

THE WORK OF ART  
IN AN AGE OF MEDIA SATURATION:  
INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE FILMS OF  
STEVEN SODERBERGH

By

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## **Abstract**

In the late 1960s, the term "intertextuality" emerged in France in the work of Bulgarian theorist Julia Kristeva. As it was originally conceived, intertextuality was applied primarily to considerations of compare and contrast among texts. Basically, intertextuality pertains to the recognition of the presence of one text in another text. Gradually, as theories of intertextuality developed, the term was expanded to include various forms of cultural production. Text does not only apply to the literary text. All objects of cultural production, particularly electronic arts such as film, can be considered texts. And in more recent films that tend towards postmodern aesthetics, considerations of their intertextuality becomes inevitable. This study will focus on intertextuality as it pertains to the analyses of several films directed by Steven Soderbergh.

I will begin by presenting a summary of aspects of intertextuality that pertain to the study of film, particularly theories developed first by Julia Kristeva, and subsequently taken up by theorists such as Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the work of Soderbergh and the recurring features of his oeuvre that facilitate recognition of his auteur status.

The argumentation and subsequent conclusions of this thesis will endeavor to demonstrate three points:

- i) Although intertextuality was originally intended to apply to the study of literature, it is an important term for the study of film. In fact, all

contemporary films are intertextual.

- ii) The work of Steven Soderbergh provides a diverse range of films that facilitate an examination of the appropriateness of using intertextuality as a theoretical framework for the study of cinema.
- iii) Most contemporary auteurs employ aspects of a postmodern style of filmmaking. One manifestation of postmodernism is the loss of originality, and the difficulty of creating entirely new works of art. But acknowledging the intertextuality of a film need not diminish the value of that film. Recognizing intertextuality as an inevitability should not detract from the auteur status of a given director. Discerning the various sources of Soderbergh's films is a recognition of both his auteur status and his role as less an original author and more an engineer of new film texts based on other artistic and cultural texts evolving from our contemporary, media saturated culture.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
CHAPTER 1: Introduction: Intertextuality, Authorship And the Cinema of Steven Soderbergh.....	1
CHAPTER 2: Intertextuality and the Genre Film: Steven Soderbergh's <i>The Underneath</i> , <i>Out of Sight</i> and <i>The Limey</i> .....	17
CHAPTER 3: Trafficking in Intertextuality: TV Preempts The Movies.....	54
CHAPTER 4: Paratextuality and Considerations of Soderbergh's <i>Kafka</i> .....	72
CHAPTER 5: The Intertextual Traces of <i>Solaris</i> (Lem) And <i>Solaris</i> (Tarkovsky) in Soderbergh's <i>Solaris</i> .....	93
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion: The Contemporary Auteur as Intertextual Engineer.....	112
Filmography.....	121
Bibliography.....	123

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## Chapter 1: Introduction: Intertextuality, Authorship, and the Cinema of Steven Soderbergh

### Introductory Remarks on Intertextuality

As a term, intertextuality is not restricted to literature or even written forms of communication. In addition to film, intertextuality has been employed in studies of music, painting, photography and architecture, to name but a few. Accounts of intertextuality reflect visions of society and human relations. The term can be used in reference to a particular sector of society, or even to a particular moment in history. The film industry regularly relies on the classic texts of Shakespeare or Jane Austen as sources for stories and film adaptations. And many blockbusters endeavor to capitalize on the success of an earlier film through remakes. For instance, Soderbergh's 1995 *The Underneath* is a remake of *Criss Cross* (Siodmak, 1949). Intertextuality became a catch-all term and methodology for comparing and contrasting texts involved in cultural production. Intertextuality is the "culminating term for processes of cultural interconnectivity centred on the printed text" (Orr 170). As a generic term however, intertextuality refers to interactions of 'text', which is fitting and applicable to any electronic medium. Film then, is text, along with novels, plays, television series, radio programmes, and so on. Text production and mass reproduction, concepts of original and copy, imitation, quotation and influence are all facets of intertextuality. In our present time, theorists claim the impossibility of conceiving of any artistic product as unique or original, whether it is a painting, a piece of

music or a film. Every artistic object is clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art. Intertextuality is at the centre of these conceptions of contemporary cultural production. This study will use intertextuality as a theoretical framework for the close analysis of five films directed by Steven Soderbergh. The fundamental nature of film as an artistic medium is that it is intertextual. Film draws on art from a variety of other media. Adaptations of novels may be the most obvious example of film's intertextuality, but as a multi-track medium film has also been heavily influenced by visual arts such as painting and photography, and aspects of sound that include sound effects, dialogue, and music. Film draws from different historical and cultural contexts. Intertextuality problematizes authorship by calling into question issues surrounding artistic creation, originality, autonomy, collaboration, and the diminishment of singular art objects alongside copies and reproductions. Soderbergh's body of work demonstrates a signature aesthetic style and recurring themes and motifs. But his auteur status is less one of a single, original creator, and more akin to the engineer who organizes, controls and constructs. He is no less an auteur because he samples and incorporates diverse facets of art and culture. It is the intention of this study to prove the inevitability of intertextuality in cinema and Soderbergh's position as an auteur despite the fact that the sources and inspirations for his films do not originate within himself but in the culture within which his films are made.

Kristeva is the first theorist to employ the term intertextuality, in chapter four

of her book, *Semeiotike*, which was published in Paris in 1969, but not translated into English until 1980. Kristeva developed what she called "Semianalysis" (Allen, 34). Semianalysis conceives of texts as always in a state of production, rather than just a product to be consumed. It is not only the object of study that is 'in process', but also the subject, author, reader or analyst. Kristeva focuses not only on the literary text, but also on the social text, those social practices of which 'literature' is only one variant. Kristeva writes that a text is in fact a permutation of texts in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another (Allen 35). Texts are made up of what is sometimes styled the cultural or social text, all the different discourses, ways of speaking and saying, institutionally sanctioned structures and systems which make up what we call culture. In this sense, the text is not an individual, isolated object, but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality. Kristeva's conception of intertextuality is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin's studies of the novel and his theories of dialogism.

Bakhtin's theory of dialogism argues that truth and meaning are a conversation, an exchange of ideas, the different utterances within any work involved in an interactive process and epitomized in the writing of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Other terms Bakhtin employs include double-voicing and heteroglossia, which acknowledge within the novel a plurality of discourses, points of view, perspectives, and so on. Kristeva conceives of intertextuality as a productivity and the text as a site where writing and other cultural productions

are in active and constant redistribution. Intertextuality names this interactive, permutational production of text, its constant intersecting and neutralizing processes. Neutralization is not so much a canceling out as an interactive leveling. Prior text materials lose their special status by permutation with others in an intertextual exchange because all intertexts are of equal importance in conceptions of intertextuality as process. Many theorists have developed their own theories of intertextuality based on Kristeva's work in the late 1960s; among them, is Gerard Genette.

Genette developed a theory of intertextuality that elaborates five different types of intertextuality. He called his theory "transtextuality", but his transtextuality is synonymous with Kristeva's intertextuality. The five facets of intertextuality he developed are, intertextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, and hypertextuality. Genette's first type of transtextuality is intertextuality. His type of intertextuality refers to a relationship of copresence between two or more texts, or the presence of one text within another text. This means Genette is less concerned with issues of semiotics and cultural processes than the theories of Barthes and Kristeva. His second type of transtextuality is architextuality. Architextuality is based on the notion of literature as a formal system. Architextuality pertains to a reader's expectations of a text and their reception of it. The third type of transtextuality is metatextuality. Metatextuality occurs when one text takes a position of commentary with respect to another text. This relation of commentary is not necessarily one of acknowledgment. The

fourth type of transtextuality is paratextuality. Paratextuality marks those elements of a text that lie outside the text but have an impact on how a reader receives the text. Elements of paratextuality can include titles, prefaces, interviews, publicity, and authorial and editorial discussions, among others. Paratextuality is very important to the reception of films by spectators. The fifth kind of intertextuality theorized by Genette he has called hypertextuality. This should not be confused with more recent theories of hypertextuality that concern digital technologies and the internet. For Genette, hypertextuality basically describes the relationship of one text to an earlier text, what most theorists would term the 'inter-text'. Hypertextuality occurs when a prior text can be definitely located as a major source of signification for a text.

The term 'text' originally meant "a tissue, a woven fabric" (Barthes). Barthes argues that the idea of the text, and consequently intertextuality, depends on the weave, the garment woven from threads of the "already written" and the "already read" (Allen 6). Every text derives its meaning from its relation to other texts. This kind of relationality can be theorized in a variety of ways: it can involve the plurality of the sign, the relation between signs and texts and the cultural text, the relation between a text and a literary system, or the transformative relation between one text and another text. However the term intertextuality is employed, it implies a new conception of authorship and reading, a conception resistant to former understandings of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy.

Whether they are literary or non-literary, texts do not possess any independent, inherent meaning. Modern theorists conceive of texts as intertextual, any given text being derived from innumerable other texts and referring to systems of languages and other fields of meaning. The act of reading plunges the reader (or film spectator) into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text is to trace those relations. Meaning becomes that which exists between a text and all other texts to which it refers. The term intertextuality is important to modern theory but, like the term postmodernism, it has a variety of meanings and risks meaning something depending on how a particular theorist uses it. For the purposes of this study, intertextuality will embody the broad recognition that all texts refer to other texts, are derived from diverse sources, and are never pure, innocent or entirely original.

#### Steven Soderbergh: Intertextuality and the Contemporary Auteur

Anyone observing the contemporary Hollywood output must recognize the prominence of the author, with potential 'star' and box-office draw, the massive advertising campaigns that seek to sell films based on the popularity of the director. The new Spielberg film, another fantasy from Tim Burton and a quirky comedy by Woody Allen, all have potential box-office draws. Directors become one element of a system of packaging intended to produce films with optimum commercial results. This system of packaging is demonstrative of what has been termed the "New Hollywood". The term 'New Hollywood' is relevant to analyses

of the cinema of Steven Soderbergh because he is part of the current landscape, young directors inspired by the films emblematic of what has been called the "Hollywood Renaissance", work by directors such as Francis Ford Coppola and Robert Altman. Soderbergh has established himself through both mainstream box-office successes (like *Erin Brockovich* (2000) and *Ocean's Eleven* (2001)) and more independent films geared towards a more cinema literate audience, such as *The Limey* and *Full Frontal* (2002).

The period referred to as the Hollywood Renaissance occurred from the mid-to late 1960s, until the mid- to late 1970s. "New Hollywood" is understood to follow this period. "New Hollywood" has also been used since the 1980s to define a brand of filmmaking very different from the filmmaking characteristics of the Hollywood Renaissance. As Geoff King (2002) has theorized New Hollywood includes giant media conglomerates and expensive blockbuster attractions. When the studio system collapsed following charges of vertical integration after WWII, the Hollywood studios did not lose their dominance and control within the industry, but secured their positions by getting involved with larger corporate entities. For example, the merging of Time Warner with AOL was a reshaping of the landscape to the continued benefit of the big studios. This has had an impact on the kinds of films that get made, especially those that receive the 'full treatment' in terms of heavy promotion and prime windows of distribution/exhibition.

The radical politics and questioning of the dominant ideology redolent in films

of the late 1960s was replaced by a turn to the right, most evident in the rise of the blockbuster. In the interests of appealing to a larger audience, these blockbusters abandoned radical content and formal experimentation. But the American cinema of the Hollywood Renaissance, as well as the influx of films demonstrative of European Art Cinema created a more cine- literate audience. These filmgoers were not interested in the spectacles blockbusters provided. A more discerning audience, in combination with the financial success of the blockbuster had an impact on the viability of the more 'arty', smaller feature, and two of the most influential independent distributor/ producers were taken over by the majors in 1993, with Miramax being acquired by Disney, and New Line Cinema by Turner Broadcasting. The independent sector has gained prominence since the 1980s catering to the media and the film savvy spectator.

The cinema of Steven Soderbergh transcends any easy classification, genre distinction, or thematic continuity. He was one of the forerunners of the burgeoning American Independent Cinema, proving the economic viability of low- budget independent films with his first feature, *sex, lies and videotape* (1989), for which he won the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Since then he has made idiosyncratic low- budget films, such as *Schizopolis* (1995) and *Full Frontal*, genre- identified films such as *Out of Sight*, *The Limey*, and *Solaris*, and large- scale mainstream Hollywood blockbusters like *Erin Brockovich*, *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Twelve* (2004). Despite the variety of films Soderbergh has made, they do contain similarities in their aesthetic styles,

characterizations, themes and narrative structures.

Soderbergh's fascination with the manipulation of time and non-linear storytelling is a recurring feature of his films. Soderbergh seeks to convey the way the mind proceeds from thought to idea through an almost arbitrary process, and it is this non-linearity that Soderbergh seeks to represent in films such as *The Limey*, *Full Frontal*, and *Solaris*. As he says, "I had been dreaming of making a film where there would be no end to the dialogue, like one uninterrupted conversation that would cut across the three temporal levels, a verbal flow analogous to the interior monologue" (Kaufman xv). Soderbergh's films proceed through the past, the present and the future, out-of-order and out-of-time, similar to the stream-of-consciousness writing that became popular among modernist early in the twentieth century.

The term "stream-of-consciousness" is somewhat amorphous. Sometimes it describes the way contemporary novels explore the inner lives of their characters, or it can be focused more narrowly to imply the "interior monologue". Most commonly it is applied to a particular type of modernist novel at its height in the work of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and early William Faulkner. The French philosopher Henri Bergson suggested that experience is an "endless flow", that characters were discontinuous, fragmented entities. And plots should not be ordered sequentially and chronologically as was most common in earlier novels, but rather move freely from past to present and back again, with all the events presented as fluid impressions of human awareness (Boyum 190). The

Soderbergh film most demonstrative of this modernist style, keeping in mind that a stream-of-consciousness style that is available to modern novelists is very different from the broader application of the term to films, is *The Limey*. But most of Soderbergh's films feature some manipulation of the traditional chronological, linear construction of time that typifies Hollywood films. One influence on Soderbergh's narratives comes from the European Art cinema he became familiar with as a student.

As a university student, Soderbergh spent most of his nights at theatres that screened primarily European films. He has cited Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) as a seminal film for him because of the way the narrative is structured. *Hiroshima, mon amour* is an intertext for Soderbergh's film *Solaris*. And films such as *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), and John Boorman's 1967 *Point Blank* were influential in Soderbergh's homage to the Hollywood Renaissance, *The Limey*. The convoluted narratives so important to the Film Noir style were another influence, and Film Noir functions as an intertext for the first two films considered in this study, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*. With respect to his peers, interviewers often ask Soderbergh about the fact that both he and Quentin Tarantino have directed films adapted from the novels of Elmore Leonard. Other than that link, their sensibilities are very different. It is interesting to contrast the differences that manifest in their films as an indication of how a director translates a literary text into a film with a signature style. Along with modernist novels, Soderbergh has also conveyed an interest in what some might term

'postmodern fiction', that plays with narrative structure, such as the writing of Dave Eggers ( *a Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), *How We Are Hungry* (2004) and David Foster Wallace ( *Infinite Jest* (1996), and *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men* (1999) ). His structures may be unconventional, but Soderbergh has always been intent on telling a good story.

Stories provide the structures upon which fiction films are built. In the Classical Hollywood Cinema, characters were the motors of the narratives, their actions and reactions motivating causal chains that moved the plot from beginning to end. For Soderbergh, the reverse is true. He uses stories to illuminate the complexity of characters, the story serving as the structure, the necessary background imperative for the exposure of the characters in the foreground. Typical of a postmodern style, Soderbergh interrogates the discrepancy between appearance and reality through both his stories and his characters. Characters begin as superficial composites whose true natures are gradually revealed during the course of the narrative. Their core is not evident or obvious when the story begins. Unlike the habitual progression of the character who, through events and experiences learns and is changed or transformed by life's circumstances, Soderbergh's characters are confronted with their true natures, that part of themselves that surface attributes as well as surrounding reality have served to obscure. Any one of Soderbergh's films might be illustrative of this tendency.

There are several recurring themes and tropes in Soderbergh's films, the

most obvious and visible being his central protagonist. His protagonists are usually alienated, isolated, estranged; they are outsiders and underdogs. The emphasis Soderbergh places on character and characterization are what distinguishes his cinema from other auteurs within New Hollywood. The figure of the awkward outsider first manifests in the sullen, dispossessed voyeur Graham (James Spader) in *sex, lies and videotape* (1989), the naïve, idealistic version of himself and his doppelganger in *Schizopolis*, and the elegant suave bank robber Jack Foley (George Clooney) in *Out of Sight*. The purest embodiment of the existentialist alienated modern man is Kafka, the protagonist of Soderbergh's film *Kafka*, a character who is an amalgamation of Kafka the literary writer of modern fiction who spent his days working for an insurance company, and K., the main character in at least two Kafka novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*.

For Soderbergh's Neo- noir *The Limey* (1999), Terence Stamp undertakes the iconic role of Wilson, an English career criminal who comes to L.A. seeking revenge for the suspicious death of his daughter Jenny. Erin Brockovich, a character portrayed by Julia Roberts in the film of the same name, is a woman out-of-sync with her environment, a hard- working single mother of three who takes on PG&E electric, a multi-billion dollar corporation charged with water contamination in the rural community of Hinkley. In *Traffic*, Soderbergh weaves three narrative strands, each representing a different facet of the War Against Drugs in the U.S. In this film, most of the characters are in some way eccentric, or distinctive; for example the two feisty DEA officers played by Luis Guizman

and Don Cheadle, the domesticated housewife come killer Catherine Zeta- Jones, and the cold, ambitious politician Robert Wakefield, played by Michael Douglas. With this film Soderbergh progresses from representations of individual loners to ensemble casts, all of whom might be perceived as unusual. *Ocean's Eleven* succeeds largely owing to the performances of an ensemble cast headed by Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Matt Damon, Julia Roberts and Andy Garcia. And the same is true for the film made as the antithesis to the large- scale blockbuster status of *Ocean's Eleven*, the aesthetically challenging *Full Frontal* . For this film, Soderbergh degraded the film by flashing and washing the image until it resembled a color copy Xerox. The point was to call attention to the pristine 35 mm image used for the film-within-a-film, a Nora Ephron Romantic comedy. *Solaris* returns to a focus on the individual. This film is intertextually linked to the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972), Stanislaw Lem's (1961) novel, and Soderbergh's own preoccupations. Here, the outsider is represented as the alien other that looks exactly like ourselves. Soderbergh's unique take on characters emerges in his first feature *sex, lies and videotape*.

By the end of *sex, lies and videotape* Graham as well as the other three main characters have all traveled the trajectory of a fairly Aristotelian story structure to encounter a relatively satisfying climax and denouement. The spectator enjoys some closure but not one accompanied by the concomitant sense that these characters have learned something about themselves that may or may not have an impact on their lives in the future. One is not certain that

Anne and Graham will stay together, or even that Graham has overcome his impotence. Graham has accepted his own alienation as well as his inability to commit to any level of intimacy with a real person. Anne and Graham's relationship will depend upon their willingness to accept one another as opposed to changing one another. Cynthia has learned something about herself through her affair with John, and John has ended an adulterous affair and lost an important client. But Soderbergh doesn't instill any confidence in the spectator that any of these people have changed. Their circumstances have changed, as have their relationships, but the people themselves are the same as they were at the beginning of the film.

Soderbergh's films are all about character, characters alienated from their environments, characters whose one consistent and recurring feature from film to film is their inability to communicate. These characters are incapable of any meaningful communication with one another; they talk past one another, and consequently any attempts at intimacy end in failure. On the surface, these characters may appear to enact intimate relationships with each other, but once one examines the dynamics of their interactions, it becomes obvious that any real emotional exchanges are missing. In any close analysis of Soderbergh's *Kafka*, one sees there are no intimate relationships established; his most explicit representation of the existentialist hero is estranged from others and his environment, even alienated from himself. When a connection is established between characters, it is ultimately revealed as contrived, based on false

premises, or destined to fail because one or both partners are duplicitous, naïve and self-serving. The relationship between Foley and Buddy in *Out of Sight*, works because it is functional and beneficial to both characters. Conversely, Foley's romance with Karen Sisco is doomed from the start, forged during a forced trip in the trunk of a car and proceeding despite both characters' entrenchment in their diverse lives and professions. One more example might be the duplicity that operates beneath all the relationships in Soderbergh's *Traffic*. Soderbergh is commenting upon the contemporary world, essentially suggesting through characterization and stylization that the alienation and disaffection endemic in postmodern society has resulted in a complete breakdown in communication, leaving characters to masturbate in the stalls of public washrooms ( *Schizopolis*).

The multilayered and deconstructed narratives emblematic of postmodernism have definitely had an impact on Soderbergh's increasing interest in the nature of reality and cinematic representations. His manipulation of color and his experiments in image degradation are part of his aesthetic sensibility. That aesthetic sensibility is postmodern, and intertextuality is one manifestation of postmodernism. The foregrounding of issues surrounding reality and simulation recurs in several Soderbergh films and is more generally associated with a postmodern aesthetic that shifts from the modernist inquiry into the sources and reliability of knowledge, to the postmodern probing into reality and what constitutes a world (McHale, 284). Other manifestations of postmodernism in his

films include the previously mentioned manipulation of narrative structures, a formal experimentation and self- reflexivity that draws attention to the apparatus of representation, intertextuality, and the blurring and blending of genres.

A selection of Steven Soderbergh's will be examined in their relation to theories of intertextuality, beginning with conceptions of genre and intertextuality, in the films *Out of Sight*, *The Underneath*, and *The Limey*. Film Noir acts as a primary intertext for these two films. In the case of *Out of Sight*, a comparison between Soderbergh's film and Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997), is relevant because both directors work from novels by the same author (Elmore Leonard), with very different results. Comparing the two films illuminates some of the features that recur in Soderbergh's oeuvre, features that are singular to his work. Three other Soderbergh films, *Traffic*, *Solaris*, and *Kafka*, will be analyzed with respect to intertextuality and the basic theories of Julia Kristeva and Gerard Genette. Specifically, *Kafka* will be theorized based on Genette's theories of paratextuality. Relations of hypertextuality will be analyzed based on the relationship between Soderbergh's *Traffic*, and the earlier British miniseries *Traffic* (Reid, 1989). *Solaris* is also demonstrative of hypertextuality, as two prior texts intertextually inform Soderbergh's film, those earlier texts being Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), and director Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 film, *Solaris*.

## Chapter 2: Considerations of Intertextuality and the Genre Film: Steven Soderbergh's *The Underneath*, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*

### Introduction

Although Montaigne referred to intertextuality in his observation that there are more books written about books than any other subject, it was not until the 1960s, when French theorists such as Julie Kristeva, Gerard Genette and Roland Barthes began using the term that intertextuality entered critical vocabulary with regularity. Julia Kristeva developed her theory based on the work of an earlier theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, who coined the term "dialogism" to demonstrate the necessary relation of any utterance to any other utterance. Bakhtin believed that the concept of truth and meaning involved an exchange of ideas, an interactive process rather than a finite statement. Language or discourse is dialogic by nature. For Bakhtin, discourse is always an utterance, and as such it is always directed towards other utterances or words and always interacting with them. An utterance can be any complex of signs, whether it be a phrase, a poem or a film. The concept of dialogism suggests that every text forms a surface where many texts intersect. Kristeva has further developed a notion of intertextuality that takes into consideration the social and cultural text within which an artistic work is situated. So, any text that refers to another text also refers to all the texts the other text refers to. Obviously this broad a notion of intertextuality risks leaving a theorist no recourse but the continuing search of sources in prior texts. To avoid liquidating the term "intertextuality" of meaning, throughout this work the

parameters within which the term is being used will be elaborated upon with respect to the films being analyzed. With respect to the films *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*, the Film Noir genre, or style will be theorized as the primary intertext for these two films. The style of Film Noir influenced all aspects of these films, both the original Noir style and the more recent Neo- noir genre.

The term "intertextuality" has some advantages over the term "genre". First, intertextuality relates a singular text to primarily other systems of representation rather than some vague notion of "context". Second, intertextuality also avoids the circular tautological arguments that many theories of genre rely on. For Intertextuality is less interested in essentialist definitions than in the productive inter- animation of texts. Third, intertextuality is more productive than traditional theories of genre which primarily debate whether a film belongs to a particular genre or not, based on notions of codes, conventions, iconographies, and so on. Of course, theorists such as Rick Altman, have argued that all films are genre hybrids, that no films are pure representations of a single genre. In this sense, genres have always been, and continue to be, intertextual. Fourth, intertextuality allows for dialogic relations with other arts and media, something that is becoming more imperative as movie studios producing films are vertically integrated into conglomerate corporations that develop toys, books, soundtracks, games and so on, that reach the market at the same time that any given film is released. Fifth, intertextuality is less "Hollywoodcentric" (Stam, 154), in that it avoids associations with Hollywood genre films. That makes it sound as though

being connected to genre films is a negative association, which is not necessarily the case. But intertextuality does provide more productive analyses of films that are increasingly hybridized, not belonging to any singular genre but to many.

That 'Film Noir' constitutes a specific genre with its own codes, conventions, and iconography is now widely disputed. The term "Film Noir" was used neither by the American film industry nor contemporary English-speaking audiences, reviewers or critics. It is primarily a critical category theorized by looking back in retrospect to films made in the U.S. during the 1940s and 1950s. The term was first applied to a group of American films by the French film critic Nino Frank, in 1946. France was inundated with Hollywood films following the end of WWII, providing critics with the opportunity of discerning popular trends in American films that may not have otherwise been as apparent. Frank claimed to have found a new trend in the crime film corresponding to the emergence of writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler in the crime novel genre. In films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941), *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944), and *Murder My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944), he noticed the emphasis placed on criminal psychology, violence, misogyny, and everyday realism. Film Noirs were heavily influenced by the social, cultural and political context in which they were made.

In his essay, "Notes on the Film Noir," Paul Schrader outlines the various influences on films later categorized as Film Noirs. The first influence comes from war and postwar disillusionment. This results in representations of alienation,

dislocation, paranoia and fear, all manifestations of the darkness encompassing much of Europe as well as America at the end of WWII. Another contributing factor was the growing threat of communism perceived in America and the subsequent witch hunts that introduced a feeling of paranoia and diffuse malaise into the American consciousness. The second influence was a postwar realism. There was a resurgence of realism in every filmmaking country reflecting the Audience's preference for a more honest and gritty portrayal of urban reality than the studio sets that dominated so many films during the war. A third influence came from the German Expatriates. There was an influx of Germans into the U.S. during WWII, many of whom had successful careers in Hollywood, directors such as Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Max Ophuls, and Douglas Sirk. Their influence is most apparent in the characteristic look of Film noirs, reminiscent of German Expressionism. The films used low key/ high contrast lighting, pervasive almost impenetrable darkness and chiaroscuro. In this sense, Film Noirs embody contradictory tendencies, combining unrealistic and expressionist lighting with realistic settings. The fourth influence theorized by Schrader is that of Hard-Boiled fiction. These novels created the "Tough", a cynical way of thinking and acting that separated protagonists from the world of everyday emotions. These novels also often center not on the detective, but on the criminals or victims. Such is the case in two films that will be discussed based on the novels of Elmore Leonard, *Jackie Brown* (Tarantino, 1997), and *Out of Sight*. In *Jackie Brown*, Jackie Brown (Pam Grier) is the focus of the action and she is a drug mule. In

*Out of Sight*, the central protagonist is career bank robber Jack Foley.

Schrader, and others, argue that Film Noirs are demonstrative of a certain tone and mood more than they are a conventional genre. Stylistically Film Noirs often feature voice- over narration and multiple flashbacks, as well as low key/ high contrast lighting and chiaroscuro effects. All three of the Soderbergh films examined in this chapter ( *The Underneath*, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey* ), include flashbacks and low key lighting, and *The Underneath* also uses voice- over narration as a remake of *Criss Cross* (Siodmak, 1949). The majority of the scenes in a Film Noir are lit for night. The scene between Karen Sisco and Jack Foley that occurs in the revolving bar in *Out of Sight* takes place in the afternoon in Leonard's novel but in the film Soderbergh shoots it at night, their intimate moments more striking against deep pockets of shadows. Like German Expressionism, oblique and vertical lines are preferred to the horizontal shots favored by, for example, D.W. Griffith and John Ford. In *The Underneath*, Soderbergh uses all oblique and diagonal angles during the scenes in the hospital when Michael Chambers (Peter Gallagher), is bedridden and becoming increasingly paranoid. The actors and setting are often given equal lighting emphasis. Tension is sustained compositionally rather than through physical action. Again in the hospital in *The Underneath*, Chambers's skewed perspective, helplessness, and growing fear are emphasized through angled point-of-view shots.

In Film Noirs, there is a love of romantic narration, the sense of an

irretrievable past, a predetermined fate, a kind of hopelessness. This is epitomized in the relationship between Karen Sisco and Jack Foley in *Out of Sight*. Their romance is tinged with a nostalgia for an impossible love, enhanced by Soderbergh's frequent use of freeze frames. The themes of Film Noirs suggest a passion for the past and the present and a fear of the future. The cinematic techniques employed in these films emphasize loss, a lack of clear priorities, and insecurity, submerging these self-doubts in mannerism and style. Style becomes paramount, something that demonstrates a connection between the more recent films considered Neo Noirs and postmodern style, for which theorists such as Frederic Jameson argue that surfaces have supplanted depth (Jameson 10).

It is arguable whether Film Noir ever existed as a separate and readily identifiable genre. The focus on mentally, emotionally and physically vulnerable characters, the interest in psychology, the culture of distrust marking relations between male and female characters, and the downbeat emphasis on violence, anxiety, death and crime and compromised morality manifest in a variety of genres in films from the 1940s and 1950s. These features appear in detective films, horror films, social problem films, and the gothic woman's film (Neale 174). In contrast, Neo Noir appears to be a real and identifiable genre, dating to the mid-1960s, and these films do feature elements often included in the Noir canon. Some films considered Neo Noir are *Point Blank* (John Boorman, 1967), *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004), *Spartan* (David Mamet, 2003) and *Mulholland Drive* (David Lynch, 2003). Neo Noir has led audiences and critics to use the

term Noir to make a genre retrospectively, based on the popularity and familiarity of current films by directors such as Paul Schrader, David Mamet, and Martin Scorsese. There are some differences to note between Noir films and Neo Noir films. The Neo Noir films of the 1960s use the hardboiled novel as source material but they differ from films of the 1940s in their use of color and sunlight and representation of signifiers of modernity such as contemporary settings and more sexually explicit content. In *Out of Sight*, the sex scenes between Sisco and Foley are more implied than made manifest. In *The Limey*, the superficial Terry Valentine enjoys his women as though they are trophies proving his virility and desirability. Leighton Grist, in "Moving Targets and Black Widows: Film Noir in Modern Hollywood," has argued that films of the 1970s use motifs of Noirs for ideological interrogation, critical parody and the ironic treatment of the lone detective, whereas films of the 1980s and 1990s are more clearly and uncritically pastiche. In other words there is exhibited in recent Neo Noirs a tendency to manipulate and imitate characteristics of earlier films considered Film Noirs, without any commitment to an engaged or ideological inquiry into facets of contemporary culture. In this chapter, both *Out of Sight* and *The Limey* will be analyzed as representatives of the Neo Noir genre. Because Classic Film Noirs include a recognizable aesthetic, and embrace recurring themes and motifs, Film Noir becomes a text that subsequent films access and manipulate intertextually.

### *Out of Sight*

With *Out of Sight*, Soderbergh plays with narrative form and alternative systems of information delivery. This is a recurrent feature of Soderbergh's films, perhaps best exemplified in *The Limey*, which relies on flashbacks and flashforwards for narrative comprehension. Soderbergh increasingly plays with time and memory and, in *Out of Sight*, the opening scenes which track the action of Jack Foley, are later replayed both as part of his memory and as an explanation for his continued criminality. *Out of Sight* is also an ideal film for examining star power and the importance Soderbergh places on characterization. This is the first film of Soderbergh's that stars George Clooney, but it is demonstrative of the respect and authority he gives actors that George Clooney has since had a cameo in a TV clip in *The Limey*, and starred in *Ocean's Eleven*, *Ocean's Twelve* (2004), and *Solaris*. The following is an analysis of *Out of Sight* as a formulaic and generic film, a Neo- noir film for which the Film Noir Genre acts as a primary intertext.

*Out of Sight* is almost the antithesis of the classic action film. Although the subject of the film is reminiscent of Tarantino's films, Soderbergh felt that examining the difference between Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*, Barry Sonnenfeld's *Get Shorty* (1996), and his own film was instructive of what different filmmakers do to material adapted from the same author. People tend to forget that Tarantino, like Soderbergh, has been influenced by many others in terms of style and tone and the structure of storytelling. All texts are intertexts, including not only the novels of Elmore Leonard, but all the crime/ heist films

and Film Noirs against which a spectator might evaluate *Out of Sight*.

*Out of Sight* is an adaptation of an Elmore Leonard novel, the novel functioning as the primary intertext for Soderbergh's film. Peter Matthews has said of Leonard's work:

There's a true formal rigour in Leonard's approach: he whittles away at words until nothing remains but absolute deadpan: the expression of an attitude as much as a writing style. Leonard's heroes don't let on much, and neither does he. His books aspire to little more than a consummate cool: of style, conception and character. That probably accounts for their enormous cult reputation. Where a major author opens up our perceptions of the world, Leonard narrows it to the articulation of a precise, hip wavelength. For all their lowlife settings and apparent shagginess, Leonard's novels are as neatly self-contained and morally trivial as drawing room comedies (Matthews 261).

Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* endeavors to translate Leonard's cool into a film about a suave bank robber who is less concerned about morals and legality than he is about wooing a Federal Marshall and making one last, big, score. Although fidelity, as a methodology for comparing the relationship of literature to film, has become more contested in recent years, examining the ways in which Elmore Leonard's novel *Out of Sight* is both similar to, and different from Soderbergh's film *Out of Sight* can be productive.

Soderbergh borrows liberally from Leonard's dialogues, which are parochial, hip and ordinary. Soderbergh also uses the characters and plot points of Leonard's novel, although he does change some attributes of characters, and he does fragment the narrative, making it less linear and more circular. The central characters are the same as are the dynamics between them but Soderbergh

does make some key changes. In the film, Glen Michaels is repeatedly played as stupid and untrustworthy, whereas in the book Leonard makes a point of conveying Michael's intelligence by revealing that he attended Berkeley for a few years. Leonard is suggesting that intelligent, educated people are not exempt from criminality. Michaels is also a more likely friend to Richard Ryder, a smart, shrewd businessman who admits to Michaels that he keeps a large cache of diamonds in his home. In the novel Michaels and 'Snoopy' Maurice Miller meet in a minimum security facility which they escape from together. This is where they also meet the eventual victim of their heist, Richard Ryder doing time for illegal trading. When they are recaptured, they are sent to Lompoc where Michaels meets Jack Foley and Buddy. In the novel, Foley is more aggressive and an opportunist, smuggling rum into prison through a guard and asking for three times its value from other inmates. In the film, Foley is characterized as a career criminal who is nevertheless a 'good guy'. This might lead to audiences having empathy for him and a more positive perspective on his romance with Karen Sisco.

In the novel, Sisco is portrayed as tougher and more assertive than the woman Jennifer Lopez portrays in the film. This is one of the first descriptions of Sisco in Leonard's novel:

Karen was five-nine in the medium heels she wore with her black Chanel suit. Her marshal's star and ID were in her handbag on the seat with the court papers. Her pistol, a Sig Sauer.38, was in the trunk with her ballistic vest, her marshal's jacket, several pairs of handcuffs, leg irons with chains, an expandable baton, Mace, and a Remington pump- action shotgun... the Sig

Sauer was her favorite, her evening-wear piece (Leonard 21).

In both texts Sisco is an imposing figure in her career but experiences less success in her relationships with men. But Soderbergh, in choosing Jennifer Lopez to portray Karen Sisco, is emphasizing her beauty and sexuality, a sexuality she uses to her advantage as a U.S. Marshall. In the book, Buddy is a big white redneck. Soderbergh casts Ving Rhames in the role, and he functions as the positive black character that problematizes any arguments that "Snoopy" Miller is a racially prejudiced depiction of a crazy sociopath.

The settings for Leonard's novel and Soderbergh's film are the same, taking place in both Florida and Detroit. Leonard's novels are characteristically intertextual and postmodern, drawing on various elements from popular culture. For example, in *Out of Sight*, Sisco's father is mistaken for Walter Matthau, and Sisco and Foley discuss movies while locked in the trunk. The postmodern tendency towards fractured and multiple narratives is a characteristic Soderbergh's films have in common with the films of Quentin Tarantino.

There are several ways in which the films of Tarantino exhibit a postmodern style. There is the use of self-conscious artifice, such as the use of intertitles in *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Similarly, Soderbergh uses intertitles to announce the first flashbacks in *Out of Sight*. Tarantino's films often blur cultural boundaries, for example between exploitation and mainstream cinema. Tarantino and Soderbergh also blur the boundaries between genres, for example the switch from crime thriller to horror film in *From Dusk 'til Dawn*. Genre hybridity is one

manifestation of intertextuality, *Out of Sight* being a combination of Romantic Comedy, Crime Film, and Film Noir. Another postmodern technique is the use of intertextual reference. The primary detective in *Jackie Brown*, a Ray Nicolet, appears in Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* as a member of the FBI task force searching for Foley, and as the husband cheating on his wife with Karen Sisco. Another manifestation of intertextuality is both explicit and implicit references to other films through personnel, situations, and props. Tarantino casts Pam Grier in the title role of the film *Jackie Brown*, clearly recalling her memorable roles in the blaxploitation films *Foxy Brown* (1974), and *Coffy* (1973). In Tarantino's films, the bad guys are placed center- stage, while he examines the lives of those characters normally considered peripheral. In *Jackie Brown*, it is neither the cops nor the gangsters who are central, but the mule Jackie Brown.

Often in Leonard's books, the locales lack substance and the characters almost seem disembodied. Soderbergh compensates for this lack by providing vivid detail, establishing a strong sense of place by shooting on location in Detroit and Miami. Where other films might situate their context with distant aerial views, Soderbergh stays close to the street, making the film appear self-contained and suburban. At times Soderbergh judders the camera, a little like Cinema Verite, creating a rough and imperfect representation of the lives of criminals more than willing to scheme and manipulate one another as well as those they intend to target as their victims of violence and theft. Like the rape in Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, the key money exchange in *Jackie Brown* in the shopping

mall is shown three times, an example of temporal frequency. An example of temporal frequency also occurs in *Out of Sight*, when the opening sequence of Jack walking out of one building, tossing his tie and loosening his shirt, and then proceeding across the street to rob a bank recurs later in the film when additional information provides the spectator with another interpretation of the event.

In *Out of Sight*, action is second to character development. Soderbergh spends more time building up character than he does setting up impressive action sequences. A significant portion of the narrative is devoted to establishing the dynamics among characters. What it is not that Jack Foley (Clooney), the career bank robber, is all that complex, but his relationships with other characters are. The relationship between Jack and Buddy is not the typical friendship forged in prison. Buddy is conflicted. He persists in his criminality but he does so with a guilt complex. After every crime he commits, Buddy confesses to his religiously devout sister. In fact, the reason Jack was caught the last time was that Buddy decided to call his sister and confess before they had pulled off the bank job instead of after. But Jack understands Buddy's compulsions and he does not abandon or blame him.

The central relationship in this film is a love story between the suave and charming bank robber Jack Foley, and Karen Sisco (Jennifer Lopez), the beautiful Federal Marshall who is taken with Foley when the two of them find themselves sharing the trunk of a car as Foley successfully escapes from Glades prison in

Florida. Their romance corresponds to Foley's flight from Florida towards Detroit where he and Buddy have planned to rob a fellow inmate Richard Ryder who keeps millions of dollars of diamonds somewhere in his home. Their plan is complicated by the fact that their other prison- mate Glen, has offered the job to their rival, also of Glades prison, a sociopath played by Don Cheadle.

Soderbergh's affinity for actors and his enjoyment working with them as well as the freedom he gives them in their roles, results in actors appearing in more than one Soderbergh film. Actors who appear in more than one Soderbergh film include Don Cheadle, Katherine Keener, Luis Guizman, Julia Roberts, and George Clooney. This is also common among auteurs who often use ensemble casts. Yashiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa established their careers using the same actors, as have more contemporary Asian directors such as John Woo ( who usually uses Chow Yun- Fat) and Wong Kar- Wai( Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung). Quentin Tarantino is another American who often uses the same actors, for example Samuel L.Jackson in both *Pulp Fiction* and *Jackie Brown*, and Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*, *Kill Bill Vol. I* and *Kill Bill Vol.II*. In addition to an ensemble cast, Soderbergh mobilizes the codes and conventions of the Film Noir genre, creating a Neo- Noir film that is dark in tone and sensibility, but less paranoid than his earlier film, *The Underneath* (1995).

*The Underneath* is a Neo- Noir, whose surfaces are far removed from the gritty and realistic images of *Out of Sight*. *The Underneath* is a film that pays homage to the Film Noirs of the 1940s and 1950s. Most scenes are shot with

low- key lighting and Soderbergh shoots all the images in a metallic blue. Michael Chambers (Peter Gallagher), the protagonist of the film, is the flawed hero who is not only a criminal but a victim. His former girlfriend Rachael becomes the figure of the Femme Fatale, the source of all of Michael's problems and the cause of his eventual undoing. Karen Sisco might also be considered a Femme Fatale, an irresistible temptation for Foley, but she is less sinister than Rachael and is a representative of the other side of the law. In contrast to the tight framing and sterility that manifest in *The Underneath*, with *Out of Sight* Soderbergh demonstrates what Anthony Kaufman (160), has termed a "Filming-on-the-fly attitude", which is a very spontaneous way of shooting. Soderbergh now basically makes decisions about how he is going to shoot scenes spontaneously, without storyboarding or any detailed planning. Like other Soderbergh films, performance and characterization are fundamental to his cinematic style. A brief look at how performance has been theorized is important.

According to Geoff King (2002), performance is described as either "impersonation" or "personification". Impersonation implies the surrender of the actor in an effort to facilitate the impersonation of the attributes of the character they are portraying. Robert De Niro and Meryl Streep are well- known for this kind of performance. Personification is the opposite of impersonation. It applies to those actors who cultivate a specific persona, the unique and distinguishable traits that they reprise from one performance to another. A persona also relies on off- screen media such as magazine interviews and appearances on talk

shows. The advantage of cultivating a persona is that it is repeatable and it belongs to the actor. Personification enables an actor to transform themselves into a profitable commodity with a unique value.

George Clooney has cultivated a persona that creates certain expectations in viewers. Based on his recurring role on the television series *ER*, Clooney brings to his roles the persona of someone charming and romantic. This is an example of how a character becomes intertextual. Clooney is playing Foley but he is also the embodiment of characters he has played in the past such as Dr. Ross on *ER*. When Federal Marshall Karen Sisco ends up in the trunk of a getaway car that Jack Foley is escaping in, the spectator anticipates a romance between Sisco and Foley. There is a certain element of suspense in the scene but it is based on whether or not Foley will get caught not on whether Sisco's life is in danger. Even though Foley is a bank robber, he is more interested in money than he is in violence. The tagline "Opposites Attract" establishes the central dynamic of *Out of Sight*.

Conventions of both star image and genre combine to establish a clear trajectory of expectation regarding the narrative. Clooney becomes the romantic lead in what is a hybrid film that combines the codes and conventions of Romantic Comedy with the tone and mystery associated with a Film Noir. In *Out of Sight*, the city is a dangerous place but the urban settings have more color and light than original noirs such as *Double Indemnity*, in which both the rainy streets and alleys as well as the interiors are dimly lit. Corruption is everywhere

evident and moral and intellectual values are blurred. The protagonist manifests a moral ambiguity, Foley being non-violent compared to the sociopath "Snoopy", but nevertheless a career criminal looking for a last job. Foley is cast as somewhat vulnerable, particularly to the feminine mystique associated with Karen Sisco, who presents a dangerous temptation because she is capable of arresting him at anytime. The general tone of the film is dark, violent and pessimistic. Foley and Buddy are alienated and doomed to fail. The ending of the film leaves open the possibility that something might yet occur as Foley is driven from Detroit to Florida, with Sisco in the front seat. Instead of closure there is ambiguity, another common feature of Film Noirs.

Working within the parameters of genre also contributes to choices concerning narrative treatment and aesthetic style. In theorizing genre, Ed Buscombe has written:

Popular art does not condemn its creators to a subsidiary role. Instead it emphasizes the relation between the artist and the material, on the one hand, and the material and the audience on the other. The artist brings to the genre his or her own concerns, techniques, and capacities- in the widest sense, a style- but receives from the genre a formal pattern that directs and disciplines the work. In a sense this imposes limitations... Certain themes and treatments are, if not ruled out, unlikely to be successful if they work too hard against the genre. But the benefits are considerable. Constant exposure to a previous succession of films has led the audience to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning... Some critics like to refer to them as "icons" (Buscombe, 20).

Genres are analogous to intertexts. They provide the codes, conventions and iconography that film directors incorporate into generic film texts. Soderbergh

works within the conventions and iconographies of genres as though genres provide a base or structure upon which narratives and characters can be built. Although Rick Altman has argued that "pure" genres never really existed, for instance even early action-adventure films usually had a romantic subplot that sought to unite the heterosexual couple at the center of the narrative by the film's completion, genre blending and hybridity continues to be associated with more recent theories of postmodern aesthetics within films. With *Out of Sight*, Soderbergh had both genre conventions and star expectations to work with.

Along with genre, Hollywood generally assumes that star names are among the greatest guarantors of box-office success. Star images often tell us what to expect from characters. They anticipate narrative developments, effectively becoming part of the narrative infrastructure. This may have made Soderbergh's remake of the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris*, a better sell, as Soderbergh secured Clooney in the lead role in what is a minimalist meditative inquiry into human existence. Stardom has always played a crucial role in Hollywood's industrial strategy, dating back to the early days of cinema. If movies have been designed according to genre categories or blends, they have also been made as vehicles for particular stars. *Erin Brockovich*, almost seems to have been written with Julia Roberts in mind. She won the Best Actress Oscar for her portrayal. Stars, if anything, have become even more important in the era of the New Hollywood (as theorized by Geoff King, among others). The studios that dominate the Hollywood landscape today are looking

for that one component of the filmmaking process that can provide something as close as possible to a built-in guarantee of success. Directors, genres and pre-sold or recycled materials all play their parts. Stars, however, are generally seen as the most consistently reliable indicators of box-office potential. They are often at the center of the film-packaging process.

Stardom is often seen as the single most important factor in the commercial viability of many films. The appeal of major stars tends to be relatively long-lasting, usually surviving box-office disaster, especially in the overseas market. Stars offer that one ingredient deemed so important by Hollywood today: the audience recognition factor, the ability to 'open' a film, to give it a presence in the marketplace on the opening weekend, all neatly packaged into the body of the individual performer (King, 159). Part of the success of *Traffic*, a complex film dealing with the multifaceted drug industry, was based on the stars of the film, who included Michael Douglas, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Benicio Del Toro, and Dennis Quaid. Part of the job of a director is eliciting the best performance possible from their actors.

With respect to directing, Soderbergh has noticed two different styles of directing. Directors with a signature style look for material they can impose that style upon. The other kind of director works from the material outward, asking what kind of style is appropriate for the material. Soderbergh is the second kind of director. He does not open a script with a predetermined cinematic style in mind. *Out of Sight* has a different style than *King of the Hill* (1993) or *The*

*Underneath*. Soderbergh has chosen a distinctive style for *Out of Sight*, that seems a natural fit to the cool stylings of Elmore Leonard. Again, Soderbergh's signature style becomes apparent from watching what another director does with an Elmore Leonard novel, Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown*. Where Tarantino, favors fade-outs and superimpositions for scene transitions, Soderbergh uses a lot of freeze frames between scenes, conveying a sense of temporality, a sense of time running out for Jack Foley. Jack Foley's charm and allure crystallizes during the trunk scene between Foley and Sisco. This becomes a kind of utopian space within the narrative, the beginning that is also somehow the end because both characters know their relationship is untenable. Soderbergh originally shot this scene in strict fidelity to the script, but it ended up too lengthy and dialogue-laden. It is this scene that sets up the impossible yet irresistible relationship between Foley and Sisco.

Foley is not likely to give up being a thief and Sisco is determined to secure a position within law enforcement. Soderbergh shoots the sex scene between Foley and Sisco as a montage sequence, including extreme close-ups such as Jack's hand on Karen's leg underneath the table, and freeze frames which lend the exchanges a certain nostalgia. The effect is most pronounced in the sequence where they have cocktails. Sisco sits alone in a rotating hotel bar high above Detroit where Sisco is chatted up by three advertising men, each of whom she repels. Suddenly Jack appears, as if materialized by thought (Matthews 263). Soderbergh composes the *tete-a-tete* in lustrous two shots that fill the frame,

connoting a self-sufficient world. Capturing Foley and Sisco in profile in the foreground and a picaresque view of falling snow outside the floor-to-ceiling windows of the hotel results in the flattening of the images and a heightened sense of this encounter being too perfect to be real. It's here that the theme of the movie is most explicitly stated. Talking of making eye contact with someone on the street, Jack muses: "And the next moment, the person's gone... and it's too late to do anything about it, but you remember it because it was right there and you let it go, and you think, 'what if I had stopped and said something?' It might only happen a few times in your life". To which Karen replies, "Or once" (Matthews 264).

Neither Jack Foley nor Karen Sisco is willing to give up the world they live in for something like love. And yet *Out of Sight* becomes possibly more romantic because the love crystallizes in memory as a lost potential, a regret. As Jack and Karen continue to talk, Soderbergh flashes forward to their single act of consummation. The reason for the freeze-frames becomes important to the conception of their relationship. They are each literally storing up moments, images, to which they can refer in the future. Both of these characters are emblematic of Soderbergh's alienated outsider, a recurring character in many Film Noirs. Foley is incapable of getting a real job and becoming a respectable member of society. And Sisco is the only woman in a male-dominated profession in which she is always condescended to and never granted permission to enter the inner circle.

With the star persona of George Clooney, and a budget of 49 million, *Out of Sight* became for Soderbergh an opportunity to combine an art- house sensibility with a mainstream Hollywood film. Soderbergh had yet to prove himself as a commercially viable director, and although *Out of Sight* did not perform at the box-office as one might expect an Elmore Leonard adaptation starring George Clooney to, it won enough critical acclaim to secure Soderbergh a position within the mainstream which he has never relinquished. When asked what this film had in common with his other work, Soderbergh replied: "At the end of the day, it's slightly fatalistic. And thanks to Elmore Leonard, there's a very non-reductive view of people. I like that the characters don't change. I don't see that happening in life, so I tend to be suspicious when people undergo big changes in films" (Kelleher 109). *Out of Sight* has the energy and playfulness found in Soderbergh's *Schizopolis*, without the concomitant screwball antics of an unlikely misogynist and his doppelganger . This is a mainstream suspense film with an innovative style that includes jump cuts, freeze frames, saturated colors, and gritty textures. It signals Soderbergh's arrival in mainstream Hollywood, after beginning a career in American Independent Film almost ten years prior to the release of *Out of Sight*. Intertextuality in *Out of Sight* primarily manifests through the mobilization of the codes, conventions, and iconography of Film Noirs.

### The Limey

What Soderbergh found most alluring and inspiring about the cinema of the

1960s and early 1970s, was the sense of freedom and stylistic innovation that manifest in both the 'new waves' of Europe and American films; not just in experimental or independent film but in mainstream cinema too. Soderbergh has been influenced by directors such as Alain Resnais ( *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961)), Jean- Luc Godard ( *Contempt* (1963), *A Bout de Souffle* (1960), *Alphaville* (1965) et al.), Martin Scorsese ( *Mean Streets* (1973), *Raging Bull* (1980), *Taxi Driver* (1975) et al.), and Francis Ford Coppola ( *The Conversation* (1974), *The Godfather* (1972), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), et al.). For *The Limey*, Peter Fonda, and Terence Stamp were specifically recruited for their iconographic embodiment of 60s counterculture. Peter Fonda, is most known for his role as a drug smuggler in *Easy Rider* (1969), and to some extent that character functions as an intertext for the character he portrays in *The Limey*. Terence Stamp appeared in many British films, and his character in *The Limey*, Wilson, is based on the character of Dave Wilson, a small time thief he portrayed in Ken Loach's *Poor Cow* (1967). *The Limey* is emblematic of postmodern aesthetics, particularly the blending of genres and the intertextuality evident in the film, as real footage of a much younger Terence Stamp in *Poor Cow* is inserted into this narrative as part of his memories of his life with Jenny's mother. Using real footage intertextually is indicative of what Dudley Andrew, in his essay "Adaptation," has termed 'intersecting'. With 'intersecting' the uniqueness of the original text is preserved to such an extent that it is intentionally left unassimilated in adaptation. The key film demonstrating this

form of adaptation is Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), an adaptation of Georges Bernanos' *Le Journal d'un cure de campagne*. Bresson includes the visual representation of the priest writing in his diary as part of the cinematic text. Soderbergh's use of actual footage from Ken Loach's 1967 *Poor Cow*, is another example of intersecting because Soderbergh employs a direct reference, inserting a scene from Ken Loach's film as an intertext representing Wilson's past as a thief.

*The Limey* can also be linked to Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* (1998). *The Limey* has been likened to a low- budget, indie- spirited do- over of *Out of Sight*. As Scott Kelton Jones has observed, both films revitalize genre motifs by using stylistic flourishes, narrative gymnastics, and memorable characters that can be as likeable, as endearing, as they are hard boiled (Jones 121). The roots of both films can be traced back to Soderbergh's 1995 remake of the Film Noir *Criss Cross* (Siodmak, 1949), which Soderbergh remade as the Neo- noir *The Underneath*. All three films are contemporary Neo- noirs, with the dark undertones, the focus on criminality, the existential conflicts the central protagonists must grapple with, and a pervasive sense of dread common among Film Noirs. In *The Underneath*, Soderbergh created a tripartite structure that intercuts past, present and future together to suggest simultaneity in the mind of Michael Chambers (Peter Gallagher). *The Limey* complicates the temporal transitions by cutting dialogue to overlap two or three locations. This is reminiscent of the way Alain Resnais uses sound in *Hiroshima, mon amour*,

in which the voice- over often represents a character off- screen, or the voices of the lovers overlap disparate images such as close- ups of bodies, shoulders and hands, or images surveying the devastation evident in Hiroshima following the bombing. These fractured narratives, as well as the mobilization of intertextual characters and generic features will be emphasized throughout the following analysis.

*The Limey* is a film emblematic of the new cinema identified as the Hollywood Renaissance, that occurred between the years of 1964 and 1975 (Mast and Kavin 461). It is American films made in this period that Soderbergh has said demonstrated the possibility and potentiality for innovation in both narrative structure and film style. *The Limey* demonstrates a potential for plurality of meaning and perspective. It is a mainstream film that reads like an art film. There is no singular interpretation though one could say that the perspective of the protagonist is privileged because it is his mind that permits a spectator's access. Wilson in *The Limey* is the only character whose inner thoughts and memories are presented. Soderbergh's creative use of point-of-view and his representation of a protagonist's subjectivity manifest most explicitly in Soderbergh's earlier film, *Kafka*. Kafka, like Wilson, is at odds with his environment and socially awkward. He never seems comfortable. Wilson's mind shifts from past to present, from real to imaginary, from truth to fiction.

*The Limey* is a film about one man's search for justice and revenge. A man who is not criminal in the sense of the antihero and heroine of *Bonnie and Clyde*

(Penn, 1967), but closer to the social misfit one at the center of *The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967), Benjamin Braddock. Wilson is an outsider, too, a man who doesn't seem to communicate very well or feel comfortable with others. Wilson is illustrative of the new heroes of Hollywood cinema. He is a man of terse, rugged charm who is stubborn and determined to avenge the death of his daughter. His perspective is privileged throughout the film. To accomplish this, Soderbergh uses various cinematic techniques including close-ups, tracking shots and jump cuts to present Wilson's subjectivity, his thoughts transitioning from the past, the present and into the future.

Soderbergh shifts temporality, visually representing Wilson's stream-of-Consciousness. Wilson's point-of-view encompasses memories of his daughter, disconnected moments in planes and hotels, and various flashes of fantasy inserted almost at random as he obsessively pursues Terry Valentine. Wilson's point-of-view is akin to the stream-of-consciousness fiction popular among modern novelists.

The term "stream-of-consciousness" is somewhat amorphous according to Joy Gould Boyum. It is sometimes used as a means of describing the way contemporary novelists examine the inner lives of their characters, a method popularized by Henry James. He sought to restrict the vantage point in his fiction to the perspective of a single, observant character. The consciousness of that character would become central to the narrative, and actions were precipitated less by external events than by developing thoughts and feelings. More narrowly,

stream-of-consciousness can be applied to the use of the "interior monologue" (Boyum, 190). The term is most commonly applied to the novels of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and early William Faulkner.

According to Virginia Woolf, the modern novel that employs stream-of-consciousness techniques has almost no plot in the traditional sense. The events depicted are much more ordinary. The direction of the novelist's attention is "within", centered on the consciousness of one or several characters. The patterning is often associational, or psychological, flowing backward and forward in time from present experience to past association. In these modern novels too, "consciousness is filled with a myriad of impressions, with endless perceptions, with all variety of recollections, many of which are summoned up by the most trivial of details" (Boyum 191). Stream-of-consciousness novels are often elusive, ambiguous and impenetrable, presenting a challenge to any reader. They are characterized by various linguistic devices which include rambling sentences, and intricate and extensive patterns of verbal imagery. It is arguable whether these kinds of novels are translatable to the screen although Eisenstein discerned in Joyce's "mosaic" structure and "montage" effects, techniques similar to his own use of dynamic editing (Boyum, 192). Edward Murray likened effects in Joyce to crosscutting, dissolves, superimpositions, and fast and slow-motion effects.

Virginia Woolf's style also manifests in movies, for example "moving from point to point in time within the spatial confines of a single consciousness and of

moving from consciousness to consciousness within the temporal confines of a single moment" (Boyum, 192). Woolf often uses motifs to establish the temporality of her narratives at a given moment, for example the use of clocks in *Jacob's Room* (1922), or to facilitate the narrative's movement in space the way she uses skywriting in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), which links the perceptions of characters in different locations in London simultaneously.

The use of the term "stream-of-consciousness" in discussing Soderbergh's cinematic style is meant in a general sense, a means of describing the alternative ways he structures his narratives, less causal or chronological, and more psychological and arbitrary. He often transitions between times and spaces using techniques counter to the Classical Hollywood style, such as the violation of the 180 degree rule, frequent uses of jump cuts, and a general lack of establishing shots or shot/reverse shot constructions. In *The Limey*, Wilson repeatedly dreams and/or remembers Jenny as a child, represented through black and white footage of her as a little girl in their home and on the beach. These images haunt Wilson and serve as re-enactments of his failure as a father, constant reminders of the repercussions of his absence. Although non-linear and jumbled narratives have recently been interpreted as postmodern, they also manifest in innovative films of the 1960s.

This kind of non-linear narrative structure was indicative of what has been termed the "New American Cinema" that emerged in Hollywood in the mid-to late sixties. According to Mast and Kavin, it is commonly associated with films

like *The Hustler* ( Rossen,1961), *Lonely Are the Brave* (Miller, 1962), *David and Lisa* ( Perry, 1963), *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* ( Kubrick, 1964), *The Pawnbroker* (Lumet, 1965), and *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) (Mast, Kawin,461). A narrative progression with a definitive beginning and inevitable conclusion is a narrative structure popularized in the Classical Hollywood Style, something that Soderbergh seeks to subvert in all of his films. He has always been interested in different forms of storytelling and the exploration of the various ways a viewer can be given information. The most definitive exception to this tendency would be *Erin Brockovich* (2000), a biopic that proceeds according to an Aristotelian structure for drama, with a clear beginning, middle and end, and a goal- oriented central protagonist who faces various obstacles but emerges triumphant in the end.

In *The Limey* there are no assurances on the metaphysical plane. Being and time are subjective. On an epistemological level, it is difficult to discern what is true. What does a viewer base their knowledge upon and how firm is its foundation? The answers are indeterminate. All these films feature cinematic innovation, and they all contain the seeds of change evidenced in the social and cultural values of the sixties. Some of the values embodied in these films, which Gerald Mast argues are representative of that era include:

Explicit treatment of sexual conflicts and psychological problems; the slick but tawdry surfaces of contemporary reality; the mixing of the comic and the serious; the offbeat antihero protagonists and the sterile society that surrounds them, and the self- conscious use of special cinematic effects ( slow motion, quick cutting, ironic

juxtaposition of picture and sound, stylized memory and dream sequences and so on) (Mast and Kavin 461).

Wilson, the protagonist of *The Limey* does not participate in any sexual liaisons in the film but he is emblematic of the offbeat hero who doesn't fit in anywhere. As with the offbeat protagonist of *Schizopolis* (1996) Munson, Wilson's frustrated efforts at communication are a theme foregrounded in *The Limey*. Both serious and sardonic, Wilson's heavy Cockney English accent bears little resemblance to regular spoken English. It embodies Kristeva's contention that all utterances, and all subjects, are double, not in terms of the Saussurian dyad of signifier and signified, but as both one and the other. Intertextuality in this sense suggests that both language and texts, can be socially disruptive, even revolutionary. Texts are not monologic documents with a singular and cohesive meaning, but rather dialogic, resisting the unity of meaning for both the text and the human subject. Wilson's utterances are both English and 'other' than English, grounded in colloquial expressions that may have resonance for audiences familiar with Cockney English, but which may be simultaneously incomprehensible to English speaking audiences unfamiliar with it. His utterances are also intertextual because they are socially and culturally influenced, their comprehension at least partially dependent on the context within which they are spoken and received. Wilson's rough edges are opposed by the shiny superficial veneer that epitomizes his nemesis Terry Valentine.

Terry Valentine is a music executive who made his money in the sixties and continues to live on Mulholland Drive with a picturesque view, totally oblivious to

the world around him. He refuses to acknowledge his own collusion with criminals because that association has the potential to tarnish his reputation. Appearances are everything here. Soderbergh introduces Valentine (Peter Fonda) using a montage of shots of Valentine from throughout the whole movie. Like a trailer we see Valentine in profile, smiling and fixing his teeth in the mirror, running his hands through his hair and so on. Valentine will become the victim of the offbeat antihero Wilson, a combination of misfit and criminal. He is not the heroic character that audiences of Hollywood cinema would identify with, but in the tradition of Alfred Hitchcock, he does epitomize "the wronged man", a tag particularly apt for Wilson, who heads for L.A. in search of the men who murdered his daughter. Wilson seeks retribution for crimes committed in the past. *The Limey* bears little resemblance to the traditional Hollywood film but it does share features with the films of the Hollywood Renaissance of the sixties.

These films evolved for several reasons, including the influence of political activism in Europe such as the famous May 1968 demonstrations, that questioned bourgeois ideals of art and culture. These films looked back at the genre films of the old Hollywood with cynicism, suggesting that their assured and optimistic conclusions simplified the unresolved and possibly unresolvable divisions in American life. The new cinema of Europe eventually converted American filmmakers. The innovations of Godard, Truffaut, Antonioni and others inspired rising filmmakers. The underground cinema rose in status and achieved financial success almost equivalent to the Hollywood mainstream film. The

popularity of the underground cinema conditioned a whole generation of filmgoers to understand and accept innovations in cinematic form, elliptical construction and visual stimulation. Another cause of the emergence of this new cinema was the growing popularity of television and the fact that people were staying home to watch it. One thing the industry did to attract new customers was to capitalize on the elitism of new film audiences. They catered to special tastes, such as family entertainment, blaxploitation crime films that catered to the racial make up of urban audiences (*Shaft* (Parks, 1971), *Coffey*), and cult films for late night customers such as De Broca's *King of Hearts* (1966), and Jim Sharman's *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975). Also, art films were aimed at viewers that were media and cinema literate. These would include Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*, Mike Nichol's *The Graduate* (1967), and probably John Boorman's *Point Blank* because of its integration of technical innovation and the rendering of subjective mind states to create an alternative to standard films of the crime genre.

Wilson is a protagonist who cherishes his freedom and autonomy more than he does money. His characterization as unchained and unswervingly true to himself is representative of the protagonists that dominate films of the Hollywood Renaissance. Also indicative of the new cinema are films that make no pretense of resembling reality. They make statements through an emphasis on artifice. Cinematic devices are manipulated to enhance a film's mood, and remind the viewer that they are watching a film. Self- reflexivity is emblematic of the

Hollywood Renaissance, art films and postmodern aesthetics. *The Limey* transitions between the past, the very recent past, and the present, a cinematic representation of the stream-of-consciousness connections that often characterize thought.

The non- linear layout of *The Limey* breaks down the definitions of time and space, of now and then, of reality and fantasy, of "proper" linear continuity. Linear continuity is akin to the emphasis on reason and rationality that typifies the thinking of the Enlightenment and the art of modernism. Linear continuity, linear progression in causal chains, codes of conduct regarding heroes and villains- these could be conceived as meta- narratives within Classical Hollywood cinema. Lyotard defines postmodernism as an incredulity towards meta-narratives. Knowledge is no longer based on reason or founded upon a cohesive, unified center of meaning or origin. *The Limey* refuses linear continuity, presenting instead, a fragmented, circular narrative construction. Relying heavily on subjectivity, *The Limey* illustrates a tolerance for the incommensurable and a conception of knowledge based on the illogical. At their conclusion, the metaphysical experiences of time and being are shaken, the epistemological processes by which knowledge is legitimated are questioned, and the boundaries between truth and fiction, and reality and fantasy are blurred.

### Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the notion of genres being analogous to

intertexts. With respect to *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*, they are Neo noirs for which the Film Noir functions as the primary intertext. The Film Noir had roots that were both foreign and domestic. These included German Expressionism, French Poetic Realism, the gangster film, and the hard-boiled novel. The problem with delineating Film Noir as its own genre stems from the fact that facets of Film Noir cut across many other traditional genres, including the Gangster film, the Western, and the Comedy. Film Noirs do have a distinct visual aesthetic, depicting a world through low-key lighting that emphasizes the contrasts between light and dark, most evident in scenes occurring on dark, slick city streets. There is usually a psychological dimension and a focus on some aspect of crime in the majority of Film Noirs ( Porfirio, 78). From Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1940), the Film Noir inherited the morally ambiguous hero, a convoluted time structure, and the use of flashbacks and first person narration. These characteristics recur in Neo-noirs, including the three Soderbergh films discussed in this chapter, *The Underneath*, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*. Of these characteristics it is the morally ambiguous protagonist that recurs most frequently in all of Soderbergh's films, the alienated existential figure who is most pronounced in one of the films examined in the next chapter, *Solaris*.

In contrast to more escapist Hollywood fare that achieve a satisfying closure, most Film Noirs have an underlying mood of pessimism that refuses to offer the traditional happy ending. What unites disparate kinds of Film Noirs is their 'blackness', translated visually through expressionistic techniques that first

emerged in German Expressionism, and a mood of dread and despair most explicitly elaborated in French existential philosophy. Existentialism is an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confusing world that he has trouble accepting. Existentialism places its emphasis on man's contingency in a world where there are no transcendental values or moral absolutes, a world devoid of any meaning except the meaning man himself creates. Looked at from a more positive perspective, existentialism embodies notions of freedom, authenticity and responsibility. From a more negative perspective, existentialism emphasizes life's meaninglessness and man's alienation. This can be expressed in terms such as "nothingness", "sickness", "loneliness", and "dread". *The Underneath* definitely mobilizes more negative connotations, Michael Chambers being an alienated man victimized by a woman who leaves him to die- a very "down" ending. In *Out of Sight*, Jack Foley is more the victim of himself than he is a victim of either society or a woman. He does fall in love with Karen Sisco, but throughout the film he takes responsibility for his indiscretions and is willing to accept the consequences of his actions. In *The Limey*, Wilson is an alienated loner, who is intent on avenging his daughter's death, and although he succeeds in killing her killer, Wilson is cognizant of the emptiness of his gesture, of the meaninglessness of the whole exercise.

Where Michael Chambers chooses an inauthentic existence over an authentic one, both Foley and Wilson accept the consequences of an authentic life. This duality, along with being and nothingness, recur in Soderbergh's films. There are

other motifs of existentialism, common among Film Noirs that are also found in Soderbergh's films: meaninglessness, purposelessness, the Absurd; chaos, violence, and paranoia; and sanctuary, ritual and order. The precepts of existentialism might be considered another intertext for Soderbergh's Neo Noir films. Mikhail Bakhtin's application of intertextuality to literature and his contention that literature is a hybrid construction, apply even more strongly to a collaborative medium like film. For Bakhtin, all words are someone else's words. The word becomes one's own through an act of "appropriation" (Allen 28), which means that it is never wholly one's own. The artistic utterance is always what Bakhtin calls a "hybrid construction", mingling one's own words with the other's words. Complete originality, as a consequence, is neither possible nor desirable. In historical and generic terms, both the novel and the film have consistently cannibalized antecedent genres and media. Film's intertextuality is also multitrack: the image track "inherits" the history of painting and the visual arts, while the soundtrack "inherits" the entire history of music, dialogue, and sound experimentation.

In the next chapter, the concept of intertextuality will be examined as it has been theorized by Gerard Genette. Building on Bakhtin's "dialogism" and Julia Kristeva's "intertextuality", Gerard Genette in *Palimpsestes* (1982) proposes the more incisive term "transtextuality" to refer to "all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts, ultimately positing five types (Stam 4). Genette's fifth type, "hypertextuality" seems especially

productive in terms of adaptation. The term refers to the relation between one text, which Genette calls the "hypertext", to an anterior text or "hypotext" which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends. In the next two chapter theories of intertextuality will be employed in the analysis of *Traffic* and *Solaris*.

### Chapter 3: Trafficking in Intertextuality: TV Preempts the Movies

#### Introduction

*Traffic*, is Steven Soderbergh's most stylistically innovative and narratively complex film to date. Trailers for the film make reference to its examination of "America's War Against Drugs", but Soderbergh's original inspiration for the film was the British miniseries, *Traffik*. The miniseries provided the impetus, and the screenwriter Stephen Gaghan developed the screenplay based on extensive information regarding the Drug Trade in the U.S. Broadly speaking, the narrative delivers a three- part story, each representing a different facet of drugs and drug trafficking, and each is represented through stylized color coordination. The segments of the film that occur in Mexico are a burnished brown, achieved by shooting through filters and with a 45- degree shutter. The images were then digitally desaturated (Lim 151). In the San Diego portions of the film, Soderbergh employed the technique of flashing, which consists of overexposing the film to white light before the negative is developed. It was a popular technique in the 70s, pioneered by Vilmos Zsigmond (Lim 151). It is a process difficult to quantify because what is seen through the lens bares little relation to what manifests on film. In *Traffic*, the result of using flashing is the creation of an idyllic look that contrasts with the slimy undercurrent that endures throughout the scenes taking place in San Diego. The third narrative strand, occurring principally in Cincinnati, is very blue, a steely blue that recalls the overall look of Soderbergh's earlier film *The Underneath*.

The visual complexity of *Traffic* is married to a narrative sophistication that presented Gaghan with the challenge of keeping the narrative concise and coherent despite having enough material for three or four films. As has been argued, one of Soderbergh's signatures as a contemporary auteur is his interest in multiple, fractured or otherwise structured narrative forms that digress from the standard model for most Hollywood films. Because *Traffic* provides a perfect example of Soderbergh's interest in narrative structures, this chapter will examine in much more detail the narrative content of this film, with particular attention paid to the ways Soderbergh delineates the different narrative strands and how they intersect to convey a complex but nevertheless coherent film. The film will also be examined alongside the British miniseries that demonstrates Gerard Genette's notion of hypertextuality, the earlier British *Traffik*, acting as the hypotext to Soderbergh's *Traffic*, which is the hypertext. As Julia Kristeva has argued, the appearance of unity in texts is illusory. All words and utterances have complex social significance 'outside' any given text (Allen 37). All texts, be they literary or filmic, possess a double meaning: the meaning embodied in the text itself, and the meaning of the text within its social and historical context. Any film consists of the rearrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meanings. Meaning is both inside and outside the text, or, as Derrida has said, there is no text without context.

### Analysis

In order to contextualize the narrative of *Traffic*, it is beneficial to look at Soderbergh's personal thoughts regarding drugs prior to his decision to make this film. As with so many films now, literature and film form a symbiotic relationship that blurs the boundary previously demarcating film from literature. In Soderbergh's book on the director Richard Lester (1999), which includes almost a year of Soderbergh's personal journal entries, Soderbergh muses on the problem of drugs:

Spent some time today thinking about drugs... that some drugs are legal and viewed as acceptable (cigarettes, alcohol) and others are not is strange to me... that people will abuse anything, given the opportunity, is part of what makes us human. The question of how much we should legislate against potential abuses is one I haven't been able to answer for myself. If cocaine were suddenly legal, would a large majority of Americans suddenly become addicted? Is cocaine 'worse' than alcohol? If we legalized drugs would I relish the idea of my daughter having easy ( or easier) access to heroine or cocaine or LSD or pot at an earlier age?... what would happen to the criminal drug trade if suddenly drugs were handled by the government? Would using drugs to pay for substance- abuse treatment, education, or social security be any worse than using gambling for the same purposes? (Soderbergh, 23).

Referencing journal entries made by Soderbergh regarding drugs illuminates another key idea of Kristeva's, the doubled identity of any "I" in a literary work.

The "I" of this entry is not the same as the director of the film *Traffic*.

Soderbergh, in the book, reflexively addresses the reader through a personal journal entry. Kristeva argues that every subject is divided, the Soderbergh writing a journal entry is different from the Soderbergh directing a film, is different from the Soderbergh responding to questions during an interview. The journal entry contains personal, subjective musings about the drug trade, which

Soderbergh then translates into the more objective, multi- perspectival film *Traffic*.

The form of the narrative in *Traffic* is designed to expose the complexity of the Drug issue, less from a moral standpoint than a logistical one. The story involves many characters in three primary strands set in Mexico, Washington D.C. and the residential community of Indian Hill Cincinnati, and San Diego. Robert Hudson Wakefield (Michael Douglas) is preparing to take over the office of National Drug Control Policy. He is characterized as ambitious and confident, a man whose career obviously takes precedence over his family, a wife and sixteen year old daughter who live in the wealthy suburb of Indian Hill Cincinnati. At the beginning of the film, Wakefield's daughter Caroline (Erica Christenson) takes cocaine with friends and is introduced to free- basing by Seth (heating crack and then inhaling the smoke through a tube), a classmate who uses drugs and his knowledge of where to find them as a means of seducing her. The trajectory charting Caroline's introduction to cocaine, increasing addiction, desperation and subsequent treatment is problematized by the timeline that is established when Wakefield meets with the Chief of Staff at the beginning of the film. The speech he delivers to the media near the end of the film occurs one month after he meets with the Chief of Staff.

Caroline (Erica Christenson) is portrayed as a smart, spoiled rich kid. Somewhat disaffected and alienated, and faced with her parent's high expectations, she decides to assert her own control over her life by controlling

her intake of drugs. In one month, Caroline transitions from an occasional drug user to an addict prepared to steal from her parents and sell her body in exchange for drugs. When her habit is discovered, Wakefield sends her to a treatment facility from which she escapes and travels to the "inner city," where she knows she can score. By the end of the film, she has been rescued from her depraved state by her distraught father, and the last scenes of her occur in a twelve-step program meeting where she is standing up and confiding her own story of drug addiction. The culmination of Caroline's addiction being a staged performance with her parents in the audience, in some ways serves as an example of how social context can provide an intertext. In this case what has become a fixture of contemporary/ popular culture, are AA, 12- step programs that provide treatments for addictions that include food, drugs, sex among others, and televised interventions. While I am reluctant to compare this film to real reality as opposed to filmic reality, it is unavoidable, as the film stylistically endeavors to present some facsimile of the real War Against Drugs. The idea that Caroline could progress through this narrative trajectory and simultaneously acquire the wisdom to go into treatment and profit from it is highly improbable, and probably impossible. This weakens the narrative's realistic depiction of the American Drug Trade. If Caroline's transition from an innocent to a cocaine addict to a person at the podium of an AA meeting is fast- tracked in the interest of heightening the drama, what other liberties does the narrative take?

One crucial aspect of a film with multiple storylines is the consistency of tone

that connects the stories and ensures that neither actors nor scenes look like they are from another film. Soderbergh has never endorsed the causal logic that moves Classical films from their beginnings through a climax towards a satisfactory ending and narrative closure. The majority of commercially successful films follow this format, that is, the Aristotelian three- act structure. Stephen Gaghan, the screenwriter of *Traffic*, has said, " life is not always/ usually cause and effect, and the sum total of living a life is absorbing all this randomness. Shit just happens, and as a moviegoer, I don't want to be subjected to the idea that there's a reason for everything, because it runs counter to my own experience" (Gaghan xii). Soderbergh somewhat contradicts this comment in the story surrounding Caroline, which proceeds in a very causally motivated way.

*Traffic*, the British miniseries, has three storylines occurring in Pakistan, Hamburg, and Britain. The scenes in Pakistan are linked to those occurring in Britain through Jack Lithgow (Bill Paterson), a British Minister representing the U.K. in their negotiations with Pakistan, for trade agreements and financial aid. Back home he discovers that his daughter Caroline is a heroin addict. Similar to Robert Wakefield, Lithgow has neglected his family while establishing his career. The relationship between father and daughter is very similar in both texts, a contentious relationship between two people who don't know each other very well. Lithgow pays for his daughter to enter a treatment facility but there are no scenes occurring there, whereas there are scenes in Soderbergh's version,

including Caroline's escape. In both texts, Caroline sells herself for drugs and steals from her family's home. In both texts, the father eventually finds his daughter and takes her home and the situation is resolved at an AA meeting in which Caroline is standing up and acknowledging her addiction. In one of Lithgow's final speech, he says, "We cannot stop the supply but we can reduce the demand by creating a decent society people want to live in rather than escape from".

This kind of idealism is espoused by the principle character in the second narrative strand of Soderbergh's *Traffic*. Javier Rodriguez Rodriguez (Benecio Del Toro) and his partner Manolo are introduced in a yellowed, bleached-out landscape of Mexico, where they have set themselves up to intercept a van "a little bird has informed them", will be smuggling drugs. They want to make some money and they successfully intercept the van before they themselves are seized by General Salazar, a corrupt military man. Salazar is impressed by Rodriguez's industriousness and he senses in him an ambition that he might be able to exploit. He convinces Rodriguez that working for him will be more profitable than continuing to work for the State Police. Rodriguez is portrayed as somewhat heroic and very idealistic. His greatest desires are a city park in Tijuana with a baseball field with lights so children can safely play baseball at night. To realize his dream he is willing to risk his life and turn evidence implicating Salazar in the warring and killing that is occurring between two rival drug cartels, the Obregon brothers and the Juarez cartel. Salazar manipulates

Rodriguez into finding and imprisoning Francisco Flores, aka Frankie Flowers, a well-known hitman. Salazar presents the situation as though it is part of his efforts to clean up the streets of Tijuana, when in fact he is working for the Juarez cartel. His arrests of people associated with the Obregons is really about ceding more power to the Juarez cartel, who want a monopoly on the drug smuggling occurring between Mexico and the U.S., on the border at San Diego.

The narrative occurring in Mexico in Soderbergh's film corresponds to the narrative occurring in Hamburg, Germany in Britain's *Traffik*. Two Officers arrest Deiter, who is smuggling heroin into Hamburg by boat. In *Traffik*, there is longer segments of the police arresting and seizing more heroin than in Soderbergh's film, which concentrates on Ruiz's arrest. Based on Deiter's information they arrest Karl Rosshalde, the man Soderbergh's Carl Ayala is modeled on. Both wives (Lindsay Duncan (U.K.), Catherine Zeta-Jones (U.S.)), named Helen, begin helpless, ignorant and desperate to find their husband's money. In *Traffik*, Helen's son is actually kidnapped by people her husband Rosshalde owes money to. Helen finds the money, gets her son, and then decides to get involved in smuggling. First she hires a hitman to kill the crown witness against her husband. Then she goes to Pakistan to meet Tariq Butt a leading man in the shipment of heroin leaving Pakistan. Butt makes a deal with Helen that if she can get heroin across the border, flying from Pakistan to Hamburg, then he will supply her with all the heroin she wants. Helena makes a deal with the Obregons, after showing them the new form of cocaine, high impact pressure

molded cocaine dolls, virtually undetectable. This provides a method for carrying the cocaine across the border at San Diego, from Mexico. Helena's deal is that she wants her family's debt to the Obregon's forgiven, she wants to be the sole distributor of their cocaine in the U.S., and she wants the principle witness against her husband killed before he can testify. In both texts, the first hit on the witness- Deiter in *Traffik*, and Ruiz in *Traffic*, is identical, a car bomb that fails. Karl, in the U.K. version, has his lawyer Domenech killed because he has betrayed Karl by helping the police ( he has a prior criminal record and is threatened with deportation to the U.S. to face charges). In Soderbergh's version, Carl has Metzger (Dennis Quaid) killed primarily because he failed to tell Helena that she and her husband had received more than a million dollars while he was in jail. *Traffik*, the miniseries, is more straight forwardly linear than Soderbergh's film, and scenes are often linked through voice- over narration. Soderbergh uses techniques such as flashbacks, dissolves, and superimpositions. He shoots primarily with a handheld camera to make the images more realistic. He does not use voice- over narration. The British miniseries, designed for television relies more on Aurality than it does on visual imagery. Soderbergh, on the other hand made his film with the expectation that audiences would be screening it in theatres.

Rodriguez was originally cast as a corrupt cop. What remains is a strange amalgamation of an almost noble and heroic official determined to preserve the

innocence of childhood and a State Official savvy enough to play both sides and not get caught or killed. Again one is confronted with a film that technically aspires to a documentary look while simultaneously presenting narratives that are pure fictions. Soderbergh's interest in documentary aesthetics extends from the films of Richard Lester, such as *A Hard Day's Night*, and films that emerged from the Dogme school of filmmaking. For *Traffic*, Soderbergh spent considerable time analyzing *Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo, 1966) and *Z* (Costa Gavras, 1967), both of which convey a sense of things being caught, instead of staged (Kaufman 158). Many have found *The Battle of Algiers* so realistic they assume it is a documentary when in fact it is a fictional narrative based on some of the real events that occurred in Algiers during the French Occupation, between 1956 and 1962. The narrative is circular, beginning with shots of Ali La Pointe concealed behind a wall with three other members of the NLF (National Liberation Front). This is followed by a flashback to 1954 which offers some illumination of the character of Ali La Pointe, therein humanizing him. Pontecorvo uses many high angle and overhead shots while Soderbergh uses only two similar shots in his film, one from the nose of a helicopter, the other from the landing pad as the helicopter descends. These shots stand out because they are two of a very few shots in the entire film that are not handheld (Kaufman, 161). The shots of the crowded streets in Algiers can be likened to the shots of the streets of Tijuana. In both films, figures of authority are corrupt. In *Battle of Algiers*, the police chief plants bombs with the help of friends, and in *Traffic*

Mexican General Salazar is intentionally increasing the tensions between the warring drug cartels because he is working with another drug lord, Madrigal, whom most assume is dead. In *Battle of Algiers*, women don disguises to smuggle bombs in handbags out of The Casbah and into public meeting places. This creates suspense similar to the suspense in *Traffic*, when Helen Ayala needs to get across the border with cocaine, and in *Traffik* when Helen must get heroine out of Pakistan and into Hamburg without it being detected.

In *Battle of Algiers* the only real actor portrays Lieutenant Phillippe Mathieu, who runs the French military intent on discovering the leaders of the NLF and ending their terrorist attacks. When speaking to the press, Mathieu claims that his organization does not use the word "torture"; instead, they use methods of interrogation. They hunt down members of the NLF and torture them until they give up the names and whereabouts of their leaders. This is similar to the tactics employed by General Salazar when he uses Rodriguez and Manolo to hunt down Frankie Flores in order to torture him until he gives up the names of of the men who hired him. In both films, scenes of torture are accompanied by music, as opposed to the real sounds of the actual torture. The use of music is very effective in creating representations of torture that have greater emotional impact. In both films there is a kind of sliding scale of criminality; everyone is suspect and culpable in some respect, and it becomes increasingly difficult to delineate between 'good' and 'evil'. This, too, makes the narratives more realistic as it is uncommon to find pure embodiments of good or evil. Pontecorvo's

narrative is interrupted between relative peace achieved between 1958 and 1960, when there is an unexpected uprising. The Algerians eventually won their freedom from colonialism on July 2, 1962. Pontecorvo does use some freeze frames and he endeavors to present the narrative objectively, something Soderbergh sought to do in his representation of the War Against Drugs. Whether or not Soderbergh succeeded in his objectivity is not important. At the least he did, like the British miniseries his film is based on, provide a multidimensional look at the drug trade and drug smuggling, and the way it impacts different groups.

Soderbergh has acknowledged a certain affinity for the Dogme school, an appreciation of what they were trying to achieve. This is yet another text, or perhaps code that informs the aesthetics of *Traffic*. The "Vow of Chastity" was issued in 1995 by Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterbergh, a response to the increasingly illusory products of the Hollywood machinery that removes film further and further from any representation of truth. Some of the tenets of the Dogme manifesto include the stipulation that shooting must be done on location, sound must never be produced apart from the images, that the film must not include superficial action such as murders, that genre films are not acceptable, and that the director must not be credited. Obviously the spectacular car bombing by Frankie Flores and his subsequent murder defy these rules and Soderbergh is credited as the film's director. But by shooting handheld and with available light, Soderbergh sought to cultivate an atmosphere of "loose- limbed

intimacy" on set (Lim 150). In addition to these visual techniques, Soderbergh tried to record the dialogues of the actors and their actions simultaneously, therein reducing the number of things the actors had to block out. Soderbergh began operating the camera on *Schizopolis* and again on *The Limey*. In the case of *Traffic*, the other operator was Gary Jay, and Soderbergh has worked with him before. He usually operated the longer lens which requires more decisions. Jay has also worked extensively with Michael Mann and he began his career in documentaries (Kaufman 159). His sense of composition within a realistic aesthetic is very pronounced. It is the form of *Traffic* that lends it a documentary quality, and the realist aesthetic balances the, at times, incredulous story such that one is entertained while watching a chronicle of a very serious contemporary issue: the war on drugs.

There are three general areas within the Hollywood film industry that the impact of Dogme '95 can be observed. First, it had an impact on the art-house segment of the viewing public. All the Danish Dogme films have had a commercial release and run; for example Vinterberg's *The Celebration* (1998) sold at least 200 000 tickets and *Italian For Beginners* (Lone Sherfig, 2000) sold many more. Second, Dogme influenced the filmmaking community in a theoretical capacity. Anyone engaged in the issues of contemporary filmmaking has some awareness of Dogme. Third, Dogme has had an impact on mainstream American filmmaking, "on its style and its language, if not its message", as Stevenson has noted (261). Although Soderbergh's *Traffic* is a more

Hollywoodcentric film about drugs, it does share some elements with a more independent Dogme influenced film addressing similar issues, *Resin* ( Vladimir Gyorski, 2001). *Resin* looks at drugs from a different perspective. It chronicles the life of a drug dealing no –hoper who sells pot to rich kids on the beaches of Santa Barbara. Bad luck finds the protagonist in jail, subject to the “three strikes” law which stipulates that anyone convicted of a third felony must serve a mandatory life-in-prison sentence. Taking a cue from Dogme, Hollywood has adopted the grainy, handheld low- tech approach. But even when Soderbergh does rely on handheld techniques, his film is more polished and intent on delivering an acceptable conclusion that will satisfy audiences. The third story, or narrative strand, involves the actions of two DEA officers intent on implicating a successful father as a major importer of cocaine into the U.S. from Mexico. Luis Guizman plays Ray Castro, and Don Cheadle Monte Gordon. Once again we find actors who have appeared in other Soderbergh films.

Guizman had a small role in *Out of Sight*, and a major role in *The Limey*. Don Cheadle has been in *Out of Sight* and *Ocean's Eleven*. These other roles function as intertexts informing the characters they play in *Traffic*. Like expectations a spectator may have when seeing a genre film, spectators also develop expectations for actors and the characters they portray. Guizman brings an element of comedy to the otherwise serious business of apprehending the drug smugglers. He is, essentially, the sidekick to Monte Gordon, the two officers representing the good cop/ bad cop, heavy/ lightweight binary so familiar in

detective and crime films. Miguel Ferrer plays Eduardo Ruiz. He is caught in the midst of transporting drugs from Mexico into San Diego. In exchange for his testimony, he receives police protection and immunity. Castro and Gordon begin to watch the wife of drug boss Carl Ayala, after Ayala has been caught and imprisoned on the incrimination of Eduardo Ruiz. Helena Ayala (Catherine Zeta-Jones) is initially ignorant of her husband's illegal activities. Her lawyer, Arnie Metzger enlightens her before subtly insinuating himself into her life based on her feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. Once she learns more about her husband's business she enlists the aid of hitman "Frankie Flowers", who she subsequently hires to kill Ruiz before he can testify against her husband. Flowers plants a bomb on the underside of the parked car transporting Ruiz from his hotel to the courthouse. This is another sequence that problematizes Soderbergh's intention to deliver a realistic portrayal of drug smuggling. Flores's murder does not really make sense, and it reflects back on the fictitious aspects of the narrative.

Stephen Gaghan, the screenwriter, was compacted his storylines throughout the creation of the screenplay, returning to the problem of what is the least amount of information a spectator would need to fill in the blanks between events so that a given narrative strand can stay aloft offscreen (Gaghan xi). Frankie's death is a good example of this. To explain how and why he is killed would normally take at least four scenes. You'd see the hit being set up, you'd see the guy going and trying to kill him and failing before trying something else

(Gaghan xi). Here, Frankie Flowers just dies, with little explanation. As one might expect, on the day Flowers plants the bomb, court gets out early and Ruiz asks if he can walk back to the hotel and get some fresh air. The officers, particularly Castro and Gordon, are indecisive. While they debate, Flowers calmly walks through the parking lot. But a gun is trained on him and he is shot dead. Like some of the bombings in Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, Soderbergh uses music to accompany the explosion.

The gunshot puts all of the DEA officers on alert and Castro returns to the car with the intention of getting Ruiz to safety. As Gordon realizes the car must be rigged, his warning is drowned out by the explosion. When, a few days later, Ruiz sits in his hotel with the officers assigned to him, he begins to eat his breakfast, just delivered, the spectator knows something is amiss. Although in many of his other films Soderbergh does not adhere to the edict that narratives proceed on the basis of cause and effect, in this particular film there are no unmotivated scenes. Ruiz retreats to the bathroom for a shower and there is another knock on the door, and another breakfast- Ruiz dies of an overdose and the Crown is forced to drop the charges against Carl Ayala. In the last scenes, Gordon shows up at a family barbecue at the Ayala residence and forces himself in to confront Carl and Helena. In the scuffle, he manages to place a bug under Carl's desk and walks away from them with a look of satisfaction on his face suggestive of his optimism regarding the eventual arrest of the Ayalas. This scene is indicative of the film's tendency to begin with rather open and

ambiguous storylines, making them a little more realistic and plausible which the film abandons towards its end in favor of neat expositions that offer resolutions to the various problems and complexities examined over the course of the film. This more positive and optimistic perspective is most transparent in the final scenes in Mexico, where Rodriguez is sitting in some stands with popcorn, watching children play baseball in a park under the lights.

### Conclusion

At the Academy Awards in 2001, Soderbergh had the rare honor of having two of his films nominated for Best Picture, *Erin Brockovich* and *Traffic*. He won the Best Director Oscar for *Traffic*. Just as Soderbergh attributed some of the success of *sex, lies and videotape* (1989) to the topicality of its themes, so did he sense the timeliness of *Traffic*. Perhaps because it was an election year, Soderbergh felt the time was ripe for an examination of America's War Against Drugs. Soderbergh felt a film might provide a forum for a debate/ discussion regarding the economic imperatives, personal experiences, and political intricacies of the drug trade in the U.S. Soderbergh endeavored to make a detailed and dispassionate film that avoided being weighted by its own sense of importance.

As has been demonstrated, the earlier British miniseries *Traffik*, functioned as the hypotext for the hypertext of Soderbergh's *Traffic*. Gerard Genette's theory of hypertextuality will be applied to another Soderbergh film later in this study, *Solaris*. First however, Genette's concept of paratextuality will be addressed

through the analysis of Kafka's 1991 film, *Kafka*.

## Chapter 4: Paratextuality and Considerations of Soderbergh's *Kafka*

### Introduction

One relevant question when examining adaptations of the work of Kafka, is the relationship between film and modernism, and how modernism in film differs from modernism in literature. Because literature and film are necessarily very different artistic mediums, an adaptation of Kafka's work, even if it were to focus on a single novel, for instance Orson Welles's *The Trial* (1963), must transform written text into visual imagery which is always a matter of one director's apprehension and representation of a writer's work. The artistic modernism that emerged early in the twentieth century promoted anti- realist, non-representational art characterized by abstraction, fragmentation, and aggression. This is the opposite of the dominant model for literature, which became the aesthetic cornerstone of dominant cinema: the reconstitution of a fictional world characterized by internal coherence and by the appearance of continuity.

This continuity was achieved by an etiquette for introducing new scenes ( a progression from establishing shot to medium shot to close shot); conventional devices for evoking the passage of time ( dissolves, iris effects); conventional techniques for rendering imperceptible the transition from shot to shot ( the 30- degree rule, cutting on movement, position and movement matches, "inserts" and "cutaways" to cover up discontinuities); and devices for implying subjectivity (point of view editing, reaction shots, eyeline matches). The conventional Hollywood aesthetic promoted the ideal not only of coherent cause- effect, linear plots revolving around "major conflicts" but also of motivated believable characters (Stam 11).

If linear progression, causal logic, and psychologically motivated characters are

representative of Classical Hollywood aesthetics, Soderbergh's cinema fits more comfortably within postmodernist aesthetics. The narratives of his films rarely proceed linearly ( with the exception of *Erin Brockovich* (2000)), he regularly plays with notions of time, using everything from elaborate flashbacks to jump cuts, and his characters are often psychologically complex but that complexity does not necessarily engender actions that proceed with causal logic. This is also an apt description of the fiction written by the Early twentieth century writer Franz Kafka.

Events in Kafka's writing are often shown only from the viewpoint of the main character. The perspective of Soderbergh's 1991 film *Kafka* oscillates between the subjectivity of the main character Kafka, and the more unrestricted narration that recounts the events coinciding with the mystery told through the narrative. Shots outside of the subjectivity include establishing shots of the town and the silhouette of the castle, aerial shots such as those mapping the labyrinthine interior of the castle, and scenes in which events involving other characters are elaborated, for instance the skewed image of the gluttonous men that receive a bomb from a masked stranger connected to Gabriela's group of anarchists. In Kafka's fictions, the reader learns no more than the central character knows about his situation, and therefore shares the hero's bewilderment. Soderbergh conveys Kafka's bewilderment while simultaneously providing enough information to create a feeling of suspense in the spectator. In his intentional disorientation of the reader, Kafka seems to be taking to an extreme a common

feature Roland Barthes has discerned in modern literature. Modern literature produces "writerly" texts, while earlier literature produces "readerly" texts (Robertson 27). By a readerly text, Barthes meant one in which an authoritative interpretation already exists and needs only to be accepted by a reader. In other words, earlier novels were founded upon an easily discernible meaning the reader need only consume.

A writerly text has no definite interpretation and encourages the reader to actively make sense out of the text. This might be linked to Bertolt Brecht's argument that the theatre that preceded his own required only that a spectator sit back and consume the spectacle before them. In contrast, Brecht's theatre necessitated the active involvement of the spectator who often left critical or outraged. Barthes may be simplifying nineteenth century realism but Joy Gould-Boyum has argued that film, in general, has remained more tied to nineteenth century notions of character than has the novel. In most films, characters are defined through action and choice, through their responses to experience, their mannerisms and behaviour, and through the content and style of their speech. The most common explanation for this can be linked to arguments concerning the level of fidelity between a novel and a film. Based on this contention, filmic characters lack the psychological complexity necessary to illustrate the tension between the inner self and social mask that tends to typify character in the contemporary novel. On this argument, film is tied to the external rather than the internal, unable to pierce through surfaces to whatever contradictions they

might conceal (Boyum 35). Soderbergh invests the character of Kafka with more complexity by using a voice-over narration that not only conveys to the spectator Kafka's perspective of events, but also adds another text to the film, in the form of a letter Kafka is writing to his father. Kafka's famous letter to his father is included in most compilations of his diaries and letters.

Soderbergh's *Kafka* seeks to examine the psychology of a famous writer capable of writing evocative, thought-provoking fictions that penetrate modernist themes of alienation, disaffection, and disenchantment with romantic notions of the industrial revolution and human progress. Language becomes a powerful tool for Kafka, who develops a unique literary style that negotiates a path between realism and expressionism. Using a Neo-noir framework, Soderbergh represents these tendencies by using realistic, plausible characters within a black and white world of night, shadows, deception, and conspiracy. Soderbergh's film is a good example of one form of transtextuality theorized by Gerard Genette. The film is demonstrative of paratextuality. The paratext includes those elements that lie on the threshold of a text, including a peritext and an epitext. A peritext includes features such as notes, prefaces and chapter titles. An epitext refers to elements such as interviews, private letters, editorial notes and so on. Soderbergh's *Kafka* is paratextual because Soderbergh draws upon not only Kafka's fictional oeuvre, but biographies written by the writer as well as Kafka's own personal writings and letters. The following analysis of *Kafka* seeks to illuminate the different sources for Soderbergh's film, as a way of

investing the film with greater depth and knowledge. Soderbergh's films do not become less authentic by discerning their intertextual traces, rather they become more productive and culturally relevant.

### Analysis

Steven Soderbergh's film *Kafka* is an amalgamation of biographical details from the life of Czech author Franz Kafka, and elements drawn from his fictions; including stories such as "The Metamorphosis" (alternatively titled, "The Transformation"), and "In The Penal Colony", and the novels, *The Trial*, and *The Castle*. All of these fictional texts are incorporated into the narrative of Soderbergh's film in varying proportions. In addition to focusing on intertextual aspects of the film, emphasis will be placed on Kafka's literary style, the way this style is transformed into Soderbergh's film, and both the philosophical and fantastic underpinnings of Kafka's writing. The first step in examining the intertextual aspects of the film involves identifying the primary literary sources of Kafka's writing that Soderbergh draws upon for his film. Second, some of the intertextual sources of Kafka's writing must be enumerated, for example the influence the work of Frederick Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud had upon his writing. In terms of style, the aesthetics of both realism and German Expressionism manifested in his work.

Franz Kafka was born in Prague in 1883. He died of tuberculosis in a sanatorium near Vienna in 1924. The first stories Kafka published appeared in the

magazine *Hyperion* in 1908; this is the same year that he began working in a semi- state owned Worker's Accident Insurance Company for the Kingdom of Bohemia in Prague. In 1912 Kafka wrote "The Metamorphosis". In 1914 Kafka got engaged to Felice Brauer, an engagement he subsequently broke. It is around this time, 1914-, that Kafka begins work on *The Trial*. In 1917 he is diagnosed with tuberculosis. He begins writing *The Castle* in 1922. It is this novel that is the primary fictional intertext for Soderbergh's film. Although the novel is often printed with a proper ending, in reality Kafka's manuscript remained incomplete at his death. Neither of his most famous novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, were completed. With *The Trial*, he wrote the first and last chapters, documenting K.'s arrest and ultimate execution first. He then wrote the rest of the chapters which he kept in a folder without specifying their order. English translations that complete these unfinished chapters are misleading because they present Kafka's work as more coherent and unified than it actually was. In *The Castle*, there is a continuous, though very expansive narrative line, but it does not reach a clear conclusion. Kafka was not content leaving his novels as fragments, suggesting that his request of Max Brod, that his unfinished manuscripts be destroyed upon his death, was genuine . Like Kafka's fictions, as well as other cinematic adaptations of Kafka's work such as Orson Welles's, a sense of mystery, chance and the uncanny pervade his writing and the films they have inspired.

Much like Kafka's real job, Kafka in Soderbergh's film works at the Worker's

Accident Insurance Company. Soderbergh establishes the anonymity and hierarchical bureaucracy underlying the Insurance Company by setting the company in a vast, high ceilinged hall, almost like a warehouse where row upon row of desks extend in all directions. This resembles the way Orson Welles represented the bank where K. worked in his low- budget adaptation of a Kafka novel, both titled *The Trial* (Welles, 1963). In the film *Kafka* (Jeremy Irons) mentions his broken engagement to one of his co-workers, Gabriela Rossman (Theresa Russell), the name Rossman derived from the hero of Kafka's first novel *Amerika* (1927). Another way the film subtly conveys the time in which it is set occurs when Kafka meets friends in the street outside a cabaret. They ask about his writing and he casually mentions the fact that he is working on "In the Penal Colony" (1914), and "The Metamorphosis", a "story about a man who wakes up to find himself transformed into a giant insect". When the film begins, Kafka is living in his own quarters, suggesting that the film is set after 1915, when Kafka in reality moved out of his parents home. At the end of the film, Kafka coughs blood into a handkerchief, intimating Kafka's future demise from tuberculosis. The way Soderbergh's film combines biographical details with elements from Kafka's fictions indicates some of the intertextual sources of the film, including Kafka's stories and his novel *The Castle* (as the castle is implicated in the mystery staged by the film's narrative), as well as Max Brod's biography of Kafka and Kafka's own diaries and personal writing. The voice- over narration in the film is inspired by the real Kafka's famous letter to his father. Soderbergh's film is

unique in the way it weaves threads from reality and fiction, but he is certainly not the first filmmaker to make a film based on Kafka's fictions.

The most famous cinematic adaptation of Kafka's fiction is Orson Welles's 1963 film, *The Trial*. As Martin Brady and Helen Hughes contend:

Cinematic literary adaptations abide in a complex relationship with their source material. In the transfer from page to screen they are engaged in a process of translation, substitution, and interpretation, and the material thus displaced essentially stands in a metaphorical relationship to the original text (Brady, Hughes, 237).

Kafka's text and Orson Welles's interpretation of it meld most easily in the early scenes when Josef K. (Anthony Perkins), is arrested in his home. The images convey paranoia, surrealist humor, and Josef K.'s own feelings of guilt and outrage. Welles uses his adaptation of Kafka's parable "Before the Law" to bookend his film. This is in lieu of an explanation for the film's lack of narrative logic. Welles uses his directorial voice to suggest that the narrative has the logic of a dream or nightmare. Both the character Kafka and the spectator become embroiled in a nightmare vision rooted in Kafka's writing.

The final minutes of Welles's film can be read as a compendium of cinematic quotations and filmic devices that convey both the positive and the negative aspects of cinematic illusion. Some of the filmic devices employed include deep focus, wide panoramas, shadows, silhouettes and projections, jump cuts, handheld camera and freeze framing. *The Trial* perpetuates themes that recur in Orson Welles's cinema, such as the relationship between truth and fiction, and the substantiality of illusion, particularly cinematic illusion. Kafka's *The Trial*, as

well as *The Castle* have been read as "metatextual critiques of bureaucratized structures, language, and processes of interpretation" (Brady and Hughes 234). The concept of interpretation is specifically central to Kafka in Soderbergh's film and more generally to theories of intertextuality. Interpretation, within the world evoked in the writing of Kafka, becomes problematic. Kafka suggests that perhaps the world is not just an assemblage of people and objects but also a 'universe' requiring some justification for its existence. Often the narrative voice is one of puzzlement. This is demonstrated in the tenor of the voice of Kafka in the film. In the process of his narrating, Kafka is trying to make sense of the events of the last few days. Kafka, in the film, is explaining things to himself, his father to which his letter is addressed, and the spectator simultaneously. Kafka seeks moral, religious and legal justifications for the world only to discover that those justifications have vanished or become impossible to verify. Seeking answers to difficult questions is an integral aspect of Kafka's writing, and Soderbergh translates this probing into the body of Kafka in the film.

A recurring trope in Kafka's writing is the search for truth and the utter impossibility of ever really discovering it. Kafka's fiction entails a seeking, it is an engenderer of truth. Its unfinishedness is a kind of expression, evident also at the level of the texts, which often remain unfinished fragments. Both *The Trial* and *The Castle* investigate the nature of truth and the role of subjectivity in determining one's truth. Realism presupposes an agreement about what reality is. In the stories and novels of Kafka that general consensus is gone and seeing

becomes problematic. There is no longer a stable reality out there, one for which a realist text can provide a window unto. In Kafka, there are only versions of reality, which may or may be profoundly inadequate or mistaken.

Kafka's narratives focus on the protagonist's consciousness and their attempts to make sense of the world. In Soderbergh's film, the narrative is structured like a mystery, Kafka endeavoring to discover the truth behind his friend's death. When the bureaucracy of the Castle is implicated in this death and another company employee, Gabriela Rossman, goes missing, Kafka reconsiders her suspicion that "they", the authorities in the castle, may be implicated in the conspiracy. When his friend, Edouard Raban, is killed, Kafka is promoted in his stead. Demonstrative of his rise in stature, Kafka is given two assistants and a larger office at the Worker's Accident Insurance Company. Kafka treats them with scorn, perhaps as a way of establishing his own power over them. Of course, this is later overturned when the assistants attack Kafka in the street, on orders issued from the castle. The assistants represent dimensions of Kafka that he is incapable of acknowledging.

That the assistants are an unrecognized aspect of Kafka himself suggests the propensity of human beings to establish their identity both through setting themselves off from others and through suppression of aspects of themselves which are threatening to the ego ideal, to use a Freudian term, and which are then projected on to a despised or hated other. The assistants exemplify the literary device of the double, familiar in German Expressionism, who uncannily

represents the return of such repressed elements of the self externalized in an alter ego. Thus repression, far from securing identity, sets up psychic conflicts which endanger the integrity of the self. The figure of the doppelganger runs through much nineteenth century literature in works by Jean Paul, E.T.A Hoffman, Storm, Nestroy, Dostoevsky, Poe, Dickens, and Oscar Wilde, among others. In the double, several figures coalesce into an entity internally as contradictory as it is complementary. One can interpret this doubling technique as the literary translation of a consciousness that has experienced its own immanent plurality and estrangement, though this consciousness is not the same as the author's. The authorial voice in a literary text might be the author, the narrator, the person asking the questions or an omniscient consciousness. In *Kafka*, Kafka is the protagonist and it is his subjectivity that is privileged. But the combination of intermittent shots and scenes that are not from Kafka's point-of-view, as well as a voice-over commentary, suggest that the character of Kafka is also, in many ways an unstable and omniscient narrator.

The experience of the self's disintegration and pluralization is one of the fundamental thematics of German Literary Expressionism. One can interpret the disintegration of the self as a response to a cultural syndrome dating from "the fin de siecle: an intense experience of the alienation and dissociation of the self, the internalization of a pathological disintegration of society" (Robertson 131). Both Freud and Nietzsche wrote about the ego as a fiction. Nietzsche conceived of the subject as a confused multiplicity, a plurality of voices. The disintegration

of the unified subject was fundamental to Kafka's fictional experiences of the self. Such terms as "Swarm", "Army", "cry of jackdaws", "orchestra", "noise", "we" ( much like Dostoevsky's use of the third plural 'we') and so on, are all metaphoric figures used to describe the dissolution of the subject into an inner plurality. Kafka depicts "different subjects in the same person". What is foreign is not the other person, but one's own self.

The literary manifestation of the plurality of consciousness can be traced through the middle of the twentieth century. In Kafka's writing, as well as that of his contemporaries, such as Samuel Beckett, the experience of transience in the self and the world of phenomena becomes the impulse behind the writing. As previously mentioned, in Kafka's stories and novels, nothing is certain any longer, neither the self, nor external reality. Kafka's heroes are split figures, split into a self and others. Kafka himself was a split figure, a fastidious office worker who took his duties seriously, and someone for whom nothing existed outside of literature. The protagonist Kafka, in Soderbergh's film, lives this paradox. He is a valued worker who is given a promotion when his friend dies, and he is also a fiction writer recognized as such by his contemporaries, for example the group outside a cabaret and Gabriela and her group of anarchists who would like to make use of Kafka's considerable literary talent. Beezlbeck, the stone cutter who helps Kafka enter the Castle through an underground passage, agrees to burn Kafka's manuscripts should he fail to re-emerge from the castle. The film elaborates upon another recurring trope in Kafka's writing: the function and

maintenance of bureaucracies.

Kafka's depictions of bureaucracies is epitomized in his story, "The Metamorphosis", in which institutions are represented as abstract and hierarchical. The position of the main character in the story, Gregor Samsa, has no relation to manual labor or primary production. He is a mere middle-man, who shows samples and collects payments. Similar to the way Orson Welles represents the bank where Josef K. works in his film, *The Trial*, Gregor's firm displays its hierarchy by the exaggerated elevation of the boss, his desk on a stage from which he monitors his employees with threats for the slightest misdemeanor. The messenger Burghel, in Soderbergh's *Kafka*, reminds Kafka that his position is not unassailable. The world of abstraction and hierarchy requires a certain kind of modern man, someone who is orderly and calculating and ever aware of time. One of the early extreme close-ups in *Kafka* is of time sheets being punched at the entrance to the company where Kafka works. The authority of men in these hierarchies is best embodied in an upright military carriage, a massive physique and a fierce look. This is epitomized in Kafka's superior in the film, played by Alec Guinness. Kafka is reprimanded for his frail physique and tendency to keep to himself, instead of socializing with co-workers.

Sociologist Max Weber is the theorist of bureaucracy whereas Kafka is its satirist. The bureaucratic ideal is satirized in his last novel *The Castle*, in which a vast and supposedly flawless organization has the effect of insulating the officials from real life. If one telephones the Castle, only an unlikely chance can get one

through to an actual official, who in any case will merely pick up the receiver for a joke; the buzzing noise one hears is that of constant telephoning going on within the Castle, confirming its isolation from the outside world. When Kafka uses an underground tunnel to access the Castle in *Kafka*, Soderbergh has him come up into a circular file room, in which files reach towards a vaulted ceiling. Next Soderbergh takes an aerial shot of the entrance to a corridor, like the identical spokes of a wheel, all directions looking the same. Soderbergh mimics this with a camera movement of 360 degrees, violating the 180 degree rule, and conveying the confusion of Kafka with the actual movement of the camera. In Kafka's novel, the traditional rule of Count Westwest exists in name only. The Count's flag flies from the battlement but he never appears and the bureaucrats, especially Klammer, enjoy the superstitious respect formerly reserved for royalty. In Soderbergh's film, there is no specific figurehead for the Castle but there is a sense of mystery behind its machinations, and the townsfolk seem to harbor some superstitious suspicions regarding who runs the Castle and what actually goes on within its walls.

The village mayor in *The Castle* explains to K., that although he has been summoned as a land surveyor when the village has no need for one, it may be a misunderstanding but it cannot be an error. In the film *Kafka*, the organization of the Castle bureaucracy does not allow for the possibility of error. In the novel *The Castle*, the authorities have "control authorities" to monitor their work:

Are there control authorities? There are nothing but control

authorities. Of course, their purpose is not to uncover errors in the ordinary meaning of the word, since errors do not occur. And even when an error does in fact occur, as in your case, who can say conclusively that it is an error? Moreover, since each control bureau is monitored by others, the first may acknowledge an error but who can say that the second control bureau will form the same judgment and then the third and subsequently the others? (Kafka 68).

This kind of mise-en-abyme of authorities and burgeoning bureaucracies is most pronounced in two Kafka novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*. Soderbergh represents this in various ways but it is most pronounced in the scene that occurs in the underground file room, with rows of file folders stacked from floor to ceiling, and the scenes when Kafka is in the Castle, where aerial shots convey the symmetry of identical hallways and staircases, and the fact that the people in the hallways he enters are oblivious to his presence. At least, they fail to notice that he is an unfamiliar within the walls of the Castle. Surveying the identical hallways extending in all directions, and remembering the nature of Kafka's fictions, the Castle becomes an eerie space where one might expect the presence of the uncanny. Kafka's writing transitions between Realist and Expressionist styles.

Kafka draws on both realist and expressionist styles in his writing. And he breaks his fictional contract. He makes us think "The Judgment" is a realist text (George is writing a letter to a friend in Russia, etc.) and then turns it into a nightmare (George dives off a bridge exclaiming his love for his parents). The "Judgment" corresponds to real uncertainty about the world, and the reality of passions needs Expressionist images of power and conflict. Even if literature no

longer has the means of representing such realities, they appear in Kafka's fictions as a series of hints and allusions which "fracture the surface of the text and remind us yet again that any literary mode is only a provisional and inadequate way of representing reality" (Robertson 30). "The Metamorphosis" employs both Expressionist and Realist styles simultaneously. For example, the expressionist image of Gregor transformed into an insect is conveyed through realistic matter-of-fact details. His family responds to Gregor's transformation in an ordinary, and soon bored manner. They confine him to his room and swear the servants to secrecy, and try to determine what he eats. Gregor dies from the wound exacted when his father pelts him with rotten apple and a chunk lodges in his back. The story elucidates fantastic events through realistic details, a technique Soderbergh employs in *Kafka*. The creature that kills Edouard Raban at the beginning of *Kafka*, cues the audience that the film is a mystery and thriller.

The doctor in Soderbergh's film, Dr. Murnau, works with patients that are transformed into mindless ghouls, almost zombies, while the scenes where his experiments are being conducted on the human mind via a domed ceiling that is a giant magnifying glass, are rendered through realistic details. Dr. Murnau matter-of-factly explains his experimentation on humans to Kafka, based on the simple assumption that chemicals control people's behaviour, reasoning that playing around with fluids and chemicals might lead to a better engineered, more efficient person. Kafka in his writing also shows his distance from realism,

particularly in the way he uses photographs. For example, in *The Trial*, K. observes a portrait of a judge, half rising from his throne, but later learns that the picture simply follows convention. In reality the judge is a tiny man who sits on a kitchen chair covered in a horse blanket. K., in *The Castle*, sees a photograph of a castle messenger. Initially it appears as though the messenger is leaping over a high horizontal bar in his haste to deliver a message. In the film *Kafka*, at the company where Kafka works, Burghel refers to himself as a messenger. Even cameras seemingly provide no reliable account of the world, and pictures need to be interpreted too. The most obvious use of photographs in the film are the nude pictures of women in compromising positions Burghel examines in the apparent privacy of a bathroom stall. The photographs are also indicative of the reflexivity that draws attention to the formal and intertextual nature of the film. Seeing Burghel admiring representations of women in still photographs reminds the spectator that they themselves are seeing a representation, not reality.

Shooting *Kafka* in black and white is a modernist technique that draws attention to the construction of the film with the figure of the mad murderer reminiscent of German Expressionism cueing the spectator to the uncanny elements of the narrative. *Kafka* is also an example of what Timothy Corrigan has termed the "literary film" (Corrigan, 93). According to this definition, two kinds of film might fall under the rubric of the literary film. First, adaptations in which the "movie draws attention to the literary work from which it is derived,

presuming either familiarity with the work or at least cultural recognition of its literary status" (Corrigan, 93). Even if spectators were unfamiliar with the original Shakespearean play, they would have recognized Baz Luhrman's 1996, *Romeo & Juliet*, as being based on the work of Shakespeare. Similarly, most audiences would know that *Emma* (1996) was based on the novel of the same name by Jane Austen. The second kind of film that might be considered a literary film would be "films in which a prominent literary presence- such as a writer turned filmmaker or a script by a recognized novelist or playwright- shapes expectations about the literary qualities of those films (Corrigan 93). Audiences familiar with the novels of Charles Dickens, may have gone to the film *Great Expectations*, starring Gwyneth Paltrow, with expectations of their own. Similarly, many spectators may be aware of Sam Shepard as a playwright, but his work has also been the source for several filmic adaptations. There are at least three reasons why Soderbergh's *Kafka* might be considered a literary film. The title identifies a famous early twentieth century writer, immediately evoking certain expectations in the spectator. Second, the themes and characters in the film are based on the fictions Kafka wrote. Third, certain details of the film, for instance the voice- over commentary that is the narration of a letter Kafka is writing to his father, as well as his coughing blood into a handkerchief towards the end of the film, are drawn from biographical insights into the life of Kafka. Also, at the level of the text, it could be argued that Soderbergh chose to shoot the film in black and white, with period associations, to realistically depict the world in which Kafka lived and

wrote.

In *Kafka*, Kafka conveys to Gabriela his certainty that Edouard Raban had not committed suicide. But he can offer no alternative explanation. He keeps an open mind, contemplating the possibilities, demonstrating some faith in the police and equally reluctant to agree with Gabriela and her friends that there is a conspiracy that can be traced to the Castle. Kafka's collection of aphorisms of "he" expresses both self referentiality and distance from the self, the borderland between loneliness and fellowship. In the film, Kafka seems to have friends but he is a loner, alienated from his surroundings and escaping reality into the world of his fictions whenever possible. Kafka's expression, "constructive destruction" is synonymous to this form of skeptical questioning, and it is based on the constant suspicion that all phenomena are masks that have to be stripped away to show the true face of things.

Kafka in *Kafka*, very clearly asserts that in his experience truth is never convenient. This suggestion that the truth is always other than it appears and other than what we think it is, is also at work in Kafka's stories and novels. Unrelentingly, Kafka's work reverses our accustomed views and values in order to reveal the "truth" hidden in their depths. "His narrative structures reverse, reduce and negate complacent verities. This narrative method is subversive, a technique of suspicion, drawing commonplace formulations into a vortex of skeptical questioning in order to make visible the truth concealed within them" (Kurz, 142). This is akin to Kafka, in *Kafka*, descending into the ground and

accessing the Castle through a secret passage. He seeks to uncover, or reveal the truth behind Raban's suspicious death, Gabriela's disappearance, and her friend's brutal murders.

### Conclusion

Employing intertextuality as a theoretical framework enlarges a text. This can occur in a number of different ways, for instance, 'reading' a text in one form of media can provide the motivation to examine outside texts that may have had an impact on the primary text. Watching Soderbergh's *Kafka* becomes more productive once a spectator becomes aware of the various texts that had an impact upon it, including elements drawn from both Kafka's fictional works, and his autobiography. Reading Kafka's fiction within its social and cultural context leads to a consideration of who among his contemporaries Kafka may have been inspired by. An artist does not imitate nature but rather other texts. An artist paints, or writes, or makes films because they have seen paintings, read novels or attended films. Art in this sense is not a representation of an artist's relation to reality but to other artists. Art is the manifestation of an intertextual dialogue between artists. The intertextual references may be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious, direct and local or broad and diffuse. This is evidenced in cinema. Directors make films in a certain genre, or "in the manner of" a certain director, or according to a set of generic conventions. Whether artists draw attention to these intertextual influences or obscure them, the intertext is always

present. The more linkages that one can create between texts, the richer the cinematic experience. In the case of *Kafka*, the viewing experience is enriched by a knowledge of the life and writing of Franz Kafka. In the next chapter, hypertextuality will be re-examined through the close analysis of Soderbergh's *Solaris*.

## Chapter 5: The Intertextual Traces of *Solaris* (Lem) and *Solaris* (Tarkovsky) in Soderbergh's *Solaris*

### Introduction

Although one might enumerate many reasons why novels have become fertile ground for film adaptations, there are two primary reasons why narrative fiction is an ideal medium for contemporary films according to Timothy Corrigan. First, narrative fiction relies on plots that develop through a character psychology that drives the action according to a temporal pattern of (frequently) cause and effect. Second, there is a mobile variety of narrative points of view that organize those events from one or more perspectives (Corrigan 137). If a film is based on a novel as opposed to a short story, significant cutting is necessary to meet the requirements dictated by a feature length film:

Choices of what to include or omit can be either artistically significant or a matter of economics. If films bring more realism to novels, those films struggle before the novel's selective power of descriptive detail (whereby a description is always a meaningful choice of what to describe), the wide variety of numerous points of view available, and the full elaboration of a character's consciousness found in novels. Many novelistic techniques, such as stream of consciousness style that moves fluidly through a central character's conscious and unconscious perceptions, are extremely difficult to recreate in a film or are considered unpopular with audiences (Corrigan 137).

Soderbergh has said his film is 20% the book *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem, 20% the film of the same name by Andrei Tarkovsky, and 60% his own preoccupations.

*Solaris*, is important to the study of Soderbergh's cinema because it showcases his aesthetic sensibility and demonstrates the genre hybridization and

intertextuality emblematic of contemporary postmodern cinema. Soderbergh uses Lem's book as the foundation for a film about a relationship, an unconventional love story. Both Lem's novel and Tarkovsky's film function as primary intertexts for Soderbergh's film. They are both hypotexts, earlier texts that have an impact on a later text, what Gerard Genette calls the hypertext. Another intertextual point of reference is Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* a nonlinear narrative that uses an unconventional love story as a vehicle for a philosophical examination of death and the nature of memory.

### Analysis

If Soderbergh had to describe *Solaris* in one word, Soderbergh would say the film is about "acceptance". That can mean a lot of different things, but more than anything else it means being present. In the film, Solaris is a new planet being studied by a group of scientists intent on determining whether the planet might be a viable energy source in the future. In some ways the planet resembles an Artificial Intelligence, an ocean that functions like a living brain. This is another Science fiction film that features "aliens" or "others" who look exactly like us. There are fewer monsters these days. Perhaps the monsters are within us.

In this film, George Clooney plays Dr. Kris Kelvin, a psychiatrist recruited to Solaris by a colleague who requests Kelvin's presence to facilitate some resolution and the return of their ship to Earth. He is chosen because of his past.

The crucial difference between Lem's novel and Soderbergh's film is that Lem emphasizes interplanetary studies and the potential ramifications new knowledge of an alien life form might have for humans and life on Earth. Soderbergh uses interplanetary study and travel as the background against which he examines the nature of reality, subjectivity and memory. In the novel, Kelvin is given an encephalogram, which the other two scientists plan to transmit to the ocean and monitor for effects. In the film, Soderbergh intersperses a variety of colored atmospheric shots between scenes but in general the planet is not given a specific representation. What is of interest is the planet's ability to manifest visitors- dead people from the crew members lives. The ocean probes the crew members' consciousnesses and memories and creates simulacra of the people it finds there. The ocean discovers, in the mind of Kris Kelvin, his dead wife Rheyra (Natasha McElhone).

Neither Kris Kelvin nor Rheyra can understand the experience of the other, understand the experience of the other, despite the fact that theirs is an intimate relationship. This is akin to the complexity of communication in Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*. Soderbergh's interest in forms of communication and their apparent inadequacy emerges. Language and communication are imperative components of Soderbergh's film as well as Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour*. *Hiroshima, mon amour* is a film about remembering and misremembering. It is about the need not to forget. It is about the process of the destabilization of memory, of remembering and repressing, of misrecognizing

and forgetting images from the past. Much of the film combines visual images with voice- over narration done in monotonous male and female voices. Based on the script by Marguerite Duras, much of the structure of the film is based on relationships of opposition, the rhetorical device of the oxymoron. Either explicitly or implicitly the narration often negates what it then affirms, illustrated in the following narration by the voice of the Riva character (Emmanuele Riva):

Who are you?  
You destroy me.  
You're so good for me.  
How could I have known that this city was made to the size of love?  
How could I have known that you were made to the size of my body?  
You're great. How wonderful. You're great.  
How slow all of a sudden.  
And how sweet.  
More than you can know.  
You destroy me.  
You're so good for me.  
Plenty of time.  
Please.  
Take me.  
Deform me, make me ugly (Duras, 25).

This brief narration could easily represent Kris Kelvin's relationship to Rheya leading up to her death. It is portrayed as both a great love and a tragic love. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, Riva's grief at the loss of her German lover leads to madness. She eventually recovers and resumes her life. In *Solaris*, Rheya is emotionally unstable and very dependent on Kelvin's attentions and affection. When she believes she will be denied because of his anger toward her, her madness leads to suicide. In both films, madness and sanity are indelibly linked to love and intimate relationships that are lost or thought lost. Riva straddles this

binary while Rheyra more convincingly slides towards insanity.

Towards the end of the film, the Japanese male character speaks of his brief encounter with Riva as part of a larger tendency of lovers to forget one another:

In a few years, when I'll have forgotten you, and when such adventures from sheer habit, will happen to me, I'll remember you as the symbol of love's forgetfulness. I'll think of this adventure as the horror of oblivion. I already know it (Duras, 68).

This could have just as easily been spoken by Kelvin who fears the future because it entails the possibility of forgetting Rheyra. Much like the Japanese man in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, Kelvin is willing to compromise his entire future if that is what sustaining his reconnection to Rheyra entails. The film is also structured non-linearly, proceeding through flashbacks and flashforwards, characters progressing and regressing, as the nature of memory and the role of memory in our experiences of the world is probed.

With *Solaris*, Soderbergh has blended the genres of Science Fiction and Romance and Melodrama. The alienated, the Other has become ourselves. Reality has become a construction, a manifestation of our own minds. It is no longer experience that commands authenticity but memory. The past and the future have become conflated. The outside world is created by our interiority. The visitors that manifest in the station on Solaris are created out of the consciousness and subjectivity of the person to whom they are connected. Kelvin arrives on Solaris after receiving a taped request from a friend asking him to come to the station and evaluate the situation. When Kelvin arrives, the station

seems unusually vacant, sterile, empty, silent, cold. He discovers the body of his friend Giabarian in cold storage and quickly locates and questions Snow (Jeremy Davies) about what happened. The scientists living aboard the ship soon discover that people from their past, dead people, manifest in their dreams and then become tangible entities living with them on the ship. Thus the face of the Other has become a cherished, departed family member or loved one. When Kelvin goes to sleep, Soderbergh begins a series of flashbacks that chronicle Kelvin's first meeting with Rheya, and the development of their romance and eventual marriage. Soderbergh shifts between the present and the past seamlessly, best exemplified in a montage of frontal shots of Rheya with different outfits and hairstyles against an alternating background. This is reminiscent of the montage of shots of Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda) in *The Limey*. The sequence resembles stream-of-consciousness, one image melding with another, conveying what and how Kelvin has represented Rheya to himself. Stream-of-consciousness is also a term that captures the way Marguerite Duras has structured the voice-over narration in *Hiroshima, mon amour*. In *Hiroshima, mon amour*, the cinematic effects employed by Alain Resnais do resemble stream-of-consciousness thinking. For Gabriel Marcel "a presence is something which can only be." In Soderbergh's film it is imperative that one recognize that apart from the 'otherworldliness' of Rheya, for example the fact that she drinks liquid oxygen, dies, and subsequently resurrects herself, Rheya is additionally a being created out of Kelvin's memories of her.

The ending of Tarkovsky's and Soderbergh's films are very different from one another. Tarkovsky, in first showing Kelvin at his father's log cabin by a lake suggests that Kelvin has returned to Earth and resumed his earthly existence. But then a backward zoom shows the figures and the cabin on an island, in what one might presume is the ocean on Solaris, the planet recreating Kelvin's past based on his unconscious or his memories. The planet is capable of creating Kelvin's memories tangibly by reading his encephalogram which Kelvin and the other scientists have sent into the ocean:

An abrupt thrill of fear ran through me. My encephalogram, a complete record of the workings of my brain, was to be beamed into the ocean in the form of radiation. What was it Snow had said- would I suffer terribly if Rheya departed? An encephalogram records every mental process, conscious or unconscious. If I want her to disappear, will it happen? But if I wanted to get rid of her would I also be appalled at the thought of her imminent destruction? Am I responsible for my unconscious? No one else is, if not myself. How stupid to agree to let them do it. Obviously I can examine the recording before it is used, but I won't be able to decode it. Nobody could (Lem 155).

As this quotation illustrates, Lem's novel is much more scientifically grounded than Soderbergh's film *Solaris*. Soderbergh simply uses outer space as the stage for a tragic love story. Lem emphasizes issues of science, religion, and faith, themes that are almost entirely absent from Soderbergh's film. In Lem's novel, he makes the connection between religion and faith on the one hand, and the endeavor to make Contact with a capital C with the mysterious ocean on Solaris on the other, explicit. In Soderbergh's film God only appears in a conversation around a table at a dinner party, and the nature of faith is more likened to the

strength of belief- Rheya becomes real and tangible based on Kelvin's belief in that possibility, and although the ending of the film is quite vague, one might determine that the possibility of Kelvin and Rheya reuniting is largely the result of their faith in one another and the porousness of the reality that surrounds them.

In Lem's novel, faith figures prominently and Solaristics is the space era's equivalent to a religion: faith disguised as science, with the ultimate goal being Contact. The comparison between religion and solaristics is reinforced by obvious parallels. Just as those possessing religious faith reject arguments that undermine the foundations of their belief, so Solarists reject arguments refuting their belief in Contact. But what mankind can expect should communication with the ocean become possible remains uncertain. The ocean has endured for such a long time it probably has no memory of its origins. A description of the aspirations, passions, and sufferings that the ocean expresses through the perpetual creation of its mountains is meaningless. Even if these insights could be transposed into human language their meanings and values remain obscure. While Lem's novel is a scientific and philosophical probing into what constitutes our reality, Soderbergh's film is necessarily much more visual and physical.

When Kelvin wakes up, after his first night on Solaris, Rheya is physically in the room with him. He is startled, speechless, and he begins to question her; who are you? Why are you here? Where did you come from? At this point Kelvin is still fairly rational and he knows Rheya is not real in any 'real' sense, that she

is a projection of his mind, that perhaps Solaris possesses the capacity to manifest a person's desires, to make their dreams real. In his novel, Lem describes the visitors as blank, ghosts made up of images and associations culled from a person's memories. The longer a visitor remains with the host from which they are constructed, the more human they become. Not surprisingly, the more a visitor resembles a human the more difficult it becomes for their host.

Kelvin puts this first Rheya in a pod and ejects her into space. Kelvin then tries to develop a plan with Snow and Gordon, but he is divided between wanting to stay on Solaris and be reunited with Rheya and wanting to prepare to leave Solaris and return to Earth. In the book, the conception of Solaris as a life form that resides in the ocean is much more scientifically grounded, and Kelvin and the other scientists endeavor to discern how the ocean has succeeded in manifesting images from their most elemental memories. Perhaps Solaris used a formula which is not expressed in verbal terms, but taken from a recording imprinted on the mind. A man's memory, they reasoned, is stored in terms of nucleic acids etching asynchronous large- moleculed crystals. Solaris removed the most isolated imprint, the most 'assimilated' structure, without necessarily knowing what it meant to the source from which it was derived (Lem193).

Rheya, as she later explains to Kelvin, is not the real Rheya, she is the Rheya Kelvin remembers, so if he has remembered some part of her wrong she is nevertheless compelled to re-enact it. When she speaks, it is not Rheya herself who is speaking but rather Rheya as Kelvin remembers her speaking. This

becomes more crucial with respect to her death; in reality Rheya killed herself after a fight with Kelvin, enraged over her decision to have an abortion without telling him. When Kelvin returns to apologize for his outburst, Rheya is dead from an overdose. Because Kelvin remembers Rheya as unbalanced and suicidal, the construct of Rheya created on Solaris feels compelled to kill herself. She drinks liquid oxygen and she does die, but, not surprisingly, she resurrects herself. This is proof of Gordon's contention that they are not real beings, that they may or may not be benign, that they cannot accompany them on their return to Earth because that might mean this phenomenon occurs on Earth on a massive scale. In a flashforward, Kelvin envisions himself on Earth after returning from Solaris, and his voice- over commentary is a verbatim duplication of Kelvin's ruminations in Lem's book:

What did that word mean to me? Earth?... I shall immerse myself among men. I shall be silent and attentive, an appreciative companion. There will be many acquaintances, friends, women- and perhaps even a wife. For a while, I shall have to make a conscious effort to smile, nod, stand and perform the thousands of little gestures which constitute life on Earth, and then those gestures will become reflexes again... I shall never again give myself completely to anything or anybody... this future Kelvin will be no less worthy a man than the Kelvin of the past, who was prepared for anything in the name of an ambitious enterprise called Contact (Lem 196).

Soderbergh's film is a meditation on human existence, on what constitutes reality, on the role of memory in the creation of our experiences, a questioning as to whether we remember people as they really are or as we perceive them to be. It is a meditation on the nature of life and death and the conflation of the

two, a kind of interrogation of our essentialist notions of life and death and how the two may be more ambiguous and less final than we imagine. Often Soderbergh captures this meditative questioning through static shots of space that function as pauses between the unfolding scenes of drama.

The film is cold, sterile, minimal, simple, but utterly beautiful. Soderbergh repeatedly cuts to virtually still images of *Solaris*/ space, almost like the codas in Ozu films, near static shots of landscapes, vistas, or city streets, inserted between one extended scene and the next, a brief meditative moment to pause and take stock of surroundings. More recently P.T. Anderson's feature *Punch Drunk Love* also includes fairly static color shots between some of its sequences. In *Solaris*, these shots are in vibrant colors, vivid pinks and blues depicting space not as foreign or inhospitable but rather as breathtaking. Soderbergh employs numerous pans, close-ups, tracking shots, both Rheya and Kelvin address the camera, and the oscillation between their centrally shot faces violate the 180 degree rule. There is also an upside- down shot, as Gordon and Kelvin are descending into the ship. This replicates one of the few shots in *Traffic* that is not narratively motivated but strictly abstract- the shot looking up at the helicopter about to land.

The two primary ways in which Soderbergh's film differs from Tarkovsky's earlier and much longer film, are the emphasis placed on science and rationality as an object of study and a grand narrative providing fundamental knowledge in the modern world in Tarkovsky's film, and the relative absence of science in

Soderbergh's film. According to cinematographer Vadim Yusov, for Tarkovsky they were creating the future, not the technological future, but the future where people gravitate to life as it was in the past, not to the primitive life styles of the past, but to past values and aesthetics. Tarkovsky wanted to convey a sense of Earth as a sensual source of life, captured through the many shots of fire, underwater plants and a varied display of the textures of nature. One reason the final images of his film seem otherworldly is that everything resembles the earth house and surroundings where the spectator first meets Kris Kelvin and his family. Except the final images of the earth house are completely still, the pond and its life form frozen. Tarkovsky emphasized the theme of human moral conscience. For Tarkovsky, in contrast to Stanislaw Lem, the Earth takes precedence over planet Solaris. Tarkovsky sees space as something terrible and the problem of the ocean on Solaris an annoyance. Lem finds the problem posed by planet Solaris an interesting challenge confronting man, though it can, naturally, cause tragic conflicts and suffering.

In Tarkovsky's film, knowledge is only valid when it is based on morality. It is man who renders science moral or immoral. The hypothesis is that the ocean Solaris functions like a massive living brain. Hari, who becomes Rheya in Soderbergh's film is a mechanical reproduction, a copy, a matrix. Hari argues that the "guests" of the crew members are manifestations of a man's conscience. In one of Snaut's speeches he argues that man does not want to encounter an alien life form, what man really wants is a mirror, that man needs man. Sartorius

philosophically argues that the crew have a responsibility, a duty to truth. According to Yusov, one intertext for Tarkovsky's film was Stanley Kubrick's 1968 *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Yusov, *Solaris DVD*). The Russian filmmaker did not have the resources afforded Kubrick, but they admired Kubrick's conception of the space station and the cosmos. The station in Tarkovsky's film looks handmade, battered, unkempt. Tarkovsky uses a preponderance of tracking shots and zooms in and out, most emphatically used in the backward tracking away from the island in *Solaris's* ocean that ends the film.

In Soderbergh's version of *Solaris*, science is a necessary component of the narrative but only insofar as it presents a unique occasion to examine the complexities of human emotion, human intimacy, and death. Soderbergh does repeatedly use codas, almost static shots of what *Solaris* looks like, and shots of the laboratory and scientific instruments and the metal sheen reflecting their images throughout the film, but these are used as background, providing a context within which Kelvin contemplates time, memory and the fate of humanity. In contrast to this, Tarkovsky begins his film with a conference weighing the merits of continuing to study *Solaris*; he spends time developing characters that are first and foremost scientists, intent to, as they say in *Star Trek*, "boldly go where no man has gone before". The project is in jeopardy because of the lack of measurable, quantifiable progress in the efforts to understand the workings of *Solaris*. The second difference between the two films is Soderbergh's shift towards foregrounding the love story between Kelvin and

Rheya, and Tarkovsky who, taking his cue from Lem's novel, positions the love story as background to the foregrounding narrative involving scientific discovery, the fate of humanity and man's reason for being. The following is a quote from Lem's book in which he disregards the importance of love to his project:

The age- old faith of lovers and poets in the power of love, stronger than death, that *finis vitae sed non amoris* , is a lie, useless and not even funny... that liquid giant had been the death of hundreds of men, the entire human race had tried in vain to establish even the most tenuous link with it...leaving would mean giving up a chance, perhaps an infinitesimal one, perhaps only imaginary... must I go on living here then, among the objects we both had touched, in the air she had breathed? In the name of what? In the hope of her return? I hoped for nothing. And yet I lived in expectation. Since she had gone, that was all that remained (Lem 204).

In Soderbergh's film, the issue of communication with one another takes precedence over communication with another life form. Even though the Rheya of *Solaris* is a simulacra created by the ocean, Kelvin's attachment to her, and his desire to be with her, is based on his identification of her as the Rheya he knew and loved. Lem doubts man's capacity to communicate with a being different from ourselves. Soderbergh problematizes communication between man and woman, husband and wife. The dilemmas of effective communication, particularly between the sexes recurs in Soderbergh's films, but in *Solaris* they find their most extreme manifestation, symbolized as the potential difficulty one might encounter in endeavoring to communicate human concerns, such as emotions and desires, to an alien life form that has no concept of what being a human entails or is comprised of. *Solaris* takes Soderbergh's issue of the perils of

intimacy and pushes it to the extreme. The suggestion is made that had Kelvin had more capacity to hear his wife and respond to her needs, Rheya might still be alive, opting not to kill herself.

It is entirely Soderbergh's invention to include a poem by Dylan Thomas, instrumental in Kelvin's designs and seduction of Rheya, and found clutched in Rheya's hand when Kelvin discovers her body after she has overdosed. While the inclusion of the poem conveys more romantic notions of Rheya and Kelvin's relationship, one cannot forget that Kelvin originally uses it as a means of impressing her, manipulating her emotions by presenting himself as someone he is not. It is an interesting choice of poem and poet, embodying the themes of love, death and immortality that are also imperative themes in the film.

#### And Death Shall Have No Dominion

And death shall have no dominion.  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,  
They shall have stars at elbow and foot; though they go mad they shall be sane  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise again;  
Though lovers be lost love shall not;  
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.  
Under the windings of the sea  
They lying long shall die windily;  
Twisting on racks where sinews give way,  
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;  
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,  
And the unicorn evils run them through;  
Slit all ends up they shan't crack;  
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.

No more may gulls cry at their ears  
Or waves break loud on the seashores;  
Where blew a flower may a flower no more  
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;  
Though they be mad and dead as nails,  
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;  
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,  
And death shall have no dominion.

Dylan Thomas

Thomas, like Duras, is fascinated by language. Thomas uses everything and anything to shape his poems, including puns, portmanteau- words, paradox, allusion, paragram, catachresis, slang, assonantal rhymes, vowel rhymes, and sprung rhythm ( Thomas 665). Thomas has said that everything he ever read, particularly when he was young, influenced his poetry, including fairy tales and adventure tales. But other theorists have identified three formative influences on Thomas's work: James Joyce, the Bible, and Freud. Again the intertextuality that informs and deforms all literary texts becomes apparent. For Thomas, the best poems leave gaps in their craftsmanship so that something that is not *in* the poem can "creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in" (Thomas 665). For Thomas, all that matters about poetry is the "enjoyment of it, however tragic it may be. All that matters is the eternal movement behind it, the vast undercurrent of human grief, folly, pretension, exaltation, or ignorance, however unlofty the intention of the poem" (Thomas 665). Thomas's emphasis on the mood and tone beneath the words of a poem could just as easily apply to Marguerite Duras's script for *Hiroshima, mon amour*.

*Hiroshima mon amour* was groundbreaking in its visual representations of

time, seamlessly transitioning between the past and the present, a technique common in many contemporary films such as *Point Blank*, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*. It is used very effectively in *Solaris* too. *Hiroshima, mon amour* is structured as a day in the present repeatedly impacted by traumatic memories of the past. As Robert Stam has theorized:

In narratological terms, the film offers what Genette calls "mixed analepses", not flashbacks in their pure state but rather past times that erupt into the present, and which are fleshed out over the course of the film... Resnais exploits the resources of the cinema to communicate and even mimic mental processes. Relentless forward tracking shots, for example, embody the oxymoronic backward/ forward thrust of memory and consciousness by moving, thanks to the editing, across the space of two geographically distant cities... the film weds night shots of Hiroshima with day shots of Nevers, indissolubly linking them through camera movement...(Stam, 277).

Resnais makes a connection between mental and cinematic processes. *Hiroshima mon amour* is demonstrative of Deleuze's claim that film can convey philosophical concepts through not only language but also through visual movements in space and time. *Solaris* is a science fiction film in which very little action actually occurs. It problematizes our usual firm delineation of past, present and future time. And it suggests that memories are not reliable facts or universal truths but rather our subjective renderings of past experiences. Like *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Solaris* generates an indeterminacy of meaning and status.

### Conclusion

While Lem's novel and Tarkovsky's film are modernist in their foregrounding of the grand narrative of human progress, *Solaris* is more postmodern, embodying a skepticism towards the universal truths long thought to be the foundations of contemporary society. Where Tarkovsky's film ends with Kelvin and his father on an island in the ocean Solaris, Soderbergh's ending is more ambiguous and circular. There are the same images with which the film opened. Kelvin is back on Earth moving through days like an automaton devoid of emotion, or is Kelvin dead and the Kelvin on Earth a simulacra created by the ocean Solaris in his image? Where is Rheya? Are both the real Rheya and the simulacra Rheya dead? What happened to the other crew members? The ending of the film generates an indeterminate number of questions therein refusing closure and leaving gaps for the spectator to interpret for themselves. Upon first viewing, it might appear as though there is a high 'fidelity' between Stanislaw Lem's novel and Andrei Tarkovsky's film, but Tarkovsky's film is much more focused upon human moral conscience, and the images of Kelvin and his father being rained upon at the end of the film embody religious symbolism, the rain representing the Holy Spirit. In his film, Tarkovsky makes the association of god/ocean and earth/Solarists one of equivalence, the ocean as not only a sentient being, but one of godlike stature. By this analogy, Solarists endeavoring to communicate with the ocean are really trying to communicate with God. In contrast to this, Lem's novel is much more philosophical and atheistic. His emphasis is upon man's encounter with an alien Other. Soderbergh's film

embraces another possible interpretation of Lem's Science Fiction novel. He uses outer space and science as mere subtexts for his primary emphasis on time, memory and human relationships.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion: The Contemporary Auteur as Intertextual Engineer

Soderbergh has successfully negotiated a position in Hollywood that has enabled him to make both big budget blockbusters (like *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Twelve*), that appeal to the masses, and smaller independent films that appeal to cinephiles. As Dennis Lim has observed:

The most gifted and fleet-footed genre deconstructionist of his generation, Soderbergh is also one of the very few American filmmakers working today who sees reinvention as the lifeblood of his craft. After years of apparently perverse career choices, the pay-off- it's now self-evident- is considerable. Soderbergh straddles Hollywood and the Indies with remarkable ease and on his own idiosyncratic terms... in the ultimate irony, this one time wild card, has, for now, reinvented himself as a sure thing, an attractive hire for studios for a host of increasingly obvious reasons: speed and economy, an uncanny track record with career making performances ( his knack for casting is matched by an unfailing generosity with actors), a newfound populism, (or at least a newfound ease about his latent populism) merging profitably with his abiding restlessness and long-standing taste for quirk and foible (Lim, 149).

Time and again Soderbergh has been in a position to settle into a lucrative career within the mainstream Hollywood film industry, with actors keen to work for him. Instead he has continued to move beyond his own borders, to challenge himself aesthetically and thematically. This study has been organized as an auteur study and Soderbergh is an example of a contemporary American auteur working within what Geoff King has called "New Hollywood". He has been his own screenwriter, a producer, his own director of photography, his own A-camera operator and editor. But filmmaking has been transformed by our contemporary media saturated culture. Soderbergh is less an original artist than

he is the engineer of new film texts that are, in fact, surfaces where multiple texts, from a variety of media sources, intersect.

Soderbergh has managed to make popular films that nevertheless subvert features emblematic of mainstream Hollywood. One recurring motif in Soderbergh's films is his manipulation of story chronology. Two of his early films, *Kafka* and *King of the Hill* (1993) are fairly linear as is *Erin Brockovich* but his most interesting films feature some manipulation of time. The fractured, multi-layered nature of *Schizopolis* is quite confusing as Soderbergh sought to transition between parallel worlds. *Out of Sight* includes some fragmentation; for example, the first images the spectator sees of Jack Foley actually occur much further along in the narrative when the sequence is repeated as an example of temporal frequency. In *The Limey*, Soderbergh intercuts past, present and future to represent the stream-of-consciousness of the protagonist Wilson. The film is primarily from his subjective viewpoint, and to the jump cuts, freeze frames, and flashbacks featured in *Out of Sight* Soderbergh adds the overlapping of images and sounds further complicating narrative representation. The somewhat circular narrative structure of *The Limey* recurs in *Full Frontal* but with this film Soderbergh adds complexity by creating different levels of reality. And *Solaris* is akin to a paradox time loop narrative popular in many Science Fiction films. Kris Kelvin himself does not return to the past to change an event, but the appearance of his dead wife on his space station is a symbolic representation of his past. Kelvin endeavors to secure Rheya's tangibility as a way of erasing his

culpability in her suicide years earlier on Earth. Along with playing with story chronologies, other postmodern aspects of Soderbergh's cinema include genre hybridization, self-reflexivity, deconstruction, and of course, intertextuality.

Despite the diversity of genre and narrative content that manifest in Soderbergh's oeuvre, his protagonists embody an alienated position weighted with a kind of vacuous despair. And their issues are never satisfactorily resolved such that the spectator believes the character has been changed or transformed. This protagonist emerges as Graham in *sex, lies and videotape*, a man who is socially awkward and incapable of intimacy. Fletcher Munson and his doppelganger Dr. Korchev from *Schizopolis* (1995) are both involved with women, but Munson's relationship with his wife is disintegrating. This is represented through the complete breakdown of communication between them, which is treated with ironic humor when Munson assumes Dr. Korchev's identity for a few days and discovers he is having an affair with his own wife! The romance between Jack Foley and Karen Sisco in *Out of Sight* is untenable from the start. Foley is unwilling to give up his criminality and Sisco is determined to prove her proficiency within the male-dominated profession of the U.S. Marshalls. The very impossibility of the relationship allows Soderbergh to stage a romance tinged with nostalgia. These characters are capable of communication but they are both too stubborn to change. Soderbergh persistently finds ways of isolating his protagonists from both other characters and their environments. The Soderbergh outsider, the alienated protagonist, paradoxically becomes the alien

manifested by the planet Solaris in the film of the same name. Here, the alien looks identical to ourselves and is in fact indistinguishable from his/her human counterparts. Perhaps Soderbergh is suggesting that even those well-adjusted high functioning North Americans of the "me" generation, are unknowingly alienated from the world that surrounds them; that we are all, in some ways, an outsider. Soderbergh's alienated outsider recurs in some form in every film he has made. He is one component of his authorial signature.

As auteur theory was originally conceived, a director has the potential to become an auteur if his or her oeuvre demonstrates a signature aesthetic style, and themes and motifs recur throughout their body of work. As Peter Wollen has theorized:

Auteur theory cannot simply be applied indiscriminately. Nor does an 'auteur' analysis exhaust what can be said about any single film. It does no more than provide one way of decoding a film, by specifying what its mechanics are at one level. There are other kinds of code which could be proposed, and whether they are of any value or not will have to be settled by reference to the texts, to the films in question (Wollen, 602).

Although Peter Wollen's quote might seem dated because of its basis in structuralism, it remains prescient because it suggests that using auteur theory as a critical tool does not preclude using any other theoretical paradigm as an equally valid method of analysis. Within the context of New Hollywood and the prevalence of the package system, it is also becoming more difficult to posit the director as the sole or central creator of a cinematic text. Nevertheless, even though film is the most collaborative of the arts, there needs to be a keel, a

stable position within the filmmaking process that can 'direct' others in the execution of making a film. This person, is, arguably, the director. The work of Steven Soderbergh traverses the boundary between independent and mainstream cinema. Even his most action- oriented films such as *Out of Sight*, *The Limey*, *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Twelve* are unique in their focus on character over spectacle. Soderbergh is also demonstrative of a contemporary auteur who performs a variety of functions within the filmmaking process including screenwriting, editing, and producing. And in accordance with the auteur theory as it was originally theorized, Soderbergh's films do demonstrate recurring motifs, themes, and an aesthetic sensibility that make any given film identifiable as a "Soderbergh film". Beginning with *sex, lies and videotape*, are the themes of the difficulties of communication, the betrayal of trust and the specters of the past. With *Kafka* more themes are added: the facelessness of bureaucracy, the sinister nature of corporations, the struggles of the individual and the perceived threat of non- conformism. In Soderbergh's Neo- Noir films, he adopts a position similar to Jean- Pierre Melville's in *Le Samourai* (1967). Rather than emphasizing action, Soderbergh focuses on character and motivation. Aesthetically, beginning with *The Underneath*, Soderbergh uses different colors to delineate different locations and periods in time. He also makes liberal use of jump cuts, freeze frames, elliptical time shifts, and hand held camera work complete with judders and tremors to heighten tension and convey a sense of realism akin to that of the Dogme filmmakers. Soderbergh is

an auteur despite the fact that all of his film texts, including their narratives, characters, and aesthetics, are intertextual.

### Some Concluding Remarks on Intertextuality

Roland Barthes suggests (in "The Death of the Author"), that the meaning of the author's words do not originate from the author's own unique consciousness but from their place within linguistic- cultural systems. The author is placed in the role of compiler or arranger of pre- existent possibilities within the language system. Each word the author employs, each text they produce, has its origins in and derives its meaning from, the language system within which it is produced. This view of language has, since the time of Barthes's essay, been termed "intertextual". And while Barthes was writing about language and literature, his theories are amenable to theories of film. Every film produced has its origins in and derives its meaning from, the film industry within which it is produced. In this study, the cinema of Steven Soderbergh has been examined in relation to theories of genre and intertextuality, with respect to two Soderbergh films, *Out of Sight* and *The Limey*. Three other Soderbergh films have been studied with respect to the theories of intertextuality developed by Gerard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Julie Kristeva. Genette's notions of hypertextuality and paratextuality have been particularly productive with respect to *Traffic*, *Kafka*, and *Solaris*. But Genette's elaboration of his "transtextuality" is derived largely from the earlier theories of Kristeva.

Kristeva's notion of semianalysis is a vision of texts as always being in a state

of production, as opposed to texts being merely products to be consumed. It is not only the object of study that is 'in process', but also the subject, author and reader. New semiotic models turn to the *social text*, those social practices of which literature is only one unvalorized variant, in order to conceive of them as so many ongoing transformations and/or productions. Texts are made up of the social or cultural text, all the different discourses, ways of speaking and saying, institutionally sanctioned structures and systems which make up what we call culture. In this sense the text is not an individual, isolated object, but rather a compilation of cultural textuality.

Building on Bakhtin's "dialogism" and Kristeva's "intertextuality", Gerard Genette, in *Palimpsestes* (1982) proposes the more incisive term "transtextuality" to refer to all that puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts. Genette ultimately theorizes five types of intertextuality that include architextuality, intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality and hypertextuality. Paratextuality is a particularly productive term for the analysis of *Kafka*. The film text is an amalgamation of details derived from Kafka's stories and novels, and biographical facts from his life. The multiple sources drawn from include Kafka's letters and diaries and biographical background principally derived from the first biography of Kafka, written by Max Brod (1963). In terms Genette himself employs, these sources exist on the "threshold" of the film text. Genette's term hypertextuality is particularly relevant to two Soderbergh films, *Traffic* and *Solaris*. Hypertextuality refers to the relation between one text, which Genette

calls the "hypertext", to an anterior text, or "hypotext" which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends. *Traffic* and *Solaris* demonstrate the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling and transformation. The position taken in this study has sought to trace the various intertextual sources for particular Soderbergh films, as an acknowledgment that every text, literary, filmic, or otherwise, is intertextual to the extent that it has been created in a specific cultural context, and been influenced by other texts from a variety of media. Soderbergh's cinema has been impacted by directors of the Hollywood Renaissance, European Art Cinema, Dogme filmmaking, television series and novels both modern and postmodern.

The function of authors has been transformed by our postmodern, media saturated contemporary culture. Authors are less the creators of new, original, texts than the creators of texts that draw from a variety of sources for their characters, stories and style. That Soderbergh's films demonstrate facets of intertextuality does not make Soderbergh himself less of an author. What theories of intertextuality must contend with are questions about whether considering the intertextual traces of a particular text are of benefit to the understanding and appreciation of that text. Who is at the centre of questions regarding intertextuality, the author, the reader or the text itself? And do considerations of a text's intertextuality facilitate the interpretation of that text or make any determinable interpretation impossible? With respect to the cinema of

Steven Soderbergh, studying the intertextual threads of his films has increased the knowledge one gains when watching them.

## **Filmography**

*Battle of Algiers* (Pontecorvo, 1966)

*Blue Velvet* (Lynch, 1986)

*Bonnie & Clyde* (Penn, 1967)

*Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1940)

*Collateral* (Mann, 2004)

*Criss Cross* (Siodmak, 1944)

*Diary of a Country Priest* (Bresson, 1951)

*Double Indemnity* (Wilder, 1944)

*Erin Brockovich* (Soderbergh, 2000)

*Full Frontal* (Soderbergh, 2002)

*Hiroshima, mon amour* (Resnais, 1959)

*Jackie Brown* (Tarantino, 1997)

*Julien Donkey-Boy* (Korine, 1999)

*Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2002)

*Murder, my sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944)

*Ocean's Eleven* (Soderbergh, 2001)

*Ocean's Twelve* (2004)

*Out of Sight* (Soderbergh, 1998)

*Point Blank* (Boorman, 1967)

*Resin* (Gyorki, 2001)

*Schizopolis* (Soderbergh, 1996)

*Sex, lies and videotape* ( Soderbergh, 1989)

*Solaris* ( Soderbergh, 2002)

*Solaris* (Tarkovsky, 1972)

*Spartan* (Mamet, 2003)

*The Graduate* (Nichols, 1967)

*The Limey* ( Soderbergh, 1999)

*The Maltese Falcon* (Curtiz, 1942)

*The Trial* (Welles, 1963)

*Traffic* (Soderbergh, 2000)

*2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968)

*Z* (Costa- Gavras, 1966)

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