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Recognising the screenwriter: Agency and authorship in adaptation

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**RECOGNISING THE SCREENWRITER: AGENCY AND
AUTHORSHIP IN *ADAPTATION***

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Bachelor of Arts (Media Studies)**

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of film studies, the uniqueness of film as an art form has been acknowledged. It is a multi-sensory experience that continually develops and, in the process, reflects social and cultural progression as well. Notions of authorship have been applied to aspects of film throughout its history and although the auteur theory has maintained a significant and lasting influence within the discipline, the screenwriter as author (or auteur) has consistently been excised from film, and indeed literary, study. Why this is the case when the screenplay is such a necessary component of the majority of mainstream films, and the screenwriter, as an originator or creator of the thematic concerns of the film plays a major role within the collaborative process of film production, is an issue this paper will investigate.

Through a critique of the auteur theory and an analysis of the film *Adaptation*, written by Charlie Kaufman, one of the foremost contemporary screenwriters today, I will argue that the screenwriter fulfills an important function of authorial agency within the structure of the film text. Although notions of agency are once again being addressed within contemporary poststructural and postmodern theories of authorship, the problem of the interplay between agency and structure is still an issue. The screenwriter provides an interesting study for understanding this issue, as s/he uniquely operates in a liminal space between the self as author, and structure as the defining characteristic of the visual mass medium of film. Using Dialectical Critical Realism and Margaret S. Archer's theory of the internal conversation and agency, I will attempt to not only provide a new approach to how agency is enacted within the culturally structured film, but also foreground the recognition of the screenwriter as author.

DECLARATION

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And, my scriptwriting students, for reminding me time and time again why it is important to tell stories that illuminate what it means to be a human being.

"To be human is to exist in the tension *between* solitude and society"

Vincent M. Colapietro

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INTRODUCTION

Film study is a broad field of inquiry and research encompassing many theoretical approaches to the modern phenomenon that is cinema. Historically, the discipline has evolved, and continues to evolve, to reflect technological advances, and societal and political concerns. Throughout the study of film there has always been an aspect of individuality or human agency, which I will define in the context of this paper as the ability to rationally and reflexively determine, create, evaluate and express desires and motives that have causal efficacy within a social context (Archer, 2003; Zipin, 2004, p. 220). This is evident in the study of theorists who have developed new concepts, or dominated historical fields; the human involvement in and between the conception, production and reception of film texts; and the analysis of the unique style and artistry of individuals within the film industry.

For the past fifty or so years most of the aesthetic focus has been on the personal and visual style of the director. This has developed under the title of 'auteur theory', or film authorship. Auteur theory is the notion that great film directors have artistic merit and a thematic style that is evident throughout their *oeuvre* of work, and it has had a significant and enduring impact on film studies. However, it can also be seen as the cause of the effacement of the screenwriter (and of the importance of the screenplay) from any serious discussion within the discipline of contemporary film studies. Yet, as I will argue in this paper, in many instances the screenwriter can be considered a filmic author: this is particularly so in cases where the thematic or characteristic aspects of the film are central, or the artistic style of the screenwriter is evident throughout their *oeuvre* of work. Chapter one will provide an historical examination of how auteur theory has developed, and why the director has dominated notions of film authorship to the detriment, not only of the screenwriter, but of other filmic collaborators as well.

The reasons for the excision of the screenwriter are easily traced through the history of auteur theory. This extends from its beginnings, fifty years ago in post-war France, through its journey to America where it was used to define Hollywood as the pinnacle of film art; its subsequent mutations to survive the 'isms' of modern philosophical,

linguistic, and cultural studies; to its resurgence in the 21st century. The adaptability of auteur theory and its importance to film studies meant that this analytical perspective even survived the 'death of the author', the privileging of the text, and the shift in focus to the audience or reader. This was achieved either via accommodation to (post)structuralism and postmodernism, or simply by its proponents staying quiet to wait for a more opportune moment (King & Miller, 1999, p. 311).

It would appear that an opportune moment has returned, as once again the problem of agency is being questioned within notions of film authorship (Staiger, 2003, p. 27). This necessitates a focus on the human, and upon *how* an individual negotiates their own subjectivity within the structures of culture and society¹. In chapter two, I will review and analyse contemporary approaches to authorship and agency and compare and contrast postmodern notions of agential authorship with that of the critical realist approach, in particular Archer's (2003) theory of the internal conversation. Here, I will argue that the screenwriter as author fulfills an important and necessary function of individual agency within the structure of the film text. I propose that the creative voice of the individual screenwriter needs to be recognised, heard and appreciated, in the film industry, and in academic film studies.

Recently within film studies the relevance of 'theory' has been questioned. We are now in the 21st century, where we can look back and ascertain what advantages and benefits have been gained through the 'isms' of the 20th century. The death of the author, the privileging of the text and image over their human creator(s), and the dominance of constructs over realities have had a major and lasting impact on the theoretical understanding and analysis of popular culture and the culture industries and their relevance to (and influence on) society. Unfortunately, they have also left a vacuum, an empty space that can only be filled by a new understanding of human agency (Eagleton, 2004, p. 21). We appear to be in a kind of limbo or void at present, where we are caught between a desire to disassociate from the past – *poststructuralism*, *postmodernism*, *postcolonialism*, *postfeminism*, and so on – and a hesitation to move

¹ In a sociological context structure refers to "any arrangement of elements into a definite pattern" that produces an enduring pattern, or "rules and resources", for example the educational structure or the filmic structure. Structure and agency are considered the "two main determinants of social outcomes", however their relative importance is a highly debated issue (Jary & Jary, 2000, pp. 614-615).

forward, an uncertainty about stating possible future directions for theoretical development within cultural and film studies. What is certain, however, is that in this current political and historical climate, a reappraisal of the human function within society is crucial. Through a study of the screenwriter and film I hope to provide at least the seed of an alternative approach.

In this paper I have restricted my analysis to one film, *Adaptation*, as this is one of the few contemporary films that foregrounds the screenwriting process. Although it is necessary to differentiate between fact and fiction, the film also represents real people as characters and is based on a non-fiction book, *The Orchid Thief*, written by Susan Orlean. This presents an interesting layering of the writing process and illustrates how individual reflexivity and rationality is negotiated in the writing process. The film also highlights the interplay between the writer as individual agent and the filmic cultural structure. In order to explain the interaction between writer and culture, it is necessary to consider other approaches than those currently dominating cultural and film theory.

Critical realism provides an alternative theoretical basis to postmodernism and in chapter three I will apply a dialectic critique of the postmodern construction of the author in the film *Adaptation*, using Bhaskar's dialectical critical realism. This dialectic stresses the importance of agency within the process, acknowledges a reality that exists beyond the structures of society and culture, and provides for an open-ended outcome in regard to progress and emancipation. I argue that the postmodern conception of filmic authorship disregards the self, instead focusing on reiterative texts and this provides a negative outlook for agency.

In chapter four, using Margaret S. Archer's critical realist theory of the internal conversation, I suggest a new approach to agency and authorship within contemporary film study by foregrounding the screenwriter as author. Through a critical realist analysis of the film *Adaptation* I propose that human agency and the possible effects and outcomes of individual projects are negotiated within structurally imposed limitations and possibilities through the internal conversation (Archer, 2003). The screenwriter, and their function, provides a relevant example of this approach to understanding authorial agency within the cultural industry of film, as a screenwriter

operates within a liminal space situated between the individual (and their desires, motives and choices for efficacious action) and the social structure.

The screenwriter as an author of film; as a human agent who imagines, creates and illuminates stories for our time; plays a necessary function within society. While writing for the media screen is among the most recent, and still developing, of literary forms, human society has always valued its storytellers. Critical realism provides a conciliatory approach to understanding agency and authorship and is a particularly appropriate theoretical approach with regard to the screenwriter, who is placed in a unique position in relation to the creation of literary works.

Arguably, there is significant dissatisfaction today with the direction and quality of mainstream films, particularly here in Australia where the poor standard of screenwriting is more likely to be blamed for filmic failure than the hegemonic effect and influence of Hollywood. However, the human condition is never predictable, and there are myriad points of view, and ways of telling stories that impact and affect cultural understanding. Yet the role of the screenwriter – who can be considered a ‘visual poet’ for our times – is stifled within the industry and ignored by academia. There is a need for a re-inscription and the re-theorisation of the concept of human agency within creative production, in order to develop a better understanding of our society, our political choices, our history and our future.

I conclude this thesis by suggesting that adopting a critical realist approach to agential authorship within film production will provide a deeper understanding of how screenwriters negotiate their creativity and therefore their right to be recognised as literary authors. Acknowledging the internal conversation as the mediatory function between the individual and society opens a wide array of currently closed approaches to understanding how not only screenwriters, but all human beings, negotiate their values, beliefs and priorities within reality and the social order. Critical realism may also provide for efficacious development and change within, in particular, the Australian film industry; affecting how screenplays are funded and developed by federal and state government film commissions. However, further research also needs to be conducted into the fundamentals of screenplay authoring.

Although auteur theory's lauding of the director as sole creator of the film text is no longer viable, its conception of the author as human agent is. Auteur theory needs once again to be raised, addressed, and developed: not in order to replace the director, or the idea of collaboration, with the screenwriter as sole auteur; but simply to include the screenwriter and recognise their important and necessary act of writing narratives, characters and themes that stay with an audience long after they have forgotten the lighting, sound or cinematography.

CHAPTER ONE

AUTEUR THEORY

The notion of the director as filmic author, or auteur, began half a century ago with a few lone French voices decrying the state of their national film industry. Their focus turned to Hollywood, producing very successful films during the war and post-war decades, and valorising the role of the director. To justify their point of view, that the director was key to a film's success, the idea of 'the auteur' rose in prominence. Auteur theory has had a significant and enduring impact not only on film studies, but also on audience reception studies, marketing and publicity: this also impacts profits for the film industry. It can be seen as one cause of the effacement of the screenwriter from any serious discussion within the discipline of contemporary film studies. The reasons for the excision of the screenwriter as author are easily traced through the history and development of the auteur theory, and its adaptability to shifting theoretical movements.

The majority of scholarly film texts trace the conception of the filmic auteur to Alexander Astruc's 1948 essay *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera Pen* (Buscombe, 1981, p. 24; Cook, 1999, p. 240; Cook, 2004, p. 441; Naremore, 1999, pp. 10-11). Thompson and Bordwell (2003), however, trace the notion of the auteur to France during the occupation period, where there was debate over whether either the director or the writer could, or should, be called the auteur of the film, with some authors even stating that "mature sound cinema would be the 'age of the scriptwriter'" (p. 415). John Caughie, in his introduction to the anthology *Theories of Authorship* (1981), states that Astruc's concept of the film artist's ability to express his creativity in exactly the same manner as a painter or novelist was the basis for the *cinéma d'auteurs*, which developed in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s. This led to a significant shift in film language, style and study (p. 9). Stoddart (1995, p. 39) asserts that Astruc's Romantic view of filmmaking provided three grounding tenets of the *politique des auteurs*: cinema's equality with literature in its ability to produce meaning; its unique language; and cinema as a form for individual *directors* to express their artistic voice, or, in

Astruc's term "an artistic obsession" (1959, p. 268). These three concepts have had a lasting effect on film theory and have contributed to its acceptance as an academic discipline (Livingston, 1997, p. 132). This was the first step towards the rejection of the screenwriter as an author. Indeed, Bordwell and Thompson state that the prominence of the director-as-author "remains probably the most widely shared assumption in film studies today" (cited in Gaut, 1997, p. 149).

The importance of the director as film auteur was taken up by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers, in particular François Truffaut who, in his polemic 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', derided traditional French films — those based on literary works that maintained a realistic approach — and praised the work of directors such as Bresson and Renoir who expressed their personalities in their films. Truffaut made a distinction between the "audacity" of the auteur and the simple story-staging of the *metteur-en-scène* (Truffaut, 2004, pp. 16-17). This meant that the visual dimensions of the *mise-en-scène* were accorded more importance than the traditional literary cinema where dialogue and plot were the main concern and where the screenwriter held the prominent role (Cook, 2004, p. 442). Although Truffaut initially limited his discussions to French directors who also wrote their own screenplays, other *Cahiers* writers focused on American directors who had considerable control over the script process. The discussion then progressed to the notion that Hollywood directors, who were constricted by the studio system with no input into the screenplay, were also great auteurs, as they were still able to express their unique artistry and vision in their films (Cook, 1999, p. 246; Buscombe, 1981, p. 24; Thompson & Bordwell, 2003, p. 416).

André Bazin disagreed with this idea, even though he admired the work of Hollywood directors such as Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock. Bazin argued that the director was a mediator whose main role was to represent reality as honestly as possible (Bazin, 1985, p. 255). Both Cook (1999, p. 240) and Stoddart (1995, p. 41) draw attention to the importance of Bazin's call that film, in particular Hollywood cinema, be recognised as both a social and historical product firmly grounded in capitalism and the necessity of popularity. Many of the *Cahiers* writers became film directors and it could be stated that their call for recognition of the director as auteur was an exercise in enlightened self-interest, which enabled them to obtain government funding for their low-budget

films. The French New Wave was developed on the foundation of the director-writer having total control over the film (Cook, 1999, p. 253), and the concept of the 'literary' screenwriter was excised. Even though this initial enthusiasm for alternative film faded, studies of directors retained a dominant position in film study due to the migration of auteur theory across the English Channel and to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The *politique des auteurs* was taken up in Great Britain, in particular by the journal *Movie* which focused on the Leavisite formal analysis of texts and the tradition of cultural values (Crofts, 2000, p. 88; Stoddart, 1995, p. 42), with Perkins (1972) in particular drawing attention to the mise-en-scène of Hollywood films. However, it was Andrew Sarris' writings in the United States that catapulted the notion of the director as film author into mainstream film discussion and academic study. Sarris, in his essay 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962', coined the term 'auteur theory' in order to organise and evaluate the work of American directors into what he called 'a pantheon'. In the process Sarris asserted the superiority of American film, claiming it was the only cinema worth studying (Cook, 1999, p. 256; Crofts, 2000, p.88; Sarris, 1992). Sarris determined three "criteria of value" for determining the director as auteur, those being: technical competence; personality; and interior meaning, or what Sarris appears to believe is an almost spiritual infusion of the director's vision in the film (Sarris, 1992, p. 586). As Stoddart (1995, p. 43) points out, Sarris' evaluations were based on his own personal tastes and, one could add, his one-eyed patriotism. Although Sarris softened his stance in his later book, *The American Cinema* (1968) – in which he used the auteur theory to develop a history of film – his concentric circles of directorial greatness continued to elevate the director as sole originator of film. This excluded the screenwriter, as well as the other important contributors to the production of film.

Sarris was not without his critics, however. In the afterword to the abovementioned book he cites Gore Vidal as stating that auteurism "deifi[es] directors over writers in the moviemaking process" (1968, p. 269). In reply, Sarris dismisses screenwriters with a trite comment about the "vast army of virtually anonymous authors who have supplied so many of the stories on the screen" (p. 269). Pauline Kael criticised Sarris' auteur criteria, in particular the notion of a director's recognisable personality, as being

simply a case of repetition of style in film after film. Kael also used the debate regarding the 'true' author of *Citizen Kane* – director Welles or screenwriter Mankiewicz – to deride Sarris and auteur theory (Stam, 2000, p. 90). However, as Stam (2000, p. 90) points out, both Sarris and Kael shared a common approach to film study, that of comparing film against film, which simply becomes a matter of relativistic focus on petty differences.

Richard Corliss was another opponent of Sarris who attempted to raise the profile of screenwriters in Hollywood by producing a book that presented an acropolis of screenwriters – as opposed to Sarris' pantheon of directors (1992). Corliss argues that the director's role is more technical: he is the pivotal organiser who "steers... in the right direction" (1985, p. xxi). Corliss makes an important distinction between the interpretive work of the director, as opposed to the creative work of the screenwriter (1992). Corliss (1985, p. xx) also draws attention to the implicit difference between the story creation and formal structuring in writing a screenplay compared to the "mystical" visual imaging of the director (and, one could add, the actors, cinematographer, gaffer, set designer, and so on). From this, it can be argued that the screenwriter as originator of the filmic concept, theme and characterisation, is more entitled to the moniker of 'author' than the director; but unfortunately Corliss' attempts to draw attention to this fact failed miserably in the onslaught of the culture production industry that is mainstream Hollywood film. That was due, in all probability, to the economic benefits available to film production companies by focusing publicity, and therefore public attention, on 'well known' Hollywood directors in addition to the already existing 'star' system. Auteur theory also maintained a dominant position within film studies, transforming itself to accommodate changing approaches to textual criticism.

One of the most influential movements in regard to textual criticism was structuralism, which was introduced into auteur theory (and film theory in general) through the work of anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, and semiotician Saussure, which challenged the long-held belief that meaning exists prior to being expressed through language (Cook, 1999, p. 282; Stoddart, 1995, p. 44). Structuralism led to a shift in thinking regarding film authorship, from meaning being created by an individual to locating the pattern of

meaning represented in the text through its structure; binary oppositions and recurring motifs or styles (Crofts, 2000, pp. 89-90). Many critics agree that the most influential writer in regard to auteur-structuralism is Peter Wollen, who makes a distinction between the 'author as individual' and the 'author as structure'. This latter dimension can be found by decoding the film to discover the underlying pattern and shape, or 'unconscious intent' (1998, pp. 60-66). However, as Buscombe (1981, p. 32) points out, there are aspects of film that are conscious decisions made not only by directors, but by screenwriters as well, and these will differ from film to film depending on in particular historical and economic circumstances. This is a differentiation between the structure of the film and the message and thematic concern of the film. Heath (1981, p. 218), in his reply to Buscombe, proposes a solution to the conscious/unconscious dichotomy by casting the author in the same mould as the reader: that is, as a subject produced by language and therefore by the text. This concept – deriving from Althusser – paved the way for the human individual to be seen as a construct and for the author to be conceived not as an originator of meaning, but an effect of the text.

Althusser drew on the Marxist work of Adorno, combined with Structuralism, in order to explain the ideological construction of the subject in society. Adorno critiqued the mass culture industry as a tool of capitalism which first creates a market for a commodity, then provides the solution by supplying the commodity desired, while maintaining control over society. Adorno argued that one of the ways this market-creation was done was through the industrialisation and commodification of art (Allen, 1999, p. 134). Althusser developed this perspective further and argued that the subject was addressed through social institutions in order to take an accepted place within society – one that is preordained in order to inculcate the dominant ideology. In film studies, Althusser's theory of ideology was predominantly taken up by the proponents of apparatus theory who compared it to Lacan's 'mirror phase' and applied it to the imagery of film (Allen, 1999, pp. 134-135). The theory of ideology can also be applied to auteur theory, however, and not to the construction, but the *constriction* of the screenwriter as author within the mainstream film industry. The individual artist struggles to maintain a unique and creative voice within capitalist ideology and the culture industry because, in order to be heard by the widest audience, the screenwriter must conform to the position interpellated for them by the economically driven

production companies. As Kohn states, "the screenplay is... a commodity" (1999); and so is the screenwriter.

Roland Barthes' 1968 essay 'The Death of the Author' is considered by many writers to be the foundation stone for poststructuralism and the foregrounding of the reader as producer of meaning (Caughie, 1981, pp. 200-201; Cook, 1999, p. 330; Crofts, 2000, p. 92; King & Miller, 1999, p. 311; Stoddart, 1999, p. 49). Barthes argues that language 'speaks the author' who no longer pre-exists the text as an originator of meaning that can be accurately determined. The meaning is dependent upon the reader and operates in simultaneity with reading (Barthes, 1977). As Crofts (2000, p. 93) points out, Barthes' notion of the author as a construction fits neatly with Althusser's anti-humanistic concept of the subject constructed through ideology, and disregards any idea of the author as a human agent that originates and creates prior to the act of determining meaning. Burke (1992), in his critique of Barthes' essay, likens Barthes' conception of the author to a 'straw man', a "fiction of the absolute" (p. 27), who was easy to kill, because Barthes' 'author' never existed in the first place. However, this approach also made it easy to kill the screenwriter and focus all determination of meaning within the filmic text, constructed by the director-as-concept.

The next major work regarding the role of the author and authorship was Foucault's 'What is an Author?' written in 1969. Foucault likened the author to a function that expands upon specific individual works to classify groups of texts according to their position or acceptance in society (1984). Foucault saw the author as a tool of capitalism that categorises and hierarchises certain discourses in order to maintain discipline (Staiger, 2003, pp. 28-29). This author-function then, goes beyond being a mere writer of texts (be they screenplays, novels or critical essays) to encompass the discourses that surround the author-name (e.g. Marx – Marxism, Foucault – Foucauldian) and their cultural acceptance. Both Crofts (2000, p. 93) and Stoddart (1995, p. 50) point out how this applies to auteur theory through the classification and comparison of films according to directorial authorship: for example a Peter Weir film, or a Coen Brothers film. Foucault's concept places the author beyond the individual creator, such as the screenwriter, to incorporate a "meta-author" (Burke, 1992, p. 93) whose name connotes much more than a single text. The focus on the director as auteur has appropriated this

author-function in film where the individual director is seen as a composite of all their previous work, whereas the screenwriter is simply bypassed. However, as Naremore (1999, p. 22) states, every reader of a text looks for an origin or source in order to make sense not only of the text, but of how they read the text. There is a political and historical context to all textual sources, in particular those that are speaking from a minority perspective (Staiger, 2003, p. 49). This alternative position presents an opening for the inclusion within auteur theory and film study of the screenwriter as an author and source of the filmic text.

Naremore (1999, pp. 20-21) also points out that the focus on the text – rather than the author – led to film being seen not as art, but as a cultural product with a burgeoning market to fill. The 'blockbuster', the consolidation of multinational media companies, and cultural globalisation saw the film industry become a streamlined commodity factory where the concept of the individual artist presenting a vision for society was excised in favour of regurgitating economic successes; or remakes of previous films or television shows which guaranteed a net profit for the investors. Hollows (1995, pp. 20-22) discusses Adorno and Horkheimer's beliefs that the Hollywood studio system maintains control over both the employees and the consumers of its products. Hollows then focuses on culture industry critic, Dwight MacDonald, who uses the term 'masscult' to describe formulaic films which have a "Built-In Reaction" (p. 25) that limits not only the audience's response, but also the artistic expression of screenwriters desiring to work in the industry.

German academic Claudia Sternberg argues that four factors "have determined the role of the American screenwriter: industrial production; multiple authorship; the *politique des auteurs*; and a denial of the author's literary recognition" (1997, p. 7). Sternberg asserts that the skill in writing a screenplay determines the thematic style of the film, and in some cases the screenwriter becomes a "hidden director" (1997, p. 231). She states:

In production, the director is elevated to a higher level than the writer and can therefore exert great influence on the material provided by the screenwriter. However, the director's extensive and often exclusive claim to a film's authorship has mainly been manufactured by a body

of film criticism in search for a 'single' author. The [pre]occupation with the director has resulted in the screenwriter being pushed out of the literary limelight... For different reasons, both film and literary criticism have equally ignored the contribution of screenwriters to film and literature. (1997, p. 21)

It would appear that the main reasons for the excision of the screenwriter as author are auteur theory's notion of the director as author and the development of the filmic cultural industry, where Hollywood films are no longer seen as art, but as profit-making commodities. What is of interest, though, is the ability of auteur theory and notions of authorship to adapt to the changing theoretical positions within the discipline – and indeed within political, economical and historical shifts. This dynamic points to the fact that a human aspect to film, or any field of artistic creation, is both relevant and necessary. Yet it is directors who are considered artists, while screenwriters are constructed as just employees, hacks, small cogs in a big machine. The director relies on many other artistic collaborators and technicians in order to construct a film. I would argue that one of the most necessary of these co-collaborators (and in many cases the primary mover) is the screenwriter. The screenwriter is the creator of the original vision, crafted into words on paper to be visually *reinterpreted* not only by the director, but by actors, cinematographers, editors, gaffers, composers, set designers, costume designers, and the list goes on. Overseeing all of these 'workers' is the production executive – the person with the cheque book, and therefore the power. A screenwriter may imagine, create and write stories that impact society, thereby authoring a film, yet is never considered an *auteur*.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO AUTHORSHIP AND AGENCY

Many theorists would argue, and even more agree, that we live in a postmodern age. Within cultural and film studies, postmodernists suggest that there are no grand-narratives (such as progress, enlightenment, reason and rationality) by which we can define our existence in the world, within society and indeed as human beings. All notions of the human disappear into the text, to be deconstructed in a playful, ironic fashion. Truth becomes relative and subjective, which is quite ironic in itself as the subject (that is the rational human being) has in effect died along with the author (Carr & Zanetti, n.d., p. 2).

However, the author refuses to stay dead and keeps reappearing within contemporary film study. The difficult concept of authoring is negotiated and renegotiated within current theoretical frameworks in order to arrive at a suitable understanding and position of the author as a poststructuralist subject. Although some work is being done in an attempt to include other filmic collaborators within the concept of auteur, once again most of the discussion is centred upon the contribution of the director. I would argue that postmodernism does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the role of the individual, in particular the screenwriter, as an author within the film industry. The question of agency and of how individuals act as authors with causality, coherency and efficacy is difficult a one to answer from a postmodern viewpoint since that would entail accepting the idea of a rational, reflexive human self, who is not simply a construct of society. Gergen (cited in Archer, 2000) states it thus:

With the spread of postmodern consciousness we see the demise of personal definition, reason, authority, commitment, trust, the sense of authenticity, sincerity, belief in leadership, depth of feeling and faith in progress. In their stead, an open slate emerges on which a person may inscribe, erase and rewrite their identities as the ever-shifting, ever-expanding and incoherent network of relationships invites or permits. (p. 19)

Without some form of solid grounding in the essential values and ideals that make us human (and the beliefs we need to interact with society, the world and each other), we will gradually lose the ability to understand our essential nature. Since time immemorial, storytellers have given us this grounding. In this chapter I will outline some of the current attempts to redefine the notion of the postmodern filmic author and provide an alternative and refreshingly hopeful approach to the notion of authorship: that of Critical Realism.

One of the many forms that postmodern practice takes is a film aesthetic that plays with what Robert Stam (2000) calls a “media-conscious cinema of multiple styles and ironic recyclage” (p. 304). Jameson sees this as a cannibalisation of bygone styles; an attempt to fulfil a nostalgic yearning for a present that is not as *real* as that past which appears as a simulation (Jameson, 1998). This pastiche of the present-past is not content with merely knowing the author is dead, but attempts to ensure that the writer disappears within the work altogether. Kohn (1999) sees this as beneficial. He suggests a screenplay is simply a blueprint, or a rough outline, that is an example of a rhizomatic text: open to many authors, many voices participating. However, Kohn himself states that every screenplay begins with one person writing the words of a story. This is the problem that current theories cannot accommodate: where do the original ideas for a screenplay come from? If we take a postmodern approach there are no new ideas, no stories that are relevant to, and important for, challenging, questioning and even changing the world we live in.

This nihilistic postmodern attitude leaves no room for new stories, for a forward-looking progression. As Stam (2000, p. 300) points out, the focus of the ‘posts’ is a negation of not only grand narratives but also of all previously held paradigms, leaving only an empty space, disillusionment. This is the space filled with a multiplicity of media images, with no need of an author or originator (Andrew, 2000, p. 24). Arguably, this dynamic is evident today in the spate of biographical films (searching for an authenticity that is hyperreal); the endless sequels and remakes of past films and television programmes; and the appropriation and remaking by Hollywood of foreign films and genres. If there is a future for the creation of new mainstream Hollywood films, it appears to be a bleak one. However, Stam (2000, p.

307) argues that “postmodernism alerts us that new times demand new strategies” and suggests these will be played out within the postmodern mediated political space. This allows the possibility of new approaches (or new old approaches) within film theory. I would argue that things must change, and that we are currently seeing the stirrings of a conceptual shift in film and cultural studies. A possible new approach is to study the role and craft of the screenwriter as author; a (post)modern author if you like, as the screenwriter is a uniquely modern writer. A screenwriter writes for the visual screen – images expressed as words. It is a craft that combines the skill of narrative and story, with the necessity of constructing in a clear, precise, form the visual aspects of a film. The same is true, it can be argued, of television programmes and advertising: the internet, computer games and other forms of visual communication; they all start with words on a page.

Where does the screenwriter as author currently stand (or sit) in film studies? With the auteur returning “to academic respectability today” (Andrew, 2000, p. 25), it would appear that human agency, or a new form of individual creativity, is also open to discussion. As Terry Eagleton asserts, in the first sentence of his latest book, “the golden age of cultural theory is long past” (2004, p. 1). The famous French names have all succumbed to their fates, and with their passing film study is (or should be) moving forward. We are entering a new era where what we have learned from ‘high theory’ has to be reassessed and developed in order to maintain, or reattain, relevance within society: both culturally and politically (Eagleton, 2004; Stam, 2000, p. 302). This approach can be constructed as post-postmodernism, or a reappropriation of approaches overlooked in the onslaught of critical theory. Perhaps the death of certain authors is a good thing after all? The paradox is, of course, that those authors who pronounce the death of the author (and the subject; the enlightenment project) all rely on their own subjectivity and authorship to make their point (Kenway, 1995, p. 38). Their texts are marked with their personal presence.

In the same way that authorship is clear in arguments about the death of the author, there will always be a mark or trace of the human in all texts. In many films the screenwriter will be evident as author; there will be a “signature” that points to the uniqueness of the style and theme (Andrew, 2000, p. 25) that is enhanced by other

human collaborators who add to the screenwriter's initial act of story creation. Andrew (2000) describes this signature as:

Always a problematic and very special sign... a mark on the surface of the text signalling its source. The signature embeds within it – as in hypertext – a genuine fourth dimension, the temporal process that brought the text into being in the first place. The signature moors the film image to a submerged reef of values by means of the slender line drawn by camera or pen. (p. 25)

Other contemporary scholars disagree. Warwick Mules does not see the human as existing before representation in our mediated society, but instead attempts to “remake the human out of the residues found in the matrix of representations” (2002, p. 267). Unfortunately, he appears to ignore the fact that the representation was conceived by an individual (or group of humans) in the first place. As King and Miller (1999) state, there is “always a human function” in film (p. 311) and this begins, in almost every instance, with a concept, an idea, from the mind of a writer.

The challenge of situating the author within postmodernism has drawn many diverse and ‘fractured’ attempts to provide a satisfactory explanation. However, it appears that human agency is an issue that cannot be simply skirted round. The rational individual appears to have been buried alive. Wayne Booth, best known for his study of rhetoric as narrative technique, attempts to overcome the problem of the individual with the notion of the “implied author” (2002, p. 5), or what he describes as the centre of the film – the creative energy or voice of all concerned that expresses the essence of the film, the themes that keep you pondering hours after leaving the cinema. Films such as these are rare, where the collaboration of artists produces something larger than simply their combination of skills. It is this type of film that Tag Gallagher (2001) discusses in relation to the auteur, stating that it is the auteur that provides – through their artistic expression – a “sensitivity of reality”, a way of thinking that is as unique as every human being in the world. This is an example of the concept of individual agency, which Andrew (2000) draws attention to in a discussion of Edward Said's work. He states “[Said] retain[ed] a belief that critical humanism (that is, strategic interventions by individuals) could alter such massive and dispersed ideological formations as the

one he identified as 'Orientalism'" (p. 25). In the same way, individuals can intervene in the postmodern negation of the rational, real self – in particular, the author.

Dana Polan (2001) calls for an understanding of auteurs as philosophical visionaries, who nevertheless must struggle within the film industry in order to reach as wide an audience as possible. He suggests that the study of authorship be seen as a means for developing social theory, by studying the individual's appeal for expression within the constraints of the culture industry. The screenwriter as social agent is illustrative of this struggle for recognition – of the attempt to reach as wide an audience as possible – and of the constriction of the ideologies and capitalistic focus of the film industry. Polan provides a forward-looking and positive approach to authorship in film which encompasses many of the important issues facing society today. His work raises the problem of the author as rational agent and the interplay between structure and agency, or as Staiger puts it, "the question of causality for a mass-media text" (2003, p. 28).

In *Authorship and Film*, one of the more recent texts to grapple with the irreducible concept of the auteur, Janet Staiger provides a concise historical overview of the different approaches to authorship within film, taking into specific regard the notion of agency. She stresses that although "authorship does matter" (2003, p. 27) a new conception of agency is needed "without reproducing humanist and capitalist author-functions" (2003, p. 30). In other words, Staiger proposes approaches which situate authorship and causality within "poststructuralist theories of the subject and agency" (2002, p. 29). She attempts, or perhaps justifies, this by focusing on minority groups who wish to express their authorial agency, thereby maintaining an appropriately postmodern critique of grand narratives.

Staiger classifies authorship studies into seven approaches, two of which she regards as "dodges" to the question of causality – these being (1) a formalist approach to authorship through textual analysis alone and (2) reading practices, where the author becomes a construction of the reader (2003, p. 28). Four of Staiger's other approaches (those of origin, personality, signature and sociology of production) are comparable

with the historic forms of auteur theory and auteurism discussed in the previous chapter.

In regard to the notion of agency, Staiger posits her final (seventh) approach as “technique of the self” which she defines as “the author... reconceptualized as a subject having an ability to act as a conscious analyzer [sic] of the functionality of citations in historical moments” (2003, p. 49). To develop this approach, Staiger turns to Foucault’s later work on power and sexuality and applies the “art of existence” (2003, p. 50) to authorship, whereby individuals mirror and repeat already existing discursive forms of authoring-acts within a structure; be it the film industry, or wider society. Staiger also uses gender theorist Judith Butler’s notion of performative statements to provide a satisfactory explanation of causal agency. However, performative statements of authoring – that is the enacting of the role of author through the expressed utterances – only work within already imposed and accepted norms and boundaries, and only if they are spoken by subjects who are recognised as having the pre-given power to make such statements. The repetition of these statements gives the appearance of a distinguishing ‘voice’ that separates one subject from another. Staiger states “[w]hat an author *is*, is the repetition of statements” (2003, p. 51).

These approaches to agency situate notions of causality for film texts within already existing discourses and structures of society, in keeping with postmodernism. Even though this approach is quite valid and applicable, there are problems in regard to agency and its interplay with structure. Firstly, Staiger’s main focus is on members of minority and marginalised groups who may find it difficult to speak within mainstream film and, if this is the case, they are intentionally appealing to performative statements or expressions of self in their work. This then becomes a form of authorship as identity politics, which raises doubts as to the viability of this approach to explain agency within authorship for the majority of individuals. Yet it could be said that within historical notions of auteur theory, screenwriters may be considered a minority group.

Secondly, the self as ‘subject’ is still firmly entrenched within structure – whether that be society, culture or the discourse itself. The question that remains unanswered is *how*

agency is enacted and negotiated within these structures (and how the individual determines a course of action and the impact it may have on their desires, motives and outcomes). Staiger states that “the individual conceives a self as able to act” (2003, p. 50), yet does not explain *how* this conception occurs. If the individual human is simply a product of society or language then it becomes impossible to explain any individual action that has completely radicalised or changed society. Creativity and artistic innovations cannot be reduced either to scientific evaluation, or to existing societal and cultural structures. The subject, as individual self, is influenced by factors that exist apart from society or its discourses (such as illness, beliefs and values, the natural world), and these factors impact on the self in evaluating which are the appropriate actions to take, in particular, in regard to unprecedented or unpredictable situations. The structure of societies and cultures impacts upon humans, but human creativity exists separately from structure. It is in this position, in a liminal space between the self and society, that it becomes possible for the screenwriter to enact authorial agency. The enactment of authorial agency is a process of determining and evaluating creative drive, the need for expression, against the existing cultural influences and societal restrictions. Critical realist Margaret S. Archer provides a helpful theory, that of the internal conversation, to explain this process.

In the latest of her series of books addressing the problem of structure and agency *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*, published in 2003, Archer not only develops a new theory to explain how an individual negotiates the interplay between structure and agency – that of the internal conversation – but also provides an empirical study of her model through data collected from twenty subjects. Drawing upon, critiquing, and refining the inner speech theories of pragmatists William James, Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead, Archer proposes a new understanding of inner speech to explain how an individual regulates their experience within social structure and determines possible courses of action. Archer situates her new approach to understanding how agency is enacted within the wider field of critical realism, which has been developed from, and builds upon, the work of Roy Bhaskar.

According to Bhaskar (1998):

Society is both (a) a pre-existing and (transcendentally and causally) necessary condition for intentional agency... but equally (b) as existing and persisting only in virtue of it. On this conception then, society is both the condition and outcome of human agency and human agency both reproduces and transforms society... at any moment of time society is pre-given for the individuals who never create it, but merely reproduce or transform it. The social world is always pre-structured... Agents are always acting in a world of structural constraints and possibilities that they did not produce. Social structure, then, is both the ever-present condition and the continually reproduced outcome of intentional human agency. Thus people do not marry to reproduce the nuclear family or work to sustain the capitalist economy. Yet it [this] is the unintended consequence (and inexorable result) of, as it is the necessary condition for, their activity. (p. xvi)

Thus Archer argues that there is a difference between a socially-produced concept of self and an individual awareness or sense of self (Archer, 2002, p. 12). She states that postmodernism has reinforced social constructionism where humans have no emergent powers other than that “generated from a network of social meanings” (2002, p. 12). The individual becomes a “grammatical fiction”, a cultural artifact, a concept “appropriated from society” (2002, p. 12). She states that, according to this postmodern view:

We are nothing beyond what society makes us, and it makes us what we are through our joining society’s conversation. *Society’s Being* thus impoverishes humanity, by subtracting from our human powers and accrediting all of them – selfhood, reflexivity, thought, memory, emotionality and belief – to society’s discourse. (2002, p. 12)

Yet, this concept of self (and indeed society), would not be possible without a continuous sense of self. There is a universal awareness of our individuality that is part of the reality of the world that we experience, and an understanding that “how the world is has a regulatory effect upon what we make of it and, in turn, what it makes of us” (2002, p. 12). Natural reality consists of three orders: nature, which concerns physical well-being; practice, where performative achievement is necessary for work; and the social, where the individual’s main concern is in the achievement of self-worth (Archer, 2003, p. 138). The sense of self, or continuity of consciousness, constitutes the

natural human and is universal, as “there has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body but also of his individuality, both spiritual and physical” (Mauss, cited in Archer, 2002, p. 12). Therefore the individual, although a part of society, does not exist because of society, but because of reality. Without this continuing sense of self, an individual would not be able to “appropriate social expectations and... recognise what is expected of them” (2002, p. 13). For society to function effectively, people must have a continuity of consciousness that transcends society.

Postmodernity finds it difficult to explain why individuals act outside existing discursive or social structures, as can be seen from Staiger’s (2003) attempt to explain agency as performative statements. As Archer states:

Society’s Being [the postmodern subject] needs this sense of self, in order for an agent to know that social obligations pertain to her, rather than just being diffuse expectations, and that when they clash, then it is she who is put on the spot, and has to exercise a creativity which cannot be furnished by consulting the discursive canon. Unscripted performances, which hold society together, need an active agent who is enough of a self to acknowledge her obligation to perform and to write her own script to cover the occasion. (2002, p. 13)

Archer argues that there must of necessity be both a separation of the individual from society or culture and an acknowledged mingling of self and society. Agency is dependent upon engagement with social and cultural structures, but this could not happen unless there were other (non-social) identifiable aspects to the individual (Archer, 2003, p. 7). Human agency “originates in people themselves, from their own concerns, forged in the space *between* the self and reality as a whole” (Archer, 2002, p. 12). This is the liminal space – that is, the unstructured area of imagination – in which the screenwriter who wishes to create original acts of authoring operates.

Individuals engage with social and cultural structures through personal projects. The enactment of these projects is dependent upon the limitations and possibilities – or what Archer terms “constraints and enablements” – within the cultural or societal structure (2003, p. 7). However, these constraints and enablements only have causal

powers if an individual agent “pursue[s] projects upon which they would impinge” (2003, p. 7). Bhaskar states “[t]he causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency” (cited in Archer, 2003, p. 2), with the ‘through’ determined by the individual’s internal conversation. This mediatory process depends upon human reflexivity, or upon “our power to deliberate internally upon what to do in situations that were not of our making” (2003, p. 342). The internal conversation is a stream of processing, a ‘dialogue’ between the personal projects of the self and the limitations and possibilities of the individual’s social surroundings. In other words, a person reflexively considers their position, identifies their interests and develops a project that is appropriate to their needs (or wants, or situation). The outcome may not always be successful: however, the point is not whether this is done well, but *how* it is done at all.

The internal conversation takes the form of a dialogue conducted with oneself, not *with* society, but *about* society. The individual conducts a conversation between their subjective self, which asks a question, and their objective self, which provides the answer. The person is speaking to themselves, but occupying transitory positions in order to process information, thoughts, and possible courses of action. It could be something as simple as “what time is it?” or as complicated as “how will I explain this theory?” It is a method for arriving at self-knowledge and decisions through the process of “discernment, deliberation and dedication” (Archer, 2003, p. 138). Through this internal process, the individual prioritises their concerns, and how they will accommodate those other necessary aspects of reality that may impinge on what they care about most. In many cases, the societal order may not be the main concern, and other fundamental concerns will predominate. For example, a heroin addict may commit any number of crimes, or prostitute themselves, because they are concerned only with their physical well-being, and not with their social self-worth. This inner dialogue produces a “personal pattern... a constellation of concerns [that] constitutes [a] unique *personal identity* and is the expression of [a person’s] most important personal emergent power – [their] own reflexivity in relation to reality” (Archer, 2003, p. 139). This process develops and changes as an individual matures, and as they are affected by all aspects of reality.

The *how* of the internal conversation provides a satisfactory answer to Staiger's statement that "the individual conceives a self as able to act" (2003, p. 50). This conception occurs separately from, but is dependent upon, the society's or culture's structure. The reflexive mental deliberation, or internal conversation, of an individual has a "first-person ontology" (Searle, cited in Archer, 2003, p. 36), or a subjective ontology. Thoughts are subjectively experienced and deliberated, and it is only if they are expressed as ideas or statements in the public domain that they have an objectively knowable ontology, or state of being. Even though a person may be able to express how a pain, or emotion felt, the actual experiencing of it – as with the thoughts regarding it – remain "first-person dependent" (2003, p. 37). The person's sense of self and their thoughts exist within this ontological state of being. An individual's mental states or thoughts can only be experienced subjectively, but through internal deliberation upon what to say, and how to say it, they can be expressed as ideas. The inner world of the imagination and the process of considering how to creatively express ideas is the method for interacting with society. Archer puts it thus, "Our reflexive deliberations are held to be the process through which we [as] agents selectively mediate structural and cultural properties and also creatively contribute to their transformation" (2003, p. 38).

The internal conversation provides a conciliatory approach to the interplay between the filmic culture industry and the individual screenwriter. The screenwriter as author can be seen to negotiate personal projects within the structural constraints and enablements of the film production process, and enacts agency through personal reflexive deliberation, choice and thematic style. How socially efficacious the resulting screenplay is depends upon the screenwriter's authorship skills, the story's cultural resonance, societal relevance, and the freedoms and impositions encountered within the filmic industry structure. This is the story presented in *Adaptation*.

A postmodern approach to filmic authorship attempts to define the author within the constructed parameters of always already-existing structures of society, culture and discourse. The result of this worldview has been stagnation. We are continually bombarded with remakes of films, the same plots, the same stories, the same characters. We are caught in a cycle of uninspired repetition. It would appear people

have lost the ability to progress in any way except financially and, if this is the case, postmodernism has been successful. In proposing a worldview of postmodernism, its proponents have also implemented and accepted it. Postmodernism has replaced one grand narrative with another – that of futility, uncertainty and parody. No longer is anything true, except the truth of postmodernism that there is no truth (Kenway, 1995, p. 39). If we are not constricted by relativism we can step outside the existing social construction: not to deconstruct it, but to consider it from a different perspective. Critical Realism provides a new paradigm for theoretical analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

A DIALECTICAL CRITIQUE OF THE POSTMODERN AUTHOR IN ADAPTATION

In order to develop a more thorough understanding of the position of the screenwriter as author within film studies, it is necessary to analyse representations of the author from a poststructural/postmodern perspective. This provides an opportunity for questioning the relationship between the screenwriter and the screenplay as text, in order to discern the interaction and reflexivity between the individual and the cultural structure that is film. However, if one is to adopt a strictly postmodern approach in this regard, the screenwriter is placed in a textual limbo with no opportunity for effective challenging of the existing structural limitations, or for enacting change. Agency is negated. Although a contentious concept, the dialectic (in this case Dialectical Critical Realism) may provide an alternative outcome for the filmic author by recognising the current situation, the associated problems, and the results of situating the author as textual construct. Such an enquiry may provide a new understanding which leads to a more emancipatory theoretical approach to the role of the screenwriter, and indeed film, in today's society.

Dialectical critical realism (hereafter DCR) differs from Hegel's and Marx's approach to the dialectic by inserting a fourth level within the process. Whereas Hegel posited identity, negativity and totality (or thesis, antithesis and synthesis), DCR has "non-identity, negativity, totality and transformative agency" (MacLennan, 1998, online). DCR emphasises the "notion of absence" (MacLennan, 1998, online) and therefore differs from Hegel's dialectic of idealist ontology as Hegel "ultimately could not sustain real negativity and that his totalities were all essentially closed rather than open" (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xx). Although DCR is similar to Marx's dialectical materialism, it does not provide a definite outcome, as both Marx and Hegel did. In DCR the notion of human agency is a vital component in the progression and eventual resolution of society.

In this chapter I will apply a dialectical approach to representations of the screenwriter as author in *Adaptation*. Through a logical and reasoned examination of the contradictions apparent in the film, I suggest that the postmodern concepts of the author as abject; the anxiety of influence²; and the aesthetics of failure present an unbalanced view of filmic authorship and reflect current issues of concern not only to the screenwriter, but to wider society as well. By recognising these issues concerning film authorship, however, and the reasons behind them, we can adopt an alternative, encompassing approach that provides a more positive outlook and scope for the filmic author.

Adaptation, written by Charlie Kaufman (a highly regarded contemporary screenwriter working in Hollywood), provides an interesting and very relevant example of the role of the screenwriter within the Hollywood film industry, and foregrounds the authorial process of writing a screenplay. The film can be considered a postmodern film in its intertextuality; its deconstruction of both the subject and the filmic structure; the parodic theme and the oppositional characterisation. Charlie Kaufman even becomes his own textual creation³ represented in the film, and many of the other characters in the film are actual people. However, the film also contains representations of reality, conflicting accounts of authorial intent, and a positioning of the subject and object that realises reflexive deliberation and human agency. There is a dualistic oppositional account of the role and craft of the screenwriter and of the screenwriter's accepted place within the stratified Hollywood film industry. This is combined with a philosophical concern about individual human identity, and societal interaction and development. The film can be read either as providing a critique of the 'postmodern condition', or as a symptom of the postmodern malaise to which there is no alternative.

Charlie Kaufman foregrounds the screenwriter as protagonist by inserting himself as a character 'Kaufman' into the film: not as hero, but as abject anti-hero. Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject implies a distinction between what is unclean and must be

² The notion of the 'anxiety of influence' developed from Bloom's work with poets and charts the progress of an apprentice struggling with the imposing effect of a predecessor, or in this case, the expert on accepted filmic structure (McLennan, 1998).

³ Henceforth, I will distinguish between the real Charlie Kaufman and the character 'Kaufman' thus. Although, how much the two Kaufmans overlap, only Charlie knows.

expelled, and what is acceptable in order to maintain a right and proper external appearance. The existence of boundaries suggests they can collapse, along with meaning (Macey, 2000, p. 1). 'Kaufman', the character, is the miserable 'other' of the film. From the opening scene he questions his ability not only as a screenwriter, but as a human being capable of original thought. He is a walking cliché, imprisoned in screenwriting discourse, and in his own conception of himself. This first encounter with 'Kaufman' the character – a voiceover on a black screen – is developed as a plotline in the film through his struggle with what he considers is the impossible task of adapting a non-fiction book about real people and events into a conventionally structured Hollywood film.

'Kaufman' endeavours to find meaning in the book, *The Orchid Thief* by Susan Orlean, that can be transferred to the screen: the simplicity of flowers and the disappointment of Orlean's search for passion. Although he sets himself this goal, the process is more difficult than he imagined. He is caught time and again within the overall constriction of structure, plot and the ubiquitous happy ending. He is the anti-hero, the abject failure who is humiliated when he reaches rock bottom and finally has to admit he cannot achieve the goal he set for himself. 'Kaufman' tastes the disappointment that he disavows for Orlean in the final act of the film.

The important concept for this thesis is that Kaufman (the screenwriter) *chooses* to construct himself as the abject in the film. His character cannot sustain a lasting relationship, he continuously questions his own capabilities, he masturbates and fantasises rather than relating to others and, as the film progresses, all meaning collapses. The structure of the film folds in upon itself and it is not until the third act – where the fictional film subsumes the factual film (in the filmic reality) – that 'Kaufman' can provide a 'happy ending'.

Why did Kaufman portray himself in such a humiliating manner? I would argue that Kaufman intentionally created himself as an abject character. He is playing with the notion of the typical clichéd Hollywood film which is exposed through the opposition of 'Kaufman's' struggle to produce a unique film and the development of his 'filmic twin brother' Donald's repetitive and trite generic thriller. Donald writes his

screenplay by the rules, 'Kaufman' does not believe in rules. He is also playing with the concept of the 'screenwriter', and the screenwriter's role within the structure of the film industry. He asks the question, "What is the role of the screenwriter in Hollywood: to create or regurgitate?" The audience identifies and empathises with the protagonist and expects to see change, redemption, the achievement of the goal set for him in the first act. However 'Kaufman' can only achieve his goal by faking the third act, by cheating. Kaufman exposes and disrupts the structure of the film to critique the structure of films, and the expectations of both the film industry and the audience.

Through his abject character, Kaufman juxtaposes his idea of the role of a screenwriter with the role interpellated for them through the accepted Hollywood system. He does this by contrasting his morose character with that of his twin brother Donald (who can also be seen as his alter-ego). Donald is optimistic that, by following all the rules or principles of screenwriting, he will achieve his goal and be successful. And in the film he is successful. Donald's clichéd, conventional thriller is set to sell for big money. Is the goal of every screenwriter simply to make money? Donald is influenced by screenwriting 'guru' Robert McKee, also a 'real' character, but 'Kaufman' is disgusted. He tells Donald, "The goal of a screenwriter is to do something new. Writing is a journey into the unknown". Initially 'Kaufman' rejects Donald's enthusiasm for McKee's principles, but in his desperation to fashion a screenplay that will be acceptable both to his employer, the production company, and to Orlean's vision in the book, he turns to first to McKee and then Donald for help.

The third act turning point of the film is 'Kaufman's' meeting with McKee. Here 'Kaufman' and Donald begin to coalesce and the oppositional abject ceases to exist. As Donald has exhibited anxiety of influence with McKee, so now does 'Kaufman'. 'Kaufman' pleads with McKee for help, telling him it's not about the film anymore, it's about his choices in life. McKee gives him the answer: the third act is all that matters, the characters have to change, and do not bring in a *deus ex machina*. 'Kaufman' succumbs to the accepted plot conventions and enlists Donald's help with the film, and Donald's influence alters 'Kaufman's' idealistic attempt to create a unique film.

In the third act, all the artificial plot conventions that 'Kaufman' shuns in the first act are brought into play. The film devolves into a typical Hollywood movie. A postmodern reading of the film would argue that 'Kaufman' had no choice; he was constricted by the discursive Hollywood filmic structure and failed in his attempt to create something new. The consumer-driven product of capitalism disempowers all opposition: there is no alternative. This places the film within the overall context of the aesthetics of failure (MacLennan & Hookham, 2001, p. 8). 'Kaufman' quite clearly sets out his goals, his intentions – but his character is seen as incompetent, a failure in life and therefore a failure in his writing. The film posits skepticism that change can be effective, or even possible, and suggests that the only way to counteract this is to embrace failure: to create an oppositional voice within the already-existing structure by foregrounding failure, rather than success and freedom.

Through highlighting these contemporary notions of the abject, anxiety of influence and the aesthetics of failure, I would argue that Kaufman is questioning what could be seen as a societal symptom of postmodernism. An example of this is when Donald asks 'Kaufman' for help with a "really cool way to kill people". 'Kaufman' replies that he doesn't write that kind of stuff. Then he tells Donald, "Here you go. The killer's a literature professor. He cuts off little chunks of his victims' bodies until they die. He [the killer] calls him[self] 'The Deconstructionist'" (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2000, p. 33). The failure of post-Marxism and the political left to effect radical change in society is reflected in film, a cultural mirror of our times. In terms of the dialectic there is no effective opposition to the dominance of current political, economic and social power. If there is no absence, or negative, to begin with there is no possibility of totality or any effective change or agency. Therefore we are, in a postmodern sense, reduced to irony, parody and embracing the capitalist system.

Charlie Kaufman's screenplay – and therefore the film – can be read as dialectic in itself. Kaufman both encompasses the postmodern subject and rejects it. Through his writing skill, his unique narrative structure, and his character development he lays bare the contemporary conceptions of reality, filmic reality, and the influence of Hollywood production on both the audience and the screenwriter. He addresses the oppositional: the creative voice and the clichéd utterance; reality and fiction;

disappointment and fulfillment; entrapment and freedom; and creates a new totality, a unique film that provides an alternative to the tired screenwriting paradigm. That he has managed to adapt a non-fiction book, insert real people as characters within the film, and write a critically acclaimed screenplay shows both his skill and craft as a screenwriter, and his authorial agency. He has posited that there is an alternative to the conventional Hollywood film and that film can pose the 'big' questions: about life; about what it means to be human, and about why things don't change. Kaufman has taken the postmodern film, turned it inside out and managed to not only to expose the fiction, but embrace the reality.

Unless people are informed of the fact that an ontological reality exists, outside the imposed structures of society and culture, there will be no change. The ability to enact agency, to effect change, is inherent within each individual. Film reflects our culture, who we are as a society, and it is here that the screenwriter fulfills an important function. Stories are universal: they are a part of an overarching reality of life, not only of society. The poststructural transformation of the will to truth into the power to impose truth – into Foucault's "regimes of truth" (MacLennan & Hookham, 2001, p. 11) – has resulted in the diminishing of power, the diminishing of the possibility of any progression, equality or freedom. However, critical realism provides for the possibility of individuals having the ability to intervene in the current social and cultural structure. The authorial screenwriter, through the universal story and the medium of film, can be an agent of change. There are two possibilities: either the screenwriter can be recognised as author by those within society; or the screenwriter can recognise themselves as author, enact agency and affect society.

CHAPTER FOUR

AUTHORSHIP NEGOTIATED: THE INTERNAL CONVERSATION IN ADAPTATION

If the screenwriter is to be recognised as an author, then it must also be accepted that the individual operates from their own concerns, and intentions, and that these are separately constituted from the structures of society and culture. However, the screenwriter is placed in a unique position, as they are authoring works that are geared towards a specific cultural structure, that of the film industry. It is for this reason that the screenplay differs both from novels – which are written initially for individual consumption – and the stage play, which although it can be performed multiple times, retains its original textual form. The screenplay is written for the once-only process of producing a film. If a film is remade, a new screenplay is written. (Of course, there is always an exception, as with Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho*).

Although William Goldman has stated that he writes his screenplays to be read (cited in Sternberg, 1997, p. 230), a screenwriter's work is rarely read for literary appreciation, but usually read to be rewritten and reinterpreted by many collaborators. For the screenwriter, this is a conundrum. It is a matter of their desiring to express creativity through the visual image as word, but also their being continually aware of the restrictions imposed through the film industry structure.

The problem of situating the screenwriter as agential author can be addressed through applying the internal conversation to the process of writing a screenplay. It is the deliberation involved both in creatively imagining a story, theme, plot, characterisations and dialogue; and also in the negotiation of the constraints and enablements of the screenplay format (and the film industry), that produces an authored text for the screen. Given that *Adaptation* is a screenplay adapted from an existing (but only partially-related) text, *The Orchid Thief*, the film provides an excellent example of this process of negotiation, and the concerns of the individual in relation to reality.

Each person uses the internal conversation to develop a strategy for examining, and evaluating, the social situations which (although not of their making or choosing) are an unavoidable fact of life, and must be considered in order to participate in the social order. This is a progressive evaluation of appropriate courses of action that follows the “trajectory: concerns – projects – practices” (Archer, 2003, p. 133). It can be posited that the film *Adaptation* is structured like an internal conversation and follows this trajectory, although this process is also repeated through every individual stage of discerning, deliberating and deciding on an appropriate course of action. ‘Kaufman’s’ strategy is to research and know his topic. His concerns are his reputation, his craft as a screenwriter, and his worldview. His project is the writing of the script, and his practice is how he approaches the adaptation of the book and the completion of an industry-acceptable screenplay.

The film opens with an inner dialogue. ‘Kaufman’ is questioning, and answering, himself regarding his concerns. He considers his current situation, and his ability as a screenwriter, then deliberates on possible strategies for improving himself. This inner conversation continues throughout the film, both as voiceover, and as a dual characterisation, that of ‘Kaufman’ in relation to his identical twin brother, Donald. Immediately we are given an insight into ‘Kaufman’s’ mind. He is concerned with his health, his work practices and his self-worth. The three orders of reality are then presented as themes in the film. Nature is addressed through the subject of the book: orchids and their adaptability, and how this relates to human beings and their mutability. Practice is seen in ‘Kaufman’ and Donald’s opposite approaches to writing a screenplay, the effects of the accepted industry format and expectations, and the eventual resolution of the film. Finally, society itself is questioned through the contrasting self-worth of the characters. ‘Kaufman’ compares himself to: Orlean, as a competent writer; Laroche, as possessor of self-esteem and passion; and Donald, as carefree and socially adept. That the film encompasses all orders of reality reinforces Archer’s point that individuals must conceive of projects that “establish... satisfactory practices in the three orders... [as this process is] the inescapable condition for human beings to survive or thrive” (2003, p. 138).

'Kaufman' entertains the project of adapting the book into a screenplay when he meets with Valerie, an attractive executive producer. He is offered the project because of his unique insight and writing ability. However, once he has entered into the project he must negotiate the limitations and possibilities of the cultural structures of both the film industry and the book. 'Kaufman' is considered for the adaptation because of his reputation as an unusual screenwriter, but when he states that he wants to let the movie exist, and not turn it into a typical Hollywood product with car chases, turning the orchids into poppies, cramming in sex and guns, and characters learning profound life lessons, Valerie suggests that Orlean and Laroche could fall in love. Immediately 'Kaufman's' ideas are constrained. He is subjected to the hierarchical structure of the Hollywood film industry where the producer holds power. The screenwriter is an employee, contracted to do a job – that is, write a screenplay that can be made into a high-grossing film. As well, 'Kaufman' has read the book and wishes to stay true to Orlean's story. This poses another limitation, especially given that *The Orchid Thief* is a non-fiction book, a factual account of a rather unique individual (John Laroche) who came to Orlean's attention when Laroche was charged with orchid poaching from a Florida state preserve. The book has no narrative structure, but digresses between Laroche's story, Orlean's personal reflections, the passion orchids inspire in enthusiasts, and the history of orchids and orchid hunters. However, once 'Kaufman' has accepted the project he must begin his process of deliberation and creation, and negotiate his strategy for completing the screenplay.

If we take the fictional identical twin brother Donald to be 'Kaufman's' alter-ego, the two characters can be seen as separate facets of 'Kaufman's' negotiation of *The Orchid Thief* project, and their conversation reflects an internal dialogue of deliberation. By juxtaposing Donald and 'Kaufman' as both the subjective (or speaking) self, and the objective (or answering) self, we can follow the internal dialogue that 'Kaufman' conducts during the film. This highlights 'Kaufman's' concerns and possible choices regarding the project he has undertaken. He questions the task ahead of him and weighs the options available. The easy way forward would simply be to write a repetitive generic Hollywood film, and still get paid a lot of money. But 'Kaufman' has ideals, and values his writing as a craft: as creating a literary work. In contrast, Donald finds it easy to write a screenplay by following the accepted cultural order, whereas

'Kaufman' has personal (authorial) concerns that he wishes to express. 'Kaufman's' specific interests take precedence in his work and can be seen as other orders of reality impinging upon the social order. As Archer (2003) states:

If personal identity is delineated with reference to the whole of natural reality, then social identity is a sub-set of it... We cannot but be socially engaged because this is the source of one of our ineluctable concerns *qua* agents. However, the direct implication is that we cannot simply be socially determined, because part of us has to be vested in and responsive to the prompts and restraints of the other two orders. Also and more radically, it follows that there can be considerable agential autonomy from society because that which concerns us most, and therefore that to which we are most responsive, may not lie in the social order at all. (p. 139).

In order to understand the book he is adapting (and also fulfill his own personal concerns as agential author) 'Kaufman' must attempt to encompass the natural order theme of the book, and the social order expectations of the film industry. He has to decide which is more important. Initially, 'Kaufman's' preference is for the reality of the book, the actuality of how the world is, and this is where his interests as both a writer and an individual lie. This focus can be seen though the themes of his other screenplays. In Charlie Kaufman's films his main thematic concern, as he himself states, is "issues of self and why I'm me and not that other person" (cited in Kennedy, 2004, p. F.01). Charlie Kaufman delves deep into the notion of subjectivity, agency and human consciousness. However 'Kaufman' (and, the implication is, in real life Charlie) is constrained by the cultural order of Hollywood which, although he tries to evade it, continually imposes limitations upon the completion of this screenplay. Donald is that side of 'Kaufman' which keeps reminding him that, although he has freedom as a respected screenwriter, there are some aspects of writing for film that cannot be discounted.

This balancing of freedom and constriction can be seen as dialectic between theory and practice, where "humanity lives by yesterday's proven practices rather than awaiting tomorrow's theoretical advances" (Archer, 2003, p. 145). Charlie Kaufman appears to understand this dialectical concept within the context of the film, as illustrated through a passage of dialogue in the second draft of the screenplay. Quoting Hegel, 'Kaufman'

tells Donald, "Each being is, because posited, an opposed, a conditional and conditioning, the Understanding completes these its limitations by positing the opposite..." (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2000, p. 20). 'Kaufman' and Donald are two sides of the same coin. They represent 'Kaufman's' inner dialogue and his internal conflict. The twin screenwriting characters personify his struggle to produce a screenplay that satisfies his ultimate personal convictions as a unique and creative writer, to remain true to the thematic concerns of the book, and to conform to the accepted Hollywood ideal of a high-budget feature film.

The film can be read as the actual writing of the screenplay unfolding on the screen. As 'Kaufman' writes it, this is what we see visually. For the first two acts of the film 'Kaufman' succeeds in portraying his thematic concerns with the progress of life, and the necessity of change, and his involvement in the process of screenwriting. In this he stays true to Orlean's book, even including digressive 'chapters' where he not only introduces the real characters (that is, the story of the book), but also investigates the history of orchids and the concept of adaptability. 'Kaufman' highlights this by opposing these thematic interests through his own process of writing the screenplay. He also addresses issues that are of concern to him personally. He deliberates on these through the juxtaposition of his character 'Kaufman' with those of Orlean and Laroche. He regards Orlean as the consummate writer. She is shown in her study, seated behind a desk, surrounded by books and working on a laptop. In contrast, 'Kaufman' is shown hunched over an old electric typewriter perched on a chair in his sparse bedroom. Laroche is a passionate individual who becomes engrossed in projects, but can then abandon them completely. 'Kaufman' finds this difficult, as he is a screenwriter who, although passionate about his craft, cannot distance himself from his project. This provides a comment on the role of the sole screenwriter, as opposed to the writer-director. It is accepted in the film industry that once the screenplay is completed the writer disavows all rights to ownership (and to how the screenplay is transformed technically into a film). Charlie Kaufman has drawn attention to this by making the writing of the screenplay the subject of the actual film.

These oppositions are further reinforced through the character of Donald, who adopts a formulaic approach to writing his own screenplay, including posting a list of

McKee's 'ten commandments' above both their workstations, and finishing his thriller-screenplay while 'Kaufman' is still struggling with his own adaptation. Once Donald has completed his film, he divests himself of all interest in it except for how much money he will receive. Donald also shows passion, not for his craft, but for women, whereas 'Kaufman' finds it difficult to maintain a continuing relationship and resorts to fantasy and masturbation. 'Kaufman' becomes so involved in the writing of the screenplay that Orlean becomes a part of his sexual fantasies, yet he cannot bring himself to meet her face to face.

The opposition and comparison of these three characters, 'Kaufman'-and-Donald (as one composite character), Orlean, and Laroche, is also reflected in Donald's screenplay, *The Three*. Donald's screenplay is about a cop, trying to find a serial killer's latest victim. She becomes his Holy Grail. However, Donald's three characters are, in fact, all the one character, who is suffering from multiple personality disorder. In *Adaptation*, 'Kaufman' is questioning himself about aspects of his personality and providing the answers to those queries through other characters. As the search for perfection is Laroche's Holy Grail, and passion is Orlean's, for 'Kaufman' it is the completion of the screenplay with integrity and aplomb. What 'Kaufman' questions about the filmic reality of, and complications with, Donald's screenplay are in fact included in 'Kaufman's' own screenplay that we see unfolding on the screen. The two screenplays are questioning and answering each other, and represent an internal conversation.

Through these characterisations (and in particular the dialogic interactions with Donald), 'Kaufman' is diagnosing his circumstances. By the end of the second act, 'Kaufman' is coming to a realisation that it would have been much easier to write something else, anything else (including *The Three*), than attempting to complete the project he has started, and maintain his stance regarding the truth of the book, and the reality of life. He is encountering more constraints than possibilities. The problems 'Kaufman' is experiencing are highlighted through the ease with which Donald completes and sells his screenplay (as it is in keeping with the accepted Hollywood structure and style). As Archer states, "There is a real price to be paid for the pursuit of projects that are antipathetic to vested interests" (2003, p. 136). However, if

screenwriters are not prepared to pay that price, then we will be continually subjected to the ever-contracting circle of filmic stories currently on offer.

In the third act 'Kaufman' accepts that he cannot complete his project and admits he needs help. However, he cannot simply cease working, as this would reflect on his other concerns – those of his own well-being and his work ethic, as well as his social standing as a Hollywood screenwriter. He is dedicated to completing the screenplay, but has to reassess his methods, and his options. His deliberations become more conventional, in keeping with the need to accommodate the constraints of the Hollywood cultural structure, and it is here that 'Kaufman' must abandon his idealistic approach and allow Donald to take over. 'Kaufman' cannot sustain his original concern of staying true to Orlean's book and also maintain the screenplay structure. He has to negotiate the limitations and consider new possibilities. According to Archer, "Once an agential project has activated a constraint or enablement, there is no single answer about what is to be done, and therefore no one predictable outcome" (2003, p. 131). This is illustrated in the film, through the variant scenic possibilities 'Kaufman' imagines and attempts to coalesce into his screenplay. However, he cannot bring the screenplay to an acceptable (and therefore, satisfactory) climax and resolution. 'Kaufman' becomes like the serial killer in Donald's script, who, because he is forcing his victim to eat herself, is also eating himself to death. In the same way, the film begins to consume and kill the characters one by one. 'Kaufman' has a problem that he must overcome. He achieves this by making the third act a fiction of reality, and the characters into caricatures.

The third act becomes 'Kaufman's' Japanese paper ball which, when dropped into water, turns into a flower. The third act is a metaphor, where the film turns back on itself, and instead of showing the reality of the book, the book becomes a fiction of the film. Donald takes over, and the climax of the film provides all the conventions of a typical Hollywood film: much more like Donald's generic thriller than 'Kaufman's' initial premise. All 'Kaufman's' detested conventions are included; Orlean and Laroche fall in love, the Ghost Orchid is a potent psychedelic, there are guns, car chases, and death. 'Kaufman' as protagonist learns a profound life lesson, and the *deus ex machina* is included, not once, but twice. An unsuspecting Ranger causes an horrific car accident

and Laroche gets attacked by an alligator. Orobouros has been let loose. The characters have turned on themselves and are being deconstructed to death.

From this it could be assumed that it is impossible to write a screenplay that does not conform to the accepted structural and narrative format, but I would argue that Kaufman has indeed crafted such a film. He has maintained his thematic concerns throughout the first two acts, and incorporated the conventions of climax and resolution in the third act. By including the plotlines that he initially refused to accept in the first act, he has in fact provided a multilayered film that both addresses and critiques conventional Hollywood film and the role of the screenwriter.

By including himself as protagonist of the film, Kaufman provides the accepted and expected filmic structure of the hero's journey through a life changing experience, to emerge at the resolution of the film as 'a different person'. It is 'Kaufman' that the audience relates to, and empathises with. It is Donald, who is punished for changing the film to a Hollywood fiction: who dies in the climax of the film (and to whom the film is dedicated...). 'Kaufman' has maintained his integrity and provided a final comment on having to adapt the film to an acceptable structure. Donald pays the price for disregarding the natural order. Archer puts it succinctly, "Substitute how we would have things be for how they are, and reality always has its revenge" (2003, p. 150).

That Kaufman has felt the need to invent a twin brother (who is credited with co-writing the actual screenplay, and who was also nominated for an Academy Award), shows how strongly he regards his craft as a screenwriter. It can be seen as either justification for 'cheating' in the third act (he can blame his brother), or as a very barbed comment on the role of the screenwriter in contemporary film production. Does anyone really care who the goddamn scriptwriter is, as long as they deliver the goods?

The denouement shows the completion of the screenplay: 'Kaufman's' project is finished. The internal dialogue has ceased and 'Kaufman' can move on to his next course of action, which is addressing his issues of self-worth in the social order. This provides circularity to the film structure – we are back where we started, but circumstances have changed. The film has shown that 'Kaufman', through his reflexive

deliberation, has accomplished three things. Firstly, he prioritised his concerns: those of reality and of what matters the most to him as an individual. We are shown what makes him a unique personal identity. Secondly, he assessed the circumstances and made evaluations about which course of action was both desirable and feasible. Although there were many attempts to write the screenplay, the process of which was fraught with difficulties, 'Kaufman' eventually came to a point of decision. Finally, although he had to relinquish some of his authorial desires, he completed the screenplay which was both "expressive of his ultimate concerns", and still within the available means (Archer, 2003, p. 142).

This film has provided a visual example of both the screenwriter as author, and the interplay between individual agency and socio-cultural structure. For most of the film 'Kaufman' occupies a liminal space that, although existing in reality, is separate from society and the natural world. This, it could be said, is the 'in-between space' of the practice of the screenwriter. It is a creative area of *communitas* (in the case of the screenwriter, as singular, rather than as a group); an unstructured equality that exists between boundaries, and where meaning is found in the imagination of a writer. In this liminal space the author lives in a world of images and words, of personal concerns and the desire to share stories, but is always mindful of the restricted, accepted, mainstream film structure. The screenwriter's liminal space is both expressively free and creatively constricted. Yet, because of this, the screenwriter provides an excellent example of the role of the internal conversation in the mediation of agency within cultural and societal structures.

A discussion of agency and authorship is not simply a matter of repetitive cultural discourses, or existing social structures, but an incorporation of all orders of reality. It is through the formulation of specific projects that authors interact with social and structural power. The screenwriter as film author is placed in the most difficult of positions for any writer as the social and industrial power of the film business is immense. However, in a case where the screenwriter is concerned with aspects of reality that are not strictly social, Kaufman argues there should be a freedom to express that desire. As Kaufman has stated: "I think they [directors Jonze and Gondry] understand the value of the writer", while his view on the writer's role is summed up

in his comment: "here's the person that created this stuff; why would you want to throw them away? I don't say that only for me. I say it for writers in general", (cited in Kennedy, 2004, p. F.01). Charlie Kaufman can be considered the author of his films and he provides an excellent case study for the reconception of auteur theory to include the writer of the screenplay. Screenwriters need to recognise that they have agency within the film structure. And the film industry needs to recognise the screenwriter. For without someone writing the words, there would be no film.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary culture is dominated by the visual image, which takes precedence over the written word. For many people, film (and television) provides a major means of making sense of the world, and for obtaining information considered important. More particularly, film (although primarily considered entertainment) also provides stories through which people understand what it means to be human. Film is the 21st century equivalent of fireside folklore: and the role of the traditional storyteller, who enthralled and mesmerised while teaching groups of people the truths of life in a captivating tale, is today occupied by the screenwriter.

The creative artist who writes for the screen desires to reach as many people as possible, and to tell their stories in a visually arresting and impactful format. Yet, for many people, the screenwriter remains a virtually unknown component of the finished product. The writer, or author, of the film – although a vital collaborator in the screen industry – has been hidden away behind reams of drafts, rewrites, rejected scripts, and the director.

The dominant perception of the director-as-film-author can be directly attributed to the development and acceptance of auteur theory. In chapter one I traced the history and development of auteur theory from its inception in post-war France – in particular in the journal, *Cahiers du Cinema* – to mainstream Hollywood film through the definitive writings of Andrew Sarris and, finally, to its continued acceptance within both academic film study and wider cultural film discussion and publicity. Auteur theory has posited the director as the author of film, as the dominant creative individual, and for this reason the screenwriter has been forgotten.

Directors may indeed develop a unique visual style in their films: I would argue, however, that the moniker of auteur should only be applied to those directors who also write their own screenplays. In all other cases, a director relies on a well-written screenplay – as well as many other talented, and often overlooked, collaborators. The exceptional auteur, or writer-director, is a minority in contemporary mainstream film.

The pervasive influence of auteur theory, however also highlights an important aspect of film production: the vital function of the individual in the creative process. In chapter two I presented contemporary approaches to film authorship which attempt to redefine and resituate auteur theory within theoretical perspectives such as poststructuralism and postmodernism. Throughout a variety of philosophical approaches that either reduce the role of the subject to a construct of the text, or negate the agential subject completely, the notion of a creative human agent has survived: the author refuses to die.

Contemporary film theorists and scholars, such as Janet Staiger (2003), endeavour to explain agency and authorship within the frameworks of performativity and 'techniques of the self'. Focusing on the director-as-author frames an already-existing structure – the film – within which to apply notions of agency. Yet, as I argued, these approaches cannot account for unprecedented or unpredictable agential acts. Critical realism, in particular Archer's (2003) theory of the internal conversation, provides an alternative method of analysing authorial agency, by acknowledging both the existence of orders of reality that impact upon the individual's choices, motives and desires, and the effects of cultural and societal structures. As the screenwriter occupies a unique position between the subjective ontology of a creative agent, and the objective ontology of structure, critical realism provides a more satisfactory approach to analysing the screenwriter as author.

The acknowledgement of reality beyond the confines of cultural and societal structures presents an alternative concept of the role of creative agency within film. In chapter three I applied dialectical critical realism to critique the postmodern construction of the author in the film *Adaptation*. The dialectic emphasises the existing (non)identity of the author, as well as stressing the role of agency within progressive structural transformation. A postmodern reading of the film presents a negative outlook for authorial agency, as expression is limited to the foregrounding of failure to effect change. This can be seen through the characters of 'Kaufman' and Donald and notions of the abject; anxiety regarding influence and effectiveness, and an overall aesthetics of failure. The postmodern conception of authorship relies on reiterative acts, situated

within existing texts, which limits artistic utterances and disregards the autonomous self.

The screenwriter, as a creative agent, cannot be creatively determined by the imposed boundaries of existing film structures (although they must, of necessity, negotiate those same boundaries). In chapter four I used Archer's (2003) critical realist-based theory of the internal conversation to present an alternative analysis of the screenwriter in *Adaptation* and explain agency. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the concerns of the screenwriter who occupies a unique liminal space between the self as individual and the cultural structure of film.

I showed that 'Kaufman' considers his project, deliberates on his available options and weighs these up against his own priorities as a human being. He then plans a course of action which – while it may change – illustrates ways in which he negotiates his agential authorship within the confines of accepted film structure. 'Kaufman's' internal conversation is evident throughout the film; through his own voiceover monologues, through the dialogic interaction with his alter-ego 'brother' Donald; and through the oppositionality of the in-text story of the screenplay *The Three* with 'Kaufman's' unfolding onscreen struggle to complete his adaptation of *The Orchid Thief*. Charlie Kaufman's film foregrounds the screenwriter by situating himself as protagonist within the narrative, and highlights the writing process by making the plot of the film the actual writing of the screenplay and the work of adaptation from a written text to a visual one. The film also illustrates the necessary mediatory process of the 'internal conversation' that an individual author must undertake in order to participate effectively within the creative process of screenwriting. *Adaptation* provides a concrete representation of an argument that the creative agent exists in reality and cannot be restricted to being a side-effect/product of structure.

Thematically, the film *Adaptation* presents the idea that human beings and society are continually changing and developing, and neither agents, not structure, can restrict the other completely. The creative author absorbs current shifts in culture and society, reflects topical concerns, and envisages and expresses alternative ideas. It is an ongoing

process of adapting, however as Mahatma Ghandi stated, "Adaptability is not imitation. It means power of resistance and assimilation" (n.d.).

Within contemporary approaches to authorship, auteur theory's preoccupation with the director has effaced the individual writer (who in many cases is the originating author). The majority of films are written by a screenwriter, quite separate from the director's role, who must imagine and then create a story, plotline, theme, and characters. Charlie Kaufman is such a screenwriter. The screenplay is the foundation upon which the director applies his craft: that of visually *reinterpreting* a story that has already been written well enough to garner producers, production monies, actors, artists and craft professionals – in addition to the director.

The screenwriter may conceive exceptional stories that not only provide entertainment, but also express something deeper – illuminating the human condition – yet which are rejected by the film industry. The profit-generating aspect of film production cannot be discounted. Film is big business, and foremost in the studio and distribution executives' decision-making is how much money they are outlaying, and what return on investment is realistic in the marketplace. Unfortunately, the screenwriter has to take these factors into account when considering the style and development of the story they wish to tell. *Adaptation* – in particular the third act – provides an example of the screenwriter having to adapt their authorial concerns to the constraints of the film industry.

The screenwriter does not have complete control of their authoring project. If the screenwriter were recognised as the visual author however, more focus would be given within academia to the fundamentals of screenplay authoring, and within the industry to the necessity of nurturing and appreciating the originating creative aspect of film. A distinction needs to be made between funds spent on computer generated spectacle to enthrall an audience visually, and funds spent on developing screenplays which tell stories that resonate with the emotions and experiences of an audience.

Resonance implies a connection with something that rings true, and in this regard postmodern perspectives strike a hollow note. Postmodernism has failed to provide a

plausible explanation for agential authorship within its theories of the subject. This is because the human condition is ever-changing and responds creatively to new challenges: it cannot be restricted to no more than that which already exists within society. To constrict the personal expression of individuality within a framework of repetitive discourses is to retard the possibility of progression, emancipation and hope. This is how the screenwriter is restricted by constructions of contemporary Hollywood film. Because of the hegemonic effect of Hollywood's example upon the global English-language film industry, a similar outcome is also evident in the Australian film industry.

If a screenwriter is only permitted to think in terms of creating more of what is currently developed, funded, produced (and therefore acceptable within the film industry) the more the audience will be subjected to a continuing procession of remakes, sequels, prequels and big-screen television programmes. George Orwell may have been prescient when he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the more you restrict a person's language – and their access to images of other possibilities – the more you restrict their capacity to think of alternatives. This is the importance of 'Kaufman's' metaphor of Orobouros: the film industry is continuously devouring itself.

The first step to solving this cycle of self-cannibalism is realising that there is an alternative approach to understanding the role of the screenwriter as author/auteur and as illuminator of the human condition. Critical realism provides such an approach. Applying the critical realist dialectic to analysing film – in this case *Adaptation* – allows acknowledgement both of the current state of film authorship, and of the possibility for change. However, for change to occur, the importance of human agency must be acknowledged. The concept of the internal conversation offers an approach which is capable of performing the mediation and negotiation role necessary for a person to maintain their 'self' (personal concerns, priorities and desires), in dynamic relationship to their role in society. Reality encompasses much more than structures of culture and society: and the individual 'self' exists in reality. The liminality of the screenwriter provides an illuminating illustration of the theory and practice of the internal conversation and of the critical realist dialectic in regard to agency and authorship. The screenwriter must, of necessity, negotiate their individual concerns and their desire to

tell stories, with the constrictions of the contemporary film industry. This, as I have shown, is the story presented in *Adaptation*.

For change to occur in the nature and culture of the stories we tell ourselves as a society, the screenwriter must be recognised as the story-author. This can happen in a number of ways. Firstly (and I consider this the most important change), the screenwriter must recognise herself as author. This process begins with a new approach to education, and to how screenwriting is taught. Currently, writing for the screen is seen predominantly as a means to an end: the focus is upon writing scripts that will get sold and make money. This excises the literary aspects of the craft of writing. Screenwriting needs to be taught as a craft that is justified – not in terms of how much money the script sells for – but in terms of how well the author has creatively expressed in words the visual images and the visceral emotions and human motivations that impact upon the audience.

In addition to the industry changing its recognition of authorship, apprentice writers need to realise that stories are vitally necessary for mankind – not just for entertainment, but for providing a deeper understanding of the world and human nature. Further research needs to be done on the pedagogy of writing for the screen. This will impact not only upon film writers, but upon all those who desire to write for the mediated image.

If the screenwriter is to be recognised by the film industry as the true auteur of the moving image, further research must also be conducted into the development and funding of screenplays, and therefore films. My concern is with the Australian film industry, and the expression of our national culture in the face of the dominance of Hollywood film. That we are influenced is undeniable: yet if we are to express our own voice as a nation, then our film development and production processes must be reevaluated. Although we are constricted by the amount of funding available, stories that resonate – that speak to us as Australians – do not need millions of dollars in special effects: we need more support and funding for screenwriters. State and federal film funding and development bodies need to recognise the importance of the screenwriter, and the necessity not only of solid literary skills, but of the cultural

relevance of, and a need for, films that tell us stories about our world, our hopes and fears, our dreams, and who we are as human beings.

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