

## ***Žižek and Cinema - IJŽS Vol 1.3***

# ***Qui Perd Gagne: Failure and Cinematic Seduction***

Hugh S. Manon – Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,  
Oklahoma, United States

### **Introduction – “To Cracow”**

Although it is mentioned only once in the writings of Sigmund Freud, the so called “Jewish joke” appears on various occasions in the work of Jacques Lacan (1978: 139; 1993: 37; 2006: 13, 436) and is developed in various permutations, and with great didactic force, by Slavoj Žižek (1989: 197; 1992: 73; 1998: 12). The joke, as Freud originally presents it, is as follows:

Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. “Where are you going?” asked one. “To Cracow,” was the answer. “What a liar you are!” broke out the other. “If you say you’re going to Cracow, you want me to believe you’re going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you’re going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?” (1960: 137-8)

For Freud, this unusual joke points up “the problem of what determines the truth” by playing on the difference between two kinds of lying. Whereas a basic lie involves a willful attempt to represent things as other than they are, regardless of who is listening, a second option is also available. Taking into account how various statements might be received by a particular individual—for instance someone already known to be a skeptic—a speaker may create a customized lie, one more ideally suited to the disposition of its potential victim. The result is a paradox: a lie that takes the form of the truth itself. In other words, as in the Jewish joke—which implies not only a mutual familiarity but also a past history of deception between the two

travelers—when skepticism is in the air, one way to succeed in lying is by trying to fail. Or, we might say that one way to win the day is to deliberately give up one's game, with the liar's passive surrender of the truth transforming into an active victory.

For Lacan, the Jewish joke discussed by Freud is an archetype of human deception since, unlike an animal, only a human subject (i.e. one who operates on the order of the symbolic) will on occasion mislead his opponent by telling the truth in anticipation that it will be taken as a lie:

You are in the presence of a subject insofar as what he says and does—they're the same thing—can be supposed to have been said and done to deceive you, with all the dialectic that that comprises, up to and including that he should tell the truth so that you believe the contrary. [. . .] What the subject tells me is always fundamentally related to a possible feint, in which he sends me, and I receive, the message in an inverted form. (1993: 37)

Because an inverse position “can be supposed” in any utterance, gesture, or action, the prospect of a “possible feint” hovers over all human signification, all the time. This is not, of course, to say that in all cases we are actually being misled, but rather that our engagement with representation is always/already structured in anticipation of a deception that may or may not, in fact, occur. The point (and the humor) of the Jewish joke, then, is not that the second Jew is lying, but that the first is convinced such a deception is afoot *no matter what*, and that his counterpart must be dealt with accordingly. We are thus presented with the unthinkable but nonetheless perfectly logical hypothesis that a flawed lie (i.e. one that leaks the truth “accidentally on purpose”) can ensnare a human subject just as well as, and perhaps even better than, a lie that lacks any such flaws.

In his 1992 book *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek gives this counterintuitive form of lying a proper name: “double deception.” The adjective “double” here suggests not that the victim of the lie is super-deceived (i.e. more deceived than usual), but that one deception is being compounded by another, with the second doubling back upon the first:

Man alone is capable of deceiving *by means of truth itself*. An animal can feign to be or to intend something other than what it really is or intends, but only man can lie by telling a truth that he expects to be taken for a lie. Only man can *deceive by feigning to deceive*. (Žižek 1992: 73)

Žižek goes on to explain that both in truth-telling and in lie-telling, the human subject positions her/his statement in anticipation of the Other's judgment. In other words, because we cannot empirically test each enunciation to see how it will be received, the Other performs this judgmental function for us, establishing a standard for our signifying practices and gauging whether what we are about to do or say will have its desired effect. Despite being purely hypothetical, the Other nonetheless performs an indispensable role as what Lacan calls "the guarantor of Good Faith," even though nothing binds the subject to follow suit and represent things truthfully (2006: 437). In this way, Lacan can speak of "the Other that even my lie invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which my lie subsists" (436).

An interesting example of double deception, and one that is particularly transparent in its attempt to appease the judgmental function of the Other, involves a set of security measures that were employed in the heyday of analog videotape. With the popularization of the VHS videocassette in the 1980s, video rental stores began appearing in every American city and small town. Video distribution companies sought to capitalize on this trend by pricing new releases very high (around \$80 per tape) for the rental market, and then lowering prices for consumer purchase once rental revenues had declined. Quite naturally, the owners of video rental stores became very concerned about securing their inventory against theft, and were thus among the first retailers to install the large, walk-through magnetic sensors we see at the entrances and exits of many retail stores today. While the high visibility of such technology established a sentry-like point of surveillance, the unmanned scanners also begged the question of their own trigger mechanism. That is, having encountered this new security system for the first time, patrons could not help but wonder what invisible device had been included with the cassette to activate the alarm, and where this device was located. The answer, of course, was that a series of adhesive-backed magnetic strips were affixed to the VHS tapes themselves. Strangely, however, the purpose of some of these tags was not primarily to remain unseen and engage the alarm, but instead to be readily detected as a sham and thus engage the mischievous skepticism of the would-be video thief.

One typical configuration of VHS security tags involved a three-layer approach. First, on the outer cassette shell appeared a magnetic strip camouflaged as something else—usually a UPC barcode or a "Be Kind, Please Rewind" sticker. This outermost sticker was only a decoy, however. Existing to be removed, or in a conceptual sense "seen through," the dummy barcode



would have been easily deduced by any potential shoplifter, leading her/him to look for, and find, a second strategically-placed sticker—the undisguised, black magnetic strip situated inside the spring-loaded “gate” of the videocassette. At this point, the imagined shoplifter is presumably satisfied at having figured out the deception and, without yet realizing it, has just lost the battle of wits with the wily shop owner. The two adhesive tags the shoplifter finds and surreptitiously removes are just a pretense hiding the real core of protection—the fact that the store owner has unscrewed the two halves of the tape housing to place a third magnetic strip on the inside.<sup>1</sup> To be clear, this triple-layer arrangement of magnetic security strips is not a matter of simple redundancy, but an anticipation of the subject’s own anticipation of a lie. The tape is secure only because the shoplifter is permitted to seek and find positive confirmation that the false barcode is exactly what it appears to be: a front for the “real” security mechanism that lies beyond it.

My point in recalling this obscure, somewhat overattentive security practice is to lay the conceptual groundwork for a discussion of double deception in cinema. When double deception is at play, certain blockages and snarls exist to be undone, and at the point that the subject undoes them, a hopeless engagement makes the beholder blind to some very obvious other possibilities. A problem exists, however, with both the Jewish joke and my example of 1980s video store security. Both examples depend entirely on what the deceiver, in Lacan’s words, “says and does—they’re the same thing.” In other words, both deceptions take hold at the level

of content—the “what.” It is less clear what such discursive/interactive double deceptions have to do with representational form—the “how.” Does it matter, for instance, how the second Jew inflects his crucial response—“To Cracow”—or how long he pauses before speaking it? Does the video store owner have better success if his real/false “Please Rewind” stickers are clean and carefully arranged, or well worn and haphazardly slapped on?

In cinema, all manner of “lies” take place both in narrated content and at the level of form, yet the particularities of film form—elements such as sound design, lighting schemes, editing structures, color choices, differences in lenses and film stock, etc.—remain largely unexplored as avenues of double deception. At its core, this essay is an attempt to both recognize and define the terrain of failure on which our engagement with cinematic form plays out. By examining a range of examples—the Hal Roach body-switch comedy *Turnabout* (1940), Olsen and Johnson’s anarchic musical *Hellzapoppin’* (1941), the notorious Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot film (1967), George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), the original *King Kong* (1933) and Peter Jackson’s CGI remake (2005)—I argue that double deception in film form has developed from a marginal, occasionally amusing tactic in classical Hollywood, to a primary (albeit largely unremarked) mode of deception in the analog media of the 1970s and 1980s. My conclusion, however, points up a crisis in this trajectory, whereby digital technology, and especially computer-generated imagery (CGI), has led to a pursuit of flawlessness in which the viewer’s engagement at the level of double deception has been all but obliterated.

The thread that runs through the cinematic (and other) examples that follow concerns a seduction that takes the form of various degrees of see-through-ability. The texts I examine take into account the skeptical attitude of their audience and admit their own status as representations; they say to their beholder, “You sit there expecting a lie. . .and now I am going to lie to you. . .” What is at stake for viewers in such a declaration is not a “suspension of disbelief,” but its opposite, an interchange in which belief itself is suspended and disbelief is what we are supposed to confront at every turn. The problem, and indeed the great danger of such truth-telling admissions, however, is that they run the risk of rendering the would-be deceivers (here, the filmmakers and/or the film’s producers) passive victims of their own gambit, having admitted precisely that which, under simpler circumstances, the lie of classical realism would conceal. At the same time, this essay not only explores some of the ways failure succeeds as a formal tactic in cinema, but also some instances in which cinema seems to forget that its audience is skeptical, and in doing so fails by failing to fail.

## Part I – The Big Phony

Before launching into a discussion of double deception in the formal features of specific films, I want to take a moment to consider an enormously useful, albeit declining slang word in English: the word “phony.” Specifically, I wish to underscore a distinction, already present in language, between the faux or fake, which involves a simple first-order deception, and the phony, which incorporates a double deception. To say in casual conversation that someone or something is a “phony” is in fact a highly precise designation, signifying a particular mode of pretense. On the part of the beholder, phoniness always involves a seeing-through, whether the phony detail is a tiny affectation or a grand performance. That is to say, no one ever declares “What a big phony!” without having gained a sense of superiority for having seen things “as they really are.” At the same time, the fact that such accusations are usually both contemptuous and dismissive is an indicator that such phoniness is understood as an ongoing project—not something to be debunked and instantaneously done away with. A “big phony” is recognized as such because he or she continues to attempt to deceive; if the beholder is no longer falling for it, then someone else might be. In this sense, the concept of the phony positions having-been-seen-through as a central ontological attribute.

A definitive example of phony deception, and its difference from the simply fake, appears in the 1941 Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson musical *Hellzapoppin’*. Based on Olsen and Johnson’s popular 1938 Broadway revue of the same name, the plot of the film centers on the staging of a Red Cross benefit show at an opulent country estate. Early in the film, while guests are greeted at the mansion’s front door, a narrator introduces one particular man as “Prince Pepi” (Mischa Auer), noting that “He is a phony—a chiseler. He hasn’t a penny in his pocket.” When Prince Pepi proceeds to cheat the taxi driver out of his tip, the hosts of the event and other assembled guests laugh and cheer. In the words of the narrator, “They know he’s a phony but they don’t mind—they think he’s cute.” He has been invited to the weekend getaway not because his hosts want to hobnob with a real Russian nobleman, but because they see through his façade and are amused by his buffoonish attempts to impress, which fail at every turn.

The source of Prince Pepi’s popularity is more complicated than it seems, however, and his true strategy is revealed in a chance encounter later in the film. A waiter, serving coffee, approaches the Prince and suddenly recognizes him for who he is—real royalty. Himself an exiled Russian count, the waiter kneels in deference, breathlessly exclaiming “Your highness!” Prince Pepi brusquely rebukes him:

Get up, you fool! Hurry up! Get up! You want they should find out that I'm *not* a phony? [. . .] If they find out I'm *not* a phony, they are no longer amused. No longer amused, they are no longer interested. No longer interest, no longer money. No longer money, I'm just like you, Count Alexander Alexandrovich Alexandrovsky—a poor slob.

In his pursuit of wealthy heiresses, the hand-kissing Prince succeeds through the strange tactic of deliberately failing to convince others that he really is what he appears to be. In this way, phoniness can be understood as a dialectical step beyond simple fakery; the phony admits that it is faking, revealing the flaw in its own facade. Moreover, in enunciating his strategy to the waiter, Prince Pepi speaks for the film itself, certainly one of the most self-effacing, reflexive, and intentionally *failed* classical Hollywood films ever produced.

Both in its plot content and in various formal elements, *Hellzapoppin'* is not fake or deceptive; it is phony, and without this phoniness, the audience would no longer be amused or interested. Like Prince Pepi, whose charm derives from the transparency of his deceptiveness, the film does not seek to fool its audience through a carefully structured realism, but instead seduces by way of an artifice that ceaselessly crumbles. Like more canonical film comedies such as *Sherlock Jr.* (Buster Keaton, 1924) and *Duck Soup* (Leo McCarey, 1933), as well as numerous Warner Brothers cartoons of the 1930s-1950s, *Hellzapoppin'* repeatedly “breaks the fourth wall,” addressing the audience *qua* audience through a zany smorgasbord of self-reflexive techniques: a musical number pauses so the singers can rebuke a member of the



film's audience; characters supply voices for a film-within-a-film (a la *Mystery Science Theater 3000*); the film "rewinds" to resolve a scene in a different way; characters appear rear-projected behind themselves; and so on. Whereas more typical efforts at Hollywood realism are no less artificial, their artifice is masked by continuity and a seamless internal coherence. *Hellzapoppin'* takes the opposite tack: seducing by virtue of being manifestly false, "phony" because it freely admits the hidden ways other films deceive audiences as a matter of course. Such techniques do not seek to alienate viewers, but to draw them in by way of their own alienation, and it is this sense of being "drawn in"—lured rather than simply hoodwinked—that defines the trajectory of the doubly-deceived subject. The purpose of double deception is not to convince, but to lure or seduce, and this distinction becomes clear when we consider the etymological origins of the word "phony."

Throughout the twentieth century, the American slang word "phony" (or "phoney" as it is sometimes spelled) was commonly understood in relation to telephone technology—the possibility of using "the telephone to lure victims to false appointments in order that a criminal operation might be carried on" (Tamony 1937: 108). According to etymologist Peter Tamony, this homophony is purely incidental, and the origins of the word go quite a bit deeper, to the so called "fawney-rig," a type of street swindle involving counterfeit jewelry, dating back at least as far as eighteenth-century Britain (109). Also known as "ring dropping," the fawney-rig begins when the swindler looks around to ensure no one is watching and deposits what appears to be a gold ring (or other piece of jewelry) on the street. The swindler then waits nearby for his mark to spot the ring and pick it up. At this point, the swindler rushes over, protesting that he, too, had spotted the gold ring and is entitled to half its worth. The finder of the ring quite naturally objects to this, and the swindler, acknowledging the deadlock, generously negotiates a deal: he will sell off his claim to the ring for eight or nine shillings. Accepting these terms, the mark buys off the swindler, and realizes the true nature of the exchange a bit too late: the gold ring is a worthless brass counterfeit. The counterfeit jewelry, rings, etc., employed for such purposes were readily available for purchase at trinket shops and came to be known as "fawney"—a word that, according to Tamony, was pronounced as "phony" by nineteenth-century Irish immigrants to America, before becoming a "most effective" twentieth century buzz-word (109).

Well-known to street swindlers even today, the basic procedure of the fawney-rig recapitulates the success-in-failure characteristic of the Lacanian double deception. When compared to the Jewish joke, however, wherein the deception centers on the expected substitution of one city-name for another, the moment of "seeing through" in the fawney-rig is considerably more abstract and diffuse, the point of failure less clear. In order to understand



what makes the fawney-rig (and phoniness in general) a form of double deception we need to recognize the swindler's "set up" as an essentially *formalistic* enterprise, in which the swindle is in no way tethered to the authenticity of the ring, which is never mentioned. Instead, as the fawney-rig proceeds, the moment of double deception occurs when the swindler evokes a certain feeling or tone in the scene: a gritty milieu of street-level criminal activity that positions the holder of the ring as anything but innocent. For this reason it is imperative that the swindler does not initially approach the finder proclaiming, "Hey, that's my ring!" Because it inherently sounds like a lie, such a claim would be open to debate, shifting suspicion wholly onto the swindler, with the consequence that no swindle could take place. Wiser than this, the swindler takes into account the ring-finder's anticipation of such a protestation and takes an opposite tack, feigning to deceive. In other words, the swindle works by positing another swindle in front of it: I saw you pick up that ring and now *we are both in on the swindle!* To find a ring on the street and keep it is akin to theft—a vaguely immoral, marginally illegal act that requires a certain degree of concealment on the part of the finder. (Unless the finder is a child, "finder's keeper's" is not usually something one advertises.) This sense of guilt is only compounded when the finder is seen finding, resulting in the exchange of money for the ill-gotten ring. Significantly, however, it is only by creating a sense of getting away with something—a sense that both he and his mark are together behind the deceptive veil—that the fawney swindler's second, more profitable deception can succeed. Paradoxically, because the finder has come to possess the ring illegitimately, as part of a "dirty deal," the assumption is that there can be nothing illegitimate about the object itself. The finder's mild guilt in seeking to pocket the ring, and in taking advantage of another's loss, creates a conceptual blind spot, such that the ring cannot be anything but the real thing. It is thus crucial that the deal struck by the swindler is for a newly found ring, and not for a ring he carries with him, since the supposedly random act of finding, followed by a mutual desire to cheat, is precisely what makes the swindler's cheating possible.

In concluding my analysis of the fawney-rig, I want to emphasize that the honest admission upon which all double deception is based—the moment at which the deceiver feigns feigning and admits what he really is—need not be tied in any essential way to the substance of the fraud. When a magician bares his arms and says "Nothing up my sleeves. . .," he admits that a deception is taking place—that his act is a phony—and this admission rules out a series of other considerations: that his garment may have nothing to do with the illusion, that his sleeve may not in fact *be* a sleeve, etc. In such declarations, the magician does not work to preserve the naiveté of audience members, but instead admits and actively manipulates their inherent

mistrust of magic. That is, by admitting that a trick is currently in progress, the magician preempts the audience's extant suspicion and makes it his own to exploit. In cinema, as in magic acts and street swindles, in order to gain the advantage of double deception, one need only create the mere whiff that a deception—*any* deception—is taking place in order for the mark to be drawn in. The proof of this is that although the ring at the center of the fawney-rig is discernibly not real, its legitimacy is never questioned.<sup>2</sup> What is phony, then, is not really the object we think we are concerned with (it is either a simple fake, or not), but the field in which it is encountered—a circumstance in which deception, and not honesty, is avowed and mutually agreed upon. Because it need not be linked to any particular object or representational content, double deception becomes a particularly effective strategy at the level of cinematic technique and style, a subject I take up in the next section.

## Part II – The Alleged Idiot

Anyone who has watched George Romero's 1978 zombie masterpiece *Dawn of the Dead* understands how a certain degree of stupidity in a filmmaker's technique can lure a viewer most profoundly. Unlike Romero's earlier *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which obscures its low-budget makeup effects by using black-and-white film stock, *Dawn* is filmed in garish Technicolor. In order to differentiate the undead from the living, a thick layer of grey pancake makeup coats the faces of the zombies, and in many scenes, especially those shot outdoors, their faces appear bright blue. To borrow a formulation from Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp," this is not makeup, but "makeup" in quotation marks—high phoniness, to be sure (1991: 280). The result of this failed artifice is that the numerous extras that portray the zombie hordes appear to be exactly what they are: local residents who lived near the shopping mall where the film was shot (and who happily donated their time in exchange for fifteen minutes of fame as a Romero zombie). Although the theatrical makeup begs to be seen through, this transparency has not hindered the film's status as a horror classic; indeed the makeup style and color has been imitated in too many subsequent zombie films to mention. When the blue-faced zombies appear in close-up, it is not as if the film has aimed to create a consistent, Hollywood-style realism and ineptly missed the mark. Rather, we simply do not sense that realism was the goal in the first place.

On the DVD commentary track for *Dawn*, director Romero and special effects artist Tom Savini talk about the artificial blood they used in the film in similar terms. Although the blood looks like "melted crayons," they admit that this "cartoony" non-realistic look "may have helped them out." As is well known, *Dawn* was independently produced on a very low budget, and

clearly part of the attractiveness of Romero's zombie-effects lies in their cheapness. Implicitly acknowledging the public's desire for increasingly sophisticated and expensive Hollywood special effects, Romero "plays dumb." He allows his supernatural beings to look innocuously like just plain folks, but in doing so creates a sense of real corporeality which, when violated, is almost too much to bear.<sup>3</sup> Indeed this overriding sense of *localness* is the seductive hook of most of Romero's films prior to *Land of the Dead* (2005). Filming all his productions with a crew of friends in and around his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Romero imposes a cap on what is possible and this very real, low-budget limitation provides a formalistic standard against which the film's depictions of intense violence and gore can be judged. The key is that unlike simple, first-order deceptions (i.e. actual lies), doubly deceptive representations do not seek to conceal their flaws (i.e. the gap separating the representation and the truth), but rather wear them on their sleeve. Whereas such inertia and apparent shortsightedness is usually conceived as a passive liability—something most independent directors hope to overcome in future film projects—we need to conceive of George Romero's *mise-en-scène* as a brilliant example of *weaponized inertia*. The fact that his zombies are remarkable for being ploddingly slow, with limited range, is certainly no coincidence; they are inertia personified, and far from innocuous.

In his extended discussion of "the game of 'even and odd'" in Seminar II, Lacan states that "someone of superior intelligence can in fact understand that the trick is, notwithstanding the fact that one seems to be very intelligent, to play like an idiot" (1988: 180-81). Such a strategy, according to Lacan, is entirely context-dependent. In undertaking the idiot's gambit, the intelligent player must first appear like something other than an idiot. The result of such a strategy, according to the principle of intersubjective double deception, is the introduction of a subject-position Lacan terms "the alleged idiot" (188). George Romero approaches *mise-en-scène* in exactly this way. Far from stupid, he permits himself some stupid excesses, reveling in (and profiting from) the cheapness of his low-budget techniques. Understanding media in such a framework is a bit difficult, but the key is to view the complexity of media itself—its many layers and combined formal techniques—as seeming very intelligent by default. To deign to fail in this context, to let down one's guard in the midst of such multi-layered textual sophistication, is not only highly seductive, but seemingly endlessly repeatable as a means of audience manipulation. In Lacan's words, "All you have to do is invert this game into the game *who loses wins* [*qui perd gagne*], for it to be quite evident that these things are equivalent" (182). To cast things in slightly different terms, where the elements of film form are concerned, *that which fails succeeds*.

For a second example of double deception in cinematic form, I shift from the domains of makeup and special effects to a discussion of acting and film sound—areas in which carelessness is usually not tolerated. To be precise, I am concerned with what could be termed “alleged carelessness,” which, as I explain in the next section, may be no different from real carelessness in its effects. One striking example of alleged carelessness is the 1940 Hal Roach film *Turnabout*, a highly formalistic screwball comedy in which an athletic, workaholic advertising executive named Tim Willows (John Hubbard) exchanges bodies with his leisure-loving wife Sally (Carole Landis). At the level of plot, the film provides the template for later youth-oriented body-switch films like *Freaky Friday* (Gary Nelson, 1976), as well as a glut of similar late-1980s comedies: *Like Father, Like Son* (Rod Daniel, 1987), *Vice Versa* (Brian Gilbert, 1988), *Big* (Penny Marshall, 1988), and *18 Again!* (Paul Flaherty, 1988). It is at the level of form, however, that *Turnabout* distinguishes itself. Whereas in the later body-switch films, the joke is that two very dissimilar actors (usually portraying a father/son or mother/daughter pair) take up each others’ attitudes and mannerisms, this actorly effort displaces another option, in which the film’s soundtrack does most of the work. In *Turnabout*, the switch is not only visible but audible, with the characters’ respective voices traveling to the opposite partner along with their psyche.<sup>4</sup>

Having established its protagonist couple along with their marital trouble, *Turnabout*’s major conflict commences when, for the first time in their married lives, Tim and Sally actually agree on something: that if they could, they would “change places.” Perched on a shelf in their bedroom, a bronze statue from India comes to life and grants their wish. A puff of white smoke engulfs the screen and suddenly Sally is wearing Tim’s pajamas and Tim is wearing her nightgown. The real shock, however, comes when Tim opens his mouth and says, “Oh, Tim! It really happened,” and the voice we hear belongs to Carole Landis. Conversely, when Sally replies “Aw, go on back to sleep; it’s just a nightmare,” the voice is John Hubbard’s. Each partner is visibly startled that the other’s voice has just emerged from their body, and at this point *Turnabout* brazenly announces what in other screwball comedies remains latent. That is, unlike *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941), *Turnabout* cuts straight to the heart of the matter. The notion that gendering is itself unstable, if not entirely arbitrary, becomes literalized in a swapping of sexed bodies. The man comes to inhabit the imaginary envelope of the woman’s body and the woman inhabits the man’s. This conceit persists doggedly for the next thirty-five minutes of screen time, and each time they appear we cannot help but note the actors’ deliberate attempt to position their lips so as to receive the voices that will later be dubbed onto them. It is like ventriloquism, but with a human dummy.

As an attempt at simulation, this technique fails miserably. It is first of all impossible to believe in the switch itself; we do not for a second think that Landis has trained herself to imitate Hubbard's voice, for instance. At the same time, the actors continually fail to match their lips and facial expressions to the words that will be supplied. Or, what amounts to the same thing, the voices we hear fail to keep up with the actors' pantomime. At one point, Tim prances across the bedroom, saying, "I have to get up and go to work, and you loll around in bed. And you call yourself a man." As the line goes on, Landis's voice becomes increasingly out-of-synch with Hubbard's lips and facial expressions. Later, when Henry the valet (Donald Meek) accidentally "gooses" Tim while trying to tuck in his loose shirttail, Hubbard clearly mouths "Aaah!" whereas Landis' voice says "Oooh!" Though I could cite numerous examples of such vocal/bodily mismatches, the upshot is that no one is being fooled here—no one, that is, but the other characters in the story-world, who are all too ready to write off the swapped voices as a case of laryngitis. Although the first time a voice becomes grossly desynchronized it may catch the viewer by surprise, the flaw quickly becomes something we expect and cease actively trying to pick apart. There is a comedy taking place here, but it is a comedy of the film's formalistic jumps and lags, not its scripted content. Were the film to aim at a less approximate, more perfectly synchronous relation between sound and image, the viewer would never be able to get past the contrivance; we would constantly feel swindled. Instead, because we fully recognize the trick, we engage in a game that is not unlike the pleasure of *trompe l'oeil*, except at the level of sound—a *trompe l'oreille* in which we amuse ourselves by pretending we do not believe in a fraud we know to be true.

Lacan's most pointed discussion of *trompe l'oeil* appears in a passage from his 1964 Seminar entitled "What is a Picture?" Here, Lacan identifies the doubly deceptive structure of *trompe l'oeil* in the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios. As the story goes, two friends are engaged in a painting contest. Initially, Zeuxis paints grapes so realistic that they attract even the birds. Parrhasios counters this effort, and "triumphs over him for having painting on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him [says], *Well, and now show us what you have painted behind it*" (Lacan 1978: 103). Lacan explicates this story by making a crucial distinction, a point that is easy to miss, especially given the temptation to misunderstand *trompe l'oeil* as an imaginary, rather than a symbolic (i.e. "double") deception. The point of the story is not that Zeuxis is fooled by the painting of the veil into believing that it is real, since, as in any instance of *trompe l'oeil*, the representation is self-evidently a fraud. Instead, as Lacan stresses, the point is that Parrhasios has presented Zeuxis with the representation of a veil (of

all things!) and that, like any desiring human subject, Zeuxis presumes that *veils conceal*. In the words of Slavoj Žižek:

We can deceive animals by an appearance imitating a reality for which it can be a substitute, but the properly human way to deceive a man is to imitate the dissimulation of reality—that act of concealing deceives us precisely by pretending to conceal something. In other words, there is nothing behind the curtain except the subject who has already gone beyond it. (1989: 196)

Having seen through the all-too-expected deception of Parrhasios' fine technique, Zeuxis finds himself deceived nonetheless—specifically at the site of the painting's blunt content. According to Henry Krips, “Despite seeing through the deception, indeed because he sees through it, he is trapped by the image since, in asking what is painted behind the veil, he mistakenly infers: veils conceal, therefore something must be painted behind the painted veil,” presumably the final proof of Parrhasios' great skill (1999: 28). A painting of a bowl of apples, Zeuxis anticipates, or perhaps of some vases of oil? For our part, we can just as easily imagine Zeuxis regretting his words as soon as he utters them, without Parrhasios having said a thing.

Like the hyper-realistic image of a *trompe l'oeil* painting, which trumpets its own artifice relative to the “real” objects that surround it (the picture frame, the gallery wall, etc.), the swapped voices in *Turnabout* do not attempt to pass themselves off as genuine.<sup>5</sup> There is never a point in the film when we are supposed to be confused as to which actor's voice we are hearing. Instead, the voices are structured like Parrhasios' painting of a veil—they are a deception that we are encouraged to see through at a first stage, only to be convinced that because we see a veil, there must be something beyond—something to it. In seeking to understand the doubly deceptive stunt at the center of *Turnabout*, it is useful to recognize that double deception, of which *trompe l'oeil* is one variety, in fact consists of three stages and not just two. In other words, by opting for double deception, the deceiver dialectically invokes two other absent, non-adopted options: the non-deception and the counterfeit. In the film's terms, the zero-degree of deception, or non-deception, would involve the actors switching clothes and perhaps changing mannerisms, but keeping their own voices. Opposite this, a simple first-order deception, or counterfeit, would either involve the actors straining to impersonate each others' voices, or more likely, an attempt to visually camouflage the lack of synchronization between sound and image through various long shots, obscured faces, low-key lighting, etc. Instead, what the film delivers is an audiovisual double deception. There is no effort at impersonation or cinematographic sleight of hand here. Instead, the unrefined ventriloquial mismatches,

emphasized in repeated close-ups of the two protagonists, become an integral part of the show.<sup>6</sup> To attempt to ignore this idiocy, or to feel superior for having discovered it, is to have missed the point: that at the level of production, the other elements of the story-world we take for granted as “real” are no less artificial.

### Part III – See Monkey

In a recent course on Lo-Fi Aesthetics I argued that, in terms of influence, the 1967 Patterson-Gimlin film—which allegedly depicts a humanoid creature known as Bigfoot crossing a creek bed at Bluff Creek, California—is the most important American film of the late twentieth century. Named after Roger Patterson and Robert Gimlin, the two men responsible for the footage, The Patterson-Gimlin film (hereafter *PGF*, as it is abbreviated by Bigfoot enthusiasts) is a primordial example of “lo-fi” (i.e. low fidelity) cinema—a film that, in terms of technique, could do things much better, but for reasons related to deception and viewerly seduction opts to do things worse. Owing to the preposterousness of its subject matter, *PGF* sets the lure of double deception in high relief; the object we behold is compelling not despite the film’s formal failures, but precisely because of them. Similar to the hand-held Vietnam combat footage airing nightly on U.S. television news programs in the late-1960s, the aesthetic quality of *PGF* is rough and its subject matter spectacular. We might even suggest that the aesthetic of *PGF* owes much to the 1963 Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination—a film which, in terms of form, it closely resembles—were it not for the fact that the Zapruder film was unavailable for public viewing until 1975, long after *PGF* was produced.<sup>7</sup>

Exhibited by Roger Patterson on nationally televised talk shows such as *The Joey Bishop Show* (in 1967) and *The Merv Griffin Show* (in 1970),<sup>8</sup> the footage begins as a complete blur, as if the camera operator has been caught off guard (Long 2004: 258). Seconds pass; then the object of the film becomes clear. Far off in the distance, a large ape-like figure covered in black fur lumbers from left to right across a creek bed lined with rocks and fallen trees. The entire film is an extreme-long shot, with the creature perhaps eighty to one-hundred feet away. In the middle of the footage, in a shot that has since become an iconic representation of Bigfoot, the creature looks back at the camera once, without breaking stride, and continues forward,



disappearing into the woods. The film is only about fifty seconds long, and features highly unsteady camera work, which expresses both the camera operator's shock at what is being viewed, and his repositioning of the camera for a better vantage.<sup>9</sup> In total, only about five seconds of the creature's appearance are entirely unobscured and stable enough to be readable as such, and these five seconds of relative clarity anchor our interpretation of the rest of the film. Without them, it is unlikely that the average viewer would be able to describe what he or she had seen. Even then, the creature is extremely far away. Significantly, too, the film is silent, adding to the viewer's desire to know more. All of these limitation—shakiness, brevity, lack of sound, distance—contribute to what I am calling the film's low-fidelity aesthetic.

According to David Bordwell, by 1960 it was widely believed that Hollywood cinema had attained full maturity, and it is significant that the Patterson-Gimlin film appeared at a moment in cinematic history when "a certain technological state of the art had been reached" (1985: 10). In Bordwell's words, "high-definition color films, wide formats, and high-fidelity magnetic sound had set the standard of quality that continues today." My point is that *PGF* is rigged in a very specific way: to look utterly unlike any of the expectably high-quality mainstream motion pictures circulating at the time. In this context, it triumphs both as a subversive masterpiece of low-fidelity cinema and as a paradigm shift in fictional narrative. In order to understand the aesthetic



of *PGF* as a dominant contemporary influence, we need to recognize that like many recent fiction films, television shows, and even news broadcasts, *PGF* asks the viewer to engage with formal limitations *qua* limitations. Whereas the content of the film is straightforwardly fictional, clearly a large man dressed in a semi-convincing gorilla suit, the real trick of the film lies in the high visibility of its formal failure—a jarringly chaotic approach to camera to which the viewer cannot but respond: *and now show us what is beyond it*. Understood in this way, the footage does not exist to deliver a legendarily elusive humanoid into the lap of its viewer, but rather to reaffirm and continue to perpetuate the creature’s elusiveness. The goal of this highly opaque film is opacity itself. The film is, to borrow a phrase from Henry Krips, a representation whose “credibility is enhanced by the transparency of its masquerade” (1999: 164).

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Patterson-Gimlin film is that it won’t go away. How can such a stupid, self-evidently fraudulent film attract such attention, and for so many years? The answer is that the film is a fawney-rig at the level of form, a paradigmatic case of double deception in which a *mise-en-scène* redolent of failure blinds the viewer to the inauthenticity of the object at the center of things. In discussing the film in even the most cursory way, one is immediately dragged into the question of the creature’s veracity, having already passed by the question of whether the film’s form itself operates in good faith.<sup>10</sup> In this way, *PGF* is like the *trompe l’oeil* painting viewed by Zeuxis. This would not be problematic, however, except for the fact that once a viewer has been led into a debate about authenticity and veracity, even a skeptical view (look, can’t you see the seam on the back of the suit?) opens up the possibility that the object we have seen *may be authentic*. To engage in debate assumes that there is something worth debating, as opposed to an unsexed, unengaged, truly disbelieving point-of-view that simply scoffs and walks away. *PGF*, like all grainy, out-of-focus, distant representations of the paranormal, thus wins at a game of double deception at the moment we take for granted as “really flawed” the topsy-turvy, amateurish quality of the image in order to pursue the object that lies beyond it as something worth talking about.

An important question remains, however. Does it matter whether the formal failures we see in a film like *PGF* are contrived, or the result of an actual shock at the time of the film’s production? Is it not possible to doubly deceive by creating the conditions in which a real, unplanned failure will inevitably appear? In the realm of science-fiction and horror, *PGF* is a paradigmatic example of what might be termed the “honesty method,” which is not exactly honesty per se. Rather than creating a truly deceptive costume, locating an actor of suitable size, training him to adopt unnatural posture and gait, and filming him close-up for several minutes with a high degree of optical clarity, Patterson and Gimlin make a quantum leap beyond

such simple, first-order deception. If I may venture a speculative hypothesis of my own about *PGF*: the reason that the camera operator's movements seem genuinely surprised is because *he was genuinely surprised*. The footage we see is the result of an encounter that was exactly half-planned—a practical joke of sorts that really did catch the cameraman off guard. Either the cinematographer was not aware that a man in a costume was going to appear, or he was not aware of *when* the actor was going to appear and the result bears all the characteristic traces of a real shock. The film thus incorporates a small measure of “real” reality into its fictional realism. According to the A&E documentary *Ancient Mysteries: Bigfoot* (1994), “[Roger] Patterson, who died of cancer in 1972, swore on his death bed that this film was authentic.” Patterson was not lying in the sense that the film *is* authentic, even if the creature is not. What we see feels like genuine happenstance because, for at least one of the participants at Bluff Creek on October 20, 1967, it was exactly that.

The same lo-fi technique and “honesty method” that permitted *PGF* to attain a level of popular iconicity was also the key to the runaway success of the micro-budget 1999 pseudo-documentary *The Blair Witch Project*.<sup>11</sup> As is well known, the actors in *Blair Witch* were only provided with script outlines, and the directors of the film actually terrorized them at night, engendering real on-camera spontaneity in service of a fictional narrative.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, the film is never entirely a deception, but, like *PGF*, a kind of half-deception in which actorly surprise and fright is on some level really real. However, unlike *PGF*, with its spectacularly impossible content, *Blair Witch* represents a more consolidated approach to evoking the supernatural, wherein the aesthetic is all there is and the supposedly horrifying objects we see are completely innocuous. As the film's protagonists record themselves hiking through the Maryland woods, shaky camcorder footage alternates with grainy black and white 16mm. Doubly deceived by the film's self-avowed amateurishness, and hypnotized by its many layers of flaws, audiences manage to become convinced that tied-together twigs and piles of rocks on the forest floor are harbingers of doom. In this way, the film seems to have learned a lesson from *PGF*. Whereas Patterson and Gimlin certainly might have shown us *less* of the creature and still managed to seduce, to reveal *more* of this half-seen *objet a* would have been a desire-killing mistake.

As movie monsters go, the creature we see in *PGF* is no more or less realistic than the gorilla-suited actors we see in Z-grade comedy and horror films such as *Robot Monster* (Phil Tucker, 1953) and *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* (William Beaudine, 1952). The key is not the Bigfoot costume in itself—fodder for numerous cryptozoological inquiries over the years—but rather that the film's doubly deceptive camerawork forces the viewer to engage with the costume *as a costume*. In this sense, it is useful to understand *PGF* as a highly attenuated

homage to the special-effects masterpiece *King Kong* (1933, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack). Though this may seem like an outrageous claim, the two films are not terribly far apart in their approach to special effects. In the 1933 *Kong*, as in *PGF*, special effects do not seek to engage viewers by convincing them of the impossible—that a giant gorilla has really climbed to the top of the Empire State Building, or that the existence of Sasquatch is now scientifically confirmed. Rather, both films showcase their own limitations, confronting viewers with a disbelief about which they were previously unaware. The proper response, then, both to *King Kong* and *PGF*, is thus not real fear or distress, but instead a question: *how did they do that?*<sup>13</sup> Though it is a commonplace assumption in cinema studies that mainstream films uniformly desire to dupe their audiences, it is oftentimes when the viewer engages with the question of a film's production as a question, and does not miss it, that he or she is most powerfully seduced, or at least momentarily drawn in. However, as I go on to explain in my conclusion, it is also possible to create a scenario in which audience skepticism about the production of impossible images disappears as soon as it emerges, with the leap to an easy answer. By making some brief observations about the painfully high-fidelity aesthetics of modern computer-generated imagery, I want to suggest that double deception in the age of digital, if not entirely impossible, certainly is no longer any kind of paradigm.

## Conclusion – Perfect, Too Perfect

At a point somewhere in the middle of Peter Jackson's CGI-driven 2005 remake of *King Kong*, movie director Carl Denham (Jack Black) and his leading man Bruce Baxter (Kyle Chandler) trek to the end of a canyon where a herd of apatosaurs are foraging. Denham nervously sets up his camera and calls for Baxter to step into the foreground: "I need you in the shot or people will say they're fake." "Nobody's going to think these are fake," Baxter responds. The joke, of course, is that everything in front of the camera, including the dinosaurs, trees, water, and sky, are all computer generated. At the time it was produced, Jackson's *Kong* was not only the most expensive film ever made in the U.S., but it also contained more special-effects shots than any film to date—around 2400. In a film full of digital excess, the apatosaurus stampede—to my eye, anyway—is the most unconvincing, surface-level mish-mash imaginable, largely owing to the hyper-smooth, undulating trajectory of the "camera." When characters move around in CGI, they are always tracked in an optimal way. There is no "lag" on the part of some real-world cinematographer; the object of the shot always remains perfectly centered and perfectly in focus—and this is precisely the problem. In non-CGI motion pictures, such precision, even with much rehearsal, is by definition impossible. Cameras dip or weave too

soon or too late, tripod axels “stick,” focus is momentarily lost, etc., and all of this is expected—not a matter of suspension of disbelief, but a confrontation with artifice that paradoxically confers a sense of legitimacy on the photographed object. Conversely, in Jackson’s *Kong*, the computer-generated flyovers of island landscapes appear entirely frictionless—far smoother than the real helicopter shots they seek to emulate. Moreover, when the hyperkinetic camera whirls in sweeping arcs around various giant creatures (which it always does), they seem to lack mass, appearing less like real animals and more like sped-up versions of the giant helium-filled cartoon characters that coast down Broadway as part of the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. When the camera deftly tracks Kong as he leaps across a fifty-foot wide chasm, his landing should cause massive destruction, but if we pay attention we see that his impact is as gentle as a hot-air balloon. In fact, regardless of their intended weight, this is what CGI bodies tend by default to appear like—blimps full of air.<sup>14</sup> The question is why, despite huge advances in technology, CGI continues to appear so unconvincing. The answer, I believe, has less to do with flaws in animation technique than with CGI-artists’ endemic miscalculation of human subjectivity.

CGI aims not to produce a sense of the “really real,” which would incorporate signs of failure at the level of form, but instead, like the elaborate layouts created by model train enthusiasts, seeks to include as much microscopic detail as possible in any given shot—as if the clearest, most unimpeded image is always the most interesting. By CGI standards, the mark of a good animator is his or her ability to render detail in crisp, three-dimensional perfection, with every tree leaf blowing in the proper direction and each dinosaur’s skin appearing “just so.” Spurred on by improvements in computer technology—wherein the degree of possible detail is directly related to processor speed, available memory, etc.—the digital animator endlessly pursues minute particularity (along with the fluidly kinetic perspective it necessitates), never recognizing that what the viewer wants, and wants to be convinced by, is some evidence of distortion, some stray or unruly bit of data to suggest that content has for a moment overdriven form. By carefully polishing their scenes so that no such traces remain, CGI animators are like the criminal masterminds at the end of so many *films noirs* of the 1940s and 1950s.

In *films noirs* such as *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), the viewer looks on as the mastermind commits his meticulously well-planned murder, establishes an airtight alibi, anticipates all possible avenues of detection, and in general creates a perfect mimesis of normal, everyday reality. Then, at the end of the third act, the detective walks into the room and says his obligatory lines. *We got him. He tried to commit the perfect crime, but that was the*

*problem: it was too perfect.*<sup>15</sup> The best example of such failed *noir* perfectionism comes in Fritz Lang's last Hollywood film, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956). As part of a complicated plot to impugn the fairness of the legal system, writer Tom Garrett (Dana Andrews) deliberately frames himself for a murder he did not commit. Having aroused the suspicion of the homicide detectives in charge of a recent unsolved murder case, Garrett proceeds to scrub the interior of his car perfectly clean. His rationale: "The police will naturally be looking for Patty Grey's fingerprints, and since we can't give them hers, it should make them suspicious if they can't find any fingerprints at all." The modern CGI images we see in films like Jackson's *Kong* are like this overly-scrubbed *noir* crime scene. They are "perfect, too perfect," having erased not only the evidence that a deception has taken place, but also all the "normal" imperfections that viewers equate with cinema as a representational form.

Like the *noir* mastermind, the CGI artist's greatest asset—a highly intelligent attention to detail—becomes a fatal flaw. Why for instance, when a giant CGI monkey appears in the foreground, must it always be in focus? The answer: we must be permitted to see it in all its glorious detail! This is a misguided approach to seduction. What the viewer wants is a fog, a haze, a fracture in the form of the image itself—some sense that the moment is so startling that we are *not* seeing all there is to see.<sup>16</sup> CGI practitioners presume that our cinematic window on the world must be crystal clear, forgetting that humans have no problem whatsoever seeing through cinematic flaws: scratched film stock, lens flare, film grain, blurriness, over- and underexposure, etc.<sup>17</sup> Such seeing-through is precisely what makes the original 1933 *King Kong* infinitely more compelling than its remake. What the viewer wants, in both cases, is some trace of the fingerprints of Kong's creators—which is what we literally get in the rippling fur of the giant ape in the 1933 version: traces of the stop-motion animators' fingertips as they repositioned the 18-inch scale model of Kong between each frame. In modern CGI, there are no such traces, no markers of digitization in the digital image itself. Having perfectly erased all the formal fingerprints indicating that "this is a representation"—all of the nods that convey an aura of phoniness—the skeptical viewer is forced to contemplate the depthless surface of the film's content, which cannot be anything but a disappointing, obvious fake. Unchained from any formal constraints, the 800 pound gorilla suddenly appears light as air.

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<sup>1</sup> If all this anticipated sticker-peeling would seem impossible in the public aisles of a rental store, one must remember that rental tapes were checked out, taken home, and then returned. Store owners were thus concerned that renters would pay two dollars to rent the desired tape in order to remove the magnetic strips at their leisure. Then, after a couple of days had past, they would return the tape to the store, casually shoplifting it at some future date, never having to worry about being detected.

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the ring in the fawney-rig is relegated to the role of the MacGuffin—the object everyone is nominally chasing after and constantly talking about, but in terms of overall structure, a valueless place holder. On the Hitchcockian MacGuffin, see Žižek, 1992: 181-2.

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the phony-looking makeup passive-aggressively sets viewers up for a fall. Having been lulled into a comfortable equilibrium by the cheesy theatrical artifice, the film's original audiences were profoundly shocked when real (i.e. animal) entrails erupted from the bodies of the zombies' victims. The infamous surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929) works in a similar way. Today, the film appears like what it is, a scratched and creaky antique. Consequently, when the film implies that a woman's eye is about to be slit in half by a straight-razor, we cannot comprehend how such an event could possibly occur outside the realm of modern special effects, and for the moment are able to maintain a safe detachment from the film's content. Then, surprise! Like Romero use of offal from a butcher shop—producing real guts on screen where we expect fakery—Buñuel's slitting of a (dead) cow's eye is a kind of anti-special-effect, requiring little effort and no cost, but nonetheless packing a wallop! To be clear, however, my point is that a degree of phoniness must have already been established in order to produce such dramatic shocks.

<sup>4</sup> The film is a conceptual remake of director Hal Roach's earlier production *Okay Toots!* (1935), in which a married couple switches bodies and voices. Decades after *Turnabout*, the conceit reemerges on the situation comedy *Bewitched* ("Samantha Loses Her Voice," airdated 5/12/1968), with similar effects.

<sup>5</sup> The Willows' bitter and frequently grumbling cook Nora (Marjorie Main) provides an interesting reference standard for the mismatched voices of the film's two protagonists. Best known for her role as Ma Kettle in a series of late-1940s and 1950s comedies, it is difficult to imagine an actor whose stern demeanor and rough appearance give body to her voice better than Marjorie Main. Whereas the Willows' asynchronous voices are nothing if not perfectly articulated and clear, Nora's perfectly synched voice is delivered in just the opposite way: as a series of terse, guttural blasts of slang, while her lips and body remain unexpressive and largely still.

<sup>6</sup> The conceit is brought full circle when Tim's two partners in the ad firm, Phil Manning (Adolphe Menjou) and Joel Clare (William Gargan) hear a radio ad for Marlowe Pineapple Juice, a major account that has been lost owing to Sally's indignation over her husband's shady deal-closing schemes. The two men are drunk and tear apart the radio, yet the Marlowe jingle won't stop playing, even when the amplifier is disconnected and lying in pieces on the floor. The two men start smashing the radio's vacuum tubes one by one and the jazz music begins to recede, one instrument at a time, until only a lone clarinet is heard. When Clare points out a stray tube that has rolled to the side of the room, Manning sneaks up on it and smashes it with the head of his cane. With one last dying squeal, the clarinet stops and the two partners shake hands after a job well done. They have killed the film's belabored premise once and for all.

<sup>7</sup> The public was denied access to the Zapruder film until March 1975, when Geraldo Rivera aired a bootleg copy of the film on his ABC talk show *Good Night America* to great public outrage. Given this anachronism, if anything, we might venture the completely outrageous hypothesis that the wide circulation of *PGF* helped establish the coordinates through which the Zapruder film was understood after 1975. The reemergence of the Zapruder film rekindled speculations about an assassination conspiracy—hypotheses that would at times verge on the paranormal—and there can be little doubt that the seductiveness of both films derives from an obfuscation and incompleteness at the level of form. Part home-movie and part documentary-style realism, both *PGF* and the Zapruder film depict a hyperbolic, seemingly impossible event that is simultaneously veiled and lent credence by a shaky, grainy, lo-fi aesthetic.

<sup>8</sup> The footage continued to circulate for years in theatrically-released documentaries such as *Bigfoot: Man Or Beast* (Lawrence Crowley, 1972) and *The Mysterious Monsters* (Robert Guenette, 1976), as well as on various television shows concerned with the paranormal.

<sup>9</sup> Most versions of *PGF* available on the web are either truncated or artificially stabilized/enlarged to make the creature more easily viewable. A relatively complete, albeit obviously degraded third- or fourth-generation video copy of the original footage appears on the DVD *Ancient Mysteries: Bigfoot* (1994), a program narrated by Leonard Nimoy for the A&E Network. Another option is to purchase Jon-Erik Beckjord's first-generation 16mm print of the film, which occasionally appears for sale on eBay. The cost: \$1 million.

<sup>10</sup> Although numerous theories about the Bigfoot costume have emerged over the years, one potentially myth-busting question never seems to emerge: *why did Patterson and Gimlin decide to make their film so shaky?*

<sup>11</sup> Famously, *The Blair Witch Project* was produced for around \$25,000 and after five years had grossed \$248 million worldwide.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the spectatorial "badge of honor" worn by a select set of early *Blair Witch* viewers, was not that "I figured it out that it was a fake," but rather, "I saw the film on opening night, and having no idea what it was about, I actually thought it was *real*."

<sup>13</sup> Part of the lore surrounding *PGF* is that Roger Patterson screened the film for special effects experts at both Disney and Universal Studios. In both cases, the experts were unable to debunk the film as a hoax, and claimed that with their current technology they would be unable to duplicate the film or create a costume so sophisticated and lifelike (Krantz 1993: 93; Hunter 1993: 119).

<sup>14</sup> It is thus appropriate that Jackson's remake, unlike the original, is a largely bloodless film. Despite all the bodies being crushed and bullets flying, we rarely see a drop of blood on screen. Yet if these CGI beings have no guts—no substance beyond their surface—why should we expect to see blood? If anything, they should indeed bleed "nothingness."

<sup>15</sup> One variation on this line occurs at the end of *Backlash* (Eugene Forde, 1947). Detective Tom Carey (Richard Benedict) tells a group of gathered youngsters, it was a "perfect case. . .the trouble was it was *too* perfect and that's what made me suspicious."

<sup>16</sup> Warner Brothers cartoons of the 1930s-1950s are full of such flaws—object and bodies unexpectedly change tint due to a colorist's oversight, backdrops repeatedly "loop" past in a chase scene, character motions are jumpy and repetitive, etc. Inherent in hand-drawn animation, such flaws do nothing to undermine our investment in the story-world, and quite significantly the creatures we see appear far more convincing, especially in terms of physical inertia and weight, than any CGI animation.

<sup>17</sup> The internet video site YouTube is a case in point. The degraded quality of YouTube streaming videos creates no problem for the viewer whatsoever; or rather, it ensnares the viewer in its own illegibility and compression. Without all the visual interference, users might be less inclined to believe what they behold is really real.