The Argument

(with annotations)

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ABSTRACT

The Argument (with annotations) is a 19-minute film[1] in two parts.

The first part is an appropriated-footage essay that seeks to un-familiarize, to render strange, the seemingly commonplace human knack for constructing and understanding metaphors. A voiceover narrator discusses the unthinking ease with which people do so; it goes on to examine instances of metaphor in literature, and to ask how the metaphorical principles of the written word apply, or don't, to moving images. There are also a couple of tangents: a conundrum about mirrors' axes of symmetry, and a bit about the interchangeability of the words "about" and "around". All this is accompanied by onscreen text and illustrated by clips from various films. At the voiceover's conclusion, a shot of a carpet (from the film *The Long Day Closes*) triggers a brief reverie on the subject of transcendence.

The second part of *The Argument* begins with the revelation that its narrator is not a disembodied voiceover, but a bodied Lecturer (played by Clare Coulter) in the real world; we watch this woman go about her post-lecture evening, which comprises a dinner date with her husband, a sour conversation, and a getting-lost-on-the-way-to-the-bathroom that leads to her accidental attendance at a basement-venue punk show. On top of this "evening in the life of a Lecturer", text is occasionally superimposed: excerpts from her presentation (i.e., the first half's voiceover) plus scribbled marginalia in her own handwriting.

[1] I use the word "film" in reluctant concession to the parlance of the times; *The Argument* is fully digital, neither shot nor finished on celluloid.

The Argument (with annotations) is intended as a riff on the genres of the essay-film and the more recent "video essay",[2] a riff whose narrator's authority is called into question, and whose audience — thinking they are watching an appropriated-footage piece (an essay of one sort or another) — has the rug pulled out from underneath them when they find that they are watching a fiction film.

[2] The difference between "essay-film" and "video essay" is not merely one of medium. The "essay-film" has a long and storied history, comes complete with its own canon (in the likes of Marker and Farocki), and has no prescribed subject matter. "Video essay" (as the term is understood by a growing number of people) has come in the last half-decade to mean what is arguably a subset of "essay-film": appropriated-footage videos (usually short ones) about cinema which are disseminated primarily online as an extension of, or parallel to, film criticism (the form's higher-profile practitioners including Kevin B. Lee for Fandor.com and Matt Zoller Seitz for RogerEbert.com).

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As for the production of the film itself, there are too many people deserving of my humble thanks to list here. But that's what credits are for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF IMAGES

1. BACKGROUND.

a. Where I'm Coming From

My body of film and video work from 1999 to present has consisted, to a large extent, of moving images with a monologueish bent. In my short videos, I am usually the sole performer, soliloquizing whether on- or offscreen. In 2009 I created *All The Mistakes I've Made*, an hour-long lecture-performance that I saw as a "live version" of my videos; in 2010 I wrote and directed the feature film[3] *You Are Here*, which, though it features a plethora of performers none of whom are me, nevertheless gives them plenty of monologues and voiceover of the same ilk as those in my other, more self-centred, works.

In keeping with this, I intended and proposed *The Argument* (at that time titled *Correspondences*; see Chapter 3.h.) as a lecture-performance. *Performing the history of metaphor* was the sub-title, and I intended it as an hour-long live show in which I would do no less than "trac[e] in tandem the histories of metaphor and of human consciousness [from pre-Homeric times] up to the contemporary moment."[4] The realization that I'd bitten off more than I could chew can be inferred from the chastened introductory sentence of one of my interim thesis-progress documents: "Metaphor is a huge topic."[5] So: focus narrowed, with some inspiration from Geoff Dyer's *The Ongoing Moment* (see Chapter 4.b.).

I ended up changing not just the project's scope, but its medium too. During a six-week residency with the Dutch media arts organization Impakt, I developed a new hour-long performance (*All The Mistakes I've Made, part 2*). The intent was to treat this as a

[3] (shot at least 85% on video, natch)
[4] My thesis proposal, 14 Feb 2014.
[5] My thesis progress report, 13 Jan 2015.

laboratory for my *Correspondences* thesis performance project. However, what happened was less of a laboratory and more of a whirlpool: any and all performance-lecture-related ideas floating through my mind were inexorably gathered by, and sucked into, the residency project. I emerged from the Netherlands with a new lecture-performance — one which was not my thesis project — and with a lack of any leftover lecture-performance-related energies or ideas to bring to *Correspondences*. So I decided *Correspondences* would be not a performance, but a film. From there it was a short step to the idea that the Lecturer be portrayed not by me, but by an actor. For the idea that the Lecturer be a woman in her sixties or seventies, I can thank John Greyson and J.M. Coetzee (see Chapter 3.b., “Persona”).

b. Conceptual Bases, or: The Great Swallowing

The underpinnings of *The Argument* are primarily to be found in the writings of literary critic Northrop Frye (*The Educated Imagination* and *The Great Code: The Bible & Literature*) and psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas (*Being a Character*).

Additional inspirations and shadings that will be mentioned over the course of this paper come from the writings of R.D. Laing, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, J.M. Coetzee, Paul Schrader, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

But the jumping-off point comes from a passage in *The Iliad*.

> Now the strong rage triple took hold of him, as of a lion
> Whom the shepherd among his fleecy flocks in the wild lands
> Grazed as he leapt the fence of the fold, but has not killed him,
> But only stirred up the lion's strength, and can no more fight him
> Off, but hides in the steading, and the frightened sheep are forsaken,
> And these are piled pell-mell on each other in heaps, while the lion
> Raging still leaps out again over the fence of the deep yard;
> Such was the rage of strong Diomedes as he closed with the Trojans.[6]

This simile goes on for so long that the reader could almost be forgiven for taking it as a story of life and death in the animal kingdom (or of a doomed farming operation), and not in fact as the story of a top-notch warrior in mid-tantrum.[7] It's a Scheherazadean parenthesis whose extended length allows the reader to forget what's outside the brackets,[8] to sink into the "as of" while the "such was" disappears over the horizon.

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[6] Lattimore, Richmond, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 131-132.
[7] Folk given to flights of fancy might even wonder if it's possible in some other sense to lose oneself so fully in a metaphor: if it's possible to forget that one experience is a metaphor for another, and thus if it's possible that our experience at this moment might in fact just be a metaphor for what is *actually* happening (whatever that might be).
[8] (and for more on brackets, see Chapter 4.a., "Two-Part Invention")

"What happens when a poet, say, uses an image, an object in nature, like a flock of sheep or a field of flowers?", asks Frye in *The Educated Imagination*.

> If he does use them, he's clearly going to make a poetic use of them: they're going to become poetic sheep and poetic flowers, absorbed and digested by literature, set out in literary language and inside literary conventions. What you never get in literature are just the sheep that nibble the grass or just the flowers that bloom in the spring. There's always some literary reason for using them… we can say that whenever a writer uses an image, or object from the world around him, he's made it a symbol.[9]

This is not (thank God) Frye arguing that every piece of literature is a *roman à clef*, that every noun in a poem or a novel must correspond to some different, actually-meant thing over here in the real world. In the case of Blake's poem "The Sick Rose", for instance, Frye argues explicitly against the possibility of any one-to-one symbol-to-symbolized interpretation, concluding that "To understand Blake's poem, then, you simply have to accept a world which is totally symbolic: a world in which roses and worms are so completely surrounded and possessed by the human mind that whatever goes on between them is identical with something going on in human life."[10, 11] Not a correspondence of things, but of something more elusively verb-y: something that's *going on*. When we engage with literature, says Frye, we are doing a different kind of thinking than when we engage with the world; everything in literature is suffused with the *possibility* of metaphor, and the reader who knows how to read literature will approach it accordingly.

He follows this line of thinking to the conclusion that "literature does not reflect life . . .

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[9] Frye, Northrop, *The Educated Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2002), 36-37.
[10] Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, 43-44.
[11] Frye of course means the world of literature. But a world in which everything is "completely surrounded and possessed by the human mind" also sounds like a good description of life as seen through the eyes of a delusional paranoiac.

it swallows it. And the imagination won't stop until it's swallowed everything."[12] It may be an apocalyptic-sounding outlook, but Frye puts a positive spin on it in the very next paragraph (to do with how literature's world-swallowing ability preserves something necessary and human inside of us). Still, as is my wont, I prefer to stop with the apocalypse.[13]

But elsewhere, in *The Great Code: The Bible & Literature*, Frye takes pains to describe how, though metaphorical thinking is and has always been central to human thought, the *idea* of thinking "in metaphor" — that is, the very concept of considering metaphor a category of thought, as opposed to just unavoidably thinking metaphorically all the time — is a relatively recent invention in our evolutionary timeline.

> . . . while Homer's conceptions would not have been metaphorical to him (when he uses a figure of speech it is usually a simile), they have to be metaphorical to us. As we think of words, it is only metaphor that can express in language the sense of an energy common to subject and object. The central expression of metaphor is the "god," the being who, as sun-god, war-god, sea-god, or whatever, identifies a form of personality with an aspect of nature.[14]

> . . . we might come closer to what is meant in the Bible by the word "God" if we understood it as a verb, and not a verb of simple asserted existence but a verb implying a process accomplishing itself. This would involve trying to think our way back to a conception of language in which words were words of power, conveying primarily the sense of forces and energies rather than analogues of physical bodies.[15]

In other words, what we call "metaphor" is a watered-down version of what it used to be.

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[12] Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, 47-48.
[13] This is my personal pathology. (See the last page of this paper.)
[14] Frye, Northrop, *The Great Code: The Bible & Literature* (Toronto: Penguin, 1983), 7.
[15] Frye, *The Great Code*, 17.

If this is true, we can only go so far in imagining what it must have been like to live and think in the metaphorical age; any such attempt on our part will be like using English to describe what it's like to think in Greek. But Nietzsche took an evocative shot at it:

> The waking life of a mythically inspired people — the ancient Greeks, for instance — more closely resembles a dream than it does the waking world of a scientifically disenchanted thinker. When every tree can suddenly speak as a nymph, when a god in the shape of a bull can drag away maidens, when even the goddess Athena herself is suddenly seen in the company of Peisastratus driving through the market place of Athens with a beautiful team of horses — and this is what the honest Athenian believed — then, as in a dream, anything is possible at each moment, and all of nature swarms around man as if it were nothing but a masquerade of the gods, who were merely amusing themselves by deceiving men in all these shapes.[16, 17]

So, Northrop Frye: metaphor used to be an all-encompassing world-devouring way of being: *the* way of being. And it still *is* all-encompassing and world-devouring, even if only metaphorically, even if only within the bounds of literature and of its readers' minds.

And then we have Christopher Bollas: a psychoanalyst whose writing often reads like poetry, and whose ideas about the "object" (in the analytic sense, which includes people as well as inanimate things, and as far as I understand means things-outside-of-and-in-relation-to-a-self-which-is-experiencing-them) seem to me close kin of Frye's ideas of

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[16] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (Oregon State University). http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Nietzsche/Truth_and_Lie_in_an_Extra-Moral_Sense.htm

[17] Whether this sounds to you like heaven or hell probably says more about you than it does about Nietzsche. Frye's notion of a world swallowed by metaphor can likely function as a Rorschach test of sorts; as for what diagnosis the test would give me, I refer to my aforementioned predilection for apocalypse.

metaphor — close enough that I am drawn to read Frye through the lens of Bollas (emphasis mine):

". . . without giving it much thought at all," writes Bollas, "**we consecrate the world with our own subjectivity**, investing people, places, things, and events with a kind of idiomatic significance. As we inhabit this world of ours, **we amble about in a field of pregnant objects** that contribute to the dense psychic textures that constitute self experience."[18]

And: "As we constantly endow objects with psychic meaning, **we therefore walk amidst our own significance**."[19]

The place where Bollas and Frye overlap is my field of interest in making this film. How do human beings, compulsive metaphoricians as they are, interact with the world? Do we not perceive objects sometimes as real, sometimes as metaphors? And when we perceive them at least partially as metaphors, do we not sometimes perceive them as metaphors whose author is ourselves, and sometimes as metaphors whose author may be some higher figure? And to raise the stakes: how do we *know* when to treat an object as real, and when to treat it as a metaphor?

For the purposes of *The Argument*, there are three levels on which we can encounter metaphor, and in order of most to least abstract, they are: (1) in language, (2) in the moving image, and (3) in reality. *The Argument*'s first half, the essay-film, begins with #1 and traces a jagged path of inquiry towards #2. The film's second half suddenly (and to the viewer's surprise, I hope) switches to #3. My point of departure, in retrospect, seems to have been the question: can I make a film whose first half is an essay inspired by Frye, and whose second half is an experience as described by Bollas?

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[18] Bollas, Christopher, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (East Sussex: Routledge, 1992), 3.
[19] Bollas, *Being a Character*, 12.

2. SCRIPT.

a. The As-Produced Script (annotated) for the film's first half

[music: George Butterworth, "A Shropshire Lad"]

FADE UP ON:
THE BIG LEBOWSKI

THE DUDE placates LEBOWSKI in the back of a limousine.

DUDE: **Nothing is fucked here, nothing is fucked.**

LEBOWSKI: **Nothing is fucked?! The goddamn plane has crashed into the mountain!**

FREEZE FRAME.

The LECTURER, a woman in her early 70s, narrates.

LECTURER (VO) : What plane? What mountain? You will respond to these questions with the answer: obviously there is no plane, obviously there is no mountain.[20]

[20] I take this dialogue scene as a sort of instance of *ur*-metaphor, which may be an odd thing to do. But the scene has personal resonance for me in that when I first saw it, it felt funny not just in a jokey way but in a way that was breaking my brain. In any case, for the purposes of motif-construction, I tried to fit the following Zen aphorism into the film:
"When I began to study Zen, mountains were mountains;
when I thought I understood Zen, mountains were not mountains;
but when I came to full knowledge of Zen, mountains were again mountains."

And obviously you are right. But I respond to your question with another question: How is it that you are *okay* with this?

TITLE: The Argument (with annotations)

LECTURER (VO) : And, a related question:[21] Why is it that mirrors reverse *Left* and *Right* but not *Up* and *Down*?

MIRROR SHOTS: REDRUM in *The Shining*. Jeremy Irons shaves in *Dead Ringers*. A scene from *The Third Man*, mirror-imaged. The classic Marx Brothers mirror scene. Trepidatious mirror-touching: *Prince of Darkness*.

LECTURER (VO): It seems like it shouldn't even be a question. You *know* that words go backwards in a mirror, but not upside-down. And you *know* that when you raise your right hand, your reflection raises its left -- the opposite -- and yet if you point that finger up, your reflection points its finger up also. It does not go topsy-turvy, head over heels. You may scoff at this question, as some do. Or, like some others, you may feel that the answer to this

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The Zen aphorism is referenced on pg. 38 of Paul Schrader's book *Transcendental Style: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*, which book I myself reference elsewhere in *The Argument* (see pg. 17, footnote 35). I wanted to include not just the aphorism but also the studio-logo-image of Mount Fuji which begins many Ozu films, but, like many of my attempts at motif, the motif of "mountain" didn't fit.

[21] This question is, of course, *not* related, at least not in any way that our narrator makes clear. This is the first indication that she is not "all there".

question is there, but you can't quite put your finger on it.[22]

[music: "A Shropshire Lad" again.] **Close-up of a finger touching a human brain. Shots of fingers (stock footage) pointing at the moon.[23]**

LECTURER (VO): But back to the plane. And the mountain. Neither of which exists. And you know that they don't exist. But somehow that is understood and *acceptable*.

***Moneyball.* Jonah Hill has just shown an offscreen Brad Pitt some meaningful baseball footage.**

JONAH HILL: It's a metaphor.

BRAD PITT: I know it's a metaphor.

LECTURER (VO): We know it's a metaphor, but calling it a metaphor is merely giving the phenomenon a name without recognizing its significance. *We do this kind of thing all the time*. We talk about things that are not there in order to refer to things that are. When

[22] Okay, well, this is where the mirror question gets *sort of* related to the plane-mountain question "How is it that you are okay with this?": both questions are, it's hoped, questions which the audience feels they *should* be able to answer, but can't, or at least not with as much readiness as they would like.

[23] "[x] is like a finger pointing to the moon" is a saying which, if not actually one of Confucius's, is, as the saying goes, as old as Confucius. It can apply to any number of things, but also happens to be a perfect (metaphorical) description of metaphor. I myself first encountered it in R.D. Laing's book *Knots*, and can perhaps be forgiven for thinking Laing had invented it. A subsequent Google search showed that the multiply-attributed phrase has, among its million deployments, passed Bruce Lee's lips in *Enter the Dragon* and engendered any number of vaguely inspirational memes; in any case, Laing's remains the most striking instance of the phrase I've yet encountered, about which more later.

someone talks about one thing that does not exist, in order to talk about another thing that does, we know what they are talking about.

If this does not amaze and/or confound you, it may just be that you are not thinking about it properly.

The Hudsucker Proxy: **A man falls fast and far down the side of a skyscraper.**

LECTURER (VO): You can say that objects fall down because of "gravity", but just saying the word "gravity" does not invoke any understanding of the phenomenon.[24,25] As far as you are concerned, gravity may as well be magic.

TEXT, TYPEWRITTEN ON PAPER:
"This man Meriones pursued and overtaking him
Struck in the right buttock, and the spearhead drove straight
On and passing under the bone went into the bladder.
He dropped, screaming, to his knees,
and death was a mist about him."[26]

[24] I am well aware that here I am using "gravity" as a metaphor for "metaphor" (or more accurately, "how we think about gravity" for "how we think about metaphor"); I wanted to somehow acknowledge, in the film, the tail-eating perversity of my own rhetoric, but couldn't see how to do it without just confusing the issue.
[25] Also, this phrase is taken from something I read years ago, I've forgotten where, a piece of writing which was saying about motor skills what I'm trying to say here about metaphor. It was something along the lines of "even in the case of someone who supposedly can't do mathematics, the vast series of physics-computations that a human brain does in microseconds so that its owner can *catch a flying ball* is boggling. Saying 'it's just instinct' doesn't make it any less awe-inspiring; it merely gives the phenomenon a name."
[26] Lattimore, *Iliad*, 130.

LECTURER (VO): Phereklos son of Harmonides is actually killed by Meriones. Phereklos son of Harmonides does actually drop screaming to his knees.
But is death actually a mist about him?

The onscreen text is modified by handwriting in accordance with the next bit of VO.

LECTURER (VO): It could be that an eruption of blood was actually a mist about him. Or it could be that, in his final moments, his eyesight failed. Or it could simply be that he died. But death was not *actually* a mist about him because — at the risk of overstating the obvious — death is not, nor can it be, a mist.

The Fog: **a fog slowly envelops the New England shore.**

Superimposed, TYPEWRITTEN TEXT scrolls up:

"The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
the yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

and seeing that it was a soft October night,
curled once about the house, and fell asleep."[27]

Text is again modified by handwriting in accordance with the following VO.

LECTURER (VO): Curled once about the house.
Today we would be more likely to say "curled once around the house". But we understand that they mean the same thing.

What is the story about?
What are you thinking about?
What are we talking about?

To talk *about* something, then, is not to get inside of it, but is to remain on the outside, around its perimeters -- you talk *about* the thing the same way fog curls *about* a house.[28]

Perhaps the hope is that, if you can talk closely enough *about* the thing, your talking will describe its shape. Like taking a mould.

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[27] This is T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". I refrain from attributing it, and other quotations, in the film, since attribution seems in the case of *The Argument* an all-or-nothing game; if I attribute some quotes/images but not others, the viewer will wonder why. And *The Argument* has enough appropriated images that to credit each of them would overwhelm the film in a barrage of citation.

[28] There are a few counter-interpretations: one comes up onscreen as an annotation in the second half of *The Argument,* to the effect that "talking *around*" something, these days, means "avoiding the point". Also, *The Argument* doesn't explicitly relate this "about/around" question to the *Iliad*'s "death was a mist about him" line, but I find in my notes the phrase "maybe everyone's death is actually *about* them, the way biographies are about them", about which maybe the less thought the better.

***Forbidden Planet*: footsteps appear in alien soil, the imprints of invisible feet.**[29]

LECTURER (VO): What are we talking about? We are talking about metaphor.

***Forbidden Planet:* two chatting space-soldiers are interrupted by a hideous offscreen SCREAM.**

TEXT, as before:
"He dropped screaming, to his knees,
and death was a mist about him."

LECTURER (VO): "Death was a mist about him." As written language, this is a metaphor. But suppose we were to show the mist?

300. Dead-Alive. War of the Worlds.
Sprays of blood (Spartan, zombie, Tom Cruise) mist the air.

LECTURER (VO): What happens then? Is it still a metaphor? How do we know when a moving image is metaphorical?[30]

***The Man With Two Brains*: Kathleen Turner interrogates an offscreen Steve Martin.**

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[29] I had intended to have here a montage of *moulds* — things inside other things having the same shape — which would have included a shot of the Jell-O dessert which the Lecturer fumbles in *The Argument*'s second half. But that idea fell by the wayside. Now the Jell-O scene is a callback without anything to call back to, and how effective a metaphor the *Forbidden Planet* footprint-shot is for the idea of shapes whose contours index other objects is not for me to say.

[30] A key question of the lecture — in my mind, at least. I initially followed the question with a voiceless, textless montage of near-random images from various films, in order to cause the viewer to ask herself "Is this image real or metaphorical? How about *this* one? Or *this* one?", but it turned out that the context did not hold.

K. TURNER: **Michael, were you out on the lake today kissing your brain?**

FREEZE FRAME.

LECTURER (VO): Chracametaphor.[31] In linguistic terms, a metaphor with a broken spine. If a metaphor is a finger pointing at the moon, a chracametaphor is a finger pointing at the moon during a lunar eclipse. So, what might a visual chracametaphor look like?

The Prisoner **end credits: a bicycle appears piece by piece.**

LECTURER (VO): It's clear this penny-farthing stands for something, points at something. How could it not? It was assembled for us obsessively every Sunday, for 17 weeks in 1967 and '68. And it is not to be overlooked that Patrick McGoohan, the series creator, was diagnosed several years later with what was then called schizophrenia.[32] So, one thing we do know is that, when we grapple with this

[31] True story: I discovered the term "chracametaphor" on Wikipedia while writing this script — much to my pleasure, as I hadn't known there was a word that described so exactly what the Lecturer is talking about here. Well, turns out there isn't. During the rewrite process, when going back to check things, I discovered that that Wikipedia entry does not exist, "chracametaphor" is not an actual word, and I have no idea if I was hallucinating or what.

[32] Another true story: long before I ever actually saw *The Prisoner*, I read, in an appraisal of the show published at filmfreakcentral.net, that McGoohan was schizophrenic. When I finally did see the series, in early 2015, I watched it all thinking what a fascinating window it was into the mind of a schizophrenic. Then I pulled up that old article, and, surprise, no mention of McGoohan having a mental illness — not there, not anywhere else on the internet. Number One only knows where I got that false memory from. This story became part of the Lecturer's story in *The Argument*, and is conveyed in a series of onscreen annotations in the film's second half. (For more on this and the "chracametaphor" confusion, see Chapter 4.a., "Two-Part Invention".)

bicycle-assembly in a vaguely Homeric nowhere-space, when we grapple with this, our minds take on patterns that are congruent with, moulded by, the mind-patterns of a schizophrenic. Whatever this image may be about, it is also about our mind -- "about" our mind in the way a container is "about" its contents, and the way that contents and container come to have the same shape.[33]

***The Man With Two Brains*: a glowing brain in a glass jar sits on a laboratory shelf.**

CUT TO: Steve Martin in a rowboat, sitting across from a brain in a glass jar. The jar is wearing a scarf, a hat, and wax lips. He bends down and kisses them.

LECTURER (VO): Had I shown you that image earlier, you would have known that her question was not a metaphor, or a chracametaphor, but a literal question about literal fact.

Text, and still images from *The Man With Two Brains*, delineate the following sentence's logic:

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[33] Though I did not manage to make my moulds-montage idea work (see footnote 29), I'm pleased that I was able to retain the concept, preserve this line of VO (though I did delete the immediately preceding line, "Our minds fit with his mind like gelatin fits in a mould"), and follow it with the shot of a brain in a jar. The shot (a) is an image of an object in a container of similar shape, (b) connects back to the earlier shot of a brain, the "can't quite put your finger on it" shot from the intro, and (c) leads back into our *Man With Two Brains* section.
This *brain* motif is an example of what I consider a successful motif-construction, compared to the *mountain* motif which I had to abandon (see footnote 20 on pages 8-9). About the *moon* motif I've not said much, but I invite the reader to recall Joel & Ethan Coen's reply when asked to explain the significance of the recurring hat in their film *Miller's Crossing*: "The hat is very significant." As to why I care about any of this, see Chapter 4.a., "Two-Part Invention".

LECTURER (VO): From this we can draw the conclusion that metaphorical status can be determined by the order in which things are presented to us.

Light plays over a patterned carpet.

LECTURER (VO): Here is an image of a carpet.[34] And, on that carpet, moving shadows. Traces of the sun and of whatever objects are getting between sun and carpet. And what is this image? It is nothing if not literal. But I cannot help but take it as something else too. Is this image a metaphor? I think so. For what I do not know. It is not surprising that I cannot name the thing. There is no static-free communication with the holy.[35]

CUT TO: The LECTURER, standing at a podium in a lecture theatre. She is a white woman in her seventies, dressed sharply. The carpet-image is projected behind her.

[34] This image is from Terence Davies's film *The Long Day Closes*. I have the Lecturer rhapsodize about it (brief as it is, this bit is the most rhapsodic she gets) because my first experience of this scene, at Film Forum NYC in 2013, was ecstatic. I was aware, even at the time, that my ecstasy was thanks in no small part to Davies's use of George Butterworth's gorgeous orchestral tone poem "A Shropshire Lad" in the scene. Worried that the music would take the wind out of my argument's sails (by prompting the audience to say "well, sure this image feels transportive, it's got lush music slathered all over it"), I stripped the music out and made the carpet-image silent. The Lecturer later listens to "A Shropshire Lad" on vinyl back at home, at the very end, while her onscreen annotations reveal that she's done the same thing I have.

[35] This sentence is lifted wholesale from page 23 of Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*.

LECTURER: But it may be that, had I experienced things in a different order, I would understand.[36]

[36] Things are getting shaky here. If she can't name what the thing points to — isn't that (according to her) just a chracametaphor? My hope is that this contortion and mental strain is a good point of transition from part 1 (VO/lecture) to part 2 (fiction film about Lecturer as a living person), in that it will key the viewer to see her as a character who is straining *for* something. For another justification, or rationalization, of this shakiness, see Chapter 4.b., "The Argument Against Taxonomy".

3. PROCESS.

a. Pre-Script Writing

My writing process usually involves the making of longhand lists, and *The Argument* was no different. My notebooks were a series of topic-compilations in which I collected ideas that came to me as a result of my reading, viewing, and writing. Going back through those notebooks in preparation for writing this paper, I found it a bit strange to see how many of these lists I'd made had largely the same contents. I felt like Shelley Duvall in *The Shining*, finding her husband's "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" pages — except that that scene was about her discovering *someone else's* mental loop; imagine if she herself was the novelist and, after having written what she thought was a novel, discovered that she'd just been doing a typing exercise. Luckily, the preparatory scribblings for a film are not the film itself, and it's not incumbent upon them to be anything other than a catalyst.

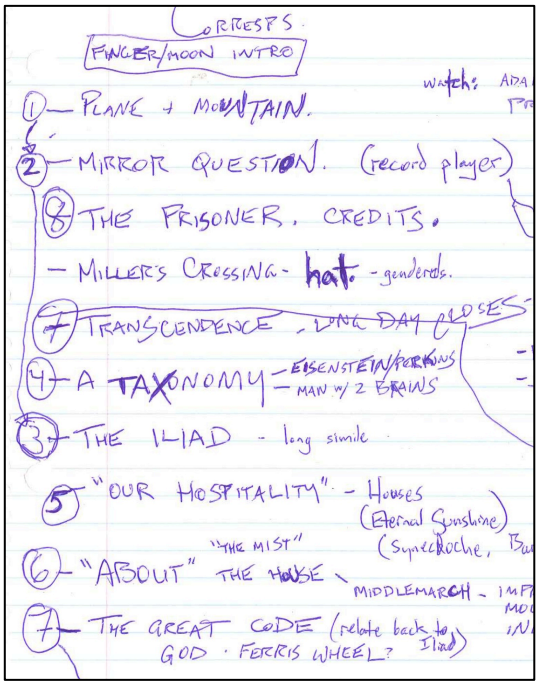

Image 1. Scans of notebooks.

I do wonder how many hours I've spent making lists and writing ideas down, thinking I'm making progress, when in fact I'm just replicating lists I've already made. But it's like organizing an office containing a year's worth of unfiled papers — first the paper mess (or my mind) has to expand to fill the room, before it can slowly coalesce.

b. Persona

As I am used to performing my own texts, whether live or on video, it would have been perfectly natural for me to be the Lecturer in *The Argument* (and indeed that seemed the only option when the piece was still going to be a live performance). The catalyst for my *not* being the Lecturer is twofold. First, as I've mentioned, I completed my Impakt residency lecture-performance, and wasn't ready to return to the form so soon. Even so, I still could have cast myself as the Lecturer in the film, but then came the second catalyst: I read the J.M. Coetzee novel *Elizabeth Costello* (recommended to me by John Greyson, my thesis supervisor). The book's protagonist is an aging novelist-academic whose public oratory grows ever more dogmatic even while she herself loses touch with who she is and what she believes.

This resonated with me. Maybe it was because, as John rightly speculated, I have a "nose-to-the-glass" relationship with scholasticism. My feature film *You Are Here* also featured a character called "the Lecturer" (a man in his sixties, played by R.D. Reid), who uttered a stream of gnomic verbiage similar to that in *The Argument*. And that character had in early drafts been called "Dr. Howard Eisenberg", which is a character I've been deploying and redeploying ever since I gave the name to a fictional psychiatrist[37] in my 4th-year undergraduate film *The Whole Machine*.

The nonexistent writings of the nonexistent Eisenberg, in particular his book *A Taxonomy of Textual Monstrosities*, provided the structural framework for my performance *All The Mistakes I've Made*; referring to a theoretical work allowed me to make sweeping statements and vague assertions which might have been more open to attack had I had to stand up for them myself. As it was, I pointed to something outside of my talk, something I could be sure nobody had read because it didn't exist, so my audience would assume that if my argument seemed muddy it was just because I was summarizing someone

[37] (who existed only aurally, on an answering machine (voiced by me))

else's ideas; everything could be clarified, all finer points delineated, if they were to read up on their Eisenberg.

So, academia as a deflection — but also as a fetish. I know that I wished I really had written the *Taxonomy*, that I had gone through the steps of organizing thought and language into categories and subcategories and sub-subcategories. I enjoy the idea of doing that in the same way I enjoy the idea of footnoting and sub-footnoting and sub-sub-footnoting, the way I continuously crawl in my mind's desert towards the mirage of total exhaustiveness. Or in the same way that I enjoy the idea of "higher knowledge" being a playground where proper accreditation earns you the right (speaking of deserts) to crack dry jokes. It doesn't get much dryer than this (Frye): "I understand very well what Samuel Johnson meant by saying that Burton's was the only book that got him out of bed earlier than he wanted to. If I cannot match that, I have at least been more liberal with charts and diagrams than usual."[38]

It's not just lecturers that I fetishize. The Lecturer in *You Are Here* wasn't even the film's protagonist; that pride of place belonged to another character, the Archivist (Tracy Wright). Not much of a stretch, sure, as far as proxies go: I'm clearly aligning myself with those who give over their lives to the pursuit of knowledge and categorization. But it's worth pointing out that none of my proxies are what we would call professionals — at least, not orthodox ones. The *You Are Here* Lecturer gives thematically diffuse talks that are more personal-development-guru than anything resembling academia or pedagogy; the Archivist, self-styled as such and "working from home" in no one's employ, is basically just a hoarder; and the fact of the Lecturer's lecture in *The Argument* is that if you think about it too long you have to be skeptical: is this really a university professor? What the heck course could she possibly be teaching? (More on this in Chapter 4.b., "The Argument Against Taxonomy".)

[38] Frye, *The Great Code*, xxi. I also like "Some . . . may well feel that to attempt a fresh and firsthand look at the Bible is mere foolhardiness, and of course they may be right, but the years have brought me an elastic conscience and a tenure appointment" (pg. xxiii).

As I think back on my conception of these characters, I remember going through my years-old script notes for *You Are Here*, some time well after the film was finished, and finding the scribbled revelation: "Maybe the Archivist is A WOMAN?!?!?!" I had forgotten that I ever had conceived the Archivist as *not* being female, and I still can't actually summon up the memory of writing a male Archivist, but I certainly believe that I initially did so. It seems a natural outgrowth of my identification with these characters that I would just assume them to be "like me".

Which is why I apparently was so excited, at the time, to consider the possibility of making the Archivist in a basic way *not* "like me", to cleave the character from myself along gender lines, and see if that might allow her to diverge from me in other ways as a result. So, I think, *Elizabeth Costello* and Elizabeth Costello served as a reminder of this. The concerns of *The Argument*'s lecture are not, I don't think, explicitly gendered or keyed to a certain stage of life.[39] But I understand that, were I to put myself onscreen as the Lecturer, my white 40-year-old maleness would gather the subject matter around itself; by giving my personal concerns to a character of a different demographic, I hope to allow associations and identifications that I would not have been able to consciously engender or predict (see also Chapter 3.f., "Clare Coulter").

It's true that the professorial female narrator is a familiar enough trope in essay-film, and if *The Argument* only consisted of its own first half, then it would be fair to say that it was only continuing the trope. Being a trope, this genre of narrator has become invisiblized, made into a default setting which is presumed to be a transparent window onto the text's meaning. The professorial female voice narrating, say, Harun Farocki's *Images of the World and the Inscriptions of War*[40] is not actually meant to be thought of as female, not as gendered or human at all, but as Farocki's thought made sonically manifest. And not a professor, either. Professorial, yes — the narration depends to some

[39] (although they are most likely to be found in members of the economic classes that can afford to spend time thinking and writing about metaphor)

[40] (or, say, Eric Henry's *Wood Technology in the Design of Structures, or: how to live happily ever after*, one of my favourite films, which I showed to Clare Coulter as a primer on what I wanted her VO to sound like)

extent on the trope's sense of authority — but not a professor, because it's not a person. So my intent with the second half of *The Argument* is to de-invisiblize the trope by de-invisiblizing the person: taking the supposed generic and rendering it, rendering her, specific.

c. Musical Numbers

In my first draft of the script's second half (the original footage that we needed to shoot), I put in a scene wherein the Lecturer, after an argument with her husband at a fancy restaurant, gets lost on the way to the bathroom and stumbles upon a punk gig. As I was writing it, I was certain it was just a placeholder: something to put down on paper in order to, you know, *have a script* which could then be discussed and revised — but never something to actually consider shooting. It was too… ludicrous? Maybe. Too much of a non sequitur? Definitely. Why would I put it in? No reason. Therefore it should come out.

But then, whilst working on a revision, I went to see the Miguel Gomes film *Tabu* at the Close-Up microcinema in London, and changed my mind. Gomes's film is divided (roughly speaking) into two halves, the first of which is full of synchronous sound & dialogue, the second of which is essentially a silent film. But, surprisingly, it wasn't this bipartite structure which most struck me.[41] It was the fact that the second half occasionally erupted into onscreen surf-pop music performance. The narrative, to be sure, offered rationale for this — one of the characters was in a band — but there was nevertheless a freewheelingness in Gomes's approach to form that tantalized me.

I came home from that screening thinking "I can't think of a good reason to keep this punk-basement scene in *The Argument*, and maybe that's a reason to keep it." Though *Tabu*'s musical scenes were totally diegetic, and diegetically justified,[42] something about them had felt less like reason and more like magic — or let's call it lateral thinking. I know myself well enough to know that I like making films in which every little piece has a reason for being there; to wilfully contradict this approach seemed like a productive

[41] In fact, bizarrely, it's not until I typed that sentence out that I even noticed that *The Argument* and *Tabu* are both divided in half along narrative and stylistic lines.
[42] It's also bizarre how I managed to forget just how logically *Tabu*'s narrative does justify these music scenes — not even *musical numbers* in the "movie musical" sense, but just scenes of some of the characters playing in their band — but I suppose I was quite set on convincing myself to keep my own musical scene.

idea, even if I couldn't say productive of what (because the whole point was that I couldn't).[43]

[43] In the film's first feedback screening, when I mentioned to my friends and colleagues that I had no real reason for the music-venue scene, one of them dismissed my vestigial worry with: "It's cinema".

d. Quitting the Game: Laing & Paranoia

In my original script, the elements of the lecture were in a different order. Notably, the lecture did not finish with the *Long Day Closes* carpet; it finished with the *Prisoner* credits and then a quick coda in which, rather than talking about transcendence, the Lecturer described life as a game according to someone else's rules. Her words here were taken from the first page of R.D. Laing's *Knots*:

> **They are playing a game. They are playing at not**
>
> **playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I**
>
> **shall break the rules and they will punish me.**
>
> **I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game.**

This, like several other sections and ideas, fell by the wayside; I thought it too much of a hard turn into paranoia. These words are one thing to read on the page, another to hear someone say out loud. This would have been compounded by the fact that this moment would also be the moment when the audience first sees that the Lecturer is in fact a real person.

It would have been doubly compounded by how I was planning to shoot and edit it: cutting from the Lecturer at her podium to her continuing the lecture in front of a bathroom mirror. I had a pair of shots planned — symmetrical shots of her hands on either side of (a) the podium and (b) the sink.[44] I kept the shots in our shooting plan even though I had long since jettisoned the *Knots* quote; I thought they would still be a good visual echo of each other. And so they may have been. But the image of her hands on the

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[44] This whole bit was consciously inspired by a lyric from a They Might Be Giants song, "Till My Head Falls Off":

> Clearing my head and gripping the lectern
> I smile and face my audience, clearing his throat
> and smiling with his hands on the bathroom sink.

bathroom sink turned out to look so awkward that the actor, Clare, told me while we were shooting, “you’ll never use this.” I thought she was right but pretended otherwise.

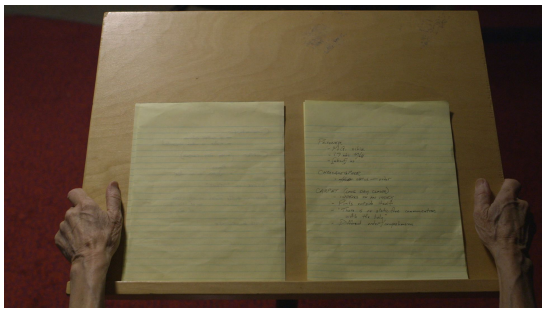

Image 2. Rushes for *The Argument.*

Image 3. Rushes for *The Argument.*

e. Mirror Shots

When compiling a list of mirror-shots to use in the "why do mirrors reverse left and right but not up and down?" sequence, I thought of a fantastic shot in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, of young robot Haley Joel Osment leaning his face against a mirrored kitchen surface, which reflects him looking back up. "Yes, I should use that shot", I thought — and suddenly realized that no, I shouldn't, because it was a clear instance of a mirror reversing up and down. The point of the conundrum I'm posing with that question is that you *think* it's a fallacy, you feel it's got to be, and yet you can't quite say how, so you doubt your own logic. But the *A.I.* shot very succinctly shows that the conundrum *is* a fallacy — the kid is right-side-up, his reflection is upside-down, and so the shot is a concrete counterexample.[45]

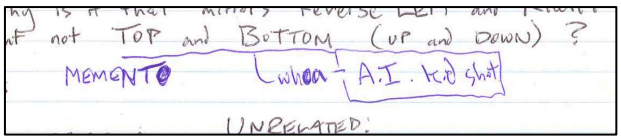

Image 4. Scan of notebook.

So I knew I couldn't use this shot; it would torpedo my whole argument. But I am grateful that it occurred to me, because it led to the idea of constructing such a mirror-shot of the Lecturer herself in the second half of the film.[46]

Image 5. Frame-grab, *The Argument.*

[45] Basically, if you were wondering, it's not a question of right-left, it's a question of axes of symmetry; a mirror flips left and right if you put it *beside* the object, but if you put it *above or below* the object, guess what? It flips up and down.

[46] Apparently I have no problem with undoing my argument so long as I do so at the end.

f. Clare Coulter

I was very fortunate to have Clare Coulter, a highly respected veteran of Canadian stage and screen, to play the Lecturer. She was recommended by John Greyson, who made the connection in part because of Clare's reputation for working with linguistically challenging material such as Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker*.[47]

Clare committed herself to the process, and her generosity had benefits beyond the scope of her performance. For instance, her keenness to find an actor right for the part of the Lecturer's husband made her very proactive in the search; she gave several suggestions (with detailed rationale), one of whom was the man we eventually cast, Robin Benger. Robin was perfect — not an actor at all, but a documentary filmmaker and old friend of Clare's; she thought that the two of them would have good chemistry on screen, and it was true. Their ability to simply hang out and feed each other energy (while shooting, and also during the extended waits between shots) was vital to the believability of the onscreen couple and to the wellbeing of the shoot.

Perhaps most vital, however, was Clare's approach to the voiceover. At her behest, the two of us met several times leading up to the shoot, not just to rehearse the VO but to discuss it in depth. The problem seemed to be that she just didn't understand it — or, rather, didn't feel that she understood it in the way that I did. And for a long time, this did seem to be the case; there was something about the scratch VO that I myself had recorded, she said, that just *worked* in a way that her renditions didn't. This, according to her, was because I just intuitively knew what I meant, whereas for her it was a struggle to claw her way towards comprehension. And, truth be told, I thought she was right.

But so we met and discussed it and she picked it apart. She peppered me with questions about certain passages and their logic, and it was difficult for me to defend or explain them, in part because I knew that some of the passages didn't *have* logic, as much as they

[47] (I confess, though, to a lack of familiarity with Clare's and Churchill's bodies of work.)

pretended to. I wasn't quite clear (and still am not) as to how much I actually believed the text and held its reasoning to have sense.[48] Indeed, the passage she attacked most vehemently (and which, I knew in my heart of brains, was full of self-contradictions)[49] ultimately ended up on the cutting room floor.

We did finally achieve a VO that I was happy with, and it would be hard for me to isolate a single reason for this, but I think it was due largely to this detailed ongoing discussion that Clare and I had about the text, spanning weeks before we shot anything and weeks more before we recorded the VO. But I believe it was also thanks to her idea of putting my scratch VO on her cassette recorder, so she could play it line-by-line and try to imitate its cadences.

She had done this, she told me, for her long-running role in the British television series *The Worst Witch*: she would send the scripts to a British friend, who would read all Clare's lines to a tape machine and send her the tape. Then Clare would memorize the lines *exactly* as performed on the tape, ossifying them so that there was no chance of modification to the rhythm or inflection. It worked, she assured me, but I was quite leery of the idea; it initially had her sounding, to my ears, like a John Wayne robot (I guess that's what you get when you mix my vocal DNA with that of an older woman). It did seem, however, to lead her to a comfort with the material.

When the day finally came to record the VO, Clare took the cassette recorder out and read the text in a line-by-line mimicking of my reading… and it was close, I suppose, but I wouldn't have called it ideal. We took a break, came back a half hour later, and she did a straight read-through without the cassette recorder, without stopping — and it was the

[48] I am not still not sure whether this base-level uncertainty of mine with regards to my material is a *problem* or not; it could be (I rationalize) that this grey zone is simply part of the package, a correlative of my work's grey zone between autobiography and fictional persona.

[49] A sequence which goes from Buster Keaton's blown-up house in *Our Hospitality* to a discussion of the burning house in *Synecdoche, New York* and the question of whether objects "mean" something simply because they're on fire.

most natural and *hers* that it had ever sounded. Something must have happened in all that process of hers that enabled her to internalize it.[50]

[50] But Clare's own assessment of the result is another thing. After I sent her this chapter, she replied to me via email: "What I would say about your very good description of what our process was is that in the final adding up I did come to the conclusion that this method for me had (contrary to what I had always held to) not been the good thing I had assumed it to be. That it dampened the creative potential to create a voice with true dynamic. The act of copying (the way I did it) in the end represents a pale truth of the original, and robs me of presenting the truth of the actor. We talked about this. I am only repeating. And other people would say they don't hear it (the paleness) but I hear it, I feel it! . . . I do think your piece was a crucial turning point for me. The next time I do something with original audio as reference I will start with my own voice and work to get something as dynamic as the original, even at the cost of the so-called truth of the original."

g. Onscreen Text

The film contains a lot of onscreen text, the approach to which was not set out from the beginning, but rather discovered in the process. I knew that the Lecturer's notes (the annotations in the second half) needed to be handwritten, and from quite early on I thought to have them written in pen on a yellow legal pad. This did provide quite a striking visual.

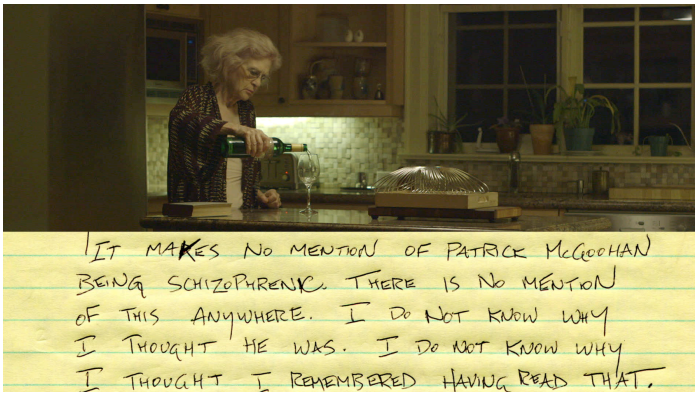

Image 6. Frame-grab, early version of *The Argument.*

However, I was less sure about how to treat the text in the first half (the lecture). In early cuts, it had all been digital onscreen text, quite rudimentarily rendered. But this was dissatisfactory from a design standpoint — not just in terms of lacking "slickness", but in terms of the film lacking a visual identity. So I thought it would be a strong statement if the first half's onscreen texts were also handwritten on yellow legal pad.

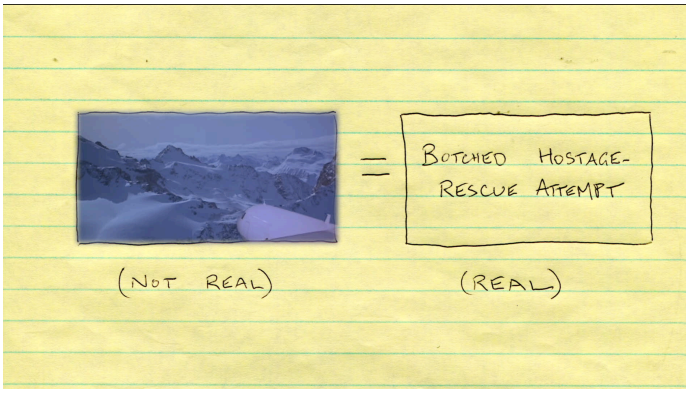

Image 7. Frame-grab, early version of *The Argument.*

This did indeed provide a visual throughline, connecting the first and second halves to each other. However, I ultimately abandoned this approach, for two reasons. Firstly, I was never able to find a way to use the yellow-pad handwriting for *all* instances of onscreen text in the first half. As a result, the film's coherence-of-textual-identity was illusory; it actually was more fractured this way than it had been before (now the instances of non-handwritten text were like peas under the princess's bed).

But secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it raised too many questions as to the authorship of the images and text in the film. *The Argument* is already playing it a bit fast and loose in this respect: is the whole first half the Lecturer's lecture, verbatim, unedited? Or is it just excerpts of her talk? And is the visual component of the first half *what she is showing on screen to her audience*? Or is it simply *what the film is presenting to us in the real world* while we listen in on her lecture? These questions, of course, do not arise in the first half, because we don't yet know that this *is* a lecture, that she is a real character. And certainly there are basic questions of narratology that, though they could unravel any film, would only be asked by an alien or a pedant.[51] We look aside — unless the film blunders and throws the questions into our faces. So, when in the second half of *The Argument* the yellow legal pads appear, well, if the first half has also already been full of yellow legal pads, the film's fast-and-loose playing is highlighted, and those questions become unavoidable in retrospect.[52]

I certainly don't think that Matías Piñeiro's film *Hermia & Helena*, which I saw in 2016 at the London Film Festival, can lay sole claim to the technique of superimposing handwritten notations over images, and I'm not even sure whether or not it was the direct

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[51] (Nobody watches *The Age of Innocence* and says "hey, how come nobody's noticing the camera? And they didn't even have film cameras back then. What's going on here?". Conversely, nobody watches *The Blair Witch Project* without being aware that everything they're seeing is delivered by cameras wielded by characters smack dab in the middle of the diegesis. But if *The Age of Innocence* contained a first-person-digital-camera sequence, or if *Blair Witch* had a classical-continuity period-piece component, then… Never mind what I was going to say; now that I've typed it out, I see that the only conclusion is to say that both movies would be masterpieces.)

[52] i.e., they muddy the argument.

inspiration for me to do so, but the timing seems to scan, so I'm happy to give Piñeiro the credit.

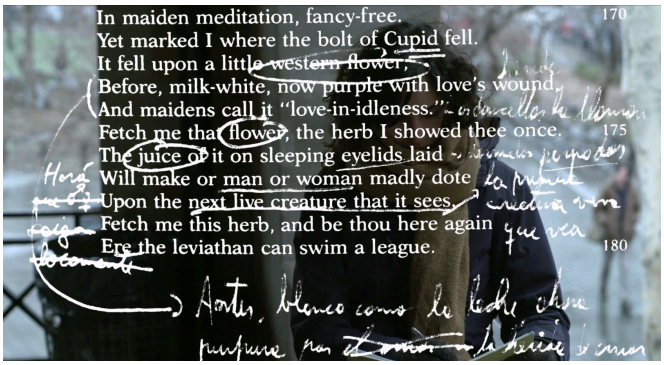

Image 8. Frame-grab, *Hermia & Helena,* dir. Matías Piñeiro. Reproduced with kind permission of the director.

Now, I have excerpts from the Lecturer's lecture appear onscreen, with relatively terse handwritten notes "scribbled in the margins", as it were, in order to allude to the concepts I want to get across as succinctly as I can.

Image 9. Frame-grab, *The Argument.*

This also solves another problem I was struggling with, which was pointed out to me at a feedback screening – namely, the fact that my original annotations were unrealistically prosaic. It is hard to buy "notes-to-self" marginalia that are written in full and, let's face it, inefficient sentences, as in Fig. 4 on page 33: "I do not know why I thought he was. I do not know why I thought I remembered having read that." While this tortuous-path prose is sincerely my essay-writing style, no one would write to themselves in such a

repetitive and laborious fashion;[53] the idea of notes to self is that you want to get them down in time to preserve the thought. I needed to find a way to render them as believable notes-to-self which were also notes-on-that-self's-lecture.

So I knew I had to strike a balance in the marginalia, between a minimum of exposition on the one hand (because she is talking to herself, and one doesn't need to overexplain when one is talking to oneself) and sufficient exposition on the other hand (because her onscreen notes are for the audience's benefit, and the reason I'm putting them there is so the audience can see them and understand them).

This is of course the classic problem of exposition — communicate information to the audience without it being apparent that that's what you're doing — but in an interestingly uncommon form. Exposition is most often considered a problem of dialogue; dialogue is (a) spoken out loud and (b) between or amongst two or more people. But in this case, I'm dealing with these issues in (a) non-verbal form and (b) with only one character. I hope that this solution of combining the printed text of the lecture with her handwritten jottings does indeed strike the necessary balance and, in expositing without seeming expository, function as (among other things) an analogue of "good dialogue".

[53] Well, okay, I do. But just because something is based on truth doesn't mean it's believable.

h. The Title

I like a good double entendre, in a title as much as anywhere else. This project's title was *Correspondences* from the start, when it was still going to be a lecture-performance. It seemed to me a word that could be interpreted in productively various ways. Of course there is the idea of correspondence in terms of one thing corresponding to another: a metaphor could easily said to be, or at least to involve or to invoke, a "correspondence" between two things.[54] I was also drawn to the word because of its meaning in the sense of "communication", specifically a written communication between two people. I was thinking of the epistolary novel (and its equivalent in cinema), the idea of structuring a film or a lecture around a series of letters/emails/texts between two people. But this idea found its way first into *All The Mistakes I've Made, part 2* (the lecture-performance I made during the Impakt residency), in the form of a faked correspondence between me and Paul Schrader, and I wasn't interested in re-exploring the epistolary form right away in my thesis project. The more I worked on *Correspondences,* the more the title didn't fit.

The title did stick quite a while, though: long enough to make it onto the slate during production in summer 2016. But by that point I knew it was just a placeholder (and in fact I had already disseminated drafts of the script bearing the catchy title *Some Thoughts on Metaphor in Static Text and Moving Pictures: A Lecture (with footnotes)*).

At a symposium called "Architecture/Essay/Film", which I attended in spring of 2016 at University College of London, presenter Laura Rascaroli uttered the seemingly innocuous phrase "Essay-film makes an argument." My ears immediately pricked up; the word "argument" had already been primed for me, as I'd been reading *Paradise Lost,*

[54] Writing this now, I realize that the question of which word to use there – "a metaphor could easily be said to [be/involve/invoke] a correspondence between two things" could have been spun into a key question in the film. Really, the question "what word should be put between those square brackets?" is tantamount to asking the question "WTF *is* a metaphor anyway?!". It's a question which I may not have explored with a great deal of rigour in *The Argument*, but which it's safe to say was one of the most abiding undercurrents in my making of the film.

every chapter of which begins with “The Argument”, i.e., the synopsis of what is about to occur in that chapter.

Reading Milton, I’d found that use of the word enjoyably musty and archaic,[55] and when Rascaroli employed it in relation to essay-film, I thought that it was a perfect fit. Not only is the Lecturer in *The Argument* presenting an argument, but she’s having one with herself — there are contradictions and illogics in what she’s saying, and, as shown by her annotations, her memories are not all correct, her thoughts are not all on the same page. Add to this that the main event of her onscreen evening is a prickly conversation with her husband. *The Argument* it was.

[55] (I suppose it satisfied my academia-fetish)

4. IN RETROSPECT.

a. Two-Part Invention

I mentioned, in two footnotes on page 15, two true stories of two fabrications made by my brain without my knowledge: the term "chracametaphor" and the schizophrenia of Patrick McGoohan. Why would I have made these up?

I still harbour the suspicion that "chracametaphor" is a corruption of an actual word that does actually mean "a failed metaphor, a metaphor that does not clarify what it represents". But a cursory search did not yield any such word and, if I'm honest, I didn't want to do more than a cursory search; likely I was afraid that I would find the actual word, it would be "karuchametaphor" or some such, and a tantalizing mystery would be blandly solved.

But then there's the McGoohan problem. Another look at Walter Chaw's filmfreakcentral.net article, in which I'd thought I'd read that McGoohan was schizophrenic, yields clues:

- Episode 5 is entitled "The Schizoid Man"
- "[writer Vincent] Tilsley mentions that McGoohan was a scary guy"
- "A gentleman to the last, [director Peter Graham] Scott calls McGoohan 'demanding' instead of a terror and probably insane, which is nice"
- "a few talking heads speculate that McGoohan was having a nervous breakdown throughout the series".[56]

Not too surprising, actually, that my mind would have mashed these tidbits together and come out with that mistaken memory (and though I'm not too proud that on some level I

[56] Chaw, Walter, *The Prisoner: The Complete Series (1967-1968) - Blu-ray Disc*. http://www.filmfreakcentral.net/ffc/2012/06/the-prisoner-the-complete-series-1967-1968.html

may have conflated scariness with mental illness, I do acknowledge that I could well have done). And not too surprising, either, that my eventual viewing of the series would seem to corroborate the "diagnosis". A paranoid's wet dream, *The Prisoner* is a network of recurring motifs, the very fact of whose obsessive recurrence dares its viewers to make sense of them. It's like a world written in code, and it was easy for me to imagine that in watching the show I was looking through a window into a schizophrenic's mind.

It turned out I wasn't. But what I was seeing was, I think, a text that tended sharply — in Northrop Frye's terms — to the centripetal. Frye describes a spectrum from "centrifugal" texts (ones which point outside of themselves) to "centripetal" texts (ones whose networks of language point inwards, within themselves).[57] Though at first his "centripetal" may seem another word for "tautological" or "solipsistic", I take it to mean something different from those terms, both of which imply a certain absence of meaning. I take it to describe a text whose linguistic terms are defined, as far as this is possible, in relation to each other *within that network only*, and whose densely overlapping series of relations create an increasingly complex intra-network system of meaning.[58]

I think it's safe to say that, in my attempt to make *The Argument* a web of motifs as densely packed as possible, with as many connections *between* motifs as possible, I was trying to create a film that was wholly centripetal.

[57] Frye, *The Great Code*, 57-58.
[58] This is what I see when I look at the penny-farthing bicycle in *The Prisoner*.

On the notion of centrifugality vs. centripetality, the question of whether a network's terms point outward or only at each other (and as per footnote 23), here are the final four pages of R.D. Laing's *Knots*:

4th last page

A finger points to the moon

Put the expression
a finger points to the moon, in brackets
(a finger points to the moon)
The statement:
'A finger points to the moon is in brackets'
is an attempt to say that all that is in the bracket
( )
is, as to that which is not in the bracket,
what a finger is to the moon

Put all possible expressions in brackets
Put all possible forms in brackets
and put the brackets in brackets

Every expression, and every form,
is to what is expressionless and formless
what a finger is to the moon
all expressions and all forms
point to the expressionless and formless

the proposition
'All forms point to the formless'
is itself a formal proposition

3rd last page

Not,

as finger to moon

so form to formless

but,

as finger is to moon

so

[all possible expressions, forms, propositions,
including this one, made or yet to be made,
together with the brackets]

are to

2nd last page

What an interesting finger

let me suck it

It's not an interesting finger

take it away

last page

The statement is pointless

The finger is speechless

b. The Argument Against Taxonomy

In my script notes I repeatedly find the word "taxonomy", as a sort of chapter-heading-placeholder. It stood for a section of *The Argument* in which I planned to get into the nitty-gritty of what metaphor is, how it operates, and what are the various forms in which it manifests. This is, again, a holdover from the project's early-days conception as a lecture-performance. It ended up being, I think, a structuring absence, in that it was the section which I kept "writing around" as opposed to looking at it head-on.

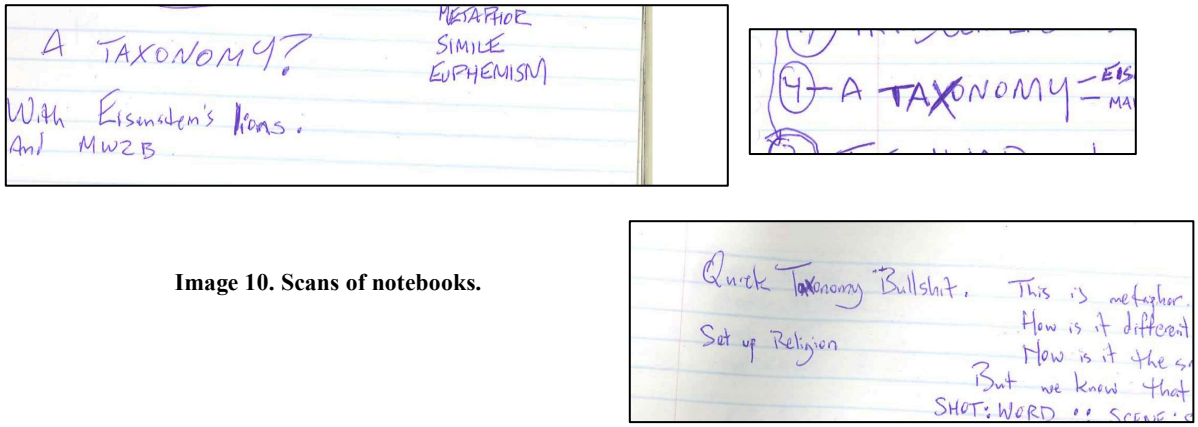

Image 10. Scans of notebooks.

Lakoff & Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* was suggested to me early on[59] and I delved into it with excitement at its mission statement that "metaphors as linguistic expression are possible precisely because there are metaphors in our conceptual systems."[60] But my initial enthusiasm turned into… something else, and I could never quite seem to make my writing encompass the "taxonomy" that would in effect say, "Okay, let's sit down and really define our terms. We've got Simile, Metaphor, 'pataphor, Figurative Language, Symbol, Euphemism, Associative Language, Synecdoche, Metonym, and that's just the beginning, but what exactly *are* all these? How do they differ and where do they overlap? And then, from there, let's start looking at how these phenomena can be compared in (a) literature and (b) cinema."

[59] (by Prof. Amnon Buchbinder)
[60] Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6.

No, I didn't do that. I instead followed a much more associative[61] line of thought in my text for the Lecturer, emboldened by examples like Geoff Dyer's *The Ongoing Moment* (suggested to me by my thesis reader, Sharon Hayashi), which talks about photography by making non-exhaustive surveys based on highly idiosyncratic criteria (e.g., photos of blind accordion players; of hands; of photographers) that are transparently specific to Dyer's interests.[62] This very non-taxonomical approach was more in line with my temperament, and I followed it. But I feared that my doing so was leading me down a path to inconsistency.

What I mean is that, in *The Argument*, my Lecturer is saying in effect that metaphor's a thing to be marvelled at, and we must reclaim our ability to find it strange instead of everyday. But an inconsistency arises if she first says how we need to look closely at metaphor, to notice how weird and complicated it is — and then glosses over every opportunity to inspect it in detail. It's like a medical professor espousing the necessity of understanding the human body and then just showing her students pictures of cadavers.[63]

So why did I avoid the taxonomy? It's possible that it presented a too-daunting task (rigour is hard work!). But it's possible too that, as much as I wanted a bright and shining beacon of clarity at the core of my film, another part of me specifically *didn't* want that. I think of Jeremy Irons as Beverly Mantle at the end of *Dead Ringers*, waking up after having killed his twin brother Elliot in a drugged stupor the night before; Beverly wanders round their apartment calling Elliot's name in a singsong "where on earth could you be?" tone, while refusing to look at the corpse he's obviously already noticed in the corner.[64]

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[61] (to put it kindly)

[62] Of course the chosen foci of a book are always, one hopes, specific to the author's interests. But in some cases, a book's basic argument can on its own justify the inclusion of all its content — its substance flows naturally from its throughline, and since that throughline is presumably the author's interest, the specifics resulting therefrom automatically also fall into that category. By contrast, in the case of Dyer's book, one gets the sense that each new step, each turn to a new topic, is somehow dependent on the author's ongoing interjections; his proclivities are part of the book's very engine.

[63] A morbid choice of metaphor on my part (and a mixed one, as I'm veering from taxonomy to autopsy), but I think I know why I picked it.

[64] That's why.

I go back to Northrop Frye, who wrote in *The Great Code*: "To answer a question is to consolidate the mental level on which the question is asked."[65] I don't imagine he'd be any too pleased to find that his sentence had been taken as a reason to avoid doing one's homework, but still, we take our excuses where we find them. It's possible that I was avoiding answering the basic questions of what metaphor is and how it operates because I was afraid that to do so would take the magic farther *out* instead of putting it back in. Looking again at Lakoff and Johnson: "metaphors as linguistic expression are possible precisely because there are metaphors in our conceptual systems" kind of explains away a lot of the wonderment that my Lecturer is trying to instil. I think I was afraid that the more I read of Lakoff and Johnson, the less I would be able to invest in any of the things I wanted the Lecturer to say; it would be, I maybe feared, like learning the secret workings of magic tricks (or the cosmos, or drama), and then trying to convince people how awe-inspiring they are. But then again, maybe if I'd considered the counterexamply likes of Penn & Teller (or Neil deGrasse Tyson, or Brecht), it could have put my fears and reticence to rest.

It is possible that I missed out on an opportunity, the chance to have that bright and shining taxonomical clarity at the core of the film and *still* convince of the magic of metaphor. To dissect the animal and then reanimate it.[66] But I justified it to myself (and still do) with the thought that whatever in me is avoiding the rigour of taxonomy — in order to avoid looking at something, and/or to avoid having a certain magic siphoned from things: in either/any case, in order to avoid having to *change my way of thinking* — whatever in me is avoiding that is also whatever in the Lecturer is avoiding that. And since this film is, in part, the transposition of my previous work's intellectual focus onto another persona, I suppose that stands as a worthy (if not the worthiest) vector.

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[65] Frye, *The Great Code*, xv.
[66] Yes, now that I've written it down like that, yes, that would have been best.

To put it another way (in the style of R.D. Laing):

The Lecturer is saying we don't question our use of metaphor enough.

But if I question what she's saying (if I question her line of questioning) then it falls apart.

I can't let that happen because then I won't have a film.

She can't let that happen because then she won't have a pathology.

(With this I can identify.)

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