interesting that what stuck on this first pass was the last sentence. Perhaps with the image being stronger and more olfactory – I can smell 'rich earth' more than I can hedgerows or lingering leaves.

On the second pass I seem to linger on the words 'December' and the gold-red colour of the leaves. I feel myself growing dismissive of the ploughed earth image – as though I have fixated on it enough and need to find other images that catch my mind's eye. 'December' elicits a certain confusion. I'm aware that in European countries, and especially England (where I assume this story is set) December signifies snowy winter. Yet having recently experienced December in South Africa, I can still feel the heat on my skin. So there's a schism in my image of 'December'. I can also anticipate that on the third pass I will fixate on the wind and its sudden change, although I can feel the temptation to run with it now, I need more 'data'.

On the third pass I read more intentionally, repeating some words and phrases or running over them again. I know that it's 'December the third' and that the 'wind changed overnight' invoking a sudden shift in climate – from autumnal to wintry in a matter of hours. This is what sticks in my mind – perhaps because I anticipated it would earlier. I can also feel, though, a sense of loss, of the bygone season of autumn which up until this point had been rich and full and is now emptied out, hollow and cold. I am tempted to 'run with the wind' and explore how changes in the wind and tide directly affect the ebb and flow of the birds' attacks, however this would not be in the spirit of the exercise. I have already read the story a number of times in the

past, and thus already have a latent phantasy of what is to come. If I were to put myself in the mind of an uninitiated reader, I would be none the wiser.

On the fourth and final pass words start to lose their meaning. This is the problem of repetition. If I were to repeat the word 'plough' enough times, it would surely start to feel alien and wrong – emptied out of all its meaning. As such, I would suggest that the close reading methodology employed above should be conducted over three separate passes and no more. Any further repetition has the opposite effect to what's desired. Instead of the expected depth and nuance that would come with multiple passes, I am quickly short-circuited towards the textuality of the text – the sound and feel of the words, rather than the significations of them.

The phantasies I have just rendered are immediate, even intimate, for they share something internal. If I were to ask ten people what phantasies were awakened having read over the passage only once, I would get ten different responses – this much is obvious. Less apparent is what would happen for each reader over multiple passes. In this case, the differences in reading styles between each individual would result in an even greater diversity of responses. One person may read very fast, which, in the estimation of Konurbaev (3) would result in a markedly 'muted' text. This could mean that the author's voice is less apparent while images (with, albeit, less depth) are rendered at extraordinary speed. Another person may read very slowly, thereby picking out the author's voice with much clarity – the voice lending texture and tonality to much deeper images. It would be useful here to use the signifiers 'thick' and 'thin' to account for the varying depth a phantasy can be, according to the reading style of the individual.

My phantasies drawn from du Maurier's short story vary between thick and thin, when I bring memories of them to mind. I can still picture the stone-walled cottage in which much of the familial action is played out; the scattered corpses of the 'suicide birds'; the father, Nat, carrying a hoe to ward off the increasingly threatening swoops of the birds as he rushes his daughter home from the bus-stop; the infuriating complacency of Nat's neighbours and their expected, brutal deaths; the preoccupation with protecting one's eyes against the stabbing beaks of the birds. My phantasies are primarily episodic, reflecting the general lack of a substantial

narrative plot in the short story which is saturated, instead, by a heady atmosphere of claustrophobia and slow-burning dread.

Du Maurier's story evolves from one central conceit: what would happen if birds suddenly started attacking humanity? Stuck primarily to Nat's perspective, the narrative thrusts forward with a certain urgency, an assured 'masculine' brutality. The birds, when they attack, draw blood, stab at Nat's eyes while he 'beat[s] at the birds with his bare hands' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 5). While the opening of the short story possesses a sense of continuity to a legible 'before', there is no certainty of a reassuring 'after' by the story's end. The final image, too, is of fire – Nat watches the empty cigarette packet burn in the hearth. Recalling the fire at the end of *No Country for Old Men*, where carrying it signifies human endurance, the resounding phantasy here is of total, apocalyptic destruction. There is something distinctly machoistic about Nat wanting to 'smoke that last fag' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 39), watching the empty packet (read: world) burn to a crisp. Interestingly, the site of this burning is located in the hearth – the centre of familial life. While there seems to be no discernible familial conflict in du Maurier's text, there are subtle traces of something not entirely 'homely'.

Throughout the text, there are moments of silent, non-verbal communication and connection between Nat and his wife: 'a silent message passed between them' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 7). As they make preparations to escape the besieged cottage by car 'her eyes watched his all the time. He believed she understood, otherwise she would have suggested helping him to find the bread and groceries' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 35). The urgency, the need to survive and protect, is loaded within this interaction. There seems to be nothing but cohesion between them, and yet, the sentiment I get of them and their relationship is decidedly hollow. I get a strong sense of *heimlich* (homeliness): 'the sight of the kitchen reassured him' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 6). Their milieu (pre-bird assault) is well defined, bringing 'comfort and security' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 6), yet the dialogue exchanged between them is almost always coloured by exigent demands. This would make sense given the sudden and unprecedented apocalypse occurring around them, however, I still cannot shake the feeling that the characters are mere outlines. The patriarchal father, the sensitive and receptive mother, the innocent children, that is, until they see 'the blood on their father's hands' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 20). Ultimately, there are the

slightest traces of dissolution within the family's internal world while their external world erupts into senseless chaos.

Hitchcock's adaptation of 'The Birds' veers dramatically away from the concerns of a cohesive family unit on the Cornish coast. Instead, he totally subverts the idea of 'family'. This impression careens directly into my phantasy of the Hocken family, yet, interestingly does not destroy it. Instead, I feel again a powerful confluence between du Maurier's story and Hitchcock's adaptation, despite their vastly different narratives. What is it in the adaptation that so seamlessly melds with my phantasy of the text? This is what I aim to uncover throughout the rest of this chapter.

If only he could keep them from his eyes

> *Oh! he's a wicked man, who comes to little children when they won't go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody; and he puts them into a bag and takes them to the half-moon as food for his little ones; and they sit there in the nest and have hooked beaks like owls, and they pick naughty little boys' and girls' eyes out with them.* (Hoffmann 185)

> *A man's unconscious fear of castration manifests itself as an apparently physical trouble in his eyes; a poet's fear of ceasing to be a poet frequently manifests itself also as a trouble of his vision.* (Bloom 78)

One of the most traumatic scenes in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* portrays Lydia's encounter with a victim of the birds' vicious and unprovoked assault on humanity. Upon entering Dan's room, she notices first the sacrificed corpse of a seagull, lodged halfway through the window. She looks around the room, spotting more bird casualties. The camera switches between her increasingly dreading expression and what she sees. Bloodied legs in pinstriped pyjamas. She peers beyond the half-open door. Why are we so drawn to the dead? Why do we look further, closer, until the abject becomes too much? She suffers the consequence of her morbid curiosity

– the eyeless corpse of Dan. Hitchcock makes sure to drive home the trauma of this encounter with the abject. His camera 'punches in' three times getting closer, ever closer to the site of the gaze of the traumatic real – the black and bloodied holes where two eyes used to be. Lydia responds proportionately – she turns and flees, her mouth agape as if she's trying to scream, but the scream cannot escape her larynx. The abjection residing with the eyeless corpse is so overwhelming, so incommensurable, that a scream – the most instinctual display of fear – cannot be evinced.

Kristeva puts it elegantly when she states:

> There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Kristeva 1)

Recalling Poe's (345) 'Imp of the Perverse', in which 'we stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss – we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and horror become merged into a cloud of unnamable feeling', the high-frequency vacillation between horror and desire that Kristeva describes is a comparable phenomenon. The void of the abject, that is, a perceptible encounter with the traumatic real, elicits this bifurcated response. We are rendered 'beside ourselves' not only because we cannot assimilate the object, but also because we can no longer distinguish between repulsion and attraction towards that object. Recall my description of 'rubber-necking' in chapter two. A similar dynamic is at work here: 'because our reason violently deters us from the brink, *therefore* do we the most impetuously approach it' (Poe 345). Lydia is beside herself, her very subjectivity eviscerated, absorbed, consumed by the traumatic real. It is after all, the trauma of the visual (not to mention the audible) that most haunts the subject. In Lydia's case it is a harrowing collision of the two: the oedipal vision and

the deafening silence. All of which renders her not only beside herself but also completely devoid of expression – she cannot scream.

Sit in a darkened cinema, watching a pulpy horror movie and it is the scream, the clutch at the other that characterises our response to the 'jump scare', the hideous reveal of the monster. Upon leaving the cinema and entering the waking world, we are haunted by echoes of the abject we have witnessed. We sleep with our bedside lamps on, afraid of what's looming in the dark. Our imaginations are consumed with terrible monsters. Cinema has the power to consume, even *overwrite* imagination. Such is the case with adaptation. Try to read Tolkien's masterpiece after having watched its cinematic adaptation and notice how it is almost impossible to imagine the characters as anything other than their filmic, 'real' representations. If we were to think of adaptations within the bounds of Bloom's theory of influence, then the following passage from Bloom will undoubtedly apply here:

> 'But the poem is now held open to the precursor, where once it was open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work'. (Bloom 16)

Such is certainly the case with *No Country for Old Men*. The Coens' representation of character and setting is so 'spot on' that it seems as if they actually wrote the original text. Confluent auteurism is not some kind of dialogic equilibrium or exchange of voices; it is usurpation, consumption, absorption. I am certainly not asserting that cinema is a superior medium. When two rivers converge the water becomes indivisible. Yet the faster flowing tributary, carrying the more rapid current, subsumes and engulfs the current of the more torpid tributary, setting the tempo – so to speak. This is essentially what happens when an auteur adapts a text. Text and film-text become indivisible, but imagination is overwritten by the stronger current – cinema. In the previous chapter, I have dubbed this: 'phantasy erasure'. It is also important to note that, tacitly, I've delineated two clear possibilities for confluent auteurism as a model of authorship and/or a mode of perception.

We may see confluent auteurism as a theory of authorial influence á la Bloom. In this sense, the theory accounts for the both–and quality of an adaptation by identifying confluence from

the perspective of the author. This becomes tricky when the nebulous spectre of 'intention' demands attention. After all, how can we truly know what goes on inside the auteur's head when adapting a text. Have they deployed the gaze in a similar manner to the text intentionally or unwittingly? My scepticism and mistrust of authorial intervention, in interviews for instance, does not help matters. So what of the second avenue – the mode of perception? Here I invoke reader response theory loosely, brushing up against the likes of Iser without allowing for a crosspollination of sorts. This avenue is perhaps more productive because it allows for the so-called 'phantasy erasure' to be explored – not through a generalised viewer, but through my own lens as an individual spectator. In this case it is not the actual, authorial both–and nature of the adaptation that I am interested in, but rather the *perception* of it. In other words, how is it that we as spectators perceive a confluence of author-text and auteur-text, even if the author/auteur have diverged. Such is certainly the case for *The Birds*, where fidelity becomes a contested space.

No Country for Old Men is a rather straightforward case of confluent auteurism as fidelity is clearly present. The text and the film-text are so close that it seems, to paraphrase Bloom, that the auteur has written the author's source text. Hitchcock's *The Birds* makes absolutely no attempt at fidelity, besides the core conceit (birds attack humanity) and perhaps a similar deployment of the gaze (for instance, the preoccupation with eyes and the loss thereof). Yet, despite this divergence, there is still a *perception* of confluence. We might say '*The Birds* is a successful adaptation'. So, from an authorial perspective, there have been clear moves away from the source text towards an elsewhere. From the perspective of perception, however, this divergence does not seem to matter, or is at least secondary to the overriding sense of confluence.

Perhaps the elsewhere that Hitchcock gestures towards is not outside of the original text, then, but rather inside, concealed within the inner folds of the text. The secret interior, the *uncanny centre*. To put it more explicitly: Hitchcock inscribes an overtly oedipal dynamic in his adaptation that seems to veer away from the core ideals of the nuclear family present in the source text. However, it is my contention that this oedipal dynamic captures and augments an already extant uncanny centre within the source text. In other words, du Maurier's text is filled with latent oedipal imagery that Hitchcock identifies and expands upon. Furthermore, the

attack of the birds remains a mystery in du Maurier's text. Hitchcock, on the other hand, siphons out that oedipal thread and exposes it to the spectator for immediate symbolic apprehension. The real becomes symbolic, becomes *explained*.

While it may temporarily satisfy an audience hungry for meaning, disappointment and disillusionment soon follows. This is precisely because the real, like the birds themselves, is vastly underdetermined. There are so many possible explanations, so many idioms through which to read the birds' attack that pretty soon an attentive audience will realise that there is no possible explanation. The meaning behind the birds recedes back into the real, leaving the audience emptied out. Hitchcock knows exactly what he's doing here. In fact, I'd go so far to say that he performs a bit of crafty trickery. As I will go on to demonstrate, Hitchcock manages to achieve the baffling effect of providing an explanation without actually providing any explanation at all. In other words, Hitchcock contrives a way in, through the mire of meaninglessness, towards a final cause, but at the last moment and without warning, withdraws any and all explanatory idioms whatsoever. The question thus arises: what idiom does he present in the first place? I've mentioned the oedipal, but I really ought to mention the family.

The family is a citadel of unbounded protection. We are 'thrown' into the family unit at birth, and we are immersed in its symbolic order. In other words, we are enmeshed in an institution that is underpinned by language. As infants we feel safe within this unit and we develop powerful attachments to the point at which any form of separation or interruption is unconscionable. Du Maurier explores the durability of the family unit when an unprovoked external threat intrudes in the domain of the symbolic order. Hitchcock extends and modifies this dynamic by inserting an oedipal crisis into the family unit – thus not only expanding on the 'irruption of the Real into the Symbolic order' (Humbert 3) but also explaining it.

The key question that resounds in both du Maurier's story and Hitchcock's adaptation is, as Slavoj Zizek puts it, 'the stupid, obvious one, why do the birds attack?' (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*). For Zizek, 'the violent attacks of the birds are obviously explosive outbursts of [the] maternal superego, of the maternal figure preventing, trying to prevent [a] sexual

relationship. So the birds are raw, incestuous energy' (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*). Hitchcock establishes the oedipal triangle very early on:



Figure 6

Figure 6 is an exemplary demonstration of Hitchcock's unsubtle encoding. We see Mitch, the patriarchal surrogate, leaning confidently against the mantelpiece – the hearth being metonymic for the homestead. On the sofa sits Melanie – obviously a little uncomfortable. Her body language suggests she is trying to shield herself from the discomfort that is obviously precipitated by Mitch's overbearing mother. It is no surprise then that Mitch's mother takes up most of the real-estate in the mise-en-scene. She dominates the frame both visually and audibly. Her conversation with the chicken-feed supplier over the telephone supplants any other attempt by Mitch and Melanie at meaningful dialogue. They wait quietly for Mitch's mother to finish.



Figure 7

As the scene progresses and Mitch's mother becomes increasingly concerned, asking the supplier if 'there's something going around', Mitch leaves his position by the fireplace and reverts to the same spatial plane as Melanie as seen in Figure 7. He takes a seat on the piano stool and in a remarkable moment – wonderfully directed by Hitchcock – he takes a tentative sip of his drink while Melanie keeps her own drink pressed to her lips. This puts Melanie and Mitch on the same level, almost as if they're both in collusion with each other and both equally afraid. Their fear, however, is misplaced. What ostensibly prompts Mitch to move to a seated position near Melanie, almost in solidarity, is concern over the chickens. He moves precisely when his mother says: 'you don't think there's something going around do you?' (*The Birds*). His anxiety over the chickens could be displaced from his lust/fear relationship with his mother. Melanie, too, fears the overbearing mother figure. Her own mother left her family when she was a child. She never heard from her again. Mitch's mother is a deeply intimidating presence for Melanie – her frequent mistrustful glances at Melanie should be ample evidence for this. Later in the film, Melanie displaces her anxiety towards Mitch's mother by articulating a shade of jealousy, remarking to Mitch that he's lucky to be in such a loving relationship with his mother.

This jealousy of the loving relationship between Mitch and his mother is more than just a displacement of her own feelings of maternal absence. When Melanie remarks to Mitch up on the sand dune: 'you know what a mother's love is' (*The Birds*), she's unconsciously inferring that there's more to this 'mother's love' than merely maternal nurture. She is likely to be tacitly aware of the oedipal tensions that exist between Mitch and his mother, though this awareness may never fully escape the unconscious registry. Melanie becomes a spectator to the weird and unfamiliar Brenner family unit. The very makeup of the family is odd.



Figure 8

Figure 8 presents a compelling case for Hitchcock's defamiliarization of the family unit. In frame are three figures that all contribute to this sense of oddity. The much younger sister, who resembles more of a daughter to Mitch than a sister, talks energetically to Melanie. Melanie is very quickly adopted as part of the family by the naïve girl, who begs and implores Melanie to stay. What Mitch's sister does not realise are the finer intrafamilial conflicts that Melanie's appearance in the Brenner family animates. Later we see Mitch referring to his suspicious mother as 'dear', with a 'husbandly' tone. Finally, in Figure 8, we have the bisected portrait of the absent Brenner patriarch. Not only does the father's absence cast a large shadow over the family, his absence also instantiates the oedipal triangle. In essence, Mitch has already

‘murdered’ his father by assuming the role of the patriarch. The prevailing, figural superego is transferred from the father onto the mother, who recognises in Melanie a threat to the peculiar symbolic order over which she presides.

The attack of the birds is not only an irruption of the real into the symbolic order, but furthermore a manifestation of the maternal superego. The superego regulates behaviour according to appropriate social codes and norms. While the attack of the birds may seem at first random, untamed, chaotic and more akin to the id – the opposite is in fact true. The key to this dynamic can be found in Girard’s theory of mimetic desire. To put it simply, we are not born with the ability to desire – we are taught to desire. This instruction is accreted mainly though mimesis, that is, observing others and mimicking or at least transposing that behaviour. Desire is a socially communicable construct. When two or more people desire the same person, tension and competition evolves. According to Girard, the only way to sublimate this conflict is to defer the origin and continuation of these tensions onto a scapegoat. In the case of Hitchcock’s film, the birds become a convenient scapegoat for Melanie and Mitch’s mother to redirect their interpersonal tension towards. They can thus unite against the attack of the birds, sublimating their own feelings of competition and desire. The attack of the birds can be read as an expression of Mitch’s mother’s unconscious – her desperate desire to prevent Mitch and Melanie from becoming lovers. It is the machinations of an overbearing superego, bleeding into reality itself.

There is, however, a complication in all of this: the striking similarities between the birds and E.T.A. Hoffman’s ‘The Sandman’, who is far more akin to the manifestation of the paternal superego – the father figure – than the maternal. In the haunting story, The Sandman is described as such:

> ‘Oh! he's a wicked man, who comes to little children when they won't go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads all bloody; and he puts them into a bag and takes them to the half-moon as food for his little ones; and they sit there in the nest and have hooked beaks like owls, and they pick naughty little boys' and girls' eyes out with them.’ (Hoffmann 185).

Firstly, there's the gendering of this bird-like monster: 'he'. Secondly, there's Freud's reading of the Sandman in his seminal essay 'The Uncanny'. In this essay, Freud states that 'we know from psychoanalytic experience, however, that the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 68). Furthermore, he states that the fear of losing or damaging one's eyes is a substitute for castration anxiety. Our eyes and, more specifically, the ability to see are inextricably linked to our perceived sense of potency in the world, for how could we exercise agency as able subjects if we were blind – at least so we think. Freud goes on to comment that 'a study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated. The self-blinding of the mythical criminal, Oedipus, was simply a mitigated form of the punishment of castration— the only punishment that was adequate for him by the *lex talionis*' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 68). Lex talionis roughly translates to 'the law of retaliation' and has been encoded biblically as 'an eye for an eye' in Exodus 21:23–27 ("KJV Bible"). Oedipus gouging out his eyes as a substitute for castration has deeper resonances.

As mentioned previously, our eyes are tied to our sense of potency. So, too, for a man are the testicles – the ability to procreate. Castration is not merely terrifying for its dismemberment, it also cuts a man off from their vital functions, their biological telos in the world. In fact, castration's standard definition is 'the state of being deprived of power, vitality, or vigour'. Castration anxiety, according to Freud (cited in Taylor), 'describe[s] a boy's fear of loss of or damage to the genital organ as punishment for incestuous wishes toward the mother and murderous fantasies toward the rival father. The anxiety is validated by the boy's discovery of the anatomical difference between the sexes' (Taylor). Freud goes on to argue that 'castration is not merely a boy's fantasy, but is intensified by environmental factors such as parents or nannies threatening to cut off his penis or offending hand at the time of his early masturbation' (Taylor).

Freud questions:

> For why does Hoffmann bring the anxiety about eyes into such intimate connection with the father's death? And why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disturber of love? He separates the unfortunate Nathaniel from his betrothed and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys the second object of his love, Olympia, the lovely doll; and

> he drives him into suicide at the moment when he has won back his Clara and is about to be happily united to her. Elements in the story like these, and many others, seem arbitrary and meaningless so long as we deny all connection between fears about the eye and castration; but they become intelligible as soon as we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected (Freud, *The Uncanny* 68–69).

But what is the link between the Sandman and 'The Birds'?



Figure 9

Besides the obvious parallels in avian imagery, the key is *eyes*. Both du Maurier and Hitchcock seem preoccupied with the loss of eyes. In du Maurier's story, the children lament after the first attack of the birds that ''they tried to peck us… they went for Johnny's eyes'' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 7). In Hitchcock's film, perhaps one of the most horrifying moments is when Mitch's mother encounters the man in Figure 4, who is a strikingly oedipal figure. We not only have oedipal tensions in Hitchcock's adaptation, but a clear instance of oedipal iconography. We not only have the attack of the birds that represent an irruption of maternal superego, but 'the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 69). The 'dreaded father' figure in Hitchcock's film is obviously the deceased Brenner patriarch, whose portrait not only watches over the household, but also faces the fireplace. The fireplace, as mentioned

before, is metonymic for the homestead – a distinctly maternal image. This inscribes two opposing superegos – the maternal and paternal. It is also worth noting that the birds literally erupt into the Brenner household through the fireplace. The birds are at once both, as Zizek argues, 'obviously explosive outbursts of [the] maternal superego, of the maternal figure preventing, trying to prevent [a] sexual relationship' (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*) and as Freud argues of the Sandman 'the dreaded father' (Freud, *The Uncanny* 69). The real is neither maternal nor paternal, but a synthesis of both. The superego, too, is comprised of both parental figures. In the case of Hitchcock's film, the birds are both an irruption of the real into the symbolic order and an intervention of the maternal and paternal superegos. The conflicting desires of both the maternal and paternal superegos are such that the resulting tension precipitates apocalyptic chaos.

The family unit in du Maurier's short story is far less fraught than in Hitchcock's adaptation. Nat Hocken, whose name is resonant with pastoral echoes, is a war veteran cum farm handyman. Du Maurier sets up Nat to be the ideal fulcrum about which the action of the story – namely, the attack of the birds – unfolds. She does this early on, describing Nat as someone with a 'war-time disability' who performs 'lighter jobs' like 'repairs to the farm buildings' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 1). These skills serve him well later on in the story when he puts them to use boarding up the house to protect his family from the birds' onslaughts. His war-time experience also prepares him somewhat for the attack on home soil – being reminiscent of 'the heavy raids on London' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 23). The exceptional and unprecedented nature of the attacks does not seem to hamper Nat's proficiency in protecting his family. He assumes the archetype of the Father, being able to oversee his family unit and plan for any eventuality.

The archetype of the father is key to both the inner workings of du Maurier's story and Hitchcock's adaptation. At a fundamental level, the father operates as a complete presence in du Maurier's story and a complete absence in Hitchcock's film. By rendering the father as a haunting absence, Hitchcock falls into a distinctly Gothic tradition. According to Kyle Bishop, 'instead of relying exclusively on du Maurier's source text, Hitchcock develops a less obvious sense of menace and terror by tapping into the Gothic literary tradition, creating a cinematic adaptation that is more of an assemblage of antecedents rather than the expected effort at one-to-one fidelity' (Bishop 136). This avoidance of fidelity and preoccupation with certain modes

established, not only in the original text but also in affiliated movements, is consistent with my model of confluent auteurism.

So what should we think of Hitchcock's *The Birds*, then, which makes next to no effort at fidelity? In addition, perhaps tangentially: what should we think of the adaptation, which we feel is *better* than the source text? To address the foremost question first, I would propose that an adaptation that deviates from the source text leaves more space for our phantasy to be retained. In addition, and perhaps this relates to the second question, when an adaptation is created from a new or extended idiom, it surely influences our perceptions of the source text. When I approach du Maurier's story after having watched Hitchcock's adaptation, I am certainly more predisposed to seeking out oedipal imagery, for instance. So, within Hitchcock's adaptation there is an interstice where our phantasy of du Maurier's text can be retained, and there is a simultaneous influence of adaptation on text. For instance, my phantasy of du Maurier's Cornish setting remains relatively intact, being so different to Bodega Bay. However, while my phantasy of the Hocken family may also remain relatively unaltered, I find myself inclined towards reading far more into du Maurier's subtle oedipal encoding – to the point at which I may be reading into something that I would not have read into had I not been exposed to Hitchcock's oedipal idiom in the first place.

Now that I've fully extended these musings, I realise the need to apply the following synthesis to a close reading of the adaptation. Looking closely at confluent auteurism, we have on the one hand a term which seems to release a certain image of balance or equilibrium between text and film. I have shown in this chapter, however, that such a conception obscures just how potent the audio-visual experience of cinema is, and in turn, how comparatively tenuous our phantasy of the text can be. I turn to the formulation of the term itself: confluent / auteurism. Upon closer inspection it seems that this term could just as easily be an oxymoron. After all, surely auteurs *by definition* are distinct entities? There also arises, within me at least, the confusion surrounding the use of the word auteurism in this context. More specifically, am I referring to the confluence of multiple auteurs arriving at the same adaptation, or am I referring to only the auteur that directs the adaptation, whose work in adapting the text can be described as confluent? I return, once again, to the underdetermined nature of the very term I have

formulated. I simply do not have a single meaning that can foreclose the multitudinous possibilities of the term. I also believe this to be a very good thing.

It follows then, that a close reading of any adaptation that exhibits that *both–and* quality, must be underdetermined. A single text relays infinite meanings, as does an adaptation of said text. Like Lacan's real, which lies beyond symbolic apprehension, so does the *both–and* quality of an adaptation. There are simply too many cause-effect dichotomies at play here. Any attempt to recoup such a quality within symbolic apprehension will be very unlikely to find a sufficient explanation. In other words, when a film seems to be both akin to the directorial voice and the voice of the original text, we are reaching for the thing-in-itself – which can never be grasped. This is not a cop-out. This underdetermined quality of certain adaptations engenders a vast amount of freedom to play with certain possibilities and combinations. It is this dynamic that I will now demonstrate in a close reading of a specific slice of film and text.

Back in your gilded cage, Melanie Daniels

> *Into this Passion, the Dark Intention that Valentinus called 'strengthless and female fruit,' the ephebe must fall. If he emerges from it, however crippled and blinded, he will be among the strong poets.* (Bloom 14)

> *But what is the Primal Scene, for a poet as poet? It is his Poetic Father's coitus with the Muse. There he was begotten? No – there they failed to beget him. He must be self-begotten, he must engender himself upon the Muse his mother.* (Bloom 37)

Towards the end of the opening scene in Hitchcock's *The Birds* is a simultaneously compelling and exasperating performance of gendered stereotypes. Mitch asks Melanie, slightly patronisingly, to show him a canary. What ensues constitutes, I suppose, as a climax to the veritable comedy of errors that Melanie initiates when she pretends to be a shopkeeper and Mitch plays along. The back and forth is obviously flirtatious, and the constant reminder of lovebirds, that Mitch is seeking, provides a highly contrived metonym to stand in for their

sexual tension. The lovebirds soon become a typical MacGuffin (a pursued thing which drives the action forward), for Hitchcock at least – who notably adopted the concept in his cinematic canon. Before the lovebirds transition from metonym to MacGuffin, however, is the galling performance I alluded to earlier. My exasperation at certain elements of Hitchcock's direction, especially in relation to gender-performance, will likely be a common theme for this close reading.

As Melanie reaches gingerly into the golden cage to extract the canary, the canary sort of erupts out of Melanie's hands in a flutter of feathers. What follows is a pathetic, in the ineffectual sense of the word, performance done entirely by the two women present while Mitch stands back in amusement. There are a notable number of shots that simply show Melanie and the shopkeeper's hands grasping pointlessly at the bird. These shots are intercut with Mitch watching in a patronising amusement. I'll get to the 'grasping pointlessly' aspect in a bit, for it's analogous to trying to grasp the thing-in-itself. Eventually, after some excruciating seconds of oohing by the two women as they frantically grasp up at the thing-escaped, the bird lands in a shallow bowl. Mitch bites his lip like a man about to do something impressive (in the stereotypical sense, of course), and puts his hat over the bird. He has done the impossible: he has captured the thing-in-itself! He has apprehended the real! Of course not. As soon as Mitch lifts up his hat, for a split second we see an impostor: not a real bird (in the common usage of the word), but an obviously fake substitute. This was probably done for utility sake; it is, after all, much easier (and more ethical) to capture a fake bird than a real live one. However, the implications are far more interesting.

As I've stated before, as soon as the real has been symbolically apprehended, there is an immediate loss of its ineffable quality. I may be conflating Kant and Lacan here, but allow me for a moment to explore the fascinating possibilities. The implication of the impostor-bird, when read through a Kantian-Lacanian lens, is essentially as follows: the real-apprehended becomes a 'fake' avatar or imitation of sorts – not a visual concretisation, but a simulacrum of one. This has wider implications for the birds themselves. The birds, as I've stated before, are vastly underdetermined. While Hitchcock may be presenting a sliver of hermeneutic possibility, which I will discuss in a moment, he is in fact representing a phenomenon that becomes both a MacGuffin, and a red herring. The 'stupid obvious' (*The Pervert's Guide to*

Cinema) question to ask of the film is not necessarily 'why do the birds attack?' which is actually a question of desire – what do they want from us? It becomes instead an ontological question 'what are the birds, really?' If the birds are an instantiation of the real, or the thing-in-itself – and I wonder again if the two can or should be conflated – are they *real*?

Das Ding an sich – the thing in itself – is as central to Kant's philosophy as the real is to Lacan's. The temptation to conflate them can be traced by the relation between what Kant calls the *noumenal* and *phenomenal* realms. The noumenal realm is the world as it really is, beyond our perception of it. The phenomenal realm is the world as it appears to us. These definitions seem to run in close proximity to Lacan's conception of the symbolic and real orders. The symbolic order is our legible 'reality' informed by our linguistic apprehension of it, while the real order, as previously discussed, is that which escapes symbolic apprehension. In terms of the birds' ontology – their state of being in the world – teeters between the real and the symbolic, and possibly the noumenal and phenomenal. I'm sure that my conflation of these two philosophical idioms will seem progressively more unstable and incompatible in light of further study; for now at least, they seem compatible and productively cohesive. The birds, then, are both of the noumenal, real order and the phenomenal, symbolic order – reality as it appears to us.

Now we have the perennial Lacanian confusion between *the* real and real. The real is an abstract concept, 'the impossible' as Lacan states. What is real, or based in reality, is not within the noumenal realm but the phenomenal realm – which could be (again with a conflation) the symbolic domain of linguistic apprehension. We, after all, language our reality based on our sense of it. To return to the birds, then, they certainly have physical dimension. They are not merely apparitions that phase through the cast of characters like phantoms. They draw blood. So they are real in the sense that they can be apprehended. But the ontological question remains underdetermined. Nat Hocken, in du Maurier's story, poses a compelling question towards the end of the narrative:

> 'Nat listened to the tearing sound of splintering wood, and wondered how many million years of memory were stored in those little brains, behind the stabbing beaks, the piercing eyes, now giving them this instinct to destroy mankind with all the deft precision of machines' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 38).

Hidden beneath the veil of the bird's physical presence lies the absence of explanation – in the case of Nat's musings: intent.

Within du Maurier's story, characters' explanations are desperately naturalistic. Nat attributes the initial attack of the birds in the darkened bedroom to a fear-instinct: ''Fright made them do that'' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 7). Later on, notably in the daylight, Nat finds there is ''no explaining it, really'' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 9). In fact, he even muses that 'had it not been for those corpses on the bedroom floor… he would have considered the tale exaggeration too' (du Maurier, *The Birds* 9). In Hitchcock's adaptation, too, we find the corpses of the birds as a split-off, residual fragment of the inexplicable multitudes of birds that survive to attack another day. Like Chigurh, the birds are pure drive without a referent. In the absence of a referent, we find temporary solace in splitting off the symbolic real from the real – the physical, harm-causing dimension of the birds' attacks and their residual corpses, and the silent, nebulous 'instinct to destroy mankind'. We engage in a process of myth-making in an attempt to explain the inexplicable.

One of these myths that is most apparent and appealing is the oedipal. When Mitch says 'back in your gilded cage Melanie Daniels', and later 'I was merely drawing a parallel', he is not just speaking *from* what the interaction and his character motivations necessitate but also *for* an exorbitant elsewhere. In other words he is speaking *for* something outside of the film's context, the subtext having a metonymic resonance. His 'parallel' between Melanie's supposed ostentatious yet restricting background and a literal and metaphorical 'caged-bird' stands in as an early, possible explanation for the birds' later attacks. As mentioned in my earlier filmic analysis, the onslaught of the birds can be seen not only as an irruption of the real into the symbolic, but also an 'explosion of raw incestuous energy' (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*) – an exorbitant maternal (or paternal) superego trying to prevent a sexual relationship from developing between Mitch and Melanie.

Put differently, the birds' attacks can also be seen as an explosion of 'untamed femininity' – revenge against patriarchal patronisation that is deeply entrenched in the world of the film. This explanation seems more tenuous, as the birds attack indiscriminately. However, through the

lens of Zizekian masochism this conception stands amongst the others with a coherent logic. To paraphrase Zizek: masochism becomes an escape from (patriarchal) oppression, wherein the only way to escape the physical and psychical dimension of harm is to harm oneself. The jouissance in the pain, is a release, a temporary freedom from the abuse of the other. Thus the attack of the birds 'misfiring', so to speak, and harming their own progenitors is a masochistic act. The (unconsciously) self-inflicted harm becomes a temporary release – harming oneself to harm the other. Note that when the birds attack Melanie in Mitch's presence, his benevolent-paternal and patronising demeanour quickly dissolves into a more 'feminine' kind of care and tenderness.

As tempting as it may be to go with this interpretation, it has more holes in it than can be patched up. Essentially there's the obvious counter: psychoanalysis is but one of numerous lenses through which to view a text or film, and while it may be fun to pretend that it is a fits-all idiom, it simply is not. Of course a text releases multiple meanings, this is common knowledge. I'm not suggesting that psychoanalysis, as a school of thought, postures itself as a hermeneutic holdall. What I am positing, however, is that while psychoanalysis can be syncretised with other explanatory idioms, it will inevitably (like the others) fall short in trying to account for the real dimension of the birds. Speaking of syncretism, I feel I've done an inadequate job of synthesising my theory with praxis – in other words, textual analysis – so far.

It's almost as if I, myself, have split off an apprehensible element of the real and underdetermined nature of the texts I have explored thus far – exploring them within a certain idiom – all the while advancing my own theory that accounts for an adaptation that is in itself underdetermined. I ask myself, is synthesising an underdetermined theoretical dimension and an underdetermined, idiomatic, textual dimension even remotely possible? I have no idea. I do not think this is a cop-out nor a bad thing. I believe vehemently that ideas should always be open and resistant to any kind of foreclosure, lest they become stale, muted and dogmatic. This dynamic also speaks to the limits of reader-response / reception theory. While it is possible to articulate a theoretical dimension in parallel relation to a textual-analysis one, it almost seems as if never the twain shall meet.

As I've proceeded with these three chapters so far, I have attempted to run these two aforementioned dimensions as closely linked, tending towards each other and with each revealing productive possibilities in the other. After all, what use is theory without praxis and vice versa? In my final chapter I will attempt this alluded-to synthesis, with an adaptation case that, in fact, disappointed my phantasy of the original text. I found Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* to be most underwhelming, when measured against the original text. While my impulse was to articulate 'that's not it' in response to the film, there were still many elements that saturated and overwrote my initial phantasies, to the extent that some of the cinematic material even influenced my proto-phantasy of the text. I experienced a degree of confluent auteurism in this instance, even when I spat out some of the adaptation. In order to probe how this can be possible, I will endeavour to draw those two dimensions as tending towards each other rather than alongside each other. I will explore my proto-phantasy, phantasy of the text, perceived phantasy of the auteur and my (excuse the pun) final phantasy following the film.

Chapter Four – Real Horrorshow, or 'a real show of horrors'

Perfect love casteth out fear and all that cal

> *In the hallway was the good old municipal painting on the walls – vecks and ptitsas very well-developed, stern in the dignity of labour, at workbench and machine with not one stitch of platties on their well-developed plotts. But of course some of the malchicks living in 18A had, as was to be expected, embellished and decorated the said big painting with handy pencil and ballpoint, adding hair and stiff rods and dirty ballooning slovos out of the dignified rots of these nagoy (bare, that is) cheenas and vecks.* (Burgess 25)

> *Faced with this cultural object, which is the fiction film, the impression of reality, the impression of dream, and the impression of daydream cease to be contradictory and mutually exclusive, as they are ordinarily, in order to enter into new relations wherein their usual distinctness, while not exactly annulled, admits an unprecedented configuration leaving room at once for overlapping, alternating balance, partial coincidence, staggering, and ongoing circulation among the three: authorising, in sum, a sort of central and moving zone of intersection where all three can 'meet' each other on a singular territory, a confused territory which is common to them and yet does not abolish their distinctness.* (Metz 141)

I anticipate the criticism that I may be harking back to a long-dead mode of 'theory'. I am referring especially to Lacanian film theory which both predominated film studies in the 1970s-1980s and was considered to be 'the Theory' (McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze" 27). Todd McGowan observes that:

> Film theory today is almost nonexistent. The universalizing claims about the cinematic experience made by figures such as Sergei Eisenstein, André Bazin, Christian Metz, and Laura Mulvey have disappeared. Contemporary film scholars are increasingly content to make local, particular claims about film. This focus on particularity – that is, the analysis of isolated phenomena – completely dominates the field of film studies.

> Amid this contemporary landscape, proffering a universal and totalizing theory of the filmic experience seems outdated and naïve. (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* ix)

Confluent auteurism, then, may be viewed as an 'outdated and naïve' attempt at 'proffering a universal and totalizing theory of the filmic experience'. I freely admit that my formulation teeters ever so precariously on the brink of being either 'totalising' or (what I would hope to be) focused and specific, accounting for an emergent property of reading/spectatorship that can be applied individually as much as universally. The reader is notably, in this formulation, co-creator of meaning in the text. Loosely following Iser, my wish is to provide a lens through which to analyse the 'implied reader'.

In the preface to his excellent book *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*, McGowan insists:

> When I talk about spectatorship, I am talking about the spectator that the filmic text itself demands, not an empirical spectator. Of course, no film ignores its historical context or those who will watch it, but the context and the spectator do not exist in an external relationship to the filmic text. Each film carries its context with it through its aesthetic development, and each film structures its spectator through its specific mode of address. (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* x)

McGowan's point here has a similar resonance to Eco's theory of text-use described in chapter one, that is, the text foments a certain response from the reader whereby that reader cannot be isolated from the text in and of itself. I hope, here, that I have revealed where my theory is situated in existing discourse. To put it more transparently: confluent auteurism maintains its value as a literary theory because it draws conclusions not merely from my own phantasy as reader-spectator, but, more importantly, from the phantasy of an implied reader as released by the text and subsequent film. When I say 'implied reader' I do not mean some nebulous archetype onto which I can project my own phantasies of readership. What I mean is more along the lines of 'the reader as they are *produced* by the text'. This conception certainly does not rob the reader of their agency, rather the idea is that the reader is *guided* towards certain interpretations that they can either accept or reject. The text is suffused with traces and cues that lead the reader towards a certain point – but it is ultimately the reader that has the last word.

As I have proceeded it has become ever more critical to ground my abstract formulations in legible textual dynamics. Confluent auteurism has shown itself to be both a theory of the reader-spectator, and a theory of the text-to-film. Put differently, my theory has drawn from textual cues as they influence my own phantasies and proven that what I think are my own phantasies of text, film and auteur, are in fact inseparable from what the text-to-film demands of me. A compelling example of this dynamic is the way in which the cinematic paratext surrounding Kubrick's adaptation influenced large portions of my proto-phantasy (this will be discussed in more depth in the second section of this chapter) going into the text for the first time. I was already primed by the film to see Alex, as he appears in the text, in a certain light. By the time I watched the film itself my phantasy of Alex almost perfectly aligned with Kubrick's representation. I have come to realise, in retrospect, that I was already seeing Alex in the way the film wanted me to see Alex. Is this anecdote generalizable? Every person will approach text and film differently, having been exposed to a multitude of different paratexts. Some may watch the film and never read the text, and vice versa. Some may have read the text before watching the film, whilst others would have watched the film before reading the text. Surely confluent auteurism cannot purport to account for all these interactions?

Indeed, my formulation only applies when the spectator is perceiving the film *as an adaptation*. Those who are exposed to only one medium or the other form phantasies, yes, but they cannot possibly experience a confluence if they have not been exposed to both text and film. This much is obvious. Where things get a bit tricky is in the idea that we are the auteurs of our own phantasies. When Metz (113) speaks of 'a spectator who is also the *auteur*' of their own dreams, can this be extended to phantasies, too? The word 'auteur' implies sole authorship. While we may be sole authors of our dreams, surely the same cannot be said for our phantasies, which are fomented by an external referent? This may be a convincing rejoinder to the notion of confluent auteurism, were it not for the simple fact that there is no such thing as a sole auteur. Are the phantasies of film directors, in whom we accord the honorific identity of 'auteur', not also fomented by an external referent? Whether that be the screenplay or the novel that inspires the director's phantasy, our phantasies are always already open structures that are susceptible to intertextual crosspollination.

When Metz articulates the fact that 'the reader of the novel will not always find his film, since what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else's phantasy, a thing rarely sympathetic (to the extent that when it becomes so, it inspires love)' (Metz 112), he is implying this very confluence of phantasies. While I could have just left my formulation as 'confluent phantasy', I have taken it a step further by involving a greater sense of authorship and influence over those phantasies. Hence auteurism. In the discussion of *A Clockwork Orange* to follow, I will begin to trace the various stages of phantasy formation as an iteration of progressive authorship. Moreover, I will show how one can experience confluent auteurism, even if the film disappoints their phantasy.

Against this I raise my sword-pen

> *'What's it going to be then, eh?'* (Burgess 3)

> *Certain fiction films have more than 'the air' of a daydream; they derive directly from the daydreams of their author (here again we meet Freud's 'fancy'): films that we call 'autobiographical', works of narcissistic film-makers or young creators particularly bound up with themselves, showing little resistance to the desire to 'put everything' into their film; but this is also true in a more distanced and less adolescent form of many narrative films whose explicit* donnee *has nothing autobiographical about it, and, at the limit, of all fiction films, and even others, since no one would produce anything without his phantasies.* (Metz 132)

Flipping through my copy of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, I am struck by my engagement with the text – especially in terms of annotation, and the profusion of it. Each page is inundated with troves of underlined passages, circles around prominent words, asterisks and 'NB' designations. What is it about this particular text that renders almost every word as significant or prominent in my eyes? It is worth noting that my reading of the text was accompanied by an excellently produced audiobook. Burgess's infamous defamiliarization of language in the text would have made for painfully slow reading were it not for the audiobook which helped me essentially 'glide' over the text – the timbre and texture of the narrator's voice

not only melding seamlessly with the text, but also lending a greater weight to the significations of the words. Since I annotated so emphatically, it would make sense that my phantasies would be 'thick' and full. I do not think this is the case. The sense I got from the text was an overpowering presence of 'voice', which elided richer phantasies.

The language of Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* is notoriously difficult. It runs circles around the reader, always a step ahead. As I became more familiar with the dense Nadsat slang through choice contextual cues, I realised the language itself was teaching me how to understand it. This processual learning was not only satisfying – the satisfaction of comprehension – it was also somewhat pleasurable, blissful, even. Much like Alex's *jouissance* in listening to 'Ludwig Van', the more abrasive aspects of the text – swelling like the strings section, piercing the very fabric of sound with soaring horns – evoked in me a feeling of loss, discomfort, bliss. It may seem oxymoronic to group 'discomfort' and 'bliss' together. How can a state of discomfort evoke bliss and vice versa? This is both the territory of jouissance – which describes a feeling of repletion or over-pleasure to the point of discomfort – and the terrain of the sublime.

In her fascinating book, *Stanley Kubrick: Adapting the Sublime*, Elisa Pezzotta includes this quote from Tarkovsky:

> Touched by a masterpiece, a person begins to hear in himself that same call of truth which prompted the artist to his creative act. When a link is established between the work and its beholder, the latter experiences a sublime, purging trauma. Within that aura which unites masterpieces and audience, the best sides of our souls are made known, and we long for them to be freed. In those moments we recognize and discover ourselves, the unfathomable depths of our own potential, and the furthest riches of our emotions. (Pezzotta 165)

Here we find an alternative terminology of jouissance, or perhaps something of the one is in the other. Either way, studies into a spectator's experience of the sublime seems to be well-trodden ground. In her introduction, Pezzotta (13) maintains that 'thanks to the introduction of the concept of the sublime in adaptation studies, adaptations can be rethought as a recreation of the sublime experiences lived by the director while reading the source novels, listening to

the music that he adapted and, in general, contemplating, appreciating, and experiencing other artists' works. Thus, adaptations can be reinterpreted as an everlasting dialogue among artists and epochs'. It is clear that Pezzotta is approaching this subject from two distinct vectors: the first sees the spectator as participating in a kind of sublime experience, while the second sees the adapting director as an agent of intertextual dialogue, who also experiences the sublime.

While a semi-biographical analysis into Kubrick's own experience of the sublime in reading and adapting Burgess using extradiegetic materials – in other words, interviews, biographies and the like – could be interesting, it is also, in my estimation a futile endeavour. It would most likely turn out to be a hunting of the snark of intentionality. In spite of these impedances, there is a more reliable way of tracing the 'sublime experiences lived by the director': the saturation of presences and absences that the director communicates in the text of the film. The act of tracing a director or author through their text and establishing what kind of Model Reader that text is attempting to produce is so thoroughly obvious and 'done' that it verges on the banal. I hope to reinvigorate this dialectic by introducing confluent auteurism as a lens through which we can approach both the reader as they are *produced* by the text and the author as they are *revealed* by the text. The question arises, then: what kind of Model Reader is Burgess's text eliciting? Selective close reading is called for.

''What's it going to be then, eh?'' (Burgess 3). The refrain that commences each of the three parts. As with almost any 'cult classic', I had been exposed to a degree of paratext (texts outside of the primary text, often written by other people) that kick-started my phantasy, so to speak. I found myself wondering, as I commenced reading (and listening to an excellent audiobook at the same time), 'what *is* it going to be? What's in store for me?' I knew of the text's notoriety. I knew from the blurb of my Penguin Modern Classics copy that 'fifteen-year-old Alex doesn't just like ultra-violence – he also enjoys rape, drugs and Beethoven's Ninth'. I'm mentioning all of this extradiegetic text because it is a crucial component of what forms what I'll call the *proto-phantasy*, that is, the earliest inchoate phantasy that the reader possesses going into a text. The proto-phantasy is highly contingent, of course, on the amount of paratext a reader is exposed to. In my case the image of Alex (see Figure 10) was burned in my mind's eye, long before I had even thought about attempting the text. What makes this image so memorable,

having seen it only momentarily at an unremembered time, is that it represents an explicit encounter with the traumatic real.



Figure 10

The traumatic, terrifying real. In our dreams, it forces us awake – the real being too much to integrate: 'eyes I dare not meet in dreams' (Eliot, "The Hollow Men" 19). In our waking hours it foments a nauseating anxiety – the response, as in the dream, being a flight into the protective ramparts of the symbolic: 'these fragments I have shored against my ruins' (Eliot, "The Waste Land" 430). Copjec (120) identifies relief from this anxiety as 'the setting up of the symbolic as rampart against the real; the symbolic shields us from the terrifying real'. Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* opens with a futuristic yet oddly dated synthesizer-laden soundtrack and an extreme close-up of 'eyes I dare not meet in dreams'. Pale blue-grey, accentuated on the left by iconic eyelashes and framed as if in permanent smirk by the brim of a bowler hat, Alex looks directly at us – the spectators. Without any preceding knowledge of who this person is, those sordid eyes tell us everything we do not want to know. His gaze penetrates us, travels beyond our selves, stretching into invisible eternities.

What is it about Alex's gaze, more specifically his eyes, which arouses in us such anxiety? Rosa et al interrogate and account for a similar dynamic:

> If I am a being looked at, what would the gaze be then? It cannot be the eye, which is the organ of vision; it must be something in its own right, the peculiarity of which can be grasped by articulating the fundamental relationship between gaze and stain, given that, in the world, there is something to look at before there is a sight to see it. In this

> way, the ocellus of animal mimicry is the essential presupposition of the fact that a subject can then, at a later time, see it and remain enchanted by it: in other words, the fascination with the stain is antecedent to the sight that discovers it. The gaze, therefore, is not the eye, and if the ocelli impress it, it is not because they resemble eyes—this is the contribution of Roger Caillois valued by Lacan (1988, [1964b])—but on the contrary, the eyes are able to arouse a sense of intimidation because they resemble ocelli. (Rosa et al. 3)

Lacan (74) asks 'must we not distinguish between the function of the eye and that of the gaze?' He proposes that the stain 'is valuable in marking the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen' (Lacan 74). This 'given-to-be-seen' is ineffable, it is that which exists both inside and outside of our look. Ocelli are intimidating precisely because they evolved to be so.

It would be superficial to attribute our feelings of anxiety and intimidation only to the feeling of being watched when Kubrick opens on Alex's eyes. Yes, the gaze seems to be transmitted from the eyes. It is the eyes that we conventionally associate with watching and being watched. However, as Lacan (95) stresses, 'it was looking at me, all the same. It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated – and I am not speaking metaphorically'. Looking again at Alex's eyes [Figure 10], our focus is drawn almost immediately towards the points of light glistening in his eyes. As we turn to the accompanying image of the owl-like moth in figure 10, we feel a sense of unease. Are the white semi-circles that seem to glisten within the deep-black 'pupils' uncanny because they resemble eyes, or because of their very conspicuousness – the forms themselves?

Following Rosa et al's logic that 'the eyes are able to arouse a sense of intimidation because they resemble ocelli', Alex's eyes transmit the gaze because, like ocelli, they are the point on the perceived object that exists to instil in us a profound sense of lack. While Lacan (73) would argue this is 'the lack that constitutes castration anxiety' thereby an 'acknowledgment of the impossibility to dominate the point in the other from where what the subject to be seen is looked at' (Rosa et al. 3), I would further posit that this lack is in the apprehension of the real. Rosa et al (3) go on to articulate that 'we can see that the gaze in the field of the other is what appears to me as a stain. Now this cleft between the gaze and the eye is like a missed appointment, therefore, a real effect: What I look at is never what I want to see in the other, and of the other,

because what is presented is a veil, something beyond which I ask to see.' We are, in other words, never fully satisfied with our apprehension of the other. There is always something missing. We are always looking beyond the veil of the object's appearance, trying to apprehend its noumenal ontology – the thing-in-itself.

In Alex's penetrating eyes, then, is something of the real, something of the profoundest lack, veiled by a mask of intense aggression and 'ultra-violence'. This is the impression of the protagonist that I had going into the text itself. I had a lucid picture of Alex in my mind's eye, while his fellow 'droogs' faded into a miasma of vague presence. Being a real effect, this introjected image of Alex's gaze represented not merely a formation of a proto-phantasy, it represented, too, a disruption of that very same phantasy. As McGowan (*The Real Gaze* 15) puts it: 'when cinema lulls the subject into its dreamy, fantasmatic netherworld, it may insert the subject into ideology, but it also may open up the possibility of an encounter with the traumatic real that disrupts the power of ideology'. Ideology becomes a cornerstone, then, of this phantasy-production. The presence of the so-called 'big Other' in our symbolic understanding of the world enmeshes us in the linguistic formation of its system, while also limiting our worldview and capacity for seeing things differently.

McGowan (*The Real Gaze* 16–17) goes on to say that 'the encounter with the traumatic real, which is an encounter with a point of non-sense within the big Other (what the big Other cannot render meaningful), frees the subject from its subjection. In the moment of the traumatic encounter, the subject experiences the groundlessness—and ultimately the nonexistence—of the big Other and the symbolic world that the big Other sustains. The traumatic encounter reveals the nonsensical status of our master signifier.' Phantasy-production is, by nature, an imaginary and symbolic operation. Not only are we introjecting and projecting phantasies, we are also resolving within those phantasies a symbolic coherence – an adherence to a sense of meaning in our external and internal worlds. Our phantasies need to 'make sense' in the context of our symbolic reality. When I encountered the real gaze of Alex, it disrupted the very version of ideology the filmic image was invoking and drawing me into. For McGowan (*The Real Gaze* 17), this gives the subject a degree of freedom: 'as a result of the traumatic encounter with the real, freedom opens up for the subject. The point at which the symbolic order fails—and our relation to this point—becomes foundational for us as subjects'. This freedom is important to

consider, since this lability between a structured, Model Reader's phantasy and an exposure to the slippages and gaps within that phantasy provide us with a more nuanced view of our experience of confluent auteurism.

As mentioned before confluent auteurism, while expressing a dialectic between multiple poles, adheres to no binary. It is neither a universally positive or universally negative experience. My phantasy of the novel can be disappointed by aspects of the film and I can still experience this confluence. When I experience a disappointment, and I'll get to an instance of this now, I shore up my symbolic defences to retain my tenuous phantasy. The statement: 'the film wasn't as good as the book' might just as well read 'the film did not satisfy *my phantasy* of the book'. Not only is this disappointment registered in the symbolic and imaginary orders, there is something of the traumatic real in there too. I'll elucidate this triadic dynamic with a concrete example below.

One of the major frustrations I had with Kubrick's adaptation was the blatant nature of so many of his cinematic cues. What was rendered subtle and subtextual in the novel became explicit, almost blaringly loud. The 'Singing in the Rain' motif is one such example. The phantasy produced in me by the text had me imagining the moment that F Alexander starts to unravel as a linguistic slip on the part of Alex. ''Real horrorshow. Written well thou hast, O sir'' (Burgess 119) says Alex, unawares that he has triggered in F Alexander a visceral memory of that violent night that the droogs beat him to a pulp while raping his wife. Later, a further slippage occurs when Alex says in passing ''nor am I dim'', to which F Alexander muses ''Dim. That was a name somewhere, Dim'' (Burgess 121). These slippages, where the traumatic real of that violent night breaks through the symbolic net of language, where words and 'manners of speech' begin to transcend their intended significations, are a deeply textual way of making this revelation known to the reader. My phantasy, which was likely in line with the Model Reader as produced by the text, was ridden with anxiety and dread at Alex's slip-ups. I could imagine the storm of chaotic nerves firing in poor F Alexander's body. All in all, I could see how language could both protect Alex, and render him vulnerable.

Kubrick's cinematic conversion of this scene is, as Robert Stam would put it, 'automatically different'. While Burgess worked solely within the textual domain, Kubrick had the opportunity to represent, through affective response and other visual cues the revelation of F Alexander. Instead of using language to create this slip-up by Alex, Kubrick utilises diegetic music: Alex singing. On that sordid night when Alex and his droogs commit unspeakable atrocities in F Alexander's 'HOME', Alex belts out 'Singing in the Rain', timing every beat with a sharp kick or the like. This lodges as an auditory cue. It's immediately defamiliarising, taking a classic out of Hollywood's songbook and violently subverting it.

I would not have minded this motif were it not so forcefully, abrasively contrived later in the film when Alex, in F Alexander's bath, for no legible reason begins to belt out the very same song. This is intercut with a disturbing ultra-low angle of F Alexander having some kind of seizure of remembrance. It becomes painfully obvious to the audience what F Alexander has recalled. This is a moment, in my estimation, in which Kubrick 'spoon-feeds' the audience. This is of course controversial to say, and I'm sure many would vehemently disagree. I would invite such disagreements for the very reason that it would further prove my point! Confluent auteurism is a give and take: while I take umbrage with Kubrick's directorial licence, fiercely defending my phantasy of the text as 'more nuanced', I have no doubt that others may relish in these moments. While I see it as 'dumbing down' and 'overly contrived', others may take pleasure in these very aspects of it. In each and every case of ceaseless argument – attack and defence – we enrich our phantasies. Whether that is in defending our textual phantasy, or *adapting* to a new filmic phantasy, the process is always paradigmatic: driven by reaction-formation or radical acceptance.

Stop the film!

> *Projective identification, by definition, affects the sense of self, since it involves getting rid of aspects of the personality through splitting them off and locating them in the object, so that in the subject's phantasy the* identities of both subject and object *are affected*. (Sodre 43)

> *The fascinating image of a double is therefore ultimately nothing but a mask of horror, its delusive front: when we encounter ourselves, we encounter death.* (Zizek 21)

I'd like to take a step back at this point in aid of reconciling how a richly nuanced and brilliant film, that is shocking as much as exhilarating, can still disappoint my dear phantasy of the text. Why is it that I so dogmatically rage against so-called 'spoon-feeding', ardently defending the precursory text as 'so much better than the film, so much less explicit and Carnivalesque' than Kubrick's realisation? In this last section, I'd like to explore this dynamic further, and move towards an understanding of confluent auteurism that accounts for not only its experience as a perception, but also as a psychic necessity to keep our phantasies intact, for the film and text to remain the 'good object'. What I've come to realise, is that in trying to derive a new theoretical formulation to account for a very niche experience, I was unwittingly traversing the fascinating realm of phantasy erasure / retention without stopping for a moment to untangle these densely overdetermined concepts. I approached this thesis from so many different vectors that the current formulation of confluent auteurism still does not seem to satisfy me.

As I will go on to show in this section, I believe all of these realisations to be especially helpful in light of the fact that I will be extending some of the ideas explored here into my doctoral dissertation. It's important to bear in mind that this thesis can never be a neatly-packaged standalone product. It has been drawn from my honours thesis and will be extended into my doctoral thesis. The joy inherent in this process has been allowing myself the freedom to explore ideas of my own formulation, while loosely brushing up against existing thought. This thesis has very much been a hermeneutic exercise that has continually evolved as I've gone on. Even as I write this, a part of me says of confluent auteurism 'no, that's not it'. Such are the hazards of theorising within a Lacanian idiom: the real cannot be escaped, as we find ourselves obsessively repeating and iterating upon the symbolic cracks left in its wake.

As mentioned previously, we experience the gaze of the traumatic real all too readily in the field of the dream. On a few occasions throughout this dissertation I have redirected my focus into detailed analyses of particularly pertinent dreams. I have found that certain dreams, ones that we retain a particular phantasy of long after waking, figure in my internal world to the

point that they figure, too, in my writing. These dreams echo like ghostly presences in my work, which (ironically) in and of themselves are saturated with ghosts. I would be remiss not to acknowledge my somewhat late encounter with the work of Ignes Sodre, which has so greatly enlarged my ongoing (re)formulation of confluent auteurism. Sodre (24) elaborates on how 'Freud (1915) discovered that unconsciously we invent ghosts because of our sense of guilt in relation to the dead; our ambivalence turns them into 'evil demons that have to be dreaded'; the proof of their existence is their persistence in living in our memory'. The connection between my aforementioned dreams of a many-eyed black cat or oneiric thesis with introjected dream-ghosts will likely seem oblique at this point, not to mention the connection between said ghosts and phantasy erasure / retention. The key is in object relations, as expounded by Sodre in *Imaginary Existences*.

I'd like to begin this process of synthesis and exposition with a brief account of a recurring dream I've had since my grandfather (lovingly nicknamed Peeko) died in 2010. The dream often entails a family gathering, wherein I usually feel preoccupied or out of sorts. At some point during this gathering, Peeko will arrive completely unexpectedly, much to my fevered enchantment. He will be standing completely upright, with a beautifully straight back which will perplex me as throughout his life he was crippled by a hunched-back deformity. My delight will soon dissolve into suspicion as I invariably ask him 'where have you been for so long? I thought you were dead! Why did you leave us, only to return now?' I always remember these dreams vividly upon waking up. I also often feel the need to explain or talk about the dream to someone. My phantasy around the dream turns on the premise that Peeko's revenant appearances mark some iteration of spiritual visitation.

According to Sodre (24), in the field of the dream 'the dead object, in phantasy murdered by one's death wishes, comes back to haunt the mind in a tormenting way, since it cannot be made to live again, and cannot entirely die, that is to say, disappear from the internal world'. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Peeko was afflicted with a hunched-back as well as coughing fits that would rack his entire body. If I think about it carefully, candidly, I can acknowledge that, while he was alive, I had phantasies of Peeko dying so that his suffering (and mine, vicariously) would end. Sodre sums up this dynamic as follows:

> In a normal mourning process, in the depressive position, guilt for the damage inflicted on the object, now lost, has to be faced, to permit a process of internalisation to take place in which the object gradually becomes established in the internal world. Loss and responsibility for ambivalence have to be accepted so that the object can live in memory. But when guilt is unbearable, and the damage inflicted on the object is felt to be irreparable, manic defences are used pathologically, to annihilate the object. The inner world becomes populated with ghosts, rather than with memories, and the capacity to perceive internal reality has to be constantly attacked. At the threshold of the depressive position, the paranoid fear of retribution – 'an eye for an eye' – becomes the fear of the superego's accusing eyes, as well as the hatred for the mind's eye, which is tormented by the suffering internal objects who have turned into ghosts. (Sodre 39)

I was only thirteen when Peeko died, so I doubt I had the emotional capacity to reconcile my unconscious annihilatory feelings towards him – and thus a relief – with the exigencies of my grief. The fact that I still have vivid dreams where he returns as an apparitional presence demonstrates to me that I've never fully reconciled these two forces. There is the real of the dream that points towards my unassimilable guilt and the phantasy of the dream – the wish-fulfilment part – that points towards my longing to be reunited with the lost object. My phantasy, in which a séance occurs, is thus profoundly at odds with the real of the actual dreams. My phantasy protects and defends against the onslaught of the guilt I feel, while the dream quickly erases that phantasy and supplants it with overwhelming visual and auditory imagery that reveal (albeit opaquely) the depth of that same guilt.

As discussed previously, when the diegetic real of the dream approaches the non-diegetic real of the waking world we are forced awake – the real becoming too much to assimilate. What I have not yet discussed explicitly is our tendency to generate phantasies around those dreams upon waking. In the case that the depth of our guilt has been revealed, we are suffused with phantasies of self-soothing: 'that was not real', or, 'it was just a dream', or (perhaps when the dead object has appeared as a ghost) 'they have visited me in my dream to communicate something, to try to reach me'. Phantasies arise as a critical psychic necessity to defend against the real of the bad object and the real of our guilt associated with that object.

I have not raised these thoughts tangentially, for they relate directly to my primary concerns regarding phantasy and confluent auteurism. I have come to the realisation that confluent auteurism is not merely a theoretical formulation proffered as an explanation for a particular reader-spectator perception; confluent auteurism is, in itself, a phantasy of my own. From the beginning I was sustained by a seemingly unanswerable question: 'how can a film adaptation be both its own distinct thing and yet still hold so much resonance with the original text, as if the two are intertwined so closely that the lines between the two mediums start to blur?' Without consciously realising it, I was engendering a phantasy of film and text that would maintain both as good objects. Confluent auteurism was only possible as a phenomenon because I willed it to be so – I saw what I wanted to see in both. But why is it important to maintain positive object relations with text and film? The answer lies in *projective identification*.

Rosenfeld (quoted in Sodre), identifies the contours of identification as follows:

> Identification is an important factor in narcissistic object relations. It may take place by introjection or by projection. When the object is omnipotently incorporated, the self becomes so identified with the incorporated object that all separate identity or any boundary between self and object is denied. In projective identification parts of the self omnipotently enter an object, for example, the mother, to take over certain qualities that would be experienced as desirable, and therefore claim to be the object or part-object. Identification by introjection and by projection usually occur simultaneously. (Sodre 42)

It has already been established that when we read a text, we fashion a phantasy of that text. What I have not yet articulated is why we form a phantasy in the first place and how that phantasy is constructed. Admittedly, the 'why' is far too underdetermined to attempt to approach in this dissertation. I might proffer that a phantasy is fomented out of some set of psychical operations, both conscious and unconscious, that allow for language to be assimilated and understood through a more readily accessible framework: the (internalised) image. The 'how' has already been alluded to above: when we read a text we project ourselves onto that object while almost simultaneously introjecting that projected-upon object in order to assimilate it into our internal world. Projective identification accounts for this dual dynamic of projection and introjection. A fitting example was explored in an earlier chapter: by projecting

myself into the world of Harry Potter, whereby my sense of self was bound up in my phantasy of the textual object, I was inclined to maintain that phantasy to protect my ego against threat. That threat comes in the guise of the film adaptation.

Upon watching the film, our phantasy of the text is at risk of total erasure. Like facing ghosts in our dreams, in which we will have to hastily re-stitch a phantasy around that traumatic encounter in order to protect our ego from the real of our own guilt, and the punitive superego that attends it, I contend that we face ghosts in our dreamlike reception of the film. These ghosts arise not out of persecutory guilt, but rather out of encountering the double. We see in the onslaught of images our phantasies made *real*, our faceless characters given flesh and feature. We see ourselves, we see everything that we have projected onto the textual object cast directly back at us. We see death – the death of our ego-bound phantasy and its recodification in the flesh of images. In other words, our phantasies prior to the film arise as a necessity of comprehension and assimilation, while our phantasies after the film are a heady combination of refurbished images made vivid and a defence against those very images, to retain our original phantasy – of which we were so inextricably a part.

With introspection, what lies behind my disappointment in elements of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is a reluctance to give up my own phantasy which I feel better serves and embraces the text. Not only does this position afford the text a great deal of primacy over the film, it also belies the fact that my phantasy is an internal object, while the film is an external object. When an internalised object (textual phantasy) comes up against a new external object (film adaptation) that has to be assimilated, the boundaries between self and other are put into contestation. As Sodre puts it:

> Excessive use of projective identification can lead, on the one hand, to confusion and loss of a firm sense of self, and on the other, to an extreme rigidity in character, where artificial new boundaries are created between subject and object, and are then tenaciously adhered to; in this case, the new boundaries between what's 'me' and what's 'you' have to be maintained as a fortress against the threat of the return of the split-off projected parts of the self, which results not in confusion but in its extreme opposite, in an absolute certainty which has to be maintained at all costs, to the

> impoverishment of the personality, and serious disturbance in the capacity for object relations. (Sodre 44)

Since we embed parts of ourselves in the film through projective identification, it would make sense, then, that these 'split-off' parts of the self will haunt the boundaries between what is 'us' and what is 'them' – the 'them' being the objects on the screen. Parasocial relationships, in which we develop powerful attachments to those we see on our screens, has been well-documented. Say I were to develop a parasocial attachment to Alex – he is, after all, the hero of the story and the point around which our affective responses revolve – where it feels like I am still inhabiting his reality upon returning to the 'waking world', I'm sure many of us have experienced that rarefied, shimmering sense of our reality having just watched an immersive film. Say my sense of reality, and its affective dimensions, become so bound up in Alex-the-other that the boundaries between what is 'me' and what is 'him' start to blur. This is where maintaining 'absolute certainty' comes in – where we assert a very decisive split and we spit out the heretofore absorbed other.

This stringency, which could arise as the tendency to argue 'it wasn't as good as the book', or, 'it wasn't how I imagined it', obfuscates the assimilation of internal and external objects that confluent auteurism (as a perception) promises. To say, like I did earlier in this chapter, that confluent auteurism can be experienced even in the event that my phantasy has been disappointed by the film, serves to maintain good object relations between text and film while also assimilating as much of the external object as our ego permits. While confluent auteurism is a useful formulation to account for the 'both–and' quality of certain adaptations, it's formation through a complex process of projective identification cannot be overlooked.

As I draw this chapter, as well as this dissertation, towards its conclusion, I'd like to proffer a critical reading of an aspect of both text and film that perhaps best describes what I've set out to do throughout. In doing so, I will simultaneously weave recollections of my phantasy's encounter with the film as external object, in order to underpin the previous abstractions in concrete praxis. The aspect of text and film I will be discussing entails the attempts made by Dr Brodsky to deploy cinema as a means to overwrite Alex's delinquent behaviour through the expurgation of his ultraviolent phantasies.

In the text, our first glimpse into Alex's sordid phantasies occur in the intimacy of his bedroom, where surrounded by stereo speakers 'on ceiling, walls, floor, so, lying on [his] bed slooshying the music, [he] was like netted and meshed in the orchestra' (Burgess 26). Lying supine with his 'gulliver on [his] rookers on the pillow, glazzies closed, rot open in bliss, slooshying the sluice of lovely sounds' (Burgess 26) he experiences what could only be described as orgasmic jouissance: 'then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven… Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh' (Burgess 26). As the music 'comes', Alex describes not only the sublime corporeality of the instruments, but also how he 'knew such lovely pictures' (Burgess 27). These pictures are phantasies of ultraviolence, generated not through the assimilation of textual material, but rather through the assimilation of auditory material.

In these phantasies, Alex sees 'vecks and ptitsas, both young and starry, lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and [he] was smecking all over [his] rot and grinding [his] boot in their litsos. And there were devotchkas ripped and creeching against walls and [him] plunging like a shlaga into them, and indeed when the music, which was one movement only, rose to the top of its big highest tower, then, lying there on my bed with glazzies tight shut and rookers behind my gulliver, I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it' (Burgess 27). Bearing in mind Alex's apparent orgasm towards the end of the quoted passage, notice the projective identification occurring within these phantasies. He is simultaneously projecting violent desires onto variations in the music and introjecting (assimilating and internalising) them. His phantasies are part external object made internal and part precursory desire.

Kubrick follows the contours of this scene very closely, augmenting it with his own trademark stylization. He details his intentions with the film as follows:

> I'd say that my intention with *A Clockwork Orange* was to be faithful to the novel and to try and see the violence from Alex's point of view, to show that it was great fun for him, the happiest part of his life, and that it was like some great action ballet. It was necessary to find a way of stylizing the violence, just as Burgess does by his writing style. The ironic counterpoint of the music was certainly one of the ways of achieving this. All the scenes of violence are very different without the music. (Nelson 134)

Music is central not only to Kubrick's signature stylisation of the violence, but also to the very conception and representation of violent phantasy in the film. This notion is consistent with Beate Schirrmacher's (33) assessment that 'the textual ambiguity of *nadsat* is transmediated in different forms in the blends of noise and music, in the visual mirrorings and even in the images that self-reflexively highlight the violent aspects of the audiovisual medium of film. Together, they are able to evoke all-pervasive visual uncertainty that constantly evokes contrasting values and attitudinal ambivalence which is similar to *nadsat* narration in the novel'. Indeed, Kubrick's deployment of patently cinematic techniques draws attention to the medium as message; the message being, film language – in contrapuntal relation to nadsat language – is underdetermined, evoking profound feelings of 'attitudinal ambivalence'.



Figure 11

Kubrick's cinematic version of the scene wherein Alex apparently masturbates to a piece of classical music encapsulates the notion that phantasy, as a mode of projective identification, can be represented audiovisually in a way that draws attention to its own artifice. We see Alex unsheathing a tape recording of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, performed by the Berliner Philharmoniker, and inserting it into an expensive-looking hi-fi system. The drama of the eminent six-note introduction and short percussive roll is further complemented by a medium shot of a poster-blind with the etched portrait of Beethoven himself followed by a fast zoom into an extreme close-up of Beethoven's furrowed expression and dark eyes. Schirrmacher points out that the portrait of Beethoven eerily resembles the face of Mr Alexander (see figure 11). This theme of doubling, resemblance and association runs throughout the film, but becomes especially marked in this scene.

Schirrmacher observes how the deployment of movement (or the lack thereof) draws attention to the cinematic medium, while simultaneously provoking attitudinal ambivalence:

> The shots from Alex's room and the imagery that follows all present different (unexpected) motion of supposedly inert bodies: the portrait of Beethoven (with a resemblance to Mr Alexander) moving in the breeze, the living snake in front of a painted body, the figure of Christ multiplicated and dancing. Even in the subsequent imagery, the bride falling to her death, the undead vampire, the volcanic eruptions and the rock avalanches, movement is not a sign of life but of death and lethal threat. When the visual rhythm starts to align to the musical rhythm, the cutting of the film becomes violent, too, as it literally cuts the body of Christ into pieces. Accordingly, the passage provokes attitudinal ambivalence towards the very building blocks of film, the movement of (inert) images, the inherent violence of the cutting and the editing. (Schirrmacher 33)

Association, resemblance and doubling all figure in my reception of this passage of scenes. There's the traumatic gaze of Beethoven, repeated twice (doubled), which bears resemblance to both Mr Alexander (encountered in the HOME scene) and, perhaps more readily, the traumatic gaze of Alex in the opening shot of the film. This is followed by a heavy-handed gesture at Edenic iconography: we see a living snake wrapped around a section of repurposed lumber, seemingly sniffing around the obscured vaginal orifice of a suggestive painting of a nude woman. The very same painting, from a similar angle, is reflected in Alex's mirror a few shots before the Beethoven sequence. It's almost as if the camera, which tracks down the exposed body of the painted woman, to the snake, and then to the quadruplet-figurines of Christ doing the cancan, is following Alex's gaze in the mirror. This is further exaggerated by a lengthy close-up of Alex, squirming in apparent masturbatory concentration, while the darkened portrait of Beethoven looms in the background, out of focus. As Alex says 'as I slooshied, I knew such lovely pictures' we see that same extreme close-up of Beethoven once again. As such, there's a doubling not only of Beethoven's gaze, but also of Alex's intense gaze, too. This doubling serves, especially in the montage of Alex's phantasies to follow, to emphasize that music (especially that of 'Ludwig Van') figures inextricably in Alex's 'lovely pictures' of ultraviolence.

It comes as no surprise, then, that when faced with Dr Brodsky's cinematic Pavlovian instrument, in particular the gross distortion of Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' that accompanies Nazi imagery on the screen, Alex screams repeatedly 'it's a sin! It's a sin!' When Brodsky leans forward in interest, asking what Alex means by that desperate assertion, Alex decries 'using Ludwig Van like that, he did no harm to anyone!' The irony in such a statement goes beyond the obvious association that Kubrick has already made between Beethoven and Alex's violent phantasies (and later actions). The parodic timbre of Beethoven, and the Nazi footage it supplements, draws attention to our ambivalent relationship with inherently 'violent' classical music. Only when the music is supplemented by clearly marked imagery of ultraviolence, does Alex (and, in turn, the audience) make the connection between music and violence. Kubrick's exploration into 'using' Beethoven, either by Alex in a masturbatory context to drive his phantasies, or by Brodsky in a conditioning context to erase those phantasies, exemplifies how music inhabits an ambivalent position in both Alex's psyche and the cinematic apparatus.

Ultimately, Brodsky's initial success in reconditioning Alex has as much to do with the phantasy-erasing capability of cinema as it has with the utilisation of drugs to induce sickness through association. My pointing this out is not merely incidental. *A Clockwork Orange's* depiction of reconditioning Alex's violent phantasies through the more potent medium of the cinema bears an indexical relation to this dissertation's conceptual foundation. Drawing this parallel is most certainly not in aid of arguing that cinematic adaptations are purposely contrived to erase our phantasies of the text through a process of reconditioning. It is merely drawn to illuminate how the experience of phantasy erasure can be parenthetically likened to reconditioning, in that the experience of the cinematic image (and soundscape) interpenetrates our textual phantasies so powerfully that they can, and probably will, be fundamentally altered and refurnished. Just as Alex has to readjust to a world in which music no longer induces 'such lovely pictures', we, too, have to readjust to a transformed frame of reference in which the text no longer induces the same phantasies to which we have become accustomed. We have to cope with this loss and acclimatise ourselves to the received-phantasy left in our original phantasy's stead.

These formulations, however, belie one vital consideration: phantasies are profoundly indeterminate and labile. Textual phantasies are fomented as internal, active processes while cinematic images and sounds are received as external, passive processes. Perhaps the potency of cinema lies in our passive reception of it, the image and sound conveyed being received through the path of least resistance. Perhaps we cling to our textual phantasies because they are not only internalised through projective identification, but are also done so through an active process of assimilation and imagination. Confluent auteurism, bearing in mind these considerations, arises as a psychic defence to protect and retain what's internal while simultaneously assimilating what is external in a harmonious way. I will round off these considerations in the conclusion to follow.

Conclusion

At the start of this project I set out to explain a niche phenomenon I had discerned in the Coen Brothers' adaptation of *No Country for Old Men*: how was it possible that the film adaptation seemed at once both Coenesque and McCarthyesque? In my honours thesis, I derived the term 'confluent auteurism' to account for this dynamic. With a heady sense of arrival, that I had 'coined a new term', that my academic career may turn on that initial impetus, I advanced the notion (predominantly in my Masters proposal) that I was attempting to derive a 'new theory of authorship'. Seeing this 'both–and' phenomenon from an authorial perspective allowed me to explore and progress through competing idioms of authorial presence and intentionality. From structuralism to poststructuralism, I approached the question of authorial confluence through (to name a few) a Barthesian, Foucauldian and Derridean lens respectively. I drew up complex topologies – diagrams that intersected in exciting ways – in order to better illustrate what it was that I meant by 'confluent auteurism'.

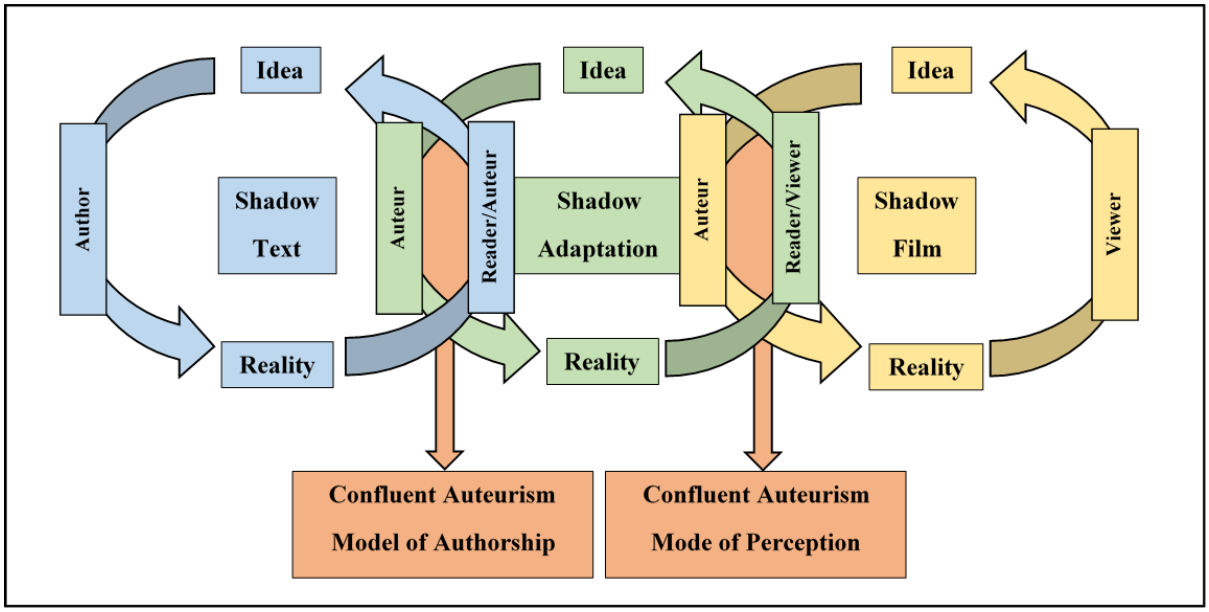

Figure 12

In figure 12, above, I have included the topology I arrived at. It goes without saying that none of this made it into my final dissertation, yet it formed a central part in the evolution of an idea. I will not attempt to explain the above diagram in detail, for I fear that even I, myself, have lost

the capacity to fully comprehend it – such is the trap of attempting to diagrammatically represent pure abstractions. I will say that T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Hollow Men', especially the lines 'Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the Shadow' figured heavily in this topology (Eliot, "The Hollow Men" 89–92). I recognise that it may be jarring to encounter an entirely different and illegible set of ideas in the *conclusion* of a dissertation, however, this project has always had the auto-ethnographic, meta-awareness that this has been a heuristic exercise. The evolution of the theory is, in my view, as important as the final theoretical formulation.

From a cave of shadows (and authorial intention), I eventually emerged into the sunlit world of things and what lay behind those things: the real. Such was my introduction to Lacan, and the exciting possibilities of psychoanalytic theory. Once immersed in this idiom, I found myself, once again, drawing up topologies. Having identified that the Idea / Reality / Shadow triad could be convincingly mapped onto Lacan's orders of the Imaginary / Symbolic / Real, I was enthralled. Here was a topology that seemed to circumvent the intransigence of authorial intention into the realm of something truly unknowable. Captured as I was by the indeterminacy of the shadow, the real felt like (for lack of a better term) a new, shinier thing. In this idiom I felt both freer than before, and more restrained. As I was grappling with the sheer complexity of Lacan's Seminar XI, I was unwittingly projecting my own psychical narrative onto that very material.

It is here that I acknowledge that a sizeable portion of the work I did within this framework was informed by and gestated in a therapeutic context. I mean this literally. The years spent on confluent auteurism and its attending ideas were also spent in a rewarding period of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. While I admit that I often brought my ideas into the sessions as an intellectual defence against the very real I was theorising, my dissertation would also not be the same without it. My evolution away from authorial theory towards a psychoanalytically-informed reception theory cannot be separated from my immersion in this mode of psychotherapy; theories of authorship did not seem to offer the kind of answers I was unconsciously seeking. My encounter with Lacan's *objet petit a*, which in itself was a revelation, offered a way into theorising the seemingly impossible: how can an adaptation appear as a confluence of authorial presences while still maintaining a marked sense of

individuation? *Objet petit a*, as the object-cause of desire, also arose as an expression of my deep curiosity and proclivity to navigate various, contrasting theoretical positions. The idea that there was a profound and insatiable lack behind my patterns of thinking and desire could no longer be ignored.

As my thinking and reading took on this Lacanian inflection I began to realise, albeit inchoately, that the term 'confluent auteurism' no longer adequately fitted its definition. Indeed, I had shifted quite drastically from describing an external phenomenon to revealing an interior psychical process. Yet, despite this growing awareness, I still clung to the term like a lodestone. Perhaps it was out of a stubborn commitment to what seemed like an original formulation, or, perhaps it was for the simple reason that to alter the term at such a late stage in the project would involve radical (and seemingly insurmountable) revisions of critical aspects of the dissertation. So, I left the term as-is, hoping that by 'democratising' the word auteur – that we are auteurs of our own phantasies – would maintain the term's primacy and relevance.

What I felt myself reaching towards, by the end of the project, was a way to describe a psychical process of assimilation and conflation of different phantasies. There was also a growing feeling of necessity that, in drawing these formulations into a doctoral dissertation, there would need to be a shift in terminology that matched the shift in theory. I was ready to proffer such a formulation in this conclusion, that the process I was now theorising could be best delineated by the term *phantasy conflation*, and while I like this lambent new term (it's certainly easier to say), I am hesitant to latch onto it. While I think this resistance is productive, in that it allows me a degree of latitude in my doctoral research to come, I also acknowledge the unusual situation I've put myself in. It's certainly not standard procedure in a dissertation to not only problematise the term that represents the theory, but to also submit a more fitting, supplementary term in the conclusion of that very dissertation. In spite of all this, I find myself increasingly drawn toward academic candour and my curiosity continues to abound.

It is with this heady sense of candour that I present my closing thoughts. This project has been a profoundly nourishing journey in which I have navigated the likes of Lacan, Metz, McGowan,

Bloom and Barthes only to emerge with even more curiosity than before, ready to embark on the next voyage. At the heart of this journey was phantasy itself, or at least the graspable traces of it, for phantasy is, in itself, so individual, so indeterminate, that to theorise it is more an exercise in ceaseless introspection than in reification. It is phantasy that I will cling on to as I continue to interrogate the psychical processes behind it and its interactions with different media. Phantasy-studies has great potential for further exploration, especially in the realm of intermedia research. The ways in which phantasies are fomented, erased, retained, supplanted and augmented are endlessly fascinating to me. It strikes me that specialising in a field that straddles film and literature will present exciting opportunities for different kinds of research postings. Ultimately, like dreams, phantasies offer their own version of remarkable revelations. It is in their legible interactions that they reveal themselves in all their infinite impermanence.

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

- Excerpted from *Ulysses* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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