

**Odyssey of the Hyperreal (anti)Hero: A Couch Potato's Epic
Pornosophy of Becoming**

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Abstract

This paper odysseys the narratives, images and information of my hyperreal environments. It chronicles my steady rise and fall from the intense, climactic, dazzling and ecstatic narratives of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Cannonball Run*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Jaws* and *The Omen* to the sudden realization in university that I am nothing but the embodiment of a post-structural non-self. Down and out without a graduate degree to my name I embark on an odyssey to cure my sense of being insignificant, invisible, of feeling like an extra. Beside me at the helm, as my hyperreal guru is Robert Altman's *The Player*.

Foreword

The role of this odyssey in my pursuit of mastery in Environmental Studies is that it expresses my own perpetual becoming in hyperreal environments. Crucial to this becoming is the performance of, and the ecstatic play with, all the versions, simulations and/or narratives of reality. This odyssey embodies this playful ecstasy. Furthermore, it fulfills a number of objectives set out in my plan of study. First, it defines/ dramatizes hyperreal environments as environments of texts, narratives, and representation. Second although my paper does not display the phenomenology of *The Player* as hyperreal, it does display its intertextual and metafictional nature as typical of the hyperreal. Third the absurdity of my odyssey exemplifies my own mastery over my hyperreal environment's seductive, anesthetizing glamour. This is arrived at through my own paradoxical flee to and flee from the hyperreal. And finally, it discerns my self-reflexive multiple realities, both banal and ecstatic: blonde graduate student, 34 year old orphan, Boo the Clown, neurotic dominatrix, defiled vegetarian, transvestite jogger, single mother of seven year old alien abduction expert, and filmgoer. This odyssey is the culmination of my own self-deconstruction therapy in a hyperreal where the self, meaning and reality itself have become obsolete.

Introduction

Once upon a time there is a girl who thinks she is the devil's son because she saw *The Omen* and detests church and loves to draw with black crayons. Living in a suburb named after a man who shot himself on a hill¹, she is surrounded by what she feels is a banal environment enlivened only by the horrors of shopping mall death, bloated Tupperware parties, monster homes with invisible owners, and community centres ruled by brownies, beavers and hockey moms. But she is also surrounded by the intense, climactic, dazzling and ecstatic narratives of Hollywood film thanks to her mother, who loves going to the movies almost as much as arthroscopic discourse. So just as she is becoming a citizen of suburban north Toronto, she is also becoming a citizen of the sophisticated romances (as well as not-so sophisticated romances) of, the Rock Hudson and Doris Day comedies, *Lover, Come Back* and *Pillow Talk*, the quasi-exotic heroic worlds of Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Blade Runner*, the heaving cleavages of Adrienne Barbeau and Farrah Fawcett in *Cannonball Run*, the supernatural's grip on white middle class New Yorkers in both *The Amityville Horror* and *Jaws* and the sinews and sweat of the bodies of action studs – Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis and their imitators.

Between her dad's heart attacks and her mother's liver transplants she goes to university where she reads some abstruse, often cocky books on post-structuralism and postmodernity. Here she learns that she is not the devil's son, nor even daughter for that matter. She is merely a fragmented, unstable and plural subject with not even a centre, let alone an essential gender to unify her. No she is just an open and incomplete non-entity – a blonde towhead produced by language, ideology, and libidinal energy and economies. Unlike the larger than life heroes and villains in the movies, defined by sweat, soundtracks, and spectacular tragedies redeemed by happy endings, the postmodern renders her invisible, insignificant, a non-self with a very incoherent, open non-narrative lacking any distinct beginning, middle or ending, let alone a happy one. Between learning to become a balloon sculpting clown and breastfeeding her newborn son, the girl now me, notices that despite the lambasting of grand narratives by postmodernists, a grand narrative of their own emerges dramatizing the loss of the Enlightenment self or subject. Hyped-up postmodern commentaries narrating the disappearing Enlightenment self by various pomo anti-heroes of academia invade my Ikea bookshelves. As I read the following passage from *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* I become aware of myself disappearing, fading into the background behind all the television, all the movies, advertisements and catalogues I so love to experience:

(The) model of the subject as a rational, unified, powerful and controlling being has come under increasing attack from the days of structuralism onwards...Claude Levi-Strauss spoke of the death of man, arguing that deep structures worked through mankind,... Roland Barthes spoke of the death of the author as a controller of textual meaning; Michel Foucault spoke of the modern conception of the subject as something that could be erased quite easily, rather as marks in the sand could be. For poststructuralists and postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity,

¹ Thornhill, Ontario.

and is to be regarded as a process in a continual state of dissolution rather than a fixed identity or self that endures unchanged over time.²

Suddenly I experience a sort of epiphany like the ones needed to tie loose ends in movie-of-the-week whodunits, or to begin a major paper. It is my continual flight to, my continual living through the larger-than-life lives of Hollywood film protagonists that postpones my own protagonist becoming, my transgression into herodotom. I live as bystander to countless narratives, realities that landscape my own unstable, *hyperreality*. It has gone hyper in every sense of the word and its prefix form. The realities that crowd my environment are excessive, fleeting, chaotic and larger than life, reeler than real. Did Captain Kirk discover such a universe? One that in the words of Jean Baudrillard is “no longer dialectical; (as) it moves toward extremes, and not towards equilibrium; (as) it is devoted to a radical antagonism, and not to reconciliation”?³ My own hyped autonomic nervous system, my perpetual fight or flight state, described in psych. parlance as a Generalized Anxiety Disorder, embodies “this ascent to extremes”.⁴ To Live the hyperreal is to live superlatively. My panic attacks in No Frills (most likely due to Loblaw's withdrawal) reflect the dizzying effect of living through the “more true than true, the more beautiful than beautiful. I flip through *Architectural Digest* to find the popcorn-shaped house ideal for me, yet one I will never afford. Shopping online for concept cars that are not for sale, I *am* driver, road-raging in my Nissan Maxima at all the other much younger Escalades, Murango's, Carreras and of course those new retro Thunderbirds with their quasi-nautical side windows. I wallow in “the passion of intensification, of escalation”, of mounting power having moved up from a 1.9 L Ford engine – V4 - to a 3.3 L Nissan – V6, from a 4 Gig Pentium, 4M of ram, to a 20 gig, 32M ram Pentium, from a Kodak Instamatic camera to an Olympus Cammedia 3.2 megapixel digital camera, from Doritos Cool Ranch to Doritos Cooler Ranch, to a basement apartment with impending ceiling-breakdown to a haunted two-bedroom above ground.

Yet as I experience the velocity of Highway 407 and the Don Valley Parkway, the accelerating fashions of frozen dinners and cosmetic surgery, the speed with which movies and novels appear then vanish from sight, I slow down into insignificance. I am downsized to an extra of an extra, detritus in a sea of momentous dramas, sucker punch comedies, and metaphysical action adventures. Reality and its representations are obsolete, having been superseded or rather preceded by the simulation of the hyperreal. The hyperreal is all for show, only skin deep, lacking depth's prestige. Baudrillard the superficial geologist contends “We are a fissile universe; a universe of erratic icebergs and horizontal drifts... For at bottom the ground never existed, only a cracked epidermis. Nor was there ever depth.”⁵ Simulation now precedes its original, surpasses it by being infinitely more believable and entertaining in the dizzying pursuit to explain everything in “25 words or less”⁶.

Myriad offerings or simulations of reality overcrowd my Ikea-infested apartment. CNN, Salvador Dali, Coca Cola, *Sears Catalogue*, *Fight Club*, *Martha Stewart Living*, *Playboy*, Nerve.com, Englebert Humperdinck, *Winnie the Pooh* (the Disney version), *Monster Garage*, *Daily Planet*, Metallica, and of course the *Milk Calendar* are merely the realities at the apex of the

² *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*. Stuart Sim, Ed. Icon Books Limited. Cambridge: 1998. 367

³ Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. “Fatal Strategies” Mark Poster, Ed. Stanford University Press. Stanford: 1988. 185

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. 195

⁶ *The Player*'s movie executive protagonist, Griffin Mill demands that all movie pitches from writers be 25 words or less.

piles, sediments of what comprise my own unkempt hyperreal environment. I postpone living through the sanctuary that is facetiously known as that of a couch potato. As a couch potato I am comfortably inert, always already distracted by the hyperstimulating versions of reality offered in narratives, images and information.

In such hyperreal environments as mine, a couch potato ontology emerges; actually it is more of an anti-ontology of perpetual un-becoming, of diversion from being a subject. This un-becoming, this not becoming a protagonist in my own story, whether it be coherent or in typical postmodern fashion, fragmented, I believe can be combated by the very diversionary tendencies that render my own couch potato non-being. Although as a couch potato I am apathetic — politically, socially, and morally — I am also inspired by the texts that surround me, that are me. They offer larger than life intensity, spectacles that fuel my own inert vegetative state of bystanding. As a couch potato, a comfortably seated vegetable, as an object, I am ideally suited for the hyper-commodified, hyper-entertaining hyperreal. Pitching a sermon on the allure of becoming object, Baudrillard contends:

the subject position is no longer a valid vantage point on the real, and that the privileged position has shifted to the object, more specially to the hyperreal, the simulated object.⁷

And that:

above all the subject has *the passion to be object*, to become object – an enigmatic desire, whose consequences we have barely evaluated in all domains, whether political, aesthetic, or sexual, lost as we are in the illusion of the subject, its will and its representation.⁸

Just as I desire to be an object of desire (of the camera) - a heaving butter soaked-breast, a '68 Ford Galaxy swathed in moonlight, a bad guy — the ultimate one, the devil's son of course who wins the audience's sympathy with puppy dog eyes and the blackest of black leather jacket — Jack, the insomniac narrator in David Fincher's film *Fight Club* wonders aloud:

What kind of dining room set *defines* me as a person?"... It used to be Playboys; now -- IKEA. The things you own, they end up owning you.⁹

It is that which keeps me inert, that which fuels my desire to be an object, to imagine being the object of spectacle, which I believe can actually ignite a couch potato. For Baudrillard it is nothing as lofty as the rational principle nor use value that can promise us salvation "but the immoral principle of the spectacle, the ironic principle of Evil."¹⁰

⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*. "Introduction" by and edited by Mark Poster. Stanford University Press. Stanford:1988. 6

⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Ecstasy of Communication*. Translated by Bernard and Caroline Schutze. Semiotext(e). New York: 1988. 93-4

⁹ *Fight Club*, David Fincher, dir. 1999.

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *Selected Writings*. 202

This couch potato evil, my own passion as object, for objects and the promises they offer, together with my passion for spectacle — to be more than spectator, to be a spectacle myself — combine in a cultural knowing, a couch potato epistemology of sorts. This epistemology, this knowing — not only through the terrifyingly hyper-esoteric texts of post-modernists filled with multi-syllabic words beginning with hyper, but also through sitcoms, tabloids, reality TV, biblical epics, tattoos and *The TV Guide* — comes from being so thoroughly intertextual and metafictional. I believe that it is the very formation of my couch potato un-becoming, its intertextuality and metafiction that can mobilize to secure myself as hero, and maybe even anti-hero. I even dare to use the bloated post-structural terms intertextuality and metafiction, as they too embody the absurd ontology and epistemology of this underemployed yet overeducated couch potato. Shopping and fucking as a hyperreal commodity, I am like the stolen Blockbuster rentals, the burnt CDs, and overdue library books stocked in my apartment. We are all metafictional and intertextual texts.¹¹

In the words of dictionary.com, I, as a metafictional text am “Fiction that deals, often playfully and self-referentially, with the writing of fiction or its conventions.” And, as an intertextual text, I relate to or derive “meaning from the interdependent ways in which texts stand in relation to each other.” The hyperreal manufactures me as inert, hopelessly distracted by endless rehashing of narratives, *Spiderman* the comic book, to *Spiderman* on Teletoon, to a live-action *Spiderman* on DVD, from a spring of metaphysical action moves, to a summer of pirate movies. My provisional escape from *Harry Potter* is contingent on there being more publications “In Easy-to-Read Type” for internet children like my son who, thankfully, is hooked on the large, bold font printing of *Frankenstein*. Yet despite this inertia, this sensation of floating as detritus on a hyperreal sea of continual new releases, my son and I, as metafictional intertextual texts, absorb other texts self-reflexively, reflecting on the latest and the newest through the texts that always already comprise us.

But how do I actually become a somebody, feel significant, an (anti)hero adrift on this Snapple-stained couch in such a glamorous hyperreal? Armed with my couch potato powers of metafiction (obnoxious self-reflexivity) and intertextuality (textual co-dependency) I turn the television on to *Scream’s Exhumed* movie. It is *Sunset Boulevard*. I click on to Count Bathoria’s website, jack up the Eminem on the stereo, pick up a Snapple and drink my way through *Penthouse*.

Cut to the present where I embark on an odyssey perched on a half-eaten toilet seat.¹² Bills for Rogers Cable, Toronto Hydro, Enbridge Gas, Bell Canada, Bell Mobility and TD car insurance, dart around by B-12 deficient tangles, lashing me with paper cuts, as I attempt to excrete out all my worry and hopelessness. They begin to threaten me, with homelessness, premature wrinkles and utter loneliness. I reach up and catch the Bell Canada bill — only \$162.56 owing — and wipe my bum with it. Yes, here I begin. On the run, always already in debt; I am a part-time clown, full-time couch potato writing to avoid fading into some trite politically correct tragic poverty narrative, down-sized for a movie of the week or worse yet a CBC segment on the poor. Rather than rise up off the toilet to join the latest Environmental Studies field trip to some

¹¹ My own intertextual absorption of the title phrase of Mark Ravenhill’s play, *Shopping and Fucking*.

¹² Half eaten toilet seat theories: sewer worms that have mutated into urban dwellers from the desert worms of *Tremors*. Moulds taken from the teeth marks indicate the demi-toilet seat eater could be one of H..R. Eiger creations that did not make the cut in the *Alien* films. My own theory is I’m just making the half toilet seat up as a sort of metonymy for my sense of self as fragmented, open, bottomless, murky and dangerous.

anti-poverty rally, to eradicate my sensation of being invisible, insignificant and disgraceful, I choose to watch a movie. My choice might give the impression that I cowardly, unheroically seek a quick escape from the harsh reality my evil unfair society constructs to legitimize my son's and my impecunious state. Well yes, of course I am. I flee the phone bills, and the phone calls from collection agencies, for the more sensational, more important, the larger more profane problems, conflicts, tragedies, and disasters of Hollywood films. Why pay money to get to an anti-poverty rally where my clown-like comportment could have me up on indecent exposure charges, when I could stay home, wrestle with my adorable alien abduction expert son and experience "Suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings"¹³ in the comfort of our little living room. I too, after living plotlines of an orphan, of the impoverished and evicted, plotlines studded with moments of perverse philosophizing and clowning around, deserve a happy ending. How can I make fate go my way and win the lottery so that I can turn my Nissan Maxima into a snowmaking monster just in time for a July pool party, the quintessential grand finale in the Greenaway tradition to the publishing of my book about hyperreal houseboys? Yes I do seem to be plotting my odyssey towards a diversion, an amusing rest stop where Robert Altman's *The Player* a satire on Hollywood film studios is currently playing.

I'm not leaving. This paper is staying here, because I feel that I can learn a lot about becoming a *somebody*, an (anti)hero, a self who is a protagonist in a story that is important, epic in fact, that espouses a kind of philosophy derived from *The Player*, that is pornographic in its exposure of not only Hollywood, but reality. This philosophy, this way of being embodied by *The Player*, is epic pornosophy.

Using my technical skills I slam my Panasonic DVD player on the coffee table (Nerds and dog hair flying everywhere), in an attempt to get it to actually play *The Player*. Just as *The Player's* stasis convinces me I am witnessing DVD player death, the academic texts on my Billy bookcase that inspired my overeducated/underemployed condition begin to sway and chant quotes interspersed by expletives.¹⁴ I have betrayed them and they know it. My flight to films, hardbodies and IKEA prompts Arthur and Marilouise Kroker's *Digital Delirium* to declare to me shrugging halfway through:

Image the world, but understand nothing.... The real can no longer keep up to the speed of the image. Reality shudders and collapses and fragments into the vortex (*shrug*) of many different alternative realities: some cybernetic, some designer, some residual ... Today things have speeded up to inertia.¹⁵

I yawn back, mumbling something incomprehensible even to myself, microwave some popcorn and recline into my odyssey to become a *somebody* via watching *The Player* analogue-style, on video. Part devil's son destined for world domination, part indolent clown, part blonde hack whose only ambition is to write novels containing paid product endorsements, part terrorist who demands the flute be wiped off the planet, I dare you to sit with me on my futon with the dubious stains as I mosey through *The Player*, in a grander than grand quest for epic pornosophy, for a be-coming in the hyperreal.

¹³ *The Player*.

¹⁴ Billy is the name of a line of bookcases at Ikea.

¹⁵ Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise, editors. *Digital Delirium*. New World Perspectives. Montreal: 1997. ix

Dramatis Personae

Couch Potato a.k.a. Karen a.k.a. Bitch Clown a.k.a. Dade's mom
Dade
Griffin Mill a.k.a. Tim Robbins
June Gudsmondottir
Larry Levy
Susan Sarandon
Judith Butler
Writer
Walter Stuckel
Jimmy Chase
Tom Oakley
Andy Civella
Buck Henry
Bonnie Sherow
Joan Tewksbury
Pat Resnick
Alan Rudolph
Assistant Director
Tigger
Waiter
Sandy

The Heap of Overdue Library Books:

Image-Music-Text, Roland Barthes.
The Perfect Crime, Jean Baudrillard.
Selected Writings, Jean Baudrillard.
Simulacra and Simulation, Jean Baudrillard.
Vital Illusion, Jean Baudrillard.
Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, Judith Butler.
Hélène Cixous. Rootprints : Memory and Life Writing, Hélène Cixous, and Mireille Calle-Gubar.
Collins English Dictionary.
Of Grammatology, Jacques Derrida.
The Natural Alien: Humankind and Environment, Neil Evernden.
Being and Time, Martin Heidegger.
Digital Delirium, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, editors.
Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary, Bill Nichols.
3 Screenplays: The Player. The Rapture. The New Age, Michael Tolkin.
Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction, Patricia Waugh.
The Content of the Form : Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation, Hayden White.
Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond, Robin Wood.

And One website:

<http://www.overthere.com.au/digital/>

Act One
The Utterly Credulous Hyperreal Odyssey of an Aspartame-Addicted Couch Potato, her Heap of Overdue Library Books and one Delightfully Arrogant Independent Film Masquerading as a Major Hollywood Motion Picture

SCENE 1

A couch potato working on a major paper of the hyperreal and her overdue library books sit in front of a 24-inch T.V., on a rotting futon stained with Diet Snapple and various unidentified goos. "A mangy dog barks", demanding the futon back¹⁶. A slightly John Williams-sounding soundtrack circa Superman era begins, borrowing samples of Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir"

Couch Potato— I'm a text, a text of texts, living breathing heaving sweating trembling shopping through the textual landscapes of my hyperreal environments....

Gender Trouble – You're performing the subjectivity of an indolent text. You are doing couch potato, performing it into reality.

Image-Music-Text – You're "a multidimensional space" in which a variety of narratives, "none of them original, blend and clash". You are nothing more, nothing less than a "tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture." You are "the space on which all the quotations"¹⁷

Couch Potato— Blah, blah, blah. I thought you didn't want to come on this odyssey. You refused to come along if a movie is my primary text. Besides can you not mutter something a little less clichéd, something a little less quoted? That line is on all the literary theory websites, in all those comic book commentaries on dense academic lingo.

Heap of Overdue Library Books – You have betrayed us. You have betrayed yourself, the academic-wannabee that lives to deconstruct, that believes in parody, in intertextuality, in metafiction, in semiotics, in...

Couch Potato— No, I would never betray you. You are my springs of inspiration. Well, maybe just a little. Just give The Player a chance. Here. Have a look at the DVD cover:

Siskel and Ebert – "Two very enthusiastic thumbs up"
New York Daily News – "Blisteringly brilliant"

¹⁶ Intertextual allusion to the last words the murdered writer in The Player writes: "Blackness, a mangy dog barks ...".

¹⁷ Barthes, Roland. Image-Music-Text Stephen Heath, Trans. Noonday Press. New York: 1978. 142

Griffin Mill – “The Best Movie Ever Made!”

From the Oscar®-nominated director, Robert Altman (*M*A*S*H* and *Nashville*), *The Player* dishes up a brilliantly outrageous, celebrity-studded thriller of murderous obsession among Hollywood’s glamorous elite.

When callous movie studio executive Griffin Mill (TIM ROBBINS) starts receiving anonymous death threats from a rejected screenwriter, his already shaky career begins to crumble. Finally, his desperation drives him to kill ... but did he rub out the wrong writer? Relentlessly hounded by a street-wise detective (WHOOPI GOLDBERG), Griffin falls recklessly in love with the dead man’s girlfriend (GRETA SCACCHI). Then the mysterious threats begin again – and Griffin is plunged into a plot more outrageous than any movie.

The Heap of Overdue Library Books roll their ©’s at the hokey synopsis and accompanying accolades from Siskel and Ebert, the New York Daily News, and in true metafictional form, from Griffin Mill, the asshole movie executive protagonist himself.

Couch Potato – Don’t you understand. *The Player* is the ideal self-help guru for the hyperreal. Look, even the cover deconstructs reality’s hegemony over fiction, as it cites quotes from both real, Siskel and Ebert and the New York Daily News, and fictional, Griffin Mill *The Player*’s protagonist, entities.

Heap of overdue library books What is so “Blisteringly brilliant”, so “Brilliantly outrageous” about this “celebrity studded”, film of “murderous obsession” among “Hollywood’s glamorous elite”? How can a Hollywood film on Hollywood, with sex, violence, big stars and a happy ending, be subversive?

Gender Trouble – It’s not so brilliant, not as brilliant as we are anyway. She’s chosen *The Player* to be her hyperreal guru of becoming because it’s light, ultra-low fat, easier to digest, than our more dense exclusively academic discourse. After all *The Player* satisfies her couch potato hunger for “Suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings, mainly happy endings”.

Couch potato – No! It’s not that. And besides, there’s a lot more to *The Player* than just the plot. There’s metafiction, intertextuality, parody, movies within a movie, recurring themes of voyeurism, and mistaken identity not to mention the sham it makes of reality.

Couch Potato looks up at the now overdue texts on her shelf, – Baudrillard’s Selected Writings, Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble and Roland Barthes’ Image-Music-Text - aware of the possibility that they may just be books, not quite surreal enough to have ears. But, she offers her case anyway.

Couch potato – If you would only come along with me on my odyssey. You would deconstruct The Player to be naughty, evil even, a scoundrel of a film that employs its metafictional self-accolades and intertextual savvy of Hollywood films to both uphold and subvert the formulaic underpinnings of both Hollywood film and reality itself. Of course I crave its “Suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, (and) happy endings,” but these elements, elements typical of a Hollywood film, subvert attempts at creating any overall monolithic reality out of the hyperreal. I believe there is a philosophy, a philosophy of scoundrels, liars, pirates and clowns embodied by The Player that can actually facilitate my transformation from overeducated underemployed Couch Potato to a someone, to the overeducated post-employed CrawlerBackhoe, who by day is the anti-heroic writer with the superlative glimmering leather jacket and custom-painted Pinto, who inserts paid product endorsements in her novels and, who by night saves the world with an erotic cooking show full of subliminal anti-workplace messages. This philosophy, I can only characterize as epic pornosophy.

The Heap of Overdue Library Books (yawning) – Not another multi-syllabic postmodernist slogan.

Gender Trouble – Her couch potato drag of academia renders us all charlatans.

Couch Potato – Look I need your authority, your notoriety, your power, in negotiating my excessive, unstable, accelerating and commodified environment. Why do I continually feel like an extra in a movie that is full of innumerable other movies that are so overwhelming, so ecstatic, so seductive? Yet as an extra I feel this banality, this anxiety this humiliation at not being mediated, published, watched because of my importance, my scandal? I need beauty — liposuction, spectacle — that snowmaking machine in July for just a few staged human sacrifices, hope — eternal life — and of course the rent. You can help me, negotiate through the hyperreal, through the text that is both a winner and a scoundrel of the hyperreal, The Player, and help me decipher its epic pornosophy.

*Yawning yet still fuming over Couch Potato’s betrayal, her flight from the intensely intellectual to the intensely entertaining, the Heap of Overdue Library Books is about to jump ship off the futon with The Player at the helm, that is until the mangy dog, that is Couch Potato’s Berni-Poo¹⁸ flips over the DVD cover with her paw, allowing them to catch sight of Griffin Mill’s Armani suit. The Heap of Overdue Library books instantly fall under the spell of its double-breasted semiotics. Then, suddenly in a Poltergeistic moment, Hayden White’s *The Content of the Form* and Neil Evernden’s The Natural Alien hurl themselves off the bookshelf landing on the futon, just in time for an action-packed although jargon laden story.*

SCENE 2

¹⁸ Couch Potato’s Muppet of a dog is a cross between a Bernese Mountain Dog and a Standard Poodle.

A blond couch potato reclines on a futon, resting her foot on a Heap of Overdue Library Books. She wants them to interrogate her, wants to interrogate them, but they all sit motionless waiting for the video of The Player to begin. Only the hybrid Berni-Poo is active, chewing on the couch potato's first copy of Heidegger's Being and Time. Then suddenly...

Couch potato – Remember when I said I'm a text, a text of texts: living breathing heaving sweating trembling shopping through the textual landscapes of my hyperreal environments...just like all of you.

Image-Music-Text – I remember you cut me off, just when I was going to set straight your understanding of a hyperreal, overpopulated by texts...

Couch potato – Yes. You offered up that oft-quoted line of yours, that I, like movies, novels, sitcoms, music videos, advertisements, news programs et. al. am a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of texts, “none of them original, blend and clash”.

Image-Music-Text – Yes, but you misrepresented my quote by using ‘narratives’ instead of ‘texts’. There's a difference.

Couch Potato – That's what I meant. I mean if you can accept the following metaphor of texts are the trees, mountains, roads, rivers, buildings of the hyperreal, but that we make sense of, or understand them through the narratives we construct.

Baudrillard's Selected Writings – Excuse me but you're both guilty of wishful thinking. In the hyperreal, the universe of simulations, depthless surfaces, copies with no originals, clones without parents, there is only time for the look, the image, which is the multidimensional space in which a variety of *images*, none of them original blend and clash. Narrative is too slow. “Communication is too slow... The look is much faster; it is the medium of the media, the quickest”.¹⁹

The Content of the Form – This is true, but the image signifies innumerable narratives that we all need to make sense of ourselves. Narrative is what we can grasp onto, what this Couch Potato here, can empower herself with when our hyperreal environments “dissolve the distinction between realistic and fictional discourses”.²⁰

Being and Time – Excuse me but my ontic status is about to dissolve. Get me out of this dog's mouth.

Couch Potato (grabbing Being and Time minus “The Ontic Priority of the Question of Being” section) – Oh sorry. She's just a pup. Content has a point. The look, actually more the stare than

¹⁹ Baudrillard's Fatal Strategies. 186

²⁰ White, Hayden. The Content of the Form : Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation. John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore: 1987. ix

the look, is a longing for the story behind the sweating pumped up breasts on July's issue of *Maxim*, behind the living room "for families who love the outdoors" with the glowing chairs in the 2003-2004 *Ikea Catalogue*²¹. Maybe *Baudrillard* is promise, a re-iteration that we need the spectacle of narrative.

The Natural Alien – Hold on here. Are you saying that in the hyperreal, one's environment is no longer physical, no longer trees, rivers, waste dumps cities, towns and forests and tundra's, but semiotic and narrative .

Couch Potato – That's what I'm saying. According to dictionary.com...

The Natural Alien – dictionary.com?

Couch Potato – Well, alright then. According to the *Collins Dictionary*, environment denotes:

Collins Dictionary – You just have to ask me. It would be nice if you'd put the glue gun to my binding, it's a little loose around the J-L section. Anyway Environment denotes: "external conditions or surroundings especially in which people live or work"²².

Couch Potato – Thanks. Yes, so environments in the hyperreal are always already mediated, not only through media, but through narrative, through meanings that overlap and obfuscate any one sign's absolute meaning. In other words my only hope in becoming a somebody is through some sort of narrative becoming. My own ontology, my own epistemology is narrative. It exists through and knows through movies-of-the-week, magic realist as well as slasher novels, the films of Quentin Tarantino, Neil Simon, Blake Edwards, Peter Greenaway, Martin Scorsese, and of course Robert Altman.

The Content of the Form – I know she really goes for happy endings, but Couch Potato has a point. "Far from being a problem ...narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely the problem of how to translate human knowing into human telling."²³

Image-Music-Text (suddenly the lights dim, animated dust bunnies sit around *Image-Music-Text*, as though it were a campfire. A spotlight, one similar to those in late 80's music video, shines on the now hardcover text) – "The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances - as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures and the ordered mixtures of all these substances ; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula), stained glass windows,

²¹ *Ikea Catalogue* 45

²² *Collins English Dictionary*. J.M. Sinclair, ed. HarperCollins Publishers. Glasgow: 1998. 517

²³ White. 1

cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural; it is simply there like life itself."²⁴

Couch Potato– Thanks, Image for having the guts to utter a universal, the only universal besides the utter lack of universals.

Couch Potato looks up at the formation of a sequin vortex that has just formed above a pile of Vogue, Penthouse and Playboy magazines. Images of saline padded bodies, and Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein Ralph Lauren ads fuse together in their centrifugal force. All the library books, DVDs and videos have been sucked in, only The Player is safe, as it is held in place by the dictionary and the weight of its ego. As they rotate, Couch Potato catches glimpses of mutations that only exist for that moment: Image-Masturbation-Eggo, The Content of the Guess, The Perfect Gap, Playboy's Voluptuous Reality.

Couch Potato– Oh no! It's the LOOK! It's trying to condense all the narratives, all the texts, all of me, as though it's a black hole. It's trying to condense all of them into looks, headlines and sound-bytes. The author's dead, but not the story too!

All of sudden Ghost Busters' slime and Ripley's Believe it or Not ectoplasm begin to ooze from the DVD.

Couch Potato (pointing at The Player DVD) – Look! A fictional character is about to emerge. (seeing beneath the goo, a figure in a black Donna Karan single-breasted suit) Help us, Griffin!

But it is not Griffin. It is Larry Levy (Peter Gallagher) Griffin's rival, the executive after Griffin's job who attends A.A. meetings "because that's where all the deals are being made".²⁵

Larry Levy – Writers are no longer needed, Stories are too long for MTV, for the test audience. Headlines are all anyone has time for, they offer epics at the speed of light.

Out of the palms of his hand animated headlines appear and begin to swirl around the vortex: "Immigrants Protest Budget Cuts in Literacy Program", "Mud Slide Kills Sixty-four in Slums of Chile", "Further Bond Losses Push Dow Jones".

These headlines are those Larry offered in his first meeting with the studio executives. Movies can now be described in 25 words or less.

²⁴ Barthes. Image-Music-Text. "The Structural Analyses of Narratives" 79

²⁵ The Player.

Couch Potato – But, Larry no one in *The Player* could actually describe a movie in twenty –five words or less.

Larry Levy – You forget. I did. Remember my pitch for “*Mud Slide Kills Sixty-four in Slums of Chile*”: “Triumph over tragedy. Sounds like a John Boorman picture. Slap a happy ending on it and the script will write itself, write itself, write itself, write itself”²⁶

Larry Levy himself is abruptly sucked into the ever-more powerful vortex above Couch Potato's coffee table, having been pushed from a hand, a large recently manicured one that indicates it is most likely the hand of Griffin Mill.

Griffin Mill (his voice from within the DVD cover itself) – “What an interesting concept it is to eliminate the writer (and the story) from the artistic process. If we could just get rid of these actors and directors, maybe we've got something here.”²⁷

Couch Potato – Well, since I am a text also in danger of losing my own stories I might as well jump in.

This immediately stops the vortex, and all the books fall awkwardly right back to where they were.

Couch Potato– What happened? Why did it stop?

Image-Music-Text – You clogged it.

The Content of the Form – You're full of too many stories.

Couch Potato – I am? I am.

A small paperback, underneath a half-chewed question-mark shaped rawhide, struts up onboard the futon. It is the 3 Screenplays: The Player, The Rapture and The New Age.

3 Screenplays – It's not her. Not really. I mean she is the sum total of all of us. But the vortex came from her too, from her mind, her knowing of narrative. Can't you see we just experienced a self-reflexive moment in her own narrative? Her own self-awareness broke the spell.

Image-Music-Text – You mean her own metafiction, but it wasn't just metafiction but intertextuality as well, We're all part of her text, so when she jumped in, it was one of those moments like when the Super-Friends or Power Rangers all combine into one ultra hero.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Couch Potato – This is *The Player's* power as well, its overt metafiction and intertextuality. As we ourselves are all metafictional and intertextual, *The Player* takes it to extremes, pushes it like Baudrillard's universe does, to a point where the rules of Hollywood versus reality begin to bend in on themselves.

The Natural Alien – What are you talking about? Metafiction, a text's self-reflexivity; what's the big subversion in that?

Patricia Waugh's book, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* is almost totally obfuscated between Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Plato's *Republic*.

Metafiction – Excuse me *Natural Alien* (nods), little, insignificant couch potato (nods): "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text".²⁸

Couch Potato – Yes exactly! This is what *The Player* does. Its metafictional narrative structure is, is like a mobius strip.

The Natural Alien – Your point is?

Metafiction – Her point is that "in showing us how... fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day to day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'.²⁹ It is the same whether the metafictional text is a novel, a movie or a music video....

Couch Potato – or a person. *The Player* begins with ...

Baudrillard's Selected Writings – Look just turn push play on the VCR. It's about time your hyperreal guru did some guru-ing.

SCENE 3

EXTERIOR: STUDIO. DAY.

Close-up: Mural. The voice of an assistant director. The camera starts on C. Bragg mural of The Movie Queen.

VOICE (offscreen): Quiet on the set! Scene one, take ten. Marker!

²⁸ Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Routledge. New York: 1984. 2

²⁹ Ibid. 18

(Slate in. We pull back from a motion picture slate to see SANDY, a studio secretary, reaching over her desk to answer the phone.)

VOICE (offscreen): And, action!³⁰

INTERIOR: PIGSTY APARTMENT. NIGHT.

Couch Potato (sipping Diet Nestea for a change) – See how *The Player* from the start asserts its own status as a film. The film begins prior to the frame of the movie, beyond the illusion of it as a reality in and of itself. It exposes what lies outside of the opening scene itself by including the assistant director and the movie slate.

Baudrillard's Selected Writings – It's probably just another plate of the hyperreal.

Couch Potato – Of course it is. This is what *The Player* is made out of, a continual play, a continual taunting of the distinction between reality and fiction. (Baudrillard's Selected Writings shrugs its covers.) For example this opening scene — it's so obnoxiously arrogant — it goes eight minutes without a cut, yet

Metafiction – Shhh! Let's just watch *The Player* shall we? It will tell us.

Couch Potato (begins anti-panic breathing exercise as she realizes she's getting hyper)

EXTERIOR: STUDIO. DAY (cont'd)

(The camera follows GRIFFIN MILL and ADAM SIMON into the studio office, a bungalow.) As GRIFFIN and ADAM enter, WALTER STUCKEL, the head of studio security, and JIMMY CHASE, a studio gopher, leave the building. We follow them, JIMMY walks his bicycle.

WALTER: The pictures they make these days are all MTV. Cut, cut, cut, cut. The opening shot of Welles' *Touch of Evil* was six and a half minutes long.

JIMMY: What about Absolute Beginners? That was an extraordinary shot.

WALTER: English. We're talking about American movies. And Orson Welles was the master.

WALTER: *Rope* was a masterpiece. The story wasn't any good, but he shot it without cuts, I hate all this cut ... cut... cut...

Couch Potato – Cut, cut cut. This opening scene itself goes some eight minutes before a cut. Walter and Jimmy's conversation calls attention to *The Player's* cinematic feats, and by doing so reminds us that it is a film we are watching. At the same time it alludes to other classic Hollywood

³⁰ Tolkin, Michael. 3 Screenplays: *The Player*, *The Rapture*, *The New Age*. Grove Press. New York: 1995. 11

films, and by surpassing the length of their shots, arrogantly asserts itself as “The best movie ever made.”³¹

The Content of the Form– Yes. So what is *The Player* attempting to do, metafictionally that is? I mean it’s a potent metaphor, your idea that reality and fiction are a mobius strip, but how does this play out in *The Player*?

Baudrillard’s Selected Writings attempts to gag the Couch potato with what’s left of *Being and Time*, in hopes of just watching the movie, but Bill Nichols’ *Representing Reality*, a text heretofore in a highlighter-induced stupor, objects.

Representing Reality – Did I hear someone mention reality? What do you mean there’s reality in a Hollywood film?

Couch Potato – Well, it’s not exactly a Hollywood film, but it’s not exactly an independent film either. It was produced by an independent production company, Avenue Pictures, but it is owned by United Artists an independent production company formed by some of Hollywood’s founding artists. *The Player* positions itself liminally between fiction and reality. This parallels the opposition of Hollywood and non-Hollywood such as independents and foreign films. *The Player* displaces this parallel that the more Hollywood a film is, the further removed it is from reality, the more non-Hollywood a film, the more realistic it will be.

Representing Reality – So how does this metafictional *Hollywood* film posit reality and fiction as a mobius strip?

Couch Potato (to *Baudrillard’s Selected Writings*) – Stop that fake snoring, You can’t snore you’re a book. (to *Representing Reality* and all the other texts caught on the futon by a goo strengthened by dog hair) Well, as we’ve seen, it begins outside of the usual frame of a film. We see the frame in the movie slate and by hearing the unseen assistant director say, Quiet on the set, and action. But then quickly after this, we are in the movie, the film’s simulation of reality. However, because the film is about making movies, movies for a “real” audience who adore real movie stars, there is a play with reality and fiction throughout it. But it veers out of its frame again at the conclusion when ...

Metafiction – Just fast forward it.

Couch Potato– Alright then. Here’s the last scene. As Griffin drives home, he hears a pitch on his car phone:

WRITER: Hiya, Griff. Remember me? I’m the asshole who used to be in the postcard business.

³¹ Griffin Mill, *The Player’s* tagline.

GRIFFIN: You!

WRITER: That's right. The king of suspense himself. You remember me.

GRIFFIN: I haven't heard from you in awhile ...

WRITER: Well, I've been busy. I've been writing a script. I got inspired...

it's a Hollywood story, Griff, a real thriller.

It's about a shitbag producer, a studio exec, who murders a writer he thinks is harassing him. Problem is he kills the wrong writer. Now he's got to deal with blackmail as well as the cops. But here's the switch. Son of a bitch, he gets away with it.

GRIFFIN: Gets away with it?

WRITER: Absolutely, it's a Hollywood ending, Griff. He marries the dead writer's girl, and they live happily ever after.

GRIFFIN: You guarantee that ending?

WRITER: If the price is right, you got it.

GRIFFIN: If you can guarantee me that ending, you got a deal.

WRITER: I guarantee it, Griff.

GRIFFIN: What do you call this thing, anyway?

WRITER: *The Player*.

GRIFFIN: *The Player*? ... I like that.

Couch Potato— In a mobius strip there is no distinct outside or inside, both run into each other. The mysterious writer, the king of suspense who has been stalking Griffin, as Griffin stalks him, surfaces at the film's conclusion to create Griffin himself. Yet the writer and his script can only exist because of Griffin's existence and his heinous actions, and his luck of 'getting away with it'. Which came first, the chicken or the egg, the writer or the protagonist?

Metafiction – This metafictional play is rendering the barrier between fiction and reality more translucent. It offers us glimpses into the play between reality and fiction, and it is not a unidirectional relation of cause-effect. Reality does not precede fiction.

Couch Potato— Fiction exposes reality as just another fiction: just another narrative, a grand one.

Vital Illusion (a text that heretofore has been gorging on *Couch Potato*'s fattest issue of *Vogue*) – Don't forget, the real has been murdered, not by fiction, by the imaginary, but by an excess of reality.

Couch Potato – But as a living text, plugged into all these super-sensational mediated realities - LCD billboards that are clearer than the highway in front of me, my Harman Kardon stereo that massages my ears with Music From the Films of Clint Eastwood, deafening me to the death threats being screamed next door as I write this major paper – I don't feel real enough! Not beautiful, smart, funny, not rich enough.

Vital Illusion – You feel you are an extra, scarcely visible in the scene. Maybe your elbow is visible, barely but with a digital zoom

Couch Potato – Yes that’s it. I feel so extraneous, hence my invisibility renders me a couch potato.

Vital Illusion – But look, look at The Player’s extras. Stars, the stars themselves, the realer than real, such as Julia Roberts, Bruce Willis, Jack Lemmon are shown that they too can be extraneous!

The Content of the Form – The excess of stories/realities in the hyperreal, their proximity and overlap, and their intersection renders them unstable. The narrators’ points of view, as well as the appointed protagonist, can be displaced. You know this yourself. As a couch potato....

Couch Potato – Yes, as a hyperreal couch potato I know of and exist for many counter-narratives that rise up to dispute their previous, more well-established narratives. Tom Stoppard’s Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead offers two extras’ version of the story of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. The True Story of the Three Little Pigs sets the record straight by re-telling the story from the wolf’s point of view. The Player not only is a mobius strip of reality and fiction, it is also obscene, with its insides on the outside, the main characters are those behind the scenes, the invisible movers and shakers of a film, while it is the stars, the larger than life heroes such as Bruce Willis and Arnold Schwarzenegger, who are relegated to the background.

The Natural Alien – I don’t see though how this can help you on your odyssey to become a somebody. How can a little metafictional wit release you from your perpetual postponement. I suggest a little Phenomen....

Couch Potato – What Vital Illusion is suggesting is that it is the illusion of being a *somebody*, a movie star, a hero, a subject, a self, that perpetuates my sensations of being insignificant, of smallness.

Suddenly a gust of wind with an odour that only comes from freshly opened boxes holding the latest Intel P4 Processor with hyperthreading technology, blows Arthur and Marilouise Kroker’s Digital Delirium open on page 91, a couple of pages into Arthur Kroker’s ‘Digitized World: The Processed World of Marshall McLuhan’. A hand similar to, Thing in The Adams Family suddenly pops out of a bag of Lays Sour Cream and Onion Chips and points to a passage that the book itself reads in a monotone voice not too dissimilar from Charlton Heston’s.

Digital Delirium – “Confronted with the hypnotic effect of the technological sensorium, McLuhan urged the use of any probe – humour, paradox, analogical juxtaposition, absurdity – as a way of making visible the total field effect of technology as medium. This is why perhaps McLuhan’s intellectual project actually circles back on itself, [as The Player does] ... he transforms the act of ‘reading McLuhan’ into dangerous participation in a radical experiment which has, as its end, the exploration of the numbing of consciousness [in the hyperreal]”³²

³² Kroker, Arthur and Marilouise. 91

Couch Potato– Yes, and although *The Player* is a quasi-Hollywood film, it uses metafiction and intertextuality, as well as parody and the absurd, to call attention to the assumptions we need to feel numb. We must aspire to be superstars, protagonists in our own narratives complete with a beginning, middle, and end, complete with a John Williams soundtrack with violence, nudity, heart hope and happy endings. What do I have to do to become mediated, to attain the importance of being a segment on the news at six, to be the topic on a talk show, or to have an entire film made about me, with Julia Roberts playing me?

Vital Illusion – Ah, just write this paper. I'm dizzy. (*Vital Illusion* falls back onto page 521 of the spring 2002 *Vogue*)

Suddenly a book with Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward on the cover attempts to commit suicide by falling off the futon and onto the Berni-Poo's chew toys below. It is renowned film scholar, Robin Wood's *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond*.

Couch Potato (grabbing the text just in time) – Don't do it. It can't be that bad. My odyssey that is.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – You don't understand. It's that film. It breaks certain laws, rules of Hollywood narrative, ways of being a Hollywood film that might dislodge reality itself. They know not what they have done. Frankenstein, Oppenheimer, those tomb raiders in *The Mummy*, Griffin Mill!

Metafiction – That's what metafiction is supposed to do, defamiliarize to the viewer both fiction and the reality.

Couch Potato – My own metafiction, my sense of being fictional, a simulation, is my source of play. This becomes spectacle in and of itself.
- Please don't jump. The odyssey needs you.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – *The Player* exists at the expense of other texts. It's like the magician who divulges all the secrets, so there is no longer any magic.

Baudrillard's Selected Readings – All there is left is magic. It is the secrets that have disappeared.

Couch Potato - I find *The Player* irresistible twice-over because as it titillates me with sex, stars, suspense, luxury cars and *Architectural Digest* interiors, it renounces the usual attempt at masquerading as a reality, as well as its own metafictional attempt to be just a film. Just watch.

Couch Potato fast forwards the tape just to the point where Griffin, who now realizes that he is the prime suspect in David Kahane's murder investigation, and June arrive at a spa in Palm Springs. He decides at the airport to take June here rather than Acapulco when he spots Detective De Lonpre speaking to airport security.

EXTERIOR: OUTSIDE DINING AREA. NIGHT

A pig roasts on a spit. Griffin and June enter the area and go to a table. There is a champagne bucket at the table. Almost no one is around. Music is playing. He seats her. She looks around and whispers to him.

JUNE: There're not many people around?

GRIFFIN: Well, they're fully booked, actually. Fifty rooms, a hundred people.

JUNE: Where are they all?

GRIFFIN: Hiding.

(A WAITER suddenly appears and opens the champagne.)

WAITER: Sir?

GRIFFIN: A couple of Banning Springs Waters, please.

WAITER: Right away, Mr. M.

JUNE: Do places like this really exist?

GRIFFIN: Only in the movies.

(A naked couple across from them glides into the hot springs)³³

Couch Potato – Here Griffin, nudge-nudges, wink-winks to the audience that his existence is strictly filmic. But at other times *The Player* subverts the distinction between real and imaginary. When Griffin hears a pitch from Tom Oakley (Richard E. Grant) and Tony Civella (Dean Stockwell), Tom insists on making a film that is “important” and reflects what actually happens in “reality” when a woman is accused of murdering her husband. His story about an innocent woman wrongly accused, fighting for her life is too important to have stars in it:

OAKLEY: This story is just too damned important to risk being overwhelmed by personality. That's fine for action pictures, but this is special. We want real people here. We don't want people coming into this with any preconceived notions ... If I'm perfectly honest, if I think about this, this isn't even an American film. ... No, there are no stars, no pat happy endings, no Schwarzenegger stick-ups, no terrorists. This is a tough story – a tragedy – in which an innocent woman dies. Why? Because that happens.

Couch Potato – Yet at the conclusion of *The Player*, we see the final cut of Oakley's film too important for stars, *Habeas Corpus*. It is now Bruce Willis, as the district attorney who saves the innocent woman wrongly accused now played by Julia Roberts in the nick of time by blasting his way into her gas chamber:

INTERIOR. SCREENING ROOM. DAY.

BONNIE(Griffin's now ex-girlfriend): You sold out, I can't believe it, how could you let him sell it out? What about the truth? What about reality?

OAKLEY: What about the way the old ending tested in Canoga Park? Everybody hated it. We reshot it. Now everybody loves it. That's *reality*.³⁴

³³ 3 Screenplays: *The Player The Rapture The New Age*. Grove Press. New York: 1995. 78

The Natural Alien – I, too like Vital illusion, am getting dizzy. This is so confusing. Reality and fiction are so confusing. So let me try to get this straight here: The Player purports that in reality innocent people suffer tragic demises. Yet in movies they prove their innocence and are rewarded with happy endings, pat or otherwise.

Couch Potato – Yes, and June remarks while depicting Griffin as a Viking thief in a painting, that murderers, gangsters and thieves “must suffer for their crimes”.³⁵ But that this has “nothing to do with how things really are”.

The Natural Alien – So The Player establishes a clear divide between reality where innocent people die and the guilty get off, and fiction where the innocent receive happy endings and the guilty are punished.

While this dialogue ensues, a square paperback, Jean Baudrillard’s The Perfect Crime, along with Andrew Dunbar and Dean Lahn’s Body Piercing, a coal black paperback with a matte finish, fasten Mr. Potato Head arms onto themselves and quickly spike Couch Potato’s newly opened bottle of Snapple.

Couch Potato – And then it displaces this binary, by accentuating its own status as a fiction whose hero is a murderer who not only gets away with it, but gets the innocent victim’s girlfriend. No one is punished in The Player but the innocent: David Kahane, and Griffin’s ex-girlfriend, Bonnie who is fired for wanting to maintain the ‘reality’ of *Habeas Corpus*.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – This is exactly what I mean. It turns the rules of Hollywood narrative in on themselves. It promises its audience a happy ending, but for a murderer. The film seduces us into identifying with a protagonist who is a murderer....

Couch Potato – a (yawns) player. (*Couch Potato falls unconscious onto the Heap of overdue library books*)

SCENE 4

DREAM. LABORATORY.

With a white futon for each of its walls, floor and ceiling the laboratory resembles a white room- a padded cell for the insane. A piercing electrical hum resonates throughout the room. The low-tech lab equipment includes test tubes, beakers and flasks each giving off white smoke, as well as super-sized pumps like those seen in any film version of H.G. Wells’ Time Machine. They clash somewhat with the holographic monitors that hover in the air a la Steven Spielberg’s Minority

³⁴ Tolkin. 86

³⁵ Ibid. 48

Report. This is the Couch Potato's dream of the space where texts blend and clash – the intertextual laboratory.

Couch Potato finds herself naked, only for an unbuttoned red lab coat worn by gynecologists in David Cronenberg's Dead Ringers. She looks down, astonished that she appears at last to have the bosom of Adrienne Barbeau in Cannonball Run.

Couch Potato – I've got to wake up from this dream. The Perfect Crime must have spiked my drink again. I can't believe my odyssey would include a dream provoked by a mutiny.

She looks around, noticing the various texts sutured together, Ghost meets Manchurian Candidate, Goldie Goes to Africa, The Graduate Part II.

Sutured Texts (chanting) – One of us! One of us! One of Us³⁶?

They seem to be enlarging, towering over Couch Potato.

Couch Potato – These are the texts of the future. The pitches that Griffin hears in his office in the first scene. Oh my God!

Couch Potato stares mesmerized at one of the giant Snapple bottles inside of which floats her clone, sutured together with innumerable texts some of which include The Player, Baudrillard For Beginners, Werner Herzog's Nosferatu and Evelyn Scott's The Fourteen Bears in Summer and Winter. Suddenly what looks to be Frankenstein's monster with Alien tentacles emerges out of one of the holographic monitors and begins to pull apart the texts Couch Potato is made from.

SCENE 5

PIGSTY. MORNING.

Couch Potato's son, Dade, who up till this point has been in his bedroom involved in his own imaginative odyssey with his scientist friend Tigger in Hundred Acre Wood calls forth.

Dade – Mama! Mama! Mama! Wake up. I need some pancakes. You need to help us construct that soapbox derby car for the big race in the Hundred Acre Wood.

Dade's Mom – We don't have any Magic Baking Powder, just No-Name. They won't be as magical!

Dade's mom looks around to see the books blanketing her, gradually recalling that they drugged her. Dade runs back out the door and slams it energetically.

³⁶ The line chanted by the circus freaks in Tod Browning's Freaks after they have turned the trapeze artist who tricked one of them into the Feathered Hen.

Dade's mom – Just give me a half hour, Dade. I had a mutiny last night.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – Ahem. I just want you to know that I had no part in spiking your Snapple last night. I actually felt compelled to watch the film, to see how its metafictional elements blow apart all the narrative dictates I exist for.

Image-Music-Text – It's not just metafiction. (*turns its front cover awkwardly up to Dade's mom*) We haven't explored The Player's intertextuality yet, have we? I mean we're all intertextual aren't we? By the way what did you say your name was, Couch Potato who is Dade's mom?

Dade's mom – You never asked before. It's Karen. I hate that name, it's so, so, common. I looked it up once. It means sharp. I am so much more/less than Karen. I am a fluid text always already amassing more and more texts.

Gender Trouble – There's a multitude of Lacanian insights in the performativity of sharpness in such a feminine name.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – That's such postmodernist rubbish! Let's just get to the point, the bare bones of this odyssey. (*to Karen*) You are questing aren't you?

Karen – Yes.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – So how do you think The Player's intertextuality can help you become a somebody, a hero, someone to be imitated?

Karen – That's the whole point of intertextuality as well as metafiction in the hyperreal. They both demonstrate that the wish to become a distinct, stable hero or somebody is futile. We are fluid and open texts. I am not a couch potato who suddenly becomes Karen, end of story, but rather as a text I am continually becoming.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – Well I begin on page I and end on page 352.

Suddenly a souped up mutation of the I-love-you bug worm momentarily superimposes the world wide web over "reality". But this is long enough for Diane Caney's Inside/Outside Intertextuality website to steal the spotlight.

Inside/Outside Intertextuality – "There is a continuous play across – text, image, screen, person, air, intellect, film, emotion, view out the window, imagination, theory, creativity, editor, desire – the list does not end travelling over and through the vastness of what can be called intertextuality.... There is an exchange which takes place between a reader's identity and the texts being read during any reading process. There can be no strict distinctions drawn, however, between what is INSIDE and what is OUTSIDE reader-occupied space. Any contact with the

world (of texts, with ANY THING, even consciousness) results in a cacophony of responses – with countless intertextual strands that coalesce and fly away.”³⁷

Karen – Your idea of a text as a “shipwreck” and the complimentary notion of the selfwreck emphasize the sense of identity as tenuous, fragmented. “identity [as]shattered into a thousand pieces.”³⁸

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – Okay, okay. You see the self in that sort of wacky postmodernist vein. An entity or rather non-entity that is open, fragmented – a selfwreck as you say. But get back to *The Player*. SHOW ME THE INTERTEXTUALITY!

Karen – Okay. Let’s go back to the opening shot of *The Player*, only a little further along.

(We see JOAN TEWKESBURY and PAT RESNICK in the middle of a story pitch.)

PAT: It’s a star –

JOAN: Like a Donna Mills, a Joan Collins ...

PAT: Not a real TV star, it would be played by a movie star ...

JOAN: A star star. Julia Roberts would be good, Dolly Parton would be good –

PAT: Goldie, Julia, Michelle

GRIFFIN: You know, I like Goldie.

JOAN: Okay ... Goldie goes to Africa... and she becomes worshipped

PAT: Well, she’s found by this tribe –

JOAN: of small people...

PAT: She’s found by this tribe and they worship her, but then –

GRIFFIN : Oh, I see, it’s kind of a Gods Must Be Crazy, except the Coke bottle’s now a television actress –

PAT: Yeah, exactly right. It’s Out of Africa meets Pretty Woman.³⁹

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – It’s absurd.

Karen – Let me fast forward a bit. It gets more absurd when Alan Rudolph director of such cerebral films as *The Moderns*, *Afterglow* and *Mortal Thoughts*, offers Griffin a pitch.

GRIFFIN: What’s your pitch?

ALAN: Well, does political scare you?

GRIFFIN: Political doesn’t scare me. Radical political scares me, political political scares me.

ALAN: This is politely politically radical, but it’s –

GRIFFIN: Is it funny?

ALAN: ... It’s a funny political thing.... and it’s a thriller too.... And it’s all at once.

GRIFFIN: What’s the story?

³⁷ <http://www.overthere.com.au/digital/>

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Tokin. 16-17

ALAN: Well, I want Bruce Willis ... It's a story about a senator, a bad guy senator at first. And he's traveling around the country on the country's dime, you know like that Sununu guy used to.

GRIFFIN: -so there's sort of a cynical political thriller comedy –

ALAN: yeah, but it's got a heart in the right spot. And anyway, he has an accident...he becomes clairvoyant, like a psychic.

GRIFFIN: So it's kind of a psychic political thriller comedy with a heart.

ALAN: With a heart. Not unlike *Ghost* meets *The Manchurian Candidate*

(And) when he reads the president's mind its "completely blank.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – This is all very entertaining, revealing Hollywood to be as vapid as its worst critics believe: that there are no artists, no creators, just endless genre and plot re-working. But, movies are no longer being derived from other movies. That new pirate movie from Disney, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Mystery of the Black Pearl*, is derived from the Disney Theme Park ride, Pirates of the Caribbean.

The Natural Alien – We're all just composites of McDonald's, Disney, and Microsoft. But I'm also the oaks, the maples, the marijuana and the thistles of my author's backyard.

Karen – Yes, of course you are. I am the dandelions and mud in my backyard. But I perceive them through the texts, narratives, realities that I am.

Image-Music-Text – Did I hear someone say author? Don't you see it is these grandiose concepts such as the author, god, the subject that have put Karen in this mess in the first place. In the hyperreal these concepts are no longer viable, yet narratives/realities continually insinuate them to us.

Karen – Yes. This is why *The Player*, its metafiction and intertextuality as funny and subversive as they are, makes an ideal guru for hyperreal becoming.

Once again the light dims, although being the morning, the sun itself must experience an eclipse. A flashlight shines on Image-Music-Text who again transforms into a pristine hardcover edition. It then opens to a page of "The Death of the Author" (a harp plays in the background):

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing [...] [However] by refusing to assign a 'secret,' an ultimate meaning, to the text (and the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases--reason, science, law. ⁴⁰(147)

⁴⁰ Barthes. 147

The Natural Alien – How lofty. So I suppose that is why at the end of *The Player* when Griffin receives the phone call from the writer who has been stalking him, he is left anonymous, unnamed.

Karen – Yes. At first I thought it was the screenwriter's voice, Michael Tolkin. But he and his brother play the Schecter brothers, a pair of fictional screenwriters. He is as much a creation of Griffin's as Griffin is of his. *The Player* plays with notions of identity, of authorship, authorship of identity.

The Vital Illusion – Yes the author is dead and reality has been assassinated. What is there to do but play, play with all the outmoded binary oppositions, the remains of the real that we continually prop up as absolutes?

Karen – The accelerated play between *The Player* and other texts, and our ability to keep up with most of its allusions, is an indication that we ourselves as intertextual texts are continually absorbing other texts. Yet despite all its subversive humour *The Player* still upholds the binary oppositions of Hollywood film and reality.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – This is all very academic and dry, but how does this intertextuality, its play with binary oppositions help you, Karen, in the hyperreal?

Karen – Good versus evil. Right versus wrong. Heroes versus villains. Self versus other. Us versus them. It is like what *Simulacra and Simulation* says. These grand signifiers are all there is. They are the maps of territories that do not exist. Hollywood attempts to simulate these territories. But they never satisfy us, in fact the more real, the more reeler than real, the more demanding we become.

Simulacra and Simulation – Ah: "the murderous power of images, murderers of the real, murderers of their own model, as the Byzantine icons could be those of divine identity. To this murderous power is opposed that of representations as a dialectical power, the visible and intelligible mediation of the Real. All Western faith and good faith become engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God of course. But what if God himself can be simulated reduced to signs...Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum."⁴¹

Suddenly June, the dead girlfriend's writer who immediately falls for Griffin, emerges out of the The Player's DVD cover. She wears a flowing white smock covered with azure blue paint stains and silver glitter that to Karen a.k.a. Boo the clown resembles the type she face paints with. The room's temperature has dropped at least 25 degrees Celsius. Icicles form on the books' covers and Karen's double chin. They can all see their breath.

⁴¹ *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated Sheila Faria Glaser. The University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor: 1994. 5-6

The Natural Alien – Who is she?

Karen – That's June, she's the anti-heroine to Griffin. David Kahane, her boyfriend who Griffin murders, referred to her as "the ice queen".

The Natural Alien – Why is she here? So beautiful. And with a British accent.

The Content of the Form – How do you know that. She hasn't spoken yet?

Karen – He's right. She has a British accent, but tells Griffin in the short story, not the long, that she's from Iceland.

Derrida's Of Grammatology pushes itself in front of all the other texts)

Of Grammatology – Because she stands liminally between narratives and images. Hyperreal, she is all surface, only story, no history. She lies, is amoral, and ...

The Natural Alien – See, she is the anti-Hollywood, representative. The artist...

Karen – Because she personifies *The Player's* epic pornosophy.

Gender Trouble – She performs an aberrant femininity.

June (annoyed at all this hokey theorizing, cuts in) – I'm here because I don't go to movies. "I don't like reading" either. I like words. And letters, but I'm not crazy about complete sentences.

Karen – Why don't you go to movies?

June – Because life is too short. *(At which point she immediately rewinds back into the DVD case)*

Dade (breaks the tension and awe by yelling out from his bedroom/Hundred Acre Wood) – Has it been a half an hour yet?

Karen (It's been forty-nine minutes) – Not quite.

Dade – How much longer till I get to eat my pancakes?

Karen (to the bewildered Heap of overdue library books)–I'll be back shortly. *(yelling to Dade)* I've got strawberries and Reddi Wip.

Dade – Okay.

Act Two

Sulking Bitch-Clown Drives the Salacious Hyperreal on a 5.5L V12 Epic Pornosophy

SCENE 1

INTERIOR. PIGSTY. NOW.

A seething, miniature version of Karen, about the size of her overdue library books struggles to hold on to the DVD cover of The Player. As it falls onto her face, she suddenly bites into it, swallowing palm trees and Griffin's left foot. Slowly she begins to grow. As if understanding the whole point of this, Karen then spins herself around a la Wonder Woman transforming herself into yet again another alter ego, Bitch Clown.

Bitch Clown – I sulk because all my library books returned to the library. They fled when She came. June, whatever-her-name-is. June with the unpronounceably absurd name.

Griffin Mill emerges naked out of his smile on the cover of The Player DVD.

Bitch Clown – Here's my pitch. A blonde couch potato, part-time clown has a surreal encounter with an asshole movie executive ...

Griffin – Where's my clothes?

Bitch Clown – It must be like The Terminator. Michael Biehn and Arnold can pass through time, but their clothes can't. Maybe it's the same with DVD covers and "reality". Here put this on.

Griffin – A clown suit?

Bitch Clown – Let me get you the hat for it. Did you notice that pitch rhymes with bitch?

Griffin – The crotch is cut out of it.

Bitch Clown – Of course, you're to be my sex slave, my backyard barbecue human sacrifice. I'll get off scot-free. Just like you. After all there's no law against the rape, torture and murder of a fictional character, especially a villain.

Griffin – Is that part of the pitch?

Bitch Clown – Perhaps. I want to be a player in the hyperreal, as opposed to a playee – the passive one in the comedy duo, the butt of the joke, the audience. I want to do the playing.

Griffin (spoken in an exaggerated Groucho Marx voice, an indication of the transforming power of the clown suit) – So you wanna be a player, do you? What do I look like — the blue fairy? Think this is Spielberg’s *A.I.*, some 21st century rendition of *Pinocchio*. Look at me. Didn’t you watch my movie? I’m an ‘asshole’ — “one of a breed” — a liar, a murderer even. I’d stab my best friend in the back, not to mention my enemy.

Bitch Clown – Just listen! (*Bitch Clown sprays Griffin with a can of Reddi Wip*⁴²) Anyway so this chance surreal encounter caused by, by let’s say the concurrence of the aurora borealis and the fleeing of the clown-couch potato’s library books...

Griffin – Too much like that Dennis Quaid, James Caviezel picture, *Frequency*.

Bitch Clown – Anyway their lives are forever changed by this chance surreal encounter. The movie executive gets a heart, and the bitch clown, no longer quite so bitchy, gets a life.

Griffin – You should try DreamWorks for that one. Get me back into my DVD. You can put an ad in Variety for your Home Depot sex slave. Let me out of this pigsty.

Bitch Clown – Tell me what it’s like to exist in *The Player*, its epic pornosophy.

Griffin – Epic what? Is this an art film? Sort of *Clockwork Orange* meets that, what’s it called, that Peter Greenaway film with the guy in the new *Star Wars* movies, Ewan MacGregor. Oh you know....

Bitch Clown – *The Pillow Book*. No, No. What I mean is, what is it like to exist pornosophically, in a film where pornography and philosophy have collided into a sort of hybrid parody that thrives in the hyperreal? Your performance, your own acknowledgement that you are performing, that you are only a fictional character, in turn exposes my own status as a ‘real’ person to be itself a performance.

Academic superstar Judith Butler crawls out of the DVD clock, in fast-forward. She wears the Armani suit Griffin was just wearing on the cover of The Player’s DVD.

Judith Butler (makes quote gestures with her index and middle fingers similar to Doctor Evil in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* when she utters the italicized words) – “In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to

⁴² See <http://reddiwip.com/what.htm>, for a “Reddi-Wip Real Moment”

express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means".⁴³

Bitch Clown – Your parody of a movie executive, of the stars' parody of themselves is an obscene though revelatory exposure of the nature of identity as performative.

Upon hearing Bitch Clown's use and abuse of her beloved concepts Judith Butler melts onto Bitch Clown's purple and green clown shoe. Griffin acts as though he never noticed Butler's presence.

Griffin – You're no player. You stay at home and watch T.V. –cable, videos, DVDs. I bet you haven't even been to a movie theatre in years. You think you're a "comer", a mover and a shaker, that you can make things happen, put the screws where it counts.

Bitch Clown – I've got you in a pink and black clown suit with your Johnson hanging out.

Griffin – That's only because I show it in *The Player*. I'm one of the few Hollywood fictional characters who actually has one.

Bitch Clown – I can be highly dangerous when I want to be. I'm one of the masses. We could take you down.

Griffin – Dangerous? Yeah, if the cable goes and you're low on new releases. You might just walk into a Blockbuster armed with Reddi-Wip and a Blow-Pop.

Bitch Clown – Wait! I have a degree and can become mentally ill at a moment's notice. I'm worthy. I can play.

Griffin – When you become a player, a real player you make your own dialogue, your own happy ending. You do it all yourself. You do it all yourself. Now get out of my face!

Bitch Clown – Oh yeah. You're just a fictional character. I'm real. I can turn you and your story off anytime I want. I can even pause it during your sex scene in the spa with June.

Griffin – You mean love scene. The reality is that I'm more real than you'll ever be. I exist everywhere. In the minds of filmgoers, film critics, not to mention all that worship for me on the internet. And no matter, how many times *The Player* is shown, I always get my happy ending.

And the last word, for Bitch Clown dissolves back into the intertextual dreamscape of Couch Potato, a.k.a. Dade's mom, a.k.a. Karen, a.k.a. Boo the Clown.

⁴³ Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge. New York: 1999. 173.

SCENE 2

INTERIOR. PIGSTY. AFTERNOON.

Heap of Overdue Library Books – Wake up! Wake up, Karen. You're going to burn the pancakes.

Karen (incredulous) – It was only a dream. I dreamt Griffin was here. And you'd all gone back to the library.

Heap of Overdue Library Books – We dreamt it was June.

The Content of the Form – Strange how the scene titles did not let us in on the fact that they were just dreams.

Karen – Suspense tactics. I wanted the reader to have no expectation coming into the two scenes. They are vital, the last scene at the end of a chapter and the first scene in the next one.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – This is absurd. I'm so frustrated here. I wouldn't mind being returned. Borrowed out by some film grad with a ...

Karen – I was a Bitch Clown.

Vital Illusion – We know that.

Karen – No, I mean in my dream. It was pornographic. Obscene. I was going to do horribly salacious things to Griffin at a backyard barbecue.

Vital Illusion – There's hope for you, us all yet. You must be veering toward epic pornosophy.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – Or madness. What can epic pornosophy be – a diabolical mutation....

Karen – I prefer the term cross-breeding. Actually I do kind of like diabolical...

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film –diabolical mutation of the epic, philosophy and pornography. A stunt, a gimmick of some unimaginative postmodern grad student.

Karen – Epic pornosophy embodies my hyperreal craving/strategy for absurd narrative spectacle. It is absurd because it juxtaposes the epic, pornography and philosophy. It is larger than life narrative that is heroic because it dares to expose the obscenity of the lack of depth, origins, of causes and ultimate meanings.

Baudrillard's Selected Writings – “This will to spectacle and illusion, in contrast to every will to knowledge and power, is another form of fundamental cynicism. It is alive in the hearts of people, but haunts just as well the processes of event. In the raw event, in objective information, and in the most secret acts and thoughts, there is something like a drive to revert to the spectacle, or to climax on stage instead of producing oneself originally. To manifest one's being is necessary; to be enraptured is absolutely vital.”⁴⁴

Natural Alien – Not to mention the will to parody to academia's impenetrable multi-syllabic jargon, the will to mock such mouthfuls as Linda Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction.

Karen – In the hyperreal, there is simply no life support for a subject, a self that is intact, distinct and integrated. It is impossible in the plethora of objects, but more than that it is banal. The innumerable simulations, their intertextuality and metafiction, provide me with a never-ending supply of texts/spectacles/narratives I pretend, perform and contemplate. I am a couch potato, but I am also Karen, Dade's mother, Boo the Clown, the devil's son, a writer of a major paper that odysseys all over a futon and back.

Suddenly a gust of Betty Crocker chocolate cake powder literally collides The Player into Karen's innumerable texts. Karen — now as small as she feels in the hyperreal, the size of a McDonalds' French fry — and the heap of overdue library books sit on the shoulders of Griffin and June respectively, in the following scene.

SCENE 3

EXTERIOR. DINING AREA. NIGHT.

GRIFFIN and JUNE are dancing.

JUNE: Tell me about the movies you make.

GRIFFIN: Why?

JUNE: Because I want to know what you do.

GRIFFIN: Well, I listen to stories and decide if they'll make good movies or not. I get 125 phone calls a day, and if I let that slip to a hundred, I know that I'm not doing my job.

(GRIFFIN and JUNE walk down [with Karen and her overdue library books hanging onto Griffin's shoulder for dear life])

GRIFFIN: And when they call, they want to know one thing: they want me to say yes to them and make their movie. If I say yes to them and make their movie, they think come New Year's, it's going to be them and Jack Nicholson on the slopes of Aspen, that's what they think. Problem is, I can only say yes—my studio can only say yes—twelve times a year. Collectively, we hear about fifty thousand stories a year, so it's hard; and I guess sometimes I'm not nice and make enemies. And that's what I was to David....

Vital Illusion – To reality Griffin is God of the hyperreal, maker of simulation and schmaltz.

⁴⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. Baudrillard's Selected Writings. 201

Griffin and June seem not to notice the hearty band of overdue library books and Karen.

JUNE: Was his story one of the twelve?

GRIFFIN: No, it wasn't.

JUNE: Why?

GRIFFIN: It lacked certain elements that we need to market a film successfully.

JUNE: What elements?

GRIFFIN: Suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings. Mainly happy endings.

JUNE: What about reality?

GRIFFIN: You're not from Iceland, are you?

JUNE: Did I say that? Hmmm. Why don't you put me in the hot springs and see if I melt?⁴⁵

At which point the overdue library books shriek such a horrid intertextual scream that they, as well as Karen, immediately return to the pigsty and the Snapple-stained futon.

SCENE 4

The books begin to look for an open window when Baudrillard's Selected Writings turns into a lectern.

Baudrillard's Selected Writings – "Catastrophe is a ...

Karen – You mean like Airport, Airport '75, Airport '77, Earthquake, Jaws, The Poseidon Adventure ...

Baudrillard's Selected Writings (louder, sterner) – "Catastrophe is a parable(?), which is there to signify this passion of passions, a simulating passion, a seductive passion, a diverting passion, where things are only meaningful when transfigured by illusion, by derision, by a staging that is in no way representational; only meaningful in their exceptional form, in their eccentricity, in the will to scorn their causes and extinguish themselves in their effects... Nevertheless, this..."⁴⁶

Karen – Just like in The Player ...

Griffin – Just like me.

Griffin has actually come through the door this time; arm and arm with his fictional wife, June and his "real-life" partner Susan Sarandon. Everyone is speechless except

⁴⁵ Tolkin. 79

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Baudrillard's Selected Writings (*more louder, sterner*) – “Nevertheless, this eccentricity is what protects us from the real, and from its disastrous consequences.”⁴⁷

Karen (to her new guests) – Have a seat. Don't be afraid of the futon, it derives a macabre glamour from all the intertextuality and interwoven goo. Baudrillard's Selected Writings was just in the middle of praising your reality. I mean your film.

Griffin (trying to impress both of his loves) – Please continue, Karen. This all sounds very interesting.

Karen (fully aware he is mocking her) – Well, it's just like The Player. Despite its will to be wicked it is however critical of any serious attempt at an authentic, honest, genuine claim to reality. The Bicycle Thief depicted in the film as The Player's antithesis, is a film that promises its viewers 'reality', coming out of the Italian Neorealist tradition⁴⁸. But for The Player, it is this promise of a true, authentic reality that is banal, tacky even. The straightforward universe of binary oppositions, of good/bad, Hollywood/other, artist/hack of The Bicycle Thief/The Player deconstructs as the narrative dictates that The Player follows, fold in on themselves. Although The Bicycle Thief ends in tragedy – a sign that it is truly an art film – and The Player ends happily – the hallmark of a Hollywood film - both present a 'reality' where the innocent suffer and the guilty go unpunished. And, as June notes, in Hollywood films thieves, murderers and gangsters must suffer for their crimes. So The Player is both Hollywood with its happy ending, and other as it is the villain protagonist who gets it. It is a film situated liminally between contemptuous independent film, and corrupted Hollywood film.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – This is also evident in the parodic depiction of the artist-writers, who are just as egotistical and homogenized as Griffin Mill and Larry Levy. The sheer banality of David Kahane's pitch based on his experiences as an American student in Japan prevents from Griffin remembering it during his drink with David in the Karaoke bar. After David's death, June confesses she always thought David was “uniquely untalented”. The authenticity and authority of the serious artist not in it for the money is mocked in the eulogy given by Phil, a fellow writer:

The Hollywood studio system didn't murder David Kahane. Not the ninety-eight million dollar movie, not the twelve-million dollar actor, not even the million dollar deal that David Kahane never landed. No, the most we can pin on Hollywood is assault with the intent to kill because society is responsible for this particular murder. And it is to society that we must look if we are to have any justice for that crime. Because someone in the night killed David Kahane, and that person will have to bear the guilt... the next time we sell a script

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ <http://www.inblackandwhite.com/ItalianNeorealismv2.0/neo-films.html>

for a million dollars and the next time we nail some shit-bag producer to the wall, we'll say: "that's another one for David Kahane!"⁴⁹

-Phil and David are so interchangeable that Phil wears the same grungy clothes at the funeral - "boots, blue jeans, red shirt, brown sportscoat and glasses"⁵⁰ that David wears the night of his death.

Karen – *The Player* is the out-of-the-closet hyperreal text as it is set in the hometown of simulation – Hollywood, a.k.a. Tinseltown. It offers a look at how Hollywood commodifies narratives and people into movies and stars, in an accelerating intertextuality. The pitches in *The Player*, and their writers' demands for Julia Roberts and Bruce Willis demonstrate this. Griffin hears so many potential realities/products in a day, he demands that they be condensed into "25 words or less", an allusion to the glut of realities, he must pick and choose from. The Player's lack of condemnation for this commodification allows the absurd in the hyperreal to flourish.

Susan Sarandon – You're telling me. First I play a "saintly onlooker" at the end of Griffin's film *Habeas Corpus*, then, Tim re-makes me as Sister Helen Prejean in his *Dead Man Walking*. I know it's the same for those poor narratives, but at least they don't have to read about themselves in other texts.

All the overdue library books shake their covers in disagreement.

Karen – Well, I was thinking specifically of how narratives are thought up from the texts and stars that already exist. How *The Player* reveals this absurdity. An example of this is Buck Henry's pitch for *The Graduate Part 2*. It is of course contingent on the viewer's own intertextual knowledge of *The Graduate*. Let me just rewind a bit here:

BUCK: *The Graduate*, part two... The three principals are still with us: Dustin Hoffman, Ann Bancroft, Katherine Ross – twenty-five years later, and so are the characters: Ben, Elaine, and Mrs. Robinson. Ben and Elaine are married. Still, they live in a big old spooky house in Northern California somewhere and Mrs. Robinson lives with them....Her aging mother has had a stroke... so she can't talk
GRIFFIN: Is this going to be funny?
BUCK: Yeah, it'll be funny –
GRIFFIN: With a stroke?
BUCK: Dark and weird and funny with a stroke.
GRIFFIN: Okay.
BUCK: She's up there in the bedroom upstairs listening to everything that happens. They've got a daughter who's just graduated from college –
GRIFFIN: That's good, that's good. Young blood.
BUCK: Twenty-two, twenty-three years old, like a ... Julia Roberts –

⁴⁹ Tolkin. 44

⁵⁰ imdb.com. see *The Player*'s trivia site.

GRIFFIN (*simultaneous*) Julia Roberts, right.

The Natural Alien – What about the outsiders, those who threaten the commodifying star-crowded Hollywood?

Griffin – Some of them are pretty interesting. Look at June here, she could give Hollywood a shake-up. Blonde, willing to take off her clothes, but she doesn't go to movies.

June punches Griffin in his smile. Even the books try to applaud.

Karen – Well the whole notion of Hollywood and outsiders as somehow two distinct universes, one fictional the other real begins to deconstruct as soon as Griffin wanders outside of Hollywood in search of David Kahane. Griffin soon finds himself in a movie theatre, but it is an art-house cinema half-full with “slightly depressed film lovers, dressed in dark clothes”⁵¹. This audience loves movies, but not those produced in Hollywood. Later, Griffin suggests to David that his studio should do a remake of The Bicycle Thief, a reference to Hollywood's propensity for reproducing foreign and independent films in their own image. During a studio meeting the following day, when Larry Levy asks when was the last time anyone really went to a movie, actually bought a ticket to see one, it is Griffin who admits to seeing The Bicycle Thief. Griffin, the quintessential man of Hollywood admits to watching films not of Hollywood.

Griffin – I think we should re-make it with Eminem, and that kid in Blues Clues.

Susan Sarandon – That's not a kid, that's Steve, the pale white adult in the golf shirt.

Griffin – That's even better.

Karen – Anyway the studio itself is threatened in the first scene by the simultaneous arrival of Japanese tourists, and the threat of a shake-up in the studio. Joel Levison, Griffin's boss, says maliciously, “What are the Japs doing here?” Japan hovers on the fringes of Hollywood in The Player as David Kahane's script is about the coming together of American student with Japanese culture.

Sexual Politics and Narrative – What of the police that question Griffin? Whoopi Goldberg is the biggest star who plays a fictional character, yet this character is very un-Hollywood; a middle-aged black female who wears dowdy clothes?

Karen – Yes. In fact when Griffin compares the cop played by Scott Glen in the film currently in production, The Lonely Room, to Goldberg's character, Detective Avery, she asks somewhat bewildered, “He plays a black woman?”

⁵¹ Tolkin. 35

-The police are depicted as absurd and at times surreal. When Griffin follows Detective De Longpre (played by country singer Lyle Lovett, itself an absurd intertextual casting choice) to look at some mug-shots, Detective Avery is in the midst of accusing another female detective of stealing her tampons, a theft too mundane for most larger than life, Hollywood films with the exception of Farley brothers comedies. Yet in the same scene, Detective De Longpre talks about a movie he saw the previous night, Tod Browning's *Freaks*. According to Detective Avery "he was raving about it." Although the freaks in *The Player*, those who are other to Hollywood, are the Pasadena police, the film *Freaks*, is a Hollywood horror classic. The fluidity of Hollywood insiders/outsiders, becomes all too obvious to Griffin at the end of the scene when he begins to lose his cool. Laughing and pointing at him, the detectives begin to chant, "One of us! One of us! One of us!" This is what the circus freaks chant to the trapeze artist at the end of *Freaks* when they have turned her into the "Feathered Hen"⁵².

Griffin – That's was Susan's grandmother.

Susan Sarandon – Actually it was Tim's. And, Griffin's great-grandmother. We always seem to play characters who are a quite a bit younger than ourselves.

Karen – But what about my identity? What about us "real" people, in such an unstable fluid hyperreal?

Hélène Cixous, rootprints: Memory and life writing – You're not the only one with an unstable sense of identity. Even fictional characters are in danger of being subsumed under the tidal wave of intertextuality. "Each (hero and) sentence of a text has survived the shipwreck of two hundred pages".⁵³

Karen – Uh... (*Stunned momentarily as this is a text that up to this point has remained on the bookshelf and mute*) – The constantly-shifting nature of identity, the shifting of surfaces, plates with no anchors, houses with no sub-urban basements comes out in the continual inability of characters to identify each other. They continually misidentify each other, and often have difficulty pronouncing each others' names. More often than not, characters such as Griffin seem to make their identities through the products they own. Griffin never just orders water. He orders, Vitel, Crystal Geyser or Banning Springs Water. When a waiter pours his water in a wine glass, Griffin irately demands he have his water in a water glass not a wine glass. The Range Rover, Griffin owns, defines him as a wealthy movie executive. David Kahane refers to it facetiously as a "boat". But when Detective Avery questions Griffin regarding where he parked his car, he remarks that if he had a "shitty car" like David Kahane's Saab he "might be a dead man" now.

The Natural Alien – But you mentioned that there is a recurring theme of mistaken identity

⁵² www.imdb.com See Freaks.

⁵³ <http://www.overthere.com.au/digital/identikits.html>

Karen – Yes. It begins with Jimmy Chase in the opening scene identifying Alan Rudolph as Martin Scorsese. Even after Alan Rudolph says he is not Scorsese, Jimmy Chase insists that he is indeed Scorsese, saying to him how much he loved Cape Fear. At a party with Griffin, Bonnie Sherow is introduced by Griffin's lawyer as Bunny, which echoes the name of the only witness at the scene of David Kahane's murder, Mrs. Bunny. Jennifer a studio employee is mistaken for Rebecca DeMornay, while Joel Grey doesn't believe Griffin when he introduces himself as Griffin Mill.

-But the most significant misidentification occurs when Mrs. Bunny identifies Detective De Longpre as the murderer in the line-up, rather than Griffin.

Gender Trouble – It's like you. We keep mis- or rather re-identifying you. First you were Couch Potato, then Karen, then Bitch-Clown, now Karen again.

June – And what am I then to Susan?

Susan (looking at June) – What am I to you?

Griffin – You're my, my

Susan and June simultaneously – Don't say it!

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film (to Gender Trouble) – The whole concept of stars, their definition through performance, through the roles they play, implies that identity is performative, just like you claim gender is.

Gender Trouble (who had been absorbed in the recontextualizations of Griffin/Tim Robbins appearing with June, a fictional character, and Susan Sarandon, a "real"life actor) – Reality, gender – the same can be said for both of them (*Gender Trouble opens and that hand that resembles Thing in The Addams Family points to the following*);

In imitating gender (reality), drag (fiction) implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender (reality) itself – as well as its contingency....To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender (real) identities.⁵⁴

Karen – So in the hyperreal I'm not tied down to my self-designated left-handed couch potato tag. It is my intertextuality and self-reflexive metafiction that allows for this openness to resignification and recontextualization. June Gudmundsdottir personifies this notion of identity as performative

⁵⁴ Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge. New York: 1999. 175-6

as superficial; June from wherever, with the unpronounceable surname. She appears to be a Hollywood aberration; she doesn't go to movies, doesn't read, and doesn't work. She never shows or sells her paintings. But like Hollywood, she is all surface. She claims to be from Iceland, but has a British accent, and later smiles smugly, when Griffin suggests she's not really from Iceland. She is mysterious, fraudulent, overtly and absurdly unreal. June, the ice-queen, all in white in contrast to Cher's fire-engine red, is an aberration fit for a Hollywood fairy-tale. She is the enigmatic mystery in white that Griffin, the murderer and liar, craves more than anything else.

June – Don't forget, I'm also a painter of Hollywood, the coldest place on earth.

Sexual Politics and Narrative Film – But let's get back to identity as performance. I think this is fundamental to *The Player's* epic pornosophy that you speak of. Identity as performance, a kind of spectacle, or reassurance of one's identity when one is watched observed. This is why in *The Player*, there is a recurring voyeurism. Characters are continually being watched not only by the viewer, but by other characters. We are not just unseen observers in the opening scene. As viewers we are made aware of our own illicit viewing as we must peak through the blinds of Griffin's office to see the screenwriters giving Griffin their pitches. Shortly after, this spying through windows recurs when Griffin watches June through her kitchen window as he talks to her on his cell-phone. Griffin himself has his every move watched by Detective DeLongpre. When Detective Avery asks him bluntly if he had "fucked" June, it is De Longpre who replies, "I didn't see him".

Susan Sarandon – I want to see him.

Karen – The absence of an essential core identity, meaning, of any essential morality in *The Player* is an overt depiction of the experience of living through simulated realities. This living is absurd. For me it must be lived epically pornographically and always, always philosophically. One must live as spectacle, performance to construct oneself, via all the texts one experiences. Living in the hyperreal is about acceleration, about the breakneck turnover of people, places and things. I do believe to live as spectacle and with spectacle that is so fast, I must know how to drive, how to maneuver the texts I am, and am about to become. Epic pornosophy is a perpetual becoming, I liken to the multiplicity of driving we see in Hollywood film, car chases a la *French Connection*, strolls a la *Driving Miss Daisy*, deal-making on the way to work a la *The Player*, and of course the race a la *Cannonball Run*, where how you look matters just as much as if you win.

Suddenly the pigsty door opens and in comes Dade and Tigger in a zombie state and white labcoat.

Dade – Mama, Tigger lost his mind in my pancakes. But I didn't know and I ate them.

Griffin – Your son, has he ever wanted to act?

Karen – Tigger, can't lose his mind in a pancake breakfast. You must be just imagining. Why don't you try to imagine his mind back. Dade, Griffin here wants to know if you want to act?

Dade – Noooooo! I don't do any of that silly stuff! Mama, why are you talking to your books?

Karen – I'm just imagining.

Dade – Oh. Cuckoo! Cuckoo! Can we make the soapbox derby car for the hundred acre race now?

Karen – Sure.

Karen – Let's call it The Hundred Acre Player.

Griffin – That might be a copyright infringement.

At which point the heap of overdue library books finally go back up on the Ikea shelf and Griffin begins making deals with Tigger about a sequel to The Tigger Movie.

Dade – No. How 'bout the Red Rocket Rumble?

Karen – How 'bout Lucifer's Rod?

Dade – Let's call it ...

We fade back into the television, which is black for once.

Conclusion: A Couch Potato Getaway

I can't have a conclusion, an end, a pronouncement of termination, of closure distinct from all other texts in the hyperreal. A paper that odysseys a world so overpopulated by stories, images, narratives and information that their continual overlap and intimacy will inevitably generate parodies, gossipy reviews, sequels, prequels, spin-offs, re-makes and of course a T.V. mini-series adaptation. But Environmental Studies regulations requiring major papers to conclude still exist, even for ones which odyssey hyperreal environments, where texts appear to be "open-books", always already intertexting with one another and their consumer. So perhaps this is my opportunity for a happy ending, or as it is an academic paper - as outside of Hollywood as you can get in North America that is - it should end tragically, sober and unsatisfied, but with an obscure hope for the future. But this is also the conclusion of my couch potato's ontology, on my continual becoming through the performance of epic pornosophy, through absurd narrative spectacle with *The Player* as my primary text, my textual mentor, my self-help guru. As Eminem declares, this is my one shot, my opportunity to seize everything I ever wanted.⁵⁵ Here is my opportunity, not for a neat and tidy transcendental epiphany, a statement that will change the world, rather it is the occasion for a sudden incredulous plot twist into the cerebral, and a subtle grand finale, a climatic spectacle that leaves the reader feeling robbed of a banal ecstasy; it is the opportunity to end on a prank. After all is not reality built on the gimmicks of grand narratives, CNN and Microsoft?

They did not enter through the door. They did not crawl through the window or blast through the wall a la *Terminator 2*. No, like vampires they had to be invited in. And how could I resist such drama, such spectacle, such visceral violence and palpating romance, all in THX? Now I am their hostage: the pirates, players, spy kids, ice queens, desperadoes, jungle-men, and wasp-women. But they are not alone. I also could not resist the insatiably esoteric isms, conceptions, and -osphies of Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Judith Butler, Robin Wood, Neil Evernden, Hayden White et al. They all came into my living room, my mind, into my budget, and furnished me with what is described respectively by directors, postmodernists and therapists as stories, simulations or realities. Why if they do not even know me, do they hold me captive, I, a nobody, a couch potato, a single mother, a bitch clown, an extra of an extra, so far removed from the spotlight I am an audience member, one of the mob. But then again I did invite them, I turned on the T.V., chose to rent them, or purchase tickets to see them at the local cinema. I chose to sit comfortably inert, titillated by the larger than life concerns of meteors about to destroy the Earth, a summertime alien invasion, a \$100 million bank heist by thieves just as pop culture savvy as I.⁵⁶ With them here I can almost forget death, taxes, and my student loan. But of course my captors can not make them go away. Even in the hyperreal, you still have to pay the rent, flush the toilet and pick up the dog poop burying the backyard.

But as an inhabitant of the hyperreal, I continually live a performance, whether as a clown, an anxiety-ridden grad-student or a latex-clad dominatrix cooking pancakes in a kitchen

⁵⁵ Allusion to Eminem's "Lose Yourself", which begins, "Look, if you had one shot, one opportunity / To seize everything you ever wanted". *8 Mile Soundtrack*.

⁵⁶ Allusion to the abundance of pop culture savvy criminals in such films as *Pulp Fiction*, *Heat*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *True Romance*.

built from empty Snapple bottles, I perform through the narratives that I am. Like any intertextual metafictional reader I am:

assembling the endless textual territories of the [hyperreal] ... both seeing and becoming the embodiment of the (inter)textual field(s), the myriad fields, the plains bursting with embryos, teeming with invitations to *read*, to *run*, to *adventure*, to *play* in the vast force-field of intertextual possibilities.⁵⁷

I chose Robert Altman's *The Player* as my hyperreal guru, because as it seduces me with sex, violence, suspense and glamour, it also seduces me with the intertextual knowings we both share. The innumerable allusions to other films hurtling across the screen, is as dizzying as the hyperreal itself. But it is these allusions, these texts that I know of, that I am made of. What is crucial in *The Player* is that as pornosophy it dares to expose the irrelevance of the disappearance of the real. Rather than lamenting this lack of causes, truth, and essential identity, *The Player* playfully shows off the epic possibilities of "losing yourself" in narrative spectacle, in the deconstruction of the binary oppositions we continually attempt to fit the hyperreal into. Real/fiction, self/other, Hollywood/non-Hollywood are transfigured into mobius strips where real becomes fiction, fiction becomes real, self becomes other, other becomes self and Hollywood becomes non-Hollywood and of course we all become Hollywood. It pornosophically exposes the boundary between reality and fiction to be a ghost, having been murdered in time to be the subject of conversation of some intensely shallow movie executives, who themselves profit off reality's enigma.

Yes I am a willing hostage to the "suspense, laughter, violence, hope, heart, nudity, sex, happy endings" of Hollywood's hyperreal. Through this odyssey with *The Player* at the helm and my mutinous crew of academic superstars, I have learnt to drive through the hyperreal epic pornosophically. The potency of the absurd, the power of metafictional and intertextual play with texts inside and outside of me, does not transform me into a *somebody*, a *player*, into Karen – Bitch-Clown Dominatrix of the hyperreal. No, what *The Player* has guided me to, is a perpetual becoming, a growing, a perpetual odyssey of myself, of my own little corner of what Rod Serling once called *The Twilight Zone* and what Jean Baudillard calls, the hyperreal. I conclude tentatively, ready for a re-write armed with an order from Eminem himself: "You better lose yourself in the music, the moment".⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Caney. See the section entitled "text-fields".

⁵⁸ Eminem.

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