DARK TIME(S):
NON-LINEAR NARRATIVES IN THE POSTMODERN FILM NOIR

by

BROCK POULIN

B.F.A., The University of Regina, 2000
B.Jour., Ryerson University, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Film Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2005

© Brock Poulin, 2005
Abstract

In cinematic circles, much has been made of the film noir genre. While debates continue to circulate about what exactly film noir is and how films can be seen to fit this model, contemporary examples of the film noir produced in the last ten years have begun to exhibit an exciting and inventive postmodern tendency: a non-linear narrative structure. Narratives are scrambles, run backwards, replay a significant moment several times or are a blend of two or more of these innovative narrative tropes. I will be looking exclusively at these films and have termed them post/neo/noirs. Thus, those films that feature an intersection between the film noir, the postmodern and feature an unconventional and non-linear narrative structure will form the basis for this study.

I will first present a brief summary of the existing scholarship dedicated to film noir as well as my own original template of essential film noir characteristics. Next, a framework outlining the fundamental and recurring characteristics of postmodern theory will be established, as this will be the major theoretical structure used to dissect and analyze the films within this thesis. Chapters I-IV will act to show the distinct types of post/neo/noirs, provide a close analysis of ten recent films, and show how certain films and sub-categories of the post/neo/noir emerge as more successful and important cultural texts.

The argumentation and subsequent conclusions of this thesis will be threefold:

a) The post/neo/noir sub-genre is fundamentally postmodern and produces transnational texts that embrace these concerns.
b) Only those post/neo/noirs that fully incorporate both postmodern filmmaking impulses and a deft merging of film form and content are effective at producing a significant commentary.

c) Not only is film noir a stable genre category, it can be seen as a dominant one, as films that fit the film noir framework can be considered film noir regardless of what other genres they might seem to otherwise belong to.

d) The post/neo/noir has the potential to offer a vital, profound and complex social criticism and is designed for consumption and interpretation by a sophisticated postmodern audience.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents.......................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgements....................................................................................................... v

INTRODUCTION Post/Neo/Noir: A New Sub-Genre......................................................... 1

CHAPTER I Freezing the Clock: Examining Moment of Impact Films.............................................. 22

CHAPTER II Rewinding the Clock: Memento, Irreversible and the Backwards Narrative.................. 48

CHAPTER III Mixing It Up: Genre-Blending, Postmodernity and the Scrambled Narrative.................. 68

CHAPTER IV Unlocking the Blue Box: A Close Critical Analysis: Mulholland Drive.......................... 80

CONCLUSION Post/Neo/Noir Now...................................................................................... 105

Filmography.................................................................................................................. 109

Works Cited.................................................................................................................... 111
Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my patient and generous thesis advisor, Dr. Brian McIlroy, for his encouragement and guidance. I would also like to acknowledge the rest of the faculty, administrative and support staff of the UBC Film Program, especially Dr. Lisa Coulthard for her assistance with resources and her helpful feedback; and Richard Payment, film librarian, for his understanding.

To my fellow colleagues and the undergrad students from my tutorials: our conversations, debates and laughter have made my time at UBC a pleasure and helped me write this thesis in ways you can't imagine.

As always, thanks to Cathè and Glen Poulin for their continued and unflagging support.
Introduction: Post/Neo/Noir: A New Sub-Genre

The existing scholarship dedicated to defining film noir is, for the most part, vague, uncertain, unstable, temporally limited and highly contradictory. The term “film noir” was retroactively coined in 1955 by French film critic Nino Frank in response to the collective malaise that began to become apparent in post-World War II American cinema (Spicer 2). Thus, the classic Hollywood film noirs were not made under the rules and conventions of an established genre, but were created somewhat unintentionally. The films themselves could be very generally described as dark, crime-filled, psychological thrillers with a thematic focus on ambiguous morality. However, in the six decades of discourse that have emerged since the genre was established, theoretical debates have circled the question, “what is film noir?” Is it a genre? Or is it a filmmaking style, a cycle of films, or, more abstractly, a tone or mood? Is it all of the above? Do style and story necessarily work together or is it possible to divorce the two?

In his 1986 book, Dark City: The Film Noir, Spencer Selby understatedly calls the film noir, “the most slippery of all film categories,”
(Selby 3) and most other writers who focus on the same area agree, as does an examination of how critics have approached this body of films. Further complicating a summary of the existing scholarship surrounding this elusive genre, many critics disagree on the specific characteristics, themes and elements that comprise the film noir. As well, nearly all believe, problematically, that the film noir period ended in the late 1950s and they all assign postclassical film noirs names such as neo-noir or pseudo-noir, without ever really explaining the key differences meriting a new term. The closest most critics get to defining new noirs is to explain that contemporary film noirs reference and play with conventions of classical Hollywood examples of the genre. This evolution of film noir seems to be more a result of the postmodern era than a reason for the establishment of a new genre. As well, many critics disagree on which specific filmic texts should be considered film noirs, and have difficulty situating contemporary film noirs alongside the classic, genre-defining films like *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) and *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958).

Before I can properly analyze and criticize the films in this thesis, it is essential that I provide my own working definition and a brief historical background of film noir. Perhaps it is not as slippery as some think. This study is concerned with those film noirs made in the last ten years or so, and particularly with those that feature narrative manipulation as a major formal interest. I will term these post/neo/noir films. I will use this term not because I believe these films do not fit the film noir genre, but for clarity of explanation. This chapter, then, will set up a theoretical framework, including brief digressions into postmodern theory and issues of transnational filmmaking, for
the closer look at the post/neo/noir films that will make up the remaining four Chapters. As well, I will show that the film noir did not end in the late 1950s but continues to thrive today, albeit in a new and self-reflexive direction.

**History & Noir**

The classic Hollywood film noir, and by association, all film noirs (as they all derive from the classic Hollywood model), were influenced by a specific set of literary, cultural and cinematic influences. Importantly, these influences are from a number of countries, as are the films that make up the analysis in this thesis. In his 2002 essay, "Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism," David Desser argues that most critics' assertion that film noir is an American genre is inaccurate and links contemporary transnational examples of the genre not only to issues of globalization and postmodernism, but to those influences which first caused film noir to emerge in the first place. He calls contemporary examples of film noir with global influences "global noir," and moves beyond America-centric criticism of film noir. Indeed, it seems that film noir is a genre with transnational concerns built right in, as classic influences and contemporary production cycles of the film noir span the globe. It is not necessary to go into too much detail here, as most critics concerned with film noir have already done so exhaustively (James Naremore's *More Than Night* (1998) and Andrew Spicer’s *Film Noir* (2002) both go into much detail in delineating its influences), but some of these factors will inform aspects of my analysis, so a brief rundown of these influences follows:
1. American hard-boiled fiction. Works by authors such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, Horace McCoy and Cornell Wollrich were a heavy influence on early film noir. In fact, John Belton points out that, "nearly 20 percent of the films noirs made between 1941 and 1948 were adaptations of hard-boiled novels written by American authors" (Belton 2005: 226). These pulp novels focused on themes of the private eye, crime, gangsters, disillusionment, and, inevitably, death.

2. German expressionism. "German expressionism is always cited as the major influence on film noir's arresting visual style and also its pessimistic mood" (Spicer 11). The film movement's high-contrast, disorientating cinematography and focus on subjective, paranoid experience can be clearly seen in nearly all film noirs. As well, German expressionism is concerned with "distortions, alienation, fragmentation and dislocation" (Spicer 11), as is film noir.

3. French poetic realism. Ginette Vincendeau describes French poetic realism as, "a genre of urban drama, often set among the Paris proletariat or lower middle classes, with romantic/criminal narratives emphasizing doom and despair. In these films, "poetry" and mystery are found in everyday objects and settings" (Vincendeau 52). As well, the 'lost girl,' common to these films is directly related to the femme fatale of the classic film noir era (Spicer 15).

Of course, there are many other influences to the films in this genre, but it could be argued that these three are most important. Other influences include the gangster film, the gothic romance, the Weimar street film, the urban thriller, European émigrés to America working in Hollywood following
World War II, Universal horror films and the cinematic innovations of Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*, 1941; *Touch of Evil*, 1958). The cultural climate also played a role in the development of the genre, with factors like postwar readjustment, McCarthyism, and the rise of popularity of theories of Existentialism and Freudianism leading to a darker portrayal of American cinema than even before (Spicer 8-23).

When dealing with contemporary film noirs, the complexity only increases. These films very often rely on an intricate web of knowledge of other texts and an acceptance and appreciation of self-reflexive cinematic techniques. A film like *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) is influenced not only by many of the above factors, but also references other many other forms, genres and filmmakers. These references affect everything from dialogue, intertitles, costuming and framing, but also one of the recurring characteristics of all the films in this study: an innovative narrative structure.

Desser's work on global noir reinforces the importance of this kind of intertextuality. As he points out in the same work, "the ability and necessity of acknowledging the intertextual chain of references, borrowings, and reworkings – may be at the heart of global noir. For it involves filmmakers and film audiences in a circuit of acknowledgements – the ability of filmmakers to make references and their confidence in the audience's recognition of them" (Desser 528). Thus, in a postmodern age, this intertextuality is worldwide and draws from other cultures as well as other cinemas. This thesis is concerned with films not only from America, but France, Germany, Mexico and Canada, reinforcing the genre as truly transnational in both production and influence.
Theory & Noir

In his much-published essay, "Notes on Film Noir," Paul Schrader states, "Film noir is not a genre. It is not defined, as are the Western and gangster genres, by conventions of setting and conflict, but by the more subtle qualities of tone and mood" (Schrader 8). Schrader, like many critics, provides a rickety and unsatisfying description of the film noir, especially when considering those film noirs made today. Tone and mood are subjective and emotional, and therefore vary from viewer to viewer and from era to era. However, this has not prevented other writers from vaguely defining noir tone ("somber, claustrophobic, deadpan and paranoid" (Durgnat 93) and mood ("cynicism, pessimism and darkness" (Schrader 8). Although useful, Schrader's description of film noir fails to account for film noir as a continuing genre, as it is firmly rooted in a strict timeline.

Richard Dyer, in an expansion on Schrader’s work, made strides to clarify Schrader’s description of noir, stating, "if its characteristic mood or feel is what is most important about it, this is none the less a highly specific quality and not just some generalized pessimism or Angst which one can find in an enormous range of films" (Dyer 53) To create this specificity, Dyer goes on to describe the structure, iconography and visual style of film noir, but falls into a common trap: he claims the film noir cycle ended nearly fifty years ago. As well, in his descriptions of the necessary structure, iconography and visual style of film noir, his analysis has a different effect - it creates a framework that is too limited. He sees film noir as beginning in post-war America and continuing until the late 1950s, with specific stylistic characteristics required in order to fit the genre with specific stars and settings also essential. Indeed, his
classification defines a specific sub-genre of film noir, but not all films that can and should be considered examples of film noir.

Film noir, as described by John Belton, reverts back to the Schrader-style use of subjective descriptive terms. He argues that it can be defined as “a purely affective phenomenon; that is, it produces certain emotional responses in people” (Belton 2005: 229). This emotional response is described as “an uneasy feeling” (Belton 2005: 229). Is it possible to classify a body of films based on something as subjective as emotional reaction? I believe not. Belton continues his exceptionally vague definition by positing, “not every film noir needs to be noir from start to finish; it needs only to be noir for a moment or two. It requires only a single character, situation, or scene that is noir to produce the disturbance or disorientation that is necessary to give the audience an unsettling twist or distressing jolt” (Belton 2005: 229). That said, would Happiness (Todd Solondz, 1997), with its deeply unsettling scenes of pedophilia and a noir-ish femme fatale character, The Crying Game (Neil Jordan, 1992) and Million Dollar Baby (Clint Eastwood, 2004), with both plot twists out of left field and dark, moody cinematography, or virtually any gore-drenched, blood-splattered horror film, say, the re-imagining of Dawn of the Dead (Zach Snyder, 2004) also fit the bill? According to Belton’s approach, these texts would all be considered noir, as would a great percentage of films made today. According to my definition, which follows shortly, only The Crying Game is truly a film noir.

The approaches of Schrader, Dyer, Belton and many other critics to film noir only complicate the existing problems in classification, not because some films that appear like other genres could be considered examples of the
film noir (the complex relationship between film noir and genre will be addressed before long), but, most problematically, because most critics attempt to pin the genre down into a set timeline. Most often, the film noir cycle is thought to have begun in the early 1940s and continued until the mid-to late-1950s. While this time frame may be effective for establishing what might be called the classic film noir, it does not account for any film noirs that have been made in the last half-century. Ironically, it might be acceptable to pin down this genre to a time frame of fifteen or so years, if it were not for the vagueness of most attempts at definition. If we are to believe that film noir can be defined through something as wildly subjective as tone or mood, then how can we assume said tone or mood definitively ended with a certain text? I do not believe we can. It is unreasonable to assume that any tone or mood is a product of any specific time period, but that is a constant, ongoing observation and product of the human condition.

Instead, I posit that in terms of timelines, film noir began with what is considered classic film noir and continues to be made today; the genre has never gone away, it just keeps changing. And, contemporary film noirs resemble classic film noirs in the same way other genres operate. That is, a romantic comedy (or, as it was classically described, a screwball comedy) like 50 First Dates (Peter Segal, 2004) belongs to the same genre as It Happened One Night (Frank Capra, 1934), but the genre has grown, shifted and changed as the cultural, social and political climate changed around it. The same can be said for the film noir.

Richard Martin, author of Mean Streets and Raging Bulls: The Legacy of Film Noir in Contemporary American Cinema (1997), agrees with this
approach. In his book, he argues that film noir is now a fully realized genre, regardless of how others have defined it, stating, "the industrial assimilation of the term film noir... has contributed to its establishment as a contemporary Hollywood genre irrespective of how one is to define the generic status of the classic films of the forties and fifties" (Martin 4). As well, debates circling and obsessing over the classic noir period are, at this point, not overly useful, as film noir continues to exist and flourish today. He is more concerned with how filmmakers are using the conventions and concerns of classic film noir today than where these conventions come from. Martin provides a useful description of the film noir, in both the classic and contemporary modes:

Like the archetypical hero adventure, in fact, these films are modeled on the paradigmatic identity quest, featuring dangerous journeys into the underworld of both the protagonists' habitats and their own fragmented psyches. Cynical and pessimistic in tone, these are essentially timeless narratives about the darker side of the human condition, modern fables that highlight the dangers of alienation, the fragmentation of society, the breakdown of human interaction, the debasement of love, the beguiling power of wealth, the corruption of government, and mankind's inherent propensity for inertia and impotence.
(Martin 6)

This description is useful because it highlights many of the recurring and essential themes and concerns of all film noirs, further supporting the claim that these films are still being made today. It might seem like Martin's description fails because of its non-specificity, which I have critiqued other critics for lacking. However, when this description is attached to more concrete elements of film noir, as I will delineate later, it becomes an essential tool for classifying films as film noirs; it also eloquently outlines some important recurring themes and will be an important tool for the later analyses of individual films.
Genre & Noir

I propose that film noir is in fact a genre, with recurring characteristics and essential elements. However, these elements are not as simple as they might be for an analysis of a genre like the backstage musical, the romantic comedy or the horror film. It is also important to note that film noir, unlike other film classifications, can cut across other genres, while remaining one of its own. I believe this is the root of the difficulty in classification, but not a concern that cannot be reconciled. As this thesis will reveal, film noir can appear very much like a melodrama (21 Grams, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, 2003), a gangster film (Pulp Fiction), a mystery (Memento, Christopher Nolan, 2000), or even a black comedy (To Die For, Gus Van Sant, 1995; Go, Doug Liman, 1999). I see film noir as a classification term that can and does override other genre classifications. That is not to say Memento could not also be considered a mystery or To Die For does not also belong to the genre of black comedy, but they are also both, first and foremost, film noirs. I believe that if a musical consists of essential elements such as singing and dancing, then film noir, regardless of time of production (that is, Double Indemnity contains these characteristics, as does Pulp Fiction), must contain the following six essential elements. Within the following description, I make brief reference to all of the films that will be the main focus of the rest of this thesis.

1. Crime. All film noirs contain some kind of criminal behaviour. These visions of crime run the gamut from acts like illegal dog-fighting (Amores Perros, Inarritu, 2000), a heist (The Usual Suspects, Bryan Singer, 1995), armed robbery (Run Lola Run, Tom Tykwer, 1999) to hit and run (Maelstrom,
Denis Villeneuve, 2000; 21 Grams) and rape (Irreversible, Gasper Noe, 2001) Also common is the inclusion of some kind of weapon, most often a gun. The gun becomes a familiar and recurring visual icon of film noir.

2. Social Criticism. All film noirs, whether explicitly or in a more subtle way, offer some kind of social critique. That is, they reflect what is wrong with the world in which we live with a bleak and dystopian vision of society. Urban spaces, particularly, are often presented as hotbeds of malaise, disenfranchisement and moroseness. Critiques of poverty, violence, the police and crime are common and often portrayed subversively. In film noir, we find characters trapped, helpless and frustrated by the social world in which they exist. Mulholland Drive (David Lynch, 2001), for example, is a film noir that can be read as a scathing social criticism of Hollywood and the failed, wasted and ruined lives littering the city of dreams.

3. Dark Conclusion. When it comes to film noir, do not expect a happy ending. It is essential for the conclusion of film noir to be a troubled ending, or, at the very least, ambiguous and dark. A common conclusion, unsurprisingly, is death, as 21 Grams, Irreversible, Memento, Mulholland Drive and To Die For support. Other films may not end with homicide or suicide, as these films do, but all feature unstable and unsatisfying conclusions. Sometimes the bad guys win (Go, The Usual Suspects) and sometimes they do not (Reservoir Dogs (Tarantino, 1992), Pulp Fiction), but there is never a typical, Hollywood, status-quo-reinforcing ending in film noir.

4. Vision of Morally Corrupt Society. Relating heavily to the above concepts of crime, film noirs show a morally ambiguous or corrupt world, where the protagonist feels ambiguity regarding what is right and what is
wrong. Often, criminal activity is shown on par with what is legal, and often characters are given a choice either to obey the law or not. In these cases, breaking the law is almost always portrayed as the right choice to make, or, at the very least, the only choice (see *Run Lola Run, Mulholland Drive, Go, Amores Perros*). As well, conventional organizations of law, such as the police, are shown to be corrupt and underhanded. Often, there is no punishment for this corruption, and no reward for the inverse. Thus, morality has no place within film noir; there is often no moral center by which the viewer can judge the characters or their actions within these texts.

5. Existential Questioning/ Focus on Psychology. Film noirs are always concerned with probing into the psychology of their characters and often feature characters locked in endless loops of existential questioning and crisis. While *Maelstrom* takes a dark look into the life of a self-destructing twenty-five year old affluent girl, *Irreversible* investigates the darker sides of a seemingly happy couple. Also common are dream sequences, unreliable character perspectives and sequences (or, in the cases of *Mulholland Drive* and *The Usual Suspects*, entire complex narratives) that are revealed to be products of the characters' fractured, unstable or imaginative psyches. This play with reality and representation links heavily to issues of the postmodern that form the crux of this study and will be outlined later.

6. Violence. Film noir texts must include violence. In classic film noir, produced under the Production Code, this violence was often shown outside the frame (cheekily alluded to in *Reservoir Dogs*). However, in contemporary film noir, violence is often used to shock and unsettle the viewer and is often surprising, gory and extreme. *Irreversible* features an unflinching nine-minute
rape scene, shot in real time, that seems nearly endless; *Pulp Fiction* assaults the viewer with a gunshot decapitation scene that comes out of nowhere; In *Go*, a character is hit by a car and thrown into a nearby ditch, bloodied and left for dead; The car crash in *Amores Perros* is nothing short of heart-wrenching.

These six elements must be in place in order for a film to fit into the film noir genre. The most glaring omission might seem to be that of the film noir femme fatale. While many films in this genre do feature some kind of corrupting, deadly or dangerous woman, some do not. As well, many postmodern film noirs play with the expectation of the classic film noir femme fatale and invert gender roles and audience expectations. Thus, I have not included this element on the list of essential characteristics.

**The Postmodern & Noir**

As difficult as it has been to define film noir, it could be argued that it is just as daunting to provide a clear explanation of postmodern theory. A pleasantly basic definition, posited by writer Chuck Klosterman is that postmodern art is "any art that is conscious of the fact that it is, in fact, art" (Klosterman 36). However, as this thesis will demonstrate, postmodernism is a complex and expansive set of ideological concepts and one that is in terms of contemporary film noir, an invaluable one.

Stuart Sim, editor of *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (1998), calls postmodernism, "a wide-ranging cultural movement which adopts a skeptical attitude to many of the principles and assumptions that have underpinned Western thought and social life for the last few
centuries" (Sim 339). More specifically, Sim details postmodernism's
denunciation of the inevitability of progress in all areas of human endeavour
and refusal to support a commitment to originality in both thought and artistic
expression. Postmodern theory also encourages "a dialogue between past
and present in thought and the arts" (Sim 339). Thus, postmodern works often
resort to past styles and sensibilities, although usually in a highly ironic way.

In his groundbreaking 1983 essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society,"
Frederic Jameson describes the closing of the gap between low and high
culture as an indication of the postmodern age and stresses the importance of
pastiche to this movement (Jameson 185-202). In terms of a film like _Pulp Fiction_, a film Desser calls "the standard of generic definition" (Desser 518) in
terms of contemporary film noir, this might mean combining a convoluted
narrative structure and self-reflexive thematics with references to McDonald's
menu items and the disturbing goings-on in the basement of a sleazy gun
shop.

The aforementioned concept of post/neo/noir being a transnational
cinema also connects to issues of postmodern theory. In their 1998 essay,
"Postmodernism and the Cinema," Val Hill and Peter Every tie the
postmodern nature of contemporary cinematic texts to issues of globalization
and the need for films to fulfill the desires and demands of an international
marketplace, "while the forms, codes, conventions and narrative structure of
postmodern cinema possess a strong resemblance to that of the mass-
produced cinema of modernity, the need for globalization produces both an
intensification of its formal specificities and an allowed and necessary address
to difference" (Hill & Every 103). Thus, difference is allowed, celebrated and
commodified, so long as the text fulfils the demands of an international postmodern audience.

Theorist Paolo Portoghesi, in his influential 1992 essay, “What is the Postmodern?” uses architecture as an example of the postmodern condition and focuses on concepts of multi-layered meanings. Theorist Charles Jencks, who also places a strong focus on architecture, calls these “double codings” (quoted by Sim 340). For example, the postmodern architect might create a building that speaks, on one level, to other architects and those who care about architecture, and on another level, to the world at large. Thus, the building would contain different meanings depending on the sophistication and discourse of the person viewing the building. Postmodern films work in much the same way. Again turning to the archetypical post/neo/noir film, nearly anyone can follow the basic plot structure of *Pulp Fiction* (even though it is convoluted), but only those well-versed in the French New Wave film movement might appreciate Tarantino’s wink-wink references to French director Jean-Luc Godard. And, an understanding of some or all of the other references in *Pulp Fiction* creates a multiplicity of meanings, depending on the specific discourse, understanding and engagement of each individual audience member. In terms of film, this often means a focus on some or all of the following concerns aptly summarized by Norman K. Denzin in his writings on *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986): pastiche, parody, an effacement of the boundaries between the past and the present, a presentation of the unpresentable, an assault on nostalgia and a threat to safe, middle-class life (Denzin 230).
Linda Hutcheon describes postmodern art as art that "takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (Hutcheon 1). To expand, Hutcheon details how these postmodern works are aware that they are, in fact, cultural artifacts and that while they may take on the look or feeling of a text emptied of all meaning, it is this acknowledgement, this interplay between and reference to previous works that ultimately creates meaning. These cultural works can and do offer a critical commentary on our current age. Thus, we can be quick to critique and deconstruct a classic film noir like *Criss Cross* (Robert Siodmak, 1949); however, that film's post/neo/noir remake, *The Underneath* (Stephen Soderbergh, 1995), is more difficult to approach and reconcile because as a postmodern text, it has a critique built right in, as not only does it offer a commentary on common film noir themes like paranoia, psychological instability and the double-cross, it also remarks on the original film's commentary and on the classic film noir. It contains meanings upon meanings.

When negotiating these postmodern texts, Hutcheon contradicts other postmodern theorists by positing that it is this critique of the world around us that she sees as most important, and that these works can and do offer critical commentary instead of merely showcasing a parade of surfaces without depth:

Critique is as important as complicity in the response of cultural postmodernism to the philosophical and socio-economic realities of postmodernity: postmodernism here is not so much what Jameson sees as a systemic form of capitalism as the name given to cultural practices which acknowledge their inevitable implication in capitalism, without relinquishing the power or will to intervene critically in it (Hutcheon 27)
In *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), Hutcheon also describes the main characteristics of postmodern art. Although it is not possible to cover all angles that Hutcheon so brilliantly does in her book in this thesis, I have distilled five concepts (from the work of Hutcheon, Jameson, Sim, Natoli, Lyotard and others) that will be important to this in-depth study of postmodern film noir. These are:

1. **Extreme self-reflexivity.** Postmodern film noir is aware that there is a genre termed film noir, that this genre looks, sounds and feels a certain way and that the audience is aware of the film noir genre. Postmodern film noirs are also unafraid to acknowledge the fact that they are films, hence the inclusion of intertitles, self-aware narrative structures, visible and obvious editing and a subtle commentary acknowledging these texts' statuses as films. Thus, these films contain references to other films, other filmmakers and other film noirs as well as to filmmaking apparatuses. It would not be out of place for a post/neo/noir to contain the intertitle, "crime montage," before presenting a crime montage or for a femme fatale to acknowledge her status as a femme fatale (as in Brian De Palma's aptly titled *Femme Fatale* (2002), a post/neo/noir that I have chosen not to include in this study due to its unfortunate lack of quality or logic).

2. **Irony/ Parody/ Pastiche/ Intertextuality.** Connected to the previous characteristic, most postmodern art has a sense of humour and contains witty references to other works of art. As explained by James Naremore in *More Than Night*, "film noir has generated its own 'mediascape': in a resurgent hard-boiled fiction, television series, interactive video games, magazines, cover art, websites, comic books and graphic novels, even tourist industry
simulations” (Naremore 254-277). Thus, post/neo/noir films contain clever allusions to some or all of these film noir-inspired products as well as to something as specific as the celebrity featured in that film. For example, in *Ocean’s Twelve* (Soderbergh, 2004), megastar Julia Roberts plays a character who looks very much like Julia Roberts, imitates Julia Roberts in order to assist in a heist, speaks to Julia Roberts’ publicist and then to Julia Roberts herself. So, here we have Julia Roberts pretending to pretend to be someone pretending to be Julia Roberts who then speaks to Julia Roberts on the telephone. Clearly, the key here is an astute and meta-oriented sense of humour. Chapter I of this thesis will explore parody, especially Hutcheon’s contribution to this body of knowledge, in much more detail.

3. Blending of High and Low Culture. Postmodern art is not afraid to blend high art and low art. The aforementioned example from *Pulp Fiction* supports this, as do nearly all post/neo/noirs, such as a film like *Irreversible*, which employs not only Beethoven as a musical soundtrack, but grinding industrial music, and not only carefully constructed and elegant cinematography, but minutes-long shaky, hand-held, home-movie-esque camerawork. This blend can also take the form of pop-cultural references or clever visual references that run the gamut from low art to high art and all ground in between.

4. An Obsession with the Visual and Time. Essential to this study, postmodern film noirs are concerned with visual media and play with visual style and time. These texts value representations of objects and people, through visual mediums like television, computer screens and advertising. The postmodern believes that something does not exist until there is a
mimetic representation of it (Hutcheon: “what is really constructed meaning is that which is being represented” (Hutcheon 49). In terms of narrative, postmodernism values the belief that history is a product of a flawed collective memory and acknowledges the fact that there can be multiple and even contradictory histories rather than one singular, widely accepted historical truth. In film, this can mean multiple and contradictory storylines, time frames that do not match up or a blurring between fiction and history or narrative and reality.

5. Disorientation. Not only visually, but also thematically and through concepts of reality and representation, film noir texts aim to disorientate the viewer. This may be through overwhelming the viewer through visual or aural manipulation (like Irreversible and Run Lola Run), but also through plot twists or revelations of truth that change everything that has come before what the audience has already seen. Chapter IV, dealing exclusively with David Lynch's labyrinth-like and puzzling Mulholland Drive, will make this concept one of its primary foci.

As I will be examining the films in the following chapters through a filter of postmodern theory, I will not expand on the ideas I very briefly outlined above, but will discuss the key points of postmodern theory as they relate to these films, all of which are postmodern in nature.

Noir Now

So, fifty years after many theorists insist the film noir cycle ended, where are we? I argue that there is a new sub-genre of the film noir, which I will call the post/neo/noir, and existing within that genre thrives many texts
concerned with narrative manipulation, experimentation and innovation. These films all exhibit postmodern impulses and all contain the six essential elements of noir I have outlined above. Thus, the remainder of this study will focus on three distinct types of these films.

Firstly, I will look at what I have termed *moment of impact* films — texts that focus on the importance of a single moment and obsessively replay said moment. Next, I'll look at films that feature their entire narrative played out in reverse order, the *backwards narrative*. This will be followed by a lengthy look at the most prominent type, the *scrambled narrative*. This thesis will conclude with a close analysis of a commendable example of the post.neo/noir film, *Mulholland Drive*. The question of whether such narrative innovation is a manipulative novelty (causing the viewer to focus on structure and ignore a possibly weak or absent theme and/or story) or a narrative necessity (an element which helps shape the film into a multi-layered meta-work in which form and content enrich, inform and contribute to each other) will never drift too far out of my sight.

Before I move on to the analysis of these different types of non-linear post.neo/noirs, it is important to note that by narrowing the scope of this study to those film noirs that feature a non-linear narrative, I am admittedly ignoring films with a conventional narrative structure that have contributed to the discourse on postmodern film noir. Films like *Blood Simple* (Joel Coen, 1984), *Blue Velvet*, *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1997), *The Deep End* (Scott McGehee and David Siegel, 2001), *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), *The Doom Generation* (Gregg Araki, 1994) and *The Man Who Wasn’t There* (Coen, 2001) are important, relevant and undeniably postmodern. However,
with this focus on the intersection of the postmodern and film noir alongside its ties to narrative, these films will not be included in the following analysis. Indeed, the scope of this analysis would not allow for an examination of all postmodern film noirs and the issues surrounding them. Instead, the following Chapters will uncover and examine a specific and understudied cinematic impulse that continues to grow in complexity: the non-linear post/neo/noir.
Chapter I: Freezing the Clock: Examining Moment of Impact Films

"We shall not cease from exploration and at the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."
-T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” quoted in Run Lola Run

"I have little time left... I would like to tell you a story, a very pretty story... It's a story that begins with someone leaving... A young woman starts on a long voyage towards reality."
-Narrator (a talking fish), Maelstrom

“Chance, fate, or coincidence rules.”
-David Desser, “Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism”

It’s a universally known yet unsettling fact that our entire lives can change in a moment. We can suddenly reach some kind of realization regarding our lives, our relationships, our selves or the world in which we live; and, we often never know when these moments will occur. Medical diagnoses are given, children are born, accidents happen and decisions are made that change the course of everything that is to come. While modernist films might recognize and point out the importance of these moments by highlighting them with swelling music, climactic editing or flashy, significance-drenched camera work, postmodern works occasionally take it one step further: they replay these moments again and again and either show how one moment can lead to different outcomes or show how a single moment has the power to start a ripple effect and touch endless lives.

This chapter will focus on four post/neo/noirs, Run Lola Run, Go, Amores Perros and Maelstrom. These films all deal with time on a thematic plane, so their connection to narrative works on a few different levels, and they all fit the film noir model set out in the Introduction (with one small exception, to be discussed in the first section). I will be looking at these films
alongside postmodern concepts of pastiche, repetitive storytelling and narrative structures, as well as disorientation, representation of the unpresentable and violence.

Maelstrom: A Narrative Fish Out of Water

I choose to begin this Chapter with the Canadian film Maelstrom, not because it is a perfect or definitive example of the post/neo/noir. In fact, it satisfies all of the film noir criteria except for the dark conclusion. Maelstrom ends on a fairly happy note, with a couple formation and most plot problems resolved. However, I choose to begin my study with this text because, as a small, independently produced film, made outside the Hollywood system on a miniscule budget, it is a good barometer of how postmodern filmmaking impulses have permeated all aspects of global film production. Not only does the film nearly satisfy the film noir model, it stands as an excellent model of how the moment of impact can be used not only to structure an entire narrative, as the rest of the works in this chapter demonstrate, but can be a contributing factor, or, a small detail, in an overarching postmodern artistic statement. I will deconstruct two elements of the film: its narrative structure, which focuses on a significant moment of impact and the framing story of the narrator, played by a fish, as well as touching on several minor postmodern traits the film exhibits.

Maelstrom tells the story of Bibiane Champagne, a twenty-five year old failed entrepreneur and the daughter of a wealthy businessman – a Montreal “legend.” As the film opens, Bibiane is in the midst of a crisis that only
escalates as the plot progresses. She has just had an abortion and to deal
with the psychological trauma, turns to drugs, alcohol and random sexual
partners. One night, while intoxicated, Bibiane commits a hit and run, killing a
man. Racked with guilt, Bibiane goes to the funeral home where the man’s
ashes are being stored. While there, she meets, falls in love with, and is
ultimately redeemed by the dead man’s son, Evian.

The film opens with a postmodern scene that, much like Denzin’s
analysis of the severed ear discovery that opens *Blue Velvet*, “bring[s] the
unpresentable... in front of the viewer in ways that challenge the boundaries
that ordinarily separate private and public life” (Denzin 225). The sequence
involves Bibiane’s abortion. As the film opens, we are shown Bibiane, in a
hospital, legs in stirrups. The film then cuts to a close up to a plastic tube, the
soundtrack fills with what sounds like a vacuum cleaner and red fluid begins
to flow through the tube. The following image is the result of Bibiane’s
abortion, the aborted fetus, being poured into a plastic bag, the bag is sealed
and the aborted fetus burnt in a large oven. These images are shocking and
disturbing, but also symbolic of presenting something in a feature film that is
considered taboo, in bad taste, or, in postmodern terms, “unpresentable.”

Even Bibiane’s ultimate saviour is presented in a postmodern, ironic
manner. The entirety of the film is filled with water imagery – Bibiane showers
four times, she plunges her car and cell phone into the river, Evian is a scuba
diver, the streets of Montreal are shown as rainy and wet, and the film ends in
a fishing boat off the coast of Norway. This protagonist feels morally and
internally “dirty.” Following her abortion and the accidental murder of Evian’s
father, Bibiane frantically tries to clean her body, and intertitles state, “While in
the shower, Bibi becomes more aware of her body. Paradoxically, she loses touch with time and the world around her," and these showers are presented as a saving grace following her various traumas. Thus, when she meets Evian, a man who shares a name with one of the most popular brands of bottled water, the witticism is not lost on the audience.

Postmodern theory understands that all possible stories have already been told and this concept is expressed in Maelstrom through the narrator, or, more accurately, the narrators. The film opens with a grotesque fish in a surreal abattoir beginning to narrate a story. The story is that of Bibiane, her slow breakdown and subsequent redemption. However, the fish dies over and over, each time with a chop of a knife blade to the head; this scene is repeated several times throughout the film. And, although different fish are being slapped onto the chopping block, there is no variation in the story that they have to tell. The fish represent a collective consciousness, a loss of individuality and the impossibility of originality in storytelling. At one point, a particularly humorous fish narrates, "to be continued," before the deadly knife plunges down, killing him. However, as Linda Hutcheon might observe, it is this admission of the inability to create an original story that allows this film to carry value as a vessel of critical commentary.

The style of the film reflects the postmodern obsession with disorientation. The film begins with an un-translated passage in Norwegian (only later in the film do we slightly understand what the passage might be), and many times the viewer is assaulted with confusing or disorientating images that take seconds or minutes to make sense of. For example, midway through the narrative, the viewer is startled by a close-up of a slimy eel
slithering around on a slab of concrete. This scene is eventually revealed to be Bibiane’s nightmare, but not until we, as an audience, are properly disorientated. The opening abortion sequence also takes time and distance to reconcile fully. As well, sporadically throughout the film, an expressionistic, abstract image of splashing water is inexplicably flashed upon the screen, intermittently interrupting the narrative.

The narrative structure further supports this fixation on disorientation. The moment of impact here takes place in a restaurant and acts as a splintering-off-point for the film’s narrative. Bibiane and her best friend are eating sushi and they, realizing the octopus is not fresh, send it back to the kitchen. The first time we see this scene, the narrative continues on and we continue to follow Bibiane’s life up until she, deciding to let fate control her future, drives her car into the river. We are left unsure of whether or not Bibiane survived the icy plunge or not. At this time, the narrative rewinds to the moment of impact – Bibiane and her friend’s meal in the restaurant. However, this time after the food is rejected the narrative does not follow Bibiane, but the source of the distasteful octopus. This leads to a chain of events that eventually serve to bring Bibiane and Evian together. We see an angry phone call from restaurant to fish warehouse (where Evian’s father worked when alive), and an investigation into the absence of Evian’s father (who was responsible for selecting octopus – ironically, his absence at work let to Bibiane’s rotten meal). Police find him dead in his apartment and the story is printed in the paper. The narrative then finds Evian at work, scuba diving. We see him enter a helicopter and then at a funeral parlour, collecting his late father’s ashes. Here he will meet Bibiane for the first time. However,
just before he does, the narrative once again rewinds, this time back to Bibiane and her crash into the river. We then follow Bibiane once again until she meets up with Evian in the funeral parlour and their two narrative lines connect and become one. This convoluted narrative structure demonstrates both the disorientating postmodern impulses running through this text and how a complex storyline must be negotiated by an equally sophisticated postmodern audience.

*Maelstrom*, on a thematic level, probes deep into the psychology of a woman who is experiencing a formative level of personal trauma. And, as all film noirs do, it includes an element of the existential. In this case, the film ends with our narrator, the fish, beginning to share the ultimate existential solution, the meaning of life. However, in a final adroit existential anti-reveal, the fish says, “All that’s left for me is to reveal the great secret of your existence.” Before we hear his revelation, however, his head is, once again, chopped off and the film concludes on an existential, postmodern, ironic note. The film also contains a moral ambiguity, as Bibiane never turns herself in for a murder she committed while driving drunk as well as a social critique of how children often stand in the shadows of their parents.

*Run Lola Run & Pastiche / Parody*

*Run Lola Run* is also a very simple story. Lola’s boyfriend, Manni, has lost 100,000 marks on public transit. The money belongs to Manni’s criminal boss and unless Lola can come up with the money in twenty minutes, Manni will surely be killed. The film plays out three different possible scenarios for
how Lola spends these frantic twenty minutes in a mad and desperate quest
to save her boyfriend’s life.

As a solid example of a post/neo/noir film exhibiting seemingly endless
use of pastiche, consider the first five minutes of Run Lola Run – basically,
the opening credit sequence: Following the above passage (opening this
chapter) by Eliot is the citation, “After the game is before the game,” by S.
Herberger (a popular German soccer coach). The concept of time is
immediately introduced with the sound of a ticking clock on the soundtrack.
We then see an elaborate, baroque stone pendulum swinging back and forth,
with credits in a crumbling, antique font interspersed. The camera pans up to
the clock attached to the pendulum, with time speeding by on the face faster
than real time. A gargoyle on the face of the clock opens its mouth and the
camera enters the mouth, bringing the audience inside the speeding clock,
symbolically, inside time itself. We are then introduced to a blurry crowd of
people against a white background. Although we do not know it yet, this
crowd of people milling about aimlessly will become the supporting players in
the film – office workers, strangers riding bikes, a security guard. On the
soundtrack, on top of the ticking clock and electronic music, is an unknown
narrator aiming a series of existential questions and concepts at the audience.
A man then kicks a soccer ball into the air, higher than humanly possible, and
the camera heightens to a bird’s-eye view of the crowd, who, miraculously,
form the words “LOLA RENNT” (the English translation of the German title is
actually “Lola Runs”). Without losing sight of the ball, the camera follows the
ball to the ground, and into an unseen tunnel, where the film becomes
animated, and we see Lola, in cartoon form, running through the tunnel. She
passes rows of teeth and we realize that Lola is actually inside the aforementioned gargoyle’s mouth and throat, again, inside “time,” while more titles are flashed upon the screen. This leads us to the next title sequence, a showcase for the actors. Each actor is shown as a police mug shot, from several familiar mug shot angles (back, side, full frontal), and then the character’s name is written in handwriting on top of the photo while the actual actor’s name lands on the screen with a thud. After being introduced to over a dozen characters from the film and actors in about thirty seconds, the film cuts to another bird’s-eye-view shot, this time of a city, and then immediately swoops down, past buildings and trees and into the open window of an apartment building before stopping, for barely a second, on a ringing red telephone.

This sequence takes up about five minutes of the film’s running time. As an audience, we are asked to negotiate literary and pop-culture references, theoretical and abstract concepts of time, existential questioning, human typography, a complex soundtrack, a surreal animated landscape, continuous camera movements, digital imagery and a blurring of actors’ and characters’ personae within a reference to the familiar image of the criminal’s mug shot. This also serves as the establishing shot and exposition for the story. It is a lot to ingest, and most audience members do not “get it” all on the first viewing. This brief sequence could be considered a case study in postmodern pastiche.

In her work on parody, Linda Hutcheon says that it is often called, “ironic quotation, pastiche or intertextuality,” and that it is “central to postmodernism” (Hutcheon 93). Therefore, I will be using these terms
interchangeably. According to Hutcheon, if there is one thing that is especially crucial to a postmodern text to include, it is a particular relationship to mass culture, especially in terms of high and low art and a use of intertextuality to express this meshing. These postmodern films do not strive to appeal and speak only to those who can understand and grasp the complex concepts and references of an elite intelligentsia, but purposely mix high and low culture into a postmodern hybrid. Thus, in *Run Lola Run*, we have a European art film with complex issues of existential theory and high culture references mixed up with a narrative structured much like a low culture video game. As well, the film contains unrealistic slapstick comedy (like Lola’s repeated high-pitched scream that breaks glass), elements of the absurd (a blind woman pointing out a key prop and the characters not noticing) and a reference to a person only known by those familiar with German soccer.

*Run Lola Run*’s complex postmodern stew does not end with the opening credits. In fact, the entire film is a complex barrage of postmodern influences and references: stylistically, aurally, temporally and thematically. In terms of style, the film is a mish-mash from the grab-bag of cinematic possibilities. There are fast, rapid-fire sequences featuring MTV-style editing as well as smooth, controlled dolly shots. Tacky, postcard-style images juxtapose black and white surveillance footage. The filmstock used varies from traditional 35mm colour film, black and white 16mm film, high-quality DV video, lesser quality, camcorder-grade video and cell animation. Framing is a pastiche of camera angles, tilts, zooms, sequence shots and film speeds shown alongside multiple perspectives, single-split, double-split and triple-split screens. One of the most inventive and disorientating camera shots is a
roulette-ball's-eye-view of a spinning roulette wheel. The film also includes a subtle and clever reference to the Dogme 95 film movement, as an appropriately melodramatic scene is shot with a shaky, hand-held video camera and looks as if it could have been lifted from the oeuvre of Lars Von Trier.

Also, the music and soundtrack of the film is symbolic of the film's obsession with pastiche and ironic referencing. The ticking clock acts as a recurring sonic motif, underlining the narrative's obsession with time. The lead actress (German-born Franka Potente, who plays Lola) performs the vocal tracks on some of the soundtrack music in English, adding an additional linguistic layer to the aural landscape. As well, contemporary German pop music blends with the classic American jazz standard, "What a Difference a Day makes," Lola's unrealistic animalistic shriek, and a middle-Eastern inspired instrumental score.

The narrative structure of Run Lola Run further supports its postmodern nature. Essentially, the narrative of the film is repeated three times, until Lola accomplishes her goal of saving her boyfriend from being killed (or more accurately, he saves himself). However, the film does not simply rewind to where it began to show how things could have gone differently. Instead, the characters existing in the reality of the film actually experience these alternate narrative possibilities as the audience does. In some ways, it is as if the characters in the film are playing a game and we are watching them get better and better at it. For example, in the first sequence, Lola arrives late to meet Manni and must assist with an armed robbery of a grocery store. In this sequence, Manni must teach Lola how to use a gun.
However, in the second sequence, Lola retains her firearm knowledge and can wield the gun like a professional. The film is rife with these kinds of clever illustrations. Lola learns to avoid a dog on the staircase, Lola figures out that it would be faster to hitch a ride with an ambulance rather than run and Lola discovers a shortcut, all to reach Manni in time and save his life.

As well, within these three overarching sequences exists a sense of play with the narrative structure. Some words and sequences are repeated over and over, stretching time out, and some sequences, like Lola’s run down the stairs of her apartment building, are shortened through the film momentarily becoming animated. Other narrative strands, presented as snapshot flashback and flash-forwards, occur when Lola passes strangers on the street or in an office hallway. These sequences move forward and backward in time hours, days, months and even years, to the characters’ futures, pasts and deaths, all in a matter of seconds. After the death of Lola at the end of sequence one, and the death of Manni at the end of sequence two, the film adds another temporal layer as a flashback to another, unknown time. These after-death scenes reinforce the film’s focus on psychology and fate.

The entire narrative takes place over the course of twenty minutes, although the running time of the film is nearly ninety. There is no sense of real time or an attempt at creating real time in Run Lola Run as it follows its own rules of narrative logic and subverts conventional cinematic attempts to maintain clarity in terms of temporal logic.

For all its feverish, frenetic and chaotic style, the themes of the film are not all that different from those of classic film noir. This is a stylish story about a woman who, faced with an impossible situation and a morally vacant
atmosphere, chooses crime to solve her problems. There is a strong focus on
the psychology of Manni and Lola, as visualized by the camera zooming into
close-up while fading to red and then fading up (in the after-death scenes) to
them in bed, gently discussing their fears, disappointment and expectations of
each other. *Run Lola Run* does not have one dark conclusion, but two deeply
dark conclusions and one that is ambiguous but not overly hopeful. It is a
post/neo/noir film with a subtle undercurrent of a commentary about the
instability and sacrifice of romantic love.

**Pulp Fiction Junior: Go & Pop Culture**

Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* will be looked at in Chapter III; however, it is important to note here that one of the most original, ingenious and postmodern contributions the film offered, outside of narrative structure, was a gleeful and unrestrained fixation on pop-culture references. Owen Gleiberman, one of the most interesting and insightful popular film critics working today, draws the parallel between *Pulp Fiction* and *Go*, largely based on this obsession with pop-culture, calling *Go*, "a rave-generation joyride, a kind of junior *Pulp Fiction* that courses along on waves of freedom and excitement" (Gleiberman ew.com). *Go*, in fact, does possess much of the same postmodern spirit when it comes to presenting characters who are so immersed in celebrity, television, advertising and all aspects of popular culture that their language is comprised almost entirely of sly, funny and not unintelligent pop-culture references. That the film also falls into the *moment of impact* sub-genre of the post/neo/noirs is no surprise.
Go tells three interlocking stories about youth culture of the late 1990s. Ronna is a Los Angeles supermarket cashier, who, in a desperate need for cash to pay her rent, tries to pull off a one-off drug deal. Simon, co-worker of Ronna, heads off to Las Vegas with three of his friends and ends in way over his head. And, Adam and Zach, two soap opera actors forced to participate in a sting operation to entrap a drug dealer, have an unexpected detour involving their supervising cop, his wife and a make-up artist.

Firstly, much like the introduction to Run Lola Run, Go's opening credit sequence also hints at its postmodern nature. First, as with every film, the studio logo (Columbia Pictures, in this case) is presented on the screen. However, much like a pirate radio signal breaking up the airwaves, the studio logo is cut into by the film and its music, before it is finished its familiar run. Then, when the opening credits begin, we see the recognizable image of the beginning-of-reel countdown, except, in a postmodern twist, the countdown is upside down and backwards.

The moment of impact here is much more subtle than the life-changing phone call in Run Lola Run or the hyper-violent car crash in Amores Perros. It takes place in the staff room of a supermarket. However, before this moment is shown, the narrative begins, essentially, at the end of the film. We see Claire, a supermarket cashier, expressing her surprise at where she ended up and how she got there (the shot is framed in such a way that we do not know where she is, or in fact, who she's with). Claire ends her monologue by saying, "I mean, this time yesterday, who would have thunk it?" and we are immediately shuttled into the moment of impact, where Simon convinces Ronna to take his shift so he can go to Las Vegas.
The rest of the narrative structure demonstrates this postmodern sense of play, as time moves forward and backward through the three separate yet interconnected stories in a fluid and unexpected way. And, the narrative structure, while fairly clear, does provide some instances of disorientation. For example, at the outset of Adam and Zach’s narrative stream, we see the two characters, Adam in his underwear, with a radio strapped to his leg and a smarmy-looking older man looking on. It takes a few moments of the audience putting the pieces together to figure out that Adam and Zach have been busted for possession and must participate in an undercover drug investigation. Also, when we are introduced to Simon, blackness fills the screen and muffled music is barely heard on the soundtrack. Simon then lights his lighter and discovers that he is in a small, dark space. Is he buried alive? Trapped under something? Soon enough it is revealed that Simon’s jokester friends have locked him in the trunk of their car. The ironic joke here is that the audience is just as disorientated as the character is.

The pop culture references in Go are so varied, extreme and excessive, it almost feels like an ironic play on the landmark and then-innovative inclusion of these references in *Pulp Fiction*. For example, three supermarket employees play a game of “Dead Celebrities,” in a competition to see who has to go back to work first, and in the process, they name-check Steve McQueen, Michael Landon, Lee Marvin and Malcolm X. Throughout the course of the narrative, myriad celebrities, television shows and products are mentioned. Here is a random sampling: Swatch (popular Swiss watch manufacturer), former porn star Traci Lords, game show emcee Monty Hall, *The Breakfast Club* (John Hughes, 1986), *Beverly Hills 90210*, the mini-series
Roots, Janet Jackson's *Rhythm Nation* record album, Vanilla Ice, James Bond, *Magnum P.I.*, *Knight Rider*, mail-order service Amway, pop singer Alanis Morrissette and Telly Savalas. The characters in Go speak pop culture references more fluently than they do English. This language becomes an ironic commentary on the postmodern, media-dominated landscape.

Go is a not uncritical look at youth culture of the late 1990s. Although propulsive, occasionally hilarious and very energetic, it is also a critical examination of the empty and shallow nature of a postmodern youth. Morals are absent, as nearly every character participates in drug-taking, anonymous sex, crime, or all of the above. These characters are looking for a thrill, or anything, really, to remind them that they are alive. And, the subversive critical undertone suggests that this desperate quest can only go so far before its time to stop and take a look.

*Amores Perros*: Violence, Punishment & Consequences

Although decidedly more earnest and sincere than the other films studied in this chapter, Mexico's *Amores Perros* (English translation: "Love's a Bitch"), shot in beautifully grainy, over-exposed, self-conscious cinematography that could not be anything but film, is also very much a product of the postmodern condition, especially in terms of its concerns with a) representing the unpresentable, b) shocking and excessive violence and punishment and c) a complex and disorientating narrative structure.

Like Go, *Amores Perros* features three interconnecting stories. The moment of impact here is a shocking moment of violence – a brutal car crash
that leaves characters dead, maimed or amputees, and all forever changed. The three stories are: Octavio, a jobless teenager, falls in love with his brother’s wife and enters the underground, illegal world of dog fighting in order to raise money to fund his escape from Mexico City; Daniel, a married man with two young daughters and Valeria, a model whose image graces perfume ads all over the city, decide to start a life together until Valeria is badly injured in the crash and things change for the worse; and, Chivito, an ex-guerrilla and hit man, changes his ways after learning a lesson from his dogs and looks to his past to rectify his former sins.

Much like the abortion footage in *Maelstrom*, *Amores Perros* features several scenes that could be described as representing the unpresentable. It is important to note that although these images *could* be captured and shown, they are events and images that would not be allowed to be actually performed and filmed (they must be faked, staged), and therefore act as signifiers for the unpresentable and break boundaries of comfort in the viewing audience. The most explicit and controversial images of this sort in *Amores Perros* are those of bloody, violent and brutal illegal dog fighting. These scenes, which are difficult to watch, show dogs tearing each other to pieces, dead, limp dogs littering the floor of a filthy fighting ring, dogs being shot and gooey dog entrails being mopped off a grimy concrete slab. Later in the film, when a dog trained to fight is left alone with a gaggle of other dogs, we see a blood-splattered room filled with mangled, gore-drenched, dead dogs. Also shocking is the *moment of impact*, the fatal car crash. Characters, soaked with blood, crying and screaming for help, or already dead and limp, are shown in explicit, and arguably, excessive detail. The fact that this car
crash is repeated three times underlines the film's obsession with extreme
violence. As well, when we witness the aftermath of Valeria's experience in
the accident, we see her broken leg, oozing pus and blood, blue and swollen,
in shockingly vivid close-up.

Alongside these excessively grisly images of violence exists a layer of
sadism geared towards the characters. None of these characters go
unpunished for their sins and the comeuppance doled out is excessive and
harsh. Thus, unlike the other films studied in this Chapter, *Amores Perros*
does include a sense of morality; however, the characters existing within the
narrative do not seem to realize it until it is too late. Adultery is a major theme
here; all characters who commit the transgression are severely punished
through injury, death or death of a loved one. Regret over past actions serves
as the character's self-inflicted punishment, as each character ends the film in
a deep malaise caused by the realization that they have created their own
prison and that things, in fact, could and should have worked out differently.

With *Amores Perros*, we once again have a film with an intense and
complex narrative structure. As previously mentioned, the film is loosely
organized into three individual stories; however, none of these are self-
contained by any means. Characters drift in and out of narrative threads and
streams; characters appear in the background when least expected and minor
characters transition to significant agents of plot importance. Little exposition
is given to explain who is who and what they are doing; all is slowly revealed
over the 157 minute running time. This is a film that requires patience, as
pieces of the narrative puzzle slowly connect and begin to express their logic.
This narrative structure and dark, expressionistic mise en scene serve to emphasize what is perhaps the main theme of the film: how much can change in an instant, with no control or will of the individual. In fact, this lack of control over the world and our place in it is emphasized as the singular constant. The only thing we can control, *Amores Perros* suggests, are our actions on a day-to-day basis, especially in terms of what we know to be right and wrong, because, as will be discussed next, coincidence, fate and chance govern the *moment of impact* film.

**Chance, Fate & Coincidence**

In his previously mentioned work on the transnational film noir, Desser also focuses on the importance of chance, fate and coincidence to these films and that while plot, theme and character are important similarities between texts, the narrative and cinematic style are most essential. He states, “of greatest import are the multiple storylines, skewed chronologies, chance encounters that seem to underscore the presence of fate or destiny (or the power of coincidence, however improbable), and a shocking moment of violence, often at the start, which seems to set things in motion” (Desser 530). Indeed, chance, fate and coincidence power the narrative engine of all these films, underlining the post/neo/noir obsession that no matter how hard we try to control our destinies, we are ultimately trapped in the absurd and arbitrary nature of a postmodern world.

These films all exhibit examples of this sort, and often in highly unlikely and unrealistic ways. In *Maelstrom*, fate is shown through Bibiane “saving” Evian from a plane crash by seducing him and convincing him to miss his
flight and chance is demonstrated by Bibiane taking a chance on survival when she plunges her car into the river, basically telling herself, “if I survive, it is the universe giving me a second chance and if I die, it is because I deserve punishment.” Run Lola Run features a narrative thread demonstrating the ultimate icon of chance, as Lola takes 100 marks and relies on luck to gamble it on the chance she can make 100,000 marks in a few minutes. Amores Perros also features a narrative strand concerned with gambling, as Octavio’s future is set on his dog’s success at fighting. As well, chance plays a role in those who are involved in the film’s centerpiece, the shocking car crash. Emphasis is placed, especially with Valeria, on being at the wrong place at the wrong time and the results that can and do follow.

The moment of impact films also all include scenes where characters from different narratives and storylines intersect in unexpected and occasionally unsettling and disorientating ways. In Go, we hear two sides to the same telephone conversation in two different narrative sequences, and are left to piece together the relevance of that conversation. As well, Adam and Zach are briefly introduced to the plot of the film during Ronna’s sequence. However, later, and quite unexpectedly, the characters are given their own narrative stream. Adding another layer to the already complex plot, the two men end up accidentally hitting Ronna with their car, which is shown at the end of Ronna’s narrative stream, although the audience is unaware of who hit her until near the end of the Adam and Zach’s story, two narrative streams later than Ronna’s. In Run Lola Run, both Manni and Lola are, at different times, mere centimeters away from the homeless man who is in possession of the 100,000 marks that is essential to saving Manni’s life. And,
in *Amores Perros*, characters often drift in and out of each other's narrative streams, such as Chivito passing Susana and Octavio's brother on the street, Chivito saving his own dogs and leading the thugs to Cofi, Chivito witnessing the car crash, and Octavio watching Valeria on the television, hours before her (and his) eventual car crash, which, by this time, we have already witnessed.

Taking Desser's focus on coincidence as a jumping-off point, it is worthwhile to not only examine the coincidences that are apparent in each individual text, but to examine the recurring, and perhaps not coincidental motifs between these four films to see what kinds of postmodern impulses are at play in the *moment of impact* post/neo/noir. The following nine unique yet heavily interrelated features are all at play in at least three of these films and are important postmodern characteristics to expand upon.

1. Homeless Man / Postmodern Prophet. Interestingly, *Maelstrom, Run Lola Run* and *Amores Perros* all feature a character that is a wise, almost supernatural, old, homeless man. These characters, who seem to act as symbolic of the rejection of capitalism, are the moral centers of their respective films and are mostly positive representations of fierce individuality, as they often seem to have money and the means for a "normal" life, yet do not choose one. In *Run Lola Run*, this "bum" is coded as intelligent and clever, while the homeless man (Chivito) in *Amores Perros* is even more explicitly shown as a rebellion against consumerism. Although a wealthy hit man and former guerilla, with several hundred thousand dollars to his name, he finds his clothing and means for survival in dumpsters and trashcans. Unlike many of the lead characters in these post/neo/noirs, the postmodern
prophet is not a slave to money. As well, ironically, Chivito in *Amores Perros* supplies a moral center for the final sequence of the film, as he, after witnessing the brutality and wasteful consequences of canine violence, forces two brothers (whom he calls Cain and Abel), one of whom hired the hit man to kill the other, to see the arrogance and ridiculousness in their actions. The old man (while not explicitly stated as homeless, he represents the discarded, the lowest of society), in *Maelstrom* shows up at two locations, the subway with Bibi and in a bar with Evian. He is the only person each of the two characters confess their crimes to and acts as the catalyst to which each character can accept what has happened and then move on. It is also important to note that *Mulholland Drive* also includes this kind of character, although the homeless man serves a different symbolic purpose and is much more monstrous and foreboding there than in the *moment of impact* films.

2. Television / Character. *Go, Run Lola Run* and *Amores Perros* all use television as an integral part of character introduction or character development. In *Go*, although we may not notice it, we first see Adam and Zach on a soap opera on the television in the staff room of the supermarket, subtly indicating their occupations as actors. In *Amores Perros*, we first see Valeria on a television talk show called “People Today,” being watched by Octavio, and then, after he leaves the room, watched only by us, the audience watching the film, through the television in Octavio’s empty bedroom. Valeria’s image is also reproduced and displayed on billboards and screens all over Mexico City. Interestingly, when her image fades from the cityscape, so does her desire to live. And, in *Run Lola Run*, an additional intertextual dimension is added to the narrative through the television. We see Lola run down the
stairs of her apartment building and the camera swerves into Lola's mother's bedroom and then swivels around to focus on her television, where the continuation of Lola's run down the stairs is presented as an animation. Other technological mediations present in these films include answering machines, cellular telephones, computers, stereos, automated public access telephones, surveillance cameras, mechanized wheelchairs and security alarm systems. These characters exist in a world ruled heavily by various technologies.

3. Intertitles. Instead of relying solely on the visual image to tell their respective stories, these films feature a heavy reliance on intertitles to add a textual layer to the already complex surfaces of each film. Go uses the intertitles to divide the story into a triptych, "Ronna," "Simon," and "Adam and Zach," although these basic divisions have trouble containing the overlap, spillage and extraneous characters contained within the film. Amores Perros also uses three distinct intertitles, "Octavio and Susana," "Daniel and Valeria," and "Chivito and Maru," to quasi-separate the film into three distinct chapters or stories; however, like Go, characters break through these divisions and appear in one or two other segments, further blurring the narrative lines. In Maelstrom, intertitles like, "to make love we turned hate around," are used to express Bibiane's internal dialogue and delve into her broken mental state.

4. Focus on the Automobile. Once again returning to Desser's work on the global noir, he illustrates the importance of the automobile to these films and connects them to what will be the final feature of the moment of impact films, "Money as a Motivating Force." Desser states, "It is the automobile that best represents the postindustrial landscape of global noir, the atomization of the individual, and the imbrication of global capital in individual lives. And that
these films all revolve around money – needing it, making it, stealing it – is also no coincidence” (Desser 532). The automobile plays a major role in all these *moment of impact* films, perhaps most significantly in *Amores Perros*, which includes a car crash that serves as a significant incident for the rest of the narrative threads. It leads to Valeria and Octavio’s realizations that their dreams can and will not be realized and leads Chivito to the rescue of Cofi, which changes the path of his life in several significant ways. *Run Lola Run*, *Go* and *Maelstrom* all include car accidents, with death or injury as the result. Especially significant is a sequence repeated three times in *Run Lola Run* where two car crashes and one almost-crash, all caused by Lola, profoundly influence her future(s). In these films, the automobile is a dangerous and unpredictable vehicle of fate, chance and coincidence.

5. Excessive Close-Up Framing. In terms of camera framing, these films utilize the close-up shot more than films of other genres. Suggesting the importance of probing psychologically into the fractured, damaged and vulnerable psyches of the characters, many shots and reverse shots are extreme close-ups of the characters’ eyes or fractions of their faces. *Maelstrom* opens with a high-contrast, low angle close-up on Bibiane’s troubled eyes, the significant after-death scenes in *Run Lola Run* show little more than Lola and Manni’s expressive faces, and in *Go*, each character is treated to his or her moment of psychological investigation where their anguished, skeptical, ironic or angry visages fill the screen.

6. Psychological Angst. Although some characters within these films seem happier than others, there is a strong focus on unhappy, distressed, depressed and desperate characters on display in these films. Although she
spends much time running, Run Lola Run's Lola also spends a great deal of
time crying, and, in the after-death flashbacks, Manni and Lola's "better time"
seems like anything but. The entire narrative of Maelstrom follows the
seriously tortured Bibiane as she attempts to restructure her broken life. In Amores Perros, no character escapes psychologically unscathed, as the film
tortures and punishes all players, as discussed above.

7. Elements of the Absurd. Although dark, these postmodern films
still allow for a sense of ironic play, as evidenced by elements of the absurd
injected into the mise en scene and narrative(s). Maelstrom includes that silly
talking fish and a surreal, strange butchery, while Go shows several scenes
from the perspective of a character tripping on ecstasy, first rolling around in
the produce aisles of a supermarket, then having an existential conversation
with a housecat.

8. Temporal Obsession. As films that focus on and replay a specific
moment in time, these texts contain temporal references not only in their
innovative narrative structures, but also within dialogue and mise en scene.
Characters within these films are very concerned with time, and often these
films include deadlines (such as Run Lola Run and Go) or characters asking
for the time or obsessively focusing on time and the lack of time to accomplish
their goals. In terms of mise en scene, clocks, watches, the passage from day
to night and back again, and late, speeding vehicles become important
signifiers of this fixation. As well, these works are not epic in their respective
time frames, as they take place over twenty minutes, twenty-four hours, four
days and a few weeks, respectively. Instead, they choose to take a close look
at a short period of time and emphasize how much can happen in a short
period of time, as *Run Lola Run*’s inclusion of the song, “What a Difference a Day Makes,” on the soundtrack cleverly alludes to.

9. Money as Motivating Force. Is money the root of all evil? These films suggest that it just might be, as money, or more specifically, the lack of and desire for or loss of money motivates much of the plot. In these *moment of impact* films, money does rule the world. The entire narrative of *Run Lola Run* and one third of both *Go* and *Amores Perros* explicitly deals with the quest for money and it is the desperate need for money that lands those films’ characters, Ronna and Octavio, in the hospital, badly injured. *Maelstrom* shows money as a single, yet chief contributing factor to Bibiane’s present breakdown, as she has lost 200,000 dollars of her father’s money in a failed business venture.

**Moment of Impact: A Successful Postmodern Phenomenon?**

Overall, these films are all quite successful at merging form and content into effective and fascinating examples of postmodern art. Specifically, this body of films clearly collectively demonstrates both the six essential elements of film noir as well as the five concepts of postmodern film noir. And, it is important to note that these works are more than a novelty or gimmick (they do not exist as empty shells or pure surface) and their respective narrative structures do, in fact, add layers of postmodern meaning to these texts. Critical and popular reception supports this. *Maelstrom* was named best picture of 2000 at Canada’s Genie Awards, and *Amores Perros* garnered an Academy Award nomination for best foreign language film. *Run
Lola Run was an art-house smash and launched the career of its lead actress, Franka Potente, who went on to appear in The Bourne Identity (Doug Liman, 2002) and its sequel, as well as Todd Solondz's excellent Storytelling (2001). Go was arguably the best reviewed of the glut of teen films that filled the marketplace in the late 1990s and "the one truly thrilling move I've seen... this year," according to Gleiberman (Gleiberman ew.com). These films were relatively successful at the box office, earning back their respective production budgets and earning a place in the critical and popular consciousness.

As the following Chapters will start to uncover, there is something fundamentally profound and vital contained within these films that focus on the power of the moment, especially when considered alongside narratives that are scrambled, or, as the next Chapter shifts its focus to, the backwards narrative.
Chapter II: Reversing the Clock: Memento, Irreversible and the Backwards Narrative

“Time destroys all things”
-Irreversible

“Even if you get revenge, you’re not going to remember it.
You’re not going to know it happened.”
-Memento

“It doesn’t exactly help things, though, that Memento – a film that starts with its ending and keeps forever jumping back into the footprints it’s only just finished making – presents the world from Leonard’s own scrambled, self-erasing point of view.”
-Chuck Stephens, Filmmaker

This Chapter will examine another recent narrative innovation in the post/neon/noir, the backwards narrative. These films typically begin with the last scene in the story, and work, in reverse order, towards the first, leaving the viewer to construct the actual chronology as the film progresses. These films are worthy of study because, like the moment of impact films, they are directly, self-reflexively concerned with time. Irreversible and Memento are the two films I will be focusing on here. Using the five distilled concepts of postmodernism outlined in the Introduction, I will show how these two films nearly fit this framework (these films both show a lack of Irony / Pastiche / Parody / Intertextuality, especially when compared to the other films in this study). I’ll also examine how and why they, although indeed postmodern and artfully made, are less successful at merging form and content into a profound and pertinent cultural text. As well, I will look at how this concern (or obsession) with an innovative narrative structure and postmodern concepts of excess emerge as a hindrance and distraction to the overall effectiveness to the films’ thematic power.
The Danger of Excess

In Film Noir, Andrew Spicer dedicates a chapter to what he calls “Neo-Noir 2: Postmodern Film Noir.” These films are similar to the sub-genre I have been studying here; however, Spicer does not put emphasis on narrative structure and, significantly, does not necessarily view these postmodern films as empty texts, although he does warn of how they could easily slip into that territory without the proper understanding and management of the material, especially in terms of the danger of excess. Without a deft handling of the often violent content and a film’s stylistics, it is possible for films of this genre to become emptied shells, lost of import. He states, “postmodern neo-noir retains the capacity, handled intelligently, to engage with important issues. The darkness of postmodern noirs is not simply a borrowed style but a continuing exploration of the underside of the American Dream... this reappropriation of past forms can be highly meaningful, not necessarily... empty, nostalgic pastiche” (Spicer 149-150). He cites Body Heat (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981) and Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982) as examples of postmodern noir that transcend empty stylistic exercises. Although Spicer examines only American films in his study of film noir, I believe ideas can and do translate to films from all countries to expose the underside of not only the American Dream, but also the collective human condition.

In this same chapter, Spicer discusses the blurring of the boundaries between mainstream and independent cinema. This blurring, in a transnational postmodern study, can also be seen between not only mainstream and independent cinema but between American cinema and films...
made in other countries. Often these films make reference to or borrow sensibilities, narratives or plot devices from each other. This seems to be the case for France’s *Irreversible* and *Memento*, an American film with a British director (Christopher Nolan) and an Australian lead actor (Guy Pearce). In fact, due to their extreme similarities, I will be looking at these films somewhat concurrently, as the *backwards narrative*.

Spicer also outlines two important aspects of postmodern noir: “excess and hybridity” (Spicer 155). This means demonstrating a mixing of film noir genre traits with other genres alongside an evident thematic and stylistic focus on excess. These issues of film noir and genre blending will form the framework for Chapter III, dealing with the *scrambled narrative*; however, Spicer’s focus on excess is essential to the *backwards narrative*. As Spicer puts it, “every aspect of the viewing experience is intensified: a spectacular mise en scene... editing and camerawork tend to be taken to extremes using a hyperbolic camera, rapid zooms, shock cuts and ultrafast montage sequences” (Spicer 156). As will be shown, this postmodern excess can, in some instances, have negative effects on the films’ overall thematic clout and can, in fact, lead to a draining of the texts’ importance. I believe the two *backwards narrative* films studied in this chapter do allow this postmodern concern with all kinds of excesses to result in a sub-sub-genre of the film noir that is, essentially, empty of meaning. This excessive excess paired with a notable lack of parody or irony creates problematic texts which lack the cathartic resonance of many of the other films included in this study.

Gaspar Noe’s *Irreversible* is not a film for the faint of heart. The film’s plot takes place over only a few hours and is notable for its appalling scenes
of violence and rape. The story is basically this (chronologically, however not the order in that it is presented): Alex and Marcus are a new couple, pregnant with their first child. Pierre is a former lover of Alex's and a schoolteacher who has recently come out as a homosexual. After attending a party, Alex is brutally raped and beaten and sent into a coma. Marcus and Pierre, seeking revenge, find the man that they think is responsible for the attack and kill him. Injured and defeated, the two men are arrested and taken away in an ambulance. Critics were divided; a few thought it was a powerful meditation on fate, loss and violence, while others found it sickeningly graphic, unnecessarily nihilistic and could not look beyond the narrative structure as anything more than a clever device.

*Memento* also uses the triptych of rape, revenge and violence as the focal point of its story. Once again, taking place over a short time period (a few days), we follow Leonard as he avenges the rape and murder of his wife. Because Leonard has no short-term memory, or as he puts it, "I can't make new memories," he must rely on an elaborate system of scribbled notes, labeled Polaroid photos and his own heavily tattooed body to negotiate the world around him. He is manipulated by a femme fatale, Natalie, and it is ultimately revealed that he has been set up by a crooked cop, Teddy, to do his dirty work for him. At the end of the film (or, chronologically, the beginning) Leonard kills Teddy. While Teddy is technically far from innocent, it is revealed that he had nothing to do with the rape and murder of Leonard's wife. In fact, even the status of these events is questioned.

Like the *moment of impact* films, these films are both highly reliant on chance, fate and coincidence, and when they are positioned alongside one
another, striking similarities become so apparent it is difficult to believe this could be accidental. Aside from *Memento*’s addition of an ironic reference to the film noir fascination with amnesiacs, both films tell a very similar tale. Both deal with rape, regret, revenge and, ultimately, mistaken identity and murder. When all of the narrative puzzle pieces are put together, it is revealed that the characters’ quest for revenge has been futile and pointless and that what they believe to be true is not. Typically postmodern, these films seem to be showing the arbitrary nature of postmodern life. However, not only are the protagonists unreliable narrators with an unreliable point of view, both films, in their quest for narrative originality and violent excess, display unforgivable gaps in logic.

Perhaps the most glaring of these logic breaches is evident in *Memento*. If the lead character, as the film makes explicit time and time again, remembers nothing after the attack that killed his wife, how does he remember that he has this short-term memory condition? This condition would have set in after his memory was lost, adding it to everything else he cannot remember. Yet he does, in fact, remember the condition and its intricacies. Also, as is shown through the reverse-narrative technique, there is no consistency in the length of time Leonard can stay lucid before his current memories fade. Some scenes go on for several minutes before he loses his memory, while other scenes imply that he can retain knowledge for much longer or shorter time frames. The conclusion of the film fails to address these issues, instead opting for a “maybe he has this condition, maybe he was the one who really killed his wife, or maybe he is just insane” approach that in effect leaves the viewer not knowing what they have just seen and, more
importantly, with the impression that it does not really matter anyway. Like Leonard, we have no way of figuring out the film’s narrative with any kind of assurance. This postmodern impulse towards ambiguity, confusion and disorientation does make the film engaging and complex, but essentially and unfortunately, mostly without any significance.

The logic fissures in *Irreversible* are less extreme yet still apparent. For example, how do Marcus and Pierre know where to go to find the man who they think has raped Alex? Why does Alex venture out on her own, when she is more than aware of the impending danger? These events happen not because they make much sense to the characters or to the audience, but to serve the film’s overarching focus on shocking moments of excessive violence. When characters are forced to behave in unbelievable ways in service of these plot set-ups, any momentum, empathy, meaning or catharsis being built by the story is undermined by these obvious fractures in common sense. The *backwards narrative* films do fit most of the following five condensed concepts of postmodernism (described in detail in the Introduction), and this excessive reliance and fixation on some of these characteristics further shows how the films ultimately become drained of importance by substituting style and surface for narrative substance. It is important to note that this focus on surface, etc., does not make these films less postmodern than others; in fact, it could be argued that these two texts fit the postmodern paradigm, especially in terms of cinematic aesthetics, much more overtly than other kinds of post/neo/noirs. However, it is the lack of irony / pastiche / parody / intertextuality, which I see as an essential postmodern characteristic, that ultimately prevents a perfect fit.
Extreme Self-Reflexivity

These films are both exceedingly self-reflexive in terms of cinematic aesthetics and narrative construction. Nearly every aspect of *Irreversible* serves to constantly remind the audience that they are viewing a constructed film, as the use of credits, cinematography and music demonstrate. *Irreversible* begins with the scroll of the end credits, clearly playing with audience expectations and indicating that we are perhaps about to witness a narrative told in reverse. However, this is quickly destabilized as the film immediately leads into what looks like an opening credit sequence. Linguistically, the film is also self-conscious, as these title credits feature backwards letters and flash across the screen so quickly they are nearly unreadable. The cinematography is, for the most part, designed to make the viewer aware that the camera is being manipulated, as disorientating, swirling, shaky and incomprehensible scenes are juxtaposed with lengthy, static scenes where the camera hardly moves. There is no attempt to show the camera as invisible or from a character’s point of view; instead, the hysterical camerawork seems to follow no reason or make much sense other than as a self-referential device. It’s tempting to imply that in an extreme, postmodern reality, it only makes sense that the stylistics of a film would be just as unhinged as the characters’ realities; however, this does not account for the scenes where the camera does not budge, as there is seemingly no reason
behind these choices; although frenzied, the cinematography also seems oddly arbitrary.

The music used in the film also highlights the constructed nature of the work, as loud, pulsing diegetic industrial music is juxtaposed with non-diegetic classical Beethoven. The final scene ups the self-reflexive ante even more. It begins with Alex lying on a blanket in a sunny park, a Beethoven piece playing on the soundtrack. The camera begins positioned upside down, then arches over Alex and then takes a bird’s eye view of the park and the small children running through it before madly spinning, blurring the image. The camera tilts to show a spinning horizon and then into a blue sky. The image next begins to strobe and flash black and white as the Beethoven is drowned out by loud static-like noise. Finally, the first words of the film, “time destroys all things,” are briefly flashed upon the screen before it cuts to black. What does this ending try to communicate? Ostensibly, that our actions and decisions are meaningless and that the unstoppable progress of time will surely annihilate any semblance of security or happiness we manage to create. After such a grueling viewing experience, what amounts to a shrug and a smug acknowledgement of the emptiness of postmodern life from the filmmaker is simply not enough.

_Memento_ strives for slightly more aesthetic clarity, although its visuals also bring attention to the film’s construction. Scenes in colour and black and white are alternated, as the present narrative and a past scene (where Leonard does not seem to be suffering from his condition) begin to work towards each other. As well, flashbacks from a third time, the night of Leonard’s wife murder, are also included and peppered throughout the
narrative. As a result, the viewer is constantly reminded of the film as an artificial construction and becomes trapped in a continuous loop of trying to figure out what is going on, what is really happening, what is remembered and what is actuality. Typically postmodern, *Memento* keeps coming back to the idea that the line separating reality and representation is indistinct.

Both of these *backwards narrative* films are self-reflexive by their very structures, as a reverse-running narrative structure makes the viewer aware of the unconventional nature of the films' construction. This device also creates excess in storytelling, as parts and fragments of scenes are repeated and overlapped. This narrative ennui is necessary in order for the viewer to piece together the storyline; however, it also leads to unnecessary repetition and an increase in the running time of the films that could instead be used to build character development or underline themes.

**Irony / Parody / Pastiche / Intertextuality**

These films are decidedly less playful and parodic than post/neo/noirs of other sub-genres and I believe this is a large part of what prevents them from emerging as successful examples of a solid meshing of postmodern form and content. *Memento* is a film with many possibilities to acknowledge and play with classic cinema and noir tropes, yet largely fails to. And, while Leonard's meaningless journey and empty revenge have the possibility to make a vital commentary on postmodern life, the film's positioning of him as the unequivocal and clear protagonist, without any ironic distancing of the audience (we only ever know what he knows and see the world through his
flawed perspective), leaves the film without an agent to really say much about anything at all.

*Irreversible*, however, is much more problematic and, in fact, verging on dangerous. Rife with homophobic characters and offensive presentations of homosexual men, the film emerges as shockingly insensitive and regressive in terms of queer presentation and representation. The queer villain here is shown as nothing short of a complete monster. He is a disgusting, drug-addled pimp who prefers young boys but is willing to brutally rape Alex in a pinch. He is presented as a sadistic, violent and without morality. Also, his coding as gay seems to be included not to add character depth or interest but to make a subversive commentary on the underlying nature of queer sexuality as perverse and to heighten Alex’s humiliation and shame, as her attacker frequently compares her to and describes her body as female and therefore, less enjoyable to violate. Following the rape, he decides to beat her to near-death in order to “teach her a lesson.” Even worse are the characters shown in “The Rectum” sex club scene, as it is not a single man but a community of men who are shown here. There appears to be little rhyme or reason to why Noe chose to set the scene in such an environment, except for his seemingly endless appetite for cinematic shock tactics. Queer sexuality here is shown as deviant, with men begging to be tortured, hurt and worse. When Pierre loses his temper and beats who he thinks is Alex’s attacker to death, a crowd of men cheer him on and appear to experience intense pleasure from the brutal murder, jeering and encouraging Pierre as if it were a sexual release for him; we can assume for these men, murder would be the ultimate in sexual release and enjoyment. If one character had
behaved this way, it might have been acceptable; when it's a crowd of men, it is beyond offensive. Making sweeping generalizations regarding a community is dangerous territory to tread and Noe ups the ante by actually showing a substantial segment of that community actually taking pleasure in and condoning the behaviour. As well, transsexuals are shown as vulgar prostitutes and even the one quasi-positive gay character, Pierre, is shown as a hotbed of repressed rage, angst, and, of course, extreme violence.

These representations are dangerous enough to warrant questioning; however, if *Irreversible* was aware of its hateful and questionable representations and framed them, say, within an ironic commentary on the ridiculousness of homophobia or the futile and pathetic nature of violence, it might serve a purpose. However, this would require a deft handling of the material and a clear and obvious ironic voice, which this film sorely lacks. The filmmaker seems to be dead serious when it comes to the treatment of the subject matter and, as such, does not allow for an ironic or parodic reading of the content of the film. Postmodern texts require this mode in order to undermine and give meaning and purpose to perilous subject matter. Without it, like Noe's *Irreversible*, the viewer is left only with what material is presented to them, no matter how self-reflexive the aesthetics may be.

Although mostly irony-free, these films do feature some examples of intertextuality and parody. The femme fatale of classic film noir, particularly, is played with through the characters of Natalie and Alex, respectively. In classic film noir, the femme fatale was considered a dangerous, fallen woman whose purpose it was to corrupt, manipulate or lead a man to peril. *Memento* ironically plays with the established femme fatale character (even going so far
as to make her profession that of bartender, in a reference to the moral
ambiguity of the classic femme fatale) by showing Natalie as a scorned, sexy,
evil woman who was born to manipulate men. In the film, Natalie convinces
Leonard to seek revenge on a man for her own advantage. However, the
film's conclusion fails to create much anger or scorn over her behaviour, as
Leonard rounds out the film as the real villain and Natalie remains equally
unsympathetic and by default, vacant.

Irreversible's Alex also plays with the femme fatale, as her actions
ultimately lead to the downfall of not one but two men. Her brutal rape and
beating (presented in a graphic, disturbing, nearly ten-minute single take)
becomes the catalyst that unleashes the suppressed rage and animalistic
urges of her two male acquaintances. Her sexuality and forceful personality
are framed as dangerous and integral to both her own rape and the
subsequent actions of her friends; if she had not gone out alone, it is
suggested, things would have turned out very differently.

Both films also play with the shadowy, mood-drenched aesthetics of
the classic film noir and its inverse, juxtaposing cheerful, brightly lit scenes
with the dark, bloody scenes of the urban nightscape and dingy, dirty
basements and tunnels. This ironic focus on violent acts occurring not only at
night but also in broad daylight is a recurring theme for the post/neo/noirs, as
Chapter IV's focus on Mulholland Drive will make clear.
Blending of High and Low Culture

The *backwards narrative*, by design, is a complex and challenging text. It defies the classically established, chronological narrative structure that most films follow, and as such, acts as a representative of higher art, as a certain patience and sophistication is required in order for the viewer to comprehend the plot.

However, these films blend their high-minded approach to narrative structure with themes and sequences that borrow from and reflect what might be called low culture, especially in terms of mise en scene, dialogue and graphic violence. *Irreversible*, with a key scene set in a sex club called, unfathomably, “The Rectum” and featuring drugs, nauseating displays of murder and violence and depictions of sadomasochistic and deviant sex, leaves little to the imagination. *Memento* is content to show rape, murder, drug dealers, prostitutes and a trashy pub in which several characters spit in a beer which Leonard later drinks. As well, both films are littered with characters spewing dialogue that is meant to shock, as the scene in *Memento* in which Natalie tries, and ultimately succeeds at getting Leonard to hit her by throwing every name in the book at the sanctity of Leonard’s murdered wife. In *Irreversible*, approximately every second word is racist, sexist, homophobic or exceedingly vulgar.
An Obsession With the Visual and Time

Like all postmodern art, these two films demonstrate a clear obsession with visual media and time. Perhaps this is clearest in *Memento*, where Leonard, without the ability to make new memories, must rely on reproductions of images and frantically scribbled notes to himself in the hopes that this will all make sense. The opening scene of the film expresses the importance of images to a postmodern text. We see Leonard holding a Polaroid snapshot of a dead man's body. However, instead of coming into sharper focus, the image is fading back to white and the snapshot is sucked back into his camera, underlining the film's concern with backwards time and visual mediation. As Linda Hutcheon might put it, for Leonard (a representative for us, the postmodern audience), nothing is really real until there is an image representing it. Leonard, like the viewer, must construct reality through a patchwork of unreliable and constantly changing messages and images.

As well, both films' mise en scene is littered with television screens, media advertising, high-priced cars, recognizable liquor bottles and allusions to expensive clothing. The films' obsession with time is shown through their complex narrative structures, the characters' frantic, frenzied pursuits to exact revenge *right now* and the hyperactive pacing of the plots.
Disorientation

This concept is perhaps the most important postmodern impulse in these texts. In fact, both films are designed to confuse and disorientate the viewer. *Irreversible*'s camerawork is a good example here, as it its deafening, grinding industrial musical score in the scene set in “The Rectum.” In this scene, done in one take, the camera flips upside down, zooms past doorways, lights, television monitors and stairways, confusing the viewer as to where and who the characters are and what they are doing. This set-up, which goes on for nearly fourteen minutes, is a case study in cinematic disorientation. Marcus and Pierre frantically maneuver through the underground sex club, bathed in red light and shout, run, sweat and, ultimately kill a man. Pierre brandishes a fire extinguisher and pummels the man, over and over, until his face splits, nose deflates and brains apparently seep out. Pierre continues this violent act until the man is dead, his face a bloody and disgusting pulp. It is possibly the most disturbing and violent scene in cinematic history. The disorientation only escalates here, as the audience remains unaware who this man is, why he is being attacked so brutally, and, significantly, whether this beating is real or not, as the line between real footage and presumably, a special effect, is terrifyingly blurred.

This disorientation continues throughout the narrative, as the audience slowly becomes aware of how things have led to this point and, in fact, that things are not how they appear. *Memento* displays its commitment to disorientation, as the lead character is just as confused as the audience. At one point, Leonard finds himself running through a parking lot and we hear his
confused internal monologue, "Ok, I'm chasing someone... No, Someone's chasing me!" The scene is presented as an ironic joke regarding our collective confusion instead of a suspenseful meditation of Leonard's ultimately very tragic situation.

Both films also present characters as villains only to then undermine this idea and show that the protagonists have killed the wrong person. Once again, there does not seem to be much point to this deliberate trickery other than to prove that the filmmakers could baffle and frustrate their viewers through a parade of red herrings and things not being what they seem to be. Unfortunately, this acts as yet another aspect of these films that render them vacant. Once the audience catches on that absolutely nothing we see in the film can be trusted and that the characters are just as disorientated and clueless as we are, there is little to latch on to.

The Backwards Narrative: A Successful Postmodern Phenomenon?

I turn now to an article by Harvey O'Brien on a linear narrative post/neo/noir, Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers (1994). O'Brien ruthlessly criticizes the film: "Natural Born Killers is probably the ultimate postmodern film. It is a meaningless spectacle about the meaningless spectacle of (post) modern life. It is style without content which argues content is pointless and irrelevant" (O'Brien eircom.net). O'Brien goes on to describe other postmodern traits of the film, securely placing it as a cultural artifact of unquestionable postmodern nature, while arguing that it is the excess and futile positioning of its elements (like references to old television shows,
current media events and the film’s high style) that ultimately leaves the film
without much meaning, “Stone has taken this idea [the couple on the run film
genre] and bled the genre totally dry, serving it up as a stew of human cultural
entrails which doesn’t comment on genre, but makes it merely another
ingredient floating in a filmic mire designed to end all film” (O’Brien
eircom.net).

While I disagree with some of O’Brien’s harsh criticism of Stone’s film
(in many ways, it is a more effective merging of theme and form than the films
studied in this section), I think this description touches on some of the reasons
behind the failure for Memento and Irreversible. Although these films are
clearly postmodern, they end up being little more than exercises in narrative
structure, shock value and puzzle solving. In the same way that Natural Born
Killers nearly gets away from its central argument by replacing substance with
style (even though, this, by and large, could be argued is the point), these
backwards narrative films are so concerned with creating a unique and
unconventional narrative structure that the filmmakers seem to have trapped
themselves within their own gimmick and essentially made films about that
gimmick; all other themes and concerns are forced to become secondary
characteristics in service of structure.

For example, with repeat viewings of Memento, as described earlier,
the viewer becomes aware that there is a good deal of logic missing from the
film. If this had been intentional, hinting at Leonard’s possible status as a
confused, unreliable narrator, then any thematic power that this realization
might have had is undermined not only by presenting him as a helpless,
clueless and ultimately bad person but through unanswered questions
brought out at the narrative's finale. For example, why throw his intentions and possible role in the death of his wife into sharp focus near the end of the film if only to ignore them? An open-ended film, if treated right, can be a potent existential meditation. However, when the same open-ended-ness is used as a cheap and meaningless narrative gimmick without any ties to theme, it shows.

As for *Irreversible*, there is no central argument to complement the excessive formal concerns and violence. While these excesses do not necessarily, by definition, drain the text of meaning, as a violent and complex film like *Amores Perros*, which used these devices to service the overall themes of the inevitability of change and punishment for a lack of moral behaviour, demonstrates. However, in *Irreversible*, there does not seem to be much of a thesis that these excesses are commenting on, nothing for them to merge with to create meaning. Why are the characters punished so severely in *Irreversible*? Is it because they are morally ambiguous? Or are we all destined to be plunged, unknowingly, into unspeakable trauma? The film does not seem overly concerned with supplying any possible answers or meaning outside from the spectacle of extreme violence, rampant homophobia and dizzying camerawork. There might be a capacity for retroactive pleasure for the audience if there was any sense that we were watching real characters on the screen, but as the postmodern style and structure of the film relentlessly reminds us, this is a constructed film, with no ties to reality or the real world, so the audience should just sit back and view the film at an ironic distance and marvel at the innovative formal structure.
When characters in *Amores Perros* or *Go* are injured it can be read as a comment on their actions; however, when Teddy in *Memento* and the unnamed man and, in fact, Alex in *Irreversible* are killed or injured, it is not to add depth or import to the film's overall meaning, but instead to, once again, retroactively shock and surprise the audience with the information that the protagonists have killed the wrong man or injured a stranger. Violence is around us at all times, sure, but when, as the films go out of their way to present, violence is constructed, it helps to understand why. Otherwise, what's the point?

I would argue that although the *backwards narrative* exists as a clever and interesting (at least, on first viewing) exercise in screenwriting and editing, ultimately, these films are unable to merge form and content into something that tries to communicate much about anything aside from the cleverness of the filmmakers and the capability for contemporary postmodern film to be both pointless and engaging at the same time. This failure can be accounted for due to three characteristics these films both feature: a) ridiculous logic gaps that ultimately transform the texts into absurd exercises, b) a lack of irony that exposes unacceptable subtexts, and, c) an excessive reliance on excess that seemingly serves little narrative purpose.

The next Chapter, focusing on the *scrambled narrative*, echoes some of this thematic vapidity, yet, as will next be explored, is by and large more successful at actually managing to merge form and content into a significant commentary dealing with the postmodern world in which we live. The next Chapter will use genre theory and genre-blending as a primary focus and will
also uncover and discuss an undeniable contributor to the post/neo/noir in American cinema, Quentin Tarantino.
Chapter III: Mixing It Up: Genre Blending & The Scrambled Narrative

"You’re not anybody in America unless you’re on TV. On TV is where we learn about who we really are. Because what’s the point of doing anything worthwhile if no one is watching? And, if people are watching, it makes you a better person.”

-Suzanne Stone, To Die For

Take it easy? My husband and my little girls are dead, and I’m supposed to take it fucking easy? I can’t just go on with my life! I am paralyzed here! I am a fucking amputee! Do you see that? Who are you? You owe it to Michael. Now you’ve got his heart. You’re in his house fucking his wife! And sitting in his chair! We have to kill him!

-Cristina Peck, 21 Grams

This chapter will again focus on a sub-genre of the post/neo/noir, the scrambled narrative. These are films that present their narratives in a seemingly random (yet meticulously structured) order, clearly eschewing the classical beginning, middle, and end story structure. In this case, I will be focusing not only on narrative structure, but also on concepts of genre blending in order to argue that this double fragmentation, of genre and narrative, connect to concepts and conventions of postmodern disorientation and self-reflexivity. As well, I will dispute and present an alternate argument to those genre critics, like Steve Neale in his book Genre & Hollywood (2000), who have posited that film noir is a genre “doomed to incoherence” (Neale 203). It must be said that these scrambled narratives are certainly not the only sub-genre of the post/neo/noir to employ genre hybrids and genre-blending. In fact, writers like Rick Altman in his book Film/Genre (1999) and Janet Staiger in her essay, "Hybrid or Inbred: The Purity Hypothesis and Hollywood Genre History," have shown that genre hybridity has long been prevalent in filmmaking and that nearly all films feature some kind of mixing of genre. Pure genre films, it can easily be argued, are rare if not unfeasible. However, what I
see to be unique in the case of film noir, to reiterate an important concept I laid out in the Introduction, is that I see film noir as a classification term that can and does override other genre classifications. Thus, although this blending is rampant and prevalent in all film genres, if a film fits the framework and directive of the post/neo/noir, regardless of which unstable genre it might seem to belong to, I believe the film can be considered, first and foremost, a film noir.

This Chapter will first establish how fragmented narratives and fragmented and blended genres are, indeed, postmodern in nature. Then, I will make the case for Quentin Tarantino's much-studied oeuvre existing as a major influence on both the scrambled narrative and the post/neo/noir. I will conclude by examining two cases of noirs that are genre hybrids and might not immediately and obviously be considered definitive examples of the film noir, even though I believe they perfectly fit the mold: Gus Van Sant's To Die for and Alejandro Gonzalaz Inarritu's 21 Grams.

Genre Hybridity & Narrative Fracturing: Postmodern Impulses

In his book, Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary (1989), Steven Conner details the profound difference between "classic-realist" films and those that are inherently postmodern. To Connor, the difference is partially reliant on how films relate to style, and by extension, genre. While a modernist film (or "classic-realist" film to Connor) is heavily tied to the personality and recurring obsessions of a director, a postmodern film features multiple styles. According to Connor, "As in other areas of
contemporary culture, the collapse of the modernist ideology of style, therefore brings with it a culture of multiple styles, which are combined, set against each other, rotated and regenerated in a furious polyphony of decontextualized voices" (Connor 176). To briefly expand, in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," Jameson described modernisms as, "predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as your own body... This means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity..." (Jameson 114). So, with a postmodern film, as has been established already in this thesis, the text engages with many styles, many influences and many other texts. Although these theorists link modernist filmmaking to auteurism, it is important to note that the director's personal sensibilities and concerns can not be divorced from the content and appearance of the film, but must be seen as co-existing with other influences, references and intertextualities. This is certainly the case for Van Sant and Inarritu, whose oeuvres, especially in the case of the former, could certainly be used as the basis of individual auteurist analyses.

These concepts can also be expanded to link the postmodern impulses in filmmaking to recent and extreme examples of genre blending. In the same work, Conner focuses on Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1986) as a postmodern site in which genre and time are negotiated. In terms of time, this not only means an ironic play with time within the film, but also a mixing of historical time frames which leaves the viewer unsure of when the action is supposed to be taking place. The film seems to be set in a dystopian nowhere with little concept of history and a purposeful datelessness. This datelessness also links to a
genrelessness. Says Connor, “Along with these forms of temporal
discontinuity goes the film’s generic heterogeneity, with its unsettling lurches
between comedy and tragedy, utopia and dystopia, adventure story and
satire” (Connor 177).

Many of the post/neo/noir texts dealt with in this thesis also feature a
similar difficulty in placing in a particular genre, although, as has been
established above, they are all, above all else, film noirs. Another postmodern
text which has been a recurring mention of this study is David Lynch’s Blue
Velvet, which has been established as very much a postmodern film. Connor,
who describes the vague and strange treatment of history in Blue Velvet as a
major postmodern trait, argues that the way the film deals with genre is
equally postmodern in nature: “the film provides an improbable and disturbing
stitching-together of different genres and genre-expectations” (Connor 178).
Returning once again to Norman K. Denzin’s work on Blue Velvet, who
believes it is both audience expectation and the postmodern condition that
fuels the engine of these texts, “postmodern individuals want films like Blue
Velvet for in them they can have their sex, their myths, their violence and their
politics” (Denzin 472). These same concepts explain the scrambled narrative,
as not only are mixed and unsound genres appealing and integral to a
postmodern audience, but so too, we can surmise, are unstable narrative
patterns, disorientating storylines and self-reflexive and self-conscious
stylistics.
Quentin Tarantino's Contribution to Post/Neo/Noir

This thesis would be impossible to write without mention of Quentin Tarantino. His second feature, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), while racking up international film awards and hitting a home run at the box office, changed the face of contemporary film noir. Critics, when describing this seminal work, often focus on two related aspects, its pretzel-like narrative and its undeniable postmodern nature. *Pulp Fiction* is a movie about movies, and is clearly aware of cinematic codes and its own narrative innovation. I now return once again to Hill and Every’s work on postmodern cinema. They see Tarantino as a seminal postmodern filmmaker due to the intertextual and influential nature of his cinema, “The pleasure of the texts consciously spills over into an audience’s knowledge of other films, other performances, other musics. One only has to think of the success of *Reservoir Dogs* or *Pulp Fiction* to see the power of these commodities to reference not only social life but, more importantly, all other forms of popular culture” (Hill & Every, 104).

It could also easily be argued that Tarantino’s decision to tell his story in a non-linear fashion ushered in a new era of filmmakers (and screenwriters) who became more and more interested in playing with time. Film noirs, from the classic era of the 1940’s and 1950’s through the neo-noir of the 1980’s, have often used the flashback as a narrative device, yet were solidly rooted in a clear sense of what is happening in the present and what is a flashback from the past. Even a complex narrative like Billy Wilder’s 1944 masterwork *Double Indemnity* (often cited in writings as one of the definitive examples of
the classic Hollywood film noir), which slowly merges the past and present, maintains a clarity of time that *Pulp Fiction* purposefully subverts.

What was so fresh and exciting about Tarantino's epic was the way it re-envisioned the then-stale noir flashback. Instead of seeing past events through a single character's point of view, pieces of the narrative puzzle are taken apart and re-arranged, not to reveal a single event or clue (as past film noirs often did), but to challenge the audience and acknowledge a new, savvy viewer who welcomed such a challenge. The past and present are offered in the same manner, non-chronologically, and the viewer is asked to question not only *why* events are happening, but also *when* they are happening and *what this all means*. In *Pulp Fiction*, the form and content of the film noir engaged in an original, stirring and synchronistic way. Critical and popular acclaim are still being heaped on the film, and Tarantino's contribution to cinema will be long remembered.

Tarantino's other films (featuring him as the sole director), *Reservoir Dogs, Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* (2004) all feature narrative innovation of some sort, with either a combination of *scrambled narratives with the moment of impact* (*Jackie Brown*) or a scrambled and fractured narrative spread out over two films (the *Kill Bill* series). Even the latest film made by *Pulp Fiction* co-screenwriter Roger Avary, the under-appreciated and generally ignored *The Rules of Attraction* (2002), an adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' novel (and, a post/neo/noir that, unfortunately, due to the scope of this study, could not be included), played with time. As a stylistic innovation, the filmstock is reversed and scenes are replayed from variant perspectives and angles. Clearly, Tarantino's
contemporaries and artistic collaborators consider this narrative innovation to be a significant feature of contemporary filmmaking.

Because Tarantino has been the focus of much academic attention, I have decided not to rehash what others have derived from his body of work. Books like Paul Woods' *Quentin Tarantino* (2000), Jane Hamsher's *Killer Instinct* (1997), D.K Holm's *Quentin Tarantino* (2005), as well as outwardly endless essays and articles in academic journals and anthologies chart Tarantino's oeuvre and his contribution to contemporary cinema. What is important here is to acknowledge Tarantino's influence, reference and acclaim and understand how, particularly, *Pulp Fiction*, through its success and then-groundbreaking scrambled narrative, arguably opened the door for other filmmakers to experiment with complex and postmodern narrative configurations.

**Post/Neo/Noir Black Comedy: *To Die For***

Few would dispute that Gus Van Sant's *To Die For* is a black comedy. It follows the exploits of Suzanne Stone, a clueless and dim-witted weathergirl as she does anything she can to become a famous "television personality." This includes seducing a teenage boy, compiling endless and uselessly comical research and story ideas and, ultimately, murdering her husband. However, most of these events are played for laughs and the screenplay is littered with punch lines, visual gags, and multiple instances of Suzanne humorous lack of intelligence. Van Sant's is a dark vision, yes, but also a very funny one. The narrative structure begins and ends at the same place, with
Suzanne's videotaped description of her life, framed like an anchorperson, with perfectly coiffed hair and a clipped delivery.

As a film noir, it features a social criticism of materialism, the empty hunger for fame and media saturation as newspaper clippings and mediated images of Suzanne on television become focal points of the story. At one point, Suzanne's extended family appears on a talk show to discuss her life and the film's plot is intercut with segments from Suzanne documentary, which is supposed to be about "teenagers of today," but really amounts to nothing. Such a focus on images, surfaces and image culture also reveals the text's inherent postmodern nature, as does its scrambled narrative, the inclusion of documentary-style sequences, direct address and Suzanne's unflinching belief that, "You're not anyone in America unless you're on TV." To Suzanne nothing is real or holds value until there is a mediated image representing it, and it is this ignorant and deluded viewpoint that ultimately leads her to homicide. This obsession with the visual and time, already established as a key postmodern trait, engages not only the form of the film but the content as well.

Also postmodern is the film's intertextual references to well-known journalists, documentary conventions and media tropes. The soundtrack to the film is particularly postmodern, as it plays ironically with Suzanne's apple pie image by underscoring scenes of her walking across the high school campus and small New England town with loud, industrial death metal. Rich with irony, parody and pastiche as well (the documentary, Suzanne's ridiculous "newswoman" costuming, the high school students' clichéd
vocabulary and mannerisms), the film certainly demonstrates postmodern impulses and undercurrents.

*To Die For* also contains the essential film noir elements of crime and a dark conclusion in which Suzanne is killed (by a cameoing David Cronenberg playing a Mafia hit man) and frozen in a lake. The final shot cleverly shows Suzanne’s sister-in-law ice-skating on the lake above Suzanne frozen corpse. As well, shocking and surprising scenes of violence are included as is Suzanne’s clear lack of a moral barometer. In her world, sleeping with the boss to get ahead is just as acceptable as having her husband brutally murdered.

This blending of genres and postmodern impulses of fragmentation, narrative splintering, self-reflexive and ironic aesthetics and a deft merging of both form and content culminates in a socially resonant and, yes, humorous take on contemporary American image culture and the seemingly empty void at its core.

**Post/Neo/Noir Melodrama: 21 Grams**

John Belton describes melodrama as a genre in which the thoughts and emotions of the characters are put into gesture, costume, décor and other elements of the mise en scene. The melodrama works on a purely emotional level and is concerned with the creation of a commanding mood while eliciting a powerful emotional response from the audience. Accidents, improbable reversals of fortune, and threats to the middle-class family are common plot occurrences and these texts are marked by “stylistic excess” (Belton 131-137).
Based on this description, Alejandro Gonzalaz Inarritu’s *21 Grams* could very much be considered melodrama. It focuses on the complex intersections between three people dealing with unspeakable tragedies: Paul, a university professor who is severely ill and waiting for a heart transplant; Jack, an ex-con who is forced to question his Christian belief system when he inadvertently kills a man and his two daughters with his truck; and, Cristina, the wife and mother of said man and daughters and former drug addict who is unexpectedly plunged into an abyss of grief and loss. Paul receives Cristina’s dead husband’s heart and Paul and Cristina plot to kill Jack for what he has done. In the end, tragedy rules, as Paul and Cristina’s short-lived love affair is doomed by Paul’s implied death, Cristina’s relapse and reinstated addiction and Jack’s return to the penitentiary.

The film, which is presented in a complex and disorientating blend of scenes in a scrambled order, slowly reveals the intricate plot details and connections between the characters, thus deepening the tragedy and emotional depth of the film. However, significantly, like *To Die For,* *21 Grams* is also very much a film noir. It contains the necessary elements such as crime, social criticism, violence and a pitch-black conclusion as well as dark, expressionistic cinematography. It shows the characters trapped within a morally ambiguous and troubling society, significantly, set in no particular place. In fact, even the stylistics of the film reflect a meshing between the melodrama and the film noir, and, importantly, between film form and content. In one scene, Jack slices a tattoo of a cross on his arm off with a heated up knife; in another, Cristina snorts cocaine while the camera pans back, revealing Cristina reflected in a mirror, in a representation of the drug addict
and the mother – the sad doubling and doubling back of her personalities.

Props like children’s shoes, cigarettes and a pick-up truck act as melodramatic signifiers and, as occurs in melodrama, the characters’ heightened and extreme emotions seep into the mise en scene and the film’s stylistics – an empty swimming pool becomes a symbol for the characters’ empty lives and an expressionistic shot of birds flying against a sunset becomes a sublime and existential image reflecting the film’s themes.

The postmodern narrative structure, self-reflexive cinematography and clear connection to film noir engage with the melodrama to create a collage of meanings, styles, genres and emotions. The scrambled and fractured narrative structure also, in fact, reflects the characters’ internalized splintered and damaged emotional states to create a rich and multifaceted cultural artifact.

**The Scrambled Narrative: A Successful Postmodern Phenomenon?**

These films are successful culminations of not only form and content but also postmodern concerns of disorientation, narrative fracturing and genre blending. Both *To Die For* and *21 Grams*, as I have shown, can be seen as belonging to other genre classifications, yet their connections to film noir override these genres. Because contemporary and classic films have always been concerned with mixing up genres, the concept of genre in itself is largely unstable and, because of the multiplicity of approaches to film genre, completely variant. Thus, I posit that film noir, a genre that is often disputed as even existing as one, is perhaps one of the only stable and, in terms of the framework I have established for it, one of the only classification systems that
features clear demarcations in the realm of genre theory. Of course, film noir's existence as a genre that can and does override other genre classifications could be argued against, but, as Altman, Staiger and other have proven, nearly any genre can be debunked and shifted around depending on approach and intent. Thus, if a film features the traits and conventions of film noir, depending on what it appears to be on the surface, the film is noir, and this classification system (while somewhat unlike other ways genres have been established), does hold together. In fact, perhaps it is the elusive and slippery nature of classic film noir and its status as a critical, retroactively noticed genre that allows for this stability in contemporary examples. The next and final Chapter, dealing exclusively with David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*, will offer a close analysis of the film and show the incredible intertextual and postmodern potential for the post/neo/noir.
Chapter IV: Unlocking the Blue Box: A Close Critical Analysis: 
*Mulholland Drive*

"I just came here from Deep River, Ontario, and now I’m in this... dream place."
- Betty, *Mulholland Drive*

"There’s a man in back of this place.  
He’s the one who’s doing it.  
I can see him through the wall.  
I can see his face.  
I hope that I never see that face ever outside of a dream."
- Man in Winkie’s, *Mulholland Drive*

"You will see me one more time if you do good.  
You will see me two more times if you do bad."
- The Cowboy, *Mulholland Drive*

After looking at an array of films, all of which reflect the collision between the postmodern, film noir and narrative on some level, it is now time to look very closely at a film that represents a successful, effective and culturally important culmination of the concepts I have been circling throughout this thesis. David Lynch’s masterful *Mulholland Drive* is that film: an exemplary example of a post/neo/noir and a startlingly brilliant work of postmodern high art that also packs an emotional, cathartic punch.

*Mulholland Drive* was originally planned as a television series pilot for ABC. However, word is that once network executives saw the pilot, they passed on the show. French producer Alain Sarde and Canal Plus stepped in to finance the project’s expansion from television show to feature film. Lynch re-assembled the cast and shot more footage, reshaping the story and reversing the open-ended nature of a series into a story with a definite and somewhat clear conclusion. The release date was October 8, 2001 and the film went on to make a respectable-for-an-art-house-film $20 million US worldwide. An award at Cannes, a best director Academy Award nomination
for Lynch and a slew of critics’ awards for lead actress Naomi Watts’ performance also followed (Lynch davidlynch.com). However, the film is arguably most remembered for a narrative structure and final act that left audiences confused and frustrated yet utterly entranced.

*Mulholland Drive* centers on Diane Selwyn, a young actress who has moved from Deep River, Ontario to Hollywood in hopes of becoming a movie star (after receiving an inheritance following her aunt’s death). Diane meets and falls in love with Camilla Rhodes, a stunning and seemingly cruel actress who rejects Diane for her director, Adam Kesher. Diane, devastated and broken, puts a hit out on Camilla’s life. After Camilla has been killed, Diane moves closer and closer towards a total psychotic break and, in the final few hours of her life, she has a guilt-soaked fever-dream in which her subconscious presents an idealized re-telling of her own story. The events that occur have a tenuous relationship to what has really happened to Diane, and because the dream is presented as reality before we actually see what is real, these connections can take repeated viewings to work out.

I will be deconstructing the work by exploring the film’s narrative, psychology, nostalgia, intertextuality and themes; and ultimately explaining what it seems to me the film is saying, and how it says it, through a multi-layered meta-structure and use of sophisticated film style. First, however, it is essential that I demonstrate how *Mulholland Drive* fits both the framework I have set out for film noir and the postmodern.
Mulholland Drive & Film Noir

Themes of crime and corruption weave through the film's complex narrative structure. The central crime involves Diane putting a hit out on the life of her ex-lover Camilla and this act motors the rest of the plot, with other crimes splintering off from this one in reality as well as in Diane's constructed fantasy. The film kicks off with two mysterious men attempting to kill a woman, which is interrupted by another criminal act, seemingly intoxicated teenagers drag-racing along the titular road. Breaking and entering, multiple murders, implied prostitution, vandalism, domestic abuse, financial fraud, and much gunplay all act as important plot points and are integral to the story. Perhaps most remarkable is Diane's imagining of the structure and dark underside of the Hollywood movie industry, which she sees as ruled by a Mafia-like pair of brothers. This pair, along with a wheelchair-bound dwarf, who seems to act as their boss-of-sorts, control and manipulate casting decisions and have the power to construct fame and success. An implied threat of violence and overt ability to control the movie making system through financial means surrounds this mysterious group and their criminal acts.

This obsession with crime ties together with another essential film noir trope, violence. The surprising car crash, leaving a dozen dead in a ditch overlooking Los Angeles is only the initial display of violent imagery. Characters are shot, beaten, pushed and attacked. Throughout the duration of the film, we witness no less than thirteen deaths and many displays of physical aggression: sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, but at all times present.
Mulholland Drive was dedicated to Jennifer Syme, an actress who appeared in Lynch's Lost Highway (1997) and was also the director's assistant for several years. She died violently at age 29 in a car crash just months after giving birth to a stillborn baby (the father was Keanu Reeves). Although never confirmed by Lynch himself, there seems to be a tenuous connection between Syme's tragic life and this film, making it arguably Lynch's most emotional and female-focused motion picture to date. This is not an empty text. Instead, there is a powerful and poignant critique of Hollywood as an illusory and dangerous trap for young women. The film is littered with women with stars in their eyes, who have either tried and failed to become Hollywood successes or act as pawns of a patriarchal and harsh system. The many random women who populate the narrative are all in some ways desperate and reliant on their looks, their surface, in order to achieve their goals. Importantly, in Mulholland Drive, no woman actually succeeds except for Camilla, an ambitious and manipulative femme fatale who is, at the outset of the film, already dead. Within Diane's dream narrative, female characters pop up and act as symbolic of this critique of Hollywood-as-meat-grinder – it chews up fresh young women and spits them out unrecognizable and beyond repair. A bruised prostitute, a tired-looking waitress, many desperate-for-the-part starlets and Coco (played by a terrifying Ann Miller), are all presented as women in decline, and their wasted and shattered lives literally and figuratively litter the "city of dreams."

Like all film noirs, the conclusion to Mulholland Drive is dark and tragic. After her frenzied fever dream in which she tries to escape her unbearable reality, Diane, plagued by demons both real ("Those two detectives were here
looking for you again," says her neighbour) and imagined (she is tormented by an elderly couple rendered in miniature; I believe these characters serve as visualizations of Diane’s parents or grandparents or even perhaps her deceased aunt and uncle; Either way, they seem to symbolize lost youth, innocence and idealism). Diane, hysterical and screaming, runs into her bedroom, grabs a gun, and shoots herself in the head. The tragic conclusion is deepened with a brief coda in which we see the happy and blissful faces of both Camilla and Diane (both now dead) superimposed over a glittering Los Angeles nightscape, both reinforcing the aforementioned Hollywood critique and adding emotional depth to the heartbreaking finale.

Diane does not know what to do when she has lost her lover, so instead of dealing with the reality of the situation or moving on, she makes the choice to have her killed. This film has a strong focus on contemporary society, particularly Hollywood as morally bankrupt. Hollywood is an apt landscape to set this story, as the hysterically desperate and money- and fame-hungry characters who we are led to believe exist there are at extreme odds with the manufactured and glossed-over image the city presents for itself through the media and who it chooses to celebrate. The lines between good and bad and right and wrong are blurred, as characters make decisions based on money and fear rather than a moral code. Everyone is in a continual state of manipulating others or being manipulated themselves, with a selfish and self-obsessed quest for fame and success at any cost — sexual, financial or moral. Even the conclusion and denouement in which Diane seems to pay for her crimes is underscored by the sense that Diane is just as afraid of being
caught and punished for her actions, as she is guilty and morose over what she has done.

Perhaps more than any other film analyzed in this thesis, *Mulholland Drive* is explicitly concerned with psychology. The first 80 percent of the film probes and explores the subconscious of Diane, who re-imagines her waking life in the last few hours before her suicide. As mostly consisting of dream logic and dream imagery, the bulk of the film is actually a product of Diane’s fractured and unstable emotional state. Unlike other “it was all a dream” fake-outs, Lynch creates a complex and confounding dreamscape that only retrospectively can be seen as all about Diane.

*Mulholland Drive & Postmodernity*

*Mulholland Drive* also fits the postmodern template I have been using throughout this study. Concepts of intertextuality and nostalgia will be explored in detail later in this Chapter; however, it is important to point out that the film is a multifarious blending of high and low culture, with scenes of humorous violence, high camp and self-referential pop culture references (much-mocked country singer Billy Rae Cyrus cameos as a pool man) existing within a complicated and psychologically intricate narrative structure and an art film sensibility. As well, the film is self-reflexive in that it is a movie about movies and the movie industry and uses strange juxtapositions and camera angles to remind the viewer that they are, in fact, watching a film. At one point, Betty says to Rita, “Come on, it’ll be just like the movies. We’ll pretend to be someone else.” The playful and ironic way in which Lynch creates his contemporary vision of Hollywood is also indicative of its
postmodern nature, as is the film's apparent obsession with the visual (photo-resumes, gaudy costuming, gorgeous cinematography, obvious make-up).

Postmodern disorientation is perhaps the most obvious characteristic at work here, with a narrative structure that seems designed to confound. As well, Lynch mirrors this logic disorientation with scenes of blurry, out-of-focus cinematography, distorted sounds, and seemingly unrelated scenes, sequences and characters. Of course, it all does fit together at the end, but even many film critics have failed to understand and grasp the postmodern logic of the film.

Critical Reception: Incoherence

_Mulholland Drive_ not only fits the frameworks set out for the postmodern and film noir, but the plot itself, much like classic film noirs like _The Big Sleep_ (Howard Hawks, 1946), can be very difficult to decode. In fact, critical reception has largely failed to understand the intricacies of the narrative structure, mostly opting for the incoherence argument. Many of the complex and intertextual references as well as the narrative and visual disorientation featured in the film led many popular film critics and audiences to chalk the film up to being beautifully shot and interesting, but far from logical. It is important to note that most of these critics do not view _Mulholland Drive_ as a bad object or one unworthy of attention, but that they simply were unable to “unlock” the narrative and fit the puzzle together. Here is a somewhat random sampling of what some well-known film critics have said about the film:
"An extended mood opera, if you want to put an arty label on incoherence."
   - Desson Thomson, Washington Post

"A load of moronic and incoherent garbage."
   - Rex Reed, New York Observer

"The film is performance art, it's masturbation – apparently very fulfilling for the doer but pretty dang tiresome for the watcher."
   - Karina Montgomery, CINERINA

"Lynch is playing a big practical joke on us. He takes characters we have come to care about and obscures their fates in gibberish."
   - James Berardinelli, REELVIEWS

"The movie is hypnotic; we're drawn along as if one thing leads to another— but nothing leads anywhere, and that's even before the characters start to fracture and recombine like flesh caught in a kaleidoscope. Mulholland Drive isn't like Memento, where if you watch it closely enough, you can hope to explain the mystery. There is no explanation. There may not even be a mystery."
   - Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun-Times

Reception in academic circles was undoubtedly more supportive; however, perhaps due to how recently the film was released, I have not been able to uncover much material through my research. John Belton provides a useful narrative diagram in American Cinema American Culture (2005) and academic journals such as Film Comment and Senses of Cinema seem to understand that this is a multi-layered, subconscious-focused film. Maximilian Le Can's article "In Dreams: A Review of Mulholland Drive," understands the narrative intricacies but digresses into comparative analyses with other films before fully fleshing out the minutiae. Other articles (Amy Taubin's "In Dreams" and Philip Lopate's "Welcome to L.A.: Hollywood outsider David Lynch plunges into Tinseltown's dark psyche," respectively) also comprehend the complex structure of the film but fail to look at how Lynch's aesthetics play a large role in creating meaning and instead focus mostly on his past oeuvre and the plot points in Mulholland Drive. While these academic critics do not
present the incoherence argument, none has presented an especially detailed analysis of the film. No book has been published on David Lynch post-
*Mulholland Drive.*

I very much believe that there is a cohesive and coherent logic at work in the film and that it within this “incoherence” that deep meanings and resonant themes are played out. What follows is how I see all parts of the film fitting together into a post/neo/noir meta-work, with a detailed breakdown of how the film’s elements fit together and *what it all means.*

**The Narrative**

The narrative of this film can be roughly divided into two sections, Diane’s reality and Diane’s delusional fantasy. The first 80 percent of the film, with a few small exceptions, shows this dream, told chronologically. The final 20 percent of the film is reality. However, this second part is told with a scrambled narrative and is a mixture of real time, flashbacks and brief breaks back to Diane’s constructed fantasy. How do we know what is real and what is not? Lynch has inserted subtle clues into the narrative to indicate this. The film begins with a surreal jitterbug sequence, with images layered over other images. An overexposed image of a beautiful blonde woman, smiling and blissful, is superimposed. This represents Diane’s back-story, her victory at a “jitterbug contest” and also a symbolization of her lost youth, hope and dreams. Then, in a blurry POV shot with strange, tortured breathing on the soundtrack, we see a dark bedroom and bed and the camera collapses into an orange pillow. Fade to black. The dream begins. Roughly 114 minutes later, the cowboy enters Diane’s bedroom and says, “Hey pretty girl, time to
"wake up," vocalizing the events as, in fact, being only a dream. Within the dream, props, people, images, music and locations are shifted around and reconfigured at the service of Diane's subconscious. As well, important symbols from Diane's life (the blue key, the blue box, the photo-resume) take on different shapes, appearances and significance and within her mind Diane imbues these objects with meanings that also serve as signifiers for the themes of the film.

The fever-dream acts as Diane's attempt to forget or re-imagine her life; however, as her fantasy narrative progresses, the illusion begins to shatter and reality slowly trickles in until Diane is awakened and, racked with guilt and either on the verge or in the midst of a breakdown, takes her own life by shooting herself in the face.

When this reality is restored, there is a shift in narrative structure. Instead of the chronology of the dream, we now see the real world through Diane's fractured remembering of what has caused her mind to create said dream. Thus, the film becomes non-linear, a pastiche of events all dealing with Diane, her failed quest to become a success in Hollywood and her doomed relationship with Camilla Rhodes. And, in typical Lynch fashion, reality is stranger than the dream. The film form also undergoes a shift as the film transitions to the real world. Ironically, Lynch presents reality as more dream-like than the dream. Strange, canted framing, racking of focus, anomalous cuts (unpredictably short or long takes), unexpectedly concise or protracted scenes are juxtaposed and the soundtrack becomes more and more abstract, with sounds and music continuing over cuts, creating a messy, uncertain intermingling of images and audio.
The Dream

Diane creates a complex and strange wish fulfillment narrative for herself. It begins with a black car traveling down Mulholland Drive. Inside the car is Camilla (however, in the dream, we never find out her "real" name) and, when the limo driver stops the car she says, "What are you doing? We don't stop here." The driver turns around and aims a gun at her; however, before the murder can be completed, a group of freewheeling, drag racing teenagers collide with the limo. Camilla is the only survivor of the crash. Thus, Diane's dream begins with the playing out of Camilla surviving the crash and, by association, the hit put out on her life by Diane in reality. It only makes sense that Diane's re-working of her story would begin with Camilla somehow escaping the hit since Diane is clearly guilt-racked and obsessed with what she has done and is desperately trying to convince herself that Camilla could still be alive (even though we later know that she is certain Camilla is, in fact, dead).

Also, importantly, Diane places Camilla in a black limo, the same black limo that, in reality, took Diane to Camilla's engagement party, where she made the decision to end Camilla's life and, by extension, her own. Diane feels that her life ended the night of the party, so it only makes sense that the limo acts as a vehicle of death in her dream. After escaping, Camilla stumbles down a hill into Los Angeles and hides herself in a recently vacated apartment as detectives investigate the crash site.

The next sequence features two characters that do not seem to have anything to do with the rest of the narrative. Two men sit in Winkie's diner.
They could be co-workers, friends, or psychiatrist and patient. One man says to the other, "I had a dream about this place," subtly underlining the entire narrative thread's existence as a subconscious construct. The man explains his dream and how he is terrified that there is a man behind the diner who is "doing it." It is implied that "it" is creating fear, anxiety, distress and psychological torture, much like what a guilty conscience can produce. In fact, their conversation is peppered with words like "scared," "fear," "afraid" and "frightened." The two men creep out behind the diner to investigate and encounter a monstrous homeless man lurking behind a wall. The man who had the dream falls to the ground. This scene is difficult to piece in to the rest of the dream logic; however, it is integral to the themes Lynch is working with here. He shows danger, terror and fear lurking in the most non-threatening of places and creates a symbol to represent Diane's growing guilt, fear and hysteria. The man looks like a demon because he represents a demonic act: Diane's actions against Camilla. In reality, this Winkie's restaurant is where Diane arranged the hit on Camilla's life and, in fact, within the flashback contained in the reality portion of the narrative, Diane sees the fainted man staring at her from the counter and thus in her dream, he must be punished and disposed of for possibly overhearing Diane's illegal plans – to ensure he is not a witness to what Diane has done.

Nearly 20 minutes into the dream narrative and the main character Diane has yet to make her entrance. A montage of phone calls communicating, "the girl is still missing" is next, followed by a black telephone beside a red lamp ringing and ringing. The ringing telephone forms a sound bridge and segues to Diane (or "Betty Elms", as she has re-named herself in
her fantasy) arriving at the airport in Los Angeles. This sound bridge acts as an understated connection between the ringing phone (which is later revealed to be in Diane’s seedy apartment) and the character of Betty. Diane’s re-imagining of herself is that of a cheerful, perky, friendly and fresh optimist who speaks in cinematic clichés ("Won’t that be the day!" “Thank you, darling”). Betty arrives at the airport with an old couple, Irene and her traveling companion, who along with everyone else in this narrative stream, are kind and welcoming to Betty. After Betty leaves the old couple to take a cab to her aunt’s apartment, Lynch inserts a simple yet important scene. We see the old couple in the back of a car, driving to an unknown destination. They have bizarre smiles on their faces and do not speak. These characters also provide a subtle hint at the world being a constructed unreal one, as once the characters are out of Betty’s immediate situation, they become empty of any agency and literally have nothing to say or do – these people are all players in Diane’s created world.

After Betty and “Camilla” meet (Betty accidentally finds her nude in the shower stall of her aunt’s apartment and assumes that she is a friend of her aunt’s), another narrative thread is introduced, this time involving Adam Kesher, an acclaimed director who is casting his new film, The Sylvia North Story. This thread introduces the second thematic concern of the film, Hollywood as a corrupt and bizarre tool for organized crime and the arbitrary nature of achieving fame and stardom. In a meeting with Hollywood heavies, Adam is told to cast an unknown actress, Camilla Rhodes, presented to him in a photo-resume. Diane has visualized Camilla as a blonde woman who, in reality, she sees kissing the real Camilla at a party. And she has also created
an elaborate criminal underworld that controls the casting and production of the motion picture industry. Adam is instructed to proclaim, “This is the girl,” when Camilla auditions and choose her as the lead. In reality, Diane auditioned for and failed to get the part of Sylvia North, so in dream logic, she sees actors and directors as pawns in her imagined criminal underworld. This is Diane's rationalization of how and why she was unable to become a successful actress; she cannot deal with the fact that perhaps she was not talented enough to warrant success, so she places the blame on the system. Later on, this theme is explicitly driven home.

Betty goes in for her “big audition” and surprises everyone by delivering an amazing performance: subtle, powerful and nothing like what is expected. However, no matter how “stellar” her audition was, she is still unable to get the part because of the criminal control and pervasiveness that, at the time of her psychotic fever-dream, she has only begun to think she can glimpse. As well, this scene is key because it is the first scene in which Diane begins to emerge from the constructed identity of Betty; Diane’s dream begins to fracture. The seductive and sexual being Betty becomes during her audition is Diane.

Meanwhile, Betty and Rita (the name dream-Camilla has given herself) try to unravel the mystery of Rita’s identity (Rita: “I don’t know who I am!”), who has lost her memory in the car crash. They find a strange blue key and stacks of money in Rita's purse, in a re-appropriation of both the money Diane used to have Camilla killed and the blue key she was told she would find once the deed was done. The women make phone calls, search the newspaper and go to Winkie’s, where they see a waitress named Diane (in reality, Diane
sees the waitress at Winkie’s when she is arranging the hit and her name is Betty) and Rita remembers the name Diane Selwyn (who, in fact is the architect of this complex narrative). Thus, Lynch again shows cracks in the artificial world Diane has created, as her real name emerges, as does the inspiration for her fantasy persona, the waitress who is also, presumably, some kind of starlet-in-waiting. Betty makes a telephone call to Diane Selwyn and, in complete denial of her own actual persona, says, “Strange to be calling yourself,” to Rita, and we hear Diane’s authentic voice on the answering machine. This investigation continues, and Betty and Rita go to Diane Selwyn’s apartment, break in and find Diane’s corpse on the bed. This can also be read as a key scene as not only does it foreshadow Diane’s eventual suicide, but it shows how the barrier between Diane’s fantasy and reality are beginning to blur. In her guilty fever-dream, Diane not only goes to her own apartment, where she is sleeping at the time, but she visualizes herself dead and disfigured, perhaps as some kind of self-punishment for what she has done. It is becoming more and more difficult for Diane to keep reality out of her fantasy.

In another narrative stream, Lynch presents more characters acting as symbols, and particularly how these characters relate to Diane’s skewed and deluded vision of Hollywood. Women, particularly, are a focus here, as the broken, cynical and frantic women littering Hollywood, the “city of dreams,” can all be read as signifiers of the fractured psyche we are submerged in: Diane Selwyn’s

As well, we see Adam Kesher’s bizarre attempt to reconstruct his film, as he finds his wife cheating on him with the pool man and finally agrees to
cast "Camilla Rhodes" as Sylvia North after a peculiar meeting with someone called the cowboy. In reality, the cowboy is a man Diane glimpsed out of the corner of her eye at the engagement party; however, in her dream logic, Diane has dispatched him as just another element in the corrupt underworld that is Hollywood. When Betty and Adam see each other for the first time, their eyes meet in a clichéd "love at first sight" movie moment; she reconfigures her alter-ego as the object of Adam's lust and admiration and Camilla as utterly reliant upon her for her survival and identity discovery.

**No Hay Banda: Club Silencio**

The final sequence before Diane's illusion is shattered takes place at a mysterious theatre called Club Silencio. After making love (perhaps the final thing Diane can "pretend" before her self-delusion runs out; perhaps this part of the fantasy is too "real" and too tragic in order for Diane to go on), Rita wakes Betty by talking in her sleep. She says, "Silencio...silencio...silencio..." and asks Betty to go somewhere with her; they end up at Club Silencio. Lynch indicates that there are cracks and fissures forming in the heretofore "safe" environment Diane has created for herself. The journey to the club is shot with out of focus cinematography and accelerated and decelerated pacing. They arrive at Club Silencio and witness a strange man on an empty stage delivering a monologue in front of a red curtain in a mixture of English, Spanish and French:

"No hay banda.
There is no band.
Il n'est pas d'orchestra.
This is all a tape recording.
No hay banda and yet we hear a band...."
It's all recorded.
It is all a tape.
Il ne'st pas d'orchestre.
It is all an illusion.”

Diane emerges from the persona of Betty once again and retrospectively we apprehend that she is also realizing what she has done (killed her former lover) and what she must do (pay some kind of price for it). She also, in a hysterical shaking fit, appears to be so racked with sadness, guilt, disappointment and humiliation that her constructed persona appears to be on the verge of rupture or self-destruction. Once again, reality is breaking through her dream and this time her constructed fantasy cannot be maintained. Diane is desperately clinging to her illusions, her fantasy, but cannot anymore. Rebekah Del Rio's performance of Roy Orbison's “Cryin’” (here, sung in Spanish, “Llorando”) and subsequent collapse (while her singing continues), and the entire stage show at Club Silencio is in many ways the key to unlocking Mulholland Drive. Thematically, this scene works on two levels. Diane's performance is also over and also revealed to be an illusion, not real. Like Rebekah, Diane can pretend to perform all she wants, but that will not change what is happening in her real life. This scene is also Lynch commenting on the cinema itself. We, as audience members know it is false, constructed, that “there is no band,” yet we believe in it, and in fact, must believe in it in order to experience any kind of catharsis. The power of cinema, as shown through the intertextual and complex nature of Diane's dream world, is the last thing she can cling to and is ultimately and undeniably false.

At this point, Betty opens her purse and finds a blue box that matches the key found in Rita's purse. The blue key and blue box are representations
of what Diane has done: representations of reality. She has re-imagined the blue key and what it opens in her fever dream as reality itself. The hit man told her she would find a blue key when Camilla was killed, and therefore the blue key and blue box represent this incontestable fact. Therefore, in her fantasy, Diane has constructed a complex, multi-layered narrative in a desperate attempt to prevent things from being found out, from being discovered, thus delaying her forced confrontation of reality. However, in dreams, as in life, reality cannot be ignored for long.

 Appropriately, when Rita is about to open the box, to thrust Diane back into reality, Betty, Diane's constructed alter ego, literally vanishes. She, after all, was only an illusion, much like Club Silencio. Rita, now alone, unlocks and opens the blue box, which is staged in an appropriately terrifying way – reality and consequences are scary. The strange blue box is opened and the camera tracks inside the box, which then falls to the floor and disappears.

**Reality**

Reality is presented in *Mulholland Drive* as non-linear, nightmarish, scrambled and with Diane as the unquestionable central character. Diane's failed relationship, failed career, catastrophic decisions and pathetic life are played out in a montage of sorts, with images and music bleeding between scenes. This sequence replays Diane and Camilla's doomed relationship and Diane's failed attempt to become an actress and movie star. Only after experiencing Diane's idealized vision of herself and her career trajectory do we understand the full extent to which this is a sad, dark and tragic story. One of the final conversations between Diane and Camilla involves Diane throwing
Camilla out of her apartment and exists in sharp contrast to the tenderness between Betty and Rita:

Camilla: “Don’t be mad. Don’t make it be like this.”
Diane: “Oh, sure... You want me to make this easy for you. No! No fucking way! It’s not gonna be. It’s not easy for me!”

The centerpiece of this section involves Camilla’s engagement to Adam Kesher and the party thrown to celebrate it. This is where Diane’s life shatters and we witness her shift into extreme depression and desperation. This scene is also key to unlocking much of the dream logic, as we are introduced to characters’ true identities and realize the implied significance of the location and what happened there. Coco, who in Diane’s subconscious was transformed into a friendly landlady, here is Adam’s mother and treats Diane with a mixture of pity and condescension. The young actress who becomes Camilla Rhodes in the dream, approaches and shares an intimate kiss with the real Camilla that is beyond unbearable for Diane. In a beautifully shot and acted prologue to the party, we see Diane traveling down Mulholland Drive in a black limo and then Camilla leading her through a “short-cut” through the woods to the party in the Hollywood Hills. It is Diane’s last moment of happiness (and, significantly, one of the only times during “reality” that she smiles) and also yet another subversive commentary on Hollywood, as the women are “safe” only in the dark recesses of the forest, while the city is presented as horrific and unpleasant.

Nostalgia for the Past

A key postmodern concept and a frequent feature of the work of David Lynch, *Mulholland Drive* is an ironic use of nostalgic images and music.
Through an erasure of the boundaries between past and present, the film exists in a postmodern dystopia that is both now and then at the same time. The 1950s, particularly, seem to be a fixation for Lynch, perhaps because like Hollywood, it is a decade that presented a sanitized, perfect exterior masking very real cultural and social difficulties. *The Sylvia North Story*, is, presumably, a film about a pop singer from the 1950s and Adam, while auditioning lead actresses for the part, has them lip-synch to pop hits from that decade ("I've Told Every Little Star", "Sixteen Reasons") while dressed in costume. Ann Miller, screen dancer from the classic era plays Coco in an over-the-top, ironic throwback to classic Hollywood cinema, complete with oversized pearl earrings, elaborate pin curls and outmoded dialogue ("In my living glory, baby!"). Coco could have walked right out of the 1950s, as could have Betty, with her perfect blonde hair, perky personality and detective smarts, who exists as a pastiche of Nancy Drew and Sandra Dee. Lynch sets his film in a Hollywood that has not changed much from that of the past. Computers are absent, telephones are of the non-cellular variety, and Betty's apartment is a beautiful, sun-soaked Hollywood cliché, complete with courtyard. However, the dark themes that seep through this idealized exterior are insuppressible and, like the controversies, scandals and hidden social problems of the 1950s, soon come to light.

**Intertextual References to Lynch's Oeuvre**

listing of the recurring themes and obsessions running through Lynch's work. Categories like “body,” “curtain,” “dream,” “night,” “smoke” and “surface” are used to chart a complex intertextual web connecting the various films that make up Lynch's oeuvre (Chion 161-198). *Mulholland Drive*, too, contains this fascinating interplay. Viewed as a whole, it is possible to draw these chronic fixations and concerns through to his latest effort, creating a complex, auteur-driven postmodern mélange.

Lynch's films are often concerned with guilt, denial, murder and violence and often feature the suffering or death of a woman. In *Blue Velvet*, Lynch traces the affliction of a lounge singer, Dorothy Valens, who lives in the Deep River apartment building (Diane is from Deep River, Ontario). His television show *Twin Peaks* (1990) and feature film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992) revolved around the mysterious question, “Who killed Laura Palmer?” a high school girl living in a small town. Lynch's fascination with mysteries, crime-solving and ultimately empty questioning and investigating is a key trait of his work and can be found in his work from *Blue Velvet* through *Twin Peaks, Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive*. Search all you want, Lynch seems to be saying, the secrets and mysteries of the human psyche will never be solved.

Sexual obsession, loss of innocence, shocking violence, desperation and the absurd and corrupt lingering below the surface of the everyday are also key themes worked out in his films and are all important features of *Mulholland Drive*. Visual markers become significant as well and link to these concepts. Red drapes are common, hinting at the always-hidden dark underside to contemporary life. Dwarfs often make an appearance as
signifiers of the other and corruption; smoke-filled rooms obscure clarity of 
vision and blur and cloud visuals and actions.

This intertextuality does not exist in a vacuum within Lynch's own 
filmography but extends to other films, and, significantly, the canon of film noir 
texts. Like he first demonstrates in Blue Velvet and perhaps most explicitly 
shows in Lost Highway, Lynch is concerned with using the conventions, tone 
and themes of film noir, often in a highly ironic and playful way.

**Intertextual References to Film Noir**

Very much a film set in and about Hollywood, Mulholland Drive 
expands upon its postmodern potential by referencing other films, other 
filmmakers and, particularly, the established conventions of film noir. These 
film noir references run the gamut from classic-era film noir to contemporary 
film noir. Within Diane's dream, Camilla sees a poster on the wall for the Rita 
Hayworth vehicle Gilda (Charles Vidor, 1946), a classic film noir, and 
therefore renames herself Rita and is known through the rest of dream 
narrative as that name. This intertextual connection to Hayworth operates on 
another level as well. Hayworth was famously scrubbed of her ethnic identity 
when formed into a Hollywood star, and Lynch uses this connection to 
underline the theme of the homogenizing and image-controlling nature of past 
and present Hollywood. Betty's Rita is also vulnerable, injured and 
consistently fetishized, a blank, desperate slate on which Betty can play out 
issues of identity and create her ideal version of her former lover.

After Betty and Rita find Diane's corpse, Rita, terrified and confused, 
feels she must hide her identity. Betty makes her over in the image of herself,
with a short blonde wig. The scene, with two icy blondes acting as doubles of each other, is reminiscent of the films of Alfred Hitchcock (Dial M For Murder (1954), Vertigo (1958) and Psycho (1960)). Add to this identity confusion and conflation and the dream character of Camilla Rhodes (blonde), the real character of Diane (also blonde) and the waitress Diane/Betty (yes, blonde), who appears in both reality and dreams, and Lynch is clearly playing with these ideas of identity and identity formation.

Earlier in the film, Lynch orchestrates a scene that looks, feels and is shot much like the early work of Tarantino (Reservoir Dogs, Pulp Fiction). An unnamed hit man is in a grimy office talking to another man. Then, out of the blue, the hit man shoots the other man in the head and then, due to a series of mishaps and accidents (shades of chance, fate, coincidence), ends up killing a woman working in the next office and the janitor vacuuming in the hallway. The hit man shoots the vacuum cleaner to get it to shut off and ends up setting the building’s fire alarm off. This mixture of violence, excess and humour clearly references Tarantino’s obsession with and thematic focus on petty criminals and violent surprise. As well, much like the glowing briefcase in Pulp Fiction (which was a reference already), Lynch inserts a mysterious black book described as, “The History of the World... and Phone Numbers,” which acts as the motivation for the office worker’s murder. Thus, not only classic film noirs but also contemporary examples are blended into Lynch’s rich intertextual stew.

Lynch also plays with conventions of classic film noir. In one scene in particular, two detectives are investigating the car crash from which Rita escaped. Dressed in trench coats and suits and ties, the two men seem to
have just stepped out of a film noir from the 1940s or 1950s. Consider the ironic dialogue between the two men, spoken in a deadpan yet cliché film noir parody:

Detective #1: "The boys found this on the floor in back of the caddy." (Holds up a plastic bag containing a pearl earring)
Detective #2: "Yeah, you showed me."
Detective #1: "Could be unrelated."
Detective #2: "Could be. Any of those dead kids wearing pearl earrings?"
Detective #1: "No. Could be someone's missing maybe."
Detective #2: "That's what I'm thinking."

When studied alongside Mulholland Drive's other pastiche and parody of film noir conventions, such as the inclusion of an amnesiac, a femme fatale and unreliable narration, as well as noir stylistic conventions like urban spaces, dark, expressionistic lighting, and unexpected angles and cinematography, the film becomes not only a meditation on its clearer themes, but a reworking and re-appropriation of the entire canon of film noir.

"A Love Story in the City of Dreams":
A Successful Postmodern Phenomenon

Unlike some of the films looked at in this thesis, Mulholland Drive is a post/neo/noir that is actually about something and is not just an empty shell posing as a cultural artifact. When the narrative, references and postmodern concerns are dissected, the film seems to have two main thematic concerns, exposed through a deft merging of form and content: revealing Hollywood as a city of illusion and lies and the universal and painful nature of any kind of loss. At its core, this is a straightforward story about two women who fell in love and, due to outside pressures, the impossibility of the Hollywood myth and a fractured and damaged mental state, things do not work out for either
Diane or Camilla. David Lynch describes *Mulholland Drive* simply as “a love story in the city of dreams” (Lynch davidlynch.com) That it is also a tragedy for our postmodern times and a brilliant reworking of film noir conventions speaks to Lynch’s uncompromising vision, artistic brilliance and, perhaps most refreshing, his apparent belief in patient, intelligent and challenged film audiences.
Conclusion: Post/Neo/Noir Now

Returning to and expanding on the four central arguments of this thesis, as outlined in the Abstract, this conclusion aims to show how these statements have been proven through the analysis, theoretical framework and examples provided by this study.

a) The post/neo/noir sub-genre is fundamentally postmodern and produces texts that embrace these concerns.

These films, like films from many other genres, are products of the global postmodern condition and as such feature international intertextual references, pastiche that takes from a wide assortment of cultures and cinemas and an understanding of current conventions of global film noir production. Examples of self-reflexivity, surface, irony and disorientation can be found in each text, as can a recurring sense of despair, disillusionment and moral ambiguity. As well, not only are American films definitive examples of the film noir, as the globe-spanning objects of study I have chosen here prove. Collective malaise, psychological angst and other elements of the film noir are prevalent in films from Mexico, Germany, France, Canada and the United States, forming a catalogue of post/neo/noirs that is truly transnational and postmodern in scope.

b) Only those post/neo/noirs that fully incorporate both postmodern filmmaking impulses and a deft merging of film form and content are effective at producing a significant commentary.

As films like Irreversible and Memento prove, a full engagement with the postmodern is required within these texts, especially in terms of irony. When this or other elements are missing, it can transform a film otherwise capable of critical commentary into one that is empty of meaning, or, even
more problematically, rife with dangerous and offensive representations. However, when the films are successful at integrating form and content, like most of the other films looked at here, they become refined examples of contemporary filmmaking that not only demonstrates an understanding of and sophisticated use of cinematic convention, but supplies a cultural critique enhanced by this knowledge. These postmodern texts are far from empty, as their very postmodern nature can be seen as a vehicle in which this critique is expressed. It only makes sense that a film containing a message regarding the complex and media-drenched nature of postmodern life would be a meta-structured, multifarious text itself.

c) Not only is film noir a stable genre category, it can be seen as a dominant one, as films that fit the film noir framework can be considered film noir regardless of what other genres they might seem to otherwise belong to.

Most theorists and critics working in the field of genre theory hold two beliefs: genres are fundamentally unstable and film noir is a problematic if not impossible classification term to reconcile. However, as this thesis has shown, the unique status of film noir as a critical and retrospective genre has allowed for more freedom and greater depth of analysis. Instead of looking merely at visual iconography or conventions, critics looked at what the films were all about and how they communicated their messages. This specialized way of looking at the film noir ironically allows for individual texts to be categorized and established as film noirs based on a number of social and cultural criteria instead of strict rules involving set conventions or elements. Thus, the film noir becomes a dominant mode when blended with other always already unstable genres.
d) The post/neo/noir has the potential to offer a vital, profound and complex social criticism and is designed for consumption and interpretation by a sophisticated postmodern audience.

As shown by most of the films in this thesis, particularly *Mulholland Drive*, postmodern impulses and profound meaning are not mutually exclusive, as some postmodern theorists have posited. Instead, these films are designed for a savvy audience who can decode and understand the complex and multifaceted nature of postmodern art. Social criticisms of poverty, crime, capitalism, materialism, fame, wealth, celebrity and false ideals are included in these post/neo/noirs and integrated in a subtle yet complex way, as proven through the texts examined in this study. Although sometimes “incoherent” on the surface, when interpreted, these are culturally important and profound statements dealing with the torment and confusion of contemporary life.

Post/Neo/Noir Continues...

Two recently released post/neo/noirs show that this trend is continuing to be prevalent in transnational filmmaking. *Sin City* (Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005) and *Bad Education* (Pedro Almodovar, 2004) are both texts that feature this same culmination of the postmodern and film noir within scrambled narratives. *Bad Education* blends concepts of reality and fiction, time and place and character and actor within a film within a film metastructure, while *Sin City* is a hysterical pastiche of film noir genre tropes, a comic book sensibility and excessive and hyperbolic violence. Both films have been met with enthusiastic and positive critical acclaim and suggest that the post/neo/noir is a genre destined to remain relevant and flourish in our
contemporary times. Unmistakably, the post/neo/noir is emerging as an ideal site in which filmmakers and audiences can negotiate the confusion and darkness of our times.
Filmography

21 Grams (USA, Alejandro Gonzalaz Inarritu, 2003)
50 First Dates (USA, Peter Segal, 2004)
Amores Perros (Mexico, Alejandro Gonzalaz Inarritu, 2000)
Bad Education (Spain, Pedro Almodovar, 2004)
Big Sleep, The (USA, Howard Hawks, 1946)
Blade Runner (USA, Ridley Scott, 1982)
Blood Simple (USA, Joel Coen, 1984)
Blue Velvet (USA, David Lynch, 1986)
Body Heat (USA, Lawrence Kasdan, 1981)
Bourne Identity, The (USA, Doug Liman, 2002)
Bourne Supremacy, The (USA, Paul Greengrass, 2004)
Brazil (USA, Terry Gilliam, 1986)
Breakfast Club, The (USA, John Hughes, 1986)
Citizen Kane (USA, Orson Welles, 1939)
Criss Cross (USA, Robert Sidomak, 1949)
Dawn of the Dead (USA, Zach Snyder, 2004)
Deep End, The (USA, Scott McGehee and David Siegel, 2001)
Doom Generation, The (USA, Gregg Araki, 1994)
Double Indemnity (USA, Billy Wilder, 1944)
Femme Fatale (USA, Brian De Palma, 2002)
Go (USA, Doug Liman, 1999)
Happiness (USA, Todd Solontz, 1997)
Irreversible (France, Gasper Noe, 2001)
It Happened One Night (USA, Frank Capra, 1934)
Jackie Brown (USA, Quentin Tarantino, 1997)
L.A. Confidential (USA, Curtis Hanson, 1997)
Lost Highway (USA, David Lynch, 1997)
Maelstrom (Canada, Denis Villeneuve, 2000)
Man Who Wasn't There, The (USA, Joel Coen, 2001)
Maltese Falcon, The (USA, John Huston, 1941)
Memento (USA, Christopher Nolan, 2001)
Million Dollar Baby (USA, Clint Eastwood, 2004)
Mulholland Drive (USA/France, David Lynch, 2001)
Natural Born Killers (USA, Oliver Stone, 1994)
Ocean's Twelve (USA, Stephen Soderbergh, 2004)
Pulp Fiction (USA, Quentin Tarantino, 1994)
Reservoir Dogs (USA, Quentin Tarantino, 1991)
Rules of Attraction, The (USA, Roger Avary, 2002)
Run Lola Run (Germany, Tom Tykwer, 1999)
Sin City (USA, Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, 2005)
Storytelling (USA, Todd Solontz, 2001)
To Die For (USA, Gus Van Sant, 1995)
Touch of Evil (USA, Orson Welles, 1958)
Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me (USA, David Lynch, 1992)
Underneath, The (USA, Stephen Soderbergh, 1995)
Usual Suspects, The (USA, Bryan Singer, 1995)
Works Cited

Altman, Rick. Film/Genre. London: British Film Institute, 1999.


Montgomery, Karina. "*Mulholland Drive,*" *CINERINA Online* (www.cinerina.com) accessed [March 2005]


O'Brien, Harvey. *Natural Born Killers* Article (eircom.net) accessed [March 2005]


Reed, Rex. "*Mulholland Drive,*" *New York Observer Online.* (observer.com) accessed [March 2005]


Taubin, Amy, "In Dreams", *Film Comment*, Volume 37, No. 5, (Sept-Oct 2001), pp 51-54.
